

Linda Melconian

Assistant Counsel and Legislative Assistant, Speaker Thomas P. (Tip) O'Neill, Jr., of Massachusetts

Special Exhibit: A Century of Women in Congress

The 18-Minute Gap

Linda Melconian recounts her experience on the House Floor during a pivotal moment in the Watergate investigation.

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And they were investigating and listening to all of these tapes, it was, it was a fascinating period to be here, because you wanted to get the *Washington Post* before you got your coffee in the morning, because Woodward and Bernstein were coming out with story after story, and each story, as the, as the months went on, was getting closer and closer to the President. And the fact—was there obstruction of justice? Was he—did he know about the cover up? Did he participate in the cover up? Did he sanction the cover up? And that would be the high crimes and misdemeanors. So they were going on. And they would listen to these tapes and come in—now, we had electronic voting by this time, so most, many Members would come in, and they'd vote, and they'd leave. They might hang around for a while. And many of the Judiciary Committee Members came in after they were listening to these tapes weeks after weeks, and listen—doing the impeachment investigation, and kind of hang around on the floor for a while, because they had to go back to this. So far, nothing was emerging that, that seemed an impeachable offense. So one day, I was on there, and we had a vote, and we electronically—and I noticed the Members of the Judiciary Committee came in, quickly voted, and disappeared. Two or three of them, four of them. And then Chairman Rodino came over to me and said, "Where's Tip? I've got to talk to him. Can you find him for me?" I said, "Yes, Mr. Chairman." I went into the Democratic Cloakroom, called our—called Leo said, "Where's the Leader?" And I don't know where he was. I said, "Get him on the floor ASAP. Find him and get him on the floor." I said, "Something's happened in Judiciary. The Members are disappearing after they vote, and Pete Rodino has a very worried look on his face, and, and wants to speak to the Leader ASAP." So I chatted with Rodino. And again, you're staff. I didn't say, "What's up? What's going on?" I chatted about other things, floor stuff, whatever. And a few minutes later, the Leader came on, and of course, I left them, and they talked. And that was the 18-minute gap, and that's when they knew they had grounds for impeachment.