

Mary L. Wentworth Papers

1966-1997

7 boxes (11 linear feet)

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[About SCUA](#)

[SCUA home](#)

[Credo digital](#)

[Scope](#)

[Overview](#)

[Series 1. Campaign against Silvio Conte](#)

[Series 2. Social Justice](#)

[Series 3. Everywoman's Center](#)

[Series 4. Universal Health Care](#)

[Inventory](#)

[Series 1. Campaign against Silvio Conte](#)

[Series 2. Social Justice activism](#)

[Series 3. Everywoman's Center](#)

[Series 4. Universal Health Care](#)

[Admin info](#)

[Download](#)

[xml version](#)

[print version \(pdf\)](#)



[Read collection overview](#)

The activist Mary Wentworth has worked throughout New England on behalf of a variety of progressive causes, beginning with the antiwar and feminist movements in the 1960s and 1970s and working against racism and other forms of discrimination, militarism, patriarchy, corporate power, and U.S. imperialism. In 1984, she ran for U.S. Congress against long-term incumbent Silvio O. Conte, winning almost thirty percent of the vote in a district in which Conte had run unopposed.

The Wentworth Papers include records relating to her congressional campaign against Conte, material on U.S. involvement in Central America during the 1980s, and other issues of concern throughout her career.

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Social justice

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Background on Mary Wentworth

An activist for social justice and peace, Mary L. Wentworth was born in Maine on April 15, 1929. Following her undergraduate work at Smith College, Wentworth parlayed her linguistic skills into a job in 1951 with the top secret Armed Forces Security Agency in Washington, D.C. But it was only after marrying Alexander MacColl, an educator, in 1952 and moving to Philadelphia, Pa., that Wentworth was drawn into social activism. Galvanized initially by the civil rights movement and the desire to confront racism, she began to get involved in antiwar protests during the 1960s and became an ardent feminist by the end of the decade.

After divorcing her husband in 1973, reclaiming her maiden name, and relocating to Amherst, Massachusetts, Wentworth began to delve deeper into social justice work. Among her more important commitments, she worked at the new Everywoman's Center at UMass Amherst during the late 1970s and early 1980s and she became director of the Poor Woman's Task Force. The list of organizations she was involved with is both long and exceedingly diverse, ranging from Colonial Village Tenants Union, to the NAACP, the Nuclear Freeze Campaign, CPPAX, and the Grey Panthers, and she particularly drawn to anti-poverty activism and the anti-imperialist struggle that grew around U.S. intervention in Central America during the Reagan years. She was arrested in 1979 during the protests at the Seabrook nuclear power plant and again during antiwar protests at Westover Air Force Base in 1985.

In addition to issue-oriented activism, Wentworth has been drawn at several points into formal politics. A regular presence in Amherst town meeting, she has had a deep engagement with local issues surrounding education, poverty, and housing, though most famously, she opposed thirteen-term Republican Congressman Silvio O. Conte for his seat in the House of Representatives. Although Conte occupied the liberal end of the Republican spectrum and was popular enough that he often ran unchallenged, Wentworth was highly critical of his stance on social issues and his record of cutting funding for social programs. In 1984, she won the Democratic nomination and ran as a peace candidate in a bid to unseat the congressman, who was completing his thirteenth term in office. Although the Democratic Party seemed little interested in opposing a powerful politician like Conte, especially with a long-shot candidate, Wentworth nevertheless won a comparatively strong 27% share of the vote.

An internationalist, Wentworth traveled widely during the 1970s and 1980s, including early trips to the People's Republic of China (1974) to Central America, Cuba (1978), and Europe. A writer, she is a frequent contributor to the *Hampshire Daily Gazette* and the *Valley Advocate*, and has written an autobiography *Discovering America: A Political Journey* (2003). She currently lives in Amherst.

Scope of collection

Spanning her long and diverse career as an activist, Mary Wentworth's papers include records relating to her electoral campaign against long-term Republican incumbent congressman Silvio O. Conte, material on U.S. involvement in Central America during the 1980s, and other issues of concern throughout her career.

Series descriptions

Series 1. Campaign against Silvio Conte

1980-1984

In anticipation of the 1982 primary elections, Wentworth made a bid for Silvio O. Conte's seat in the House of Representatives. Citing what she considered to be Conte's political failures to adequately address issues related to women's rights, workers' rights, and his support of President Ronald Reagan's economic policies, Wentworth galvanized a sizable constituency in her sticker-campaign that eventually garnered her nearly thirty percent of the Democratic vote in the 1984 elections. This series

includes some of Wentworth's campaign speeches, photographs, items from her sticker-campaign, fundraising letters, notes on Conte's voting record in Congress, and a host of other materials related to her Congressional run.

Series 2. Social Justice

1968-1997

27 folders

Wentworth was deeply committed to social justice. She involved herself in a wide array of organizations and broadened her scope across the sociopolitical spectrum. This series contains information regarding Mary's support of abortion rights and her growing concern for single mothers, as evidenced by a speech given relating the "Feminization of Poverty". She was also involved in welfare education and promotion during the Reagan years. Mary committed herself as well to education reform and joined a committee raising awareness of inaccuracies/misinformation in textbooks used by the Amherst area school system. One of Mary's most impressive accomplishments is her organization of the Colonial Village Tenants Union. Mary was very aware of the growing problem of rent control and endeavored to promote tenants'-rights awareness in the Amherst, MA area.

Information relating to the various politically-oriented groups to which Mary belonged. Mary's activism undoubtedly played a key role in her decision to run for Congress, but she did not stop after her campaign. Involvement ranges from the late 1960s with the South Jersey Peace Center to opposition of the Boltwood Parking Garage in downtown Amherst, MA circa 2000. In between, her involvements cover citizen-based activism regarding tax legislation and political action, pursuing racial equality with the Grey Panthers and the NAACP and support of nuclear disarmament.

Wentworth spent a great deal of time traveling before her Congressional campaign; she viewed her experiences as integral to deciding to campaign against Conte. Mary traveled to China in the mid-1970s as part of the United States-China Friendship Association and she also visited Cuba and Central America during the early 1980s; both trips are particularly intriguing given their respective time periods. Upon her return, Mary became even more committed to change abroad, frequently writing to newspapers and giving speeches/talks around Amherst; she even published *Seeking Common Ground*. This series contains: information relating to groups in which Mary was involved; journals, mementos, and correspondences from her trips to China, Cuba and Central America; Mary's involvement in a Sister City project in Nicaragua; and a wide array of other political interests from around the world.

Series 3. Everywoman's Center

1971-1983

27 folders

From 1979-83 Mary L. Wentworth worked at the Everywoman's Center (EWC) at the University of Massachusetts Amherst as director of the Poor Woman's Task Force (PWT). In the spring of 1983, Wentworth and Malika Jones, director of the Third World Women's program--also under the umbrella of the EWC--were informed that they would not be reappointed for the following year for failure to fulfill job-related duties. The contexts of this box include general information regarding the EWC and specific materials related to Wentworth's and Jones' termination, the subsequent struggle to get reappointed through a series of grievances filed, signed petitions and letters from community members in support of her (Wentworth) past efforts, advocacy, and contributions to issues involving women's rights.

Series 4. Universal Health Care

1983-1996

50 folders

Materials related to the Clinton administration's efforts to pass a universal health care bill, including articles and publications, reports and studies, and Wentworth's local efforts in western Massachusetts as co-chair of Franklin/Hampshire Health Care Coalition to get Congress to support a single-payer system of health care delivery which would be publicly funded and provide universal coverage.

Inventory

Series 1. Campaign against Silvio Conte

1970-1984

Agricultural reform

1984

Box 1: 1

Budget

1982

Box 1: 2

Campaign ads/fliers
1984
Box 1: 3
Campaign correspondence (1 of 2)
1984
Box 1: 4
Campaign correspondence (2 of 2)
1984
Box 1: 5
Campaign flyers and mailings
1982
Box 1: 6
Campaign itineraries
1984
Box 1 : 7
Campaign materials (1 of 2)
1984
Box 7: 1
Campaign materials (2 of 2)
1984
Box 7: 2
Campaign newsletter
1984
Box 1: 8
Campaign: notes
1984
Box 1: 9
Campaign questionnaires (1 of 3)
1984
Box 1: 10
Campaign questionnaires (2 of 3)
1984
Box 1: 11
Campaign questionnaires (3 of 3)
1984
Box 1: 12
Campaign photographs
1982
Box 1: 13
Campaign records, bank statements, deposit slips, balances (1 of 2)
1984
Box 1: 14
Campaign records, bank statements, deposit slips, balances (2 of 2)
1984
Box 1: 15
Campaign speeches
1982
Box 1: 16
Candidate statements (1 of 2)
1984
Box 1: 17
Candidate statements (2 of 2)
1984
Box 1: 18
Congratulations letters
1984
Box 1: 19
Conte: constituent questionnaire
1981-1982

Box 1: 20
Conte: correspondence, newsletters, notes
1980-1984
Box 1: 21
Conte for Congress: itemized receipts
1981-1982
Box 1 : 22
Conte in Congress (1 of 2)
1984
Box 1: 23
Conte in Congress (2 of 2)
1984
Box 1: 24
Conte material
1982
Box 1: 25
Conte notes
1984
Box 1: 26
Conte speech: senior citizens
1984
Box 1: 27
Conte/Wentworth positions
1984
Box 1: 28
Democratic convention
1984
Box 1: 29
Democratic National Committee New Jersey Democratic State vs. Republican National Committee New Jersey Republican State
1984
Box 1: 30
Democratic nomination notification
1984
Box 1: 31
Eleanor Roosevelt award
1984
Box 1: 32
Election period
1982
Box 1: 33
Election results
1984
Box 7: 3
Events
1984
Box 1: 34
Film: Wentworth for Congress: four 60-second spots
1984
Box 7:
First District congressional elections ,1972-82
1984
Box 1: 35
Focus on Women Inc.
1984
Box 1: 36
Fundraising letters (1 of 2)
1984
Box 1: 37
Fundraising letters (2 of 2)

1984
Box 1: 38
Holyoke report
1984
Box 1: 39
In defense of the First District
1981
Box 1: 40
Information of First Congressional District
1984
Box 1: 41
John Arden for Congress: clippings
1982
Box 1: 42
Labor issues
1984
Box 1: 43
Letters
1982-1984
Box 1: 44
Letters from Vince O'Conner
1982
Box 1: 45
Letters to Conte's constituents
1984
Box 1: 46
List of people who had nomination papers
1982
Box 1: 47
Mailing list
1984
Box 1: 48
Media contacts
1984
Box 1: 49
Media coverage
1983-1984
Box 1: 50
Media coverage
1983-1984
Box 1: 51
Media coverage
1984
Box 1: 52
National Democrats
1984
Box 1: 53
Nomination papers, lists of names, instruction sheets, receipts
1984
Box 1: 54
Photographic album
1984
Box 1: 55
Principles of economic justice
1984
Box 1: 56
Receipts, congressional campaign
1982-1983
Box 1: 57

San Francisco convention
1984
Box 1: 58
Shirley Chisholm notes
1984
Box 1: 59
Steering committee
1984
Box 1: 60
Stickers, voting instructions
1984
Box 1: 61
Voting maps, first congressional
1980
Box 1: 62
Voting record
1982-1983
Box 1: 63
Wentworth campaign (1 of 2)
1982
Box 1: 64
Wentworth campaign (2 of 2)
1982
Box 1: 65
Women in campaign
1984
Box 1: 66
Series 2. Social Justice activism
1968-1997
Correspondence (1 of 2)
1984-1988
Box 2: 1
Correspondence (2 of 2)
1984-1988
Box 2: 2
Congressional correspondence: non-campaign
1981-1983
Box 2: 3
Congressional newsletters- non-campaign
1982
Box 2: 4
Protest songs and chants
1976-1982
Box 2: 5
Citizen activism: Berkshire Forum
1987
Box 2: 6
Citizen activism: Citizens Against PACs
1984
Box 2: 7
Citizen activism: Citizens for Participation in Political Action (CPPAX)- general
1984
Box 2: 8
Citizen activism: CPPAX- directory
1997
Box 2: 9
Citizen activism: CPPAX- newsletters (1 of 2)
1992-1997
Box 2: 10

Citizen activism: CPPAX- newsletters (2 of 2)

1992-1997

Box 2: 11

Citizen activism: CPPAX- newsletters- The Record- Franklin/Hampshire Chapter

1992-1996

Box 2: 12

Citizen activism: CPPAX- notes

1994-1997

Box 2: 13

Citizen activism: Citizens Party

1983

Box 2: 14

Citizen activism: conferences (1 of 2)

1970

Box 2: 15

Citizen activism: conferences (2 of 2)

1982-1983

Box 2: 16

Citizen activism: Haymarket People's Fund

1984

Box 2: 17

Citizen activism: Socialist Scholars Conference

1990

Box 2: 18

Economic justice: general

1986-1988

Box 2: 19

Economic justice: food stamps

1982

Box 2: 20

Economic justice: taxes- Citizens for Fair Taxes- agendas/meetings

1989-1990

Box 2: 21

Economic justice: taxes- Citizens for Fair Taxes- articles

1989-1990

Box 2: 22

Economic justice: taxes- Citizens for Fair Taxes- letters

1989-1990

Box 2: 23

Economic justice: taxes- Citizens for Fair Taxes- notes/fliers

1982-1990

Box 2: 24

Economic justice: taxes- CTJ: Citizens for Tax Justice

1988-1990

Box 2: 25

Economic justice: taxes- TEAM: Tax Equity Alliance for Massachusetts Inc.

1989-1990

Box 2: 26

Education and the school: alternative grouping

1992-1993

Box 2: 27

Education and the school: Amherst Regional School District textbook grievance

1987

Box 2: 28

Education and the school: Amherst School reports/hirings

1990-1992

Box 2: 29

Education and the school: instructional grouping

1991

Box 2: 30
Education and the school: notes on tracking
1990
Box 2: 31
Education and the school: school committee- agendas
1991-1992
Box 2: 32
Education and the school: school committee- Deans Council
1991
Box 2: 33
Education and the school: school committee- guidelines/memorandums
1992
Box 2: 34
Family: Amherst Family Center- fiscal information
1989
Box 2: 35
Family: Amherst Family Center- letters
1988
Box 2: 36
Family: Amherst Family Center- newsletters
1989
Box 2: 37
Family: Amherst Family Center- staff/board contacts
1989
Box 2: 38
Family: child care- articles/information
1982
Box 2: 39
Family: child care- letters/contacts
1980-1981
Box 2: 40
Family: child care- notes/pamphlets
1981-1982
Box 2: 41
Gray Panthers- articles/fliers
1986-1992
Box 2: 42
Gray Panthers- health care referendum
1992
Box 2: 43
Gray Panthers- letters
1985-1995
Box 2: 44
Gray Panthers- mailing list
1990
Box 2: 45
Gray Panthers- minutes and reports
1984-1991
Box 2: 46
Gray Panthers- Network newsletter
1995-1996
Box 2: 47
Gray Panthers- notes
1995
Box 2: 48
Gray Panthers- position papers
1992
Box 2: 49
Gray Panthers- 1992 convention (1 of 2)

1992

Box 2: 50

Gray Panthers- 1992 convention (2 of 2)

1992

Box 2: 51

Human rights: "Background Stuff for the Seminar Series on Racism, Sexism, and Authoritarianism"- People for Human Rights papers (1 of 3)

1968-1969

Box 2: 52

Human rights: "Background Stuff for the Seminar Series on Racism, Sexism, and Authoritarianism"- People for Human Rights papers (2 of 3)

1968-1969

Box 2: 53

Human rights: "Background Stuff for the Seminar Series on Racism, Sexism, and Authoritarianism"- People for Human Rights papers (3 of 3)

1968-1969

Box 2: 54

Human rights: labor- Jobs with Justice newsletter

1999

Box 2: 55

Human rights: labor- United Farm Workers Organization Committee

1970-1971

Box 2: 56

Human rights: LGBT issues

1983

Box 2: 57

Human rights: race relations- Amherst NAACP vs. Amherst-Pelham Regional Schools

1992

Box 2: 58

Human rights: race relations- Amherst NAACP candidates forum

1992

Box 2: 59

Human rights: race relations- Amherst NAACP contact list

1989-1990

Box 2: 60

Human rights: race relations- Amherst NAACP- Political action Committee

1989-1991

Box 2: 61

Human rights: race relations- Emergency Committee for a National Mobilization Against Racism

1974

Box 2: 62

Human rights: race relations- memorandums

1990-1991

Box 2: 63

Human rights: race relations- NAACP- Diana Smith case

1990

Box 2: 64

Human rights: race relations- NAACP elections

1991

Box 2: 65

Human rights: race relations- NAACP- fliers

1989-1991

Box 2: 66

Human rights: race relations- NAACP meeting agendas/minutes

1989-1991

Box 2: 67

Human rights: race relations- NAACP New England Area Conference (1 of 2)

1990

Box 2: 68

Human rights: race relations- NAACP New England Area Conference (2 of 2)

1990

Box 2: 69

Human rights: race relations- NAACP- Olver case

1991

Box 2: 70

Human rights: race relations- NAACP- Rosemary's Place

1990

Box 2: 71

Human rights: race relations- NAACP- Stop and Shop

1990-1991

Box 2: 72

Human rights: race relations- National NAACP- Civil Rights Acts

1990

Box 2: 73

Human rights: race relations- Paul Buczala Amherst Common fight

1990

Box 2: 74

Human rights: race relations- Paul Buczala Amherst Common fight responses

1991

Box 2: 75

Housing/homelessness: Amherst rent control bill (1 of 2)

1978

Box 3: 1

Housing/homelessness: Amherst rent control bill (2 of 2)

1978

Box 3: 2

Housing/homelessness: Amherst Tenants Association- agendas/bulletins

1976-1977

Box 3: 3

Housing/homelessness: Amherst Tenants Association- Brandywine survey

1977

Box 3: 4

Housing/homelessness: Amherst Tenants Association- complaints

1977

Box 3: 5

Housing/homelessness: Amherst Tenants Association notes/articles

1977-1979

Box 3: 6

Housing/homelessness: Colonial Village- general

1977-1979

Box 3: 7

Housing/homelessness: Colonial Village- electrical complaint

1978

Box 3: 8

Housing/homelessness: Colonial Village- Kamin's response

1976-1978

Box 3: 9

Housing/homelessness: Colonial Village- newsletters

1976-1979

Box 3: 10

Housing/homelessness: Colonial Village- security deposit survey

1978

Box 3: 11

Housing/homelessness: Colonial Village- study of successes/failures of CVTU

1981

Box 3: 12

Housing/homelessness: Colonial Village- Tenants' Union- general

1979

Box 3: 13

Housing/homelessness: Colonial Village- Tenants' Union agendas/minutes

1976

Box 3: 14

Housing/homelessness: Colonial Village- Tenants' Union contacts

1972

Box 3: 15

Housing/homelessness: Colonial Village- Tenants' Union expenses

1980

Box 3: 16

Housing/homelessness: Colonial Village- Tenants' Union notebook

1976-1978

Box 3: 17

Housing/homelessness: Colonial Village- Tenants' Union press release

1978

Box 3: 18

Housing/homelessness: Colonial Village- weatherizing

1978

Box 3: 19

Housing/homelessness: eviction proceedings cartoon

1977

Box 3: 20

Housing/homelessness: home coalition/housing discrimination

1993-1994

Box 3: 21

Housing/homelessness: homelessness- general

1984

Box 3: 22

Housing/homelessness: housing- general

1982-1984

Box 3: 23

Housing/homelessness: housing newsletters

1984

Box 3: 24

Housing/homelessness: Landlord Tenants Relations Committee (1 of 2)

1977-1978

Box 3: 25

Housing/homelessness: Landlord Tenants Relations Committee (2 of 2)

1977-1978

Box 3: 26

Housing/homelessness: Landlord Tenants Relations Committee- agendas and meeting minutes (1 of 2)

1977-1978

Box 3: 27

Housing/homelessness: Landlord Tenants Relations Committee- agendas and meeting minutes (2 of 2)

1977-1978

Box 3: 28

Housing/homelessness: Massachusetts Tenants Organization

1981-1984

Box 3: 29

Housing/homelessness: rent control effect on taxes

1982

Box 3: 30

Housing/homelessness: rent control notes

1977-1982

Box 3: 31

Housing/homelessness: report on Reagan low income housing budget

1984

Box 3: 32

Housing/homelessness: Street Life newsletter

1985-1986
Box 3: 33
Housing/homelessness: tenants information/laws
1976-1980
Box 3: 34
Housing/homelessness: tenants' rights booklets
1977-1978
Box 3: 35
International affairs: Asia: China- China Reconstructs
1975
Box 3: 36
International affairs: Asia: China- China pictorial
1974-1975
Box 7: 4
International affairs: Asia: China- Chinese publication in Russian
1974
Box 3: 37
International affairs: Asia: China- Hsinhua News Bulletin
1974
Box 3: 38
International affairs: Asia: China- journals (1 of 2)
1974
Box 3: 39
International affairs: Asia: China- journals (2 of 2)
1974
Box 3: 40
International affairs: Asia: China- maps
1974
Box 3: 41
International affairs: Asia: China- mementos (1 of 3)
1974
Box 3: 42
International affairs: Asia: China- mementos (2 of 3)
1974
Box 3: 43
International affairs: Asia: China- mementos (3 of 3)
1974
Box 3: 44
International affairs: Asia: China- pamphlets (1 of 2)
1974
Box 3: 45
International affairs: Asia: China- pamphlets (2 of 2)
1974
Box 3: 46
International affairs: Asia: China- Peking Review/Pekin Informa
1974
Box 3: 47
International affairs: Asia: China trip- projector slide notes
1974
Box 3: 48
International affairs: Asia: China trip- slides
1974
Box 3: 49
International affairs: Asia: China trip- slides
1974
Box 3: 50
International affairs: Asia: China trip- slides
1974
Box 3: 51

International affairs: Asia: China- US-China People's Friendship Association
1976
Box 3: 52

International affairs: Asia: Philippines
1986
Box 3: 53

International affairs: Asia: Tibet
Box 3: 54

International affairs: the Caribbean- Cuba- itinerary
1978
Box 3: 55

International affairs: the Caribbean- Cuba- journal
1978
Box 3: 56

International affairs: the Caribbean- Cuba- letters
1977-1978
Box 3: 57

International affairs: the Caribbean- Cuba- mementos
1974
Box 3: 58

International affairs: the Caribbean- Cuba- pamphlets (1 of 2)
1978
Box 4: 1

International affairs: the Caribbean- Cuba- pamphlets (2 of 2)
1978
Box 4: 2

International affairs: the Caribbean- Cuba trip- projector slide notes
1978
Box 4: 3

International affairs: the Caribbean- Cuba trip- slides
1978
Box 4: 4

International affairs: the Caribbean- Cuba trip- slides
1978
Box 4: 5

International affairs: the Caribbean- Grenada
1984
Box 3: 6

International affairs: Central America- general
1983-1987
Box 4: 7

International affairs: Central America Education Project
1986
Box 4: 8

International affairs: Central America: New England Central America Network (NECAN)
1986-1987
Box 4: 9

International affairs: Central America: El Salvador
1981
Box 4: 10

International affairs: Central America: El Salvador- foreign aid and Conte
1984
Box 4: 11

International affairs: Central America: Nicaragua- general (1 of 2)
1983
Box 4: 12

International affairs: Central America: Nicaragua- general (2 of 2)
1984-1986
Box 4: 13

International affairs: Central America: Nicaragua- Contra speaker at UMass
1986
Box 4: 14
International affairs: Central America: Nicaragua- Ed Shahanan article
1983
Box 4: 15
International affairs: Central America: Nicaragua Sister Cities Project
1987
Box 4: 16
International affairs: Central America: Nicaragua and Honduras- slides
1983
Box 4: 17
International affairs: Central America: Nicaragua and Honduras- writings (1 of 2)
1983
Box 4: 18
International affairs: Central America: Nicaragua and Honduras- writings (2 of 2)
1983
Box 4: 19
International affairs: Central America: Nicaragua and Honduras- writings- journal and notes
1983
Box 4: 20
International affairs: Europe trip- general
1982-1983
Box 4: 21
International affairs: Europe trip- notes
1982
Box 4: 22
International affairs: Europe: Britain- welfare
1988
Box 4: 23
International affairs: Europe: Northern Ireland
1984
Box 4: 24
International affairs: Middle East: Gulf War- articles/fliers (1 of 2)
1990-1991
Box 4: 25
International affairs: Middle East: Gulf War- articles/fliers (2 of 2)
1990-1991
Box 4: 26
International affairs: Middle East: Gulf War- committees on Middle East/other groups
1990
Box 4: 27
International affairs: Middle East: Gulf War- contact list
1991
Box 4: 28
International affairs: Middle East: Gulf War- notes/letters
1990-1991
Box 4: 29
International affairs: Middle East: Lebanon
1984
Box 4: 30
International affairs: Soviet Union: ABC's "Amerika"
1987
Box 4: 31
International affairs: Soviet Union: American Friends Service Committee
1987
Box 4: 32
International affairs: Soviet Union: American Friends Service Committee Conference
1985

Box 4: 33

International affairs: Soviet Union: Anti-Sovietism mailing list

1985-1987

Box 4: 34

International affairs: Soviet Union: articles

1985

Box 4: 35

International affairs: Soviet Union and nukes

1971-1986

Box 4: 36

International affairs: Soviet Union: Soviet life- clippings

1985

Box 4: 37

International affairs: Soviet Union: women

1984

Box 4: 38

Local happenings: Amherst police- sexual harassment/racism training

1981-1982

Box 4: 39

Local happenings: Boltwood Parking Garage and opposition (1 of 2)

1997-2002

Box 4: 40

Local happenings: Boltwood Parking Garage and opposition (2 of 2)

1997-2002

Box 4: 41

Local happenings: parking garage- Heart of Amherst

1997

Box 4: 42

Local happenings: parking garage- news coverage

1996-2002

Box 4: 43

Local happenings: parking garage- opposition

1999

Box 4: 44

Local happenings: parking garage- referendum

1997

Box 4: 45

Local happenings: parking garage- town meeting members and tally votes

1997-2001

Box 4: 46

Nuclear power: Alternative Energy Commission

1974-1975

Box 4: 47

Nuclear power: anti Ground Wave Emergency Network (GWEN) Tower

1985

Box 4: 48

Nuclear power: no nukes- notebook

1974

Box 4: 49

Nuclear power: no nukes paraphernalia

1974

Box 4: 50

Nuclear power: no nukes- sexism and nukes

1974

Box 4: 51

Nuclear power: nuclear energy writings

1984

Box 4: 52

Nuclear power: nuclear freeze

1982-1983
Box 4: 53
Nuclear power: Sam Lovejoy trial notes
1974
Box 4: 54
Nuclear power: Seabrook (1 of 2)
1979
Box 4: 55
Nuclear power: Seabrook (2 of 2)
1979
Box 4: 56
Nuclear power: Take it to Wall Street protest
1979
Box 4: 57
Peace activism: Arrest at Westover
1985
Box 4: 58
Peace activism: Resist newsletter
1986-1987
Box 4: 59
Peace activism: South Jersey Peace Center (1 of 2)
1967-1972
Box 4: 60
Peace activism: South Jersey Peace Center (2 of 2)
1967-1972
Box 4: 61
Peace activism: speech on disarmament
1983
Box 4: 62
Peace activism: Telephone Action Network
1987
Box 4: 63
Peace activism: U.S. Peace Council
1986
Box 4: 64
Public health and welfare: biological/nuclear warfare
1984-1989
Box 4: 65
Public health and welfare: transportation- Intermodal Surface Transportation Efficiency Act (ISTEA)
1997
Box 4: 66
Public health and welfare: Welfare Advisory Board
1983
Box 4: 67
Public health and welfare: Welfare Law notes
1981
Box 4: 68
Writings: college papers
1973
Box 4: 69
Writings: Common Ground writings and notes (1 of 2)
1983
Box 4: 70
Writings: Common Ground writings and notes (2 of 2)
1983
Box 4: 71
Writings: radio commentary notes
1984-1985
Box 4: 72

Writings: What is Racism paper

1970

Box 4: 73

Series 3. Everywoman's Center

1971-1983

50 folders

Abortion: articles/fliers

1984

Box 5: 1

Abortion: correspondence

1971

Box 5: 2

Abortion- Pennsylvania Abortion Rights Association

1971-1972

Box 5: 3

Equal Rights Amendment (E.R.A.)

1982

Box 5: 4

Everywoman's Center

1983

Box 5: 5

Everywoman's Center (EWC): appeals for reappointment (1 of 3)

1982-1983

Box 5: 6

Everywoman's Center (EWC): appeals for reappointment (2 of 3)

1982-1983

Box 5: 7

Everywoman's Center (EWC): appeals for reappointment (3 of 3)

1982-1983

Box 5: 8

Everywoman's Center: children and welfare

1985

Box 5: 9

Everywoman's Center: harassment

1983

Box 5: 10

Everywoman's Center job issues

1983

Box 5: 11

Everywoman's Center job performance review questionnaire

1981-1982

Box 5: 12

Everywoman's Center: letters of support for reappointment

1983

Box 5: 13

Everywoman's Center: Martini report

1983

Box 5: 14

Everywoman's Center: memorandums/reports

1982-1983

Box 5: 15

Everywoman's Center: notes on job issues

1981-1983

Box 5: 16

Everywoman's Center (EWC): performance reviews (1 of 3)

1979-83

Box 5: 17

Everywoman's Center (EWC): performance reviews (2 of 3)

1979-1983

Box 5: 18

Everywoman's Center (EWC): performance reviews (3 of 3)

1979-1983

Box 5: 19

Everywoman's Center: Poor Women's Task Force firing- Mary Wentworth (1 of 2)

1982-1983

Box 5: 20

Everywoman's Center: Poor Women's Task Force firing- Mary Wentworth (2 of 2)

1982-1983

Box 5: 21

Everywoman's Center: Poor Women's Task Force Project report

1974-1979

Box 5: 22

Everywoman's Center: PWTF statistics

1981

Box 5: 23

Everywoman's Center: racism

1980

Box 5: 24

Everywoman's Center: schedule

1979-1981

Box 5: 25

Everywoman's Center: supervisor meetings

1983

Box 5: 26

Everywoman's Center: Third World Women's program

1982

Box 5: 27

Everywoman's Center: Third World Women's program firing- Malika Jones

1982-1983

Box 5: 28

Everywoman's Center: welfare questionnaire

1981

Box 5: 29

Everywoman's Center: work letters

1982

Box 5: 30

Feminization of poverty: notes/pamphlet

1981-1982

Box 5: 31

Feminization of poverty speech

1981

Box 5: 32

Friends of Family Planning

1984

Box 5 : 33

Media coverage: Everywoman's Center firing

1983

Box 5: 34

National Women's Organization

1984

Box 5: 35

Notes

1985

Box 5: 36

People for Human Rights: position paper

1969

Box 5: 37

Poor Women's Task Force

1982
Box 5: 38
Reproductive rights
1983
Box 5: 39
Sexism papers (1 of 2)
1970-1975
Box 5: 40
Sexism papers (2 of 2)
1970-1975
Box 5: 41
Valley Women's Union
1975
Box 5: 42
Western Mass Women's League
1984
Box 5: 43
Women's Conference notes- nuclear family
1971
Box 5: 44
Women for Economic Justice
1982-1985
Box 5: 45
Women's liberation, letters
1972-1973
Box 5: 46
Women's liberation movement of South Jersey
1970
Box 5: 47
Workfare contacts
1981
Box 5: 48
Workfare and women (1 of 2)
1981
Box 5: 49
Workfare and women (2 of 2)
1981
Box 5: 50
Series 4. Universal Health Care
1983-1996
8 folders
Acts/bills, legislation, and proposals: American Health Security Act of 1993- S.491- Sen. Paul Wellstone
1993
Box 6: 1
Acts/bills, legislation, and proposals: American Health Security Act- general
1993
Box 6: 2
Acts/bills, legislation, and proposals: American Health Security Act- cosponsors and endorsers
1993
Box 6: 3
Acts/bills, legislation, and proposals: American Health Security Act- updates- Mary Ford
1993
Box 6: 4
Acts/bills, legislation, and proposals: American Health Security Act- women in Congress
1993
Box 6: 5
Acts/bills, legislation, and proposals: California Health Security Act- referendum
1994
Box 6: 6

Acts/bills, legislation, and proposals: Check Sheet for Evaluating Healthcare Proposals- master copy

Box 6: 7

Acts/bills, legislation, and proposals: Clinton's Plan

1993

Box 6: 8

Acts/bills, legislation, and proposals: Clinton's Plan- evaluations

1992-1993

Box 6: 9

Acts/bills, legislation, and proposals: Health Care debate

1993-1994

Box 6: 10

Acts/bills, legislation, and proposals: Health Care for Every American Act- H.R.5500- Rep. John Conyers Jr. (D-MI)

1992

Box 6: 11

Acts/bills, legislation, and proposals: Interreligious Health Care Access Campaign

1991-1992

Box 6: 12

Acts/bills, legislation, and proposals: MA Health Care Act

1988-1995

Box 6: 13

Acts/bills, legislation, and proposals: managed competition

1992-1993

Box 6: 14

Acts/bills, legislation, and proposals: New England congressional delegation

1992-1994

Box 6: 15

Acts/bills, legislation, and proposals: preliminary proposal of Clinton health care reform proposal

1993

Box 6: 16

Acts/bills, legislation, and proposals: Russo plan

1991

Box 6: 17

Acts/bills, legislation, and proposals: second congressional district

1993

Box 6: 18

Acts/bills, legislation, and proposals: Senate Resolutions Memorializing Congress to Enact a National Health Plan

1992

Box 7: 5

Acts/bills, legislation, and proposals: senior citizen healthcare

1983-1989

Box 6: 19

Acts/bills, legislation, and proposals: single payer- info and myths

1994

Box 6: 20

Acts/bills, legislation, and proposals: single payer- New England health care caucus

1993

Box 6: 21

Acts/bills, legislation, and proposals: single payer- town meeting

1993

Box 6: 22

Acts/bills, legislation, and proposals: single payer- updated leaflet

1994

Box 6: 23

Articles: Edward Kennedy- senator

1993

Box 6: 24

Articles: info on health care acts

1992-1993

Box 6: 25

Articles: magazine articles (1 of 2)

1991-1992

Box 6: 26

Articles: magazine articles (2 of 2)

1992-1993

Box 6: 27

Articles: newspapers (1 of 3)

1989-1992

Box 6: 28

Articles: newspapers (2 of 3)

1992-1993

Box 6: 29

Articles: newspapers (3 of 3)

1993-1995

Box 6: 30

Articles: newspaper op-eds

1992-1994

Box 6: 31

Articles: press articles (1 of 2)

1991

Box 6: 32

Articles: press articles (2 of 2)

1991-1992

Box 6: 33

Articles: ways and means- Rostenkowski

1993

Box 6: 34

Correspondence: Canadian Minister of Healthcare Monique Bégin

1985

Box 6: 35

Correspondence: Edward Kennedy (Senator)

1992-1993

Box 6: 36

Correspondence: Hillary Clinton

1993

Box 6: 37

Correspondence: John Olver (Congressman)

1992-1993

Box 6: 38

Correspondence: Richard Neal (Congressman)

1992-1993

Box 6: 39

Health care in other countries: Canadian plan

1986-1993

Box 6: 40

Health care in other countries: Sweden and West Germany

1993

Box 6: 41

Marketing: advertisements and outreach

1993-1994

Box 6: 42

Marketing: bumper stickers

1993-1996

Box 6: 43

Marketing: video distribution

Box 6: 44

Organizations and groups: American Association of Retired Persons (AARP)

1991-1993

Box 6: 45

Organizations and groups: Franklin County Commission

1993-1994

Box 6: 46

Organizations and groups: Franklin/Hampshire Health Care Coalition- agendas and updates (1 of 2)

1993-1996

Box 6: 47

Organizations and groups: Franklin/Hampshire Health Care Coalition- agendas and updates (2 of 2)

1993

Box 6: 48

Organizations and groups: Franklin/Hampshire Health Care Coalition- finances

1993-1994

Box 6: 49

Organizations and groups: Franklin/Hampshire Health Care Coalition- outreach letters

1993

Box 6: 50

Organizations and groups: Franklin/Hampshire Health Care Coalition- steering committee

1993

Box 6: 51

Organizations and groups: Gray Panthers and health care

1988-1993

Box 6: 52

Organizations and groups: Gray Panthers (Pioneer Valley)- small business letter

1994

Box 6: 53

Organizations and groups: Health Care: We Gotta Have It! Women Organize for National Health Care: A Project of Madre

1991-1994

Box 6: 54

Organizations and groups: New Jersey Panthers

1991

Box 6: 55

Organizations and groups: Single Payer Across the Nation (S.P.A.N)

1994

Box 6: 56

Organizations and groups: Universal Health Care Action Network (UHCAN)(1 of 4)

1993

Box 6: 57

Organizations and groups: UHCAN (2 of 4)

1993

Box 6: 58

Organizations and groups: UHCAN (3 of 4)

1994

Box 6: 59

Organizations and groups: UHCAN (4 of 4)

1995-1997

Box 6: 60

Publications: Universal Health Care periodicals (1 of 5)

1992

Box 6: 61

Publications: Universal Health Care periodicals (2 of 5)

1993

Box 6: 62

Publications: Universal Health Care periodicals (3 of 5)

1994

Box 6: 63

Publications: Universal Health Care periodicals (4 of 5)

1995

Box 6: 64

Publications: Universal Health Care periodicals (5 of 5)

1996-1997

Box 6: 65

Publications: American Health Security News Weekly Report

1993-1994

Box 6: 66

Publications: EarthLine- Building the Movement in Western Massachusetts

1992

Box 7: 6

Publications: "Hospital and Community Psychiatry"- evaluation of health plans- articles

1994

Box 6: 67

Publications: "How to Resolve the Health Care Crisis" book

1992

Box 6: 68

Publications: Northeast Action for Health Care Reform newsletters

1992-1995

Box 6: 69

Publications: Physicians for a National Health Program (P.H.N.P) papers

1989-1996

Box 6: 70

Publications: P.H.N.P. newsletters

1991-1996

Box 6: 71

Reports and studies: "Families and National Health Reform: A Comparison of Family Premium Payment Responsibilities Under Current Legislative Proposals"

1994

Box 6: 72

Reports and studies: "Health Care for America: Guide to Health Care Reform"- Health Care for America Policy Institute

1992

Box 6: 73

Reports and studies: "Health Care Security for All: The Single-Payer Answer"

1992

Box 6: 74

Reports and studies: New York Times- comparison chart

1993

Box 6: 75

Reports and studies: PAC contributors- general

1989-1994

Box 6: 76

Reports and studies: PAC contributors- "A Plague on Both Their Houses: The Medical-Industry Complex and its PAC Contributions to Congressional Candidates"

1991

Box 6: 77

Reports and studies: PAC contributors- "Wealth vs. Health: Are Health Industry Campaign Funds Blocking Health Care Reform?"

Box 6: 78

Reports and studies: Paul Wellstone and health care

1992, 1994

Box 6: 79

Reports and studies: "Paying More, Getting Less: How U.S. Health Care Measures Up"

1988

Box 6: 80

Reports and studies: polls/polling

1993

Box 6: 81

Reports and Studies: "Report of the Special Commission... Making an Investigation and Study of Methods for Achieving Universal Health Care Coverage. . . "

Box 6: 82

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Acquired from Mary Wentworth, 1999.

Processing Information

Processed by Janiece Blackmon, Zach Burchell, David Kaczmarek, and Ashley Purvis, December 2010.

Related Material

Among several collections in SCUA related to Wentworth and her activism, see:

Silvio O. Conte Papers (MS 371)

Gray Panthers of the Pioneer Valley Records (MS 468)

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Wentworth, Mary, *Discovering America: A Political Journey*. Philadelphia: X-Libris, 2003. Call no.: CT275.W3875 A3 2003.

Language:

English

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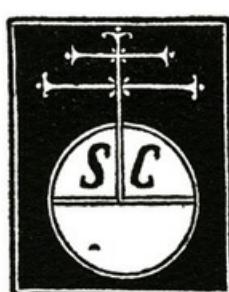
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