

Muftiah McCartin

Secretary, Office of the Parliamentarian (1976–1987)

Clerk Assistant, Office of the Parliamentarian (1987–1991)

Assistant Parliamentarian, Office of the Parliamentarian (1991–2006)

Staff Assistant, Subcommittee on Labor, Health, and Human Services, Education, and Related Agencies,

Committee on Appropriations (2006–2007)

Deputy Staff Director, Committee on Rules (2007–2008)

Staff Director, Committee on Rules (2008–2010)

**Oral History Interview
Final Edited Transcript**

January 29, 2016

Office of the Historian
U.S. House of Representatives
Washington, D.C.

“The House is such a part of the fabric of my life. It’s such a part of me, even still. Even going to work, and I’m driving down Pennsylvania Avenue, and there’s the [Capitol] dome. And I’m turning left to go downtown. Even still, there’s this sense of—that is so much a part of who I am.”

Muftiah McCartin
January 29, 2016

Table of Contents

Interview Abstract	i
Interviewee Biography	ii
Editing Practices	iii
Citation Information	iii
Interviewer Biography	iv
Interview	1
Notes	37

Abstract

Drawn to Washington, D.C., by the excitement of the Watergate hearings, Muftiah McCartin looked for a job on Capitol Hill in the early 1970s. After interviewing with a number of offices, she took a secretarial position in the House Parliamentarian's Office and planned to stay for six months. Thirty-four years later, she had built an impressive career as a parliamentarian and a committee staffer, becoming the first woman to hold the title of assistant House parliamentarian.

In her interview, McCartin traces her first 10 years on the Hill as the only woman in her office. Her male colleagues in the Parliamentarian's Office, as well as Speaker Tip O'Neill, encouraged her while she worked full time, earned her law degree, and raised her child as a single parent. McCartin describes her experience providing nonpartisan procedural guidance for Members, as well as her role in significant moments on the House Floor, including the impeachment of President William J. "Bill" Clinton in 1998. She also recalls her transition to committee work, where she learned how to create legislation and eventually served as staff director for the House Rules Committee.

Biography

Muftiah (Koach) McCartin started her 34-year House career in the Parliamentarian's Office, a nonpartisan office responsible for providing objective assistance on legislative and parliamentary procedure. After 14 years in the office, McCartin became an assistant parliamentarian, the first woman to hold that position.

McCartin was born in 1955 and grew up in Northern Virginia. The Watergate crisis and the series of reforms that followed drew her to the Hill shortly after she graduated from Robinson High School in Fairfax, Virginia. She accepted a job with House Parliamentarian Bill Brown in 1976 and quickly developed close relationships with her colleagues. With their encouragement, McCartin furthered her education in order to advance her career.

While working full time and raising her daughter as a single parent, McCartin completed an undergraduate degree in political science through the University Without Walls program offered by Northeastern Illinois University in 1985. In 1990, she earned a law degree from Georgetown Law. As a parliamentarian, she worked on the dais with presiding officers, assisted Representatives and committees with their legislative duties, and created procedural reference records.

In 2006, after 29 years in the Parliamentarian's Office, McCartin joined the staff of the House Appropriations Subcommittee on Labor, Health and Human Services and worked to create antipoverty programs. In 2007, she became the deputy staff director for the Rules Committee, and two years later served as the committee's staff director. In 2010, McCartin retired from the House. She now works as counsel at a Washington law firm.

Editing Practices

In preparing interview transcripts for publication, the editors sought to balance several priorities:

- As a primary rule, the editors aimed for fidelity to the spoken word and the conversational style in accord with generally accepted oral history practices.
- The editors made minor editorial changes to the transcripts in instances where they believed such changes would make interviews more accessible to readers. For instance, excessive false starts and filler words were removed when they did not materially affect the meaning of the ideas expressed by the interviewee.
- In accord with standard oral history practices, interviewees were allowed to review their transcripts, although they were encouraged to avoid making substantial editorial revisions and deletions that would change the conversational style of the transcripts or the ideas expressed therein.
- The editors welcomed additional notes, comments, or written observations that the interviewees wished to insert into the record and noted any substantial changes or redactions to the transcript.
- Copy-editing of the transcripts was based on the standards set forth in *The Chicago Manual of Style*.

The first reference to a Member of Congress (House or Senate) is underlined in the oral history transcript. For more information about individuals who served in the House or Senate, please refer to the online *Biographical Directory of the United States Congress*, <http://bioguide.congress.gov> and the “People Search” section of the History, Art & Archives website, <http://history.house.gov>.

For more information about the U.S. House of Representatives oral history program contact the Office of House Historian at (202) 226-1300, or via email at history@mail.house.gov.

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Interviewer Biography

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— MUFTIAH McCARTIN—
A CENTURY OF WOMEN IN CONGRESS

ETHIER: This is Grace Ethier with the Office of the Historian, U.S. House of Representatives. Joining me today is Muftiah McCartin, longtime House staffer in the Parliamentarian's Office as well as the House Appropriations Committee and Rules Committee. The date is January 29th, 2016, and we are in the House Recording Studio in the Rayburn Building. This interview is part of an ongoing project to recognize the 100th anniversary of the election and swearing-in of Congresswoman Jeannette Rankin of Montana, the first woman elected to Congress.

Muftiah, thank you so much for being here today.

McCARTIN: Absolutely. Glad to do it.

ETHIER: I'm very excited. Starting off, when you were young, did you have any female role models?

McCARTIN: When I was young, it would have had to be musicians and actresses, like Joni Mitchell, Judy Collins, Carole King. I mean, I didn't have political role models as a kid. I didn't grow up in a really political family.

ETHIER: What drew you to those role models?

McCARTIN: Sorry?

ETHIER: What drew you to them? What did you admire about them?

McCARTIN: Well, I think when I was growing up, there was a real recognition by the time I was a teenager that women's roles were changing. I was born in '55, so I was a teenager in the '70s—early '70s. I think there was a real recognition that

roles were changing. I think there was this feeling that, “Oh, I could really do anything.” I just remember *Life* magazine, *Look* magazine, *National Geographic*, and just sort of poring over stories of people who had sort of done significant things—not necessarily women. There was just a lot of dreaming, I think, as a teenager. And sort of looking for people who were doing significant things, because there was no longer this sense that I would be my mother, where I would have a bunch of kids and be a housewife.

ETHIER: So, piggybacking off of that, can you talk more about the social expectations, based on your family and experience in schooling, of what your role in society would be as a woman?

McCARTIN: From the perspective of a teenager?

ETHIER: Yes.

McCARTIN: That was really such a time of societal change. It was a time where people—I was a kid during the [John Fitzgerald] Kennedy era, when the Peace Corps started, and VISTA [Volunteers in Service to America], and the Great Society, and sort of this sense that you really could change the world. You could. Even though that wasn't—how do I put this? There was a sense of expectation at that time. I think among myself and my peers in high school, there was a sense that you really could make a difference in the world, that you really could change the world. As I got older, maybe in the '70s, that expectation maybe lessened a little bit. But there was—as a teenager—there was tremendous expectation.

ETHIER: Did you have an early interest in politics?

McCARTIN: Not at all, not at all.

ETHIER: Why did you decide to work for the House? And what do you recall about the hiring process?

McCARTIN: Do you want—can I tell you just my story? How I got hired?

ETHIER: Yes, please. Absolutely.

McCARTIN: So, I didn't go to college after high school. I went out to California after high school, worked for a company that went bankrupt. I sold my car so I could come home. I was raised here, for the most part, I was raised here in D.C. So, I came home, and I'm a kid, right? I'm like, "Well, maybe I'll stay here for six months, and then I'll go to Europe—whatever." So, I thought, "Well, if I'm going to be here in D.C., I should be where it's happening, right? And that's on the Hill." This was shortly after the Watergate hearings—the "Watergate Babies" had just been elected, and things are really happening, and so this is where I wanted to be. But remember, I'm not politically inclined at all. I'm barely paying attention to what's going on.

I had really excellent secretarial skills. So, I went to the personnel office for the House, took the test, and because my skills were so good, I got tons of interviews. And I thought, "Well, I'll do maybe 10 interviews, and then I'll line them all up and decide what's the best job to take." So, I was going through the process, and the last one was what at that time I think was called the Government Operations Committee. That's the committee whose name is constantly changing, and Jack [Bascom] Brooks was the chair of that committee.

So, I went in for an interview, and Bill Jones was the staff director of the committee at the time. He has since passed away. So, he was taking me through the process, and every time he'd introduce me to somebody, they'd say, "Oh, are you interested in the position?" And I would say, "Yes, I'm

interested in the position.” And then finally, Bill says, “Well, okay, we’ll go in and meet the chairman.”

Jack Brooks was a very intimidating person. He was from Texas, he smoked the big cigars, he was bald. He had a very strong personality. He sadly lost in the wave of the ’94 election. He lost then, but he really was a giant. When he lost, he was the chair of the Judiciary Committee.

So, I’m across from him at his desk—and I sit down. He barely even looks at me, and he pulls a key chain out of his desk drawer. He says, “So, I hear you want to work for me. Great.” He throws me this key chain, which I catch. He says, “Well, have a good time, honey.”

I leave his office with Bill, and the next thing I know, Bill’s putting papers in front of me. Nobody offered me the job. I’m just a kid. I didn’t know how to say, “Wait a minute, somebody needs to offer me the job here!” I didn’t even know how much you’re offering to pay me, you know? So, I went home in tears, because I had this plan of lining everything up. I actually had another job that I thought that I was going to take. So, I said to myself, “Well, look, it’s only for six months. What the heck?”

So, I went to work that Monday in the Government Operations Committee. The office manager at the time—well, I was in a secretarial pool, which was really uncomfortable for me. The office manager at the time, she was taking me around to meet the professional staff. She takes me into this woman’s office and she says, “This is our ‘token lady lawyer,’” which made me very uncomfortable. And so, again, I went home that Monday night, I was just absolutely in tears. “I can’t do this for six months. I can’t work in a secretarial pool. I can’t work for a woman who calls their one female attorney a ‘token lady lawyer.’ Get me out of here.”

So, I called Bill [William Holmes] Brown, who was the Parliamentarian at the time, because that was the job that I really wanted. I said, “Is the offer still available? Is it still open?” And he said, “No, I’m sorry. I offered it to somebody else.” He said, “If she says no, I’ll call you.” So, that was a Monday. He called me on Thursday, said she had turned down the offer so he offered the job to me. I said, “I will take it.”

I went in to the Government Operations Committee on Friday and quit {laughter}. And Bill Jones, to his credit—over the years, he and I became very, very good friends. But he used to always tease me that that was definitely the shortest stint for an employee on the committee. So, I think that story of my being hired is a little bit representative of the time. And so, that’s how I got here.

And then when I was in the Parliamentarian’s Office, I very quickly realized I was someplace very special. So, this whole notion of staying for six months, I just tossed out the window. In fact, I ended up staying in that office for 29 years. It’s a very, very special place. That’s where my love of the House and the Congress and the process—it stemmed from being in that office and working with those people, the Parliamentarians.

ETHIER: When you had the plan to line up all the jobs, what drew you to the Parliamentarian’s Office?

McCARTIN: All the other offices, they were either committees or personal offices. The Parliamentarian’s Office is right off of the House Chamber. The Parliamentarian’s Office is actually located in the Speaker’s Office. So, the Parliamentarian is a nonpartisan—in some ways—assistant to the Speaker. Obviously, the Parliamentarian serves all the Members and all the committees on both sides of the aisle. But being located right there in the

Speaker's—because the top job of the Parliamentarian is to advise the chair. So, it definitely had a glamour about it. It was clearly—even for the inexperienced eye that I had, I knew it was a special opportunity.

ETHIER: Zooming out a little bit, we're going to zoom back in to your career. But to look at the institution as a whole, how would you describe the atmosphere of the House when you first worked on the Hill, and did gender play a big role?

McCARTIN: There's really two ways to—actually, there's sort of three ways to answer that question. What I'll start with is really the process. The legislative process in '76, when I started, was very different than it is now. It was very different than it was even 20 years ago. The process in the '70s was a much more open process. When a bill came to the floor—yes, it came through the Rules Committee, but it was rarely closed up. For example, when the defense bill used to come to the floor—the annual National Defense Authorization Act [NDAA]—when it would come to the floor, it was like a two-week bill. Now, it's a day, maybe two days. It was very spontaneous. The House was not televised yet, so the debate was spontaneous. You had Members crafting amendments there on the floor. You had the Parliamentarians constantly engaged, constantly on their feet, because things were not scripted. The amendments weren't scripted, the process wasn't scripted, the speeches weren't scripted.

Fast-forward to now, when you have Speaker [John Andrew] Boehner and then Speaker [Paul D.] Ryan really making an effort to open up the process. And frankly, they have to some extent. But to them, opening up the process is to allow more amendments to be made in order—amendments that are scripted. It really will never get back to those days. Never. Those days are gone. That process really developed a different character of the House.

I think for those of us who have been around for a long time, in some ways we really miss that. Obviously, there are a lot of conveniences to everything being scripted in terms of schedule, and much more predictability. Back in the '70s, it was not at all uncommon to stay until 11:00, 12:00 at night, and it's less—actually, in many cases less so here, or at least you know. Back then you didn't know, because it was an open process. You didn't know what you were going to be dealing with. That really has changed the nature of the House. That is sort of one bucket.

The second bucket I'll talk about is just the gender. Remember, in '76 was really a time of sea change, right? So, in '76, there were some women who were giants, some of whom you've interviewed already. You know, like Pat [Patricia Scott] Schroeder. Pat Schroeder, Barbara [Charline] Jordan was here when I started. Shirley [Anita] Chisholm was here. Liz [Elizabeth] Holtzman. I'm afraid to list them, because I'm going to forget some, Patsy [Takemoto] Mink. But there were a handful.

So, we had these tremendous women, but they were only a handful of women. And then you began to see more and more and more and more women. So, the pool of talent was growing, until you get to '92, where you have the "Year of the Woman." I'd have to sort of look at the stats to see what's happened since '92. But that was sort of like a real pivotal time for women in the House, in '92. And on the Republican side as well. I just mentioned some of the Democrats. But women like Claudine Schneider. I was here when Millicent [Hammond] Fenwick was here—she was an elderly women who sat in the lobby and smoked her pipe incessantly, and wore those beautiful pencil skirts—and her little suit and her hair in a bun and her pipe. It was awesome. {laughter}

That actually leads me to the third bucket of how the character of the House has really changed. And that is that when I came, there were some real characters. Real characters, because politics wasn't as polished. So, you had a Millicent Fenwick in the lobby smoking her pipe. You had Congressman [Daniel John] Flood from Pennsylvania, who had that big handlebar mustache, and sometimes walked around in a cape. You had Bella [Savitzky] Abzug, who was this tremendous personality, with her hats and just sort of the way she was. I mean, everybody's different, right? And everybody can be sort of a character in their own way, but it's really different in that you don't have the—everybody's just so much more polished than they were back in '76.

ETHIER: Concerning women staff, were there particular offices or positions in the House that were easier, or more difficult, for women to attain?

McCARTIN: Well, remember, I came in as a secretary, and I was a secretary for 11 years. I wasn't just a secretary for a couple years. It was 11 years, while I went to school at night. When I came in '76, there were very few women in professional—there were women in professional positions, for sure, but there weren't women on the rostrum. There weren't really women in the Clerk's Office. There were shortly after I got there, but right when I got there, there weren't.

I think that Elaine Mielke—on the Judiciary Committee—I think she may have been the first female general counsel of a committee. Or if not, one of the first, and that was under Chairman [Peter Wallace] Rodino [Jr.]. And when I came, Carl [Bert] Albert was Speaker. Joel Jankowsky was his top floor person. He had a deputy who was a woman. Her name was Helen Newman. When [Thomas Philip (Tip) O'Neill [Jr.] came in, he had—Leo Diehl was his top aide, and then you had—his top floor person was a man.

His steering and policy person was a man, and so on, but Delores Snow was his personal office chief. He had a number of women in policy positions. We often get together still, and talk about those days when positions for women were just really sort of beginning to open up.

ETHIER: You mentioned getting together today, but were there any clubs for women staff when you were working here?

McCARTIN: For staff, I don't remember any. But, remember, for the first 11 years, I was a secretary. By the time I was an attorney and in a professional position, I was raising my children while doing a hard job.

I'll tell you that later in life, when I had more time, absolutely there were organizations supporting women, in both the public and private sectors. But, there was the Women's Congressional Caucus. I don't even know if that still exists, because now there's just so—I don't think women Members necessarily align themselves merely as women Members, like when there were just a handful of them.

I will say that when I became the staff director of the Rules Committee, there were two women in particular—there were at least four, maybe even five, female staff directors at the time. But two in particular had been around for a long time: Jeanne Roslanowick and Janice Mays. They treated me almost with unconditional love. No matter what struggles I was having or mistakes I was making, they were there, and they were so incredibly supportive. I think it was because they had been around for a long time, like 25 years—they saw so many of the struggles. They were just incredibly supportive, even without some sort of formal group.

I will say, though, also that when I became staff director, it became really important for me to develop relationships beyond what I was used to. I

found women's groups outside of Congress to be particularly helpful, like— alumni, congressional staff alum. I will say that now there are several women's groups who are dedicated to electing women to Congress— Running Start, Women Under Forty [Political Action Committee], Jenkins Hill Society—and these have become tremendous networking groups. I have to say the really strong women's-networking groups came later in my life, and not so much earlier.

ETHIER: So, zooming back in to focus on your career, and sort of stepping back to the beginning, you mentioned you were a secretary for 11 years. What were your responsibilities in that position?

McCARTIN: I came in and I made the coffee, and I answered the phone. Back then, it was before computers, and so I did all the typing. I used a large-type typewriter to prepare the scripts for the chair. I did the filing and I took shorthand. I was your stereotypical secretary.

ETHIER: Did you find the Parliamentarian's Office welcoming to you as a young woman?

McCARTIN: Yes. I wouldn't be where I am today without their support. They were incredibly supportive. They were supportive of my going to school at night. After two years in the office, I tried to quit. I had this sort of little personal crisis. I didn't know what I wanted to do with the rest of my life. I didn't want to be a secretary my whole life, and this and that.

So, I went into Bill's office, and I said, "I'm just going to go to Hawaii and pick flowers." I had this friend who had just bought an orchid farm in Hawaii and asked me to come. I told Bill, "I'm just going to go pick flowers in Hawaii." He said, "Okay, well, I really think you should think about this." The next thing I know, he's inviting me out to spend a weekend with him

and his wife. “We really should talk about this.” He suggested, “No, look, just settle down. Just don’t go off to Hawaii and pick flowers. Really come up with a plan.” {laughter}

ETHIER: And you stayed.

McCARTIN: And I stayed. I did.

ETHIER: How big of a role, if any, did your age play into how you were treated or seen in your work environment?

McCARTIN: Now, that’s really interesting. I don’t think it really did. I was 20 when I started in the Parliamentarian’s Office, but people thought I was in my mid-20s. It’s interesting now, because now I’m 60, right? Now, coming up here as a lobbyist and interacting with much younger staff is definitely interesting. Really interesting. But back then, I didn’t really pay attention to age.

ETHIER: Did you feel any added attention or pressure because you were a woman staffer? Maybe not just in the Parliamentarian’s Office, but in the institution as a whole?

McCARTIN: No. I’d have to say the most difficult of all the—well, let me just back up a little bit. Because there’s a couple ways to sort of look at that: is it like a gender issue, or is it more a human issue, right?

So, when I was in the Parliamentarian’s Office, I was raising my family. And, the Parliamentarian’s Office was just incredibly supportive, but they also were men who had spouses who didn’t work. So, they all had kids, but—and I don’t want this to sound the wrong way—but the point that I’m making is, is that if you look at Members of Congress who come here when their children are young, it’s hard.

[A 23-second segment of this interview has been redacted.]

But the point is, is that there are just some really inherent difficulties in having a very demanding job while raising children. Particularly, Members who are separated by sometimes thousands of miles between their homes and their jobs.

It's either you have an office that says, "You, Muftiah, you are taking time off to take care of a sick child, to take care of elderly parents—whatever." Or they say, "You know what? This is not just about Muftiah, this is about the human condition." Either you're going to have a culture where everybody is dealing with those issues, or you're going to have a culture that says, "No, you just work and work and work. If you have to take the time off, okay, sure, we'll let you take the time off." It's not even necessarily begrudging the time off, but it's not necessarily expected for everybody. Do you know what I mean?

I see now where more and more, the office cultures are—this is the human condition, where people don't want to necessarily be in a relationship where their spouse is not working so that they can handle all of the family crises that come up incessantly. That it's more shared, and so it's not a gender issue anymore, it's really a human issue. You see more office cultures accommodating that issue.

But back in that day, it wasn't the office culture. It wasn't the office culture really anywhere up here, where everybody worked so hard. So, it was really difficult for those of us who were raising our families.¹

ETHIER:

You have been talking about this—one of the questions I have is, how did you balance working on the Hill with your family responsibilities? If there's anything more you want to dive into with that experience.

McCARTIN:

Yes. I had a really supportive spouse, but he traveled a lot. The Parliamentarian's Office was very supportive. So, when we were in session, you were expected to be there. You could be on your deathbed. Your kids could be on their deathbed, but you were going to be there. Whereas during recesses, if my kid sneezed, I would say, "You know what? I'm going to spend the afternoon with my kid." So, it in some ways, the House, is—because of the recesses, and especially now with much more predictability in the schedule—it's actually not a bad place to raise a child.

I actually think it was easier to raise my kids when I was on the Hill than when I was in the private sector, where you're expected to be on call all the time and work weekends. There's no "four bells" downtown. There's no "Okay, we're adjourned, you can go home, and during recess you can come to work in blue jeans and take short days." That doesn't happen downtown.

ETHIER:

Switching gears a little, you worked in the House while earning your degree, as you mentioned, in political science, and then later your law degree. Can you describe that experience and how you—again—balanced working on the Hill and then also earning these degrees.

McCARTIN:

Well, also, I was a single parent at the same time, so it was tough. So, when I was working on my undergraduate degree, I had a lot of—I had a lot more flexibility working on that degree. When I got to law school is when it was really tough, because I had a class every single night. The Parliamentarians were great. I mean, I had to leave at 5:30, class started at 5:45. Then if the House was in late, I'd come back after classes.

I had one child during my time at law school, and I actually moved back home. I rented my house out, and I moved back home with my parents because I just didn't want my daughter with a babysitter incessantly. So, I

think that she was in a good place, and my parents were really very helpful during that time. But there was no sleep, that's all. There was just never sleep. My daughter still remembers that—when I would come home, which was often at midnight. She remembers the clink of my keys. She says to this day, she hears the clinks, and she says, “Oh, my mom's home.” {laughter}

ETHIER: You mentioned to me before, some people working on the Hill, acting as mentors for your classes. Do you want to talk about that—who they were?

McCARTIN: Oh, absolutely. I know what you mean. So, just to back up a little bit, just to explain what these classes were. I started going to night school shortly after I started in the Parliamentarian's Office. I was going to night school when I got pregnant, and I was at GW [George Washington University] and I was taking nine credits a semester. It was not a full load, but it was a good load. When I was pregnant, I was like, “You know what? I can't do this. I can't go to school, I can't be pregnant. I'm barfing, no!” So, I quit school after winter semester thinking I would go back when my baby was born. I was such an idiot. {laughter} “Oh, yeah, sure, I can take care of a baby and work full time and go to school. Yeah, no sweat.”

It took me three years to find my way back to school. I went to see this career counselor to help me. I was like, “I don't know how to do this. I have a demanding job—I mean, I was a secretary, but I was still working the same hours I was working when I later became an attorney. I was just doing different stuff. It was the same office, it was just different responsibilities. I was like, “I don't know what to do.” She said, “Have you ever heard of the University Without Walls?” which I hadn't.

This was before the days of online classes. She put me in touch with Northeastern Illinois University in Chicago. They had a program, and the

program was like this: I had mentors at school in Chicago, and then I would have mentors here. I had Walter Oleszek, who's with CRS [Congressional Research Service] and is a very well-known political scientist. When my professors in Chicago found out that Walter Oleszek was one of my mentors, their jaws just dropped, "What? Are you kidding me?" He was fantastic, so fantastic. And then George Kundanis, who is now with Leader Pelosi, and Sally Ericsson, who is with OMB [the Office of Management and Budget], she was a top aide for O'Neill at the time. So, they were my mentors here.

I wrote papers. I did some classes because I couldn't do everything writing papers. Then, I had to do an undergraduate thesis. I forget the title of it, but it was something like "Confrontation or Compromise: Strategies for Institutional Change." The paper was looking at the tactics the minority was using to try to change the institution to give the minority more influence. I looked at those issues and the impact of some of the big procedural fights on the institution over the years. It was good. It was fun. Then I went from there straight to law school.

ETHIER: Why did you choose political science to major in?

McCARTIN: I needed a degree, and that made sense. Because I was actually in criminal justice before I had a child. I think what happened, too, was I kind of realized I didn't want to leave the House. I didn't want to get into criminal justice. I didn't want to be a probation/parole officer. I wanted to stay where I was, and so I just needed to get that undergraduate degree so I could get myself to law school. It made sense to do political science.

ETHIER: According to the staff directories that I was looking through, you were the only woman in the Parliamentarian's Office for 10 years. Did anything change when another woman was hired?

McCARTIN: Oh, Gay Topper was like my best friend! Yes, she was hired—she had been on the rostrum. She was one of the clerks to the reporters. When Dallas Dendy left, they promoted me to assistant clerk, knowing that I was going to go on to law school and not stay in that position. So, they brought Gay in as clerk, knowing she would stay, and, indeed, she just retired a couple years ago. She was in the office for a long time. So, there was no desk for her, so she and I had to share a desk. We shared a desk for two years. She planned my wedding. She was my—I just love her so much. But finally, she put her foot down. She's like, "I think we're the only people in the universe that share a desk, and we have shared a desk for two years. This is just ridiculous." So, she put her foot down, and we did a little reconfiguring. We had little intern desks brought in. We were literally sitting right on top of each other. It was great having Gay in the office.

ETHIER: Can you describe your path from secretary in the Parliamentarian's Office to becoming an assistant parliamentarian?

McCARTIN: Yes. For me, it was all about the education, right? It was all about the education. I had to be an attorney. There's only so much I could do not being an attorney. It wasn't like, not being attorney, I could start advising on parliamentary procedure. I couldn't. So, I just had to study. They would give me some memos to do, they would give me some of the referral issues. Because everything that—all the executive communications that come in, the Parliamentarian refers to the committees. All the bills that are introduced, the Parliamentarian refers to committees. So, he would give me some minor things to do. But Bill and Charlie [Johnson] agreed it was very important that I was not in any kind of advisory role without being an attorney and having passed the bar. So, it was a really stark transition when I actually became an assistant parliamentarian.

I will also say that I was pregnant when I was appointed a parliamentarian by Tom [Thomas Stephen] Foley in January of '91. I was sort of like, "Okay, now I can really start doing this." At the same time, I'm not feeling so great, and then I had a complicated pregnancy, and so it took a couple years for me to feel comfortable with the transition. I think to the great credit of the Parliamentarian's Office, they really invested in me. They were very, very supportive. It took a while.

And frankly, I think the most difficult thing—and I think this really speaks to gender—kind of issues with our gender generally. But I think with me, it was really exaggerated. It took me a long time to find my voice. I mean, I was a kid when I got in the office. "Who am I?" I was making coffee and filing. "Who am I?" And then because there wasn't, like, more of a gradual transition to a parliamentarian, it was like all of a sudden, I'm in meetings. And, "Where's my voice?" I think that was the most, most difficult thing. Because remember, I was also working with intellectual giants. Bill Brown and Charlie Johnson were really—they knew the stuff inside and out. Who am I to question anything they say, or enter into any kind of debate when the office was making decisions? Things were done in the office by consensus. That was hard. That was really, really hard.

One of the first projects that I got as a Parliamentarian was to do the NDAA [National Defense Authorization Act] conference appointment, because that defense bill usually has a number of other committee jurisdictions involved. It's a complicated conference appointment. The secondary committees, they want to be involved in the conference, so staff would come over and argue strenuously for their committees to be appointed to the conference. Not only do they want to be involved in the conference, but they also want to make

sure that their committee jurisdiction is protected. So, they would come in and really argue strenuously.

This one staffer, who is still my really good friend—he’s retired, but I still see him upon occasion—he didn’t like the way that I had done one of the appointments in his jurisdiction. He came over, and he just ripped into me, which was sort of his way. I think he—whether I was a woman or a man, it didn’t matter—that was just sort of his way when he was going to argue something. He was going to come in, and he was going to argue in a really aggressive way.

So, I went in to Bill Brown, and I’m like, “Oh my God! He chewed me up, he spit me out.” And he didn’t say, “Oh, you’re getting your voice.” He didn’t say that. But what he did say was like, “Yes. You voiced an opinion that somebody didn’t like, and you got taken to the woodshed for it. Okay.”

ETHIER: Did any women Members who you admired, or respected, reach out to you for becoming the first female parliamentarian?

McCARTIN: Not really. That was all Tip O’Neill. Back in those years when things were so hard, he would just wrap his arms around me and say, “Mufti, I’m going to see your picture on the front page of the *Washington Post*, first woman parliamentarian.” Of course, when Tom Foley appointed me, it wasn’t picked up anywhere. My mother said her cousin called her from California. It was picked up in some Podunk town in California, which is kind of funny. It really wasn’t news at all. But he used to just say that all the time to encourage me. My boss, Charlie, told me that Nancy Pelosi was watching my career, but she never communicated that to me.

And then, there was the issue with the Hyde Amendment in ’93. The Women’s Caucus at the time—there were a number of women who were

trying to prevent the re-introduction of an amendment by [Henry John]
Hyde that would prevent the government from paying for abortions, except
in the case of rape and incest and so on. The Parliamentarian's Office had
advised that this amendment would not be in order, because the exception
was legislating on an appropriation bill. That's what the Women's Caucus
was advised.

In the meantime, Hyde came up with a really obscure precedent that
basically said that, using a particular drafting technique—it wasn't legislating
on an appropriation bill, it was a very obscure precedent narrow to this one
drafting technique. The Parliamentarians ended up ruling for Hyde, allowing
the amendment to be made an order. The Women's Caucus felt that they
had been lied to. They felt cheated. They felt that the Parliamentarians had
some sort of political agenda, and it was a terrible, terrible situation.

[A two-minute segment of this interview has been redacted.]

ETHIER: Can you describe a typical day as an assistant parliamentarian?

McCARTIN: Well, our main job was to advise the chair. So, there's always somebody
advising the chair. Another one of our main jobs was to do the referrals that I
mentioned earlier. That's a very, very time-consuming process. All the
executive communications had to be referred, and it has to be done daily. So,
every bill that came in that day had to be referred by the end of the day. We
also were on the phone constantly, advising committees, because the general
counsels of the committees would call us and ask us advice all the time on
committee procedure. We would referee jurisdictional disputes between
committees. We also wrote the rules for the Rules Committee. That was
usually assigned to one parliamentarian. Although everybody reviewed it, it

was assigned to one. And so, you're really at the beck and call of the Rules Committee.

I would be very remiss if I didn't make clear—these responsibilities are when the House is in session. But one of the most important things, because of this fidelity to precedent that I just mentioned, we kept crazy-detailed scrapbooks which eventually would turn into the published precedents, and would be noted in the *House Rules and Manual* that was published every two years. But that was a very, very time-consuming process. And then, of course, we did do the *Manual* every two years. And the *House Practice* book is—I think there's been three of them out that we were responsible for. So, compiling the precedents is huge, and it's a huge responsibility, because predictability is so important in parliamentary procedure.

ETHIER: You mentioned working with the Speaker's Office and also the Rules Committee, but I'm wondering if there are other offices and committees that you worked closely with.

McCARTIN: Oh, yes, we worked with the Clerk's Office like this {crosses fingers}—the bill clerk, the tally clerk, the journal clerk, the reading clerk. We worked very, very closely with them. The record clerks. Everybody at the rostrum. But the Appropriations Committee—when it was appropriations season, we were kind of joined at the hip with the Appropriations Committee as well. Because that is one of the few committees that actually brings their measures to the floor under an open rule. They do because the rules of the House are so restrictive on what can be offered as an amendment. So, kind of some of the spontaneity that we lost sometimes comes back in the appropriation season. Which is why appropriations on a parliamentary level is so much fun.

ETHIER: So, mentioning the rostrum, if we want to rewind a little bit. You told me a story about when you were first allowed on the rostrum. Do you want to talk about that?

McCARTIN: Right. When I interviewed for secretarial position, they had a clerk. And the clerk advised the chair on recognition and sometimes did a little more, wrote scripts, but mostly kept the clock because debate on the House Floor is tightly controlled. He would advise the chair on time and on recognition. And the clerk had to be out there all the time, along with one of the parliamentarians. So, initially, when I was hired, Bill had said, "Well, you can go on the floor. You'll be able to go on the floor and give Dallas [Dendy] some breaks," because Dallas didn't have anybody to give him any breaks, and it was difficult for him. So, I thought that was great. Then kind of a couple of years went by, and I never gave him a break. I didn't quite know why, and didn't really think to push it.

One day, Bill brought me into his office and said, "There are women on the rostrum now. So, I think it's okay for you to go and relieve Dallas." And remember, Bill is not sexist at all. He was totally, absolutely supportive of women and their careers and everything. But I think he just was a little uncomfortable in his position, to be the first. I want to say that it was '78, I think that's when I started. Maybe it was '79. That's when I started going on the floor.

ETHIER: And you've mentioned the Parliamentarian's Office being very supportive of you going through school. Were there others in the office who were doing the same thing, going through school and earning degrees?

McCARTIN: Not in the Parliamentarian's Office, but in the Speaker's Office, yes. Jack Lew, Secretary of the Treasury, he was in O'Neill's office, and he was going

to law school at night while being a top aide to Speaker O'Neill. And before him was Ari Weiss, and Ari Weiss did the same thing. I want to say Linda Melconian in his office, I think maybe she was going to school at the same time as well. Tip O'Neill was very supportive of furthering your education. I think Debbie Cabral was also getting her master's degree while working for the Speaker. He was very supportive of that.

ETHIER: We're just about an hour in. Do you want to take a break? Stretch?

McCARTIN: No, I'm okay.

ETHIER: Okay. You're good, you're good to go. So, you talked about the Hyde Amendment, and I'm wondering if there are other, maybe one or two other significant events that the Parliamentarian's Office was involved with during the years, that stand out to you.

McCARTIN: Oh, yes, impeachment. [President William J. "Bill"] Clinton's impeachment. That was such a dark mark on—I don't want to overstate it. It was a very, very dark mark on the House, I think, in my view. It was so hateful, and it really—I'll tell the one story, which just sort of gives you a little bit of a flavor of what it was like then. So—you know what? I'm going to save that story. I'm going to save that story for later.

I think the parliamentary situation on impeachment was that the Democrats wanted to amend the impeachment resolution from impeach to censure. The question was whether that was a germane amendment to include in their motion to recommit, which the minority was entitled to. That was a question that we researched for months. That was a ruling that was drafted and redrafted.

Joe [John Joseph] Moakley from Massachusetts offered the amendment to censure, and a point of order was made, and the point of order was sustained. So, from a parliamentary perspective, it was difficult. There was a lot going on in the committee. There was a lot going on just with respect to procedure. So, it was a very busy, active time. There were a lot of, sort of, tangential issues that were being researched. But that one was—the germaneness issues—that issue, that was huge. That was absolutely huge.

When [Robert Linlithgow] Livingston [Jr.] resigned, that was a really difficult time in the House as well. So, you had Livingston, who had already been elected by the Republican Conference to be a candidate for Speaker. So, of course, he would have been Speaker. There were a lot of accusations around him, and [they had to do with] infidelity, and this was sort of coming at the time of the impeachment, when it seemed a little hypocritical. That sort of played into the dynamic at the time.

And I'll never forget this. So, he's on the floor giving a speech, [name redacted] is in the front row, along with a bunch of other Members. Charlie Johnson is advising the chair. I'm sitting next to him. I forget what the first sentence Livingston said, that the Members started booing. They started booing. I forget what it was, but it was on this issue. And then in the very next sentence, he said he was stepping down and resigning. And, watching [name redacted]—and maybe this isn't fair, you'll have to ask her for her impression. But my impression of watching her is—she was booing him for whatever he was saying. And then as soon as he resigned, I mean it was like, "What?"—you just see the shock come over her and Members. You kind of felt like Members were almost becoming tearful. It was such an emotional moment on the floor.

Charlie, my boss, I remember watching him. He just went like this. {puts head in hands and bends down} He told me a couple days later that International CNN, when they were covering the speech, they zoomed in on Charlie. He was putting his head in his hands. But that was such an emotional moment.

There's one other emotional moment, it was this—way rewind. When Tip O'Neill left, and he gave a floor speech that I really recommend—especially in the kind of era that we have now, with so much partisan bickering, where I think a lot of people will say now that it's much more difficult to build friendships in the House than it was before. I'm sure a lot of Members have been explaining that to you through these interviews. There were much, much closer relationships back then. I think that that floor speech, that farewell speech, where a lot of Members were getting emotional listening to it, really epitomizes that sense of camaraderie that was in the House at the time. The sense of you fought your battles, but you had respect for each other for the most part. And tremendous respect for the institution, because this was—the backbenchers were just beginning about now. The backbenchers were really—the “Newt” [Newton Leroy] Gingrichs of the world—at that time the backbenchers were who felt like their pathway to the majority was through denigrating the institution. It was just starting then. But anyway, that was—and I often, especially with my children—it's such an important speech to listen to, to really get a flavor of what it was like back then.

ETHIER: Were you on the floor during that time?

McCARTIN: Oh, yes. Yes.

ETHIER: Did you want to share that impeachment story that you had—did you share that one? You said you would come back to it.

McCARTIN: Yes. The Livingston resignation wasn't directly related to it. It was tangential to impeachment. So, yes, that's covered.

ETHIER: Looking at the parliamentarians that you worked with, how would you compare their leadership styles? Or their outlook on the role of the office in the institution?

McCARTIN: All very, very similar. In that respect, they're all sort of cut from the same cloth. So, tremendous dedication and devotion to the institution. As far as their leadership styles, again it's a small office. So, it's not like you're the leader of a large institution. It's a very small office and very congenial and again, they pretty much operate by consensus. So, that can be a good thing or a bad thing, depending upon how much of a hurry you're in. {laughter} But everybody's point of view is—it's almost like if somebody in the office has a different point of view, you've got to run it to the ground, because if that person has that point of view, somebody on the floor is going to have that point of view as well. So, everything kind of gets run to the ground. It's a very deliberative office.

ETHIER: In 2006, you began to work on committees. You made this transition over to committees, first on Appropriations and then for Rules. Was the atmosphere different in a committee setting than in the Parliamentarian's Office?

McCARTIN: Very different. Not so much Rules, because Rules is very synergistic with the Parliamentarian's Office anyway. Appropriations was just completely different. Frank Cushing was the staff director of the Appropriations Committee when I was hired under Jerry [Charles Jeremy] Lewis. I really wanted to be in the front office and doing parliamentary work. Frank said,

“No, you need to go to a subcommittee. You need to understand what the appropriators really do. You just see everything from the floor.” I said, “Okay, great. I want to do Foreign Ops [Subcommittee on State, Foreign Operations, and Related Programs].” He’s like, “Actually I’m going to put you on Labor-HHS [Subcommittee on Labor, Health and Human Services].” Frank has since passed away. But, I used to say to Frank all the time, “How did you know? How did you know that that was a marriage made in heaven for me? How did you know that?” He was such an amazing human being.

I initially worked for the Republicans, because I’m still feeling like I’m a nonpartisan professional staff. I was not going to show any of my political stripes. Frank was very respectful of that. In fact, on the Appropriations Committee, there were a number of people like that. So, it wasn’t that out of the ordinary. I was working on antipoverty programs. I worked under the staff director of the subcommittee, Dave Gibbons, who was one of the smartest human beings I ever met in my life. He was the CFO of HUD [Housing and Urban Development], and he also worked on Ag, the Department of Ag [Agriculture] budget office, as well. I just was a sponge just soaking up from him, and learning my programs. And having some regularity in my life, because I wasn’t tied to the House schedule. I loved it. I absolutely loved it. I didn’t want to leave. I cried and cried when I left, but I felt like I needed to take the job at Rules, but it was very difficult to leave that job.

ETHIER: How did you prepare for the role of staff director on the Rules Committee?

McCARTIN: Oh, that was easy.

ETHIER: What was your path for that?

McCARTIN: Dan Turton is the one who recruited me on Rules, and it took—like I said, I didn't want to leave the Appropriations Committee—so, it took about three months for him to recruit me. Finally he called me up one day. He was like, “You know what? I'm going to stop. This is ridiculous. Either you're coming, or you're not.” It was really agonizing. It was a very, very agonizing decision for me. I felt like it was the right thing for me to do professionally, to grow professionally.

I worked under Dan for two years. So, it was sort of a natural progression, when Dan went to the White House, for me to take over as staff director. I think coming from the Appropriations Committee right to staff director would have been horrible. I think it would have been really difficult, but having that deputy step was perfect.

ETHIER: Did you feel added attention or pressure because you were a woman staff director? You sort of talked about this before.

McCARTIN: No, I worked for Louise [McIntosh] Slaughter, she was the first female chair of the Rules Committee. Nancy Pelosi was Speaker, and there were a number of women staff. Alexis Covey-Brandt, who is Steny [Hamilton] Hoyer's chief of staff—at the time, she was the floor director for Steny Hoyer. So, I worked very closely with her. She was terrific and is still terrific. It's kind of funny because sometimes Mr. Hoyer kind of introduces me as somehow mentoring Alexis, which is kind of ridiculous. It was more like the other way around, because she had been working the floor for a few years. I had worked the floor plenty from the Parliamentarian's side, but the intra-leadership politics was all new to me. She was very helpful in sort of figuring all of that out. She should be somebody you should interview. She's awesome.

ETHIER: I asked a similar question before about the Parliamentarian's Office, but what do you think are one or two of the most significant events that you were involved with while working on the committees?

McCARTIN: Well, the Rules Committee is pretty obvious, because we did ACA [the Affordable Care Act], right? We did the health-care bill, and that was an incredibly amazing process to be a part of. There were some real procedural nuances to get that done. The Rules Committee was really procedurally smack in the middle of trying to get the bill done. There was a parliamentary maneuver that ended up being called the "Slaughter Solution." Because when Ted [Edward Moore] Kennedy passed away, and then [Martha] Coakley lost, and we lost the 60th vote, right?² We needed to be able to get across the finish line with less than 60 votes. The only way to do that was through the "reconciliation" process.

And, of course, it just set up this incredibly complicated procedural avenue to get to the finish line. You had this complicated procedural avenue when you had a really complicated political avenue. You had substantive policy issues as well—the Senate bill was just not well written. It was written as a first draft, right? So, you're trying to work all these substantive issues out. You get a substantive issue worked out, and then the politics would go haywire, and you're like, "Okay, well, we can do this procedurally." And, "Well, no, we can't because of the politics." It was just—it was the most complicated thing I'd ever been involved in.

Nancy Pelosi did a beautiful job in navigating the politics. The staff, I'd have to say, did a magnificent job in navigating the substance. I think all the staff would say that there are things in that bill that need to be fixed that couldn't be fixed because of the procedural constraints of the reconciliation process.

Then when the Republicans took over in 2011, you knew it wasn't going to

be fixed, because the politics were just too crazy over ACA. One day, hopefully, they will. But we did the best we could on the substance, given our procedural and our political constraints—primarily procedural constraints because of the Byrd Rule. There was very little that we could do.³

The “Slaughter Solution,” at the end of the day, ended up being very politically controversial—so much so, that we ended up not doing it. But I think the controversy around it made it much easier for us to actually pass the Senate bill, made it politically easier for the House to get there, knowing that that was what we had to do. The only way we’re going to get across the finish line is, you had to adopt the Senate bill as is, even though it had some really horrible things in there.

So, anyway, that was—I’d have to say over the 34 years of my experience on the Hill, that was the most interesting experience. Just looking also at the collection of professional staff that were involved in that, I think it’s probably the highest caliber in a collection of staff I think I’ve ever seen. There was the energy bill in ’78 that was similar. That was sort of a similar experience. We had this amazing collection of Members and staff who were able to put that energy bill together in ’78. So, it was a little bit similar to that. Hopefully, there will be a lot of books on the dance of legislation on that one.

ETHIER: Stepping back a little bit, when Jeannette Rankin served in Congress, a lot of attention was paid to her dress and demeanor because she was the first woman in Congress. Do you think that changed by the time that you came here to work? Or did women Members and staff sort of face the same scrutiny?

McCARTIN: Yes, well, I see everything from the procedural perspective, right? So, the rules of the House—there’s a dress code for men, and there’s not for women.

So, men have to wear a tie, they have to wear a coat. They can't wear a hat. Okay, that's not the case—there's nothing for a woman. So, you have Lynn [Morley] Martin from Illinois, who's one of my most-favorite Members and she ran for the Senate and lost in a year that was really bad for Republicans. She would have been a magnificent Senator. She would play golf on Friday afternoons, and she'd come in culottes. I said that to my kids, and they were like, "What are culottes?" Culottes are like a—I don't know what you would call them nowadays, skorts or whatever. In her little tennis shoes, little golf socks, you know? And polo shirts. People were like, "What the heck?" Like, "Where is that in the rules?" There were certain male Members who would pull me aside. They pulled me aside and said, "Go talk to that Member." I'm like, "You go talk to her. You don't want her to wear that, I'm not going to go talk to her."

Then, of course, Bella Abzug with her hats—that was a huge issue that Charlie Johnson used to deal with. Charlie used to say the same thing when Members would complain to him about her wearing her hats. He was like, "I'm not going to go tell her that. I don't see—it's not in the rules."

Before Gay got there, I just always wore a suit. I just always did. Always. Skirt and a jacket. When Gay came in, Gay and I would collaborate on this. So, we always decided what we're going to wear. "We're going to wear pantyhose, we're going to wear a skirt, we're going to wear a jacket when we're in session, and that's just what we're going to do." But Members—you'd have some Members in pantsuits. You'd have some in sleeveless dresses. You'd have much more of a mix with the Members. But the staff, at least on the rostrum staff—Gay and I were going to set the standard for the Parliamentarian's Office, for the two of us.

When the Clerk changed—I can't remember, was it Robin Carle? Maybe it was after Robin. I think it was before Lorraine Miller, it must have been Robin. One of the Clerks said pantsuits were okay. Then once they did that, then Gay and I went to pantsuits, but we always wore jackets. Always, always, always wore jackets. But, yes, you'd see quite a bit on the floor. It was quite—quite a bit.

It's really funny to me—just to digress for one second on that—because I feel now like it's almost I'm giving my age away by what I wear. People don't wear pantyhose, they wear sleeveless dresses. In our day, never cleavage. Never cleavage. Now, you have cleavage, doesn't matter. It's fun for me to think that women have a lot more freedom in what to wear than men do. We certainly do. But that wasn't always the case in the Clerk's Office. I do think that women Members dressed the way that they wanted to dress in most cases. Now you see the staff doing that pretty much as well. I don't know what the dress code is in the Clerk's Office now, I'd be curious to know.

ETHIER: Moving into sort of retrospective questions now. You mentioned a number of women Members before, but I'm wondering if there are any more that you want to mention that stand out in your mind, that had a specific impact on the institution or just on you, personally?

McCARTIN: Well, I mean, Louise Slaughter gave me the opportunity to be staff director, and I'm really grateful for that. I'm extremely grateful to have been also working under Nancy Pelosi's leadership.

But going way back, I think the thing that's so wonderful is—again in '76, it was a sea change. A sea change in volume and a sea change really in quality as well, because it just took women getting the education, getting a culture where they could be more engaged professionally. You certainly saw it in the

states. You saw it in the states way before you saw it in Congress. And to sort of see that talent pool grow and grow and grow. Whereas before, like I said, there were only a handful of titans, and now we have a whole bunch of them. I have a whole bunch of women Members that I have tremendous respect for.

But other than the ones that I mentioned—I know you said that you interviewed Nancy [Lee] Johnson, she was pro-choice in a white, mostly male Republican Conference. She got up there, and she would speak to every single amendment, she never missed one. She was up there giving a very impassioned speech for choice. And Lynn Martin, I was so sorry to see her go, she was such a valued member of the Budget Committee on both sides of the aisle. But now there's so many, I'd be afraid I would leave somebody out, because there's so many now.

ETHIER: Along the same lines, women staff. And, of course, you've mentioned them, but are there any others that stand out in your mind?

McCARTIN: I will tell sort of one funny story. So, when [David Ross] Obey took over as chairman—this was 2008, right? No, I'm sorry, this was 2007. So, he took over as chair of the Appropriations Committee and also chair of Labor-HHS. So, I stayed on, I worked for the Republicans first, then I stayed on to work for the Democrats. And our office is getting renovated. We were just down the hall—I think it was [room] 300—in a bullpen, very small bullpen. It was basically a conference room. We were all women, we were all women. We used to joke about it, like we needed a little testosterone in the office. I think that that experience may be repeated a couple times. There was that article in the paper the other day, the snowstorm, and [Lisa] Murkowski was looking around and realizing that every single person in the chamber was a woman.⁴

There was this story that I told you also, about when Jo Ann Emerson was in the chair, after the Republicans took over. This was probably later '90s. And she looks at me, I look at her, and we look around. We realize that every single person on the rostrum was a woman. Every single one. I was telling her the story that I just had told you earlier about not being allowed on the floor until somebody else broke the ice. There are definitely strong friendships there, for sure.

ETHIER: Can you talk a little bit more about that moment when you realized that everyone on the rostrum was a woman?

McCARTIN: Oh, it was such a great feeling. It was such an awesome feeling. I don't know if that was the first time that it was all females, or whether it was just the first time anybody noticed.

ETHIER: Are there any other mentors—male or female—who stand out for you, that you want to mention?

McCARTIN: I can't say enough about Tip O'Neill. Because I wouldn't be sitting here today without him, without all of his support. I think I told you that story. So, when I got pregnant, the tide had been turning clearly. I wasn't going to get fired from my job or anything, but the tide hadn't turned so much that I didn't feel like I should go in and resign, or offer to resign. I mentioned that to Bill Brown. Of course, Bill was always so supportive of me. But he—you know, Bill was sort of older-school. He said, "Yeah, that's probably—because you're. . ." We shared an office with the Speaker. I'm sitting at their front desk. As people are coming in, I'm greeting them for the Speaker. He [Brown] said, "You probably should."

That was really quite an amazing experience because, of course, he [O'Neill] would hear none of it. Absolutely none of it, and offered 100 percent

support. I think that that may have been sort of one of the reasons when he saw me kind of struggling and going back to school, and trying to get out of being in an administrative position for the rest of my life. I think he really took a personal interest in me.

It's so funny because we talk about this, because he would call people "doll" and "darling" and "beautiful lady" and this and that—which maybe today might seem a little sexist, but at the time, that's just what it was. But, I think if you interviewed any of the women who worked for him over the years that they would say the same thing: how incredibly supportive he was in ensuring that everybody could grow professionally—women and men. And you look at his staff, right? Look at Chris Matthews and Jack Lew, and Linda Melconian went off to be majority leader of the Massachusetts state house or state senate—I forget which one, but Massachusetts legislature.⁵ Everybody went on to do really great things. Debbie Cabral has set up a couple of companies along the way.

ETHIER: What do you think women staff and Members brought to the institution that was a little different than men?

McCARTIN: That's a really hard one because I don't analyze people by gender. So, that's kind of sort of a hard one for me, and I have to really think about that one.

ETHIER: What lessons did you learn from your time in the House?

McCARTIN: Oh my God, I grew up in the House. I grew up there. I learned everything. I am who I am because of the House. The House is such an extraordinary place to grow up—the friendships, the camaraderie. I don't know what it's like to work on the Senate, I've only heard stories. I don't think it's as much fun as the House. {laughter} I think that there's a—even still, even though I say that when Tip O'Neill was here, there were greater bonds of friendship.

There was the traveling that they all did together where they bonded. And they weren't going home as much, and there were poker games. And there were Members living in rooming houses and hotels together and so on. There still is, you know? There still is.

Look at the Republican/Democratic floor staff marriages and relationships. Tip O'Neill's granddaughter Cat O'Neill has been dating somebody—formerly a [Kevin] McCarthy staffer—what, like, three years or something. Some of my closest friends are on the Republican side of the aisle. Hugh Halpern, who is now the staff director of the Rules Committee, is one of my closest friends. And just along the line, because working in the Parliamentarian's Office, I developed those Republican friendships. People who are really entrenched in Republican politics are some of my very closest friends. I think that the staff-member relationships are much more informal here than they are on the Senate side, as well.

ETHIER: Was there anything unexpected, or something that surprised you, about your time in the House?

McCARTIN: The fact that it lasted so long, maybe? {laughter} The House is such a part of the fabric of my life. It's such a part of me, even still. Even going to work, and I'm driving down Pennsylvania Avenue, and there's the [Capitol] dome. And I'm turning left to go downtown. Even still, there's this sense of—that is so much a part of who I am.

ETHIER: What do you think your lasting legacy in terms of your service in the House will be?

McCARTIN: I'm going to say the last part of my career—and actually this kind of still goes on, as well—has really been about mentoring the next generation. Certainly when I was on the Rules Committee, that was a huge part of my perspective,

is making sure that I was the Tip O'Neill—obviously, he's a giant, and I was just a little staff director—but making sure that everybody in the office had the opportunities that they needed to grow. Yes, that was something that was just hugely, hugely important to me.

ETHIER: Well, those are all of the prepared questions I have. Is there anything that you want to add that we didn't talk about or that is just popping into your head right now?

McCARTIN: No. I'm sure as soon as I leave, I'll think, "Oh, I should have said that."

ETHIER: It will hit you. That's okay, there will be more opportunities. Well, thank you so much for coming. This has been absolutely wonderful.

McCARTIN: Oh, yes. Well, I really appreciate the opportunity. Thanks.

ETHIER: Thank you.

NOTES

¹The interviewee asked that the following statement be appended to her response: “In summary, in the ’70s, ’80s, and early ’90s, most office cultures did not fully embrace the notion that working families needed time to deal with family issues. Because those responsibilities tended to fall mostly on women back then, it fell on the professional woman to grovel for time off. Even if the time off was given, it left a negative mark on her professional career. Men in the office were not asking for the same time off. I have seen that change significantly over the years. Men take paternity leave, and they take time off to care for sick family members. With family responsibilities falling equally on both genders, with both genders requesting time off, any marks against one’s career are no longer a gender issue.”

²In the Senate, a 60-vote supermajority can end debate on pending legislation. Traditionally, this process—called voting for cloture—has been used to end or prevent a filibuster. When Democratic Senator Ted Kennedy of Massachusetts died on August 25, 2009, the Democratic caucus in the Senate lost its filibuster-proof majority. Martha Coakley, the Democratic candidate to replace Kennedy in the Senate, consequently lost the special election to fill his vacancy. Supporters of the Affordable Care Act in the House considered using the “Slaughter Solution,” named for Rules Committee Chairwoman Louise Slaughter of New York, which involved creating a workaround in committee to enable the Senate bill to pass without a direct vote from the House.

³When Congress considers a budget resolution, it has the option to use reconciliation, a process in which revenue and spending bills are examined to ensure they do not increase the federal deficit. In the Senate, legislation considered under reconciliation cannot be filibustered. However, bills that increase spending, decrease revenue, or have no effect on the budget, can be blocked under the Byrd Rule, named after West Virginia Senator Robert Byrd. Sections of the proposed Affordable Care Act did not pass in 2010 because they were ruled by Senate Parliamentarians to have no budgetary effect.

⁴Emily Heil, “Post-blizzard, Sen. Murkowski Notes That Only Women Turned Up to Run the Senate,” 26 January 2016, *The Washington Post*.

⁵Linda Melconian served as majority leader of the Massachusetts state senate from 1999–2003.