

**The Honorable Eva M. Clayton**  
U.S. Representative of North Carolina (1992–2003)

**Special Exhibit: A Century of Women in Congress**

**A Woman Representative on the Agriculture Committee**

Representative Clayton describes the obstacles she faced on the Agriculture Committee.  
*Interview recorded May 15, 2015*

And by the way, once, once I won the runoff and, in the primary, the North Carolina commissioner came to me and said, in a very patriarchal way, “Young lady”—to this grandmother—“Young lady, you’d do yourself proud if, and your district well, if you serve on Agriculture,” as if he needed to tell me what to do. But anyhow, I did, I did serve on Agriculture because it, actually he was right. In, in his way, he was really, I think he was really begging, when I understand what he was doing. Because I think—and he might have been right. I would might have chosen Education rather than Agriculture because I’m all bringing people up and education-wise and small business. But the realization that my district really needed someone on Agriculture—as I say, I knew very little, so on Agriculture I learned a lot. And, and by the way, Agriculture was an old-boys’ culture. When I went there was one woman. I remember her to this day. Yes. Jill Long Thompson was there, and she was there for four years, and then she became the assistant secretary for agriculture. And then I think Cynthia McKinney came, and other women came. They came and left. It was old-boys’ culture, both by composition, but also by attitude. And they tolerated me. They treated me as an outsider. I had to prove to them I was worthy of negotiating. I had to, I had to win the way that I was worthy of legislating or advocating for big farmers as well as for small farmers. I had to prove to them that I could advocate and legislate even for the hungry. But it didn’t take me long to learn how to horse trade. They needed me as much as I needed them, because Agriculture is such a complex and interrelated, interdependent, set of people. So, you, livestock would need me, who represented peanut farmers, to be with you.