

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

Special Exhibit: A Century of Women in Congress

Gender Stereotypes

Representative Oakar discusses the obstacles she had to overcome as a woman candidate running for Congress.

Interview recorded March 2, 2017

I thought it was a great issue for me to be the only woman. Yes, I think gender was for some. One of the fellas did an ad in fact saying—when they realized that my polling was high, and it wasn't a poll I took, it was a poll he took, and it was leaked by one of his volunteers. And I found out that I was ahead of everybody, which was very interesting because I didn't think that was the case. But he did an ad saying, "You know, if you want a weakling," you know, that sort of thing. "You want somebody soft on issues." I mean you didn't have to say women, but that's what he was talking about. It really backfired I think quite a bit. And he was the person that everybody thought would win because his father had been in a high position and had been former mayor of Cleveland and so on, so, and worked for Kennedy, President Kennedy. So, and he's a great guy. Later on I did campaign for him. But I did think that there was, some made an issue about the fact that I wouldn't be strong enough to have that office and, so on. But, you know, obviously some people thought differently.