

The Honorable Elizabeth Holtzman
U.S. Representative of New York (1973–1981)

Special Exhibit: A Century of Women in Congress

Delicate Balance

Representative Holtzman discusses the ways women Members overcame political divisions to collaborate on several significant issues.

Interview recorded March 10, 2016

We, we said—and it was my view, I guess people changed their view about that later. I said, the agenda of what we need to do is so huge, we can't possibly, possibly accomplish everything anyway. So let's just focus on areas that we agree on. And first of all, it will make us stronger if all agree and all agree to work on them. And that's how we started. And also, it was going to, it was critical, I think, to get people's participation, the participation of women. Because I think since it was really early, there had been no caucus to the best of my knowledge before that. Women had not worked together. We were concerned about being ridiculed. We were concerned about negative press. We were concerned about how this was going to affect us in our district. I think we—this was a very important step to make people feel politically comfortable in joining with people of different political views. So, I think it worked. From my point of view, it worked. Yes, I mean, there were issues that were controversial and people couldn't agree on: for example, choice. Congresswoman Heckler had a very different view about abortion from my view. But that didn't mean we couldn't work on the Equal Rights Amendment. That didn't mean we couldn't work on domestic violence. That didn't mean we couldn't work on issues of credit opportunity. It didn't mean we couldn't work on issues of rape and sexual violence. I mean, they're all employment opportunities, pension rights. I mean, there were a whole host of other things that we could work on. If we could work on them together, great. And so, yes, that one issue, we couldn't. But that didn't mean that, that those issues were ignored. They were not ignored. It didn't mean to ignore them. It just meant that we were going to create a caucus that was going to—these were the fledgling days. You know, we were trying to make sure that this small bird was going to fly, and it did.