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Special Exhibit: A Century of Women in Congress

“Let Me Talk to a Man”

Rochelle Dornatt remembers adjusting to different office cultures on the Hill.
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I went to work for a, a Member from Texas by the name of Kent Hance. Mr. Hance was very conservative—way more conservative than I am, but he was an interesting guy. He was very, he was very Texan is the only way I could put it, and I was, I, I think I was one of the few non-Texans in the office, and I was the only female in the office who did legislative work. And when he hired me, he—in the interview he asked me, he says, “Well, you may be the expert on an issue, and you may know more than anybody on that issue.” He said, “But what if you get some good old boy from Lubbock who calls in and asks a question about that issue, and, and you take the call and give him an answer that you know is right, and he says to you, ‘Well, honey, that’s all fine and good, but let me talk to somebody who really knows, let me talk to a man.’” And he says, “What do you do?” And I just looked at him and I thought, “Oh my God, is that what this office is like?” But I looked at him and I said, “Well, if he’s got to hear it from somebody with a deep voice, I’ll either talk low or put a guy on the phone and feed him what he needs to tell the guy.” Because the important issue is making the constituent happy, right? And that’s what got me the job—that I had, I had to sort of suppress that sort of being female thing for the good old boys of West Texas. And, and that was a good job. I mean, I, I enjoyed it, but it, it was—the guys in that office had a certain attitude toward women and non-Texas women. So it, it—there were times where we, we bumped heads. But all in all, it, it was a good experience, again, because it, it forced me to learn how to adjust and adapt and handle these kinds of situations.