

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 Democratic Cloakroom

Linda Melconian describes the way then-Majority Whip Tip O'Neill introduced her to the Democratic Cloakroom.

Interview recorded June 7, 2018

And one of the things he said to me early on, he says, "Now, when you go on the floor," he says, "be careful. Don't go into the cloakroom too much, the Democratic Cloakroom." Now the Democratic—he said, "Because," he said, "the men, you know, will feel—they're going to feel uncomfortable with you in there. You know, there aren't any women in there." There were no women Pages at the time. The people who ran the Democratic Cloakroom—which was like a service operation. They had phone booths there, and if Members were on the floor debating, or listening to issues, or bills that were on the floor, their staff could get a hold of them through the phone system there, call them right off the floor. They wouldn't have to leave the floor, go back to their office. This is, of course, way before we had cell phones or anything like that. And then in the back, there was a lounge area with a TV, and that's where the men smoked their cigars, cigarettes. When we had night sessions, men sometimes fell asleep, took a little nap there, late-night sessions.