

Betsy Wright Hawkings

Chief of Staff, Representative Christopher Shays of Connecticut

Special Exhibit: A Century of Women in Congress

Campaigning as a Student

Betsy Wright Hawkings recalls how she was drawn to politics by her experience in the 1980 presidential election campaign.

Interview recorded April 18, 2016

What physically finally got me involved in politics was that in late winter of 1979, George H.W. Bush, who grew up in the same town that I did, came to our local library to do a town meeting and to try to get people involved in his campaign. And at the time I was still in high school, was not old enough to vote, but I just was so excited, frankly by the fact that somebody from our town was running for President and he sounded reasonable and I thought—and this was something I could do with my dad. And, and so, I signed up to volunteer and, gosh, if they didn't call me, you know, and ask me to come down and make calls and stuff envelopes and process checks and so on. And so, when I was on, when I was on break from school, I, I was volunteering during Christmas and during spring break and during the summer until the convention and until the, the Bush campaign became the Reagan-Bush campaign. And that was my, that was my first campaign and it was my first inauguration. I remember being blown away by the fact that I got an invitation, you know, the beautiful printed invitation to go to the inauguration. And it was a standing—room—only ticket, but a lot fewer people attended back then than have in recent years. And so, you know, I dutifully—like I say, I went to this high school in Massachusetts, and I remember getting on the Air Florida plane—you know, \$29, fly from Boston to D.C.—taking off a day from school to come down for the weekend and, you know, in my pumps and pearls and skirt in the middle of January 19—January 1981, standing there and listening to Reagan's first inaugural speech.