

## **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 Workings of the Whip Organization**

Linda Melconian provides a behind-the-scenes view of the Democratic Whip organization under then-Majority Whip Tip O'Neill.

*Interview recorded June 7, 2018*

Every Thursday morning at 9:15, we had a Whip meeting in the Whip Office. And Tip O'Neill would chair it as Majority Whip. The Speaker and the Leader would be there, the chairman of the Democratic Caucus, and we had 20 whips. The country was divided, I believe, into 19 zones. I think New York had two, so there were 20—and divided regionally, geographically. And I think there were like 10 to 25 members in each zone, and these were the leaders. They were elected by their Members in their zones, and they came to the Whip organization—they were a part of the Whip organization. I don't think we had deputy whips, and chief deputy whips, and assistant whips then. That came later. But the Leader is responsible, the Majority Leader is responsible for scheduling floor legislation. And so Leader Boggs would come, the Majority Leader would come, with a schedule for the following week on this Thursday morning, and the Speaker would be there, and would talk about the bills, get input from the whips. Are there any issues with these bills? Do we have a problem with them? Is there a controversy here? Are these bills that we should take a Whip count? Do we—are we going to have a problem? Do we want to make sure we have the votes? We never wanted to—the majority party never wants to bring anything to the floor unless it's sure it has the votes. I don't care whether it's the Democrats or the Republicans. They've got to have the votes. You know, you're not going to bring it to the floor—and the leadership controls the floor scheduling—the majority leadership.