

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

Special Exhibit: A Century of Women in Congress

Persistence and Good Advice

Representative Oakar shares how she earned a spot on the House Select Committee on Aging.
Interview recorded March 2, 2017

So I went to Senator Pepper and I said, "I want to be on Aging." I told him about why. And he said, "Oh, I'd love to have you on Aging because you'd have to be active." I said, "I promise I'd go to every meeting." And he said, "Well, here's what you have to do. You have to go to Tip O'Neill and ask the Speaker if he would put you on the committee." He said, "Just meet him. Every morning he gets there at 7:00 in the morning. So you have to get up and be right there." So I did. And he'd say, and Tip would greet me and say, "Rosemary, how are you?" And I said, "Mr. Speaker, I'd like to be on the Select Committee on Aging." He said, "You don't have seniority, honey, I have five guys that have seniority and I only have one seat. You have to wait a little while." So, I went back and told Claude Pepper. He said, "Well, keep going back." And so I said, "Really?" He said, "Yes." So, I go back next morning. I see the Speaker. He said, "Mary Rose, how are you?" And I said, "Great, yeah, sure you don't think—here's why I want to be on." And he was so nice about it but he said, "You don't have seniority, Mary Rose, I can't do it." Next morning, so he went through this Rosemary/Mary Rose deal. So one day I go again and he says, I said, "Mr. Speaker." "What can I do for you," he said, "besides that?" I said, "Well." I was ready to give up. I said, "You know, I have constituents from greater Cleveland here. Can you take a picture with them on the Capitol steps?" He said, "Love to." And he said, "What do you want me to say about you? Anything you want." I said, "Just remember my first name. It's Mary Rose, not Rosemary." He said, "Honey, I have a sister Mary Rose, and a daughter Rosemary, you're like one of my family." I said, "If I'm like one of your family, put me on the Aging Committee." And he did.