

Linda Melconian

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

Special Exhibit: A Century of Women in Congress

“Notice I Haven’t Mentioned Any Women”

Linda Melconian remembers the small number of women Members of Congress in the 1970s.

Interview recorded June 7, 2018

You notice I haven’t mentioned any women. We only had, I believe, 13 women in 1971 when I started, and when I left in 1981, there were, I believe, 22—21 or 22 women Members. So 13 to 21, 22 in 10 years—of Members of Congress. And women Members were tolerated, because they were duly elected by their constituents. They had a right to be there. Were they accepted? Grudgingly. It was still a bastion of male chauvinism, and particularly in the Democratic Cloakroom. Women were not comfortable—women Members were not comfortable going in back there with the cigar, cigarette, smelly, you know, lounge area, Member—male Members sleeping on the couches. It was just, it was very uncomfortable. They had every right to be there. They were duly elected Members of Congress. But it just was uncomfortable. So Members—most women Members in the—at least early, when I first started in the Whip Office and Leader’s Office—it changed as I got in, as we got into the Speaker’s Office—but they would come, and they would cast their vote. They might sit on the floor for a bit, but then they’d go back and do their work. They were busy doing their work.