

The Honorable Constance A. Morella
U.S. Representative of Maryland (1987–2003)

Special Exhibit: A Century of Women in Congress

The Double Standard

Representative Morella remembers being questioned for choosing to run for the state legislature while raising a family.

Interview recorded June 16, 2015

I, I would sometimes have people in—knocking on doors and meeting with them would say, "Are you running as a woman?" "Well, I don't know what the answer—I'm not running as a man." But I didn't push women's issues. I mean, you know, the point is I wanted to represent everybody on all of the issues. And so, I wasn't running as a, a candidate because I was a woman, even though these were, have always been important issues to me. But I think every time you elevate or give opportunities to women you elevate a society, you know, and bring stability. So, yeah, it would be a few questions, questions like that. I would get a lot of questions about, "How can you do that with a family?" And there was one, one critical point. When I lost my first election for the state legislature, two years later an opening occurred in the, in the state, the state senate because the man who had been in the state senate was elected to Congress—created an opening. And so, for that seat—and it was going to be a Republican seat—I had to appear before a committee of my party and I was the only woman and there were, like, four men. And I remember when the chairman asked me the question, "Well, Mrs. Morella, you know, with your large family, do you think that you would be able to give the appropriate time to take care of, you know, the responsibilities of being a state legislator?" That was a—an epiphany. I knew I wasn't going to be—I wasn't going to get it by virtue of that very question. Now—and I didn't—now, if, if my husband had been there, they would have said, "Oh, Mr. Morella, this is so fantastic. You have a great family, and a position, and I therefore know that you do understand all the responsibilities you would face." So, that was a, an example of the double standard.