

The Honorable Susan Molinari
U.S. Representative of New York (1990–1997)

Special Exhibit: A Century of Women in Congress

Underestimating Women

Representative Molinari describes feeling underestimated as a woman in Congress.
Interview recorded January 8, 2016

And once again, I think it set me aside. For purposes, I was extremely pro-choice then, I'm pro-life now, but it, it, it in some ways it very much hampered me because the very conservative wing of the party, not the, my colleagues, but the people who would make money off of fundraising, really, you know, targeted me. And when I ran for vice chair, went all out to, you know, campaign against me—"Bella Abzug without the hat," you know, just whatever caricature that they could, that they could plan. But at the same time, I think it also made me a fighter and made me—you know, I was just forced to be tougher, you know? I mean, isn't that just sort of the secret? At least it was back then. We were constantly being underestimated as females, and so, you know, sometimes being underestimated is a good thing because you can always add to the element of surprise. I remember a lot of my debates, where the people who I was debating just didn't take me seriously, until I got up there and then it was too late. And I think the same thing happens when, you know, you're negotiating across the table for a piece of legislation.