

Gwendolyn Mink

Daughter of the Honorable Patsy Takemoto Mink of Hawaii

Special Exhibit: A Century of Women in Congress

The Merits of the Congressional Women's Caucus

Gwendolyn Mink discusses the internal politics of the Congressional Women's Caucus and some of the limitations of the organization.

Interview recorded March 14, 2016

I can't answer what she would have wanted. I can answer with respect to what I observed, which is that as a bipartisan caucus, it was not necessarily the best place for a feminist legislator interested in social justice to articulate and advance those goals, right? I mean, just because you're female doesn't mean that you agree on everything, and certainly doesn't mean that you necessarily all support the same women for the same reasons on the same issues. So, I think just in, in kind of a sketchy look backwards that while the kind of the sisterhood aspect of the caucus, the, you know, having it as a place to talk about issues where there was agreement—and certainly, there were those, too—was a, was a great thing. And I think she would have liked to have had that in the '60s and '70s. For some of the most contentious aspects of her tenure, it was not, it was not necessarily an institution that would have enhanced outcomes, or made things feel better in the course of fighting for whatever was the, was the policy of the day.

MURPHY: Much has been made—

And actually, I should also say that one, one—another aspect of this was something that was actually extremely important. One of the reasons you could have such a vibrant caucus that was frustratingly unable to come to an agreement on certain kinds of issues—right, because women have a range of opinions—was that the number of women in Congress had exponentially increased. And that was something that pleased her no end. She was very concerned to have women's representation be increased to whatever extent possible, and wanted to encourage women to run for office of whatever party, but especially Democrats. And so, the, some, some of the limitations of the caucus have to do with its size, but the fact of its size was actually a sign of progress, so.