

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

Special Exhibit: A Century of Women in Congress

The Birth of the Congresswomen's Caucus

Representative Holtzman describes the origins of the Congresswomen's Caucus.
Interview recorded March 10, 2016

You know, I can't really remember the genesis. We might have been talking about it for some time before that, before we started. But, I don't know, I guess Congresswoman Heckler and I got to know each other, maybe because—I don't even really know how that happened. But, and how we decided that we were going to work together on this, but I think it was a really good idea to make it bipartisan from the get-go, and also to try to involve all the Congresswomen. And there was a lot of reluctance. I think, I think all the Congresswomen at that point—when we first talked about it, or when we first formed it—really wanted to be part of that caucus because they understood how much of an agenda there was to try to improve the status of women. They understood—everybody understood that. But they were concerned about whether we'd be ridiculed in the press, whether the public would understand that working together on women's issues would be acceptable. And they were also very concerned because the women, you know, went the gamut from very conservative to very liberal—whether they would somehow be tainted by the political views of the other women on the caucus. And so we worked out a modus vivendi for this, which is basically we said the caucus would only vote on issues if there was unanimity. And, so that would protect anybody who was afraid that they'd be stuck with a position if it was a majority position that didn't, you know, agree with their constituency or with what their own views were.