Ileana Ros-Lehtinen

Special Exhibit: A Century of Women in Congress

Gender Equality in the Institution
Representative Ros-Lehtinen shares her thoughts on the treatment of women Members during her early career.

Interview recorded April 16, 2018

I found, when I got to Congress, that this was not a welcoming institution for, for young women. Whether it was something silly like there are no bathrooms nearby, or, or something important like “Guys, where are the women leaders in committees,” and everything in between. This was not an institution that cared very much about equality for women. They cared about equality in the larger sense, but when it came to you, they didn’t think that that was so important. They didn’t strive to, to make women feel important or feel empowered or, or give you the opportunity. Maybe if your leadership had an important bill, they would give it to you and you’d say, “You know, we’re going to pass this, you might as well be the shepherd for it.” No, not really. They, they would look at their endangered Members and give them the bills. Now it’s changed a lot. I think both parties are so aware of having women and minorities have a bigger say, be more involved, they make it, they make it a point of making sure that women are in the front. Let’s make sure that women are in leadership. Our Republican Party isn’t as great on that yet, but we’re getting better. And so I think that there’s a recognition at least, when we are doing a bad job, at least they’re aware that we’re doing a bad job. Before, they were doing a lousy job, didn’t know and didn’t care. Now, they’re more cognizant of it. How could you not be?