

The Honorable Nancy Lee Johnson
U.S. Representative of Connecticut (1983–2007)

Oral History Interview
Final Edited Transcript
December 3, 2015

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

“And it was very good because when I was elected to, first, the [Connecticut] senate, and then to Congress, it didn’t occur to me not to express my opinion or not to ask my questions. And I was good at asking questions. People often asked me to ask their question. Finally, I figured out that, actually, they needed to ask their question so I could ask my own. But it was very gratifying to serve because one of the things people don’t understand is that male or female, you’ve got one vote. And the more articulate you are, and the more studious you are in developing your position on an issue, frankly, the more influence you have the more people will follow your vote because you can’t be expert on everything. So, you choose people whose expertise you believe in and whose balanced approach you believe in, and you see how they vote. And if you’re uncertain, you’re likely to vote with them, as others often vote with you. So, of the moderates, I became someone that you wanted to see how they were going to vote because I had such a diverse district.”

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Abstract

Influenced by her mother, a high school history teacher and department chair, and her father, a law school dean, Nancy Lee Johnson's political background grew from a family commitment to community activism. Building upon a successful career in the Connecticut state senate, Johnson came to the House in 1983 well-equipped to handle the rigors of Congress. She made history by becoming the first Republican woman to win a seat on the influential Ways and Means Committee and was one of a small number of women to chair a full House committee (Standards of Official Conduct). In her oral history, Johnson provides a behind-the-scenes look at committee work, including her approach to policy and legislation.

Johnson speaks about the role of women in the Republican Party and the changing position of moderates in Congress during the 24 years she served in the House. Known as a policy expert in the House, Johnson describes her efforts to secure legislation to help her Connecticut district, as well as bills aimed at improving the welfare of women and children. She also shares her impressions of the Congresswomen's Caucus—including her time as co-chair—and the efforts of women to secure equitable resources in the institution such as the gym for women Members. By the end of her career, Johnson was one of the deans of the Congresswomen. Her interview reveals the different approaches available to women who served in Congress—in Johnson's case as a Representative who worked within the system using seniority, personal relationships, and policy expertise to achieve success.

Biography

JOHNSON, Nancy Lee, a Representative from Connecticut; born Nancy Elizabeth Lee in Chicago, Cook County, Ill., January 5, 1935; graduated from elementary and secondary classes of the University of Chicago Laboratory School, Chicago, Ill., 1953; B.A., Radcliffe College, Cambridge, Mass., 1957; attended, University of London Courtauld Institute, 1957–1958; teacher; member of the Connecticut state senate, 1977–1982; delegate, Republican National Convention, 1980; elected as a Republican to the Ninety-eighth and to the eleven succeeding Congresses (January 3, 1983–January 3, 2007); chair, Committee on Standards of Official Conduct (One Hundred Fourth Congress); unsuccessful candidate for reelection to the One Hundred Tenth Congress in 2006.

[Read full biography](#)

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.

Citation Information

When citing this oral history interview, please use the format below:

“The Honorable Nancy Lee Johnson Oral History Interview,” Office of the Historian, U.S. House of Representatives, December 3, 2015.

Interviewer Biographies

Matt Wasniewski is the Historian of the U.S. House of Representatives, a position he has held since 2010. He has worked in the House as a historical editor and manager since 2002. Matt served as the editor-in-chief of *Women in Congress, 1917–2006* (Washington, D.C.: Government Printing Office, 2006), *Black Americans in Congress, 1870–2007* (GPO, 2008), and the *Hispanic Americans in Congress, 1822–2012* (GPO, 2013). He helped to create the House’s first oral history program, focusing on collecting the institutional memory of current and former Members, longtime staff, and support personnel. He earned his Ph.D. in U.S. history from the University of Maryland, College Park, in 2004. His prior work experience includes several years as the associate historian and communications director at the U.S. Capitol Historical Society, and, in the early 1990s, as the sports editor for a northern Virginia newspaper.

Kathleen Johnson is the Manager of Oral History for the Office of the Historian, U.S. House of Representatives. She earned a B.A. in history from Columbia University, where she also played basketball for four years, and holds two master’s degrees from North Carolina State University in education and public history. In 2004, she helped to create the House’s first oral history program, focusing on collecting the institutional memory of Members and staff. She co-authored two books: *Women in Congress: 1917–2006* (Washington, D.C.: Government Printing Office, 2006) and *Black Americans in Congress: 1870–2007* (GPO, 2008). Before joining the Office of the Historian, she worked as a high school history teacher and social studies curriculum consultant.

— THE HONORABLE NANCY LEE JOHNSON OF CONNECTICUT —
A CENTURY OF WOMEN IN CONGRESS

K. JOHNSON: My name is Kathleen Johnson, and I'm with Matt Wasniewski, the House Historian. Today's date is December 3rd, 2015. We're in the House Recording Studio, in the Rayburn House Office Building, and we are very pleased to be with former Congresswoman Nancy [Lee] Johnson, from Connecticut.

N. JOHNSON: Well, thank you. I'm very pleased to be here, too.

K. JOHNSON: Thank you.

WASNIEWSKI: Thanks.

K. JOHNSON: This interview today is for a project that we're conducting to celebrate the centennial of Jeannette Rankin's election to Congress. So, we had a series of questions we wanted to ask you about your career, and also about what it was like being a woman in the House of Representatives.

To start off with today, when you were young, did you have any female role models?

N. JOHNSON: Yes, my mother was a very accomplished woman. She was the youngest head of the history department of Winston-Salem, North Carolina, when she was about 27 or 28, and was very keen on our having careers before we married, which she did. I didn't actually do that, but the idea that you would be active in the community—and she was very active, and I was very active as a stay-at-home mom {laughter} which was part of the reason I got elected to first, the state senate, and then, the Congress.

I had an unconventional relationship with the community that I lived in because I had been so active in many United Way agencies and the public library, just a lot of different contacts. And, for instance, I was chairman of the child guidance clinic for many, many years. We set up the first Hispanic mental health clinic. So, you get to know a different level of leadership in a community than the formal level or the political level.

When I ran for state senate, it was an enormous upset. I beat a 12-year incumbent. {laughter} I ran thinking I'd never win, so my message to the kids was, "Hang with me, this will all be over in a couple of months." {laughter} But I enjoyed serving in the state senate, and I learned an enormous amount about what the law can and cannot do and, in fact, what the law is. For example, my first term in the state senate—this was in, I think, '77 or '78—we passed a bill that punished men who beat their wives in the same way the law would have punished them if they beat their neighbor's wife. So, it wasn't until recently that, actually, beating your wife was seen as simply a crime of battery. {laughter} It was very interesting to see where the law was, and who was treated equally and who wasn't, and work to fix it to reflect our current values.

I did a lot of work in the state senate on issues like wage enforcement, because the wage enforcement division never had enough clout to get up to the commissioner's level, to be one of his priorities. But I had kids who were working their way through college and wouldn't get paid for months sometimes. And looking into it, and talking to the wage enforcement professionals, one of the nice things about being a state senator was that you did all your own casework. You wrote all your own letters. You were it. {laughter} And you learned a lot that way about how the law actually impacted people's lives, and where the law needed to be changed or repealed.

I valued my time in the state senate tremendously, and through it got to know lots of enclaves and individuals in my community in a way that I wouldn't have otherwise. And it certainly made a difference in my run for Congress.

K. JOHNSON: So, was it that community activism that really drew you to politics, or was it something you were always interested in?

N. JOHNSON: No, I really was looking to see, "What do I do as my kids grow up?" {laughter} They were getting into high school, and I had worked eclectically—a waitress, a nurse's aide—whatever was around to make a little money going through college and, sometimes, living in the various places that we had lived before we settled down in Connecticut. I was just kind of at sea, like a lot of women are after they've been out of the workforce for 15 or 16, 17, 18 years.

So, I was thinking about, "What do I do?" And I had been—I had enjoyed my run for council, which I lost, and through that campaign realized how small my circles were. I think people don't realize how small their own circles are, of friends and neighbors, church people, or whatever you're interested in. But compared to the fabric of a community and the human challenge of governance, your circles are small.

And I really enjoyed that about running for council—meeting all kinds of people and seeing all kinds of structures and organizations that, actually, I was sort of unaware of as a mere citizen. And so I really enjoyed that and enjoyed serving. I remember walking into the juvenile court one day, just to check with the personnel if maybe the judge might be available and I could get his opinion about a bill the senate was considering. {laughter} And I would do that. I'd go around to small businesses, walk in, and say, "What do

you think about this?” {laughter} And you get a very unvarnished opinion {laughter} of government action under those circumstances. Some things were going to be very helpful. Some things were going to be very harsh. I represented a small senate district, precisely, my hometown. So, that made it a lot easier. I had one newspaper, one town committee to satisfy, {laughter} and so on.

Also, I was a Republican in a very heavily Democrat district. If all the Republicans and all the Independents voted for me, I lost 2 to 1, so party label, for me, wasn't the issue. The issue was what was going to impact on the people I represented, and what did they need for me to work on to help them. I had run on a very specific platform, and I succeeded in fulfilling those promises and just found it very, very interesting to take an issue—something that was dogging some portion of my community or the people who lived in it—and see if I could fix it. I certainly couldn't go home and say the Republicans told me to vote a certain way. {laughter} And I wasn't going to come home and say the Democrats told me to vote that way so I always had to.

And even by the time I came down here, I was absolutely amazed that you were supposed to vote with the leadership. So, it was a good way to enter politics. It was unexpected. The headline was, I think it was “[James Earl “Jimmy”] Carter Beats [Gerald Rudolph] Ford [Jr.]/ [Nancy] Johnson Beats . . .” my opponent. That was when I was elected to the senate. But it was a big upset because it was an open seat when I ran for the Congress, but there was an anointed successor {laughter} to [Anthony John] Toby Moffett [Jr.], so it was a big upset.

K. JOHNSON: And it had been a long time since a Republican had served in the state senate.

N. JOHNSON: Yes. Yes, and never a Republican woman.

WASNIEWSKI: I just want to back up a little bit. You mentioned your mom as a role model. Were there any other role models, male or female, or political mentors as you came along?

N. JOHNSON: Well, my dad was . . . his father had founded the John Marshall Law School in Chicago, and the whole . . . there were two issues that drove him. My father was dean when I was young. And there were two issues that drove him. First of all, Chicago was a city of immigrants, and they felt strongly that night school was critical to the concept of American opportunity. And I remember hearing my dad say many times, that men who have to support their families still don't have a way to better themselves and move up the income ladder. So, they were an early night school. It was very controversial.

And my childhood {laughter} was about the battles between the John Marshall Law School [JMLS] and the American Bar Association. And they'd do things like saying you have to have a specific number of full-time professors per student. Well, the school was in downtown Chicago. He had all these guys who, when they would reach about 50, 55, wanted to give back. And they were excellent teachers. They were hands-on, and they had real experience, and they were respected in the community. And he found them better teachers than hiring somebody who only had an academic background. The ABA [American Bar Association] rule was explicitly to try to get rid of the night schools. They required, later on, so-and-so many square feet of library space per student. Well, night students were working all day, {laughter} they didn't study at school. So, the expense of that space in downtown Chicago was a hardship, but he met the challenge. He was always active on their education committee. And toward the end of his career, the

students were testifying that they needed to have more professors who had real-life experience and were out there on the cutting edge of X, Y, and Z.

I watched him mobilize many coalitions, {laughter} plus, he was actually a member of the Illinois legislature for many years, about almost 30 years, I think, and an expert on pensions and stuff like that. I can remember one time when I was at about, I don't know, third grade or so, I answered the phone one dreary Chicago morning. (Chicago was very dreary much of the year.) And this voice said, "If your house catches on fire, the firemen won't come." So, I went to my dad, sort of wide-eyed. He was correcting papers on the dining room table, which wasn't unusual for a Sunday afternoon. And he said, "Oh, don't worry, honey." He said, "They're mad. They want an increase in their pension, but they don't want to contribute, and the state won't contribute, so I won't let it out of committee." Too bad there aren't any more {laughter} of those people like that at every level of government since that time. I learned a lot from him.

There was no discrimination in our household. He very clearly respected my mother. My mother initiated many activities in the community and was very active. My grandmother was one of the Hull House women, and she was very active in Chicago.¹ She also earned a certificate from the John Marshall Law School, though they didn't offer a full degree to women. I didn't really actually realize it was a secondary degree {laughter} until fairly recently. But the point is, women in my household were respected and expected to do well. My father used to say, "You can do anything you want to if you're willing to work hard." So, I didn't grow up with an, "Oh, you're my daughter, he's my son." I didn't grow up with that. And my brother was the last one born, not the first one born. So, if there were bales of hay to be lifted, we lifted them. If

there was any kind of work to be done, we did it. None of my friends had to do what we routinely did with our dad.

And it was very good because when I was elected to, first, the senate, and then to Congress, it didn't occur to me not to express my opinion or not to ask my questions. And I was good at asking questions. People often asked me to ask their question. Finally, I figured out that, actually, they needed to ask their question so I could ask my own. {laughter} But it was very gratifying to serve because one of the things people don't understand is that male or female, you've got one vote. And the more articulate you are, and the more studious you are in developing your position on an issue, frankly, the more influence you have the more people will follow your vote because you can't be expert on everything. So, you choose people whose expertise you believe in and whose balanced approach you believe in, and you see how they vote. And if you're uncertain, you're likely to vote with them, as others often vote with you.

So, of the moderates, I became someone that you wanted to see how they were going to vote because I had such a diverse district. Regardless of what committees I was on, I still had to be up on environmental issues and on educational issues, and so I had a very broad legislative shop, much bigger than most Members did, because of that. So, it made life interesting. {laughter} And it certainly didn't—I never thought about whether I was a woman or a man.

K. JOHNSON: Were you encouraged to run for your seat in the state senate, and then also for the House, or did someone recruit you?

N. JOHNSON: I was recruited. The first time, when I ran for the council, they recruited sort of young people who just happened to be registered Republican, who had

been active in the community. It was a great ticket, and everybody said what a great ticket, but of course they had the party lever. And when we went to the polls, we all lost 2 to 1. {laughter} Nonetheless, I learned a lot about the community, its leadership, how it was organized, what its problems were. It was wonderful. I enjoyed it.

K. JOHNSON: Why did you decide to run for Congress, for the House, in '82?

N. JOHNSON: Well, I was kind of bored with the senate. Government is like business. You do the same thing over and over again. You have to budget every year. In the House, it takes 22 bills to pass the budget. You pass them once, they go to conference, you pass them again—at least when it's done right. And for many years when I was here in Congress, that's how we did it.

Then there are other issues that need to be thought out and worked on. And we passed a prescription drug bill three times before the Senate bothered to pass anything, so if they don't pass anything, nothing happens. But it's okay because actually, you had to learn a lot about how were you going to get those who sell prescription drugs to compete fairly, and ensure that seniors will have a choice of plans—not just a choice of plans, but a choice of plans that sell their particularly expensive drug at a very low price. So, each time the Senate didn't act, the community continued to suggest, argue, complain, work with us to refine the mechanism in the bill.

And I can remember the third time we worked on it just thinking, "Jeez, it's really a good thing we couldn't pass this the first time; it's gotten so much better." And one of the reasons that program works so well—it was a big, complicated program, and it was implemented very well. But it worked very well all these years because it was well thought out, and there was no pride of authorship, or "Well, that's my provision," and so on. And then, in

conference, we did the whole thing all over again because the Senate didn't have that mechanism in their bill. The Senate staff and the Senate Members were very knowledgeable.

So, the legislative process, particularly at the federal level, is very thorough. It is in most states, too. For instance, at the state level when the banking committee or the insurance committee brings a bill to the floor, members do not just throw out an amendment the committee has not considered. If you haven't offered your thoughts to the banking committee in the process, they're not interested in your amendment on the floor because it's too difficult to see what the ramifications would be on the whole industry over time without time to study it.

In the House, it's sort of that way, too. You have to get permission to speak on the floor. And the person you're getting permission from is the committee member who had the most to do with the bill, or the subcommittee chairman, or the chairman. You also have to get the Rules Committee's permission to offer the amendment, and often they won't let Members propose their amendments because many amendments that are good politics are bad policy.

That discipline, however, is lost when, as today, so many of the bills are created in the Speaker's Office, and no amendments are allowed. That's really what happened to the Affordable Care Act, and it's why there have been so many problems with implementation, because there were internal contradictions and directives to do things that we have never figured out how to do. By the time you got the House bill passed, the Senate bill passed separately, and then another bill passed separately, and you really have to work out all of those things very, very carefully to have a law that affects the entire nation—all the states and all their people—fairly.

When I chaired the Human Resources Subcommittee on Ways and Means, I was very interested in foster care, and enough problems had come to our attention to convince the committee to review our current law governing foster care because most of the money paying for the state system comes from the federal government. Its number was up. Through the hearings, you see how radically different the state systems of foster care were—very well developed in certain states, like my own state of Connecticut; very poorly developed in other states. There was one state that put a foster care . . . if they really had to remove a child from their home, they just brought the child to the police {laughter} department where they had him or her sleep in a cell or at some officer's office until they could find something to do with this child, since they couldn't return them to their home right away.

So, the same with health care. There were some states that had excellent health care. Connecticut had a very, very small percentage of uncovered. It had a lot to do with our history—we had a history of manufacturing and good benefit plans, and then Medicare and Medicaid covered others, and we're a small state. So, it's not too hard to manage those problems. But a formal law knocks out all the voluntary, community-based efforts to make sure everybody is cared for, and those are real out there, effective, and keeps costs down. Communities need to build out new systems, not be forced to adopt a one-state-fits-all federal standard.

I used to ask my visiting-nurse associations out in the rural part of my district, "Well, what do you do if someone can't pay?" "We take care of them." And in the West, that was even more common. One of my colleagues said to me on the floor one time, "I don't know why you guys are so high on fuel assistance." "We do a lot of heating with wood, and we know who's elderly and who's poor. And as their woodpile gets down, I do a truckload.

Next time, someone else does a truckload. And we don't let their fuel run out." And so {laughter} you don't want the federal government to eliminate those kinds of traditions because they're really the fabric of our lives. Because if they're watching that [situation] with the woodpile, if that elderly woman needs help in other ways, she'll get it. They'll take care of her.

And so often, government programs interrupt those or destroy those mechanisms. And they meet the needs of some people, but there are lots of people that don't fit the federal definition of eligibility {laughter} and get eliminated from the system. The Affordable Care Act, right now, today . . . I was talking to three people, just this week, [they] had mentioned that their premiums have gone up \$600 a paycheck, a month. {laughter} That's a big change. And it's a high deductible. It's not even very good coverage. This is so inferior to what they used to get, it's quite unbelievable. But when you don't think through things carefully, you can't tell what you're going to get on the exchange. And they got—they certainly weren't doing this because they thought that would happen. But they didn't do it carefully, so it did happen.

WASNIEWSKI: We have a lot of policy questions towards the end, but we want to ask you a little bit more about how you came to the House and, in particular, your first election, in 1982. Do you have any memories about that election? Everyone's got a first-election memory. You ran against a fellow state senator.

N. JOHNSON: Oh, yes. {laughter} Yes, a fellow state senator who was sort of the anointed in the line of the Toby Moffett Democrats. Remember, Toby Moffett had challenged the sitting Democrat governor, Governor [William] O'Neill, a moderate Democrat. So, Connecticut has long had this split in the Democratic Party that is still there today between [Bernard] Bernie Sanders and Hillary [Rodham] Clinton. And it was greater than it is now. He was

sort of seen as the anointed, and it had been a Democratic district for a long time. But the Democrats did it by winning the three cities. And I could win all the small- and medium-sized towns, but I lived in the biggest city and I had been winning that 2 to 1. I didn't win it 2 to 1 for my congressional race. In fact, I lost it, but only by about 3,000. And in the other cities I lost by 1,000. And then the third one, I took. It had to do with the decline in organized labor to a large extent, and this big split now in the Democratic Party because there was a primary on both sides of the aisle.

My primary was with a more conservative, totally defense-oriented Republican. The Democrats, though, had a very competent, middle-of-the-road candidate who had been chairman of the appropriations committee in the [state] house. And if he had won the primary, I would have had a hard time beating him, I think. But Bill Curry was backed by the unions and the more traditional Democrat base, and so they weren't keen on him. And I had Democratic groups coming in saying, "We're not going to support you this time, but we'll get you next time" sort of thing. {laughter}

When I ran for the state senate, people actually came in and said that to me because they needed to dislodge the sort of hierarchy that controlled who the candidate would be—the Democrat candidate—so that the rising, for example, Polish small business community and others could have more say. They were tired of what they were doing and tired of the way they were pushing taxes up through actions they took at the state level. So, I've always benefited from splits in the Democratic Party and I'm shameless about it. {laughter} I encourage it, because my party is split, too.

So, in that first campaign, though, two of my senate colleagues got very active in recruiting me and represented small-town areas. "We'll get all our town committee members together in each area, and they'll all work for you,"

and so on, and so forth. And I went out to their picnic, and they had everybody together and it was fun. And I began to think this could be interesting. So, and I was getting kind of tired of the state senate. I had served on all the top committees—appropriations, and revenue and bonding, and education, and planning and development, which was a new committee and was very, very interesting. We planned waste-management areas and watershed areas, and it was very interesting. But after a while, [it was] sort of “been there, done that.”

K. JOHNSON: How important an issue was gender in that campaign, in your first campaign for Congress?

N. JOHNSON: I think it mattered. I think it definitely mattered at that time. It came to matter less, but it worked in my favor. The first hump to get over was credibility and raising money. And the president of Stanley Works had said to me one time, he said, “Why don’t you run against Toby Moffett?” He said, “I’ll back you, I’ll be your finance chairman.” So, when Toby stepped down to challenge [Lowell Palmer] Weicker [Jr.], I said, “Your offer is still good?”

And the party, also, the Republican Party, their people came up to see me. They had come up to see me before. My children were still around. I was a very active parent. So, the second time they came, and the seat was open, and my friends got involved, then I took it seriously. And my husband and I talked about it and made our own agreement about how much we’d invest and how much we wouldn’t. {laughter} Because that was always a problem, was candidates would get in heavy debt, and we couldn’t afford to do that. So, once we made the decision, we just had a lot of support. And I was a well-known state senator. I had been very active in a lot of things, and I

clearly loved it, and I really enjoyed the people. And it was sort of a natural fit.

K. JOHNSON: Did you have the backing of any women's groups, either local or national?

N. JOHNSON: Well, women's groups . . . women weren't well organized in that first campaign. They became more organized. And on the whole, I rarely got the backing of NOW [National Organization for Women]; that was very much a Democratic group. But other groups I had gotten backing [from] and I often won the education endorsement, and even if I didn't, it didn't deny me teachers' votes because I was so active in education. So, on all the cause issues, I really had usually done some work that people appreciated and through which they could see that my idea of environmental issues was local. It was also clean rivers and clean air and those things, but preservation of land . . . River issues were big in my district, and I made them big because I thought they were really interesting and important. {laughter}

WASNIEWSKI: Was there any one turning-point moment in that campaign that you remember?

N. JOHNSON: Well, it was a crapshoot right till the end because my home base, which was so important to winning, was so heavily Democrat. And so when the chips are down in a big election like that, the fact that you've served them in the state senate is a factor, but a small one. So, all the TV and everything . . . For instance, my opponent went after me on television about being anti-senior. And this was in the days of when Social Security—want to cut Social Security and that kind of thing. So, I went on, just a headshot. I had never done this before, and you pretty much had to memorize it, and yet look natural. And we went up the very next day with all the things I had done in the senate to help seniors. And so we absolutely won on that. It was a big advantage for us

that I was attacked that way because it was so typically political, and I had such concrete things to answer with and was clearly a different person.

So, there were a lot of wonderful aspects of that campaign. First of all, I had lots of volunteers—just flooded with volunteers, and they were everywhere. People would ask them, “What are you doing out here?” “Well, I’m working for Nancy Johnson. You ought to really vote for her.” And they would always have concrete things they could say. So, there was a lot of enthusiasm. There were very few scheduled debates like today, but we debated all the time. One time, toward the end of the campaign, we debated breakfast, lunch, and dinner. And it was much more natural: “What do you think about this?”

And I remember that last week or so we had a breakfast debate that was about an hour and 15 minutes from home. And so you’re up really early. So, after breakfast, we start this, and he has the first opening statement. And I’m sitting there thinking, “Am I not following him because he’s not making sense, or am I not following him because I’m just too tired to make sense?” {laughter} So, I think I made better sense than he did, at least to me. But it was the way campaigns should be. It was respectful; we weren’t calling each other names, we weren’t distorting the truth. We were just saying who we were, and what we’d done and what we could do! But, it was hard-fought. It was everywhere.

I have one very funny story. Actually, this was from my first re-election campaign, which was also, that’s always hard-fought. And I went into the Torrington Company that made bearings. There’s this quite-tall lady running a grinding machine. So, I went over, and as she looked up, I reached out my hand. She reached out her hand—it had white, milky stuff on it—and we shook hands. She then held my hand, and she put her hand in mine. “Oh,” she said, and she looked around at her fellow workers. “Your opponent was

here last week, and I stuck out my hand, and he started to stick out his, but then he withdrew it as he saw the liquid on mine.” {laughter} Case closed. {laughter} So, you’ve got to meet people where they are. And I found that very gratifying.

K. JOHNSON: Was your family involved in your early campaigns?

N. JOHNSON: No, because my family was in Chicago. I was born and raised in Chicago. And my husband’s family . . . my husband and my brother-in-law were both obstetricians, just really terribly busy. My husband took an active part, putting up signs, but he had very full days himself. My kids were involved to some extent. And in my congressional campaign, my oldest daughter had graduated from college in December and she came back and ran the thing. I don’t know what we would have done without her. Because it’s hard to get people that are well organized and mentally up to the kind of challenge a campaign is. And she couldn’t have done it without the guy who’d gotten me to run for the senate, trusted me along the way, and advised my campaign on a day-to-day operations level. But he worked full-time, so he’d come in the morning and they planned the day. And he’d just assume that she knew how to get out mass mailings and that it would be done by evening. So, luckily she was ingenious, and we had a lot of volunteers, and we got the job done.

But campaigns aren’t easy because they do depend on volunteers, or sort of eclectically whoever’s around. Now, they’re more, they tend to be more campaign operatives that come and offer themselves. That has some advantages, but it has some very definite disadvantages. You lose the flavor of the candidates themselves. There’s someone between the candidate and the constituents who is “professional” and wants you to say the same thing over and over, wants to do attacks, wants to—a lot of things that, really, you don’t have to do. {laughter}

K. JOHNSON: One thing that we want to ask you before we get too far along, is if you can just describe your district, in the early years.

N. JOHNSON: Yes, it was a very interesting district, over 41 towns, three major cities—one with 70,000 population, one with 50,000, the other one down about 25,000 or 30,000—and then lots of small towns. I used to say a third of my towns had fewer constituents than a battleship has sailors on it. {laughter} So, it was very diverse, and I loved that about it—farming issues, environmental issues, pesticides, various styles of farming, exporting, conservation, and all that kind of thing.

It was primarily small dairy, and small dairy is hard to sustain, but very important—very creative and strong farmers’ organizations. UConn had a very—it does to this day—strong extension program. Our farm bureau and farm credit capabilities from the federal level were very important, both to the farms and to housing in the small towns, for example. They didn’t use much of that, but just knowing it was there and could be called on was important to them. And those communities were very self-sufficient. They were really interesting to represent.

Every year I got to where I’d do something with the farmers. And one year I had the undersecretary for international trade come out to their annual meeting, just because we’d sort of run out of the obvious people. And I thought, “Nobody’s going to come,” {laughter} because small farms sell their milk to the local cooperative, and you don’t have the interest in export of products that you have from the Midwest. Everybody came. And they had good questions. No grass grows under these guys’ feet. They may not get it from the *Wall Street Journal*, but they know what they’re doing. {laughter} And the extension service was very strong. So, it was a privilege to work with them. But you did learn a lot. And I helped them figure out some solutions

to waste disposal as the laws about runoff and stuff made it harder, because many of them had streambeds running through their pastures, and sometimes that was a serious issue. So, I learned from them, they learned from me, and we did a lot of partnership things.

For instance, one of the things we did was really work on the SBIR [Small Business Innovation Research], the small business invention grants or something; I've forgotten exactly what the name is. But if you want to try something new, these are wonderful grants that let you do that. But they had never been used in agriculture, so I worked really hard to get that turned around so that we could get some of those for . . . because the farms needed to . . . for instance, this particular farm that needed one learned to make pots out of manure. There's a lot of processes you have to go through, so it's clean manure so to speak, but then you plant them in that, and you sell them in that. The person just plants them in that, and they're fertilized. It's fantastic. But it was ideal for a small business grant and particularly the SBIR grants, which are more about inventions. So, there were often resources we could call on, sometimes formal, like the SBIR grants.

One time I had someone come through my office down here, and he was building covered bridges. And he just wanted me to know that because I was from New England, and he was looking to get into New England, and he wondered if I had any suggestions. I said, "Well, no, sir. Not off the top of my head, but I'll watch." Well, the next week I was in a town—this was actually in about 2003, and in 2002 they'd eliminated the Sixth District and merged two districts. And I had run against a Democrat incumbent. And, of course, this Democrat mayor had supported him, but so what? After the election's over, you're mine, honey. {laughter}

And so I came in to see him. And he was sort of puzzled why I was there. And we got to talking. I said, “I just want to know what’s on the top of your agenda. What are the three things the town is really looking at?” He got to telling me about the town employees building, this trail around this quite-large pond they had in town, and all the recreational opportunities it was going to provide for people. And at the end, he said, “The problem is we want to connect it with a wooden bridge, but we don’t have the money.” So, I called this guy. I said, “You know, there’s a place you could put a . . .” In the end, he did it. He built them the bridge, more or less for free, and they got their thing completed. And he got a sample so he could tell people, “Go look at this.”

So you never know, there were really wild experiences. For instance, I had a family in Litchfield whose son was hiking in the Baja Peninsula, in California, and fell and broke his back. So he’s out in the middle of nowhere in this little clinic, and the family is not a Litchfield family of means. And so I was chairman of the Health Subcommittee—or I was on the Health Subcommittee then. So, I called the hospital out there and said, “Do you do LifeStar?” And to make a long story short, they didn’t do LifeStar, but they knew a company that did, and they did it as a charity operation. So, they did it for free. They brought him in. He didn’t lose any limbs, or he wasn’t crippled the rest of his life—all those things that he might have been if he hadn’t gotten medical attention.

So, you do develop a body of knowledge working at the federal level. It’s not unlike the body of knowledge you learn at the state level that is there for all the towns and all the people in the state, and that can be used on their behalf wherever you are. And the same is true federally. There is a body of knowledge that we all can benefit from; sometimes we don’t know it, and so

we don't get the opportunity. But I did enjoy that part. The casework part, we were very aggressive on. {laughter} We have lots of stories on that front.

WASNIEWSKI: Before we get too much further along, we wanted to ask you a question about, you know, one of the things that goes into campaigning is developing literature, and bumper stickers, and campaign buttons. And in the House Collection, the Curator had two images of your campaign buttons. And we're just curious to know, are there any particular stories or personal memories that you have of developing these? What's the behind them?

N. JOHNSON: Yes, well, this was early in my congressional campaign, and this consultant that we were working with was not a political consultant. And he had the idea that we should use the star because I was seen as quite a star. I was a little uncomfortable with that, {laughter} but it did make really quite fun and classy literature. And blue and yellow were my colors. In my first campaign, our buttons were more traditional and sort of pedestrian.

But the issue about literature is a big one because it doesn't cost very much. And if you have a lot of volunteers, and you can afford the literature, and often in those days, people could do radio and cable, which was very cheap, but not necessarily the majors, so you didn't do the majors until the very end. And we managed to scrape together \$30,000 or something at the beginning and did an introductory television ad, which nobody had ever done before. And that sort of kept others out of the field and cleared the way for me to be the candidate, although I did have a primary with a guy who had won before.

But we stuck to those colors, and we got toward the end to where we used things like this from other campaigns. And we managed to keep our costs to no more than the first campaign for about five campaigns, by all kinds of

economies of both personnel and materials. So, we would reuse things if they {laughter} were still around.

K. JOHNSON: When you first came to Congress, you were one of 21 women in the House. So, not a large number at that point, in 1983. Did you find that the women Members gravitated towards each other because there were so few of you?

N. JOHNSON: Not really. You're just so busy when you're here, you have so many new responsibilities, that they totally absorb your time and efforts. There was the Congresswomen's Caucus, and I did go to those meetings. That was useful because those attending were of both parties, and it was senior Members as well as junior Members. It was everyone. So, that was very useful. But it only met once in a while and focused only on "women's issues," which I felt was an artificial category.

What was really most useful was that Stewart [Brett] McKinney got me into what was called the Wednesday Group. That was a relatively small group that met weekly and that you had to be invited to join. Each week you'd go around the circle, and you had two minutes—there was a timer—and you talked a little bit about what was going on politically in your state or what you were doing legislatively. It was very interesting. A lot of people were in that group that went on—that were in the leadership at the time. Both Bill [Willis David] Gradison [Jr.] and Bill [William Eldridge] Frenzel, who were on Ways and Means, were in that group and highly regarded.

Getting to know Members in the Wednesday Group was an honor and an advantage. Before my first re-election campaign—now, these are both Republicans—I had them up to a campaign finance committee luncheon in Hartford. One was for the tax bill that was being worked on and one was against it. {laughter} In those days, it was really what you thought and why

you thought it. And there wasn't an ironclad "If it's taxes, you're for it" or ["If it's]taxes, you're against it." It was the mechanics of a nation keeping up its tax code to keep up with the times, cutting here, adjusting there. And that's what makes lawmaking interesting; it's mostly adjusting to meet new realities. Finally, we had to have clean-water laws and then, clean-air laws because we just couldn't manage the problem; the states couldn't manage the problem. And so the federal government had to step in. Now, unfortunately we're stepping into areas where, actually, states have and could continue to manage the problem. And that creates very difficult, unanticipated problems.

There was an article recently in the paper that discussed cities getting into passing minimum-wage laws and paid-leave laws and adding other benefits. Well, then, if you're a multistate or a multinational company, and you have to comply with three sets of laws in the U.S., it's not only daunting, but it does discourage you from working in certain parts of the country. And that's an impact on the economy that people can't immediately see but [that] affects them severely in the long run. Look at Illinois, they're literally losing companies, and Connecticut is on the verge of it because they have not paid attention to what does it take in today's world to run a successful business and employ people.

So, politics is never boring, and lawmaking is never uninteresting because it does compel you. Look at the impact of cybersecurity issues on just ordinary computer use and how you manage your employees. It's formidable. And if we knew the answers, we would have passed it. {laughter} But we don't have those answers yet.

WASNIEWSKI: You've alluded to this a little bit, but the atmosphere of the House when you were first elected was different.

N. JOHNSON:

It was different, but while the women weren't large in numbers, the women played an important role, as did the men. We had women on the Armed Services Committee that were seen as the experts in certain areas. Seniority determines what committees you were on and what respect you carried, but knowledge and your willingness to work with others determined your influence beyond your simple vote. So, while there weren't many of us, occasionally we felt discriminated against.

I'll tell you one funny little story that happened my freshman year. Stewart McKinney was on the floor, from Connecticut, managing a HUD [Housing and Urban Development] bill. And he had been here a long time, and he was an expert on HUD and a highly regarded Ranking Member. He wasn't the chairman, but the parties worked very closely together, and the Ranking Member had a real say. So, he was managing the bill for the [party] and I come to the floor. He said, "Well, what are you here for?" I said, "I'm going to speak on this amendment." "Oh." He said, "Well, I can give you two minutes. You know, that's all you kind of get around here." I said, "Okay." This was about pets in public housing. And we had had this issue in the [state] senate. I knew just where my people stood on it, and it's an important issue. So, I said my piece. He said, "And now remember, you can't go over the two minutes." I said, "It's all right." So, I did my time. I said what I had to say. And he said, "Really, a good job. But remember, on the whole, freshmen are to be seen but not heard." And that's not a bad idea because as I came to understand . . . though it wasn't until about my fourth term when I really understood at a fairly profound level what it is to govern a nation as diverse as ours and maximize the passion and opportunity of individuals while ensuring the security at home and abroad.

Right now, we have most of—the majority of the Members have been here three terms or less, and you really can't grasp the difference between the states—the rights of states to do it their way, and where do you finally have the right to override the state tradition and make them do it our way. So, some states literally can't do it our way. When we did child-support enforcement, we required a state registry. California's too big, they cannot do it that way. They have good registries, but they're at the county level, and some of their counties are bigger than most states. So, every five years, we would have to pass an exemption for them and forgive them the fact that they haven't complied and won't comply with the state-level registry requirement. So, making federal policy is a different order of thinking than making state policy. And it's particularly so now because the economy is global, it's not just national. And that feeds into people's fears because they have less of a sense of control, and into their anger if their company goes under. Of course, my part of the country was one that lost the machine tool and bearing industry, and other manufacturing companies to foreign competition. There were some good reasons why they lost and some bad reasons why they lost.

I sponsored and got passed a number of bills to “level the competitive playing field.” But to survive, companies had to have capital to modernize processes, and the leadership to diversify their customer base. A terrible challenge in a short time! And government's own processes were very slow to support them!

Toward the end of my career, I spent a lot of time on health care. But in the beginning of my career, I spent almost all my time on foreign-trade issues and actually worked hard to get the federal government to have a fund that companies could go to and get the kind of subsidy that the foreign companies were getting to compete. I remember one of them, Combustion Engineering,

won a big power plant competition in Egypt. But in the end, they didn't actually get the contracts because the Italian government put in enough money for a no-interest component to be added to the Italian company's bill at the very end. So, you can't beat that. And at that time, that kind of government action became a very common tool, and I felt we had to respond. I had a bill about that, and many Members were concerned, but those without manufacturing were dubious in the end. [President Ronald] Reagan did it unilaterally, which was really actually better because then as we didn't need it, it sort of phased out. But it was the predecessor to the EXIM Bank [Export-Import Bank], but without all the formality, and also potential for abuse.

The early years were very different. One Member could really have input through the committee process. I fought a really hard battle with the Energy and Commerce Committee over an environmental provision affecting manufacturing. And in the end, they didn't change the law, but they stopped enforcing it. Unfortunately, my two guys who had brought up the problem got \$50,000 fines, and all the silent noncompliers got nothing. It was {laughter} a hard lesson. You put your head up, and you take a risk. I don't know what they—they couldn't have done anything else. It had to do with a court decision that changed the nature of what you were liable for, and so the insurance industry stopped offering liability insurance for environmental damage from spills and things like that. But it was a hard experience for me to see the good guys hurt. I didn't get any better treatment from the Republicans in the Senate. {laughter} And in the end, [James Joseph] Florio was very helpful to me. Congressman Florio was from New Jersey and understood both the environmental and manufacturing issues. He really got it: No matter what you want, this is what's happening, and you have to do something about it.

K. JOHNSON: Did you have any mentors that might have shared some insight with you about some of the unwritten rules that you talked about—about freshmen being seen and not heard—to give you some advice?

N. JOHNSON: Well, you could always get that advice if you had time to ask for it, and if you knew what it was you wanted to ask. But for the most part, your staff had more experience than you did in the process, and they more or less would guide you. And then I was very active in the moderate group, that Wednesday Group, that later became the more informal moderate-Republican Tuesday Group. And you'd learn from others. But if you have something important to say, you need to say it. And they'll tell you if there's a better venue. {laughter} But you have to be modest about how you say it because your truth isn't necessarily the truth throughout the United States, and that's hard to learn—how to talk about things that are terribly important.

There was one waste-disposal issue that was very important to Connecticut, and Democrats and Republicans—we were all united. Yet, we couldn't get the time of day, though some on both sides of the aisle were senior Members with clout. Others thought we'd created the problem, and we could solve it. Anyway, we didn't get the help, so we're down here anyway.

To the larger issue, could you fight for what you thought was right? The answer is absolutely yes! I'd been brought up to say what I thought, respectfully. I had been brought up in a world where my dad and people I cared about were fighting for the right thing to happen on very big issues, so I didn't have trouble speaking up. People were respectful of what you had to say and you were respectful of what they had to say, and it was through that process that you found out what really was good for the whole nation. It was a wonderful process. And that's beginning to come back now.

The press doesn't want to report it because it's not as exciting {laughter} as war, human or political. But it's definitely coming back because people get tired; they want to get something done. And you see that now. This particular Congress right now may turn out to be the most productive in four or five years. {laughter} Which is a low bar, but nonetheless it's change and progress. It's because people are working together much more, but the big issues have to be addressed, or we'll never get back to a rational governance process.

You can't always have absolutely no money. And we've done that by refusing to address entitlements. It's like living in a balloon mortgage. First you don't go out for dinner unnecessarily, then you don't go out at all, then you don't buy new clothes, then you sell this or sell that. You do everything you can because you know that big payment on your balloon mortgage is coming due. Unfortunately, your wages didn't go up as much as you anticipated. So, you finally have to sell the house. But depending on when you face that reality, it can be catastrophic, or you can get out okay. Our government's right at that point, as are many states, and everybody knows it. {laughter} Everybody knows it, but nobody's willing to cooperate. People aren't willing to face the extraordinary cost of retiree income and health care costs as people live far longer than anticipated, and innovations and medicines keep people alive much longer at much higher healthcare costs. The result is these costs get part budget dollars—everything else is squeezed annually, and debt escalates at an unprecedented rate.

WASNIEWSKI: You mentioned the learning curve of kind of stepping up from a state level to having to govern at a national level. Also, there's the press at the national level. And we're curious to know what your adjustment was like in terms of dealing with the press when you first came to Washington.

N. JOHNSON:

Well, when I first came, the press wasn't interested in freshmen, so there was no press unless you generated it through town meetings and visits to local papers and radio stations. Now, the press at home is even more scarce because so many of the small papers and radio stations are gone. In my day, most towns of more than 20,000 had some kind of paper and radio station. They challenged you to make national issues [relevant] to all. But on the whole, you weren't expected to do things your freshman year. And I came back home a lot and did town meetings that connected people who were interested, and we had a great dialogue with the word spreading thereafter. One of the real tragedies for our democracy was when you could no longer do town meetings. Now, they do these telephone town meetings but they can control the questions. So, this is not anywhere near what a town meeting should be, though it's better than nothing.

For example, by 2010 if I had a town meeting, an organized group would show up to hold up a blanket that had a message on it or set up to record the town meeting. People were intimidated. And the high point of that kind of problem came when they were photographing it. They were going to run a tape. Well, you know and I know what the tape was for. But I opened the town meeting, and I said, "Look, I'm used to being taped, and I know what taping is for. And I don't mind being taped because in the end, I'm accountable for what I say and what I do. And I'm willing to . . . that's why I'm here, I'm that kind of person. But I'm also here to learn from you and I'm afraid that you won't ask the questions you have if you're being taped, or that some of you might not, and that it will constrain our discussion. And that's too high a price to pay. If you're comfortable with taping, I'm going to ask you to raise your hands. If you're comfortable with taping or you're not comfortable with taping." Well, nobody was comfortable with taping. So, I looked over at them, and they turned it off. So, when I asked them to, they

wouldn't. They said, "Well, we have the right to do this." I said, "Yes, you do." {laughter} You can't really have the kind of free flow that you needed.

And then I had people in my district who were very experienced, had been ambassadors, or were skilled researchers at UConn in cutting-edge health areas, and sometimes they'd come. Then I'd ask them, "What do you think about this?" {laughter} Or one time, this one guy who was doing absolutely what we were talking about—he was researching this issue—he gave quite a nice . . . and because I encouraged him once he said who he was and what he was doing. I said, "Well, can you tell us what you're doing? Because we should all get to know each other better, not just me." But it was a lot of fun. A lot of interest. Very interesting job, if you brought it that way. It's now become much too controlled. We have too many consultants, too many of everything, and you kind of lose that plain, ordinary juice that flows freely when people get together.

K. JOHNSON: In the 1980s, women in Congress were still a bit of a novelty because the numbers were not that large. So in regards to the press, did you ever feel like there was different treatment because you were a woman Member?

N. JOHNSON: Yes, neglect. For a while, sort of celebrity status, but there was a level at which they didn't take us seriously. But I'm not sure it was us because we were very policy-oriented. Because at one time, after this young woman who had worked for [Chester] Trent Lott on the floor, and she retired, and she said, "But I have friends in the media. I thought it'd be fun to get together for dinner once a month or so and just get acquainted with the people in the media, see if we can get more media directed at Republican women." So, we did that. And one of them said to us, finally, well—because we were introducing really thoughtful bills on welfare, social policy in various areas, environmental issues, education, and economics. So, he looked at us and he

said, “Well, you going to overthrow Newt [Newton Leroy Gingrich]?” I said, “No, we’re not going to overthrow Newt.” He said, “Well, that’s all we’re interested in—are you going to overthrow Newt, you’re going to attack [Thomas Dale] DeLay,” this or that.

So, it was very hard to get attention to substantive issues, except in your home state, and you could get attention to those things at home. And I always had a lot of substantive stuff that was directly related to the district I represented, so I got all the press I needed. But it was disappointing, the presence, and to this day, the heavy focus. To me, the Tea Party is a creation of the press. That’s a longer story. But it’s really too bad that the press of today are not the press of yesterday, where the knowledge of substance was much greater, the respect for the policy-making process was greater, and all those things.

But from the point of view of being a woman, not only was everybody’s one vote equal—which really is an important fact because you are, in the end, absolutely equal to everyone else on the floor—but women were often very well informed, had generally done their homework. So, they had a lot of influence.

And on the committees, for instance, on Ways and Means, most of the men didn’t have much experience on the kinds of things that the Human Resources Subcommittee dealt with. And so whether you were a man or a woman chairing that committee—Tom [Thomas Joseph] Downey chaired it for quite a while and was a very good chair. I chaired it, others. But you often had a lot of input into those things if you’d known about—if you knew about it all the way down to the state and local level. And most men hadn’t, because you learn that information as a volunteer in your community. I chaired the child-guidance-clinic board for many years, so you see the

relationship between state and federal and local effort in mental health issues for children. I would say women had no trouble gaining influence.

Stewart told me after that, not only did I have one minute, but he explained to me that freshmen were to be seen, but not heard. And true enough, on the escalator up and down, for months people would say to me “nice job on the floor.” And I just thought to myself, “What if I had said something really stupid? I would have been labeled forever.” So, there were few enough of us so that if you spoke on the floor, people knew you did it, {laughter} and they heard what you said. And you either progressed in your career or didn’t. His comments to me were very wise: Be careful, don’t get out there too much.

WASNIEWSKI: So, you’ve mentioned the Women’s Caucus. We just want to know a little bit about your memories of it. How often did it meet? What were the issues discussed?

N. JOHNSON: Well, it met about—I think it met once a month, I don’t quite remember how often it met. But often enough so you could work on issues together, and there’d be sort of a subcommittee—there’d be two or three subcommittees, and they’d report, and you could be on any one you wanted. And so we didn’t take on lots of things because we each had our own things in our offices and stuff, but we usually took on one or two or three big things.

Now, I came sort of after its heyday because in the election that I won, [Patricia Scott] Pat Schroeder, who was chairman of the caucus, had gone out and campaigned against the co-chairman in Massachusetts. And on the whole, Members didn’t go out and campaign for or against other Members of the Congress, period. But in that particular sense, to go out and campaign when her opponent was male, too, that created a lot of bad feeling. So, it

took the caucus quite a while to get back on its feet. It never was—in my later years—it really wasn't a power, it was just a respite room, which was important. And you could make . . . it was a friendlier place. You could talk to people in a friendly way; it wasn't about just all business.

K. JOHNSON: That was a question that we had about how important it was to have that, now the Lindy [Corinne Claiborne] Boggs Reading Room. What kinds of things were you able to discuss there? And just having that space for women Members, how important was that for you?

N. JOHNSON: Well, having that space and having the Congresswomen's Caucus meet fairly regularly were good things because the law was in a very [bad] state, and there were really lots of things that needed to be addressed. And we were careful about what we undertook because they had to be bipartisan, for one thing, but child-support enforcement probably never would have been developed. That bill took a long time to get developed because it had to interface with all these state systems. Finally, it was passed under Republican Leadership. But it wasn't made by Republicans, it was just happenstance that it passed under our leadership and not when the Democrats were in control.

The role of the Congresswomen's Caucus was stronger then. There weren't so many other caucuses and they weren't these—the parties didn't have political groups. There wasn't the conservatives' caucus and the moderates' caucus, so there weren't political groups that you were meeting with every week. And the Republicans would get together in caucus. The Congresswomen's Caucus was a nice way for the women across the aisle to be able to let their hair down. Sometimes we just talked about handling babysitting, and commuting, and obnoxious men on the road, the funny things that you run into. But other times, we did . . . you often did develop allies to cosponsor a bill.

K. JOHNSON: Who were some of the women that you worked closely with during that period, especially in the 1980s or early 1990s?

N. JOHNSON: Well, the year before I had come, Reagan had been elected and put in a very severe budget. And then there was an amendment to that led by the moderate Republicans that—I've forgotten what it was called because I wasn't here—but that group that wrote that amendment sort of stayed together and became the core of the Tuesday Group. Then, as the other structure of the old Chowder and Marching [Club] and those groups faded down, then this was how the moderates got together once a week. And that was very useful. The House Democrats developed a moderate group that met together regularly, too. But the whole system was much more open, {laughter} and we only began meeting formally because the Conservative Opportunity Society began meeting formally. Bob [Robert Henry] Michel said to us, "You've got to organize so that I can play you off against one another." So then that's when we really organized. I think that wasn't true on the Democrat side for a long time. I'm not even sure . . . Actually, on its side, it developed the Black Caucus first, and they represented—they had many more minority Members than we did because they were much more of an urban party than we were.

K. JOHNSON: You mentioned how if you were going to be working on issues, it had to be bipartisan. But a really important issue for all the women Members, personally, and then also on the job, was about reproductive rights for women. So, how did you and then how did the caucus handle that issue?

N. JOHNSON: Well, I was very pro-choice. So was more or less everybody then. Pro-choice didn't mean that you were for abortion, it just meant you were for women having the right to decide how they would handle an unwanted pregnancy. And I was very active with the national campaign to prevent teen pregnancy. They had a congressional board, sort of, and I'm on their national board

now. They've done a wonderful job and are completely nonpartisan, or bipartisan, and they stay completely away from the abortion issue.

So, we really got, for instance, very interested in teen pregnancy, it was really the caucus that developed that idea. And the men saw it right away. It didn't take a genius. But we spearheaded what that bill should look like and so on. So, there was plenty to do; there was very little law addressing problems for women, even abuse. There was no federal legislation about abuse, but that was one [issue] that we'd felt needed federal legislation. {laughter}

So, there was lots that we did together. You learned a lot from the other Members because they were very, my goodness, accomplished prosecutors and people with all kinds of experience that I didn't have.

K. JOHNSON: Did your position—you'd mentioned that you were pro-choice—did that cause any friction for you at all within your party?

N. JOHNSON: No, not particularly. Not for years.

K. JOHNSON: And you don't think there are any obstacles to what you were trying to achieve in Congress legislatively that ever caused an issue for you?

N. JOHNSON: Well, certainly there are differences of opinion. But this was like when Tom DeLay was the Whip. By the end, we'd come in, and he'd say, "You guys are such a breath of fresh air because you're interested in what the problem is and what we can do about it." So if you're not hidebound, if you think there's not just one way to do something, you can always get a lot done. And we're getting back to that now. A lot of the pro-life people are beginning to recognize the difference between their feelings and their right to impose them on you. They don't mean to deny you religious freedom, but if your religion gives you the right to determine when life begins, and it's not when they

determine life begins, you need to have the religious freedom to do what you believe is right as well. And some of that's beginning to penetrate now, that this isn't just about where you stand, but your right to stand there.

WASNIEWSKI: You were co-chair of the caucus in the late '90s. Can you describe what that experience meant to you?

N. JOHNSON: Yes, with Eleanor Holmes Norton. And she's a terrific woman, and we had a good time. We didn't undertake as many . . . well, we had a big meeting down at the White House on women's issues, of which I have pictures, or I probably wouldn't remember it so vividly. And for instance, we were very keen on women on welfare, as they came off, having some support from Medicaid. And I was careful to get that in the bill. We didn't always propose a bill, but we would talk a lot about what we needed to see. And a lot of us were in positions where it was better not to write it, just do it. Just get it in there.

So, there were many, many more women in Congress then. So, they were less cohesive. But a lot of women from rural areas of the South, they were terrific. They were really terrific, a lot of them minority. But they're—to get known in an area that big, you have to have been very constructive, you had to have done something good. {laughter} And men's Rotary [Club] and those things made it easier for men to find a way to do that in a community. But there weren't many women who were at a place in their job where they could go to Rotary. There were some, but not a lot. And so for you to become known in a rural community was really usually through church work and that ladder, the nonprofit religious ladder. But they were savvy. {laughter} I loved them. I worked with a number of them well.

WASNIEWSKI: Anyone in particular come to mind?

N. JOHNSON: Well, I can see her, but I'm at the point where I can't say her name, but I'd have to look her up. But there were three or four. It was a lot of fun. This doesn't just pertain to them, it pertains to even my children. {laughter}
Yes, and who are you? {laughter}

K. JOHNSON: Just one last question about the caucus: How important do you think it was to have a Women's Caucus? And then how significant a role do you think it played in the institution?

N. JOHNSON: Well, it was very important at the time it was created. Then the more it got involved in the politics of either party, the less important it was to the women. And there were several phases where its leadership got very involved, but as soon as they drifted away the caucus work went better because the caucus work had to be on things that are common to all women. There were lots of Members who were interested in that. But the minute you wanted to make it a political place from which to rise, it didn't work because it didn't work for the rest of the Members.

WASNIEWSKI: That might be a good place to break because we're about an hour in. Do you want to take a five-minute break?

N. JOHNSON: Yes, that'd be fine.

END OF PART ONE ~ BEGINNING OF PART TWO

WASNIEWSKI: We were talking off camera and you said you had a good story to tell us about gym equipment and Barbara Boxer.

N. JOHNSON:

Well, when I first came to Congress, women and men weren't going to the Ys [YMCAs]. They weren't going to gyms. And so while the guys played basketball together some, and there were gyms, we were very, very busy. {laughter} And there wasn't an issue about the gyms. But gradually, as it became more of an issue, as people began participating more in exercise programs in society, and this wasn't all that—I think this was maybe early 90s, maybe earlier than that. But Barbara Boxer came to me, and she said, "The gym equipment is terrible." And I said, "Well, I've never been there." So, we went over and looked. And it was those old-fashioned rowing machines—wooden rowing machines—and wooden bars on the wall. Now the John Marshall Law School {laughter} had this in their gym when I was one. And so, "Who uses this?" She says, "That's the trouble. Even if we wanted to use it, who's going to come here and row?"

So, she and I, and we got a couple of other Democrats and a couple of other Republicans, and we took the Congressman from Springfield, who was chairman of the gym resources or whatever they called them. And he was quite elderly. And we toured him around, and we said, "Now, we want machines like you have," because they had all these exercise machines. So, we were talking about what we wanted and what we had, and so on and so forth. And the bell rings to go to vote. The second bell rings, so then we really do have to go. And so we go to vote, and then, on the floor, Barbara and I come up to him and say, "Well, what do you think?" Well, he said, "I don't know why you want machines. You know, those machines only build muscles." I said, "Well, the reason all the Ys [YWCAs] have them, as well as all the YMCAs have them, is because they also exercise your heart and do some other things, see. And that's why we want them." So the Y, versus YW, he got that. And in the end, we got good equipment. {laughter} But I'll never forget him saying, "It only builds muscles." And the real consternation on his

face. “Why would you want this?” {laughter} It was sort of like asking to play football. {laughter} You were only girls. {laughter} It was funny.

K. JOHNSON: We wanted to switch gears now and talk about committee service, your time on committee. And the first question we had for you was how you obtained your initial committee assignments. You were on Public Works and Transportation and Veterans’ Affairs when you were a freshman Representative.

N. JOHNSON: Well, I wanted very much to be on Veterans because, as I say, most of the people in my town were registered Democrats and veterans. {laughter} So I wanted to be on Veterans. And Transportation was where you went as a freshman, and that was a good place. It was better than some because at least it’s roads and bridges, and people can understand those things. {laughter} And you always need those. {laughter}

And then I was put on a select committee. Now, select committees had no legislative authority, but they discussed various issues. So, I was on the Select Committee on Children, Youth, and Families. And Dan [Daniel Ray] Coats, who’s just retiring from the Senate, was the ranking Republican. George Miller was the ranking Democrat. And George was awful. {laughter} He’d listen, but he’d vote every proxy against you. Finally, Lindy Boggs got tired of that, so she started voting with me. {laughter}

But it was one of the . . . the good thing that they eliminated the select committees because we had . . . the subject of the hearing was what our children worried about. The first panel was [formed because] children were worried about nuclear attack—it was the nuclear freeze era—but that’s all right. More politics for California than politics in my part of the country, but he’s the chairman, that’s okay. And you learn, you roll with that. But the

third panel was a group of very knowledgeable child psychologists and their—one of them testified—and they all agreed—that children’s primary fear was that their parents would divorce. And having raised my children in this age, that was their primary fear because more and more divorce was becoming common. So, in the summary, in this green book that they were developing, they didn’t even mention this panel. I brought it up as an amendment. Lindy voted with me, voted all the proxies against me. That’s why when the Republicans became in the majority, we didn’t allow chairmen to vote proxies, because it meant that nobody was there, and the chairman would vote all the proxies for everybody and knock you out in everything. So, when we eliminated proxy voting, then there had to be more Members there for the markup, and their votes were recorded. And it improved the process a lot. It reduced the power of the chairman.

K. JOHNSON: You mentioned Lindy Boggs, so I just wanted to ask about her. What was your relationship like?

N. JOHNSON: Oh, she was a wonderful woman. She was a wonderful woman and she was key to the success—I should have mentioned that earlier—of the Congresswomen’s Caucus because she was so fundamentally not partisan. Now, first of all, she was from a state where it’s a whole different thing, the way they do their politics. And while it did end up in Democrat control all the time, it wasn’t the same kind of control as in the big cities, where Democrats have had control, really, from the beginning. {laughter} And you see the consequences.

One of the things that was interesting to me about Illinois, was Illinois had minority representation until—I’ve forgotten when they knocked it out of their constitution. But I think it would go a long way to kind of saving American politics if every level of government had minority representation.

That way, both parties have a stable of horses coming along who know the issues and who had been there, listened to it, and don't say ridiculous things because they've been there. That meant that the Illinois legislature, which my father served, no party ever had more than two-thirds of the votes. Yes, two-thirds of the votes. There were three people from each legislative district; two would be one party, one would be another. So, the most you could get was two. {laughter} So you always had a good dialogue. And I see now that that's part of the problem with the power of the leadership at the congressional level . . . but in our state legislatures . . . Veto-proof majority is never healthy. {laughter}

WASNIEWSKI: After a couple terms, in 1987, you got onto the Budget Committee.

N. JOHNSON: Yes.

WASNIEWSKI: Barbara Boxer was the other woman on that committee with you. And we're wondering what was your reception on the committee and do you have any memories of her?

N. JOHNSON: Well, I had applied to get on Ways and Means because Judd [Alan Gregg] was moving when he ran for the Senate—from New Hampshire, Representative [Gregg]. And so I applied for that. That was the New England seat, see. Well, Trent Lott explained that I couldn't get on that time, but he'd put me on Budget, and I'd get on Ways and Means in the next step. So, I said "fine." I served on Budget.

K. JOHNSON: Why couldn't you get on at that time?

N. JOHNSON: Oh, there were others that were sort of before me that they were going to put on. Then, after I didn't get on that, Rod [Rodney Dennis] Chandler got on. He was a good friend of mine. He said, "I'm going to manage your

campaign.” I didn’t even know there was an outside group. This tends to be more of a gender problem, that the women aren’t as conscious of the sort of “outside game,” {laughter} and how you can get knowledgeable people from the outside saying, “You really ought to put her on.” I don’t know whether that had anything to it or not.

But {laughter} it was funny in candidating for the Ways and Means Committee. I had one male member of the Republican Party say to me, “Well, there’s already a woman from Connecticut on, Barbara [Bailey] Kennelly.” I said, “Yes, and there’s two men from Tennessee. And Connecticut is the number one exporter and trading state in our nation on a per capita basis. Why shouldn’t Barbara and I represent it when you’ve got these two from Tennessee and these two from Kentucky”—the old boys’ states? So, he shut up. {laughter} He didn’t bring that up again. But I ran up against that a couple of times. “Well, there’s already a woman from Connecticut.” I said, “Well, how come you put so-and-so on when there was already a Democrat from Kentucky?”

K. JOHNSON: So, you had to actively campaign for a seat on committees?

N. JOHNSON: Well, you always do. You have to.

K. JOHNSON: Can you describe that, what that was like?

N. JOHNSON: Well, you go and see the chairman, and you go and see the—first, you go and see the members of the Committee on Committees. And you’ve got to get your own group behind you. That was another problem. We were a small state in a group dominated by New York. So, of course, the head of the delegation was a New Yorker, and he would see to his own people first. It was {laughter} hard work.

I had taken a couple of controversial positions in my freshman year. All you can do is read all the material and do what you think is right. It turned out I was the only one in New England to vote for Contra aid. And in the end, I gave the wind-up speech, the concluding speech. Oh, that was nerve-racking. I only came to speak. So that was nerve-racking, but I held my ground. And I had done a lot of work on the subject, and I knew a lot about it. So, that helped. Because then they . . .

Bill [William Reynolds, Jr.] Archer's big thing was, "Well, how can you vote on trade? You've got all this . . ." And I said, "Listen, my two Senators vote for free trade, I vote for free trade. The unions only come after me, but we're all free traders." {laughter} And when he sort of saw the cover I had and my determination . . . It's true, I was one of the ones that worked hard for trade agreements and for getting China involved. But see, that's the thing. People think trade agreements are about trade; they're not. That's a side effect of setting world standards that recognize individual property rights. Much of the world doesn't recognize individual property rights the way we do. They recognize your wife as your property. {laughter} But so, setting the sort of economic rules—and therefore the moral structure within which trade goes on—is extremely important and you only do it through trade agreements. So he saw I could handle that. You had to prove you could handle tough issues because there were going to be a lot of them. And then my first term, we voted on the Greenspan Commission [National Committee on Social Security Reform] and I got that right away and helped to do that.

WASNIEWSKI: What was your reception like once you were on the committee?

N. JOHNSON: Respectful. I still had to fight hard when welfare reform came through, to try to get the Medicaid issues addressed. And sometimes I really had to stand up

and be firm about what the consequences would be if you didn't do it my way. {laughter}

Often—not often, but sometimes—they didn't. One case they wouldn't go along with was, Marge [Margaret Scafati] Roukema's proposal to check driver's lists or driver's licenses lists, or something like that. And so we didn't do that. And I said, "Okay, you've done a lot of things I've suggested. I think it's a mistake not to do this, but we'll go with it." Well, there was such an uproar the next day. The younger Members in the committee looked up at me like, "How did we get here?" {laughter} And so we caucused, came back, and we let that one go. They felt I had told them so many things and won on all those things. And they just weren't with me on driver's licenses, so when that came out to the floor—that they were going to check hunting licenses and all these things, but not driver's licenses, it was the unanimous roar. {laughter} You just had to know who your audience—and at that point, my audience was exhausted. So, when we took it to the next arena, different audience . . . And then Marge got to get it on the floor, which she sort of deserved to do anyway; she'd done all the work on it.

K. JOHNSON: We had mentioned that we had also interviewed Barbara Kennelly, and she talked about what it was like for her at the time, being the only woman on the committee. And she had said that playing golf really helped her because she was able to have conversations with some of the Members and learn about policy, and that helped her in some ways. Was there anything that you were able to use to try to get an in, and just to have Members trust you or work with you a little bit more?

N. JOHNSON: Well, I was just around all the time and kind of a leader of the moderates. So, there'd be other circles that would form and include me. So I was around a lot and open. So, I didn't do any of the golf thing, and I didn't really watch

football very closely, either. That was almost more of a problem for me, so much so that I started reading the sports sections, but I just wasn't all that interested. {laughter} And I couldn't keep up. So, I'd just listen. I knew enough about the . . . I love playing sports, so I could comment. I could be a part of the conversation. But you have to do small talk with . . . and that's sports, and that was a weakness. And I could only be a sideline player in that. But I know Barbara did play golf, and I never had time to learn to play golf. I never came up in a golfing family.

WASNIEWSKI: What are your memories of some of the committee leaders that you served under?

N. JOHNSON: Well, when I first got on Ways and Means, I went to see Rosty [Daniel David Rostenkowski]. He was the chairman. And we had a respectful conversation. I knew my father knew him, and he got a big kick out of the fact that I was my father's daughter. And I'm sure that kind of told him a lot because my father was his own man, too, {laughter} and was very well known, also quite imaginative and a lot of fun. So, everybody knew him one way or another. And so I thought that was a good thing.

And he told me the story about Ray [Raymond Joseph McGrath]. He said, "When you work with me, if I think something's really important, and I do it, then I expect you to be with the bill the whole time." I can't constitutionally do that. If provisions come into that bill that I think are really hostile to the interest of the country or my people, I can't just go along because you're taking one little piece. Partly, later on, the more I get to know about it, there will be other pieces. {laughter} And so I could never—I never played with Rosty because I couldn't agree to his rules of the game, but I was significant on the committee because I did debate.

And when we did the . . . years later, when we did the big health debate, stimulated by [President Bill] Clinton, there was a big bipartisan group—20 on our side, 20 on their side—that developed a very good bill. It was called the [John] Rowland–Michel bill. And I was very instrumental in that early on and all the way through, and introduced the first bill that eliminated discrimination against people with preexisting conditions. And eventually, that got passed when Nancy—and then Nancy [Landon] Kassebaum's privacy bill, it didn't allow you—if you were uncovered for more than two months, then you lost the position of being covered for preexisting conditions, but you could carry COBRA [continuation of health coverage].

That's when we developed COBRA, so that [there would be a] mechanism to prevent people from not carrying insurance. And they're seeing some of that now, under ACA [Affordable Care Act], people not getting their insurance until they get sick. They get their insurance, they carry it a few months, they get out of the hospital, and they drop—they stop paying. So, that is just a human mechanism {laughter} that you have to try to fight. And it took five years for that to develop, and it's been . . . it could be improved upon, but only carefully. {laughter}

WASNIEWSKI: How about working with some of the—I'm skipping ahead to when Republicans came into the majority—the later chairmen, Mr. Archer and Mr. [William Marshall] Thomas.

N. JOHNSON: Well, after I got out, I heard Don Carlson, Bill Archer's personal office chief of staff, tell the story that he saw me coming, and he thought, "Oh, this is . . . Why does he even let her interview? He's never going to let her on the committee." But partly because I'd been firm on trade, and I had stood up on principles that were controversial, he let me on. And we became very good friends. We're good friends to this day. {laughter}

See, Archer was very substantive. He did his own taxes right through the time he was committee chairman. And this is a man who has complicated investments. When he made me chairman of the special revenue—it wasn't that; I've forgotten what it's named, but it was the lowest committee that—I was the last of the people who got to choose a chairmanship, so I got what was left. But he wanted me to take on low-income housing tax credits because he was—he said, "We've got to eliminate those." And I said, "Well, can't I at least hold hearings?" "Yes." So, we held hearings that we had with his people from Texas, and clearly they weren't doing the due diligence. And the danger is that subsidized housing will be built with public money and then put private rental property out of business. People would just move from one to the other. We didn't need that building, they were already okay.

So, we really held very good hearings. We reformed the program, and it's probably the best housing program for—low-income housing program now in America because they built it well in order to get the credit. But if they don't maintain it well, they don't get the credit over time. So, when you look at the amount of public housing that's built with public money, and how it's maintained, so far it's a superior housing program. And the thing is, you had the information. Even if you had been set against it, he'd take your word for it if he respected you. And I was always careful, well informed.

So, and he was a pleasure to work under, Archer. He was much more open, much more . . . for instance, he was absolutely focused on having a VAT [value added] tax and eliminating a lot of others. We had a retreat, and the whole subject was the VAT tax, the income tax, and all these different taxes and how they interacted, and why it would be better to have a VAT tax. And the last panel was on the transition. And that was so complicated, and it would take 10 years, and it would cost an enormous amount of money.

That's the last we ever heard of the VAT tax. {laughter} So, even for himself, he was a tough taskmaster. I respected that. The whole committee respected him about that.

K. JOHNSON: What about Bill Thomas?

N. JOHNSON: Well, I was close to Bill Thomas, but he was a nut. I mean, that's not fair to say. He was very, very smart, but very manipulative. And he liked doing things short-term because then we'd have to have a bill again. And so now we're in this constant spinning situation where we're changing tax law all the time. That's terrible for business and terrible for international businesses, and we need to do a good tax reform that includes everything. But Bill was extraordinarily capable, and those were difficult times because he had a lot of plans to kind of do some cleanup, and restructure and really reform the tax code. And President [George W.] Bush wanted to eliminate the tax on dividends. Well, that cost so much. I thought he'd just quietly ignore it, but he didn't. He did it, but it changed our whole plan. He was very interesting to work under, but if you got on his wrong side {laughter} there were consequences.

K. JOHNSON: Did that ever happen for you?

N. JOHNSON: No, not really. I was kind of an independent actor. But he used to tell me, "You don't know anything about politics." {laughter} But he wouldn't have gotten elected without me. {laughter}

WASNIEWSKI: Looking back, how important do you think it was to have a woman's perspective on a committee as important as Ways and Means?

N. JOHNSON: Really, extremely important. Extremely important. More important than I had realized when I went on. But the majority of small businesses are being

founded by women. My first term on there, I worked on a special small business pension plan because small businesses can't predict their income as well, so they can't afford to be obliged. Anyway, we got a very nice little—working with the pension community. I mean, we didn't just make this stuff up. So, you were able to actually make a lot of changes and all that expensing and stuff we did on my watch from that committee, because small business was being absolutely just ignored. And the problem of investing yet, they're the ones if they invest in a truck, they hire a driver. They don't hire somebody until they have more produce to send out and a way to do it.

So, it was—I really enjoyed the tax work on the committee because of its consequences on our economy and our social structure. And that was never a dull committee. Between the actually small tax issues, which had a lot of impact on small business, the human resources issues . . . Under our tax law it takes your money, and it is the one that gives it back, whether it's welfare, whether it's disability income, whether it's foster care. It's the Ways and Means Committee doing this, {laughter} so they didn't have many people who had the experience I had in human services or children's services or community services. And so it was really important to have somebody there who knew how these things worked, and how you could implement what the impact would be of a tax law change, and particularly in foster care, where actually you could directly impact the program. So, it was . . . and then you get into the international issues, the trade issues, global perspective.

People, generally once they're on Ways and Means, they stay there the rest of their career. And there weren't many women on Ways and Means. I think when Barbara [Kennelly] and I were on, we were the only ones. But then Jennifer [Blackburn] Dunn came on, and we had quite a few. More on the

Republican side, actually, than the Democratic side, but I don't know that that's true now.

K. JOHNSON: And you were the first Republican woman to serve on the committee.

N. JOHNSON: Yes.

K. JOHNSON: You also served on the Ethics Committee.

N. JOHNSON: Yes. {laughter}

K. JOHNSON: And you chaired the Ethics Committee. Can you talk a little bit about that experience?

N. JOHNSON: Well, first of all, dumbest decision I ever made. {laughter} And I made it primarily because I felt, as a woman, I should take it. It would be the first chairmanship of a big committee that a woman would have held, and so I did it. {laughter} But I have to say, it was really hard work. But we got through it.

WASNIEWSKI: You were on the committee for a couple terms before you became chair. Were you asked to join, or did you throw your hat in the ring to join the committee?

N. JOHNSON: Oh, the committee leadership was more or less—you had to be a sort of a top person that people trusted. But they'd appoint you. {laughter} It wasn't an appointment you said 'no' to. But you didn't have to stay on forever, and I just . . . the chairmanship opened up. There were an enormous number of controversies, in part because the Republicans had just taken over [in 1995], and so there are always more difficulties under those terms.

And we were just . . . I hadn't anticipated, but we'd been just deluged with complaints, a lot of them just partisan crap. I mean, pardon my language, but

they were just in there so they could say awful things and win the next election—say, we have a case before Ethics and whatever. So, we had to dispatch some of those quickly, and we turned down a lot of them, but you had to go through the process.

Partly, things were so polarized when we took over that I announced, “Every case will be considered, will go through the same process.” And we had to do that. If it was really a crappy thing, we went through it pretty fast. But there were a lot of cases that had no merit whatsoever. But Members had the right to be heard right away. Some of them were freshman Members, and one of them did this whole careful notebook and response. And this was an open-and-shut case. But when he recently ran—maybe he was running for Congress again, I don’t remember. He was from Indiana, but recently he ran again, and that was brought up against him: “You were called before the Ethics Committee.” {laughter} It was absolutely sheer partisan squabbling. But we did have some very important cases, and on the whole we dealt with them unanimously.

[A 41-second segment of this interview has been redacted.]

WASNIEWSKI: One of the biggest issues you had to deal with, was you were tasked with leading the investigation into the Speaker Gingrich’s book deal and fundraising. What are your memories of that period, and what effect do you think it had on your career, if any?

N. JOHNSON: Well, it was very, very, very hard. And the reason it was hard is because clearly, the Democrats were just a bloc. So, at the simplest level, we had all these—I felt sorry for some of the people that we had in that knew about book deals. One young woman—quite young in her career—she had to hire

a lawyer, come down from New York . . . nothing wrong. This was the way they do business, so that was sort of sad and disturbing.

But the worst of it was that one of the committee members routinely spoke to the press, and this is not allowed under the law. Everyone knew it on the committee, but nobody was willing to say that publicly. And so finally, I said to the press—because he'd say something, and then there'd be an article in *The Hill* or something. Then they'd send it up to my papers in Connecticut. I couldn't comment, of course, so it looked like I was dodging. It got to a point where it was very hard for me to go out in my own district because the only thing they'd ask about was Ethics. I'd say, "Well, we're working away. We're making progress." Well, blah blah blah. And I said, "Well, I can't actually talk about the case before the committee. Like a judge, I can't talk about that." But it made it look like I was dodging.

It was the harshest experience I ever had. It wouldn't have been like that if there hadn't been a member on the committee that was willing to do that, since it was an outright breaking of the law. {laughter} But there are some situations in which you can't enforce the law on your own people unless everyone's willing to do that, which they should have been. But oh, well, they weren't. So that was very, very hard.

Then there was that incident about the taping of the Speaker. And luckily I was there to see that received by a committee member. And my counsel very wisely said, "We're not accepting that tape. We don't know anything about it; we don't know where it came from." And he sent it down to the Justice Department. {laughter} So, otherwise it would have had—it would have stopped our process, and we would have had—it wasn't directly relevant, but it was hardball. But I finally won it by making a hardball call. {laughter} Because I had to get it finished, and we hadn't been able to finish it before

Christmas. We were, as a party, bound and determined we weren't going to go into the next session with this hanging there. So, I've forgotten . . . there was some kind of a subcommittee meeting, and they called me up and said, "We can't allow any hearings until the report is completely finished." I said okay. "When you finish the report, we'll do it." Well, I can't quite remember how it worked out, but it had to do with the details, because I had already talked to the counsel. The report was written. There were footnotes, and that was palling around.

To make a long story short, we did get—they did get the report done, so it was the Friday before—this is after Christmas—the next week the President's going to be sworn in. And they had done everything they could not to hold the hearings. But in stalling like that . . . so, when they reported, I held the hearing immediately, next day. And I said, "Now, you can ask as many questions as you want." I think this is sort of a gender-based thing. I was determined I was going to get this done. I said, "You didn't want to have it at the beginning of the week, so we waited the five days. Here we are, it's Friday. But don't let that bother you at all. We have as many days as we want to hear this report. And we've all read it, not once, but probably several times. So you ask questions as long as you want." And then, when there was a lull, I'd say, "Now, are there any more questions? Are there any more questions?" I'd call them by name. We were done in two hours and they had said, "We're going to need . . ." They had sent word to my staff, "You're going to need guards because there will be demonstrations." It was horrendous. But at the end, it was just a fizzle. And we got the thing on the floor the Opening Day, which they didn't particularly want. But they could have had it earlier, so. {laughter} In politics, when you have to put the glove down, you better do it firmly and follow through. {laughter}

K. JOHNSON: How would you describe your leadership style as committee chair? And also you were subcommittee chair for Ways and Means.

N. JOHNSON: Yes, I chaired almost every subcommittee of Ways and Means. Well, it was inclusive. I was always interested in people's input. Always open to their amendments and what they were interested in. It was on the whole, I think, pretty nonpartisan. But we kept things moving. If people were questioning just to make a political point, I didn't—if they were in there five minutes, you don't disturb them. But I tried to question myself, and I encouraged others to get the information out so we could make the decisions, which was hard. There was a lot of manipulation of the hearing panels that I wasn't able to overcome. It was hard to just get "Joe Blow" out there. First of all, he didn't have enough knowledge. So, how you got past the experts and how you balanced the experts was really hard. I don't know that we always succeeded. But if people had a good idea, it didn't matter to me whether they were a Republican or a Democrat.

WASNIEWSKI: You served in the majority with two Republican Speakers, Speaker Gingrich and Speaker [John Dennis] Hastert. And we're just curious to know how you—any memories of them? And then also, how you would compare or contrast their leadership styles?

N. JOHNSON: Night and day. {laughter} Actually, Gingrich was a terrific leader. And before he became Speaker, he and I were—he was a big leader of the Conservative Opportunity Society, and I was a leader of the moderates. And we got to talking about it one day, about the danger to the party of this structure. And he said, "Well, we ought to talk together regularly." So, we started making [a point to meet] Newt, and Bob [Robert Smith] Walker, and Steve [Steven Craig] Gunderson, and I at 7:00 every Wednesday morning. And we'd talk about what's coming up, where do we agree. Most things you agree on

because what you're doing in Washington is so sort of "at the top," what makes the whole economy move, and the disagreements are more on the programs: which program, appropriations, and that kind of thing. Anyway, we got to know each other, and Bob Walker's knowledge of the rules and everything was really marvelous. But his knowledge of policy was impressive, too. So, we met all the time, and that kept some communication, see, and that's not there now.

Then, when Hastert was Speaker . . . and also, Newt took seriously his responsibilities as Speaker because the Speaker is not the party leader, he's the Speaker of the House. And I think he worked with the Democrats quite closely. And I thought he made very good judgments about what came to the floor. He wasn't so much, kind of, control and power crazy as today's . . . not so much leaders, but a lot of the Members are.

Then Hastert . . . but there was increasing division within the parties. And Hastert made the fundamental mistake as Speaker of saying that he wouldn't take anything to the floor that the majority of the majority didn't support. And we went to him. That was a terrible thing. A couple of times, we just killed a rule that the party needed so that we wouldn't be able to get something to the floor that the conservatives didn't agree with, like fetal-tissue research. So, it created a more adversarial situation within the caucuses, within the Republican side.

I'm sure this happened within the Democratic side, which is why Nancy [Pelosi] then wrote that bill in the leadership office. Because she wouldn't have been able to write it in the committees and get through what she wanted. So, DeLay and Hastert did some of that. Both parties got into things, the more controversial it was or the more you were appealing to some extreme in your base. And ours has been a religious-right base, but she was

appealing to those in her party that really wanted government control. And she felt it was time they had the right to do that because she'd seen the failure under [President] Clinton. Actually, it wasn't failure, it was a success, and [Richard Andrew] Gephardt wouldn't let us vote on it. But he said, "We'll vote after August." I think during August he found out that it was going to pass, and so he wouldn't allow it to come up in September. It was a re-election year for [President] Clinton, and he thought it would be seen as a defeat. But actually, apparently in some book that Hillary [Clinton] wrote, my understanding is that she said, "anything would have been a win." Who would have known what was in it compared to their plan? Which was true. They put the issue on the table, and we worked it all out. We had exchanges, we had a lot of the things that are in there now, but we didn't have the amount of federal control [there is now].

The plan would have resulted, ultimately, in four nationwide managed-care plans. That's what killed it. And so we weren't going to do that again. And you see with the mergers and acquisitions, the incredible concentration in the health care sector. It's scary. When your only answer is on the exchanges to control cost, to narrow your number of providers, when the providers are already seeing patients . . . One of their big complaints is they have so little time for a very seriously ill patient. This is not an answer. It doesn't work.

So, the human factor, in my view, is being squeezed out of our systems because too much is prescribed at the federal level, which is far too distant from people's lives to get it. It's interesting. {laughter} And I think, for instance, in 2017, the states have the right to do it their way if they can prove that they're going to reach the same goals. And I think if there's a Republican President, I think that's going to be the first response: "Just tell me how you want to do it." And Medicaid is completely outdated. You've got to let states

integrate that into managed-care concepts and chronic-disease management. And some states that have been given that right have very good systems and those that . . . so, some tried to use that in the Affordable Care Act to get more freedom, but why expand it when you can't manage it now?

It's amazing to me how, in the end, realism drives success. And if something isn't in harmony with the way people do things, it's not going to work. We've got quite a bit of law in the books right now that isn't working {laughter} and we have to find our way out. We've been into this before. You work your way out because it doesn't work. And you see that on the exchange, fewer and fewer plans. Well, then you go to talk to the legislative assistants, and they have this big increase. This isn't right.

K. JOHNSON: You've mentioned a few times about being a moderate and a little bit about what it was like being a moderate in the House. But what role, in a larger frame, do you think moderates play in the institution?

N. JOHNSON: They still play a bigger role. For instance, under Hastert's leadership—DeLay had very good staff; Susan [Hirschmann] was excellent. And at first, we went to meet with her just to let her know where we were and what we were thinking, and how damaging that their thinking would be to us. And then we started meeting directly with DeLay, as a result of her advice. You could work with us. We'd talk about what the problem was.

But now they're back in that same situation. As Charlie [Charles W.] Dent says, "How many votes that are bad for us do we have to take? And why not have a few—let us give you a few that are hard for you to take?"

[A 30-second segment of this interview has been redacted.]

WASNIEWSKI: Another kind of big retrospective-type question, but what role do you think that women play in the Republican Party? And has that role changed over the span of your career?

N. JOHNSON: Well, I frankly think women are more highly respected in the Republican Party than in the Democrat Party. We had chairmen earlier, we had subcommittee chairmen earlier, we had women in leadership earlier. And while Nancy's been their Speaker, considering the number of women there are in the Democratic Party—and this is true in the cities. The cities have been—most of the big cities—politically, have been controlled by Democrats forever. Outside of Jane Byrne in Chicago, which was an aberration—and they hated her—they don't have a big voice. In New York, there were a couple of women in the council. They've tended to have really good women's participation on the council, Republican and Democrat.

But on the whole, the old-city system of patronage {laughter} did not include women. And it's been hard for women to break into it. Not that the patronage is still there, but that's how it started. Political parties guaranteed you a job and you worked for them. And whether that job was in the school system, where you may or may not show up, or someplace else . . . remember the janitor in New Jersey who never showed up, but he got paid? You bet he showed up at election time, did a lot of work.

So, politics grows out of people's lives. Governance grows—we govern ourselves. Nobody else governs us. We get the kind of government we want, so as long as there's transparency. My objection to the press is that when I was in the state senate and very conscientious, we were proud. On the first budget we wrote, some really good amendments that made good sense. The whole budget article on the front page of the paper, and then the jump. The last sentence was "The Republicans voted no." Not a word about our work

on the budget, not a word about our amendments, not a word about any competing visions here, or cost. And that's been pretty standard. So, sometimes I don't think it's being a woman, I think it's being a Republican woman. {laughter}

K. JOHNSON: As we're starting to wrap up here, we just had a few questions we wanted to ask you, specifically about being a woman Member in Congress. Because there were so few of you, did you ever feel as if you weren't just representing your constituents, but you were actually representing women across the country?

N. JOHNSON: Oh, absolutely. Absolutely. Connecticut had very good laws about domestic abuse, but most states didn't, and we needed to do that—the same with welfare reform. So, there were many, many instances where Connecticut had pretty good law and it was a small enough state so problems could be dealt with. But the federal law was completely unworkable.

WASNIEWSKI: During your career, what were your thoughts on women who were in leadership positions while you served? Either formal positions or [positions that] just had influence, and we're thinking people here like Lynn [Morley] Martin, Barbara Kennelly, Nancy Pelosi, later, Deborah [D.] Pryce. How did you see their rise into leadership, and what do you recall about them and their leadership styles?

N. JOHNSON: They were very good Members, but they were seen as the women's representative in leadership. And that's not where the real power was. It was better than not having anyone in leadership. There were women with real power. But it takes a certain kind of person to be in leadership and speak up, man or woman. You don't see the men speaking up either outside of the top

leader. And you don't see many women in the leadership's mini-circle of close friends.

I daresay if women were in leadership offices, they would have more of a mix, because as a gross generalization, men are better at the strategy of politics, and women are better at the policy and see society from a more—approach things in a more collaborative way, and men say, “Well, this is what I want to do. And if you want to do this with me, fine, if you'd want to do this with me. . .” Some of them are harder to get into a collaborative position, and most legislation requires not only a number of provisions and the melding of a number of ideas at the federal level—at the state level, you can put in a bill, and that's your bill, and you can get it through, and you can see it, and everybody can see it. At the federal level, you can't do that. You'd have millions and millions and millions of bills, and they'd be petty little things.

So, you were going to do a Medicare bill, so Bill Thomas would say, “What do you want? What do you think we need to do?” And I'd put in that we need to begin covering nurse practitioners and see if we can't get a more collaborative team approach. And he agreed; that got done. But you'd put in ideas, and some of them were very complicated. We've got to do something about how we reimburse hospitals because we decide how we're going to do reimbursement. Then, if it gets over the budget, we cut everybody equally. Well, one year Arizona got an 11 percent increase, and we got a decrease, {laughter} just the way the formula worked out. You say, “Something's wrong here, we have to fix this formula.” That's hard work, then, because everybody's affected.

Making policy at the federal level is, by its nature, a process that requires entertaining conflicting goals and opinions. You look at the Defense Department—incredible differences among very top-ranking people about

what the service should look like in the next five years because their view of what the next 10 years after that are going to be [like] differs. Those are hard because you're all just guessing. On the other hand, they're educated guesses and you have to decide how to move forward. Then you get Members in with their attachment to certain weaponry. And in the old days, that used to be tenable, but it's increasingly less tenable as we try to maintain a current military capability, and also do the research and development associated with a totally different type of warfare and defense. The issues are formidable now, and you have to . . . no one has the right answer. You have to look beyond that and be able to take the most sensible piece.

For instance, it's not sensible to put the Medicare tax all the way up through all wage, but it is sensible because of the other taxes that we especially focus on other parts of the income stream. But it is reasonable to bring it up because you need so much more health care. So, the right group can make things happen. And actually, I'm quite optimistic about this Speaker [Paul D. Ryan]. He's always been able—but it takes two. So, the spotlight will be on him. That's what I found out on the Ethics Committee. It doesn't really matter how good of a leader you are if everyone's determined to stall the show. {laughter}

K. JOHNSON: Did you ever aspire to be in the leadership?

N. JOHNSON: I ran once. And Bill Gradison ran that same year. We both got exactly the same number of votes. I worked hard, he didn't work at all. He was senior to me, and well . . . no, it was a good thing I didn't get in. And I never tried again because I could not vote the party line. Period. My Republicans are different than Republicans in Texas, across the country.

When I was in the state senate, and on the finance committee, I went to some national state legislators meeting, and all I remember was that we were in Texas. And I sat there, and I realized I'm more liberal than everyone on this bus. It doesn't matter about party {laughter} because we just did things differently—a much more kind of grounded town meeting-type of style, so people knew . . . and I really am convinced that the Sagebrush Revolution, all that dissatisfaction out there, was because their counties are so big they really had no say, no effective say in government.² So, it bubbled up against the federal government since the federal government has so much power out there in those lands.

WASNIEWSKI: By the time you left the House, you and Marcy [Marcia Carolyn] Kaptur were the Deans of women in Congress. And we're just curious: At that point, did that have any meaning for you in particular? And looking back, do you think you served as a mentor for other women, younger women who came up behind you?

N. JOHNSON: I honestly don't know. But Marcy and I had been—we liked each other, and we worked together, and we were very into machine tools and finding ways to protect American manufacturing during a period of really harsh competition from abroad, and a need to actually retool our own capability for efficiency and quality. And Marcy and I, and Sandy [Sander Martin] Levin, and who was the other Republican? It may have been Henry [John] Hyde. And we were really into this, {laughter} and we did a lot of legislation together. We were on a joint trip to Japan—Henry wasn't there, but Marcy and I were—and we did have a lot of fun together. We did a lot of good work together.

K. JOHNSON: Are there any women staff that stand out in your mind, that either worked for you or might have worked for someone else on the Hill?

N. JOHNSON: I had a fantastic chief of staff. I was her first—she had worked on the Hill, but she had not been a chief of staff before she worked for me. And her name was Kathleen Harrington. She works for that big health care system out in Minnesota. We all know the name of it, but I can't say it right now. It's like Kaiser, but it's not Kaiser. She was very good. And we just had a barrel of ideas about what we could do. We did all kinds of things in the district that no one had ever done, {laughter} some of which worked and some of which didn't.

When we were focusing more on exporting and trying to get small business into exporting, I worked with the Secretary of Commerce, not a well-known one, and I don't recall his name right now. But he was very interested in small business exporting and I did a press conference with him. And then I had these conferences in my district that I publicized, for small businesses and exporters. It was just sort of a riot—a riot funny, that is. And finally I was calling up my friends and said, "Just sit in the audience, I've just got to have somebody sitting there." And probably five small businesses really had some long-term effect from those two conferences. But it was ahead of its time.

WASNIEWSKI: We asked about your first campaign. We have to ask about your last campaign, your memories of that, and then how you kind of made the adjustment to life after Congress.

N. JOHNSON: Well, my last campaign was no fun. No, I was tired. The issues were the same issues I'd been talking about. We were so stuck in Washington. It was very hard to explain why we couldn't get anything done. And it started out on a terrible note, a very heavy attack on my integrity, which I had never experienced. And I kind of never got out from under that, although the polling showed up and down. But there was a huge backlash against

[President George W.] Bush, and I could feel that. They'd gotten more and more discouraged with the fact that the right things weren't happening, and I'd been there a long time. And I was tired. {laughter} And it was the right thing.

Actually, I didn't have any feelings about it. I didn't. I gave a great speech about democracy and what a privilege it had been to participate in it. But I had not gotten to know the freshman Republicans well or freshman Democrats or anybody for a couple of elections because we were just so busy. And the more senior you are, the more various venues in which you have responsibility. But I was just tired. It was a good thing I was defeated. {laughter}

K. JOHNSON: While you were in the House, what legislation that was passed by Congress do you think had the biggest influence, or the biggest impact, on women?

N. JOHNSON: Wow. I was in a long time, so a lot of the things we did for abused women and things like that were important. But I'd say the Children's Health Insurance Bill—that actually wouldn't have gone anywhere without me. [Edward Moore (Ted)] Kennedy introduced it, and he was looking for a sponsor. He couldn't get a sponsor because nobody would support an entitlement, a new entitlement, when we were beginning to drown under the other entitlements. But, so I eliminated it having to be delivered through Medicaid, and allowed states to deliver it any way they wanted. [Orrin Grant] Hatch made it a block grant. And then they got it in in conference. It was both Newt [Gingrich] and the President were very keen on it. So, I helped get it off the ground. I took a lot of heat for it because it was an entitlement, and we didn't get many cosponsors for that reason in the course [of the bill], but it kind of moved through anyway. And it took a lot of work to sort of shape it up and get people to understand how important this was.

I think the prescription drug and the work I did on Medicare, I think, was very important for women because there were just so many ways in which we made it more accessible. So many of the Medicare beneficiaries are women widows, and adjusting the benefits so that they would be more helpful to women at home—there were a lot of things in that area, but also the small business area. I used to give conferences in how to set up your own small business, and I'd have everybody there. I'd have all the agencies that could help you there, because in the era that I grew up and was raising my children, you really didn't have the choice of working. On the other hand, you really needed more income, and there were lots of women doing wonderful crafts at home. And they didn't know how to market them. None of us knew how to create a small business from this that we could manage within our own obligations, because children still came home for lunch. {laughter} So, you had to be there. And that was, in many ways, the fun of it.

I did a lot of work on small business issues, and then I ran these conferences. And years later, I'd have somebody come and say, "You know what? I'm a rep for a pharmaceutical company. It's been wonderful, and it all started with one of those conferences." Just getting them the tools and helping them to see people who had started their own businesses and so on. So, in some ways, that impacted more people's lives, and I did it all at community colleges. And we did it regularly. We'd do it twice a year, and we did it for years. Finally, we didn't do it anymore. But probably of all the things I actually did—although the conferences I did with the ag [agricultural] community were also very useful—but this probably changed more lives than anything else I did. {laughter}

WASNIEWSKI: There are now 108 women in Congress. There's 88 in the House, there's 20 in the Senate. And part of the reason, of course, we're doing this interview is

to celebrate the centennial of Jeannette Rankin's election. But looking ahead 50 years, to 2067, how many women do you think we will have in Congress at that point?

N. JOHNSON: Well, I think we're seeing more and more women in the state legislature and local governing bodies, and that's a very good thing. It's hard for me to encourage a woman to run for Congress right now, and I think many, too many—both men and women—with young children are running. It's simply not compatible with raising your children.

I had been lucky. I had a very independent and self-sufficient husband. But when you're gone every single week, at least three days a week, and then, when you're home—and this is, I guess, the biggest surprise to us was your time is not your own. So, it got to a point where if I could carve out Sunday afternoon or Sunday, that was a good thing. That's—you can do that with an adult that you've known well {laughter} and you have a lot of common memories with, but you can't do that with kids; you have to be there. And you have to be there . . .

I remember getting on the plane with John Rowland one day, and he had just this brown folder. I said, "John,"—I'm pulling a briefcase—"Is that all you're taking home?" He said, "Yes." He said, "Now the kids not only are saying, 'Daddy, will you watch television with us this morning?' but now they say, 'and don't bring your work.'" So, human beings take a lot of input, and to raise a child up with good character, you not only have to be present a good amount of the time, but you have to be doing things with them, taking them places, exposing them to things, talking about things, open and ready to talk whenever they open up.

I loved the coming home for lunch because that's when they'd talk. By the time they got out at 3:00, they didn't want to talk to me. They wanted to get out and play. {laughter} By dinnertime they were tired. {laughter} So, life is really about your own personal life, your family's life, the community's life—and all those things require attention. And my concern about the technology today is that it breaks that up. It doesn't encourage it.

And so I don't know what kind of world we're going to live in or what kind of role government's going to play in lawmaking. The more political it gets, I think the less women are attracted to it. It's not sort of a game. At least there were a lot of people at the state level, because it's a part-time job. You have to have a real job. {laughter} Who just really benefited from being there and having the title? So, if you did the work, and you made sense, they'd come with you. I didn't have to have a full-time job because I was raising kids. I was considered in those days [as having the equivalent] of a full-time job. {laughter} And I could do my homework, and it sort of worked out. But Congress has become so all-consuming and very—all of it—fraught with antagonism.

It'll move on. It'll return to a different status. And I think women as well as men will continue to run, and probably more women. It will probably get up to more like 50– 50. But it just depends on lifestyle and who wants to do it.

K. JOHNSON: We've asked you a lot of questions today, {laughter} so thank you for being patient and answering all of them.

N. JOHNSON: Well, that's fine.

K. JOHNSON: And I just have one question left for you: What do you think your lasting legacy will be with regards to your House service?

N. JOHNSON:

Well, I was seen as a policy wonk and a nice person. And I think that's about all there is to it, {laughter} because the policy you worked hard on. From the time you start until the time it finishes, it evolves a lot. Then, with each Congress—God knows what's left of what the real shape of the Children's Health Insurance Bill is now. Although I think in that particular case, it was pretty much its own. And I think in the early years of the Affordable Care Act, it still was maintained. But it will evolve; everything evolves.

So, it's more a matter of did you—in my mind—contribute to creating individual opportunity and a stronger fabric of society at the community level? And if you did those two things, the rest really will take care of itself. But if you erode the communities, then—and we've done a lot of that—small towns . . .

A lot of the things that federal government's doing this year, just because of the kind of rules they make, they're knocking out small businesses left and right. All these mergers, I don't know what the economy of a small town is going to look like in the future because even their grocery stores depend on a little of this and a little of that. They send a little durable medical equipment, they sell a few—they service the local diabetics, they service the local oxygen people. But you can't do that anymore. They're making it so that you have to be . . . the price is so low, you have to be gigantic. You have to have a huge consumer. Well, a lot of these things need services as well as product, and that's being lost sight of. So, I think there's going to be a lot of change and a lot of settling out.

And I am beginning to see those; that's what I track. I look for those things in my soap opera time. {laughter} Where is the leakage that shows that what's happening isn't in our interest? Sure enough, a lot of private-practice doctors now are having people sign up for their—they're not concierge because

there's no big money, but you just pay \$30 or \$40, \$50 a month, it depends on what the doctor charges—You pay that every month, all year-round, whether you go to see the doctor or you don't. When you need to go, you go for free, and he has an hour. So, you really get the care you need. It's a wonderful invention. It doesn't cover hospitalization, and so you have to have at least a high deductible. But it's much more affordable, it's very patient-centered, and then, because it's cash . . . and one of these doctors was telling me he saves 40 percent in overhead because he takes no insurance, public or private. {laughter}

See, we've let a lot of stuff—all of this thing about control, it all has below it this bureaucracy. What's happened to the bureaucracy in Medicare is scary because that's the one thing I do do, is Medicare problems. And there's so many more layers, and they have so much more authority, but it's ill-defined. So, it's arbitrary. And I've seen this happen in other areas before. It'll collapse and then people will do it their way. Or it will be eroded by these physicians who don't take Medicare anymore. {laughter}

So, it's hard to look into the future right now, especially when you were defeated in part because you weren't up on the current changes. It's a different mindset, and so it makes predicting even harder for those of us who are in-between. {laughter} You're the guys who are supposed to be predicting now.

K. JOHNSON: We just look at the past.

WASNIEWSKI: We look back. {laughter} Thank you so much for answering all our questions and answering them so thoughtfully.

N. JOHNSON: Well, thank you. Well, I'm happy to do it. I really love the Congress and the concept of governance.

WASNIEWSKI: It's important.

N. JOHNSON: Yes, I tell kids I don't deal with anything different than your parents, I just do it at a bigger level. But what they're trying to teach you is to do it yourself. Every morning you can either go to school or not. And if you go, nobody can make you learn. So you're governing yourself from the very beginning and you have choices. Remember, only you can make the choice to learn what you need to know right now so you can go on. And you can help make kids see that they can govern themselves, and that governance isn't something that others do to us, and that's the—and then you win. {laughter}

WASNIEWSKI: Then it's no longer an abstract. Thank you again.

N. JOHNSON: You're welcome. I enjoyed it.

NOTES

¹ In 1889, Jane Addams, an American activist and reformer, and Ellen Gates Starr, founded the Hull House, a settlement house in Chicago established to assist recent immigrants to the United States.

² Reference to a series of public land disputes between in the federal government and private citizens in the Western United States.