

## **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 Most Popular Man in the House**

Linda Melconian recalls the way Speaker Tip O'Neill methodically built a strong base of support in the Democratic Caucus.

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Well, he was, as I told you, elected Leader and elected Speaker. And by the time he was Speaker, he was the most popular man in the House, and everybody pretty much had no opposition. I think Sam Gibbons ran against him, but as, as one of the Congressmen who seconded his nomination from the South said, you know, "Tip O'Neill knows no east, no west, no west, no north, no south. He's All-American." And I thought that that summed it up very well. He had been responsive to everybody. Now, one of the things we had done in the Leader's Office—and this was one of the changes in my responsibilities—he went out and campaigned for Members, Democratic Members, to get reelected. He'd go out to their districts. They would come to me, they would come to him, and say, you know, "Will Tip come out and speak? You know, I've got an, I've got an event coming up." And one of my responsibilities was to work with the Member, to work with the staff, find from the Member who the staff person I was to talk—with whom I should be speaking—here in Washington or in the district—and put together the event portfolio of what Tip O'Neill should say in his remarks, what the audience was, what the district was about. I had to do a lot of research to prepare the Speaker. So we'd have his folder when he went out and the remarks. Sometimes they were prepared remarks. Sometimes they were bullet points and ideas, things to talk about. I'd give him whatever backup I thought he needed. But we had to know what the—had to know the audience, had to know what issues he needed to talk about that were helpful to the Member, what issues he should stay away from in that district. So it was a learning experience for all of us. But again, it helped us to get to know the Members better, and their districts, and their concerns, as we were preparing for the Speaker—because once he became Leader, the campaign was on to become Speaker.