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Special Exhibit: A Century of Women in Congress

Coming Back to Work

Patricia Schwartz discusses the challenges working women faced in the office in the 1970s.
Interview recorded June 22, 2015

I got pregnant. And everybody said “Oh, that’s great, you’re going to leave, go home, have a baby, we’ll find somebody to replace you.” And I went, “No, no, wait, wait, wait, wait, wait, wait. No, no, we need both salaries. I need to work, so what is the leave policy?” They didn’t have one. Okay, so I kind of waited for them, and they, they dragged their feet a little, and finally I was approached and I, they said, “Well, what we’ve decided is we’re going to give you three months off with pay, and then you can come back to work, and your job will be here.” And that was just the committee. I have no idea what other committees did, or Members’ offices, but that’s what they decided to do. And I caught a lot of heat from the women because I was coming back to work, which I thought was interesting. Most of the women that were there who had children, they were grown, and in high school, and that’s probably why they were older. And they expected me to be home with my baby. The men were much more understanding than the women were, it got like, you could feel it. “You should be home with your baby.” “Well, I’m going to be home with my baby, you know, but I don’t want to, I have to work. And I did, and came back to work, and it worked out fine. But, I was kind of taken aback by women. You know, your big supporters are now saying, “This is what you should do, and this is what you shouldn’t do, and this is what—” So, it was very a—kind of an interesting time.