

# Our say: Marjorie Holt was a pathbreaker for women in politics



U.S. Rep. Marjorie Holt, R-Severna Park, photographed in 1980, when she was in the fourth of her seven terms in Congress. (Check with Baltimore Sun Photo)

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**W**ith 84 women in the House of Representatives and 21 in the Senate, the glass ceiling — that favorite architectural metaphor for the obstacles facing women in the workplace — has more than a few missing panes where Congress is concerned. But the ceiling itself endures. Women have now been in Congress for more than a century. With at least 50 percent of the population, they still account for fewer than 20 percent of the membership.

Yet if today's situation seems daunting, consider what it was like in 1973, when there were zero women in the Senate and 16 in the House — and one of them was the newly elected U.S. Rep. Marjorie S. Holt, the Anne Arundel County resident who was the first Republican woman to join Maryland's congressional delegation.

Holt died on Sunday at her Severna Park home at age 97, and remembering her as just a pioneer female officeholder doesn't remotely do her justice. Elected for seven terms, the Florida-born lawyer was a formidable representative for this area.

"One of her secrets was that she provided superlative community service," remembered former County Executive Robert K. Neall, who recently joined Gov. Larry Hogan's Cabinet. From Holt's position on the

Armed Services Committee — then-House GOP leader Gerald Ford helped get her the seat — she kept a careful eye out for the well-being of this area’s Department of Defense installations, including the Naval Academy and Fort George G. Meade.

If she was staunchly conservative and a supporter and defender of President Richard Nixon, this represented the views of the 4th District, which reached from Brooklyn Park through Glen Burnie, Crofton and Annapolis, and also went as far into Prince George’s County as Andrews Air Force Base. As columnist Peter A. Jay noted in *The Baltimore Sun* in 1974, “Anne Arundel has two-thirds of the vote in the district, and Mrs. Holt is Anne Arundel’s very own congress person.”

Still, when Holt first tried to run for the House of Delegates in 1966, as she told an oral history interviewer in 2010, “I found out that nobody wanted to vote for a woman. They said, ‘You’re a nice lady, but I can’t vote for a woman.’” Instead, she built up her organization in six years as clerk of the county Circuit Court. Persistence and good community service can erode prejudice. She was ready when the redistricting after the 1970 Census opened up a promising new district with no incumbent.

Local politicians eyeing that glass ceiling in 2018 ought to realize that many of the cracks were put there by Marjorie Holt between 1973 and 1987 — and that they needn’t look further than her for an example of how to succeed politically while offering constituents exemplary representation and service.

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