

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

Special Exhibit: A Century of Women in Congress

Working Together for the ERA

Representative Holtzman describes the process of building congressional support to extend the ratification deadline for the Equal Rights Amendment.

Interview recorded March 10, 2016

I knew that if it was just I sponsoring this given the fact that Barbara Jordan was also on that committee, that a lot of eyebrows would be raised. So I said, “We’ve got to get Barbara onboard on this.” And I went to her and talked to her about this, and she immediately agreed. So the two of us were backing it on the House Judiciary Committee. We went to Peter Rodino, he was the chair of the committee. We knew we needed his support. It was a lot easier going to him with the two of us, the only women on the committee. He’s not going to turn us down. We knew that. So he agreed to it. And then we went to see—or, I can’t remember if Barbara came with me—but, I went to see Tip O’Neill, and he agreed as well. And then, of course, we had to get the Congresswomen’s Caucus behind us. And we had to divvy up the responsibilities and develop a legislative campaign, and it was a huge campaign. I had never done anything like this before because we needed—we didn’t initially have enough Members supporting it. And so what we needed to do was get our allies working at the grassroots level to put pressure on Members of Congress to support this. And we did. We got enough Members to support it and pass the House, and had a much easier time getting passed the Senate. That was just the beginning of the opposition of the right wing to women’s rights, but they started their campaign against us. We won despite their efforts. But we couldn’t get it ratified in the states, unfortunately, in the timeframe. We, we also put seven years because it had been seven years before, and who would have ever imagined that it wouldn’t be adopted. But it wasn’t and it’s still not.