

**The Honorable Mary Rose Oakar**  
U.S. Representative of Ohio (1977–1993)

**Special Exhibit: A Century of Women in Congress**

**“And They Went Crazy”**

Representative Oakar recalls her determination to pass legislation aimed at improving women’s health.  
*Interview recorded March 2, 2017*

So finally it was near Christmas, I believe and, and one of the fellas and we, everybody had their airplane ticket to go home, anxious to get out. We were on television making fools of ourselves because we hadn’t passed the budget and it was crunch time. And one of the guys in the conference committee, a friend of mine from Massachusetts, came over and said, “Mary Rose, they took your mammography legislation out again.” And I just got enraged because it was the sixth time they did that. And so Leon Panetta, my classmate, was the Budget chair. And he said something like, “On page 1012 line 10 take out blah, blah, blah, and substitute blah, blah, blah.” And I said, “Reserving the right to object, what is that?” And then Dick Gephardt ran down the aisle and said, “Mary Rose, I know you probably found out but we’re going to do it, believe me, next, next year.” I said, “What is it?” And then I went on and on about the lives that were, could be saved, 4,800 lives could be saved if that legislation passed, I was told. And still today that’s a true statement. And, and so I objected. And they went crazy. I had to be escorted by the police, the Capitol Police home. They were so mad at me because they were all ready to leave. And I said, “Well, too bad, you know.” And I, I said, “You fellas will have this on your conscience.” One of the guys came up to me from my own state and said, “You know, Mary Rose, I’m one of the 2 percent of men who had breast cancer.” And he said, “Good for you.” And he said, “Let me walk you out with this police officer.” And they drove me home. I had to leave my car there. Honestly it’s a true statement. So anyway the next day because so many people were watching us the phones had been ringing off the hook for these Congressmembers. Dan Rostenkowski told me he had over 1,000 calls. Senators told me their lines were jammed because people were watching this and calling and saying, “How dare you take that out for giving somebody a tax break?” And, so the next day Dan Rostenkowski came to me and said, “We’re going to put it back in. I have a half hour to put it back in. And I’m going to let you control the time. Would you mind if I take five minutes so I can win my next election?” I said, “Of course not, thank you, Mr. Chairman.”