

Nicola S. (Niki) Tsongas
U.S. Representative of Massachusetts (2007–2019)

Special Exhibit: A Century of Women in Congress

Drawn to Politics

Representative Tsongas explains how she first became interested in politics.
Interview recorded January 18, 2018

My father had been stationed in Tokyo, Japan. And my grandmother was coming to live with us at that point, so this is in the summer of 1960, and we're on a ship, crossing the Pacific Ocean. She and I were staying up late to play cards. And this one evening, we heard over the loudspeaker—and we were on a Navy ship, there was, it was barebones, there was nothing fancy about it—but we were both up late at night, playing cards, as we did into the wee hours, and I happened to hear John Kennedy—JFK's acceptance speech, at the Democratic Convention. I could not tell you what he said. I have no recollection of any individual word, but I have, I can forever hear his voice. And I, like many, was captivated by his presidency. I think so saddened by his, his sudden death. And I think drew me to the Democratic Party. My, my parents had been Republicans. My husband often said, as his parents were, that he grew up in a disadvantaged household, his parents were Republicans. I never felt it quite that way, but nevertheless, I think it was the presidency of John Kennedy, in my high school years that really drew me to politics.