

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

Special Exhibit: A Century of Women in Congress

The "Gypsy Moths"

Representative Schneider recalls being noticed by President Reagan for her coalition-building skills.
Interview recorded January 20, 2015

I met with Ronald Reagan many times. And I was often invited in with some members of the leadership. The reason—of the Republican Party—the reason was was that I had been recognized early on. Of course, I voted against the President's budget right out of the box. So, he thought, "Well, she's an independent mover." And then the second thing that they noticed about me is that I was a pretty good coalition builder. I was able to bring the Republicans and the Democrats together on certain bills that I thought needed to move forward. And so, the President wanted to use me to be that coalition builder. And it was particularly important because at the time, we had moderates, moderate Republicans in Congress, and we were called the "Gypsy Moths," which were a plague upon New England. But many of us Republicans, moderate Republicans, were from New England. And there were—we would meet regularly. So, there were anywhere between 21 to 28 of us. We were the swing votes. We, we could determine, and did determine, what went forward and what did not. So, I didn't hold a position in that group, but I was clearly one of the strategist organizers and coalition builders. And so, when the President wanted to move certain pieces of legislation that he thought I might be receptive to, he'd call me in along with Dick Cheney, and Newt Gingrich, and some of the other guys, even though I wasn't officially part of the leadership.