

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

Special Exhibit: A Century of Women in Congress

Running for Vice Chair of the Republican Conference

Representative Hart explains why she wanted to run for a leadership position in the Republican Conference and the practical benefits of her unsuccessful campaign.

Interview recorded September 30, 2019

I think one of the most important things for a group of legislators to do is to be able to communicate from within with each other and to be able to unify and to be able to speak as one voice. I didn't think we were doing that. In fact, I knew we weren't doing that because I was a deputy whip and so I dealt with my colleagues all the time over issues. And I thought the one thing that the leadership needed to do was to broaden the group. It was all men at the time and then Deborah [Pryce]. But we had—and it wasn't even really based on the fact that I was a woman as much as I think I'm just more comfortable with the communication side of things. And that I also, being a Republican from a Democrat district, was concerned that some of the way we came across was just too rigid as far as our Republican-ness and that really our job as a Republican caucus isn't to be Republican, it's to be—to address the concerns of the public better than the other side is doing it. And to address the issues that are—I mean the issues that are our priority, are our priority because they're important to people, not because we're Republican. And so that was my angle. I, I thought we needed that more. I don't think people were going to support me because I wasn't here long enough, but it was worth doing because I think I—well, a couple of things I did. By doing that I did get a chance to meet with Members individually, Members I didn't know very well. It gave me an opportunity to actually deepen some relationships. It was very, very helpful in the long term—even though I didn't win. And then the other issue is that, that my message, I think, came across to some degree with the people who did end up in leadership. And I think that's helpful too because even though you run for something and don't necessarily win it within a conference, you're still part of that team and that team—there is no “I” in team—part of that team, right, is that we are a group of people trying to accomplish something for the American people. So I don't know, I am hoping that it made a difference. I think with some people it did. I think, I was asked to do a lot of national media on behalf of the conference as a person not in leadership, which I thought was part of a recognition of that which I thought was important.