

Linda Melconian

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

Special Exhibit: A Century of Women in Congress

Interacting with Members on the Floor

Linda Melconian describes her role as Speaker Tip O'Neill's "eyes and ears" on the House Floor.
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I went on the floor a lot to—as the eyes and ears, to see what was going on. At first, it was to listen and learn, to really absorb the parliamentary procedures, the processes, what happened, who was close to who, who talked to whom. And as Members saw me more and more on the floor, they would come over to me, and say, "I'd like to have Tip come out to my district." This happened more as later we got into the Leader's office. "You know, I'd really like to ask Tip to come out to my office." The younger Members were much more comfortable talking to me. They were younger. They were comfortable with a woman. And they were a little more intimidated talking, maybe, to Speaker O'Neill. They didn't know him. They hadn't served so long. So they would ask me what I thought. And generally, I would give them advice, or I'd say, "You know, I think you should ask him directly. Just go right to him. You'll be pleased with his answer." If I thought it was something where I needed to maybe smooth things over before they talked to him, explain what their interests were because I knew, maybe, this particular individual was not one that the Speaker was enamored about, then I would do that first.