

The Honorable Elizabeth J. Patterson
U.S. Representative of South Carolina (1987–1993)

Special Exhibit: A Century of Women in Congress

“They Were Sort of Fearful of a Woman”

Representative Patterson describes the resistance she faced as a woman candidate at the local and state level in South Carolina.

Interview recorded April 3, 2017

I got a lot of flak when I ran for county council. It was sort of interesting, you know, a woman running. And it was countywide, so I got a lot, had a lot of funny experiences. You know, people talking about a woman running, and “Does she know what she’s doing? She should be home with her family,” and that sort of thing. But it, county council definitely helped me learn the way the system worked, as far as compromising. And that, that happened in the state senate as well because for a while, I was the only woman in the state senate. We had a lieutenant governor who was female, but as a member of the senate, I was the only woman for a while. So I had to again prove to the membership for the state senate that I wasn’t so different that they couldn’t deal with me. They were sort of fearful of a woman.