

Judy Lemons

Chief of Staff, Representative Nancy Pelosi of California

Special Exhibit: A Century of Women in Congress

Two Months' Vacation

Judy Lemons remembers how she started to work for Representative Sala Burton of California.

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When Phil died Sala picked up the phone and called me and she said, "I want you to—I want you to stay with me." And, and I said, "Okay, Sala, I'd, I'd like to do that." But I was on the labor management subcommittee at the time and Bill Clay had immediately come in and taken over when Phil died. And when you work for a Member and they've died in office, you're out of a job. You have no job. You don't know if you're going to have your next salary, your next monthly salary or not. And so, Bill Clay came in and said, "You all have 30 days." So, I wrote him a thank you note because I thought he could have said, "You go now," or, "You go next week." So, I thought "Thirty days? That, that's a gift. It could be worse." So, I wrote him a thank you note and Phil, in those days, had been an honorary member of the Black Caucus and in Bill Clay's office he had all the members of the Black Caucus, their pictures framing the wall in his office and Phil, the only white Member in this, in this wall of Black Caucus members. And so, unbeknownst to me, Sala goes in to talk to Bill Clay. And she said, "Mr. Clay, you know that Judy works on the labor management subcommittee and she has accrued a lot of vacation time. And I would like for Judy to have her vacation time." And he said, "Well," he said, "what's her name?" And Sala said, "Judy Lemons." And he said, "Oh, that's funny." He said, "I just got a letter from her. I just got a note from her." And so, he said, "Well," he said, "no one else bothered to send me a note like that." He said, "I thought that was pretty remarkable." He said, "No wonder you want her to work for you." He said, "Yes, as I recall Judy has about two months' vacation time." And so, this is how the deal worked. So, then I went out for two months and worked on Sala's campaign during my vacation.