

Rochelle Dornatt
Chief of Staff, Representative Sam Farr of California

Special Exhibit: A Century of Women in Congress

Opposition Research

Rochelle Dornatt describes conducting opposition research for the Democratic Congressional Campaign Committee in the 1980s.

Interview recorded January 18, 2017

If we were running against an incumbent Republican, you had to plow through vote histories. You, you literally would go through vote after vote after vote and, and see what you could pull out, or you would go to the home newspapers and pull out clip files and sometimes you would go to their districts and talk to people on the ground—political operatives—to see, you know, what you could, what you could find out, and then you'd put it all together. So, it was, it was a very intense, very intense job. You also had to be clever, because you had to learn how to spin this stuff, and “spin” is not a new word in politics. You had to learn how to spin something that might seem very innocuous into something that was, you know, dangerous. And, I don't know, maybe I should be a little bit sorry that that is how politics is today. It's nothing but spin. But at the time, it was very interesting, and it was, it was exciting to see what you could do with what you found. So, so yeah, that was, that was my DCCC experience. And, you know, I was very proud of it, because we—I was there for the '86 cycle, and we took back a lot of seats that, that cycle. So I was very proud of my, my role in that.