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IMAGINING WOMEN IN U.S. POLITICS: THE PROBLEM OF SISTERHOOD IN THE LONG 1960s

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The gendered expectations of the masculinist political establishment of the long 1960s made it difficult for women to define their own unique terrain as politicians. Even with the guarantee of formal political rights firmly in place, women's status as second class citizens persisted throughout the long 1960s. Often, women were forced into frames that defined their political interests around their embodied sex, rather than the needs of their constituents. This imagined construction of women as a separate subject class established a fundamentally unequal platform for women's participation as first class citizens of the United States. While ideological differences between male politicians were accepted as the normal business of a two party political system, women in Congress were frequently expected to form a politically coherent coalition around issues of sex equality. Feminism during the long 1960s provided little relief from this rigid construction of women's political interests. With the growing popularity of second wave feminism's imagined "sisterhood" for all women, female politicians were increasingly defined by their relationship--or lack thereof--to the women's movement by feminists and anti-feminists alike. This single issue framework, however, had little historical precedent as an accurate barometer of women's real political concerns and alliances.

In 1917, Jeanette Rankin became the first woman to serve in the U.S. Congress. The first and last woman elected to the U.S. Congress from Montana, Rankin was a pacifist, a suffragette, and a lobbyist for the extremely progressive Sheppard-Towner Act. Four years later, Alice Robertson became the second woman to serve in the U.S. Congress. Robertson, an anti-suffragette from Oklahoma, refused to support civil rights and women's equality legislation and was in favor of increasing the U.S. military commitment abroad.¹ These two pioneering women, politically polar opposites, frustrated their contemporaries as well as future scholars in any attempt to define a uniquely female style of legislating. Rankin, an avowed feminist, actively promoted legislative discussions of social equality. Robertson, a social and political conservative, was openly dismissive of all class based legislation and venomously critical of the early feminist political agenda. While Rankin attempted to break open the hegemonic political class from the inside, Robertson positioned herself as an outside defender of the traditional order.

Congresswomen who followed in these political footsteps were forced to contend with a largely unchanging patriarchal praxis in national political culture, resulting in implicit challenges to their status as equally empowered first class citizens. An entrenched connection between sex and gendered capability characterized the political culture of the U.S. in the late 1960s. Popular concern for the preservation of normative gendered authority influenced the composition of many of the nation's most powerful arenas during the period, including the U.S. Congress. The composition of the congressional body, even today, reflects this deep inequality. Despite their majority status in the overall population, only 274 of the approximately 12,000 individuals who have served in the history of the United States Congress have

¹ Karen Foerstel and Herbert N. Foerstel, *Climbing the Hill: Gender Conflict in Congress* (Westport, CT: Praeger, 1996), 4, 6.

been women. Of those 274 women, only 24 have served in party leadership positions, and just 26 have chaired congressional committees. These congressional women, moreover, have been overwhelmingly white. In one hundred and twelve Congresses, only forty-three “women of color” have served as U.S. Representatives, and only one has served as a U.S. Senator.² No African American women served in the U.S. Congress before Shirley Chisholm’s landmark election of 1968. During the long 1960s, establishing a position of authority in this white male dominated cult of masculinity--where feminization, as a metaphor, and women, as a reality, posed a distinct gendered threat to the normative models of power--was no easy task for any woman.

At the height of political feminism in the long 1960s, partially as a result of the visibility of the informal feminist political caucus, the public and the press often associated female candidates with the more liberal Democratic party. This presumptuous, and often false, association encouraged the popular supposition that women politicians would demonstrate a stronger tendency toward liberal policymaking. Constituency, far more than a single identity factor such as candidate sex, had the strongest overall impact on a congressperson’s voting record. For women, as for men, gender identity was one factor in a complex formula of political ideology. In order to fully conceptualize the operation of power in gendered terms, an analysis of political influence must take these multiple variables into account.

The methods by which individuals and groups ultimately prioritized their political activism in the long 1960s were far more functions of various intersectional cultural positions than they were simply the product of sex difference. Systemic relationships of economic and cultural advantage were far more constraining than simple sex and gender identity. In determining political activism, several political scientists have argued that “among more advantaged citizens, the gender differences are relatively muted; among those less well off, there is a decided focus of attention among women on issues associated with poverty and poor living conditions.”³

These intersectional influences on political identity help to explain the differences in legislative interests between women members of Congress during the long 1960s. Disregarding these intergroup differences, social constructions of women’s embodied similarities were commonly expressed by influential men in the long 1960s, emphasizing popular stereotypes that described women as weaker, more unpredictable, and more unreliable human beings. Numerous Congresswomen and Congressmen defended these perspectives on women’s essential difference, presenting challenges to women’s status in the imagined community of the U.S.

Dr. Edgar Berman, a close confidant of Hubert Humphrey who served as a White House and State Department consultant for over a decade, eventually resigned in 1970 after offering numerous public pronouncements on women’s inferior biological conditioning. In a discussion with Representative Patsy Mink, Dr. Berman argued that women were physiologically incapable of serving in demanding and high stress national positions. Offering the example of a “menopausal woman President” forced with an international crisis, Berman argued the President’s rationality would be limited by “the curious mental aberrations of that age group.” Outraged, Mink wrote to Humphrey, demanding Berman’s resignation. Ultimately, while Berman did resign, he rejected Mink’s protests as “a typical example of an ordinarily controlled woman under the raging hormonal imbalance of the periodical lunar cycle.” Refusing to apologize for his claims, Berman instead publicly lamented the “uptight” nature of “the wh-

2 Office of the Clerk, U.S. House of Representatives, *Women in Congress*, <http://womenincongress.house.gov> (accessed 8 April 2011).

3 K. Schlozman, N. Burns, S. Verba, and J. Donahue, “Gender and Citizen Participation: Is There a Different Voice?” *American Journal of Political Science* 39 no. 2 (1995): 285.

ole world.”⁴

Women in the long 1960s faced an uphill battle for election to national political office. Historically underrepresented and socially coded as fundamentally different, women politicians were frequently dismissed as less serious than their male peers. The U.S. Congress in the 1960s did not bend easily to the demands of women’s integration. While women’s low prestige committee appointments and infrequent election to positions of party leadership imply this inequality, the discourse on Congressional facilities confirms Congresswomen’s separate status. The well-publicized fight for women’s equal access to Congressional exercise facilities illustrates the presumption of certain Congressmen that “a woman’s place is in the home, not the House.”⁵

Referring to women’s election to the U.S. House and Senate as “an intrusion,” the journalist who reported this particular story on women’s access to congressional facilities was hardly more sensitive than the unnamed Congressman to the rights of female Representatives and Senators. Casually erasing these women’s political differences from one another, the story opened with the warning that, “the 11 ladies of the House, determined suffragettes all, are clamoring shrilly for equal swimming privileges.”⁶ Reducing women’s fight for equal access to workplace facilities to a battle for equal “privileges,” the article entirely avoids any discussion of larger rights violations experienced by women in Congress. Playing to a presumed opposition between men and women’s distinct legislative interests and activities, the article generously concludes, “It would be wrong to suppose that congresswomen are unappreciated. The men have welcomed their feminine frills, courted their votes, even admired their minds.”⁷ Despite their increasing presence in Congress during the long 1960s, women politicians were still frequently coded as anomalous and inconsequential.

Recognizing the challenges faced by women in Congress, the underground feminist newsletter NOW Acts, printed by the National Organization for Women, published a “Blueprint for Political Action” in the winter of 1970. This tract encouraged women to challenge the traditional gendering of political roles through the development of a feminist political stance. According to this publication, “It is vital that women become active in political clubs. It is equally vital that this activity focus on ‘our thing’ rather than get absorbed into routine, supportive roles in which women have been traditionally locked.”⁸ This opposition between the traditional political roles for women and the new feminist demands of the 1960s and 1970s offers a useful perspective for analyzing the gendered activity of women in Congress during the long 1960s. While the call for women’s political empowerment was clearly intended as a call for social justice, a close analysis of women in the Congressional body during the long 1960s demonstrates the difficulty of defining women’s unique political “thing.” Elected by different constituencies, shaped by different social and political influences, each Congresswoman defined her agenda around a broad set of interests and objectives. While the public and the press may have imagined a separate women’s agenda, Congresswomen themselves rarely all agreed on any policy issues. A few case studies illustrate this broad range in women politician’s identification with the feminist movement and an imagined “women’s”

4 “The Sexes: Hormones in the White House,” *Time* (10 August 1970) <http://www.time.com/time/magazine/article/0,9171,876731,00.html> (accessed 4 April 2011).

5 unnamed Congressman in Jack Anderson, “Are Ladies Welcome in the House?” *The Washington Post: Parade* (23 April 1967), 22.

6 Anderson, 22.

7 Anderson, 23.

8 “Blueprint for Political Action” in NOW Acts vol. 3, no. 1 (1970), *Subject: National Organization for Women*, http://foia.fbi.gov/foiaindex/national_organization_women.htm (accessed 20 March 2011).

political agenda.

Margaret Chase Smith was one woman politician who disagreed with the majority of feminist demands for women's political and social empowerment. One of the longest serving women in the U.S. Congress, Smith was first seated by special election to fill the vacancy caused by the death of her husband in 1940. Over the subsequent three decades, she became the first woman to serve as both U.S. Representative and Senator. Reelected to the House of Representative for the 77th-80th Congresses, Smith won a seat in the Senate on November 2, 1948, where she served in the 81st-92nd Congresses. Smith was also the first woman elected to the Senate during a regular election, without first having been appointed to fill a vacant seat.⁹ Despite these pioneering achievements, however, Smith maintained a very traditional view of her gendered responsibilities in government.

Smith's perspective on her political role was not uncommon among conservative female Republicans. Conservative female legislators have commonly rejected the liberal feminist construction of "women's" legislative priorities. In the long 1960s, these conservative women actively and passionately challenged "the feminist perspective that liberal policies are in the interest of women."¹⁰

Entering politics as a congressman's wife, Smith described her role in those early years of her career as first and foremost "Clyde's wife," emphasizing that "though I knew it was important to Clyde to cultivate the women's vote for him, I had never been a feminist."¹¹ Throughout her political career, Smith persistently maintained this pose of feminine subservience, emerging as a strong supporter of the Johnson administration's rhetoric of defensive masculinity. In her memoir, Smith was careful to refute any allegations to the contrary, noting:

I was perhaps identified more with WAVE [Women Accepted for Volunteer Emergency Service] legislation than any other. It left the impression, I'm afraid, that I was a feminist concentrating on legislation for women. And if there is any one thing I have attempted to avoid it is being a feminist. I definitely resent being called a feminist.¹²

Smith's position on military policies was, indeed, far more aggressive than most feminists and other members of the 1960s counterculture would have countenanced, tying her political opinions very closely to those of the masculinist establishment. In the official record and in her memoirs, Smith presented an unequivocally masculinist approach to national policy, explicitly resentful of the idea of being assigned a feminist political identity on the basis of her identity as a woman.

Catherine Dean May, a far more moderate Republican than Smith, served in the U.S. House of Representatives from 1959 until 1971.¹³ While May advocated for women's increased political presence, in this sense aligning herself with one aspect of the second wave liberal feminist agenda, she also actively positioned herself as a traditional Republican.

9 Janet Lewis, *Women and Women's Issues in Congress: 1832-2000* (Huntington, NY: Nova Science Publishers), 110.

10 Frederick, Brian, "Are Female House Members Still More Liberal in a Polarized Era? The Conditional Nature of the Relationship Between Descriptive and Substantive Representation," *Congress and the Presidency* 36 no. 2 (2009): 198.

11 Margaret Chase Smith, *Declaration of Conscience* (Garden City, NY: Doubleday, 1972), 65.

12 Margaret Chase Smith, *Declaration of Conscience* (Garden City, NY: Doubleday, 1972), 65.

13 Office of the Clerk, U.S. House of Representatives, *Women in Congress*, <http://womenincongress.house.gov> (accessed 8 April 2011).

May's support for the Equal Rights Amendment, for example, was tempered by her frequent warnings that she was not a member of any feminist organization. In a legislative sense, she firmly believed that "we should and must amend the Constitution to provide that equality of rights under the law shall not be denied or abridged by the United States or by any State on account of sex."¹⁴ May's perspectives on feminism as a social movement, however, were heavily guarded. As she reassured one of her constituents, "I certainly can agree with you that many of those involved in the Women's Liberation movement are not expressing my views on equal opportunities for women."¹⁵

Although she strongly approved of legislation that attempted to improve gender parity in U.S. society and politics, May hesitated to align herself with feminist organizations and repeatedly demonstrated her suspicion of any platform that presumed to speak for all women. Referring to the National Woman's Party as a "kookie outfit," May revealed her discomfort with the political ties she had forged of necessity with members of the organization. In an unguarded moment of frustration, May complained, "I am stuck with this battle to get equal rights for women, though I'm not so darned sure we would want them if we got them!"¹⁶ This same resistance to universal discussions of women's interests was evident in May's response to Representative Silvio Conte's request for cosponsors of a resolution to designate August 26th as Susan B. Anthony Day. While May enthusiastically agreed to sponsor the resolution, she also warned Conte, "I did note in your letter that you are 'inviting all the women members of the Congress to cosponsor it' and wonder if this isn't a wee bit discriminatory?"¹⁷ Rejecting the assumption that all women legislators would share an interest in the resolution, critical of the presumption that male legislators would be uninterested, May pointed to the implicit bias in Conte's treatment of the resolution.

Shirley Chisholm, a markedly different politician from Margaret Chase Smith and Catherine Dean May, was elected to the 91st Congress and seated on January 3, 1969. Reelected to the 92nd through 97th Congresses, Chisholm was the first black female Representative elected to the U.S. Congress.¹⁸ While Smith, May, and Chisholm shared little in the way of legislative agendas, the three were similarly unwilling to claim a feminist identity. While Margaret Chase Smith rejected feminism as contrary to her own interests, Catherine Dean May pursued a feminist agenda while persistently denying her identity as a feminist. Like May, Shirley Chisholm was proud to describe her political career as one marked by the advocacy of marginalized people, but she hesitated to describe herself as a feminist. As Chisholm described her candidacy for the Presidency of the United States:

I am not the candidate of black America, although I am black and proud. I am not the candidate of the women's movement of this country, although I am a woman, and I am equally proud of that. I am not the candidate of any political bosses or special interests. . . . I am the candidate of the people.¹⁹

This same construction applied to Chisholm's earlier campaign for congressional office, where she developed a careful rhetoric that emphasized local ideological affinity over national

14 Catherine Dean May to Robert J. Fitzgibbon (23 July 1970) http://kaga.wsulibs.wsu.edu/u/?wsu_whc,1067 (accessed 16 March 2011).

15 Catherine Dean May to Betty Gribb (24 August 1970) http://kaga.wsulibs.wsu.edu/u/?wsu_whc,1136 (accessed 16 March 2011).

16 Catherine Dean May to Stuart Semon (15 April 1964) http://kaga.wsulibs.wsu.edu/u/?wsu_whc,886 (accessed 16 March 2011).

17 Catherine Dean May to Silvio O. Conte (2 March 1970) http://kaga.wsulibs.wsu.edu/u/?wsu_whc,1140 (accessed 16 March 2011).

18 Lewis, *Women and Women's Issues in Congress*, 122.

19 Chisholm, *The Good Fight*, 71.

political affiliations.

Following the 1968 court ordered redistricting of the Brooklyn, NY neighborhood of Bedford-Stuyvesant, Chisholm faced James Farmer in an open seat election for the U.S. House of Representatives. Farmer was a fairly daunting opponent for the relatively unknown Chisholm. For the most part, the two candidates held similar positions on local, domestic, and international issues. Furthermore, Farmer's affiliations with the Congress for Racial Equality and the Freedom Riders defined his deep significance for the civil rights movement. Farmer, however, possessed a deeply misogynistic rhetorical flourish, and frequently targeted female politicians in general and Chisholm in particular. Farmer was fond of claiming that in black communities "women have been in the driver's seat" for too long, arguing that the new congressional district needed "a man's voice in Washington." Referencing Chisholm's early work as a public school educator, Farmer frequently referred to his opponent as a "little schoolteacher," and publicly questioned her ability to lead the community.²⁰ Chisholm, in her campaign slogan "unbought and unbossed," successfully answered Farmer's challenge, using Farmer's misogynistic rhetoric to draw attention to the discrimination that she and other women faced.

Despite Chisholm's defeat of her well regarded and more politically experienced opponent, many congressmen remained skeptical of her effectiveness as a politician. When Chisholm announced her highly symbolic candidacy for the 1972 Democratic Party's Presidential nomination, many members of the political establishment dismissed her as frivolous and insignificant. Chisholm openly acknowledged the impossible nature of her campaign, admitting that "as a black person and as a female, I do not have a chance of actually gaining that office in this election year." Nonetheless, she described her candidacy as vital for the political consciousness of marginalized people in the U.S. As Chisholm claimed, "my candidacy itself can change the face and future of American politics--that it will be important to the needs and hopes of every one of you--even though, in the conventional sense, I will not win."²¹

Reflecting on her 1972 campaign, Chisholm wrote, "I ran because most people think the country is not ready for a black candidate, not ready for a woman candidate."²² Unfortunately, however, many politicians demonstrated that Chisholm was right to assume they were unready for her candidacy. Displaying the same casual misogyny as Farmer, numerous politicians dismissed or ignored Chisholm's efforts. U.S. Representative Louis Stokes of Ohio, a prominent civil rights politician, simply shrugged and laughed when a reporter asked for his opinion on Chisholm's candidacy. U.S. Representative Clay Stokes, brother to Louis and also of Ohio, answered the same reporter, "Who's Shirley Chisholm?"²³

Aware of the alienating potential of a political platform that openly criticized the ideological constructions of dominant political and social culture, Chisholm was careful to qualify her public expressions in ways that would not estrange her larger constituency. In her 1970 autobiography *Unbought and Unbossed*, published in the early years of her political career, Chisholm offered a careful positioning of the dimensions of gender and race in her politics. Responding to political attacks that accused her of racial and sexual radicalism, Chisholm equivocated:

20 Shirley Washington, *Outstanding Women Members of Congress* (Washington, D.C.: U.S. Capitol Historical Society, 1995), 17.

21 Gloria Steinem, "The Ticket That Might Have Been: President Chisholm," *Ms.* January 1973: 73.

22 Shirley Chisholm, *The Good Fight* (New York: Harper & Row, 1973), 3. (italics in the original)

23 Stephan Leshner, "The Short Unhappy Life of Black Presidential Politics, 1972," *New York Times* 25 June 1972: SM12.

I am not antimale any more than I am antiwhite, and I am not antiwhite, because I understand that white people, like black ones, are victims of a racist society. They are products of their time and place. It's the same with men. This society is as antiwoman as it is antiblack. It has forced males to adopt discriminatory attitudes toward females.²⁴

Three years later, established in her national political role, Chisholm offered a less careful analysis of male privilege. Responding to criticisms of her presidential candidacy from within the black male community of the U.S., Chisholm wrote, "if anyone thinks white men are sexists, let them check out black men sometime."²⁵ While operating in political solidarity with the black community at large, Chisholm nonetheless found it necessary to describe and critique the dialogues of masculinist privilege operating within that community. Discussing the complex social realities of class based inequality, Chisholm argued for the value of a comprehensive approach to both racial and sexual equality. Critical of the stark categorical differences set up by mainstream feminists, Chisholm pointed out that "white women are at an economic disadvantage even compared to black men, and black women are nowhere on the earnings scale."²⁶

As a non-traditional politician, and as an African American woman who lived within multiple communities of class-based oppression, Chisholm saw herself as a necessary agent of change within national politics. Discussing the instruments by which gendered difference was maintained in political society, Chisholm argued, "one distressing thing is the way men react to women who assert their equality; their ultimate weapon is to call them unfeminine. They think she is antimale; they even whisper that she's probably a lesbian."²⁷ This awareness seems evident in Chisholm's warning to male Senators during the 1970 Senate Hearings on the Equal Rights Amendment. Arguing for women's equal rights, Chisholm argued that men and women alike had a responsibility to uphold a fully equitable social contract. Rejecting women's separate status, Chisholm carefully played to cultural fears of women's masculinization. If men agreed to support the legal foundation for women's social and political equality, she promised that the existing gendered order of society would remain intact, and women would not be forced into radical rebellion.²⁸

Regardless of their positions on the political aisle, many women members of Congress resisted making direct alliances with the feminist movement. Patricia Schroeder was one of few women in politics to claim a feminist agenda during this period. An outspoken critic of the racial and sexual status quo, Schroeder was a proud feminist and a Democrat who opposed excessive defense spending. First elected to the U.S. House of Representatives in 1972, Schroeder served in the 93rd-104th Congresses, a portion of which she spent in service on the powerful Armed Services Committee.²⁸

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24 Chisholm, *Unbought and Unbossed* (Boston: Houghton Mifflin, 1970), 168-169.

25 Chisholm, *The Good Fight*, 30.

26 Chisholm, *Unbought and Unbossed*, 165.

27 Chisholm, *Unbought and Unbossed*, 168.

28 U.S. Congress, Senate, *Hearings: The 'Equal Rights' Amendment*, 33.

29 Office of the Clerk, U.S. House of Representatives, *Women in Congress*, <http://womenincongress.house.gov> (accessed 8 April 2011).

Schroeder met a great deal of resistance from the more senior--and overwhelmingly conservative--members of the Armed Services Committee. Outspoken feminists in Congress were rare in the early 1970s. Representative Bella Abzug was one of the earliest Congresswomen to be elected on an explicitly feminist platform, and Schroeder's male colleagues often compared the two women, describing them both as unwelcome outsiders. F. Edward Hebert, chairman of the House Armed Services Committee in 1972 and an unrepentant self-described "male chauvinist," resented Schroeder's election to the committee. In one of their earliest meetings, Hebert warned Schroeder, "I hope that you aren't going to be a skinny Bella Abzug."³⁰ Accustomed to vetting all appointees to the Armed Services Committee, Hebert was unprepared for the emergence of political feminism and the changing concerns of the national Democratic Party platform.

Remembering this early period in her career, Schroeder argued that Hebert, "a conservative Southern Democrat who boasted about his male chauvinism, did not consider me worthy of the seat. Women, he claimed, knew nothing of combat, since they had never been a part of it." Under Hebert's leadership, Schroeder was originally forced to share a seat in the committee room with Ron Dellums, a newly elected representative of the Congressional Black Caucus. Describing this remarkable display of racism and sexism, Schroeder wrote that Hebert "said that women and blacks were worth only half of one 'regular' member, so he added only one seat to the committee and made Ron and me share it."³² Of course, black men in recent U.S. history knew disproportionately more combat than any other demographic in the population.³³ Hebert's hostility toward Dellums, a veteran of the U.S. Marines, undermined his emphasis on combat experience as a deciding factor in appointment to the Armed Services Committee. Ultimately, Hebert was simply reluctant to accept any committee member whose politics radically contradicted his own.

Schroeder's experiences on the Armed Services Committee illustrate the catch-22 of women's quest for political citizenship in the long 1960s. Women's mandated exclusion from combat service was frequently used to justify their restriction from deliberations on nearly half of the federal budget. Rhetoric that emphasized the cultural and biological differences between women and men was often used in the attempt to justify women's exclusion from formal combat roles. Proponents of limiting women's access to combat positions in the U.S. military argued that society viewed women--along with children--as members of a protected class, implying that women protecting themselves undermined the gendered ideology of U.S. society. The elite membership of the Armed Services Committee used these ideas of women's difference to build their own poorly justified logic of women's incompetence on matters of national defense.

As Schroeder argued, "the committee often justified its actions in the name of defending women and children and yet it never bothered to ask women and children what they wanted."³⁴ This paternalism deeply offended Schroeder's feminist sense of justice. Despite the emphasis placed by numerous Congressmen on Schroeder's lack of combat experience, military service was not actually a requirement for election to the Armed Services Committee.

30 Office of the Clerk, U.S. House of Representatives, *Women in Congress*, <http://womenincongress.house.gov> (accessed 8 April 2011).

31 Patricia Schroeder, *Champion of the Great American Family*, (New York: Random House, 1989), 25.

32 Lowy, 5.

33 For one discussion of these demographics, particularly in terms of casualties of U.S. troops in Vietnam, see Christian Appy, *Working Class War: American Combat Soldiers and Vietnam* (Chapel Hill, NC: The University of North Carolina Press, 1993).

34 Schroeder, 25.

Many of the male committee members had never served in the armed forces, and yet they frequently dismissed Schroeder's opinions as those of an amateur civilian. Schroeder remembers these non-veterans asking, "How can you serve on this committee? You have never been in combat." On this point, she would remind these men, "you and I have a lot in common."³⁵

Schroeder, despite her immense popularity in her own district, was never without her share of detractors. In 1972, Schroeder was the second youngest woman ever elected to Congress, and the first woman with young children to serve in national political office. Media coverage of Schroeder's early campaign emphasized these feminine and maternal parts of her identity, as journalists often referred to her as a mother rather than an accomplished attorney or a public school teacher. Even Bella Abzug, perhaps the most zealous feminist in Congress at the time, contacted Schroeder shortly after her election to warn that "I don't think you can do the job" while also caring for young children.³⁶ Clarence Decker, Schroeder's opponent in the 1972 congressional primary, went so far as to distribute flyers door to door, "condemning Schroeder for premeditated neglect of her three pre-schoolers."³⁷ Once in office, these attacks only reinforced Schroeder's support for the legislation that improved the lives various classes of working women.

Dismissing the concerns of her critics, Schroeder argued that women could be highly effective as both mothers and women with careers. As Schroeder explained:

I soon learned that children don't care who does their laundry or grocery shopping or who makes their beds. In fact, they don't care if anyone does it. The mystique that such tasks must be done by the hands of the mother should be buried forever so that no more guilt will be generated by it.³⁸

Sweeping away many of the remaining threads of the century old Cult of True Womanhood, Schroeder argued that women were not defined by their domestic roles. When politicians rejected right to work and welfare legislation, they often used rhetoric that portrayed their choices as a defense of the traditional family. These arguments entirely failed to take the experiences of millions of working mothers like Patricia Schroeder into account. Responding to a reporter who asked how she could be both a U.S. Representative and a mother, Schroeder famously retorted, "I have a brain and a uterus and I use them both."³⁹ Feminists like Schroeder strongly rejected traditional pressures for women to choose either a career or a family, claiming a woman's right to choose both.

Schroeder's concern for working mothers was most strongly expressed in her work on the Family and Medical Leave Act. When Schroeder first authored the act in 1985, she wasn't able to find a single member of Congress to cosponsor the legislation. Although Schroeder reintroduced the bill in subsequent congressional sessions, it wasn't passed until 1993, following the surge of new women Representatives in Congress.⁴⁰ Meanwhile, in her work on the Armed Services Committee, Schroeder extended her feminist agenda to the needs of military women. Often positioned as the sole voice on the committee for ordinary servicemen, servicewomen, and their families, Schroeder pushed through a number of important legislative changes. As Joan Lowy explains, "Schroeder tried to improve the lot of military families, pushing to spend more defense dollars on such things as moving allowances and

35 Schroeder, 25.

36 Lowy, 41.

37 The Schroeder's, incidentally, were and are a family of four. "Women Who Made It," *Off Our Backs: A Women's Newsjournal* 3 no. 3, (30 November 1972): 6.

38 Schroeder, 15.

39 Letty Cottin Pogrebin, "Anatomy Isn't Destiny," *New York Times* (6 May 1977): 21.

40 Karen Foerstel and Herbert N. Foerstel, 128.

schools.” She was also concerned with the status of military housing, education, health care, and childcare.⁴¹

Not all feminists understood or agreed with Schroeder’s concern for women in the military. As Schroeder confessed, “I really get an awful lot of flak from women who normally support me saying they don’t approve of my support for women in the military.” In response to these critics, Schroeder argued, “feminism isn’t about opening up the jobs you want, it’s about opening up jobs some women may want.”⁴² Later in her political career, Schroeder was very critical of the military’s explanations that women were restricted from certain combat positions for their own protection. As a feminist, Schroeder defended equal opportunities for women in all fields. Discussing women’s access to equal promotion in the military, Schroeder explained, “we are not asking for a separate competitive system, we are not asking a quota or anything else, but rather that sex would not be considered as a disqualifier before you got to any of the other qualifications.”⁴³ This same reformed set of qualifications, taken in a less literal context, could have also been demanded of popular perceptions of women in elite political positions during the long 1960s. While women were explicitly barred from full participation in the U.S. military, stereotypes and tradition also prevented them from truly achieving equal status as first class political citizens. Women members of Congress were marked as women first and foremost, regardless of their radical spectrum of legislative interests.

In the long 1960s, a small number of congressional women were actively attempting to blur the boundaries between culturally oppositional identity markers such as race and gender. While these women often disagreed on the specific outlines of their targets, they were occasionally able to orchestrate highly visible and successful protests of the status quo. Although retired by 1968, former Senator Jeannette Rankin famously led the Jeannette Rankin Brigade in a march on Washington to protest U.S. involvement in Vietnam. In 1918, Rankin had openly opposed the Great War, campaigning for the U.S. House of Representatives on an anti-war platform.⁴⁴ Sixty years later, Rankin used the march as a political vehicle to connect “well behaved and orderly” women in Congress with women in the New Left “in miniskirts and high boots,” forming a temporary political coalition that crossed commonly established boundaries of culture. Shortly after this march, in 1971, Bella Abzug “rode the anti-Vietnam War movement to Capitol Hill,” using experience gained through her work in the New Left to enter the sphere of traditional politics.⁴⁵ For a brief period in the political history of the U.S., the outspokenly feminist political voices of politicians like Abzug struck fear into the political cult of masculinity, appearing as a salient challenge to the established masculinist order of the national community.

The strength of this unofficial openly feminist political caucus, however, was short lived. Evaluating the actions of the Jeannette Rankin Brigade, radical feminist Shulamith Firestone argued:

41 Lowy, 80.

42 Anne Summers, “Pat Schroeder: Fighting for Military Moms,” *Ms.* 1 no. 6 (May 1991): 90.

43 U.S. Congress, House, Subcommittee No. 2 of the Committee on Armed Services, Hearings on *H.R. 9832: To Eliminate Discrimination Based on Sex With Respect to the Appointment and Admission of Persons to the Service Academies*, 92nd Cong., 2nd Sess., May, June, August 1974, 22.

44 Karen Foerstel and Herbert N. Foerstel, 4.

45 Federal Bureau of Investigation, field report “Demonstration Protesting United States Policy on Vietnam, Washington, D.C., January 16, 1968” cited in James J. Lopach and Jean A. Luckowski, *Jeannette Rankin: A Political Woman* (Boulder: University Press of Colorado, 2005), 202-203.

It is naive to believe that women who are not politically seen, heard, or represented in this country could change the course of a war by simply appealing to the better side of congressmen. [. . .] They came as wives, mothers and: mourners; that is, tearful and passive reactors to the actions of men rather than organizing as women to change that definition of femininity to something other than a synonym for weakness, political impotence, and tears.⁴⁷

Refusing to accept the traditional patterns of privilege in culture, an emergent class of self-identified feminists outlined new terms for the conversation on gendered equality.⁴⁸ Although a majority of women in political office refused to explicitly or publicly align with these feminist objectives, they were all impacted by the gendered bias that feminists sought to remove from politics. The straightforward and aggressive challenges to hegemonic systems of gendered identity posed by the feminist movement influenced the boundaries of women's activities in political office, regardless of their individual alignment with the feminist movement, while simultaneously posing implicit challenges to limits on women's opportunities in other elite national arenas.

47 Shulamith Firestone, "The Jeannette Rankin Brigade: Woman Power?" in *Notes From the First Year* (New York: The New York Radical Women, 1968), <http://scriptorium.lib.duke.edu/wlm/notes/> (accessed 12 February 2011).

48 Groups of radical feminists that emerged during the late 1960s and early 1970s include Redstockings and its precursor New York Radical Women, Radicalesbians, and the National Organization for Women's splinter group The Feminists. Although short-lived as an organized movement, radical feminism offered a challenge to the traditional ideology of liberal feminism that has since influenced many conversations on the construction of gendered identity.