

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

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

### **Inspired by Change**

Representative Tsongas describes some of the early influences in her life.  
*Interview recorded January 18, 2018*

Well if I think back to it, I would say it must have originated with my, both my mother and my grandmother. They were—my grandmother had attended college. She went to the University of California in Berkeley. She ended up having to raise her daughters by herself. She came to live with us when she was in her 70s. And I think there was something about her determined independence, and not letting anything get her down, that must have, must have resonated with me. My mother always valued education. She could never attend the art school she wanted to attend. Her father insisted that she go to Northwestern and major in mining engineering. And for some, somehow or other, her, her suggesting that we each needed to follow our own path, get educated—but she would, she or my father would never stand in our way, I think were probably quite important. So, if I look at just in the very early stages of my young life, I would have to say that they were the two dominant role models. But over time, I ended up attending a women's college. I went to Smith College in Massachusetts. I just recently had to reflect on the impact of Smith because it will be my 50th, my 50th year reunion year this May. I think going to a school, first of all, that was very challenging academically, thrilling in many ways, being with many young women who were aspiring to fields that historically had been dominated by men. I really was part of a change, a wave that was coming for women. And, and I think that helped fuel my, my life, really. So no one person, but I think sort of the time, both my mother and grandmother reflecting their times, and then making my way to a college that just fostered that in every way.