

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

Special Exhibit: A Century of Women in Congress

Challenging “Regular Order”

Representative Clayton describes how women Members wanted her to become freshman class president.

Interview recorded May 15, 2015

The reality that women were in a large number convinced several of us that a woman had a chance. And how it really came about, I actually said to I think it was Anna Eshoo, “You ought to become president.” She said, “No, I do not want to be president.” And she raised her hand and said, “I nominate Eva Clayton.” That’s really how it came about. So the women were going to get a candidate, and I had suggested Anna, and I don’t know who else suggested her, and before Anna allowed that discussion to go any further she told the California delegation it was going to be Eva Clayton, and she nominated me. And the reality was—and actually my friend, Jim Clyburn, wanted to become president, and someone had nominated him prior to this nomination coming from the California delegation. And, he recognized, he’s a smart politician, and plus he can count. He was a smart politician then, he still is, or he wouldn’t be Whip, so he understands where the wind is blowing. He had a good, a good sense of that. And he proposed that, “Let Eva Clayton be president for the first year, and I’ll serve the second year.” And they accepted his, his proposal. And so, essentially I served the first term, first year of the term, he served the second year of the term. So, I guess we were co-presidents, you know but, but it worked out for him then. But if the women weren’t there in numbers, Eva Clayton or anyone else, regular order would have meant the same regular order that a man would be president. Nothing wrong with a man being president, but if you have the numbers, and you have the capacity, and you have the opportunity, a woman should use that capacity. And shouldn’t step back just to say regular order, tradition would be to let a man to go forward.