

The Honorable Patricia Scott Schroeder
U.S. Representative of Colorado (1973–1997)

Special Exhibit: A Century of Women in Congress

Sharing a Chair with Representative Ron Dellums of California

Representative Schroeder describes the power of the chairman of the Armed Services Committee.
Interview recorded June 3, 2015

So, I show up the first day and there was also Ron Dellums, an African American from Oakland, who had been here before, he had been here two years. And they put him on the committee and I do not know whether he had been vetoed or not, I don't know whether they override that, that I don't know. But I, it was very clear that he was not really excited about having an African American and a girl on his committee. So we walk in and we're feeling pretty good, you know, and he starts going off about "This is absolutely horrible." I mean, he is bellowing like a bull elephant out in, out in the jungle. "This is the worst thing that's ever happened. It's not even worth running for Congress anymore. They've taken away all your power. There's nothing left." And he says, "However, I still have the power to determine how many seats are at the dais, and these two people are only worth half of the rest of my Members, so they're getting one chair." So Ron and I kind of looked at each other and we both had been in the antiwar movement, and the thing was, "Okay, now what do we do?" And we decided that we'd walk in with great dignity and we share a chair. So we sat there, cheek-to-cheek. Barney Frank used to always say it's the only half-assed thing I did when I was in Congress, but you know, I'm not sure that's true. But there we were and it was interesting because none of the rest of the committee even pretended to notice. They were all there basically to support their own, you know, their own districts and their own bases, and every—and they never want to upset the chairman.