

The Honorable Barbara Bailey Kennelly
U.S. Representative of Connecticut (1982–1999)

Special Exhibit: A Century of Women in Congress

Congresswoman Ella Grasso

Representative Kennelly shares memories of Representative Ella Grasso of Connecticut.
Interview recorded September 9, 2015

My father and she were incredibly good friends. She was, he was the party boss—and he was. And she was, she was in the legislature, secretary of state for 12 years. He—she and he worked very close together. She was brilliant, absolutely brilliant. And they were partners in legislation. He had been the legislator commissioner and he did put a lot of his time into the, into the house and the senate in Connecticut and she, she wrote his speeches. I mean she, she really was, they were partners and I was John's kid. And when I ran for secretary of state, she had a candidate she wanted very much. And she had another candidate that she wanted not as much, but second. And we have conventions—we don't have primaries—we have conventions, and I was very late on running because I had investigated why the coliseum roof fell in our town and I had to get out of the city council because people were involved and just a—you know, I'd been talked about to run for secretary of state, but I wasn't interested because I was so much in this investigation. And then when I realized I had to leave city hall, the convention was coming up and I put my name in to run for secretary of state because I knew I wanted to stay in politics. And she was very unhappy. And I beat her twice on the floor. Put one candidate in, I beat her. Another one and I beat her. But I had, you know, I had my husband, who was in the legislature. I had the majority leader, who was the boss on the city council who had all sorts of urban friends. I had many, many, many friends in that convention and she was very unhappy about it. And the next morning she called me, like at 6:00, and she said, "Your father would be very unhappy." I said, "If my father had been alive I wouldn't have done it! No way!" But so as a result we never—when I was serving—we never had a close relationship, which I always felt very badly about. But I was the kid.