

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

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

**Building Support for a Women’s Caucus**

Representative Oakar explains her role in building support for a women’s caucus.  
*Interview recorded March 2, 2017*

So we went to the senior Members, Liz Holtzman and Peggy Heckler, and I got to know them before. They were very out there for the new Members. And we said, “Why don’t we meet?” And they said, “Well, let’s form a bipartisan caucus.” And so, we all had to, I told this story last night. We all had to go to different women to ask them if they’d join, because we wanted everybody to join. So Liz Holtzman gives me Barbara Jordan. And Barbara Jordan was an icon. You know, she was very famous. And she was not reaching out too much to us. She was, I wanted her autograph, you know, I remember thinking. So I go to Barbara Jordan. I said, “Barbara Jordan, I’m Mary Rose Oakar, I was just elected to Congress for my first term.” She said, “Of course you are.” You know, she’s sitting there and on the House Floor. She always got there early because she had a problem walking and she wanted to get there early. And so nobody was in the, in the chamber at the time but Barbara and I. And I said, “Well, we’re forming this Women’s Caucus. It’s bipartisan. We’d certainly love to have you join.” “Caucus? Women’s Caucus,” she says. She says, “There’s only one caucus I belong to.” And I, I thought she was going to say the Black Caucus. She said, I said, “What caucus is that?” She said, “The Texas caucus.” So I said, “Well, can we at least use your name? Even if you don’t come to the meetings.” So that was the compromise. So we did get a few Members that never came to meetings. But just about everybody did sign on and come. And, and as a result we passed wonderful legislation together.