

Cokie Roberts

Congressional Correspondent and Daughter of Representatives Hale and Lindy Boggs of Louisiana

Special Exhibit: A Century of Women in Congress

“I’m the Only Woman in the Room”

Cokie Roberts shares a story about Representative Bobbi Fiedler and her decision to protect the interests of women.

Interview recorded May 25, 2017

You had this sense of, you know, this cowboy coming in from the West and bringing in the “Reagan Revolution” and the Senate became Republican for the first time in, in decades. In the House, the Republicans, working with Southern Democrats, had a working majority. And it was just all kinds of change going on, all the time. And one of the people who had won in that election was Bobbi Fiedler, a very conservative Republican woman from California, who had defeated a longtime Democrat, Jim Corman. And, and so she was kind of a star among the, the Reaganites as, you know, someone who had carried their message into the Congress. There’s a longer story about Jimmy Carter’s concession, but that’s another story. But, the, at any rate, she was appointed to the Budget Committee as a reward for this. And so, the Budget Committee is meeting, and there was something that they were zeroing out about women in science. And she said, “Wait a minute. Stop. Don’t do that. You know, we, we can’t get rid of that.” And they said, “What are you talking about? You’re supposed to be the big fiscal hawk here.” And she said, “Look around the room.” And still they didn’t, you know, because they don’t get it. And, and she, and, and finally she said, “I’m the only woman in the room. And if I don’t, if I don’t protect this program—which I have, which I have learned, since I’ve been here, is a very valuable program—then nobody else will.” And that role is, is, generally, embraced by women in Congress, and sometimes to their surprise.