

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

**Special Exhibit: A Century of Women in Congress**

**Getting an Unlikely Spot on the Armed Services Committee**

Representative Schroeder recalls her surprising route to a seat on the Armed Services Committee.  
*Interview recorded June 3, 2015*

What I really wanted, because I figured all the money was going through Armed Services. And I also knew how to fly a plane and I figured there weren't any women, and it was very important to have a woman's viewpoint, too. It's all about protecting women and children, and they're sucking up all the money, so there was never any money for education or anything else that I wanted because it was, "Oh no, we've got to have a strong defense." So I thought okay, well I, I want to be on that committee. And that started a real firestorm because the chairman was not at all wanting to put me on the committee. In 1973, when I got sworn in, there was an entirely different way of getting on committees. The Ways and Means Committee made the assignments then, and Wilbur Mills was then chairman of the Ways and Means Committee. This is life's little quirky things that you never know. Now, after I had gotten elected, I got this giant cheese from Wilbur Mills. And I thought, "I know who he is, but I have never seen him, shaken his hand. Why this cheese?" Didn't think much about it, you know. And then I got a call and he said, you know, "I'm in charge of all of this. What would you like to do?" So I thought, "Okay, well this is my chance." I want to be on Armed Services. Well, he kind of gulps but he—well I thought, "yeah, yeah, he will probably go on the hopper and who knows what." Anyway, lo and behold, I'm on the Armed Services Committee. Wow! You know, now I couldn't, everybody was like, "What happened?" Well, later on we found out what happened, because Mr. Mills was discovered with his Argentine Firecracker, who was wading out in the Tidal Basin. It became a huge scandal. And I knew Eliot Janeway, who was a big economist in New York. Okay, so suddenly I've got all the pieces put together. Eliot Janeway's wife and Wilbur Mills' wife were very good friends, and for some reason they were really interested in my campaign. It was like, "Here's this young woman with these kids, running out in Colorado, isn't this interesting?" So they kept nagging Wilbur. Number two. Wilbur is so busy with the Argentine Firecracker, he doesn't have time to go home and campaign much. And his wife's out campaigning all the time and she kind of has a mini stroke; one side of her face kind of froze. And he starts feeling a little guilty, as well he should, and apparently she said, "I want you to do for that woman, whatever she wants." So apparently, I gave him a pretty high bar, but he did it, and that's how I got on. I really thought it was my qualifications and my, my ability to make my case. It wasn't that at all. It was called guilt—guilt and the Argentine Firecracker.