The Honorable Eddie Bernice Johnson

U.S. Representative of Texas (1993–2023)

Oral History Interview
Final Edited Transcript

July 19, 2022
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Office of the Historian
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Washington, DC

"But I think that seniority lends itself to a little bit more acceptance of people and their individual personalities and gives you a bit more courage to approach and find ways to get things done. I think that you feel more of a responsibility to achieve something the longer you stay, and you learn that you've got to do it across the aisle."

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Abstract

Eddie Bernice Johnson represented a Dallas-based Texas district in the U.S. House of Representatives for three decades. Interested in medicine at a young age, Johnson chose a career in nursing when discouraged from earning a medical degree because of her gender. Her activism against racial discrimination in Texas sparked an interest in civic involvement which eventually led to a long career in elected office. After serving in the Texas state legislature—both the house and the senate—Johnson won a seat in the U.S. House in 1992 during the historic "Year of the Woman" election that effectively doubled the number of women in Congress.

As a Representative, Johnson served on two committees—Transportation and Infrastructure and Science, Space and Technology. In her oral history, she recounts how her Transportation subcommittee chairmanship afforded her the opportunity to curb recurring flooding in her district. Much of Johnson's legislative focus came as a member of the House Science Committee where she rose through the ranks to become the committee's first woman and the first African-American chairperson. Johnson describes how her nursing background influenced her leadership style, approach to public policy, and her interactions with congressional colleagues. She also explains how the shared experiences of African-American Representatives created a bond among the members of the Congressional Black Caucus (CBC) that strengthened their resolve to promote racial equality across the country. Johnson provides details on her work in the CBC, including her time as chair of the organization during the 107th Congress (2001–2003), and offers examples of how Black Members helped her achieve legislative goals in her district with a sophisticated support network.

Biography

JOHNSON, Eddie Bernice, a Representative from Texas; born in Waco, McLennan County, Tex., December 3, 1934; graduated from A.J. Moore High School, Waco, Tex., 1952; nursing certificate, St. Mary's College at the University of Notre Dame, Notre Dame, Ind., 1955; B.S., Texas Christian University, Fort Worth, Tex., 1967; M.P.A., Southern Methodist University, Dallas, Tex., 1976; chief psychiatric nurse and psychotherapist, Veterans Administration hospital, Dallas, Tex.; member of the Texas state house of representatives, 1972-1977; administrator, United States Department of Health, Education and Welfare, 1977-1981; business owner; member of the Texas state senate, 1986-1992; elected as a Democrat to the One Hundred Third and to the fourteen succeeding Congresses (January 3, 1993-January 3, 2023); chair, Committee on Science, Space, and Technology (One Hundred Sixteenth and One Hundred Seventeenth Congresses); was not a candidate for reelection to the One Hundred Eighteenth Congress in 2022; died on December 31, 2023, in Dallas, Tex.; interment at Texas State Cemetery, Austin, Tex.

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*.
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Interviewer Biography

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, forthcoming 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 BA 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, DC: 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 EDDIE BERNICE JOHNSON OF TEXAS—
INTERVIEW ONE

K. JOHNSON: My name is Kathleen Johnson. I'm with Matt Wasniewski who is the House Historian. Today's date is July 19, 2022. We are in the House Recording Studio in the Rayburn House Office Building. We are with Congresswoman Eddie Bernice Johnson to talk about her House career. Thank you so much for coming in to talk to us today.

JOHNSON: Thank you.

K. JOHNSON: To start off, when you were young, did you have any female role models?

JOHNSON: Yes, I had several—my paternal grandmother, my mother, and several teachers—that I had great admiration for.

K. JOHNSON: What was it in particular that drew you to them or made you want to be more like them?

JOHNSON: Well, I think that I had an experience with my paternal grandmother who had cancer when I was young. We sent her to Cleveland Clinic and all that, but, ultimately, she died. And she kept a diary, so we read her diary after that. She had four boys and one daughter, and my father was her second boy. All of them went to World War II. She had felt this nodule under her arm but was determined to wait until all of her boys got home. All of them did get home except for one. But when my father came, who was kind of the leader of the pack even though he was not the oldest, she wrote him a long letter and said she thought she needed to come and go to the doctor. She was diagnosed as having cancer, and they tried Cleveland Clinic and hospitals in Waco [Texas], but she ultimately—after about six months—died.

During that time, I thought as a kid, if I could just be a doctor, I could have saved her. So, all of my junior high school and high school days, I was thinking of trying to go to medical school. But my high school counselor said I should be a nurse because girls were nurses and men were doctors. Now, that was a long time ago. Now, I think that women probably almost outnumber men in medicine.

But, anyway, I never regretted being a nurse. I enjoyed the challenge and I enjoyed the work. So, I did pursue nursing after my counselor suggested it. I read in a magazine, as a matter of fact, where I could take a test and become a licensed vocational nurse. I pleaded with my father to let me spend $30 and get this exam so I could be ready to go to work when I got out of high school instead of going to college. And he finally said, "Okay." I got it. I read it. It had all the answers as you would read. Nobody was supervising you, so I made 100 percent. My father said, "Let's have a little chat." He said, "If you go into a hospital now that you have passed this test and you got a little certificate, what is the first thing you would do?" I couldn't think of anything that I would do. So, he said, "That's why I keep telling you, you got to get a good education." And so, he stayed with that.

When I got ready to graduate, there was not an institution in Texas that I could go to—an accredited national program in nursing—so I ended up going up to Saint Mary's at the University of Notre Dame. Rode a train for 28 hours. Now, you can get there in an hour and a half. [laughter] I finished that program. Well, actually, I didn't finish my degree. After the third year, I took my exams and I passed them all. I was excited about being an RN, so I quit school and moved back to Waco to go to work. My father was working at the VA [Veterans' Affairs] hospital there and they only had one service, which was psychiatric, which was my interest and specialty. So, I ended up

going to Dallas. I had a choice between Marlin, Temple, and Dallas, so it wasn't a big choice for me to leave Waco but to go to Dallas. I went there and started my career.

WASNIEWSKI: So, you were born in Waco, Texas, and we're wondering if you can tell us a little bit about the impact that segregation had on your childhood.

JOHNSON: Segregation was the way of life. In my neighborhood, we had both one Latino family and two White families, and the rest of them in my block were African American. Their professions spanned the gamut from being a dentist, a physician, a concrete person, a person who collected trash, and teachers. It was a big mixture of people.

My father, who was a son of a college graduate, did not want to go to college because he said he could only teach or preach. He wanted to be a businessman, so he had two small businesses on the side of his job. He worked as a nursing assistant at the VA hospital, and he had a little tailor shop, and he had a truck that he would either lease out for someone else to drive or he would drive people, meet with people. This was really right after World War II when people—especially African Americans—were moving around, moving out of the South and so, he had that business going at the same time.

K. JOHNSON: What role did the civil rights movement play in your political activism?

JOHNSON: Well, both of my parents were very sensitive to civic activity. Both of them were pretty active. My mother focused more around the church activity. My father was one to be on whatever was going on in the community. And the sensitivity of voting came very early in my life. The first time I voted, I had to pay a poll tax. But I had finished school and was living in Dallas at that

time and was married, because you had to be 21, then, to be old enough to vote.

I immediately became active in my—I grew up being active in the YWCA [Young Women's Christian Association]. It was just a block from where I lived. And so, we were pretty sensitive to civic involvement, just having the parents that we had in my family. He frequently visited the school, which I used to hate, but I knew he was going to be coming—my father—to check on us to see how things were going, and kept us pretty busy, and used his truck for hayrides for all the kids. So, we were very well known with classmates in the neighborhood. When they got ready to have something like that, they knew to come to our house.

K. JOHNSON: There was an example that Matt and I read about when you went shopping and you were trying to pick something out and were treated differently because of your race.

JOHNSON: Yes, now that was after I graduated and moved to Dallas. My roommate was getting married up at Notre Dame, and I wanted to show that I had been pretty prosperous, so I went looking in the best stores. They were mostly locally owned then—Volk Brothers and Harris, Neiman Marcus—and I found that you could not look through the racks. They would take you to a dressing room, but you could not try on shoes nor hats. And of course, being Catholic at the time, we all had to have hats. I was just kind of shocked because I had never really been downtown to do much shopping since I'd been there. I'd just gotten going about the first of the year, and this was in May or early June.

And so, I did find enough to go on and when I came back, I went to a YWCA meeting and I said, "I couldn't believe that I couldn't try—" I said, "I

could do that in Waco, and I can't do it in Dallas?" They never really thought about it that much. It had just always been that way. And so, I said, "It's time for us to do something about this." So, it was about seven of us who decided that we were going to spread the word about a boycott. We called ourselves "50 Sensitive Black Women." We never had over about 9 or 10, but we called it 50. [laughter] And it worked pretty well. We had one of the weekly newspaper owners and editors put a photographer downtown, so anybody going in the stores, they'd take a picture of them and put it in the paper to intimidate them.

But the first store that opened was the most exclusive one, Neiman Marcus. That's when I got a chance to meet Stanley Marcus. And there was also another store, Sanger's. The Sanger family I got to know as well and became a very good friend to Hortense [Landauer] Sanger, who was the wife of the son of the owner. But it really started me on a civic involvement that I have really kept up the whole time. Many of my people that, back during that time, are gone now because I was the youngest one in the group.

We had meetings throughout the community and would go to White homes to discuss what we were interested in doing. We were able to get support, primarily from the Jewish community. And so, it did open up, and I just kept busy with—because shortly after that, open accommodations start being discussed, restaurants and that sort of thing. They put together a 14-man committee to deal with that, and there were 14 White and 14 African Americans, I mean seven of each. So, we put our own seven [women] together. It was church women, Jewish women. We had one Greek woman, a lot of YWCA, and I was the youngest one in that group. I used to get teased because my bridge club people would say, "You hanging around with all

those old women and being late coming to the [laughter] bridge game each time." And I said, "Yes, but I can't get out of it."

But anyway, that's where I kind of started my more civic involvement, and it really has led to lifelong friendships. One of the sons of one of the women that started off with us is now like a family member, and he's been president of the National Trial Lawyers. He's very, very wealthy. And so, he calls me his sister, but I met him when he was 15 or 16, and his mother was in our little group of rabble-rousers. But we never really had a run-in with police because we would just sit and talk about our strategy, go and meet with people, and things finally did open up.

We even checked menus because we learned that some of the restaurants had White menus and Black menus. Black menus had higher prices. We just checked those kind of things out. That was like in '58, '59, and then one of the next things I got involved with is helping some candidates. I had a neighbor to run for the school board, Dr. Conrad, and I walked and helped with that. Then, we brought a lawsuit against single-member districts, and I walked from door to door to help raise money to pay for it.

We had an ad hoc committee, and that's when I was asked to step away from the committee so I could be nominated as a candidate. It just didn't occur to me what that really meant, but I went ahead and did that and found myself running for office. I was in such a denial that on file and registration day, I was sitting at home with my son working on an assignment, and I got this call saying, "Where are you? It's 10 minutes to 6:00, and it closes at 6:00." So, I got in the car and rushed down. I had to park it and run a couple of blocks. I got to the headquarters about two minutes past 6:00. But one of the former Dallas Cowboys that I had met at some of these meetings had filled out my form as much as he could, and he said, "This was filled out before

6:00, and all she has to do is sign it." So, they asked me for my $50 filing fee, and I didn't have it, so they gave me 30 days to come up with that $50. But that was the beginning of my getting into elective office.

WASNIEWSKI: Two follow-up questions on that. Was this for the Texas legislature seat?

JOHNSON: Yes, Texas house.

WASNIEWSKI: And who was the Dallas Cowboy?

JOHNSON: Sims Stokes, and Pettis Norman became my treasurer.

WASNIEWSKI: When you arrived in the Texas legislature, can you describe what that was like—the environment in the early 1970s?

JOHNSON: It was very interesting because the speaker's race was going on before that. And so, many of the people that had kind of heard of me, which included Lady Bird [Johnson] and her secretary, Miss [Liz] Carpenter, had kind of suggested that I support one of the candidates running, and so I just said, "Okay." I had no clue what I'd really gotten myself into in terms of what it meant to be for what speaker candidate and anything like that, but anyway, I lucked out. Price Daniel Jr. was the candidate, and he asked if I would do one of his nominating speeches, and so I did that. That was my thrust to beginning.

And just recently, I was looking at a picture someone found, and it was Sarah Weddington and Kay Bailey, who was Kay [Kathryn Ann] Bailey Hutchison later, and they predicted that the three of us were going to be, would make the history books. Well, Sarah had already pleaded the case [*Roe* v. *Wade*] before the Supreme Court, so that same month that we took the oath, the ruling came down—I think either the 23rd or 26th of January that year,

which was '73. All three of us had remained friends throughout our careers. She [Sarah] passed away either early this year or late last year. It was really an interesting venture because I had not programmed all of the cautiousness that I probably should have, so I just assumed that I was in a body where I could be a leader like everybody else.

On my job, I had been a leader, and so I just assumed that it would be no different. But later, I heard people say, "She just took leadership and moved on." Well, I really didn't know exactly what that meant. I had been a head nurse and a supervisor at the hospital and was accustomed to being a part of deliberations and discussions. Although, it wasn't that easy. As a matter of fact, that was probably my biggest challenge, working on that first job as a nurse.

The second term, I was named chairman of a full committee [labor], which is the first time a woman had ever been named a chair, and I didn't know that. As a matter of fact, I really hadn't even thought about it until later. One of the authors of a book that was from the University of Texas was writing on women in Texas, and she said, "Now, how does it feel to be the first African American to run for office and win in Dallas?" And I said, "Oh, I didn't even realize I was." [laughter] She said, "Well, how does it feel to be the first woman chair in the history of the state?" I said, "I hadn't thought about it." So, I guess I was really kind of out of it when it came to issues of that sort. I just believed in working, asking questions, and exploring things and working with other people to get things done.

WASNIEWSKI: One of the bills that you worked on was to help women get equal access to credit. And you worked with Weddington and Bailey on that.

JOHNSON: Right.

WASNIEWSKI: Can you talk a little bit about that experience?

JOHNSON: Well, because I was a registered nurse and working before getting married, I had credit, but I didn't realize that women that were married could not get credit in Texas in their own names. So, we were talking about it, and Kay said, "Let's do something." The interesting thing is Kay was the only Republican woman at the time. I said, "Well, let's all of the women get together on this." I think there was six of us, and we all signed on. It had got to be funny on the floor because one of the women—I think she was the one from Fort Worth—came in with a baseball bat that day, and so we kind of demonstrated at the mic. And so, the men kept saying, "Well, it looks like they're going to start a war if we don't vote with them." [laughter] We didn't realize the real impact of it until it was over because we all stood together and was able to get it done, where a woman could get credit without her husband's name.

K. JOHNSON: While you were serving in the Texas state house, Barbara [Charline] Jordan was representing a district in the House of Representatives.

JOHNSON: Well, she was in the [Texas] senate, but she came here [U.S. House] when I went to the [Texas] house there. But we maintained a relationship up until her very sick days.

K. JOHNSON: What were your impressions of her when you were serving in the state house and she was here in Congress?

JOHNSON: Well, we kept in touch a lot, because she would not speak anywhere in Texas unless she had me to check to see what it was going to be like. She was interested in making sure that it was not an audience that was going to cause a lot of questions about her doing it, so she would give me an assignment to go out and check these groups out and see what they consisted of and what

questions they might ask. We kept in touch because of that. She had taken speech lessons, so she was really a great speaker. I never became a great speaker, and never took lessons. I just did it as I saw it. [laughter] But I always admired her for being able to speak so forcefully.

WASNIEWSKI: During the [James Earl "Jimmy"] Carter administration, you were a regional director for the Department of Health, Education, and Welfare.

JOHNSON: Yes.

WASNIEWSKI: We're wondering how that shaped your political outlook policy-wise, and then also, did it prepare you to go on and run for the House eventually?

JOHNSON: Well, it was interesting. Yes, it was quite a challenge. And Secretary [Joseph A.] Califano was the secretary. He came to visit and we were sitting at the table, and he was also interviewing a candidate that I had made a recommendation to be a federal judge. We all sat at the table in the office. Barefoot Sanders was the candidate. And he said, "You know something? I think you could go for a higher office. I said, "Well, I don't know." I said, "Newspaper people are always mentioning that, but I don't have any desire to do it." He said, "Well, I'll tell you what. Let's try to look at something in DC to give you a little bit broader experience." And so, we did, but the very week that I moved up here is when he got fired by President Carter, and I was just scared to death. I thought, "Oh, what am I going to do?" But Secretary [Patricia Roberts] Harris, who was somebody I had met, became the secretary, and so right away I asked for a meeting with her to try to figure out where I stood in all of this. She said, "You can do the same thing he hired you for." It worked out okay, but that was one of the scary parts of my life. I had moved up here getting ready to go see him and got the news that he was leaving.

But Washington was very, very different than Texas. I think it did give me some insight and probably a little bit of backbone for, perhaps, moving to a higher level. Although, at the time, I didn't plan it, but when I went home after President Carter was defeated, I had been offered a job there with a cable company. Cable was beginning to be the city. You know, it had been just rural and so, that was interesting. Then, I had a good friend who had been a part of our earlier discussion in the community who said, "You really are a nurse, and you ought to consider getting back into nursing. We need you at the Visiting Nurse Association." So, I went and interviewed for it and took that, and I did enjoy it. I stayed there until I ran for the [Texas] senate.

K. JOHNSON: I wanted to ask you a follow-up before we move to the next question. You said that DC was very different than Texas. Can you give an example of what you meant by that?

JOHNSON: Well, I thought it was a little bit more backstabbing, a little bit more aggressiveness among the federal employees. They seem to only be interested in what you can deliver for them. It was a very different environment.

K. JOHNSON When you served in the Texas state senate, what lessons did you learn there that helped you before you came to the House?

JOHNSON: Well, actually, the whole time I was in the senate, somebody was pushing for me to look at a congressional seat because the courts had ruled that it should be an African-American seat in Dallas. But the lines really had not been drawn to support it and so, both the governor and the lieutenant governor had said, "When we draw lines this time, that seat's going to be there." I was made chair of redistricting, and, oh God, that was gruesome. I can't even describe the kind of pressure and the viciousness that went on with that process.

But I just tried very hard to be fair to everyone, regardless of party, and try to get it done. We got it done. It looked awful the way the lines were, but the courts upheld them. It was the first plan in the country that was done with computers, which makes it really ugly because they can count the gender and the race in every household. They had the blue dots for Democrats, the red dots for Republicans, and so that's when a lot of the gerrymandering started. I mean, real serious gerrymandering. It has been, I think, good and bad for this country. The extreme gerrymandering produces extreme people.

WASNIEWSKI: Just to follow up on that experience as the committee leader, did that experience—dealing with the gruesome politics—did that prepare you for a leadership position later down the road?

JOHNSON: I think so, because I never had been overly Democrat or overly Republican, because in Texas, everything was a Democrat at that time. But you had the same struggles, they just were all the same party. I think when I was in the house, there were about maybe five or six Republicans, and in the house, Democrats were still the majority. But getting things done didn't really make a difference that much because you had a majority. I never served without a majority in Texas, but it didn't mean you're going to have them all on your side. You had to work just as hard with the Democrats as you did with the Republicans and sometimes harder. But what it did do is give me a sense—I think that, and also with my psychiatric training, gave me a sense that everybody was a person, and not to put them in a cubbyhole until you had a chance to visit with them and to realize that they had as much right as you to think their way as you have to think your way. And that's what I've continued because some of the people that can sound the most gruesome, I'll just go ask them how they came up with those ideas.

K. JOHNSON: You mentioned that people were telling you that you should run for Congress, and so in 1992 you did. But why did you want to run for that seat that had been created?

JOHNSON: Well, the newspaper—after I served one term in the Texas house—kept saying that, "I think that she's ready to go to DC." And I thought, "Please. I've just been here one term." But then my second term is when I took an appointment with the Carter administration, and people just kept bringing it up. But I just never really thought that was possible. There were people who had been in these same positions a very long time. But after the courts ruled, and the lieutenant governor said to me, "I want you to chair redistricting next time because we've got to have that seat. It's been over a decade, and we still didn't get it," and so, I just said, "Okay." But I'll tell you, the whipping I went through with some of the people trying to save their seats at all costs, but it all turned out pretty well. All the people that were pressuring me on both sides—as a matter of fact, I had an easier time working with Republicans than I did with Democrats at the time. [laughter] The seat that I had was just a string that ran from Tarrant County—from Fort Worth—all the way to McKinney, just about right around the freeway. It was later challenged by, I don't know whether she was a Democrat or a Republican, but she said it was an unfair way to draw lines, and so back to court we went. Then, everybody was changed, and now it just seems like I've been in redistricting ever since then because the lawsuits never end. [laughter]

K. JOHNSON: Did you receive any good advice—memorable advice—in that first campaign when you were running for Congress that you recall?

JOHNSON: Well, I think the thing that my campaign manager kept pointing out is, do your homework, take a position and be able to defend it. And so, that's what I've always kept in mind. Don't be afraid to change positions, but if you take

a position, have a reason, have an understanding of why. I've always tried to do that.

WASNIEWSKI: Did you have any overarching campaign strategies?

BRIEF BREAK

WASNIEWSKI: So, I was just asking, during that first campaign, what was your overarching campaign strategy? How did you approach it?

JOHNSON: Well, I had two people to help me design the strategy. One was a statistician, Jewish male, and the other one was the Dallas Cowboy I was talking about. And one was aggressively pushing me to get out there and hit those doors, and the other one was also making sure that I knew what the issues were and to get as much as information from the voter as I was trying to give. We set a quota of 40 houses per day, and I would start about 4:30 or 5:00 in the evenings except for weekends. That pretty much was my strategy—ringing doorbells, talking to the people. I spent about $5,000 my first campaign, and now you got to spend more than that to file. [laughter] But during that time—that was 50 years ago this year—I really didn't get a lot of money. I got $5, $25, and that sort of thing.

It was almost the same way when I ran for the Congress. Jim [James Albon] Mattox, who had been a good friend and we had served together at Texas, and he was in Congress at the time. He said, "Let me tell you what I did last summer," because we had our primary early and then we didn't have to do anything until November. He said, "I called everybody in the district over 65 and asked them for $5." So, I had picked up that strategy, and we raised quite a bit of little money that way. But I mostly tried to put myself before the people and talk with them. Some people would say, "Oh, the last time you ran, I was living in another section and you came to my door." So, that

predominated my campaign for the [Texas] house and the Texas senate. I couldn't do that for Congress. It was too much territory. But people mostly remembered some of the things that I had done during my time in the house and senate, so it was not a difficult race.

WASNIEWSKI: Was race or gender an issue in that first congressional election?

JOHNSON: Oh, yes. Well, it was really all the way. [laughter] I remember one of my major opponents in my House race said, "Let a lawyer make your laws. Let a man do a man's job," and that was his thing. My retort with that is, "How much better can you get than a mother who has to give birth to all these men?" We ended up being very good friends after that, and I helped him get a judgeship. I didn't do much talking back. I was really hitting those doorbells and passing out material and working with churches. I've never lost a race, but I've always worked.

WASNIEWSKI: That 1992 election was the "Year of the Woman" election. You were part of a large class of women.

JOHNSON: I think it was 20-some people, which was really a big class.

K. JOHNSON: When you came to Congress, you were elected in '92, so you came in '93. How would you describe the atmosphere? Was it welcoming for you as a woman? And then, also as a Black woman, how did you feel about that?

JOHNSON: Well, it was welcoming that we had so many women that year and we spent a lot of time together. I'm not sure that I can say that I have come into a lot of gender discrimination here because I'm probably from one of the most conservative states and I've always gone out of my way to be in touch with them—some of the people I had worked with prior to coming. I would just

pick up the telephone and call them individually and talk with them about different things and try to establish some kind of relationship.

K. JOHNSON: What about any sort of racial bias or discrimination? Did that ever happen?

JOHNSON: Yes. You feel it, but I've felt it all my life. I try not to let it upset me that much. I'll wait until I think an opportune time might be and might bring it up to someone on a private basis. But I mostly chuckle about it because it is clear that there are still struggles from people—I think predominately from the South, but not restricted to the South. When you've been a minority all your life, you learn to live with some of it, and that you can't live with, you go sit down and talk with the persons. But I find that I can talk with some of them better than they can talk to each other in visiting with them. Just like, "Can I take a minute of your time?" And discuss something with them. That's the way I do it on my committee. If I know someone is antagonistic about anything, I'll call them and ask them what their problems are and how we can straighten it out, or, "What would you like to see done?" It's worked pretty well.

WASNIEWSKI: During your House career, you served on Transportation and Infrastructure and the Science, Space, Technology Committee.

JOHNSON: The whole time.

WASNIEWSKI: The whole time. But in the 103rd Congress [1993–1995] when you were a freshman, were there any other committees that you were interested in, or were you interested in those two from the start?

JOHNSON: Well, I really was. At least I thought I was, because being a nurse, I wanted to be somewhere where there was health policy. But that was Energy and Commerce and Ways and Means, so I went to Mr. [Daniel David]

Rostenkowski and had a conversation with him. He said, "Let me watch you for a term or two, but freshmen don't usually get on this committee." And so, Jack [Bascom] Brooks was my senior Member from Texas, and he said, "Well, you're going to have to get on some committee and really work at it to prove yourself to us," so I said, "Okay." So, Mr. [George Edward] Brown [Jr.], who was chair of Science and Technology, had sent me a letter and invited me to that committee because of my nurse background, so I took that. Then I went to Jack Brooks and I said, "Well, what is it that would be important to Texas if I can't get what I want?" He said, "Why don't you take Transportation?" And I said, "Okay."

I was still working with getting ready to try to get on one of the other committees for the next election, but we lost the majority big time the very end of my first term. We actually lost members of those committees because of the ratio change. So, I just stayed where I was, and then when we got the majority again, I had people still saying, "Well, no, stay, stay, stay. Wait here and stay." [laughter] And so, I just made up my mind to stay where I was because I had enjoyed both committees and had been very involved with both committees. So, I just made up my mind to stay where I was.

When the health legislation came up and the health care, I just worked with the kind of the special ad hoc committees on that. Because when that first came up and we were doing what ultimately became Obamacare, there were very few people who had actually been in actual practice in health care, and especially with hospital care. I just worked as an ad hoc member trying to help with that.

K. JOHNSON We definitely want to ask you more questions about that, but just a few more about your committee service. So, you were a subcommittee chair for Transportation and Infrastructure—the Water Resources, and Environment

Subcommittee. What were some of your responsibilities while you were subcommittee chair?

JOHNSON: Well, we were going through a lot of flooding and stuff at home, and I was a subcommittee chair—a ranking member on Science and Tech—at the time. When I looked up and saw the opportunity to go to that one, I gave it up and bid for the other one and had got it because we had the Trinity River that was overflowing. Where I live in Dallas is supposed to be in a very dry area, but we've got these tributaries and the Brazos River that runs almost the entire state to the Gulf [of Mexico], and we deal with a lot of flooding. I wanted to be there to make sure I could focus on that very specifically. I was able to do that, and we were able to get some relief.

WASNIEWSKI: We were wondering if we could get you to talk a little bit about some policy issues you were involved in. Can you tell us a little bit about how you worked to expand and also to protect the Clean Air Act?

JOHNSON: Well, actually, it was so important, and the Clean Air Act actually came under a Republican administration. Each time I would go to a Republican and I would say, "On this Republican act here—this dealing with the environment and air and what have you—things are getting worse." But I would always put it out front to a Republican that this came from a Republican administration. We've had a major step back now with that Supreme Court ruling, but it is clear that we need to focus even more on our environment because—well, even this virus, I think a lot of it has to do with the temperatures not going down and all. It's really pretty important, but I know that in my state, the fear is the oil and gas industry. But we've got to continue to focus on that because this entire planet is seeing the risk that we take by not focusing more.

K. JOHNSON: That's a good segue to your service on the Science Committee. You have broken so many barriers in your career. And one of the bigger ones—at least as far as we're concerned, for House history—is being the first woman and the first African American to chair the Science Committee. What do you think that meant to the institution to have that barrier broken? And then, what did it mean to you personally?

JOHNSON: I hadn't even thought about what it was going to mean, but apparently it has meant a lot. I had built a lot of relationships with groups that worked in all of these areas, with the research labs and all. I had to learn a lot, so I reached out a lot to the labs and did a lot of research. When my time came, [laughter] I was ready, I thought, to take over the leadership.

As a ranking member, which I was, I think, eight years before. Two years under Mr. Hall—Ralph [Moody] Hall—which was rather present, but I had known Mr. Hall over the years prior to coming here. And the second one was Lamar [Seeligson] Smith, who was also a Texan. I spent the whole six years of his reign as ranking member. That was quite an experience, and yet, we remain friendly, but I just thought he wasted a lot of time on unnecessary right-wing positions. But we still maintain a friendship, but, actually, he taught me how not to run a committee. I have tried to stay in touch with Members that seem to have some basic questions on issues, to take the time to help to research their concerns and say that to them directly. We have probably passed more bipartisan legislation probably than any other committee at this time.

As a matter of fact, I've been working today because we had, in this so-called COMPETES [Creating Opportunities for Manufacturing, Pre-Eminence in Technology, and Economic Strength] Act or USICA [U.S. Innovation and Competition Act] or whatever it'll be called—we have about 17 bills and all

of them pass bipartisanly. We're trying to add that to whatever they bring to the floor because it was vetted throughout our committee. Most of the time, it came out of committee with the voice vote. It's really important, because when I first went to that committee, it was very clear that we needed to do some focusing on minorities in the country. And somebody would always say, "There's no research that shows that." So, we had to go back, do the research. I started with, there was another woman on the committee, a Republican from Maryland. What was her name?

WASNIEWSKI: [Constance A.] Connie Morella?

JOHNSON: Connie Morella. Connie Morella and I did a lot of research on women in the industry, and that is what gave us some credibility to continue to do legislation on including more women and minorities and to focus on STEM education for workforce readiness. There were times when that got a little rough, but I'd take the time to visit with individual Members to try to make sure that they understood where we were coming from.

Now, we have researched enough and got the support from the community at large—from the college level and the experiences—that we don't have as much of a problem, now, focusing on some opportunities for women and minorities. Because, first of all, we need the talent, and, secondly, we are in a constant struggle trying to keep up because of the lack of readiness in our workforce. But when we did the research, we realized that so many women—and not minorities, necessarily—had felt pushed out of those areas for various reasons—stopping for childbirth and having to stay home sometimes because of not having a babysitter or whatever. We were just getting to the point where almost every kind of research that we need to substantiate something, we have now been able to do that.

We continue to put more and more into legislation to focus on that population that has felt a little abused in those areas because we need that. We need the brainpower. It's hardly anything without a challenge. You just can't give up on it [laughter] and do what you think you need to do to prove it to some who have never thought about it. I don't automatically think people are just necessarily always just prejudiced because of prejudice. I think they've just never taken the time to see the realities. And so, we've done pretty well in passing legislation to look into those biases and to try to do something to remedy those biases with a fairly conservative committee.

K. JOHNSON: In your experience, did you ever feel like you had to work harder on your committee, especially in those years?

JOHNSON: Oh, yes.

K. JOHNSON: Not only because you're a woman, but you're a Black woman.

JOHNSON: You do have to work harder. You have to do a little bit more homework and be able to explain in a little bit more depth sometimes.

K. JOHNSON: And do you think there's added scrutiny as well? More attention paid to you because you're a minority and you're a woman?

JOHNSON: Yes, that's true, but that's been true all my life. I think that my parents did a lot in helping me gain some confidence along those lines. My great-grandmother was Scotch-Irish, and even years ago, she recognized something. Her family came over in servitude in Galveston Island. She frequently would say, "It's just something about the shade of your skin that people treat you differently." And so, she'd say, "You got to be smart." She lived long enough for my son to meet her and listen to some of her lessons. But she really believed in education, and so her daughter—my grandmother and her sisters

were college graduates, but my father was not because he didn't want to teach or preach. But he found himself a niche working at the VA hospital and having a couple little businesses on the side.

WASNIEWSKI: You talked about becoming the committee chair. You knew how you didn't want to run the committee, but I'm wondering if you could elaborate a little bit on what your leadership style is, and if you can define it?

JOHNSON: I try to make sure that everybody has an opportunity to express themselves and what they have problems with, what they might be interested in. I seek them out for sponsoring legislation to make sure that everybody's included with something. And so, practically every piece of legislation, we can find a Republican Member along with a Democratic Member. I know a lot of times most of the legislation to come out of the committees are headed by the chairs, but I try to make sure that people expressing interests in certain areas—I'll also ask them to be the lead and make sure we have someone from the minority as well.

K. JOHNSON: What were your priorities policy-wise—things that you really wanted to bring attention to while you've been chair of the Science Committee?

JOHNSON: Well, first of all, I wanted women to be better accepted with some differences that they might have. Women are the only ones that can become mothers and have the primary responsibility for children, and that doesn't mean they don't have something to offer. We know that in most of those fields, it's a pretty sturdy job—engineering, medicine, all the courses that you can major in. But it has to be a path by which a woman can be successful, and not only because of fairness, because the need for the brainpower as well, and the same goes for minorities. And so, that's where I had focused.

When I first even thought about it, actually, was when I was back in the Texas house, and Dr. [Jack] Kilby had developed that chip for Texas Instruments. Everybody talked about how it was going to change the world, which it has. I was concerned about whether minorities are going to be inside that loop and so, back in 1973, a Latino man and I passed our first piece of legislation to address this. But what I did find was that it was going to take more than just that. It has been a continuous focus, not just on minorities, but also on women. That's the reason why Connie Morella and I started—I think the year I got on this committee—trying to make sure that we did our homework to convince why we needed to look in those directions. And, of course, as the years have passed, it's become even more important because we still have a deficit in talent in those areas.

WASNIEWSKI: So, we want to move on to a couple questions related to health care and your nursing background. How did your background as a nurse affect your outlook as a legislator?

JOHNSON: Well, I think it has done a lot because, first of all, I had worked up and gone to school and become a nurse psychotherapist. I think that a lot of that background—and seeing and working with people and understanding that everybody has their own right to feel whatever they want to—has helped me more than probably anything else in not being too upset when somebody [laughter] is a little bit too far out there, and waiting [for] the time when I can make an approach and say something to them. Now, I have basically confined that to Texas people and people on my committee. I can't say I've gone around to the whole body, but anyone from Texas and anybody that's on the committee, I'll just go sit quietly by them and talk to them about something and develop some pretty good talking relationships.

K. JOHNSON: There haven't been many nurses who have served in Congress, but what special skills or mindset do you think that you bring because of that background that you have?

JOHNSON: Well, being accustomed to hard work, for one thing. I don't know a single nurse that [laughter] does not have to work pretty hard and have to know details and have to be adaptable to all kind of personalities, never forgetting the responsibility you carry with a life. And so, I think I really don't know of a profession that better equips you to work with people. Because in nursing, you see people at their worst, and you see them at their best, and you can't help but have a close relationship if you're going to be their nurse. In my special training to become a psychotherapist, you also come to believe very strongly that everybody's entitled to their own opinion. And usually, everybody has a reason to make decisions as they're making them. So, what you have to do is try to figure out what that is, or at least express some interest in what can you do to help on an issue or whatever, and also everything that you think. You know, you got to kind of discipline yourself sometimes, too.

K. JOHNSON: Did you form any special bond or relationships with the other women that were nurses, like, Lois Capps and Carolyn McCarthy or any doctors?

JOHNSON: With both of those, yes. And [James A.] McDermott who was a physician from Washington state, I believe. There are a lot more health professionals here than when I came, now. I think there might be a few nurses because there was one from North Carolina and one from Missouri I think, but there is one other one on the Democratic side, too. But they've kind of come and gone. But there is a special bond there because of the discipline that you have to go through.

As a matter of fact, it might be a little better than it was when I went, because when I started, if you were on at night, you were the pharmacist, you were the physical therapist, all of that. [laughter] But now you've got all of these specialties. But I remember having to go to the pharmacy and fill prescriptions. You had to do the speech therapy. You had to do the physical therapy. And we had rural public health where I was in Indiana, and we gave the [Jonas] Salk vaccines all over rural Illinois and all. It was just a lot different, and it's a little bit more refined now than what it was back then.

K. JOHNSON: That sounds like a lot of responsibility.

JOHNSON: Yes, and then we had to do all affiliations, going to different states and various cities for various specialties. And that was up to you to get there, so it really taught you to be independent as well. You were based in South Bend, Indiana, but my psychiatric was in Louisville, Kentucky. My rural public health was Jacksonville, Illinois. My pediatrics was in the medical school in Indianapolis. My medical and surgical was in Anderson, Indiana, with a hospital who were the same nuns that ran Saint Mary's. You were just handed a piece of paper saying you'll do this point at a certain time, and you had to get yourself there. I think that all of that led to some maturity and some decision making.

WASNIEWSKI: You had brought up earlier during the discussion about the Affordable Care Act in the House, that you were an ad hoc advisor. You weren't on one of the principal committees like Ways and Means, or Energy and Commerce, but we were wondering if we can get you to talk in a little bit more detail about your perspective on the ACA as it developed. And then, what were you recommending?

JOHNSON: Well, I was recommending that health care should never be all free because people don't always respect free stuff—kind of take it for granted. But it should have some responsibility for patients, too, for themselves. And so, I said, "We really cannot give it free because the value will reduce in their minds." If you have to pay a little bit and have to follow a few rules, you have a bit more respect. And so, Nancy [Pelosi] looked at me and she said, "I hadn't heard that perspective." I said, "Think about it." [laughter] If somebody tells you that you're welcome to come anytime you want to whenever you get ready, it cannot be that important. But if you have to keep an appointment, and you have to pay a dime for every dollar or whatever amount, you have a bit more respect because you'll listen a little bit more closely. So, I just kept repeating that. I said, "Wait. We cannot give just free health care. People have got to realize they have a responsibility to get themselves in, get themselves checked, get whatever immunizations or whatever that's needed." I think that little bit helps to create the responsibility for one's self.

WASNIEWSKI: One of the other things that you did was introduce legislation to create—and I want to get the name correct here—the National Nurse for Public Health, which would have been complementary or analogous to the Surgeon General. Can you talk a little bit about why you felt that was important?

JOHNSON: Well, because first of all, nurses tend to be crunched, and yet they take all the responsibility. I tease physicians about this, because when they tell us, I said, "What nurse taught you?" Nurses really have the lion's share of patient care. When a doctor goes on to the—they tell them when to start something, when to stop it, what the reaction to the patient might be. But the stature of the nurse has always been crunched when they really are the ones that are firsthand responsible for that patient. Physicians make rounds, but you're

there the whole time—eight hours or more. I just thought it was time for nurses to feel themselves that they had real responsibility and others working with them have real respect for what they do. Because they work, I think—I don't say they work harder. It depends on what roles they're playing. But in a hospital setting where there are patients, nobody is more knowledgeable than that nurse who is with that patient at least eight hours per shift. Physicians give them that respect when they come. They ask the nurse, "Do you think this needs to be changed? Or what do you think I ought to do?" The nurse just spills it out what they need to do, and they write it just like they tell them. [laughter] It's a team effort, but the nurses are equally as important as the physician.

WASNIEWSKI: So, a couple institutionally focused questions here. You are the current dean of the Texas delegation. When you started in 1993, Jack Brooks was the dean of the Texas delegation. He'd been here for 40 years. So, we'd like to get you to reflect a little bit and describe how the Texas delegation has changed in your time in the House.

JOHNSON: Oh, it has changed tremendously. When I came, out of 30 seats, 21 of them were Democrats. Now, we have 36 seats, and I think we have eight or nine Democrats. Some of that has come because there's been more defined parties, which Texas used to be just a Democratic state, although it acted the same way it acts now. But I do think, still, that we still have a camaraderie across those lines, when, to be quite honest with you, many of the very major pieces of legislation I was able to get done came under Republican majority.

[Thomas Dale] Tom DeLay was one of my best friends and supporters during that time, because I've been in the minority more than I've been in the majority since I've been here. I had created relationships—some before I came. I served with him at Texas. When I came, he greeted me in. We'd have

lunch once a week as a whole delegation, and he said to me, "I know I can't be of any help. I'm in a minority." And so, I said, "Well, if I can be of any help to you or whatever, we'll just work together." Well, I was only in the majority one term, and then we were out for 12 years, but I came with a whole list of things that I was sent here to do. [laughter] I just had a talk with him and told him I needed his help to help me do it.

Now, the first term, on Transportation, Chairman [Norman Y.] Mineta—I was totally green in transportation, and I had a long list with him, and I told him what we needed to focus on. So, he helped me pass the first, big, major piece of legislation on interstate highway change in Dallas, but that's a six-or-seven-year type of plan. And when they began on it, when President [George W.] Bush was elected and the war started, they had to pull the funds back, and so they just finished that project in February of this year.

But we talked back and forth, and he kept saying, "It'll come. It just takes a while." And then we were starting a rapid rail system, DART, and he helped with that. And he said, "I'll help you as long as you don't mess with mine in Houston." I said, "I don't care what you do in Houston if you help me in Dallas." [laughter] And so, we had that as kind of a joke. I said, "You take care of Houston's. I'll just take care of Dallas." But I had probably more help at the beginning with him helping me, because just about everything that I tried to do I had made sure was well-researched at home and that I could defend getting it done and it wasn't necessarily just something I wanted personally. So, that taught me a lot about how to get things done.

And then, President [William J.] Clinton was somebody I had known since he was 19 years old. His mother was a nurse, and I got to know her. And we had worked together back in Arkansas, and Texas, and we had worked together. I saw how bipartisan he was. He would pick up that telephone and

just call somebody and talk with them. And one day I was walking through the [Samuel Taliaferro] Rayburn Room and somebody said, "Pick that phone up over there." And I picked it up, and he said, "Nancy?" I said, "No, this is Eddie Bernice." He said, "Oh, Eddie Bernice, I'll talk to you then. I was calling Nancy [Lee] Johnson." I was just stunned that [laughter] the security had seen me and knew I was a Johnson and gave me that telephone. But it let me know that he'd talk with Republicans as much as he did Democrats. I said, "Coming from Texas, there were times when we had to ask each other, 'Is that a Democrat or Republican?'" Because you really couldn't tell sometimes with what they were saying. I think that's the reason why I think more of the persons that I'm trying to work with than I do the party.

WASNIEWSKI: We've talked about Jack Brooks and Tom DeLay. Is there anyone else on the Texas delegation who you either had a special relationship with or you looked at and thought, oh, that person's a good leader, a stand-out leader?

JOHNSON: [laughter] Yes. Probably the one that was a bigger headache to me than anybody else was [Jonas] Martin Frost [laughter] because he was constantly watching the lines and he didn't carry any legislation, but he always wanted to be on yours if it was going to pass. It was a headache working with him in redistricting, always. But we were from the same area. John [Wiley] Bryant was from Dallas, and we were very close. Now, Jim Mattox and I had served at state level—very, very close—but he left during that redistricting time and ran for attorney general, so we remained close that way, but I never served up here with him.

But with the Texas delegation, we were very close. As a matter of fact, even though our dean didn't like it, we continued to have bipartisan lunches up until it was such a big turnover with redistricting. We continued to stay

together, and, as a matter of fact, we still have breakfasts now and then together to talk about certain issues.

WASNIEWSKI: Bipartisan breakfast?

JOHNSON: Yes. We haven't had much lately because I had my knee replaced and I've been out a while. But it's a mental thing with Texans. If you're a Texan, you're a Texan, you're a Texan, and you got to keep some kind of communication going. We would frequently laugh and say, "If California was as close as we were, they'd be a lot better off getting stuff." [laughter] But that's our own way of looking at it. But we worked together pretty well as a group of Texans.

K. JOHNSON: Another topic we wanted to ask about was seniority and how that's changed over time and also how important it's been to you during your career.

JOHNSON: Well, seniority has its place, but I think more than just seniority, the experience—you kind of grow as you stay, and it makes a big difference, I think, how you begin to do things a little differently. You have a chance to study people. You have a chance to travel and on trips you get to know people better. And I think a little bit more maturity sets in. I think that probably Mr. [Donald Edwin] Young was a real good example of that. He'd been here a long time, but he was approachable by everybody, and we'd travel a lot together. He's a big loss for us, actually. But I think that seniority lends itself to a little bit more acceptance of people and their individual personalities and gives you a bit more courage to approach and find ways to get things done. I think that you feel more of a responsibility to achieve something the longer you stay, and you learn that you've got to do it across the aisle.

WASNIEWSKI: We're two and a half years into a pandemic that's changed all of our lives off the Hill, on the Hill. But from your perspective as someone who's been here 30 years and you chair a committee, what impact has COVID had on the institution?

JOHNSON: Oh, I think it has a great impact because we don't see each other. Even on the floor, we don't visit as much on the floor, and we're not on the floor as much. We're just beginning to come back. So, I think it's had a big negative because no matter how strongly people feel about something, if they can talk to each other, it makes somewhat of a difference. And we've had almost two elections, well, actually, we have had two elections, and there's some people I still don't even know. You learn them better if you're watching it on the screen and see the name come up and where they're from than you can on the floor anymore. It's had a great impact because people can't associate as well, and it's been a lot of change in people. I think sometimes when you first come, especially now, you automatically think that the other party's the enemy, in a sense. And if you don't get a chance to talk and make sure that they're human beings just like you are—and they have disagreements, but you might agree on more than you disagree if you talk. A lot of that has been kind of pulled away from us, and I think it's had a very negative effect on the institution.

K. JOHNSON: What kind of impact did it have on you as chairwoman of the Science Committee?

JOHNSON: Well, I'd been on that committee so long, but, obviously, it was different. I think that the fact that I was ranking member for eight years [laughter] kind of helped to make a smooth transition into it. But the whole time I was a ranking member, I was thinking to myself, if I ever become chair of this committee, I wouldn't run it this way. So, you do learn and observe.

And yet, I didn't fall out with the chair. As a matter of fact, he comes to see me pretty often now, [laughter] and he even came in my office and put up a couple of framed bills that we did together with [Donald J.] Trump's name on it. I didn't have a thing in my office with Trump on it anywhere. [laughter] This week, I wasn't there one day, and he came here and put them up himself. [laughter] But he comes to visit pretty often, and we're both from Texas. It's really just kind of not my personality to curse or to be real ugly to somebody, especially in public, so I would just say something. I said, "Oh my God," sitting right next him and nobody would hear. A couple of times he'd leave me a message, "I now believe in global warming." And I thought, it's too late, but it's been interesting to see. I just never really challenged him too much in the committee. I would just wait until he finished and then I'd say what I needed to say. But I think that there were a lot of Members that were kind of affected by it that we had to kind of pull back in and show that the committee could be a different type of committee.

WASNIEWSKI: Thank you.

K. JOHNSON: Thank you.

JOHNSON: Thank you, sure.

—THE HONORABLE EDDIE BERNICE JOHNSON OF TEXAS—
INTERVIEW TWO

K. JOHNSON: My name is Kathleen Johnson. I'm here with Matt Wasniewski, the House historian. Today's date is December 6, 2022. We are here with Congresswoman Eddie Bernice Johnson, Chairwoman Eddie Bernice Johnson of Texas, to complete our interview that we started back in July, and we are in the House Recording Studio. Thank you so much for coming in to speak with us today.

JOHNSON: Thank you.

K. JOHNSON: To start off with, you have been in Congress for three decades now. You've been in the majority and the minority. Can you describe what it's like to switch back and forth between the two, and how you prepare for that?

JOHNSON: That's an interesting question. When I came in in '93, we were the majority, and I guess had been for 40-something years. Most people had taken for granted that it's going to be the Democrats in the majority. And all of it was new to me, so I just proceeded as instructed. But after the next election, and we came back, it was really a trauma of my life to see all the changes that had taken place already, and those that were going to take place. I remember very distinctly that President [William J.] Clinton wanted to come over and address the Democratic Caucus, and we couldn't find a place to meet. We had been meeting on the House Floor for the Democratic meetings. We ended up in the basement in the hallway. And in that hallway, every Democratic Leader's portrait that had been up was on the floor. It was just trauma for me to see what a transfer of power really meant here. It was just, obviously, a very hostile type of beginning. I just never thought I would see that, where it was always possible for majorities to switch back and forth. But, of course, we adjusted to the many changes.

First of all, at that time, we were getting 100 to 200 letters a day, which you don't do anymore. But during that time, they had a folding room to help you fold the letters and get them out. That was suddenly over. So many services that we had come to depend on were just no longer there. And so, there were a lot of personal adjustments that had to be made.

I felt in a way that I was fortunate in that I had been in Texas both in the [state] house and [state] senate, and served in a majority there, both in the house and senate. However, it was never as contentious. I guess I was really from a conservative state to begin with, whether you were Democrat or Republican. But many of the people who came here were still my friends, and I never really thought about the party. At that time, we were still meeting as a total delegation, and I really hadn't even separated who all was a Democrat or a Republican at the time. Well, when I first came, several of the Republicans said that, "I'm Republican, I'm in a minority, but if I can be of any help, let me know." I wasn't sure what that really meant, because I had never worked in the minority party at state level, although there were times when you didn't know who belonged to what party there. Tom DeLay was one of those people that I had worked with, and so he said, "If I can help, you know I will, but I can't because I'm in the minority." And so, I said, "Well, if I can help, I will do what I can, but I don't even know what I can do."

We were meeting for lunch once a week at that time bipartisanly. Well, of course, that all changed, but I still remembered to go to Tom and say, "You know, I need you to tell me how I need to do this," or, "Give me some advice on how to do that." We maintained a relationship even though I didn't want to participate, and didn't for the most part, participate in those one minutes because that bashing stuff, I was not accustomed to doing. And so, I just kind

of made it through that. But having been here now almost 30 years, I've only been in a majority 10 fractured years, not continuous. After the first term, the last two years of the [George W.] Bush administration, the first two years of the [Barack] Obama administration, and the last four years, the only times that I have experienced being in the majority. So it was imperative, as far as I was concerned, to maintain some type of bipartisan relationships if we're going to get anything done. My focus was getting things done. I worked at attempting to work on a one-on-one type basis within what I needed for input or what I was working on.

WASNIEWSKI: You were a pathbreaker in so many aspects of your career, so we're interested in what your thoughts were when Nancy Pelosi, in 2007, was elected as the first woman Speaker.

JOHNSON: Well, that was uncharted territory, obviously, but we were all pleased—and I was a supporter—to see a woman break that glass ceiling. It was an exciting time, and I think women, no matter what party, were excited around the country and even the world to see that the leading democracy had allowed a woman to come to the head of a major body.

WASNIEWSKI: Did you have any aspirations yourself to join elected leadership during your career?

JOHNSON: No, I didn't. The only aspiration I had was to lead the Congressional Black Caucus, and I kind of timed myself when I thought that could happen, and it happened on schedule. I started out as the whip my first term, and worked up through the various labels, which were not active offices at that time. Now, you get one of those offices and it's recognized, but back then you had an office, but nobody was ever recognized but the chair. But anyway, I served in every capacity, started to raise and helped raise much more money,

especially from the technology companies, and so after having been here a decade is when I ran and served as chair.

WASNIEWSKI: Just a follow up on that, which is how important was the whip position for you? Was that an important way to get out and meet people?

JOHNSON: The whip position gave me an opportunity to get to know who people were, to identify faces with the name. Because when you broke into a body of over 400 people and you only know a part of your own delegation, it is hard to get to know who they are. But as a whip, you're more likely to get to know more people in a shorter period of time.

K. JOHNSON: What role has the CBC [Congressional Black Caucus] played in the institution, and how has it evolved in your nearly three decades here?

JOHNSON: Well, I depended on the CBC, and the leadership of the CBC, to help me maneuver myself through what I needed to do to get things done. I went to our senior members for direction to assist me in trying to achieve the things that I came to do.

I had never been in a body where I didn't have goals to achieve. And coming here, I didn't have a role model at home to—therefore, we did not have the leadership that the African-American community had wanted, to give attention to issues they had some concerns about. They liked the people that were representing them, but none of them ever felt that they had gotten anything necessarily from that leader. And they were friends of mine. But in terms of addressing the transportation issues and all the issues that are very different in low-income areas than other areas, they had never seen anybody address them. I came with a list of things that they had desires to see. I had a very gerrymandered district, and it was gerrymandered to accommodate

saving the persons that were Democrats in the area. I chaired the congressional redistricting committee in the Texas senate, and, God, that was really a trying experience, very trying. I had more problems, of course, with Democrats, especially in urban areas, than I did with Republicans.

But during that process, I also got to know the Republicans from Texas and from that area, as I was relating to the kind of things that they also wanted. And that's when I got to know some of the Republicans on a more personal basis because they were easier to work with doing redistricting than the Democrats were.

K. JOHNSON: Do you have an example? You mentioned in the beginning of that answer that the CBC helped you sometimes with your legislative goals or agenda. Can you think of something in which they helped you?

JOHNSON: Well, I went to—for example—Congressman [Louis] Stokes, to ask him about how to address issues in housing, and at that time, with the [Clinton] administration, the Housing Administrator was [Henry] Cisneros, who had been mayor of San Antonio whom I knew personally. I asked him if he would help me redo every public housing unit in Dallas County and consider air conditioning in them. He said we would try to do that. He put it on the books. He didn't stay long enough to see all of it, but every one of them now have been either rebuilt or renovated to be more people-oriented and more comfortable. It's time to start again now because it took 25 years to do that. But that was one of my first goals was contacting a member of the administration on the Cabinet that I had known prior to coming here. It was Congressman Louis Stokes who suggested that since I might know him, to go to him and talk with him about it.

Then our little nonprofit groups in the community that would try struggling through lots of odds to get a few things done. It was really Congressman [William Lacy] Bill Clay [Sr.] who told me how to assist them. And at that time, you could earmark. So, I earmarked money for our little nonprofits that I thought were doing a good job in the community to help with some of those community projects of which they had taken on the responsibility for.

And it went on. I went to people that I thought would know and would sincerely help, and they did. I will never forget that type of leadership that we had that helped me learn how to maneuver and get in touch with the right people to get to know. The first Secretary of Transportation, followed by [Rodney] Slater, who had been from Arkansas, someone I had known through my relationship with President Clinton—because with President Clinton, I had met years before he became President, and his mother was a nurse, and we had that connection as well. But I just made use of contacts and asking, presenting the information as they required to try to see if I could make a difference at home. That started from the day that I got here, and it'll be going on past the last day I'm here [laughter] because I still have projects that we continue to work on.

WASNIEWSKI: How important do you think the CBC is in bringing attention to issues like diversity and equality in the House, and then also in the country at large?

JOHNSON: Well, the CBC has been in my judgment the most active body of people who had a handle on what was going on pretty much nationwide because every portion of the nation, we had some representation. My class brought in more southern representation. But it is almost a feeling that it's hard to describe outside that body because we all have something so very much in common, and no matter what end of the country you might have come [from], you

know you're Black, you know discrimination, you know racism, and you know it's not going to change overnight, but it will not ever change unless you try to change it. So we had that in common no matter where we were from.

When I came, we had people of color in key positions, in senior positions in these various committees. I learned later that some leadership didn't like that. But we loved it because we knew it was difficult for us, and we knew we had each other. When my class came in, we actually doubled the number of the [Congressional Black] Caucus members because of the redistricting rulings that made it possible for a lot more southern Democrats that were of color to come. I felt it was time to make use of being here. Not just being here for the sake of being here but giving some hope and some visibility of how things can change with good representation.

WASNIEWSKI: And that's outside the institution. But what specifically did the CBC do to advance Members' careers in the institution? How did it help?

JOHNSON: Well, we supported each other. We shared information to the new people coming in, which I was one of them. And we traveled to districts. I invited leaders to come to my district for various reasons. They came. Because it might not mean much to the community at large, but for the minority community in this country, the CBC was a superior, prime group, and to get to know one, or get to shake hands, or get to see one of them in person was very important to the minority community. And so, that was very helpful to me, to be able to establish the relationship and to have some come to my district to address various issues or call attention to the fact that they were in the area when they were.

I have felt all my career that the CBC has never gotten the credit because we can't perform miracles, so we've always been in a minority. All the struggles we go through to make a little bit of change is never really known outside this body. But we have spent all night long working with each other, developing strategy to get things done, and I don't know any other single group in this country that puts more energy, more time, and more commitment to bringing about change. That change does not always come, and when it does come, it might be in increments.

A good example is since the Supreme Court ruled and destroyed sections of the Voting Rights Act, we have spent all night long going back and forth with leadership, working with other leaders throughout the body, trying to address the issue. And nobody outside knows that but us. And during the time of John [R.] Lewis's last illness and death, I had just gone through my knee surgery, and I couldn't go, but I sat there and thought about what the caucus had meant to me. I wrote about it and published it in my local papers, is that we pray together. We plan together. We eat together. We disagree, but we don't give up. There is no other group that has come to be more important to any other minority in this body, because that's the one place you can go and get the truth. If they don't support you, you know it, but the world doesn't. They can work out a way to help you get to a point where they can support you. And so, we stand together a lot. We have been more challenged, I think, with the so-called election of the younger new group, "the Squad." But we just say, "Give them time. They'll understand." But this has been a group that has depended and relied on each other with a common thread of experiences, no matter where you live in this country, that has kept us together. It's been the most important experience of mine in being here.

K. JOHNSON: You talked a lot about the behind-the-scenes work of the CBC, but there certainly have been some high-profile events for the caucus as well, and one of the ones we wanted to talk about today was the Electoral College objection in Florida for the presidential election in 2000. What do you recall from that day? So that was January 6, 2001, when you were on the floor objecting to that vote.

JOHNSON: Well, the interesting thing, when that happened in Florida, I was incoming chair of the CBC, so that was a little over 20-some years ago. It really threw us, and to this day, you will not find an African American in this country that did not feel, to this moment, that [Albert Arnold] Gore [Jr.] did not win that race. I knew President [George W.] Bush long before he became an elected official, and I was friends [with him] and I tried very hard to work with him, but I never believed he won that election. I never will believe it. And so although we knew we were on the losing side, we felt an obligation to stand up for what we thought was right. And so, I went to Florida four or five different times, and I was in the Hague [in the Netherlands] when that decision came down from the Supreme Court, which I thought was one of the first major decisions that betrayed this country.

WASNIEWSKI: You were quoted as saying—and I'm going to read back a quote to you here—"It's really a puzzle why a nation of a democracy does not want to see African Americans vote. It's probably one of the most stressful subjects and one of the ones that has our complete attention." Can you explain the personal significance for you of preserving voting rights for people of color?

JOHNSON: Well, of course, I was born Black in a mixed family, and I can see from a family standpoint the difference in how we were treated. So racism has never been new to me. It has also been a challenge, but it's also been, I would say,

an interest of mine to try to do all I could to bring about as many equal rights as possible. Voting is very basic. I didn't have to go outside my family to see the differences in how people were treated. My great-grandmother was Scotch-Irish and she had three husbands. Only one of them was White. But all of us knew each other, and all of us remained close as long as many of them lived. We clearly could see the real, living example of racism, but we quickly learned that to get the equal rights to vote would come closer to giving us our equal standing than anything else. And so, that remains a very high priority to people of color who have suffered the discrimination.

The first time I voted, I paid poll tax, and I was married to a man that was a schoolteacher who could not belong to the NAACP. So that had to be my responsibility, to have the membership in my name. And so racism is not new to me. I've lived it all my life. While I was determined that it was not going to destroy my life, I also was committed to making sure that I could do my little part for making it as equal as possible.

WASNIEWSKI: You've seen so many things in your lifetime, the civil rights movement, the passage of the Voting Rights Act, its subsequent reauthorizations. Are you surprised that voting remains such a critical issue after all these years?

JOHNSON: I am surprised and I'm disappointed that we still have to struggle to get our votes counted. First of all, I have seen the actual activity that is put forward to discourage and to interfere with us casting our vote, which I think is most unfortunate. But that is so basic with me that I almost come to a point where I judge our leaders based on how they stand up for us to have an equal chance to vote. If you don't want me to vote, that means you don't want me for anything. And that's engrained in me. I can't think of anything that is more basic to a democracy than having people that are eligible to vote be

denied or do anything to keep the vote from being counted. That's what I see now, today, almost more so than what I did in the past. It's surprising, and it's also disappointing because I continue to be in a mixed family. My great-grandchildren, none of them are all African American. I don't want to see them to go through what I've experienced. But it's almost as if we've turned the clock back, where we are right now.

K. JOHNSON: Well, that's a segue to January 6, that we wanted to ask you about. Can you describe your experience on January 6, 2021, and where you were when the Joint Session began?

JOHNSON: Well, January the 6th, we had been told to leave the floor and go to our offices after we did the first vote, and they were going back to the Senate. And that's what I did. And from leaving the Capitol to getting over to my office in Rayburn [House Office Building], I got to my office, and the door was locked, which I thought was pretty unusual. I kind of knocked on the door, and they opened, and they said, "Come in." And I said, "What's going on?" They just took me over to our window and we looked out, and we could see the Capitol, and we could see all the mingling that had just started. And then when I saw them scale up the wall, I knew something was not quite right. Should be

But I was not in the Capitol when all of that started because I had been told to go back to the offices, and that's what I did. But from that point until 4:00 in the morning, at one point we were asked to go over to the Longworth Building and go to the Ways and Means Committee [Hearing Room], but when I went over there, there were so many people without masks, and it was such a huge group, I said to my staff, "I'm going back to the office." So that's what we did. We went back to the office and stayed locked in the rest of the

night until we would get back for the vote, which was like 4:00 in the morning or more. Then after that, we went home. That's when we found out that the staff that depended on public transportation could not get home, and we made sure that we got everybody home. But we in my office did not know the entire approach of what was going on until we saw it on the news the next day because I left the Capitol as instructed and went back to my office.

WASNIEWSKI: The insurrection had particular resonance for Members and staff of color.

JOHNSON: Oh, yes, as a matter of fact, I had Members that needed psychiatric support after that, staff members, and many, many, many that we had not even addressed as publicly perhaps as the public needs to know, of staff people who suffered such trauma during that time.

WASNIEWSKI: How do you see the insurrection in the long history of racialized political violence in this country?

JOHNSON: I have not been able to understand why in this time that we had to experience that. It was un-American. Out of all the racial discrimination I've experienced, and many of the activities of having to get up and move and get out of the way and all that, this was the worst experience in our nation's capital that I can even describe. It's hard to go outside this country and talk about it when we are the seat of a democracy for the world. I still have not been able to accept that we've come to this in this country, and we call ourselves the greatest democracy in the world. Where somebody just disagrees with how the voters voted and go and overturn it. We never had this before in this country, and I worry about what impact it's still going to have on the future. This is not America. This is not the great democracy that we stand for, and unless we get a majority of the people to stand up and say,

"This is not what we're about," I question whether or not we're the greatest democracy.

K. JOHNSON: During your time in the House, you built a reputation as someone who could go across the aisle and build coalitions on both sides, if it was an issue that you cared about. How did January 6 affect that for you? Was there a big impact of you being able to still work with people on the other side?

JOHNSON: Well, it didn't impact me against colleagues. I did watch some reactions. Most of the people that I've had a conversation about it feel somewhat the same way that I feel. Some feel more free to discuss it, and some do not. But I haven't really found anybody who liked it, and who thought it was good for the nation. Of course, we have seen it used in political ways both ways. In this business, people do what helps them, and there are many whom I've had an opportunity to speak with that have not said much publicly, but—I'm talking about people of the Republican Party now—but did not agree with or go along with any of it. But it would be a political downfall for them to express it. And that within itself to me is a weakening of our democracy, when you feel that just to express yourself on something like that would get you in political trouble. That causes me to question whether or not we are really dedicated to the democracy that we tried to build. And I think the world sees that our democracy is at risk if we don't take a strong stance to stand up for what we say we're for.

WASNIEWSKI: Did you support creating a bipartisan commission to investigate the attack?

JOHNSON: I support it all the time, and I think everybody on the Democratic side did support it. We just didn't get cooperation to have it so much by any more bipartisan than what it turned out to be.

WASNIEWSKI: And looking at the committee—the January 6 Select Committee—which is wrapping up its proceedings in the next couple weeks, what's your evaluation of that, and what do you think the impact of the committee's work is going to be?

JOHNSON: Well, I think the committee has done the best it could do under the circumstances. It was not as complete as I would have liked to have seen it, but under the circumstances, I think it did the best it could do. But I think it would be a great mistake if we ignored the findings because I do think whether you agree or not, if you ignore the findings, we're also turning our back on a real democratic approach to solving problems.

WASNIEWSKI: When you say more complete, do you mean bipartisan, more cooperation?

JOHNSON: I would have loved to have seen it be more bipartisan. But I also understand why it was not. Because people that come here depend on the support of many. Some of that many, you don't agree with, but you still depend on the majority to get you here. Once you're here, you don't want to cross that majority. I have spoken to a lot of individuals who didn't necessarily go along with what happened, but they were not going to challenge it. I think that happens when we are all left to fend for ourselves on an individual basis, and to speak up sometimes gets you into individual trouble. That's unfortunate, and especially in a democracy, and to me, every time that attitude persists, a little piece of our democracy is chipped away. And that's where we are. I am concerned about our future, and I've said that not just sitting here, but I've said it to individuals. I've said it to groups. I'm concerned as to where we are in preserving our democracy.

K. JOHNSON: In your last interview, we talked about you serving as Chairwoman of the Science Committee, so today we just wanted to ask you a couple of questions

about your portrait. How did you want to be portrayed in your portrait, and did that differ at all from the previous portraits that you saw of Science Committee Chairs?

JOHNSON: Well, I really didn't put a lot of serious thought into that portrait, because in my judgment, it's just going to be a picture maybe on the wall that I'd never see myself. But I had my first committee meeting in there, and it was up on the wall. I want everyone to know that I really appreciate the fact that I've had the opportunity to be worthy of having that portrait, but that portrait to me does not portray my love for this country, nor does it portray the scars that I've been able to work through getting there.

But I appreciate the process. I appreciate having achieved the opportunity to have that portrait. I think it will mean a lot more to young people coming along who can at least say that they've seen some progress towards democracy, and especially girls. Because I learned more recently that it's the first African-American female to have a portrait posted on this [Capitol] Hill anywhere for chairing a committee. I hadn't even given that a thought, to tell you the truth. But that's meaningful. But it also means that equality is not here yet, and so we still have to make these steps in order to say to young people, "You can do this." And especially young women, and especially women of all colors, because if you look around on these walls, the majority of them are men. Think of how many years this committee has been in action, and this is the first female? And the first minority? Well not the first minority as such, but the first African American. We've got a long ways to go. But at least we're on track to try to get there, and the rules have not been broken from the time it was set to achieve it. So, that within itself shows that we are still committed to some of our history of progress.

WASNIEWSKI: When you first arrived on the Hill, there were no portraits of Black women, and in fact there's only one other I can think of, which is Shirley [Anita] Chisholm, which went up in the early 2000s. You've just spoken to what that might mean to young women and women of color, but, personally, what did it mean to you to see that portrait go up on the wall, when you walked into the committee room?

JOHNSON: I thought of my great-grandchildren. I didn't have any grands that were female. I had one son who had three sons, who has three sons. But out of three sons, two of them now have girls. The oldest one has one girl, and the second one has two girls. And that's what I think about when I see that. I think that ultimately, hopefully, it will mean more to them. I appreciate it. I cannot tell you how much I appreciate having achieved it. But not so much what it means to me, but what it can influence other young females, whether they be of color or not, to see that that achievement is possible.

K. JOHNSON: We have a few retrospective questions, some wrap-up questions for you. The first one is, why did you decide not to run for a 16th term in the House? Why did you decide to retire?

JOHNSON: To be honest with you, I was suffering with a knee that was giving me a lot of pain. I knew I had reached the age where I should be entertaining retirement, but I had lots and lots of pressure and encouragement to stay. And I think I would have given into that had I not been suffering from such discomfort in this knee that I was trying to put off until I could get through the session. I didn't get through the session, but I think that—I'm not sorry that I retired. First of all, I reached the age where I should be retiring, and then, secondly, as I have looked back in retrospect, I have not been sorry that I made the decision to retire.

WASNIEWSKI: Because there were so few women in Congress when you first arrived 30 years ago and, even more so, fewer Black women and women of color, did you feel that you not only represented the people in your district, but that you represented women nationwide?

JOHNSON: I hope I have. But one thing I do know that's happened at home, having been the first woman of color to win an office in Dallas did spur some interest. It gave me some challenges because women of color at that time really thought it was a man's job. And so, it really was women—the majority of the women that helped me coming along were not African American. But they stayed with me. African-American women have come along. That has also made them feel that it's possible. So now the majority of the judges in Dallas County are African-American women, and many other positions that an African American had never thought about running for are now being held by them.

I do think it had some profoundness about the achievement, and I'm extraordinarily pleased that I had the support to help me get there. It was an African-American male that encouraged me to run. I had no clue what I was getting into, and didn't have a role model. But I hope I've been one. I never really consciously wanted to be a role model. I wanted to have a record of getting some things done that I thought was expected—that an elected official who has experienced the same type of experiences to focus so that we can elevate and change opportunities and show that it is possible for things to change if you are committed to making that change happen.

K. JOHNSON: Your successor is going to be an African-American woman, and during that campaign, Matt and I found an article where you said how important it was

to have a woman be in your seat after you retired. Why was that so important to you, to have a woman take the spot?

JOHNSON: It was important to me because I felt that just being a lone woman at one time was not going to be enough to have the great impact to make sure that women knew that it was possible. Because still, in my general area, I was still the only woman of color. One sometimes can stand out, but it doesn't make the impact if you can make it a habit or an expectation that someone is capable and is ready to follow in your footsteps and broaden what you were able to achieve.

WASNIEWSKI: Looking back on your career, what has been the role specifically of African-American women Members, and how has that changed?

JOHNSON: Well, I think that the African-American women that have come here have brought a real deep sincerity of wanting to bring about change and a commitment to work together to bring that change. Out of all of us who are so close in the CBC, there's also a little inside corps of women that are very close. All of us have had that desire to see change, to bring about change. Experiences that have been a little different than a male, and the idea that you have to break that mold and crack it a little bit. You can't just be the same.

We know that there has been kind of a fraternity of men that hang together, but until they get the influence of that female to say that the next step is possible, we tend to stay in the same place a lot. But I think the addition of women coming has added a little bit more perspective of what is possible and what we can do together. And nobody can tell a working mother what the challenges are of motherhood. Nobody can tell a working mother what it's like to be at work all day, maybe even taking care of somebody else's

children, and yet worried about where your child is, and what that environment is like, and if it's safe. Men don't have to experience that. Men don't have to give birth to their child that's been attached to them physically. That element alone brings about an interest of intensity that is felt by experience that nobody else can experience.

K. JOHNSON: I agree, as a working mom. What advice have you offered to women who are thinking of running for Congress? Over the years, I'm sure a lot of people have come to you asking for advice.

JOHNSON: Well, what I have tried to emphasize is that running for office is not the important thing. It is the reasons you're running. I had to go through that time to make a decision as to who I would support to follow me, and I did want it to be a woman. It is not a glamour job. It is a job of responsibility, and it looks glamorous. I saw a lot of them look like they wanted to be it because it had a title and people respected it and all that. And that's fine, except that's not the core responsibility of the job. I was really trying to say to men and women that it's not the title, it is the work. It is not the title. It is the commitment to the district you're representing.

I've had it said over and over and over again that for 30 years, I represented the same district. It was the same number. The district was not the same. I've had many configurations of the district, with many different levels of percentages of who's in the district. But there is not a single group of people within those confines of District 30, after 12 or 13 different changes of those lines, that do not know me personally. I committed to the people, and I went out of my way to make sure that the people knew that I was approachable. I must say, though, out of all of those configurations, it has become the same district because the same people—no matter where—still depend on me.

I remember with such satisfaction that I organized the Asian Chamber way back before I even went to the Texas senate, and now they've got about 30-something different configurations of that chamber. But at the time, there was only one, but it shows you not only the growth, but the interest. And to look now, and to visit, to see what contributions that people who had come from all over the Asian-Pacific-American countries and Southeast Asia, and what they've contributed to the area, they still treat me like I'm their elected official. But I don't get any—I know I don't live—my district now does not include where the bulk of them live. But it got them involved, and they remain involved, and they've added so much to the quality of life of the entire area.

As I look back, and look at the outreach that I purposely made for reasons not so much sustaining myself, but to get to know them so I would know what their interests were, has been worth every minute, and it's been one of the joys of my life to know that while all the southern sector of Dallas County takes credit for turning Dallas County blue, it was that north end sector that turned Dallas County blue with my influence. I'm proud of that. That's indelible history. And it's not so much whether or not they're Democrat or Republican, but it's the fact that we have been able to come together, get to know each other, get to appreciate the history that we have, the melting of this melting pot. It has brought about so much more understanding among races and cultures, businesses, and it is an area that I'm very, very proud of.

WASNIEWSKI: So many of your political skills were developed being able to work across the aisle in state politics in Texas and in looking back on your House career—it's been 30 years—the House has become more and more partisan, far less civil.

JOHNSON: Yes.

WASNIEWSKI: We wanted to ask you what you think can be done to reverse that trend.

JOHNSON: I hope we can. Now, I have to give credit to my past training and education. I specialized in psychiatric nursing, and I went through all the training of getting to be a therapist and psychoanalytic approaches. I came to understand and to accept that every individual is an individual. They have a right to their beliefs. They have a right to respect, and I wanted that for me, and I tried to give that to others. So when someone describes to me how ultra-right wing somebody is, I want to know what makes that person tick. I sometimes will reach out purposely to develop a conversation, to see what things we can work on together. Sometimes you can understand why somebody come to certain beliefs. But one thing I never wanted to do is dislike somebody if they didn't believe everything I believed in. I really wanted to know how they got to their part, just like I got to mine. That has kind of worked for me. I've never allowed that party line to keep me from approaching people, no matter what.

I've had people that say—when I said, "Oh, I work with Mr. So-and-so." "You work with him?" Well, I didn't approach him judging him based on what I had heard somebody say about him, or some of the statements they've made. I approach them based upon something on which we could have mutual interest. All of the time feeling that it would help in the area or help the people we represent. I've been successful in some. I haven't been successful in others. But I still believe that if I want respect, I will get respect. And I'll give it as long as I can.

K. JOHNSON: The approach that you're talking about, just trying to get to know someone, do you think that that is rare? Are there colleagues of yours that are trying to do it?

JOHNSON: It's more rare than I'd like to see it. I think we are becoming more divided here, which I really regret, but I really do believe that we can help that by respecting the Voting Rights Act. The Voting Rights Act has given us the right—the states the right—to draw lines. Since we've been drawing lines with computers, you can separate a bedroom, and these districts are so extreme and so confining to view, that it really diminishes the opportunity for that type of discussion. Until we do something about the fairness of redistricting, we will destroy our democracy at the rate we're going now. Because you're not going to bring people together to think. They'll all be cornered off in little corners where they're thinking only their one way is the right way, and there is no other way. That is what we will miss, out of all the decades that we worked to make this democracy, that will destroy it because we're seeing it before our eyes now.

K. JOHNSON: One question we like to ask people at the end of their career—was there anything that surprised you or that you found unexpected about your House service?

JOHNSON: I think probably not much surprised me. The thing that I leave here most troubled about is where we are in our country now as it relates to party. It was really not intended for parties to divide or destroy. And I still think the majority of the people in this country feel that way. But I really don't know what it's going to take for us all to think about that and begin to look for ways in which we can avert the disaster which we're headed if we don't stop. So much party division. We are still all human beings, and no matter what,

until we're addressing the needs that we need to be addressing here, will still be there, and we can't do it alone. So we've allowed ourselves to get into these corners and in a lot of ways, to protect ourselves, we won't speak away from it.

But at some point, if we build upon the founders of this country, we've got to find a way to communicate and get out of where we are now. We've got to get away from making January 6 possible. Because somebody made those people feel that it was okay to come and destroy our Capitol and everybody in it because they disagreed with how the elections went. That is not a democracy and that action will destroy our democracy in any way it comes. Whether it's coming to the Capitol, whether it's shooting people on the street, whether it's distrusting, we are at a turning point in our country, and at some point, we've got to embrace that and address it. We cannot continue to ignore it.

WASNIEWSKI: Just one final question, and that's what do you think your lasting legacy is going to be in terms of your service here in the U.S. House?

JOHNSON: I don't know what my lasting legacy will be. What I'd like it to be is to say I was persistent in making sure that women be included, that women have enough to offer in our scientific world as anybody else—perhaps even more. But I really feel that my insistence on making sure that not only minorities but women especially too, be included, and so completely that our research world will have the results of all of our thinking, not just one side. If we can think research and think reasons for making our decisions, we'll be a better country and a better world. When I think about the fact that a young Black woman out of North Carolina was one of the people that developed the vaccine for one of the most deadly type of epidemics that we are experiencing

now, that had not much opportunity, was able to do that, it lets me know that given a better opportunity, we'll have better outcomes if everybody is included.

WASNIEWSKI: We want to thank you so much for sitting down with us again for a second interview. We really appreciate your time.

JOHNSON: Thank you.

K. JOHNSON: Thank you so much.