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Special Exhibit: A Century of Women in Congress

Salary of a Married Woman
Patricia Schwartz describes the way marital status created inequities in pay.
Interview recorded June 22, 2015

The biggest and hardest problem that I remember, and I was kind of dumbfounded, after I came back to work in the late '70s, I was a working mom, so it wasn't as important for me to have a good salary. The mindset was because I had a husband who had a good salary, and he could take care of us, mine was just a little extra. That just burned me. And it kept me below a certain area. And, this was when we were in the minority staff. The Democratic majority staff dictated the salaries of the minority Republican staff—what their ceilings were and what they could make. They couldn't make any more than any of their peers on the other side, and in most cases, made less. So I became the AA on the Republican side, but I had to make $5,000 a year less than my counterpart on the Democratic side. And that's the way it was. And I would beat my head against the wall because I know she had a lot to do, but I was juggling a smaller group and a lot more. I didn't have subcommittees taking up the slack. I was, we were up to 25 people now. So it was larger than most subcommittees, and it just really annoyed me. And I remember going to my boss, asking him, he said, "Well I'll go ask again." And then asked again. And finally I just said, "I'm going to go in and ask." "Well, you really shouldn't do that, that's not your job to do that." I said, "This is my job." And I went in and the staff director at the time was a guy who was a former astronaut. And he pretty much looked me right in the eye, and he said, "You're married, right?" And I said, "Yes." "Your husband has a salary, you don't need to worry about it. You make enough." And I walked out, I was like, "I can't believe this." "So if I was divorced and, or single, that'd be different?" "Oh, yeah."