

The Honorable Nancy Lee Johnson
U.S. Representative of Connecticut (1983–2007)

Special Exhibit: A Century of Women in Congress

“Freshmen Are to Be Seen but Not Heard”

Representative Johnson describes speaking on the House Floor.
Interview recorded December 3, 2015

I'll tell you one funny little story that happened my freshman year. Stewart McKinney was on the floor, from Connecticut, and, managing a bill, a HUD bill. And he had been here a long time, and he was an expert on HUD, and a highly-regarded Ranking Member. He wasn't the chairman, but the committee, the parties worked very closely together and the Ranking Member had a real say. So he's managing it and I come to the floor. And he said, "Well, what are you here for?" I said, "I'm going to speak on this amendment." "Oh." He said, "Well, I can give you two minutes. You know, that's all you kind of get around here." I said, "Okay." This was about pets in public housing. And we had had this issue in the senate. I knew just where my people stood on it and it's an important issue. So, I said my piece. He said, "And now remember, you know, you can't go over the two minutes." I said, "It's all right." So, I did my time. I said what I had to say. And he said, "Really, a good job. But remember, on the whole, freshmen are to be seen, but not heard." And that's not a bad idea because I felt it wasn't until about my fourth term when I really understood at a fairly profound level what it is to govern a nation as diverse as ours.