

The Honorable Nancy Lee Johnson
U.S. Representative of Connecticut (1983–2007)

Special Exhibit: A Century of Women in Congress

“Those Machines Only Build Muscles”

Representative Johnson protests inequities in the separate House gym facilities for men and women.
Interview recorded December 3, 2015

But Barbara Boxer came to me and she said, “You know, the gym equipment is terrible.” And I said, “Well, I’ve never been there.” So, we went over and looked. And it was those old-fashioned rowing machines—wooden rowing machines—and wooden bars on the wall. Now, the John Marshall Law School had this in their gym when I was, you know, one. And so, so “Who uses this?” She says, “That’s the trouble. Even if we wanted to use it, who’s going to come here and row?” I mean—so, she and I, and we got a couple of other Democrats and a couple of other Republicans, and we took the Congressman from Springfield, who was chairman of the gym resources or whatever they called them. And he was quite elderly. And we toured him around and we said, “Now, we want machines like you have,” because they had all these exercise machines. And, and, he, and so we were talking about what we wanted and what we had, and so on and so forth. And the bell rings to go to vote. So, the second bell rings, so then we really do have to go. And so we go to vote, and then, on the floor, Barbara and I come up to him and say, “Well, what do you think?” He said, “Well,” he said, “I don’t know why you want machines. You know, those machines only build muscles.” I said, “Well, you know, the reason all the Ys have them, as well as all the YMCAs have them is because they also exercise your heart and do some other things, see. And that’s why we want them.” So the Y, versus YW, he got that. And in the end, we got good equipment. But I’ll never forget him saying, “You know, it only builds muscles.” And the real consternation on his face. “Why would you want this?” It was sort of like asking to play football. You know, “You were only girls.” It was funny.