

The Honorable Elizabeth Holtzman
U.S. Representative of New York (1973–1981)

Special Exhibit: A Century of Women in Congress

Inspiration to Run for Congress

Representative Holtzman describes how her participation in the civil rights movement inspired her work to improve the country.

Interview recorded March 10, 2016

But basically what happened to me was I was involved in the civil rights movement in the early '60s, and I was in the South during the early days of the protests against segregation and Jim Crow. And I saw with my own eyes a system where the police used cattle prods, and dogs, and violence to stop blacks from just the basic right to vote, basic right to walk on the street, the basic right to go into a swimming pool, the basic right to go into a library. I saw this with my own eyes. And I saw that system crumble. And I said to myself, you know, "If people really try hard, we can bring about a society with justice." So, that was a very deep inspiration for me because I felt that there was—if I worked hard enough, there was some way I could contribute to making this country a better country. My parents, my grandparents, my whole family, came as immigrants to the United States. I was the first person in my family to be born in America. And I really wanted to give back in some way to this country that had provided a refuge.