

Linda Melconian

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Special Exhibit: A Century of Women in Congress

“What Are You Girls Cooking Up?”

Linda Melconian recalls the way women working in politics in the 1970s were often viewed with suspicion by their male colleagues.

Interview recorded June 7, 2018

One time, we were talking to another female—we were talking to other female Members, and maybe there were three or four of us, two staff people and Members. And male Members would come over to us and say, “Oh, what are you girls cooking up? Are you conspiring against us?” And we’d say, “Why were—why would we be conspiring against us? We’re just talking girl talk.” “Oh.” And they’d look at us, not quite believing us, but it was sort of a satisfactory answer, so they’d walk away. But it was like, three or more—it was funny. Three or more women, whether it were two staff people and a Member or two Members and one staff person, three or more women on the floor congregating, chatting, would cause concern among the male Members. Were we conspiring against them? What I found so fascinating about this experience is that years later, when I served in the Massachusetts senate, my freshman year, and I was talking to two other members, and I had male state senators come up to me—up to us and say, “Are you three conspiring against us?” I thought, “I can’t believe this. It’s happening here in Massachusetts years later, the same thing that happened in the House Floor in Washington.”