The Honorable Yvonne Brathwaite Burke

U.S. Representative of California (1973–1979)

Oral History Interview
Final Edited Transcript

July 22, 2015

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

"It was one of those things I accepted. I probably would have preferred it not to be such a big issue because all the personal stuff was printed, my age and all of these things. And there was a lot of discussion in terms of my background, that I had no children before, and all those things that might have been embarrassing. But the reality is, if you ran for Congress at that time and you were a woman, everything about you was always open to the press. Your life was an open book. What you wore, where you went to the hairdresser, whatever—everything about you, because everyone was looking at you."

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Abstract

Yvonne Brathwaite Burke came to Congress as a nationally-known political figure. Her notoriety in the Democratic Party and experience in the California assembly opened doors not typically available to new Members, such as an assignment on the influential Appropriations Committee during her second term in the House. In her interview, Burke reflects on how she made history on Capitol Hill, as the first African-American woman to represent California in Congress and as the first Member to give birth while serving in the House. As a new mother, Burke entered unchartered territory for a woman Member of Congress: how to navigate a demanding career and care for an infant, all while in the public spotlight.

Burke explains how the fight for racial equality sparked her interest in politics. She acknowledges the demands placed on black Representatives during the 1970s, when frequent travel and speaking engagements across the country resulted in extra pressure and sometimes unrealistic expectations for Members often viewed as national representatives for all African Americans. In Burke's discussion about her African-American colleagues, she shares her observations of the Congressional Black Caucus, including her time as chair—another historic achievement as the first woman to lead the caucus. She also describes the Congressional Women's Caucus and the close bond shared by many of the women Members who, due to their small numbers, often socialized in the House and on congressional delegations. Burke's interest in helping women extended beyond her district to the Capitol, something evidenced by her attempts to keep the House Beauty Shop open and to protect the rights of its women employees. In her oral history, Burke illustrates how race and gender intersected in the institution on the heels of the civil rights movement.

Biography

BURKE, Yvonne Brathwaite, a Representative from California; born Perle Yvonne Watson in Los Angeles, Calif., October 5, 1932; attended the public schools in Los Angeles; B.A., University of California, Los Angeles, Calif., 1953; J.D., University of Southern California School of Law, Los Angeles, Calif., 1956; lawyer, private practice; served as deputy corporation commissioner, hearing officer for Los Angeles Police Commission, and attorney on the staff of the McCone commission; member of the California state assembly, 1967–1972; delegate to Democratic National Convention, 1972; elected as a Democrat to the Ninety-third and to the two succeeding Congresses (January 3, 1973–January 3, 1979); not a candidate for reelection to the Ninety-sixth Congress in 1978, but was an unsuccessful candidate for the Democratic nomination for State Attorney General of California; appointed by the Governor to the Los Angeles County, Calif., board of supervisors, 1979–1980; member of the Los Angeles County, Calif., board of supervisors, 1992–2008; director, Amtrak board of directors, 2013 to present; member of the California state transportation commission, 2013 to present; is a resident of Los Angeles, Calif.

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Editing Practices

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

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

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

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Interviewer Biographies

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

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

— THE HONORABLE YVONNE BRATHWAITE BURKE OF CALIFORNIA —
A CENTURY OF WOMEN IN CONGRESS

JOHNSON: My name is Kathleen Johnson. I'm here with Matt Wasniewski, the Historian of the House of Representatives. And today's date is July 22nd, 2015, and we are very happy to be with former Congresswoman Yvonne [Brathwaite] Burke from California. This interview is going to be part of a series that we're doing with—conducting interviews with former Members and also staff, in honor of the centennial of Jeannette Rankin's election to Congress, the first woman elected to Congress. So thank you very much for coming in today [to the House Recording Studio].

WASNIEWSKI: Thank you.

BURKE: Just delighted to be here.

JOHNSON: Thank you. When you were young, did you have any female role models?

BURKE: I'm an attorney by profession, and my only female role model was one woman, an African-American attorney, that I knew, Martha Jefferson. But I really did not have any political female role models. Of course, I was a great admirer of Eleanor Roosevelt.

JOHNSON: What were the expectations, the societal expectations, for you when you were young about—when you grew up as a young woman—about what your career would be?

BURKE: The expectation for me was that I would be a musician. My mother's expectation was that I'd be a teacher, since she had been a teacher. She kept on those expectations through her lifetime. {laughter}

JOHNSON: And did your mother play a big role in your life?

BURKE: Absolutely, my mother and my father. My father was one of the organizers of building service unions within the movie studios, so my first walking on a picket line was at 14. I really had parents who were very involved, obviously political observers—they weren't directly involved in politics, but always discussing issues and people who were involved in politics.

I can remember my mother talking about the first woman councilman in Los Angeles, who was Roz Wyman. She came to our house looking for votes, and my mother was so impressed by that. First of all, she was 22. She was young. She was a woman, and my mother had to talk about that a great deal, that here was someone who was campaigning and campaigning with people.

JOHNSON: And what role, in particular, did the civil rights movement play in your early years, and especially as that might have gotten you more interested in politics?

BURKE: The civil rights movement was very key to my involvement in politics. I was very fortunate to be able to be involved. While I was in law school, I was involved with the NAACP, and then later, I became involved with SCLC [Southern Christian Leadership Conference]. And certainly, my honor to have been able to walk with Dr. [Martin Luther] King and to visit and to give speeches for him in Atlanta, for some of SCLC's events. And also to have a communication with him over those years, 1965, 1966, before I was really involved so much in politics, but when I was involved with the civil rights movement.

JOHNSON: And what was it like being a woman in the civil rights movement?

BURKE: It was mixed. It was a male movement. There were people in the civil rights movement who were very critical of women who were going places and traveling around. And then, of course, there was a time where there was a

great deal of criticism of women from the point of view of Malcolm X. They would talk about women who had lipstick on and straightened hair. Even though there were times I had straightened hair, there were times I had a big afro. But there was considerable discussion of whether or not it was a time for men to evolve. And within African Americans, that was a little bit different than in the greater community. There was a feeling that men had been kept back, that men need to evolve in terms of the political system, and the whole business system, and the civil rights movement.

WASNIEWSKI: What motivated you to run for a seat in the U.S. House?

BURKE: I was a member of the California legislature. When I went to the legislature, there was only one woman in the California legislature, March Fong Eu. I was elected to make the third—the second and third. There was a woman who had been there for a while who took her husband's place, Pauline Davis. But March Fong Eu and I were elected at the same time (1967) and it was interesting. There were no women in the [California] senate. It was a real challenge. But it was an experience. And it was not as difficult for me, because as a lawyer, I had grown up and worked in a man's world. I had, during my entire career, been involved in kind of a competitive kind of situation, and also one where there were not women partners in firms, and in some instances, they wouldn't even hire women lawyers.

Going to the all-male legislature was an interesting experience because it was definitely all-male, and all of the organizations they had and all of the meetings were all male. But it was a good background for me, and I enjoyed serving in the California legislature.

JOHNSON: What motivated you to run for the U.S. Congress, for your House seat?

BURKE: I came to Washington on a visit, and I remember coming to a reception, and it was at an event. And I looked over at the Capitol, and I said, "I'd love to be here. I'd love to participate here." I had come during the inauguration of [Lyndon Baines] Johnson, so I had come here, but never thinking about whether I would ever want to be a Member of the House. But I looked over, and then I talked to people, and I met Members of Congress, and I said, "I think I would like to run."

WASNIEWSKI: Who were some of the Members that you met? And were you encouraged by anyone?

BURKE: Well, I was always friendly with Congressman Gus [Augustus Freeman] Hawkins from Los Angeles. But then, when I was here, I met others like Charles [B.] Rangel. I met John Conyers, [Jr.]. I met many different Members, and I realized that there was a place for African Americans in Congress and more opportunities, maybe, to take on, being a woman in Congress.

JOHNSON: Were you encouraged or recruited by anyone to run for Congress?

BURKE: No, I wasn't really recruited, but I worked very hard to get a district. And it was very competitive and very difficult. It was a reapportionment year, and I was able to put together a district that I could win in just as I had been elected to the assembly because the person resigned. The former person in my district left, so I ran in an open seat. In this case, it was a new seat that was being established, and I worked hard to try to get that seat that I might be able to run in.

WASNIEWSKI: Can you describe that district a little bit, the demography and geography?

BURKE: It was the west side of Los Angeles, and then it went to the border of Inglewood. It included Westchester. Unfortunately, I ran against a John Bircher for the assembly, and so I was still running in a very conservative area, but it also included Culver City, Ladera Heights, which were heavily Jewish and also a real large area of middle-class African Americans.[1]

JOHNSON: How important of an issue was gender for you in that campaign, in '72?

BURKE: Gender was not a big issue for me. One of the things that was very interesting at that time was "attorney at law" and "member of the assembly" was the kind of thing that made people think that you were able to do the job. In the congressional campaign, I ran against a male councilman. But I had been involved as a member of the assembly, and it was not so much a gender issue. I got a lot of support from women's groups because there had not been a woman elected to the Congress from California for 25 years. Helen Gahagan Douglas had been defeated by Richard [Milhous] Nixon, and as a result, I think women were afraid to run for Congress in the West. So that became a real cry for women who were involved in the feminist movement, in politics. "Here is our chance to elect a woman." And it didn't make any difference that I was an African-American woman. Throughout the state, there was a lot of feeling, "It's time."

JOHNSON: Was that support also financial support that you received?

BURKE: I did receive financial support. I received financial support from women and from a number of entities that I had worked with in the assembly because I had been on the health committee. I had been on finance and insurance. So I had a strong financial base, in terms of raising money.

WASNIEWSKI: Were there any key moments in the campaign that stick out in your memory?

BURKE: Well, of course, getting the district was the real toughie, but the important thing, I think, in that whole campaign was putting together the kind of mailers and the kind of support group that made a good campaign. And I think that I was very fortunate to be able to have that. I walked precincts. I've always believed that you have to walk precincts. And you have to get to the people, and you have to do all of the things that are necessary in order to communicate with people in a very direct way.

JOHNSON: You mentioned that you had been in the assembly before, and you had that experience. How important was that for you, in coming to the House?

BURKE: My service in the assembly was key. I was a known commodity. People knew me for what I stood for. They knew the kind of work I did. I had some successes legislatively, so I had a whole constituency of people who were behind me. I had a piece of legislation that provided that you had to give insurance to babies when they were born. Previous to that time, they had to be six weeks before they could qualify for insurance. So I had a large constituency of people, doctors and people who were concerned about children. I had other legislation that provided a constituency.

JOHNSON: And do you think that experience, did that help you when you came to the House, because you had already served in the California assembly?

BURKE: Absolutely. My experience—many people knew me. And of course, immediately before I came to the House, I served as vice chair of the Democratic [National] Convention [in 1972], and that was just a fluke. I wasn't even planning to come to the convention because I just remarried and had not really planned to come. But there was a real controversy in the Democratic Party. Women wanted a woman vice chair. African Americans wanted a black vice chair. And so they said, "Well, we've got to figure out

someone." And they said, "Well, we have two African-American women who are going to Congress, Barbara [Charline] Jordan and Yvonne Brathwaite Burke, so let's try and get Yvonne Burke." But they didn't bother to say anything to me. They just moved forward and got me selected. And when I knew anything, there was NBC out in front of my door, and at the same time, they were calling to try to tell me that I had been selected. So the next thing I knew, I was in Miami Beach, and it was an experience. I was before the camera for something like 14 hours straight because the chairman decided it was too much, and the people were too much trouble. So I ended up actually spending a lot of time as the person who was chairing that convention, and many people got to know me. So when I came to Congress, I was a known entity.

WASNIEWSKI: What do you remember about that first election night? That first campaign is always a big milestone, but anything about election night, itself?

BURKE: Well, interestingly enough, election night was when I told people that I was going to get married again, and that was a big shock. {laughter} And also, it was a matter of saying that I was looking forward to going to Washington, but that I would be coming home every two weeks. I was going to make sure that I came back, and that was a commitment I made.

JOHNSON: As you mentioned, you were well known—and not just in your district, but nationally—by the time you came to Congress. And one of the things we wanted to ask you about were those iconic photos of magazine covers. What was it like seeing yourself on a magazine cover?

BURKE: Well, it was a new experience, but it was an exciting experience because there were so few African-American women in Congress. At that point, there were three of us, but also, there were only 19 women in the entire Congress, and

there were 19 African Americans who were in Congress. So there was a black caucus [Congressional Black Caucus (CBC)] of 19, and when we got the women's caucus started, it was the women's caucus of 19. So we were hardly a big force, but as a result, there was tremendous identification in the press. Whatever we did and the issues that we brought forward were heavily covered by television, by the written press. So it was a different experience, in that you were suddenly very, very visible.

And coming from the West, obviously, there was a real curiosity about me being a woman from the West, just like there was a huge curiosity when Shirley [Anita] Chisholm was first elected. She became internationally known as the first African-American woman in Congress, and Barbara Jordan, who then became involved in the Judiciary Committee and had a high visibility. So everyone watched every move that we made.

And when I had a child, being the first Member of Congress to ever have a child, it was definitely a lot of press for a number of reasons. There were people who were critical, but there were people who were very supportive, and then there was curiosity. How could a woman at my age have a baby and, at the same time, be a Member of Congress?

JOHNSON: Was that a role that you enjoyed or maybe even embraced, having all that attention?

BURKE: Well, it didn't bother me. It was an issue. I felt that I could utilize the attention to move forward some of the issues that were important to me, and I think that that was one of the things that all of us tried to do. We tried to take advantage of the access to the press, to be able to move forward issues that were of great concern. The ERA [Equal Rights Amendment] was big at that time. Everyone was fighting. I understand some people are talking about

trying to start up again with the ERA. So we had to take advantage of any time that we had for visibility.

JOHNSON: And that specific cover, the *Ebony* cover of you with your daughter, what do you remember about that?

BURKE: Well, it was a cover that some people still have. And it's always remembered because first of all, it was unusual for a woman who was in business or an elective office to talk about having family and being able to carry out their duties. I, personally, have always felt that women have a right to choose what they want to do. In my case, I was at an age where I had to have a child, or else I'd forget it. So it was a decision. I always wanted to have a child. I can't say I always wanted to be in politics because I didn't really always want to be in politics—but I always wanted to make a difference. And I was an advocate, so I knew I would always be working as a lawyer. I was a civil-rights lawyer for a long time, and I knew I would always be involved.

WASNIEWSKI: With all that press attention, did you have any input into how you were portrayed, or did you try to shape that at all?

BURKE: I really didn't try to change my whole appearance or my demeanor, and many people have questioned that. I was never a firebrand. I was always a person who was kind of low-key. I took always a lot of pride in my ability to bring people together, to compromise issues, to negotiate issues. I was always direct. I was me. And I looked as I wanted to look. I did not try to meet anyone else's requirements in terms of my appearance and also my appearance in terms of the public. If there was an issue I felt strongly about, I articulated that issue. I was never a screamer, {laughter} and I was never one who was really combative. And in my case, I found that it was okay, and I never criticize anyone who was combative.

Bella [Savitzky Abzug] and I got along famously, and we were on the same committee. At first, when I got there, we were on Public Works, and I became really very friendly. In fact, Bella and her husband became friendly with my husband and I. She had a different format. She was a different persona, but we certainly got along very well.

WASNIEWSKI: And in all that press coverage, was there—did you feel, at times, like you were treated differently by different segments of the press—historically, African-American magazines versus the quote-unquote "mainstream" media?

BURKE: For the most part, I had a good experience. Recently, someone sent me a copy of *Bazaar*, which is a ladies' magazine, {laughter} and I did have a lot of coverage in terms of women's magazines as well as the mainstream magazine media. There were people who did try to have a few barbs. I remember, as soon as I got there, a famous columnist made some comments because they saw me turning the wrong way in the basement trying to go to the restaurant, and that I wasn't finding my way. And that was kind of interesting.

I also had critics who tried to imply that I was dressing in a different way than I really was, and I just took them on. If they said, "She was dressed in a see-through dress," which I didn't have on, I just took it on and said, "I wasn't. I dressed conservatively on the day that they tried to criticize me. I replied, "Let's look at the picture." There were many photos to prove my appearance.

JOHNSON: With all that attention that you received and because there were so few women when you first came to Congress, did you find that the women Members gravitated towards each other and spent a lot of time together?

BURKE: The women Members really did work together. Most of us socialized to a degree, together. We were in touch with each other. Even though we were on

different committees, we had a good relationship, and Republicans as well as Democrats. We have to realize there were so few women Republicans that they worked with us, and we had a good relationship between us.

JOHNSON: What were some of the ways that you socialized together, some of the maybe more informal things that people wouldn't know about, that you did?

BURKE: Well, I can remember Pat [Patricia Scott] Schroeder and her husband, and my husband and I would go to places together, and we might go out to a restaurant or to various things like that. We would go to receptions, and we often found ourselves together at receptions and to communicate with each other, and we did not shy away from each other. Most of us had a relationship with our districts and with our state party, but we also worked together.

WASNIEWSKI: Were there any women Members—or male Members, too—who served as mentors for you, while you were getting adjusted to the House?

BURKE: Well, I think that Gus Hawkins and Phil [Phillip] Burton were also real mentors for me in the House. Those were two people that I knew and who were very nice to me and gave me a lot of advice.

WASNIEWSKI: What was some of the advice that Phil Burton gave you?

BURKE: {laughter} Well, Phil Burton pushed me to say, "Go on and run for a position on Appropriations. Do whatever." And he was always very brash. I had worked with him in the Democratic Party on things like platform, so I knew him. And I had worked with a number of Members of Congress, the former—[Thomas Hale] Boggs, [Sr.] the former Majority Leader. I had worked with him on the platform when I worked with the Democratic Party, even before I went to Congress.

WASNIEWSKI: Those were some important connections to have.

BURKE: Yes, it was.

JOHNSON: There were four other freshmen women that were sworn in at the beginning of the 93rd Congress. A couple came later—Lindy [Corinne Claiborne] Boggs and Cardiss Collins—but Marjorie [Sewell] Holt, Liz [Elizabeth] Holtzman, Barbara Jordan, and Pat Schroeder. Did you form a special bond with those women because you came in together at the same time?

BURKE: Well, I knew Barbara Jordan because she served in the Texas legislature when I was serving in the California legislature. And needless to say, there were not a lot of African-American women who were in the legislatures, so I knew her from before. I did not know Pat Schroeder. We became very good friends. I got to know her. Liz Holtzman I did not know. So I met her after I got sworn in. Marjorie Holt, obviously, I had not known. She came from Maryland, but we certainly communicated. And particularly Barbara Jordan, Pat Schroeder, and I were involved in many issues together.

I met Cardiss Collins, when she came, I can remember one issue that, it was an issue that there had been in the South, women who were on welfare and had children. I guess people are still talking about this now, that there was a whole approach to say, "We will prevent them from having future children." And they were taking really drastic steps in some instances, as far as welfare women. And all of the four of us—Shirley, Barbara, Cardiss Collins, and myself—had a press conference saying that these actions to sterilize women who were on welfare who were poor because they had children, and prevent them to have future children was really not humane. And the comment was made by some of the men, "Oh, so now we have a black women's caucus."

{laughter} But it was our using—as you say—using what we had as an ability to get out a subject and an issue, and we did that.

JOHNSON: Was there some positive response to that, as well?

BURKE: I think there was positive—not enough for them to change, but at least it became a discussion.

WASNIEWSKI: Did you look to Shirley Chisholm for advice because she had obviously been a pioneer, and she had been in Congress for a couple of terms?

BURKE: She had been there for two years.

WASNIEWSKI: Yes.

BURKE: Obviously, I knew Shirley also, before I came, because when she was running for President, she was coming to Los Angeles. And she always did a lot of lecturing, so I knew her, and she was always willing to give advice. And she was very nice and very kind to us. Shirley was not really a social type of person, but she was always a very pleasant person and was really kind to all of us.

JOHNSON: A lot was made in the press that you and Barbara Jordan were coming to Congress at the same time, so two more African-American women. Can you talk a little bit more about her, and your relationship with her?

BURKE: Well, one of the things that occurred was that the Kennedy School, at that time, was developing a program, and they selected four Members, one of which was William [Sebastian] Cohen, and [Robert Charles] Krueger, from Texas, and Barbara Jordan and I. So we were at Harvard together, doing that fellowship, we spent a lot of time during that period of time. We were there for six weeks. We took classes. We met with outstanding economists like Dr.

[John Kenneth] Galbraith, and we met with [John William] McCormack, a former Speaker of the House who came to talk to us. It was an excellent program, and it was put together for the four of us. So we did have an entrée to the House. They helped us even getting our office and many things like that. So yes, we did have an association previously, and then during this whole Kennedy School experience.

WASNIEWSKI: How would you describe the atmosphere of the House when you first arrived? Was it a welcoming place for women legislators?

BURKE: I have to say it was fairly welcoming. There were always people who were not necessarily excited about our being there. But I have to tell you, in terms of, on my committees, I had a great experience. I initially served on Public Works and Interior—and at that time, Phil Burton was in charge of Interior. {laughter} Absolutely, I had a good experience, and I found that my legislation was, received just the same kind of consideration as a male. And obviously, Barbara Jordan's—her participation on the Judiciary Committee was acclaimed, and she was given every opportunity to introduce amendments on the voter rights bill and a number of things like that.

I only had one experience that was really kind of interesting. I was pregnant at the time, and I had an amendment, which was a "Buy America" for steel, because I had introduced an amendment to the Alaska Pipeline for affirmative action, which went through without any discussion on the Senate side and in the House. But I introduced this "Buy America" to buy all American steel, and it was a great debate between the men. I could tell they were all over on the side, trying to figure out who would have the nerve to debate a pregnant woman on the floor of the House. And finally, they found someone who debated the issue, and I can remember Congressman [John David] Dingell, [Jr.] saying to me, "This is protectionist, what you're trying

to do." So I was . . . they didn't pamper me. Don't think they pampered me or just let my legislation go through. In some instances, if it was something people accepted, it went through. If it was something they didn't know what I was doing, it often went through. But in that instance, it was really interesting to me that they said they had to find someone who would have the nerve to debate a pregnant woman.

WASNIEWSKI: Who came out?

BURKE: I'm not going to tell you, but he later became Speaker. {laughter}

JOHNSON: Well, that's a clue. {laughter} What are your memories of the founding of the Women's Caucus?

BURKE: When I became chair of the Black Caucus, we realized we didn't have any money, and that was the reason, I'm sure, they selected me as chair because I always was involved in fundraising. I've raised money for the party. We came up with the idea—it wasn't really my idea—it was a staff-person's (Barbara Williams) idea to have a foundation. And the foundation could then give events, and there could be contributions for that foundation, and it would provide the opportunity, a source, for the Black Caucus to receive funds.

Margaret M. Heckler was really a moving force in forming the Women's Caucus. "We need to have a caucus. There are a number of things we're fighting for, Republicans and Democrats, and we should organize and we probably should organize along the lines of the Black Caucus." So there was a lot of discussion and agreement that the same method of organization should be utilized by the Women's Caucus, and it was effective.

We would meet in the restroom—ladies' lounge, I guess you would call it at that time, it's still there. {laughter} We would meet there, and in fact, even

those people that we interviewed, we interviewed there. One of the issues that was our first primary issue was equal credit for women. And I remember that [Arthur] Burns was the chair of the Federal Reserve. We met with him to try to get his support for equal credit. He was not very supportive, and he was, he just kind of dismissed us all and said, "This is just an issue that we cannot embrace." But it was our first attempt.

Later, all the women went to China. Not all of us, but it was the Women's Caucus meeting. Bella [Abzug] was the one who initiated that with the Chinese Embassy. We were there for a reception, and she said, "Why don't you invite us to China, all the women?" And they did. I have to tell you that the House gave us a plane, so we had—I can't remember whose plane we had, if we had the Treasurer's plane or Vice President—we had a plane. And we went to China, and we toured and went to various places. We had our spouses, and Cardiss [Collins] brought her son. Bella and her husband were there, and it was really a challenge, but it was excellent that we all came together. And really, they're great pictures. Liz Holtzman, she was part of that, and, of course, Pat [Schroeder]. It was one of our first moves on an international score, to have people accept us as not just involved in women's issues.

We were also involved in equality issues and having a presence of women on a national stage and an international stage. And I can remember, they'd say, "Women hold up half the sky." And Deng Ziaoping, who was the premier there, was nice to us. We were actually received by everyone.

JOHNSON: What was the response like from your male colleagues to taking trips like that, but also the formation of the caucus?

BURKE: The men, whatever jokes they made, they didn't do a lot of it to our face. They were just, not dismissive. They recognized that we were a force, and they accepted it. I'm not sure that they were that excited about it.

JOHNSON: Did you get to see a different side of your female colleagues when you took a trip like that to China?

BURKE: Oh yes, it was great, and we went to a lot of different places. We had a lot of wonderful experiences. But the thing that was very interesting is that even though at that point China was just coming out of the Cultural Revolution, women were beginning to have a visibility in China, and we could provide examples for them.

JOHNSON: That must have been a fantastic trip. There was a lot of press coverage of that trip that we saw.

BURKE: Yes.

WASNIEWSKI: What role do you think that the Women's Caucus played in the institution, itself?

BURKE: First of all, the creation of the Women's Caucus for the first time said to women of every ethnicity and every political party that there was a place for women in the process. And I can't remember the name, but there was a Republican woman from Connecticut who was older, which was very important. She had been, I think, a fashion model or something, or been involved in fashion in some way. She provided an example for older women to say, "There's a role for women." And she was a Republican. She was—and there were other women who were Republicans who were involved, and who provided an example, as well as some of us, who were kind of advocates and are considered by people who as rabble-rousers. Even if we weren't rabble-

rousing, that's how people looked at us. We were feminists, but we brought together women who weren't necessarily feminists. And I think that it had an impact on bringing more women to the House and the Senate.

WASNIEWSKI: I think you're thinking of Millicent [Hammond] Fenwick.

BURKE: Millicent Fenwick is right. That's right. That's who it was.

WASNIEWSKI: She used to smoke a pipe too, occasionally.

BURKE: That's right, yes. {laughter}

WASNIEWSKI: Was there any resistance you recall from older women Members to forming a caucus, early in your career?

BURKE: I don't recall there was a reaction or an attitude not to form the caucus. I also think, though, there were some women who were less active in the caucus.

JOHNSON: You've touched upon some of the other African-American women—Barbara Jordan and Shirley Chisholm and Cardiss Collins, but can you just talk a little bit more about the bonds that you shared, and then also maybe just the extra scrutiny and the pressure that you faced because there were so few black women in Congress at the time?

BURKE: I believe that in terms of the Black Caucus, they were very, very receptive to us because first of all, all of us were activists in this sense. Cardiss Collins had been active in Chicago. She took her husband's [George Washington Collins] place in Congress when he was killed in an airplane crash. So even though she was someone who came in through her husband, she had been a part of the political machine. And of course, it was interesting that you had someone who was like a Cardiss Collins, who was a real party person from her a local party. Barbara Jordan was also very close to the Texas delegation.

I was in kind of a unique positon. Shirley was not necessarily a party person. I was one of these people who had been sometimes with the party, sometimes on the other side, in terms of issues. So I think that even though we represented different personas politically, we also represented something that could be displayed to in the press that was a type of unification. Cardiss could not always vote with us because she came from Illinois. And Barbara could not always vote with us because she came from Texas. But for the most part, we voted the same way and were involved in the same issues.

WASNIEWSKI: Shirley Chisholm was famous for saying that she faced two obstacles coming to elective office, one of which was she was African American, the other, she was a woman. And she always said being a woman was by far the biggest obstacle. We're just curious what your perception is on that, and do you feel like you faced additional obstacles because you were African American, or a woman, or a combination?

BURKE: Well, I never felt that my biggest obstacle was as a woman, but I was a little different than Shirley. I was a lawyer. I had practiced law, I was a hearing officer for the police commission, so I didn't get the impression that I got a lot of problems, even though when I graduated from law school, I was not even interviewed by a law firm. But for two reasons—because I was a woman and because I was African American. But the women weren't interviewed, and the African Americans weren't interviewed.

In growing up in a profession, I did have those two big strikes. But generally I felt that I had more problems as an African American. I had been denied an apartment. I had gone to a dance studio with other college girls, and they put us in an office. I had been through a lot of issues as an African American—even in the West, in California—that I don't necessarily think was because I was a woman.

So my experience in California was probably different than a person in New York. My biggest obstacles, and the experiences that I had that were most discriminatory, were as an African American.

JOHNSON: We've asked you about the Women's Caucus, but we also wanted to know a little bit more about your impressions of the Congressional Black Caucus, your early experiences and some of the stand-out Members in your mind.

BURKE: Well, we had a great caucus. You had Ron [Ronald V.] Dellums, you had [Walter Edward] Fauntroy, you had Charlie Rangel. So we had a caucus of stars. They were people who were requested to speak all over the nation. Parren [James] Mitchell was the caucus chair before me. They were willing to bring me in as chair, I think because they knew I had a history of raising money, and I could come in and assist them in that score. There was a certain reluctance there for a woman to be chair, at first. But, immediately that dissolved, and I was given every consideration as chair of the Black Caucus which was an interesting time because it was a time when African-American men were supposed to be moving forward. But I had a good experience as chair in terms of issues and taking part in those issues.

And of course, you have to realize that certainly in the Black Caucus—as I suspect it is today—we came from different communities. I came from a community where there were aircraft factories and Hughes Aircraft, where I had to really be out front in terms of bringing money to my district from defense money. Ron Dellums was from Berkeley, where he had to be out front in preventing defense money from coming through and being allocated. So my experience was different. Many of the Members came from heavily African-American districts. I did not come from a heavily African-American district. So we all had different approaches. Our Members from the South—

Andy [Andrew Jackson] Young, [Jr.], he had to have a different approach than someone from New York or from California.

So the Black Caucus was a unique coming together of people from different regions with different kinds of districts, but we could come together on those issues that affect African Americans. And coming from California, when people would ask me, "Who do you represent? Do you represent the black community, even though your district is different? Or do you represent women?" And I would say to them, "I have to represent everyone. I have to represent women, I have to represent African Americans, but primarily, I have to represent my district." So we were different in terms of our orientation, but we came together on those big issues. And because we had people from all of these communities, it was very important. And that's—of course, today continues to be the strength of the Black Caucus.

JOHNSON: So with all those different viewpoints and all that star power, how did you approach being the head of the caucus?

BURKE: Well, for the most part—I won't say it's that easy, but you deal with a lot of big egos. But you have to deal with those egos, and that's politics. You have to work out how to get them together and how to solve some of their disagreements. And I felt that, in a way, I was in a good position to do that.

WASNIEWSKI: Was that because of your prior legislative experience, just your familiarity with getting people to come sit down at a table?

BURKE: Well, maybe I didn't have the same kind of ego some of the men had. {laughter}

WASNIEWSKI: And how would you compare—having served on both the CBC and the Women's Caucus—how would you compare and contrast those two organizations in terms of what they achieved legislatively during your career?

BURKE: Well, the Women's Caucus did not have quite the same kind of legislative goals because it's Republican and Democrat. The Black Caucus, during the time I was there, was all Democrats, so it was different. Your role was different. We were involved in the Democratic Party. We could be called upon by the Democratic Party, but the Women's Caucus, our strength was that it was bipartisan.

END OF PART ONE ~ BEGINNING OF PART TWO

WASNIEWSKI: We're curious to know—you've talked a little bit about your committee assignments, but how it was that you actually went about seeking out those assignments and how you got them—Public Works and Interior, to start.

BURKE: I made my request for committees during this whole orientation that we went through at the Kennedy Center at Harvard, and I decided that I was interested in those issues, public works. Housing has always been a big issue for me—my background, really, was in real-estate housing. I represented people on eminent domain issues, that sort of thing, as an attorney. So I was interested in public works, transportation—which I'm still involved in, transportation—and some of those issues as far as the Interior.

Ultimately though, I ran for Appropriations in the [Democratic] Caucus, and I was elected to the Appropriations Committee. There was a vacancy, and in those days, you could run for a vacancy. So I was elected from my caucus to

the Appropriations Committee. And I selected my subcommittees, basically State and Justice because I was a lawyer, Housing because of my housing background, and Public Works, but I did not go on Transportation. But those were the committees that I worked on.

WASNIEWSKI: Can you talk a little bit about the process for running for Appropriations—who sponsored you, who prodded you? But also, this is kind of an interesting time, because there are so many reforms going on, particularly in the Democratic Caucus, trying to open it up to more junior Members. I'm wondering if that played into it.

BURKE: Really, it was a matter of California. There was a feeling there needed to be a Californian on Appropriations. And in the caucus, Phil Burton was very active in the caucus, so he really is the one that kind of suggested that I run. And I ran against a person who represented a district very close to mine, Congressman [Glenn Malcolm] Anderson. But I don't know what the dynamics were or how I was able to get the votes, but I was fairly active in the caucus. I worked with Congressman [James Charles] Corman in terms of fundraising, and I was able to get the votes. And I was elected to the Appropriations Committee. And I really did enjoy Appropriations.

It was very important for me, and had some interesting experiences with Appropriations because it was—at that time, the chairman was from Texas [George Herman Mahon].

And you went to subcommittees on a rotating basis. If there was a vacancy on a subcommittee and you were up, you could select that subcommittee. I did have one interesting experience, because my time was up, and there was a vacancy on Defense—Armed Services, rather. At that time, the CIA was under that subcommittee. So they came to me, and the chairman of

Appropriations said, "Oh, I think we should take a recess." Now, the person who was ahead of me had said he didn't want Armed Services or Defense because he wanted to get on Agriculture. So he had passed. That's how it got to me. So the chairman said, "I think that we should take a recess." So they stopped the process. When we came back, the person who had turned down that appointment then took it, and it was clear to me that—even though I felt I had been very supportive of some of the appropriations, the F-15, some of those appropriations, and I represented a defense district, I believed it was a CIA issue, the reason why they did not want me on that subcommittee. But that was the only experience that was kind of strange while I was on that committee. I had—State and Justice was a great subcommittee. It covered the State Department, Justice Department, and really incredible issues.

JOHNSON: And for a while, you were the only woman on Appropriations.

BURKE: Right.

JOHNSON: What was that like for you?

BURKE: I really did not think about it too much. I was involved in issues that concerned my district heavily on Appropriations. And I really did enjoy very much the Justice—State and Justice [Subcommittee], as well as housing was an area that I had a lot of interest in, and I got involved in some interests with other things that were very important for me.

JOHNSON: I wanted to just step back before we move on too far. You mentioned Mr. [Phil] Burton and that he was influential in you deciding to run for Appropriations. What about the CBC? Because at this time, there really seemed to be a move to get more black Members on influential committees. So was there any discussion about that for you?

BURKE: I'm sure that they were very involved in that, but since this was a California caucus, there was just Gus [Hawkins]. And he, of course, was supportive of me. The CBC did not necessarily get involved at that point. When I left, I think that the CBC was very involved in getting Julian [Carey] Dixon to take my place on Appropriations.

WASNIEWSKI: What do you remember about—Louis Stokes also got a seat on the committee. What are your memories of Louis Stokes, working with him?

BURKE: Oh, yes. Well, Lou Stokes was someone that we'd had a lot of social contact—just like with the Rangels and with Andrew Young. My husband and I socialized a lot with, Lou Stokes and Andy Young. Andy Young also had a little one. And Lou Stokes was from Cleveland. My husband was from Cleveland, so they had background in Cleveland. He knew his family. Lou Stokes I worked with very closely. And also, there are a group of us in the Black Caucus that went to Taiwan on a trip. And we didn't get a plane. We went commercial, but the group went to Taiwan.

WASNIEWSKI: That was a similar experience to the Women's Caucus trip?

BURKE: Yes.

JOHNSON: Lindy Boggs later served on Appropriations the same time as you.

BURKE: Yes.

JOHNSON: What are your memories of her on that committee and just in general, the relationship that you had?

BURKE: Lindy was a person so distinguished and so caring and so wonderful. She was very, extremely nice to me. She had an event for me at her house in Louisiana, New Orleans. And she was always just on top of issues. Well, she

had the experience through her husband. She knew the issues, plus she had a lot of respect, and she had respect on that committee. So there was a willingness to really give her, her due, even though sometimes it's tough, I think, for wives. But she always had a persona of her own, so she did not necessarily go through the same kind of issues that sometimes wives have coming in, taking their husbands' place. She had her own individual power and authority and was highly, highly regarded.

JOHNSON: And as women on Appropriations especially, did you feel like you were treated in the same way as the men, or was there any kind of pushback?

BURKE: During my whole time on Appropriations, I only had that one incident. I had a great opportunity to participate on issues. I went on a defense CODEL [congressional delegation] through Europe with them. I had really a great experience on Appropriations, excellent, and everyone was great. All the subcommittees, the chairman—the chairman was really very kind to me. I only had that one issue that ever came up. And at that time, you have to remember that the CIA was not an identified appropriated amount, so no one knew where it was in the budget. It was hidden, and no one knew. You could sometimes kind of figure out possibly where it was, but I suspect the people on that committee, that subcommittee, had to be told which items to vote for in what amounts. So I guess that was a sensitive issue with me going on there.

But Lou Stokes, he chaired the Select Committee on Assassinations, so I worked very closely with him on that. And that was a marvelous experience. It was an interesting experience. I don't know whether you've interviewed him. It was not only the matter of the President [John Fitzgerald] Kennedy, it was Martin Luther King. And he chaired, I guess, the Martin Luther King subcommittee on that, too. We went to the Attorney General's office to meet

with him, in order to see the reports, the Attorney General and the FBI reports. And when we got there, I can't remember—he was from Georgia, the Attorney General. I can't remember his name right offhand. I will in a second [Griffin Bell]. He served us a Southern breakfast, and he was really nice to us and gave us the report, which was totally redacted. {laughter}

WASNIEWSKI: During this time period, you also served as chair of the Select Committee on the House Beauty Shop. I'm wondering if you can tell us . . .

BURKE: That's correct, yes. No one else would do it. There has to be someone who's willing to be an idiot. First of all, the women at the beauty shop were not treated very well. They were not treated well in terms of salaries, and facility, and everything, and I just became very concerned about them. And they said, "We need someone who is willing to carry our water, to really kind of take up for us." And I know that my staff people said, "You can't take that. Can you imagine going back to your district and saying, 'I chair the Beauty Shop Committee?'" I said, "My feeling is, if they ask me why, I'll say, 'Well, someone has to stand up for women, and someone has to stand up for women who are working over there in the beauty shop, plus all those women who may want to go to the beauty shop. And it's not just us few Congresswomen who use it. It's for all the women, the staff women. They can all use it.'" And I just said, "Of course I'll do it." Now, I'm sure plenty of people said, "Oh, why would you do that? It's demeaning." It was not demeaning to me. As far as I'm concerned, I was trying to help someone, and I did it. And I think that I did help them.

JOHNSON: Well, and it sounds like you had a fight on your hands, too, to try to hold onto the space for the beauty shop.

BURKE: Right, that's right, yes, because they wanted to put them out of the Capitol. But it was something that had to be done. The women had a gym, which was like a room, and they had a person who sat there, but there were no facilities for women. And, of course, I'm sure, Bella—you know about Bella—she insisted she had a right to swim in the men's gym. So they'd clear it out in the morning. She had to come in the morning. They'd clear it out and let her go in and swim. And they always gave us the excuse that we couldn't go to the men's facilities because they walked around with no clothes on. And I said, "How can they all be walking around with no clothes?" But that was the excuse. So we were never allowed to utilize the facilities.

JOHNSON: Were there any areas of the Capitol, other areas besides the gym, that it might have been difficult for you to access—rooms, or clubs, or just something because of your gender?

BURKE: Well, we were not necessarily invited to the downstairs poker game or whatever it was, until Cardiss Collins came along. And she was a poker player, and she played in the game. {laughter}

JOHNSON: So this was a regular game that the male Members had?

BURKE: It was a regular game.

JOHNSON: Was that something you ever joined in on?

BURKE: No, I'm not a poker player. I probably should never have said that. You can delete that. They don't play poker down there. {laughter}

WASNIEWSKI: So we've talked a little bit about you becoming the first woman in Congress to have a baby while serving. Just—what was the response of your colleagues in general, both sides of the aisle, to that news, when you broke the news?

BURKE: People were very kind and very nice to me. And I can remember sitting next to one of my colleagues who was from Texas or for some place, and he said to me—one day, I had a cold, and he said, "I can tell that you're uncomfortable today." I said, "Yes, I'm a little uncomfortable." He said, "Well, don't sit here." I said, "No, I'm fine. I'm fine." So I think it was that kind of thing.

And then Leo [Joseph] Ryan, when I was just about ready to deliver—I lived in Potomac, Maryland, at the time, and he said, "I'll drive you to and from the office." So my husband would drive me to one point, because he came from a different point in Potomac, and then I rode with him back and forth during the last month of my pregnancy.

WASNIEWSKI: How was leadership when you went to them and had to make the case that you were going to need time away, maternity leave?

BURKE: I did not ask for it. I did not ask for time away. I took the position that I would stay until the time that I had to leave, and I would just take regular sick leave. There were plenty of people who got sick and took a week off, you know. But a Republican made the motion, and he stood up and made this motion. I didn't even know he was doing it. And he was someone who—I can't remember his name—but he took pride in the fact that he never missed a vote the whole time he was in the Congress. But a very conservative Republican, and the conservative Republicans took the position that they felt so strongly that I would have a child. They were all pro-choice, so this was the best argument they had for pro-choice, that here was someone who was working every day on the Congress, which is difficult for men, but I still had the child. So the pro-choice Republicans were very strong and very supportive of me, and the other Members, all the Members, were very nice. They gave me a shower. They gave gifts to the baby. It was wonderful.

WASNIEWSKI: How did you feel about that, that you had no forewarning that this was going to be introduced?

BURKE: Well, it just took me by surprise. Other people probably knew it, but they said, "Well, we want to do this because we do have to have some record. And this is a good time to have a record because later there might be someone that they didn't want to do it for." I think that was the feeling they needed to go on record in a real way of recognizing the fact that a female Member had a child, and that there could be this policy.

WASNIEWSKI: A precedent, yes.

JOHNSON: Did you have any conversations with the Speaker at the time, with Carl [Bert] Albert? Did he ever talk to you about your leaving or just the fact that you were having a baby?

BURKE: No, he was always really very, very nice to me, very kind to me. Yes, I had an excellent relationship with him.

JOHNSON: And of course, there were lots of stories in the press that you were making history, and so now, you had even more attention. What was that like for you?

BURKE: It was one of those things that I accepted. I probably would have preferred it not to be such a big issue because all the personal stuff was printed, my age and all of these things. And there was a lot of discussion in terms of my background, that I had no children before, and all of those things that might have been embarrassing.

But the reality is, if you ran for Congress at that time and you were a woman, everything about you was always open to the press. Your life was an open

book. What you wore, where you went to the hairdresser, whatever—everything about you, because everyone was looking at you. "What do you wear on the floor?" "What do you wear when you go out?" All of those things were absolutely open to the press. "Who do you talk to?" It was a big issue that Barbara Jordan always sat in a particular place with her Texas colleagues. That was always discussed. Everything was discussed. We were observed—how we drove, where we drove back and forth. While I was—one of the things that happened to me while I was pregnant was that I had a meeting at HUD [Housing and Urban Development], so a staff person drove me to—in my car, and I had a very small car. But Members were allowed to park in front of HUD if they had a meeting with the Secretary.

My staff person drove me there, and the officers, the Park Police, said, "You can't stop here." And I said, "I'm a Member of Congress." They said, "No, you can't park here. You're not allowed to park in this area. This is for Congresspeople only." So they gave me a ticket—gave him a ticket. And I went up, and I met with the Secretary, came back, but I turned the ticket into the Park Police, and they moved him to some remote place. {laughter} Years later, he came back, and he said, "It's my chance to get back to get a better assignment. Are you willing to write a letter that I should be forgiven?" And I said, "Of course, I would." He said, "I had no idea there were women in Congress. I had no idea there could be a pregnant woman in Congress." And he said, "When I went up, and they found out that I had given you a ticket, they said, 'Don't you read the paper? Where are you?'" I said, "I'd be happy to write a letter for you that all is forgiven. You probably just didn't realize. You weren't being unkind."

JOHNSON: When you mentioned the press, that just made me think of—one question or a couple of questions we have been asking people who have come in is just

some of the questions that you received, if there's something that you remember. You talked about the scrutiny about your dress, and your hair, and your appearance, and all that, but are there any sorts of questions that you remember that you would get routinely asked by the process?

BURKE: Well, people in the press wanted to know, "Well, what happens if you have a child? In the morning, who takes care of the child during the day?" They asked me if they could come in. I said, "Sure, you can come in, and you can watch me leave the baby and me drive off. I'm happy to do that." Yes, those kinds of things—real curiosity. "How does she do it? Where does—who feeds the baby? Who drives her to work? How does she do this?" So I was pleased to let them know about it. And the thing I think that's different about women is that all the women's magazines ran stories about all the women, and that's still kind of the way it works. That happens still.

WASNIEWSKI: Did you ever feel like you were getting scrutiny—would the press ever want to tag along to see, with a male Member of Congress, to see how the children are taken care of in the morning?

BURKE: I don't think they did. I don't think they ever talked about that. Also, I think there was a lot of discussion of the fact that I went back and forth, and I took the baby back and forth every other week to Los Angeles. And there was a lot of discussion of that. "Are you going to kill her, taking her on a plane?" So I don't think that men got—well, all of the men did not necessarily go home every week. Those who lived in New York or in Baltimore or were close by, they did. They commuted. But even in recent years, many of the men who have safe districts do not go back every week. But I noticed that the women come back every week. Most of the women, even on the West Coast, come back every week, and every other week, at least.

JOHNSON: There certainly weren't many women Members that had young children, but there were a few. Was there anything in place, any kind of support network for you, or were you on your own as to what you had to try to do to balance those two worlds?

BURKE: Oh yes, we were on our own. Pat Schroeder, she made the comment when she was sworn in—she was probably the only person being sworn in who had Pampers in her purse. But she had young children. I think she was the only one.

JOHNSON: So how did you handle that, those two roles? Suddenly, you have an infant daughter, and now you're also still a Member of Congress. How did you balance those two time-consuming roles?

BURKE: Well, people were very helpful. And someone introduced me to a woman who helped me as a nanny, and who even was willing to travel, if I went back for any period of time to Los Angeles. So I was very fortunate that way, that someone would say, "Well, I know someone who can help you."

And Andy Young and his wife and our family, we had a lot of discussions. I wasn't the only one who had young children. Andy Young had small children. Rangel had small children. Most of the Members had small children—not most, but this was a time when there were younger people beginning to come to Congress, so they had younger children. So, there was no problem. We went to their house for events, and the kids enjoyed each other and had great times. Congressman [Harold] Ford, [Jr.] was a little boy. There were young children, it's just that their fathers were the Members—that was the only difference.

I had to say there was one really interesting situation was [James Strom] Thurmond. Strom Thurmond had a small child the same age. So he had a

birthday party for his son, and he invited Andy's son and my daughter. And we had a big debate, "Should we really go?" Because we knew we were going to become part of a campaign for re-election, and we decided to go. And it's true. Our children were brought up on the stage for pictures, but we made that decision, that even though he was of a different party and different persuasion, more than anything else—I can't remember if he was a different party at the time—that we would do that. We would not put our children in a difficult position by bringing them there. At the same time, we might as well stand our ground and do it.

WASNIEWSKI: Was there, at that time, a closer network of families on the Hill?

BURKE: Yes.

WASNIEWSKI: How so? Can you describe that and how it's different?

BURKE: Well, the President always had Easter egg hunts, and there were always a lot of events for families, just like there are now, I'm sure.

JOHNSON: With some of the women that we've talked to and certainly some of the women Members that we've researched, they've talked about the idea that they weren't just representing their constituents, but because they were women and there were so few women in Congress, they felt like they were representing women across the country.

BURKE: Absolutely.

JOHNSON: And what was that like to feel that you're representing so many people, and also that you're in the spotlight because of the fact that you are a woman?

BURKE: Well, as I said, I always felt that I had three constituencies. I had a constituency of African Americans, a constituency of women, and a

constituency that elected me. One of the things that came with all of those constituencies was a demand for appearances, so all of us as women and all of us as minorities were called upon. And the expectation in all states that did not have women-elected Members and who did not have African-American-elected Members—they expected us to go. So I had to travel. We all had to travel. I think Shirley Chisholm traveled every week. But all of us had a responsibility to go to various communities throughout the United States because that was what was expected. And I just took my daughter to Louisiana. Her first experience at a childcare center was in Louisiana. So it was one of those expectations. I think that's still the case.

JOHNSON: Was that something that surprised you, or did you expect that when you came here?

BURKE: I knew it because I knew what Shirley's situation was. As soon as I was elected, I started hearing the fact that Shirley Chisholm had to travel all over, and all the Members—the African-American Members—had to travel. And it was a matter that if you didn't go to some of these meetings, or gatherings, or organizations—it seemed as though you were overlooking them and you were not supportive. And as I say, the Equal Rights Amendment was very much in the forefront, and the expectation is all of us, as women, would go wherever those organizations that were promoting it, were having events. And NOW [National Organization for Women] was emerging at that time, so there were many reasons.

JOHNSON: I'm just trying to imagine how you fit that all in, with that kind of schedule that you must have had.

BURKE: I took her with me. She lived. She's now a member of the California legislature, so it must not have been too bad. {laughter} She does not do the

same thing with her child. She points out, "I don't leave my child with anyone." I said, "Well, you lived." It's true. I took her to Taiwan, and I had Taiwanese babysitters. But maybe it was a different day. I didn't think she was going to be kidnapped because someone was taking care of her—or abuse her. It was a different time, when people really looked up to elected officials, and they certainly did not want to do anything that would put them in a bad stead with elected officials. So yes, I took her, and I found someone to take care of her everywhere that I would go, while I made my speech and if I had an event, and then I'd come back.

JOHNSON: It sounds like it all turned out well.

BURKE: It turned out fine. She doesn't necessarily follow that same thing, but she takes her daughter to Sacramento.

WASNIEWSKI: During your career, were there any women in leadership positions in the House? I know not elected, but on committees that you recall?

BURKE: I don't recall any women. There was a woman in the Senate, but I don't think that she was chair of a committee.[2] She may have had some subcommittee.

WASNIEWSKI: Did you, yourself, ever have any leadership aspirations, or were you ever—aside from the caucus?

BURKE: I really didn't stay long enough to really have aspirations. I might have. If I had stayed, I suspect that I would have.

JOHNSON: Why did you decide to leave after just a few terms?

BURKE: Frankly, traveling from Los Angeles to Washington was problematic. I had enrolled my daughter in a school, and I told them that we left on Fridays—

every other Friday—and they said, "I'm sorry. We don't allow children to come here. . ." And she said, "The Kennedys always want to take off to go skiing, and we just make it a policy. You cannot have absences." So I realized it wasn't going to be that easy, so I said, "Maybe I'd better try to find an office to run for in California." I ran for attorney general in California. I was defeated, so I went back, and I practiced law for 10 years. And then I ran for office again when she went to college, and I served for 16 more years.

WASNIEWSKI: That's on the LA city council?

BURKE: No, Supervisor.

WASNIEWSKI: Supervisor, sure. Are there any women staff from your office or any House office during your career that come to mind as being important or taking a leadership role?

BURKE: Well, Valerie Pinson was my administrative assistant for a long time, and she had worked in the [Jimmy] Carter administration. Barbara Williams was the staff person for the Black Caucus, and she was very outstanding. She was outstanding. Barbara Lee was Ron Dellums' staff person. There were probably others. I just don't recall their names. But there were women who were staff members. I think in the Senate, there was a woman who was a staff person. . . .

JOHNSON: We just had a few wrap-up questions that we wanted to ask you. How would you describe the role that women play in Congress? And do you think that role differs from what men might bring to the institution?

BURKE: Today, of course, obviously, a woman has been Speaker of the House, and women have a role, chair committees, and are very involved. I think that today, we have evolved to a point where you have more women—not

enough—who are in Congress and in the Senate, and they are very, very involved. It's still there, though. They do get more press. They are more evaluated. Their lives are scrutinized more. Nancy Pelosi, everyone looks at what kind of pearls she wears. {laughter} I read somewhere a Republican woman said, "I'm a Republican, but I tell you, I would like to get those pearls." Barbara Boxer, and I know that she and all of her positions, and her role in commerce, get attention. The legislation that women put forward gets a tremendous amount of attention in the press. So, I believe women have an opportunity to move forward, at least in Congress and hopefully in the administration in future years, very soon. But there are still some dynamics. They are still evaluated, and they may be scrutinized a little bit more.

JOHNSON: Do you think women bring anything different to Congress than men do?

BURKE: Women always bring a different dimension just by virtue of our role as mothers, our role as homemakers in some instances, going to the store and becoming aware of consumer issues. We have become involved with the environment disproportionately because it impacts us greater. So women do bring a different dimension to leadership, to positons on issues, as well as just an attitude, too. I think that it may be a kinder, gentler institution because women are there.

WASNIEWSKI: There are now 108—yes, 108 is my number—women in Congress, 88 in the House, 20 in the Senate. Part of the reason we're doing this series of interviews is to celebrate the Rankin centennial, so we've gone from one to 108.

BURKE: Isn't that great?

WASNIEWSKI: One question we're asking everybody is: what do you think that number is going to be in 50 years?

BURKE: Well, I would hope that it's at least one over a half.

WASNIEWSKI: How do women candidates get to that point, to be elected to office?

BURKE: Well, first of all, women have to utilize their experience. They are now in many local offices. They need to utilize that. Women have to accept the fact that they have to raise money just as men have to raise money, and it is an important part of the electoral process at this point. It may not be something we would like it to be. We would like to believe you don't have to raise all of these dollars, but it's here. As long as it's here, women have to be part of that process and competitive. So I think that is really one of the impediments that women are facing, but they have to do it. And you have some who are excellent fundraisers, and others, for some reason, draw away from it. They just don't care for it. And that's important in terms of leadership, moving into leadership roles. It's not on your looks. You get there by organizing, having your colleagues help you, but also being viable.

JOHNSON: And what role do you think minority women will play in this push to equal things out between men and women Members?

BURKE: I think that minority women will always be involved because they have a constituency. Ethnic women—whether or not they're Asian or Latino—the very fact that there is a bloc of ethnics that they can call upon, that bloc of ethnics applies to men, and men are not afraid to use it. It applies to women. So there will always be minority women involved because as long as they take advantage of their districts, and the fact that as long as people are registered to vote who are of minorities or of different ethnicities, that is a bloc of electors that can be utilized and should be used very well. African-American women are very involved in the local politic, and that gives them an opportunity to move up.

WASNIEWSKI: If you could offer some advice to a woman who is thinking about running for Congress, what would your advice be?

BURKE: Do it. My advice is: don't let anyone discourage you. Don't let someone say, "Well, you have children." Don't let that come into play. You know you have to travel. Everyone travels. That should not be something that comes into play. I would say to any woman who is interested in an issue, and who is willing to get involved and move forward on those issues that are important to her, to run. And you don't always win. If you lose, try again.

JOHNSON: Do you think that your service may have inspired any women to run for Congress?

BURKE: I run into women all the time who say to me, "I became an attorney because I saw you were an attorney, and I said, 'Gee, I can do it.'" And I run into women all the time who say, "Yes, I ran for Congress because I knew you, and I saw that you were there and you were willing to run, and I made that decision." And I think that there is a responsibility for some of us who have been part of the institution to encourage, and keep in touch, and sometimes to reach out, to talk to women who are running. And most of them want to talk to someone. I find that most women who are getting ready to run for Congress, they want to talk to someone who has been there and that they feel was able to participate in a meaningful way.

JOHNSON: So is that something that you do?

BURKE: Oh, yes.

JOHNSON: You've reached out to women candidates?

BURKE: Yes.

WASNIEWSKI: Looking back on your House career, was there anything that was unexpected about it or that surprised you about it, in retrospect?

BURKE: I was surprised in a sense of some of the issues I became involved with that were new to me and were very interesting and exciting and made a difference in my future.

WASNIEWSKI: Any one in particular stand out?

BURKE: Well, one that I'm not necessarily called upon, but I became involved with some of the issues in terms of oceans and NASA. I became very involved with those issues of space because I was supportive of them. And in later years, some of the people that I worked with here I was in touch with later. Some of the people that I worked with on issues of defense systems, I worked with in the future. When I was serving on a Metro board, and I became interested in the composition of some of the busses, I was in touch with some of the people I had worked with in Congress who were interested in trying to use similar technology that had been used in aircraft. So I did find new issues and new involvements.

JOHNSON: In terms of your House service, what do you think will be your lasting legacy?

BURKE: Well, I think that what is—my hope would be my legacy would be that I made some real contributions. In a real way, the legacy I think that . . . the work I did on the Alaskan pipeline that established that affirmative action should apply to contracts, not just to employment, was later used on defense and in many other areas and has grown. And today, even though there's antagonism towards affirmative action, you have DBEs [disadvantaged business enterprise] and WBEs [women's business enterprise] that are part of contracts. And when I introduced that, no one even knew what it was—ended up with $350 million from the Alaskan pipeline, and that concept,

though, became part of all defense and all government contracting. That, I think, was very important, and I think that's a part of my legacy. There are probably other things that I worked on that people will remember, but that's one of the things that was very important to me.

JOHNSON: There's something else I wanted to ask you. There are so many historic firsts when it comes to your career: the first black woman to serve in the House from California, the first black woman to chair the CBC, first black woman on Appropriations. There just is a whole list. Did any of those mean something to you more than the others, that you really were excited about and thought made a big difference?

BURKE: Well, there are a couple of things. I take great pride in that I was the first African-American woman to serve in the California legislature. I take great pride in the fact that I was the first woman elected from California to the Congress in 25 years and the first African-American woman to serve. So there are some things that I do enjoy and take pride in.

JOHNSON: Great. Did you have anything else that you wanted to add?

WASNIEWSKI: It's the end of our prepared questions. Did we miss anything?

BURKE: Okay. Obviously, having a baby in Congress—a lot of women have asked me about that, Members of Congress, even recently. Someone contacted me and said, "It's difficult, and I just wonder about what your experience was."

JOHNSON: Well, thank you so much for coming in today. It was a great interview.

WASNIEWSKI: Yes, thank you very much. We really appreciate your time.

BURKE: Oh, pleased to. Thank you.

NOTES

[1] Reference to the John Birch Society, an organization founded in 1956 by Robert Welch, and named for John Birch, a U.S. Army Captain and intelligence officer killed in China in 1945.
[2] No women served in the Senate during Yvonne Burke's first two terms in the House. In her third and final term, three women served in the Senate: Maryon Pittman Allen; Muriel Buck Humphrey, and Nancy Landon Kassebaum.