

The Honorable Claudine Schneider
U.S. Representative of Rhode Island (1981–1991)

Special Exhibit: A Century of Women in Congress

Gender, Age, and Congress

Representative Schneider discusses her constituents' range of opinions about electing a woman to Congress.

Interview recorded January 20, 2015

The reporters told me that that was a detriment. They said, "Look, you're young, you're a woman, you have no money, you have no name-recognition. How do you possibly expect to win?" And I just said, "Well, I'm going to do the best job I possibly can and, you know, we'll see what the voters have to say." But, for the most part, the reporters, I think, were uncomfortable in bringing up the whole, "Well, you're a woman" kind of thing, except for the one from the *Providence Journal*, the main newspaper. And, when I encountered constituents or voters on the campaign trail, it was always interesting to me that, more often than not, men would say to me, "Well, I'm going to vote for you because I think women are more honest than men." Or they would say something like, "I'm going to vote for you. And I may not agree with you on all of your issues, but I trust you." So, I think there was an inherent—at least among the men—attitude that, you know, "I think we ought to go with this, this new idea of having a woman." And what was disconcerting to me about the women, is that women were not supportive. The majority of them were not. And I couldn't quite understand it because I thought, "Well, I'm supportive of women. Why aren't they?" And, we did some polling data on that, and it showed that many women questioned, "Well, what makes you think that you're better than I am?" And so, it was a sort of subliminal envy, I guess, that made women hesitate to vote for a woman. And I, I would like to think that today, in this day and age, we're beyond that, but I'm not so sure.