

Kathy Gille

Executive Floor Assistant, Representative David Bonior of Michigan

Special Exhibit: A Century of Women in Congress

Putting Ideals into Practice

Kathy Gille reflects on her quest to make her political ideals a reality during her time in Congress.

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I think the very first really big surprise I had when I came to work in Washington is how many inspiring people there were people I really admired and how much I learned from them. I often say I was sort of like, you know, Mr. Smith Comes to Washington in reverse. You know, that you come, come to Washington and you expect to see all these cynical people. I saw people who were so inspiring working on human rights, working on social justice. And people who—there was a phrase back in the days of the reformers in the 1970s in Congress that was called, “know how to make it operational.” They really, they took their ideals and they knew how to put them into practice and make policy and make changes in this country. And I always saw it as—I’m not sure this is the way everyone saw it, but for me, my whole career, I’ve always been interested in the question of how do you make the link between the inside and the outside? And how you—how do you create more power to do good by doing that linkage? And I saw that as my role, primarily, as linking with people back in our district and what was happening in their lives? How does that become a national issue? And how do we do something effective for them there? That’s sort of the basic role of a Member of Congress in a lot of ways, to kind of, what is it? Link both the local and the global, as the, as that phrase goes. Also with outside groups or big social problems or social issues—people who may care passionately and ideologically about an issue, but don’t really know how to strategize about it. So, so that’s what I learned in my days working on Central America, but over, and over, and over again, David Bonior was always leading the way on issues that had that feel to it. Whether it’s from Vietnam veterans in his early days, issues about the environment, issues about NAFTA, labor, and—to when we fought for school lunches to raising the minimum wage—always in—building an outside/inside coalition for strategy. And it was just such a privilege to feel that I was in a space where I was—I’d seen the social movements of the ’60s kind of grow and begin to change the country and then in a position of some power to help make those linkages and to turn them into, into at least a strong force to fight for those values.