

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

Special Exhibit: A Century of Women in Congress

State Senate as Preparation

Representative Hart describes how her time in the Pennsylvania state legislature prepared her for Congress.

Interview recorded September 30, 2019

I still think there's nothing better. The state legislature is obviously very, very close to the people. As a state senator I did have about, I don't know 350,000 or some constituents. So it was big enough that we had to figure out ways to get to the different regions of the district and, you know, congressional districts are a little more than twice the size. So I think that a lot of the skills in outreach, the skills in just measuring the concerns and, and actually tabulating where people stand on things, you know, not necessarily like via computer or taking a vote, but just getting around to see if different regions are facing different things. What's—you know, in a—in an area maybe where unemployment is higher, you know, you have to balance the interests of the entire district. So I think that was a big, big help. Whereas if I'd served in the state house where the districts are really small the transition would have been more difficult. And a lot of people are like, "Wait a minute, you'd have gone from house to House," but it's not really comparable because our state senate seats and our state house seats were based on population size. So, you know, it didn't—it's not like I got four counties or something like that. Like a U.S. Senator gets a whole state. So it's a lot more comparable. And just learning how to help people, how to identify priorities. You know, when there's 100 problems and you really can only have the time and resources to solve 20. How do you determine which ones are the most important, which ones will help or alleviate the pain of the most people? You know, those kind of things. But, there's a lot and I think a lot of it has to do also with finding how to get to people. Not everybody has time to call you or come into your office, right? So where do you go? Where, where would these people be? Community day, you know, fire hall meetings—have town meetings in, in the towns all over the district, those kinds of things.