

The Honorable Donna F. Edwards
U.S. Representative of Maryland (2008–2017)

Special Exhibit: A Century of Women in Congress

“Just Call Me Donna”

Representative Edwards discusses breaking barriers and the different ways people approached women Members.

Interview recorded June 29, 2018

I think it was really important. I mean there had never been certainly a black woman Congresswoman from Maryland, and I was the first. And I think any time you're breaking any barriers—I mean it seems odd to say those things as first in, you know, 2008 or in 2018, but I was a first, and I think that made people step back. In fact, I, I can remember after I was elected, people didn't know what to call me. You know, sometimes they would call me “Congresslady,” sometimes they would call me “Congresswoman,” sometimes they would just stumble and call me “Congress Donna”—you know, all kinds of things because there was not a word for it, you know, at least in our congressional district and in our state. And that still actually happens. And so I found it really—so I'd just say, “Just call me Donna,” because it was too confusing. And I think that, you know, when you break barriers that there's always some resistance to it and certainly, in those races, gender was a factor. I mean things like people would talk about the jewelry that I wore or they would—I was advised not to wear dangling earrings. You know, I don't think I'd advise a man not to wear dangling earrings, but I was, that was the advice that I was given. You know there was some, I wear a lot of color. You know, I have on yellow today. And people would say, “No, you really need to stick to blue, and black, and gray.” And those are not my colors so I didn't. So things like that that are just odd, just really odd, but they happen. And, and a lot of those things you just have to let them roll over.