

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

Special Exhibit: A Century of Women in Congress

Making History for Women: Part One

Representative Oakar discusses advice she received from Congresswoman Geraldine Ferraro after she was elected secretary of the Democratic Caucus.

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Well, Gerry had run for Vice President, and came around to the Hill to thank individual people. And she came to my office to thank me. And there was nothing to thank. I was passionate about her running. And she said, "I want to tell you. You were elected." She said, "Don't do what I did. I never, because I thought, you know, I would get ahead more, I never ever told them that I should go to the meetings at the White House for leadership. And no woman has ever done that." And she said, "It's wrong, because you're elected." And some of the appointed people—at that time we had an appointed whip—and they would get to go but the elected people, the secretary, would not get to go. So she said, "Go to Tip O'Neill and ask him." So I said, "That's great advice. I'd love to go to those meetings," you know. And she said, "No, you have to go." So I went to Tip. And Tip said, "Eleanor," who was his secretary, "Get, get President Reagan on the phone." And I heard him. He said, "If Mary Rose Oakar isn't invited," because the White House invites you, "I'm not going. And she's the secretary of the caucus." So I got to go.