

The Honorable Yvonne Brathwaite Burke
U.S. Representative of California (1973–1979)

Special Exhibit: A Century of Women in Congress

Gender and the Campaign

Representative Burke reflects on California's political atmosphere during her congressional campaign in 1972.

Interview recorded July 22, 2015

Gender was not a big issue for me. One of the things that was very interesting at that time was “attorney at law” and then “member of the assembly” was the kind of thing that made people think that you were able to do the job. So, in the congressional campaign, I did run against a male councilman. But I had been involved as a member of the assembly, and it was not so much a gender issue. But it was very obvious to women, and I got a lot of support from women’s groups because there had not been a woman elected to the Congress from California for 25 years. Helen Gahagan Douglas had been defeated by Richard Nixon, and as a result, I think women were afraid to run for Congress in the West. So, that became a real cry for women who were involved in the feminist movement, in politics. “Here is our chance to elect a woman.” And it didn’t make any difference that I was an African-American woman. Throughout the state, there was a lot of feeling, “It’s time.”