

The Honorable Melissa A. Hart
U.S. Representative of Pennsylvania (2001–2007)

Special Exhibit: A Century of Women in Congress

Getting a Seat on the Ways and Means Committee

Representative Hart recalls how she won support for a seat on the influential Ways and Means Committee.

Interview recorded September 30, 2019

Also, when I, I mentioned earlier that I wanted to be on the Ways and Means Committee, like from the first day I got here. And of course, I went to see Bill Thomas who at the time was chairing and he's like, you know, "Well that's nice. You're a freshman, that's nice." But I still put it on my list, you know. When, when the committee that's set up to choose, you know, to assign Members to committees was there they're like, "Well, no, you're not going to be able to get on Ways and Means. So what do you want?" You know, but you have to ask and if people know, if you make what you'd like to do here known, it's helpful. And then I asked Chairman Thomas what I should do and he said, "Well, you have to prove to me that you'd be a good member of the committee so when we're arguing a bill please come on down to the floor. All the Members will get an opportunity to speak and if we have time left over we'll let you speak." And so I would come every time Ways and Means had a bill on the floor and I would listen to the argument—if I wasn't in another committee. It wasn't every single time they had a bill on the floor because I did have responsibilities on the committees that I was on, but I would come down and he'd let me speak occasionally on a bill. And when it came time during my second term to pick committees, Bill actually asked for me to be on the committee. Now that is a very encouraging leadership, right? That's a very encouraging committee chair. You know, it, it was fair. And I think a lot of women think it's not. I've heard women say they didn't think it was fair—but maybe before I got here. I think it depends on the chairman, but Chairman Thomas was definitely supportive.