The Honorable Eva M. Clayton

U.S. Representative of North Carolina (1992–2003)

Oral History Interview
Final Edited Transcript

May 15, 2015

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

"And, I must say, serving on the Agriculture Committee and the resistance of my male colleagues strengthened me. Now, should they have done that? Of course not. But, hey. But because of that, I think more because of my response to it, [I grew]. Now everybody will not have that same peace, but that certainly was the end result for me, that I was stronger. And I think, too, I came from the South, so I had come from a segregated community, grew up in a segregated community, knew what segregation was, went to segregated schools, and had to overcome that. So overcoming that helped me also to overcome the male resistance that I had. Should segregation have been in? No, absolutely not. Should male resistance be to their equal colleagues who happen to be female? Absolutely not. Were they trying to help Eva be stronger? Absolutely not. But, hey, the result is what the [result is]."

The Honorable Eva M. Clayton
May 15, 2015

Table of Contents

Abstract

Elected to the House in 1992—dubbed the "Year of the Woman" because of the record number of female candidates who won seats in the House and Senate—Eva M. Clayton made history as the first African-American woman to represent North Carolina in Congress. Recognized as a leader by her colleagues, Clayton was elected freshman class president. Clayton used her position and access to the White House and congressional leaders to seek assistance for African-American farmers in her district. Throughout her tenure in Congress, Clayton, who represented a rural constituency, served on the Agriculture Committee. In her oral history, she recalls the opposition she faced from her mostly male colleagues on the committee, how she overcame the resistance, and how she learned to thrive in a system grounded in "regular order."

During her interview, Clayton shares memories of her involvement in the civil rights movement which led to her volunteering for what she describes as a symbolic campaign for Congress in 1968. The experience sparked an interest in politics and public service that helped her secure a House seat more than two decades later. Clayton speaks about the role of race, gender, and age in her congressional career, touching upon memories of the Congressional Black Caucus, the bond she formed with many of her women colleagues and how she, as an African-American grandmother, brought a unique perspective to Congress. Clayton also describes her mother's influence in defining a major legislative focus: nutrition and combating hunger.

Biography

CLAYTON, Eva M., a Representative from North Carolina; born in Savannah, Chatham County, Ga., September 16, 1934; B.S., Johnson C. Smith University, Charlotte, N.C., 1955; M.S., North Carolina Central University, Durham, N.C., 1962; director, University of North Carolina Health Manpower Development Programs; assistant secretary for community development, North Carolina Department of Natural Resources and Community Development, 1977–1981; unsuccessful candidate for nomination to the Ninety-first Congress in 1968; chair of the Warren County, N.C., board of commissioners, 1982–1992; elected as a Democrat to the One Hundred Second Congress, by special election, to fill the vacancy caused by the death of United States Representative Walter B. Jones, and reelected to the four succeeding Congresses (November 3, 1992–January 3, 2003); not a candidate for reelection to the One Hundred Eighth Congress in 2002.
Read full biography

Editing Practices

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

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

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

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

Citation Information

When citing this oral history interview, please use the format below:
"The Honorable Eva M. Clayton Oral History Interview," Office of the Historian, U.S. House of Representatives, May 15, 2015.

Interviewer Biographies

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

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

— THE HONORABLE EVA M. CLAYTON OF NORTH CAROLINA —
A CENTURY OF WOMEN IN CONGRESS

WASNIEWSKI: I'm Matt Wasniewski here with Kathleen Johnson from the House History Office. Today's date is May 15, 2015, and we're here [in the House Recording Studio] with Congresswoman Eva [M.] Clayton to talk about her career in Congress. Thank you so much for joining us today.

CLAYTON: Oh, my pleasure. I'm delighted to be here.

WASNIEWSKI: We thought we'd start off with some questions about the origins of your interest in politics, to start. First off, when you were young, we're curious to know, did you have any female role models whom you looked up to? Who were they? What drew you to them?

CLAYTON: Well, I think the first female model I had was my mother, who was a very stern person who wanted the best for her daughter. As I grew older and recognized the contributions, certainly Mary McLeod Bethune was one. The high school founder where I went to high school—a Presbyterian high school—Lucy Craft Laney was her name. I might have never known her, but I knew of her, so those two persons were female models.

I would say the model for me in high school and beyond was neither female nor a black. It was Albert Schweitzer. I wanted to be a doctor, and I wanted to be a missionary. Now it's a little arrogant to think I could be an Albert Schweitzer, who I never knew either, but I read about him. He was both a doctor, he was both a musician and philosopher and a missionary. I think what was motivation for me wanting to be a doctor was a classmate who had polio. So, I thought I could be a doctor and heal her. And I looked for

someone similar. As I grew older, I wanted to be active religiously in my church or any religion, and I wanted to be a missionary. I wanted to help.

So I think those desires or motivations are that kind of thing that drove me early on to want to go to college. I majored in biology with the idea I was going to med school. I happened to meet someone who was a senior, and I guess that was the end of my medical school. But I went on to get a master's degree thinking I would go to med school—in fact, really applied and got a conditional acceptance to one, but got married and that was the end of that opportunity.

WASNIEWSKI: Can I just follow up, just so we have it for the record? What was your mother's name, and what was the name of the high school you attended?

CLAYTON: Yes, my mother's name was Josephine Mott McPherson. I was born to Josephine and Thomas McPherson. I was born in Savannah, Georgia. My father was an insurance salesman most of his life, all of his life, that I knew him. He was a manager of the company in Augusta [and that] is how we moved from Savannah. It was a black insurance company.

My mother taught school for a few years, but I didn't know her as a teacher. Most of my life I knew her as a dressmaker. And later in her life she became a superintendent of an orphanage. But both my mother and father wanted for me a better life. My father didn't finish high school. I think he probably told me he went as far as, I think, the seventh or the eighth grade. Later on in his life, he got what you could get, was a certificate. I remember he was a good salesman. We used to say he could sell tombstone insurance; already dead, he could sell it. So that's how he got to be manager of a company. My mother finished what we call a normal school. Years ago you could take advanced high school classes. In the black community it wasn't like junior college, but

it was a little advanced over high school, and you could take a test and get a certificate to teach. She formally never went to college, but she was a teacher early in her life.

JOHNSON: When you were growing up, what were the expectations, the societal expectations, of what you would grow up to be, as a woman?

CLAYTON: Well, a teacher, a secretary, a social worker. That's why I said, although I don't think I knew a female doctor, to be honest with you, my doctor, who was very kind to me, Dr. Outler, most of the doctors I knew were male. So I was out of the norm to want to be a doctor, no doubt about that.

JOHNSON: And what first drew you to politics?

CLAYTON: You know, I still wonder about that. {laughter} I think that I saw within that the possibility that I could help, that I could serve, I could make a difference. I still think politics is an opportunity where you can help and make a difference for policy, in spite of all the accolades or descriptions of politicians not being able to negotiate and compromise. I still think it's an avenue for service, and that's what drew me to it, yes.

Early on I certainly didn't look forward to being a politician. But in 1968, I had the opportunity to be motivated. Now I must say I had an incident in which I was involved, an opportunity where they really invited my husband as a young lawyer in this rural area. After college and after law school, my husband was invited to come to this rural area to form the first integrated law firm in North Carolina. We went to this rural area. He promised me he was going to this rural area, and we'd stay there for three to five years. We have now been there 50 years, so you can't count on what—but the community has been very kind to us. But there was a need, and I think we responded to the need, and we fell in the love with the rural area.

So early on he had the opportunity, along with some other leaders, and I think there might have been 12 people in a region of about 10 to 12 counties. We were invited to consider running for Congress because the registration was very low. In the particular county in which we lived, which is a rural county, the registration was like 15 percent for Afro Americans, and probably lower than that in terms of actual voter participation.

So the invite was not to me, but to him, and I just went along—and the discussion was about the desire and the need to find a candidate who would be willing to run for Congress because we needed to have this opportunity. Also, as you know, in 1968 there was a great movement for the civil rights. Martin Luther King had motivated people, and we were ourselves motivated that indeed this was our time for particularly Afro Americans to be seen as equal. I guess I got the spirit, and I raised my hand, and my husband didn't, nor did anyone else, really. So on my way back I asked, "Why didn't you volunteer?" And he said to me, "Tell me who would take care of our children and ourselves if I stopped my law practice and ran." So we knew it was a sacrifice, no doubt about that. There was no deception on the part of the people who invited this. He said that, "Now we can't give you monies. You're going to have to raise some of the monies, and you're going to often knock on doors and beg at the same time."

But we ran early on, and as I will tell people now, I was defeated royally. I mean, big time, big time. But, in that defeat, not only did I learn and appreciate what this position could do, but also in that I learned and appreciated the needs of people. For the very same reason I wanted to be a doctor, a missionary, I also find that I'm responding to policies based on people articulating their needs. So that was the reason that drew me at that time.

And then later on—I went on with my life—and later on when the opportunity came again, when there was redistricting, some of the people who I was engaged with actually approached me and said, "Why don't you consider it?" At this time I was well situated, a little bit like my husband, in a position and also in a business. I had to make the election to move from there to run, but I did, and we were successful.

WASNIEWSKI: In that first campaign, who were some of the people who recruited you to run?

CLAYTON: Vernon Jordan was [one such person]. Well, he was represented by what they called the Voter Project. The Voter Project was out of Atlanta, Georgia, part of the Southern Regional Council. And they not only recruited me—it wasn't Eva Clayton they were trying to recruit. They were really trying to recruit an individual who was a leader, who would be willing to be a candidate, who was willing to motivate people and tell them that voting is one way you achieve your citizenship. That was the accolades that they were in. They didn't knock on the door and say, "Eva Clayton, you are running." They knocked on the door and said, "We need someone to do this and for these reasons."

Also at the same time, there was a black dentist from Charlotte who ran for governor, and we kind of [formed a] partnership with each other. He was in the west. Charlotte is another part of my state, where I was from the eastern part of the state. And actually three weeks, I want to say, no, I'm sorry, two weeks before we had a rally in eastern North Carolina, Martin Luther King was killed. He had committed to coming to our rally. In fact, a number of states and locations around the South were doing the same thing we were doing in Georgia. Reginald Hawkins, who was the dentist, had the personal relationship with Dr. King. I didn't. I think they went to school together.

And so he was going to stop in Charlotte, and he was going to come in eastern North Carolina. Actually, in eastern North Carolina we probably had a larger contingency of Afro Americans, and so it was a big, big issue.

In fact, yesterday I visited with Congressman G. K. [George Kenneth] Butterfield, [Jr.], and he reminded me that when he marched for me in 1968 that the FBI was following him. I said, "Well, if they were following you, I'm sure I got a record too." So we'd see . . . but he was in law school then, and he organized a march from law school to come over to Wilson [North Carolina] where we were having the rally. (He is from Wilson.) And by the way, how life is so related, his father, who was a dentist, gave me free space in an office so we could have a campaign. There were a lot of volunteers. There were a lot of people who were interactive with this activity, it just wasn't me. It wasn't the kind of traditional campaign that I ran in 1992. It really was kind of community organization. It was an effort that came from the spirit that we can do this, and I want to be a part of this. So, it was an exciting time.

JOHNSON: So, there was a long gap between your '68 campaign and then '92.

CLAYTON: Oh, yes.

JOHNSON: What motivated you to run in 1992?

CLAYTON: Well, a real possibility that you could win. {laughter} It's quite different from making a stand and making a case that you ought to be sent, but now the redistricting gave you really an opportunity to run. Also the people who wanted me to run, in that area. And not to say I was the only candidate; there were other candidates as well. They saw the possibility as well as I could. Redistricting meant that we had the opportunity, because of the population demographics, that we could have that real political possibility of winning.

JOHNSON: Who were some of those people that recruited you to run?

CLAYTON: Wilson, [Howard] Fitts, I can't remember all of them. Fitts was also involved with me in 1968, and he approached me again in 1992. His son now is Judge Fitts. But he felt that I did a good job then, and he approached me again. In fact, Fitts, the father Fitts, actually managed my 1968 [campaign], and he said, "I'm no longer able to manage, but I want you to run."

WASNIEWSKI: How had the district changed in the intervening years? Can you describe the district that you ran in in 1992 a little bit, the geography and the demographics?

CLAYTON: Well, the geography—and I'm doing this from memory because I don't really recall. As I recall the geography was not quite the same. It was not from Durham all the way to the coast, because I don't remember ever campaigning in the Durham area. Now how they had changed demographically was to make sure that the geography would encompass a significant number of Afro Americans. That gave an opportunity to win. So at the time I ran in 1992, the demographics and the percentage of blacks there were significantly higher than when I ran in 1968. So in order to achieve that, you had to change the boundaries of that. So it was 49 percent of the population when I ran in 1992. That was not the case, and I can't recall what it was, but it certainly wasn't the case [in 1968]. So, in order to achieve that you had to have different boundaries.

But by and large it was a rural district, even though you had a small part of Durham, which is urban. It was that part of Durham, going all the way to Elizabeth City, to the coast, and went all the way down to Wilmington. You had little pieces of 28 counties. Now that I'm more mature, "How in the world did I do that?" Or better still, "Why in the world did I do that?" But

28 counties—many only parts of the county. Now the little rural county where I lived, all was in the district—20,000 people. But the district had a little piece here, a little in that area, so all along the Virginia border, going all the way down to Elizabeth City, moving down, and a little piece of Wilmington as well.

JOHNSON: You had had some experience in state government before your campaign in 1992. So you served in the administration of Governor Jim Hunt, and you also served on the Warren County—you were also Warren County commissioner. What about these experiences do you think helped you in your campaign and then also in your career in Congress?

CLAYTON: Oh, I was certainly more mature, and I certainly knew the relationship with the state. My experience in the state gave me a feel for the interrelationship between state and federal government. While I was at the state, I had the opportunity to serve as the assistant secretary of community development, and that had what we call the OEO [Office of Economic Opportunity]. I also was involved in the Housing Finance Agency. I was involved in community development. Several of those programs depended on an interdependent relationship with the federal government.

OEO, if you recall, was a poverty program provided to the state, and the state had to supplement the program and provide for communities. So basically what I was involved in was providing the combination of resources to cities and communities to respond to housing, community development, and infrastructure that was needed in small towns and cities. The Housing Finance Agency was a little different, but it related also to the state. It was the financial instrument that made housing financially feasible, so it supplemented the purchase of homes in the area.

WASNIEWSKI: How important in that 1992 campaign was the issue of gender, and how did you approach that?

CLAYTON: Well, I'm female. That's one. I must say I did not raise the issue of a woman against a man, that "I as a woman will do this." I raised the issue that "I, Eva Clayton, will do this." I was the only female. I also was in a position, because I had some experience, to say that, "You know I care." Now, if you could translate what I was saying: "I have a record, and I've demonstrated to you I care. I just shared with you what I did with the state. I had a demonstrated record. Not only had I put myself earlier to run, I had a demonstrated record that I care about rural areas. I care about poverty. I care about you." So I think I was in a unique position because I was the only woman, and they knew I was pro-choice. They knew I cared about children. They knew. So I was in a position to say without saying, "I, Eva, a woman." I said, "I, Eva Clayton," okay? Now if I needed to say that, I would.

Now women who were supporting me obviously said, "Eva Clayton as a woman will do this." EMILY's List, who supported me, also said that for me. I attracted a number of women's groups, inside my district and outside my district, who knew that the issues I cared about were issues that women cared about and strongly in that area. So gender was there, whether I said "woman" or not, because I was the only woman who ran and that helped me. Now if I had two women, I don't know what we would—we both would have cared, right, and I would have said, "I care more."

In fact, what I did say is, "We have six good candidates, but Eva Clayton is the best." Rather than to say, "He doesn't do that, he doesn't do that, he doesn't. . . ." I just wanted to say, "If you want the very best for yourself, you will choose Eva Clayton." Now that might have been arrogance, but I believed that. And I said it with the . . . "The Best for the First" became a

slogan that we used. We wrote it on our T-shirts, we wrote it on our cars, we wrote it on the plaques. We had no apologies for thinking we were the best, and so a woman was the best in that candidate, whether they wanted to see it or not.

JOHNSON: How important was the issue of race in your campaign?

CLAYTON: Very important. But, it was evenly split. We had three whites. Let me correct that. I think we had two whites. We had three whites who ran the whole campaign, two whites who ran in the primary—I can't count, I guess—and then three blacks besides myself. So that is six. So I made the fourth black to run. There were two whites in the primary.

Then I ran against a white in the general election. But race was important I think in the sense that this is an opportunity for a black to be elected. It was also a sense of opportunity. Otherwise you wouldn't have had four of them running because they saw the same thing I saw. I also think in the sense of the response of people voting, whether they voted for me or not, we had perhaps one of the highest percentages of voting we had had in that district in 1992 in that area. So it was a new opportunity, and I think the electorate saw this as an opportunity, and they wanted to be engaged in that process. It was a sense of pride.

WASNIEWSKI: Nationally, 1992 was called the "Year of the Woman" because so many women won election to office for the first time that year. We're curious to know, from your perspective, what factors do you think played into that?

CLAYTON: Well, I think a number of factors. The redistricting gave not only Afro Americans but it also gave some women the opportunity. The Anita Hill discussion or argument or whatever you want [to call it], a hearing, certainly infuriated or inspired our women, whether they were black or white, to be

engaged in that.[1] I think [President Bill] Clinton's articulation of equal opportunity to women and equality gave opportunity to that. And I just think that a number of years before women had tried, and things just seemed to have come together at that particular time. As you know, 27 women came from all over, the largest number coming from California. So it was a very, very significant time for all of us to come at that same time.

JOHNSON: You mentioned EMILY's List and some of the other groups that supported you. But how difficult was fundraising for you in that campaign?

CLAYTON: Oh, it was difficult. EMILY's List did support me, and I was very, very supportive. I was helped tremendously. Their support became even more significant in the runoff because when I actually, at the end of the primary, I didn't have the highest number of votes. Walter [Beaman] Jones, [Sr.],'s son [Walter Beaman Jones, Jr.,] actually didn't get the 40 percent, and I challenged him. At that time EMILY's List said, "We know, even more than we have given you before, that we need to do it now." So it was really a significant time because it was money against money.

So the call came not only from EMILY's List, but EMILY's List also reached to other groups in that area, so it was very significant. But also Afro Americans might have put in less money per check, but they put more checks in, and so we had an opportunity to rally people and tell them this is the time. "If you're going to ever do it, you have to do it now. Don't wait later to help with the banquet, we need it now."

I wasn't very good at raising money, but boy did I learn how to lose my pride and say, "Hey, I need your help." So it's very significant. Raising money unfortunately has to be a part of the effort. I wish we could say there was another way, but that's just the reality of it. And still, I probably, as

compared to the amount of money that's raised now, we probably didn't raise as much, and I can't recall exactly how much we raised. But the costs of elections have gone up and up and up. So money was significant then. It's probably even more significant now, but it was very significant, and it became more significant obviously at my runoff than it was at my primary.

To be honest, some of my opponents in my primary joined forces with me. You know, I appreciate that. So it pays to be respectful of your opponent as you're going. You never know, you may need them down the road. And they were very helpful, so I am very grateful some of them did help me financially.

WASNIEWSKI: What was the most memorable moment of the campaign in '92 for you?

CLAYTON: You're really trying my memory here. {laughter} A lot of it was—let's see, what was the most memorable part of my campaign? Well, there are several. Obviously, I think the most memorable was when I realized that the opponent didn't get the 40 percent. I must admit that was the most memorable. But there were also other memorable parts of it.

Let me just comment on that. Obviously I was hoping I was going to lead. But if you can't lead, you're going to hope that there was enough not to have the person, whoever he/she was, get the 40 percent. So I think just recognizing that I was behind, immediately behind, the person who didn't make the 40 percent, that was the most memorable part of it.

But I think the other part of it, and this is more general than it is specific, is the outpouring of people to help me. And I think during the march I was saying—the 1968 rally we had when Martin Luther King was to come and didn't come—it became more of a memorial, but it also was an outpouring of people recognizing this was something bigger than an election. [Ralph] Abernathy came, and I think that actually the rally was larger than it would

have been. I can't imagine that people wouldn't have come for Dr. King. But I think that King was a different determination, a different realization that this was something far more significant than just an election. That we had just lost a giant, and he too saw the value of voting. So the realization that this made it real for so many human beings, it kind of brought all of us to a new sense of reality and purpose.

But there were a lot of memorable times. There were times when your opponents would try to throw you off cue. There are a lot of things. You become not immune, but you do learn. You take some things for granted; then you realize that these guys will throw you off cue as quick as anything. So this grandmother had learned very quickly. We learned.

JOHNSON: You served briefly in the 102nd Congress [1991–1993], the very end of the 102nd. There were only 34 women who were in the House and Senate at that point. The number jumped to 55 in the next Congress, but still a very small number of women. Did you find that because there were so few of you that you gravitated toward each other during that period?

CLAYTON: Oh yes, where we gravitated, yes, particularly the freshmen women did to each other. But also we were grateful that there were those who were still in the House, who were in the House when we came. They certainly served as models to us, and they also gravitated towards us. They also reached out to us to say, "Here's the real deal." And they told us how important seniority was. Being a freshman, you think that because you're big in the numbers, you're going to be able to do all these things. And we had great expectation of ourselves.

I think women . . . I think it's instinctive of women that we can do. I don't know if it's a mother instinct, I don't know if it's a female instinct, but we

can fix it. If something's wrong, what's wrong? We'll get it, you know? I think we, as newcomers and women, we thought we could. Now our experienced women colleagues didn't say you can't fix it, but they gave us the real dope. How to maneuver and recognize that seniority trumps most things, and how you could interact with the senior Members to make sure you got your agenda. So they were very helpful.

But 55 women only represents 12 percent of the total, and at that time I didn't see any woman who was a committee chair. So at best we had some who were subcommittee chairs, but none who were full committee chairs. You had women who were in the leadership. I think at that point Nancy [Pelosi] was. When I first came she was not a Whip. She became a Whip later on. So you had women who were in a position to be moved up. You had women who would counsel us.

And I think the men began to feel the sense of pressure that women, indeed the Women's Caucus, was a more vibrant caucus. Sometimes when we are members of caucuses, and I know I had my name on a lot of caucuses, I was actually the co-chair of the Rural Caucus. I was obviously a member—an active member—of the CBC, the Congressional Black Caucus. I was actually the chair of the Congressional Black Caucus Foundation, in which I gave them a lot of leadership. But I'm saying, your interest is so diverse . . . and I was a part of the Foreign Caucus, the Africa Caucus. But the Women's Caucus really did caucus, and they not only caucused, but they helped each other on bills. I think you began to understand the strength of that.

I served on the Agriculture Committee. The fact that I was working in nutrition and tried to get Agriculture members to see the value, not that they didn't, but they just didn't want to pay for it. I was fortunate and blessed to have the Women's Caucus, who indeed helped me to put pressure on the

Agriculture people so I could get my bill. Because I needed these same people to vote for the settlement. Well, since I've been here I've talked to Rosa [L. DeLauro], and Rosa reminded me how she, outside of the Agriculture Committee, was partnered with me and others to make sure I was successful in getting things through Agriculture.

So the women, we found ways of connecting whether [or not] we were on that committee. I was very fortunate that there were people who would tell me how they could assist in terms of that. So women were very, very helpful to me, yes. The strength.

JOHNSON: Did that go across the aisle, too? Were these also Republican women that would help? It didn't matter what your party was at that point?

CLAYTON: Sometimes. Actually, it depended on the issue, it depended on the issue. And in case of hunger, some of it really was in that area, yes. Now how far? Some would have some limitation on how far they would push, but the caring about the issue in terms of children or caring about hunger, yes, it certainly did.

JOHNSON: And with that counsel that you talked about, was there anyone in particular that took you under their wing and really tried to serve as a mentor for you?

CLAYTON: Marcy [Marcia Carolyn] Kaptur. And actually I had a good relationship with [Constance A.] Morella. She was the one who helped me in the nutrition programs in that area. Barbara [Bailey] Kennelly and Rosa DeLauro were very active with me.

WASNIEWSKI: Overall how would you describe the atmosphere of the House when you were first elected? Was it a welcoming place? Was it a place where you needed to make adjustments?

CLAYTON: Well, at first it seemed very welcoming, yes. Oh boy, we had just arrived, and boy, we were going to take the place over, right? It was very welcoming. Then the reality set in; then you realized we needed to make adjustments, and Congress needed to make adjustments. Yes. After you settle in and the euphoria comes down, you realize that, not that they were saying step back or go home, but you realize that your euphoria or excitement the first two or three weeks had some limitation as to how far that was going to go. So I think all of us, as we settled down and got on our various committees and realized we were at the end of the line, regardless of what committee, whether you got your committee of choice, you were still at the end of the line, and that there's a pecking order. In fact, there's a pecking order how you speak, or even how you put bills in. I think that we had—what do they call it—"regular order" when we understood what regular order meant. It meant that, "Hey, you got your little place, whether you're a woman, or whatever." So, yes, I think all of us made adjustments. But the joy of having that number of women coming in together gave us a bonding and a strength that we wouldn't have had if I had come by myself. I would have been isolated a little bit. So there were comforts in numbers in that area.

WASNIEWSKI: Were there parts of the institution that were easier for women to join or conversely harder?

CLAYTON: Well, if you think about the committees, I think there are committees that are more difficult to get on. Now I asked for Agriculture, but Agriculture was easier to get on. Not many people wanted to be on Agriculture, woman or man. I wasn't sophisticated enough to know which were the most, more powerful, prestigious committees. I was advised later . . . I got elected because, in large number I got elected president of my class, and then later on someone who came to me said, "You should be on Rules. Ask for Rules." Yes.

I asked for it, I didn't get it. Obviously, knowing which committees to get on, it was more difficult for women to get on some committees.

Now when we got here, as far as structural, we found out that the gym wasn't accessible to women. They had to make adjustments physically to it. In spite of them knowing that women were here, you would think they would have made a small adjustment like that. Women may want to go in the pool; they want to go to the gym. They didn't do that. Structurally to make sure there are a number of bathrooms, too, for women, as well as men. They didn't structurally do that. The private sector was ahead of them in terms of that. So things are slowly changing. Regular order means slowly changing, that's what it meant. You finally had that reality of what that meant.

JOHNSON: You had just said that you were president of your freshmen class. How did that come about? Was that something you campaigned for, or did people recruit you?

CLAYTON: No. Well, the reality that women were in a large number convinced several of us that a woman had a chance. How it really came about, I actually said to I think it was Anna [Georges] Eshoo, "You ought to become president." She said, "No, I do not want to be president." She raised her hand and said, "I nominate Eva Clayton." That's really how it came about. So the women were going to get a candidate, and I had suggested Anna, and I don't know who else suggested her. And before Anna allowed that discussion to go any further, she told the California delegation it was going to be Eva Clayton, and she nominated me.

The reality was—and actually my friend, Jim [James Enos] Clyburn, wanted to become president, and someone had nominated him prior to this nomination coming from the California delegation. He recognized, he's a

smart politician, and he can count. He was a smart politician then; he still is, or he wouldn't be Whip, so he understands where the wind is blowing. He had a good sense of that. He proposed that, "Let Eva Clayton be president for the first year, and I'll serve the second year." And they accepted his proposal. So essentially I served the first year of the term, he served the second year of the term. So I guess we were co-presidents, but it worked out for him then.

But if the women weren't there in numbers, Eva Clayton or anyone else, regular order would have meant the same regular order that a man would be president. Nothing wrong with a man being president, but if you have the numbers, and you have the capacity and you have the opportunity, a woman should use that capacity. She shouldn't step back just to say the regular order tradition would be to let a man to go forward.

JOHNSON: What were the benefits of that position for your time in Congress?

CLAYTON: Well, it surely had no authority actually, but it was for me a greater sense of visibility and access. I was used as a liaison between my class, the leadership, as well as the President [Clinton]. They also probably used me to assemble the leadership of my class to vote the party's ticket or the bills that they were pushing. Because to have about 40-some Members in that class meant you had a significant number of that.

So the benefit was access, the benefit was visibility. I used that in my push for the black farmers. Knowing that I could have access, I made the opportunity available for black farmers to meet with the President [Clinton]. I had presented the case to my Agriculture Committee; they had dismissed it. They did hear it, in fairness to the Agriculture Committee. They heard it, they said nothing they could do because the statute of limitation is expired, and you've

lost the opportunity to raise the issue. And it was a legitimate issue for the black farmers, and it actually was a limitation legally, but it didn't mean that we shouldn't find a way. So the opportunity to have the President hear this case, certainly I used that.

I also used access to then Speaker [Thomas Stephen] Foley when we had a terrible storm which destroyed a bit of Princeville [North Carolina]. The action to come, to get resources, he did, and it made a big, big difference to that. I wouldn't have had the opportunity to raise those issues in that way if I hadn't had the position. So, yes, I used it.

WASNIEWSKI: You've already touched on the Women's Caucus, which you had joined. But how would you describe the leadership of the caucus at the time when you joined it?

CLAYTON: I'm trying to think who was the chair. Well, the leadership is—I'm trying to think who that chair was right now [Patricia Scott Schroeder and Olympia Jean Snowe]. But actually the value of the Women's Caucus is the coming together of the senior Members with the junior Members, and many of them were on various committees. So we could bring issues, or they brought things that they were working on to inform us. So the value of the leadership caucus was [for providing] information. The value of the Women's Caucus was connection and support. They could inform us, and also we could bring ideas and ask for advice.

WASNIEWSKI: I'm looking more for a general sense of how it worked in the institution.

CLAYTON: Yes, yes. Oh, it worked very well. It worked very, very well. It was an excellent source of information. It was an excellent source for also inspiration and support. Sometimes we had ideas about, good ideas, but it couldn't work. Having that experience of someone to tell you, to make it work. In the

instance of nutrition or the instance of . . . now I didn't bring the issue of the black farmers that much to them, but I brought the issue of nutrition to them. I brought the issue of small women farmers to them, in those areas because some of them, were on Appropriations. I didn't know that much about rules, and how we could get amendments. So it was a great source for me personally in terms of information or guidance in that area.

JOHNSON: What role did women play in the Congressional Black Caucus?

CLAYTON: Well, there were 10 of us coming at one time, so that was the largest number they had ever had. I think there were, I want to say there were 27 or 28 Members at that time—slightly more men than women. The leadership was male, but the vice chair became a woman, and you could see leadership that was changing. Eventually Maxine [Waters] became chair. So there was a gradual [movement] . . . women played a significant role in terms of issues, poverty, in terms of justice, in terms of housing, in terms of, very much like the Women's Caucus, in terms of others who had bills. I know I relied on Representatives [Louis] Stokes and [William Lacy] Clay, [Sr.], because they were senior Members, and one was on the Appropriations, one was on the Rules. So I think women began to be not only the voice and the face of the CBC. I don't think I was the first woman who was the chair of the foundation, but I became chair of the foundation. If women hadn't been in the CBC, I'm sure that might not have happened. But women played a significant role in that.

JOHNSON: Did you bring a different perspective to the caucus? Because most of those Representatives that you mentioned and most of the people that were on the CBC were from urban districts.

CLAYTON: Well, I think I did. I am obviously from a rural area, I'm from the South, and at the time also was more mature. I'm not saying that they weren't mature. Please don't—I don't mean that in a negative way, I meant that age-wise, that's the only thing there. Also I think I had the experience of having governed, having led an administration, and just personally I probably have a different demeanor than some. But I think there was diversity in there. There were many—there were other people very much like me.

When I first came to Congress, one of my closest friends was another person whose name is Carrie [P.] Meek. She might have been a little more matured, age-wise, than I. We gravitated to each other, so I would say to her, "Us old folks kind of go together, right?" But I think both of us were respected in that area for what we did.

WASNIEWSKI: You've talked about Agriculture Committee. Can you describe the process of getting onto Agriculture, and who you went to for that?

CLAYTON: I simply gave my request. You submit to your party, submit your preference of committees, and I did. I wanted Small Business and Agriculture. As I said earlier, I had advice, and I went also for Rules. They granted me both of those committees.

Agriculture I wanted because I came from a rural district. I came from a district that depended on agriculture, but it's a big factor economically and culturally. People thought of themselves as a farming community. Although I had a small part of Durham (urban), just a very small part of Durham, but most of my constituencies were thinking rural. I would tell people that I would work for the agricultural community. I'd worked for a rural community. I'd work hard—not just work—I'd work hard for them, particularly for small farmers.

Personally I had very little experience with farming other than that I liked to eat, and I also wanted to see my farmers advance. I would also say to them that I married a farmer, and he's such a poor farmer he became a country lawyer, trying to get the farmers to think that they had an advocate in myself. The big agricultural interests did not support me initially. They did [support] one of my opponents. The big farmers, all the . . . we had a number of agriculture interests in our area. Poultry farms, fairly significant agriculture firms across America, were located in North Carolina. But I knew my district, so that's the reason I wanted Agriculture.

And by the way, once I won the runoff in the primary, the North Carolina agriculture commissioner came to me and said, in a very patriarchal way, "Young lady," to this grandmother. "Young lady, you'd do yourself proud if, and your district well, if you serve on Agriculture," as if he needed to tell me what to do. I did serve on Agriculture because actually he was right. In his way, I think he was really begging, when I understand what he was doing. And he might have been right. I might have chosen Education rather than Agriculture because I'm all [about] bringing people up and education-wise and small business [opportunities]. But the realization was that my district really needed someone on Agriculture. . . . As I said, I knew very little, so on Agriculture I learned a lot.

By the way, Agriculture was an old boys' culture. When I went, there was one woman. I remember her to this day. Yes. Jill [Lynette] Long Thompson was there, and she was there for four years, and then she became the assistant secretary for agriculture.[2] Then I think Cynthia [Ann] McKinney came, and other women came. They came and left.

It was old boys' culture both by composition, but also by attitude. They tolerated me. They treated me as an outsider. I had to prove to them I was

worthy of negotiating. I had to win the way that I was worthy of legislating, advocating for big farmers as well as for small farmers. I had to prove to them that I could advocate and legislate even for the hungry. But it didn't take me long to learn how to horse-trade. They needed me as much as I needed them because Agriculture is such a complex and interrelated, interdependent, set of people. The livestock [community] would need me, who represented peanut farmers, to be with you. Then I had a diverse group, too, in my area. I had the big poultry, I had peanut farmers, I had tobacco farmers, and I had small farmers and the black farmers. And I represented a lot of poor folks. So the issues intertwined for me, and sometimes there were areas of conflict. But I also tried to use that as an opportunity to get some things done. Eventually I became the Ranking Member of what was then called Operations, Nutrition and Forestry. I think it's called something else now, but anyhow, nutrition is the main one of it.

Two issues stand out for me in terms of how Agriculture responded. The black farmers' issue . . . tolerated. They allowed me to bring the black farmers' issues to them, and I appreciated that. I'm not saying they knew what their answer was going to be already, but, hey, my suspicion is they did. Legally they were right; the statute of limitations had run. But no effort to find out what can we do in spite of that. But once it became a national issue, and also once I had other access to raise these interests, then I gathered support among the old boys' club. "Let's see how we can work this out. How about an amendment? Would that work?" And I said, "Oh, yes, that will work, providing you're going to put it on legislation that's going to pass. Not introduce something you know you put on the floor." And sure enough, to their credit, they did.

But the value of having, both in my own mind, the ability not only to be suspicious but just to raise the question: "What else is going on here?" And also having support independent of your old boys' club you're sitting on. So having had you asked earlier about having been freshmen president—and now by this time I was no longer president, right, but I had developed a relationship with people, women in particular, but also with the [Congressional] Black Caucus, and also have had the access to the President to give an audience there.

Then when it came to nutrition, the issue there was the food stamp. And the opportunity I thought for us on the Agriculture Committee is to extend the food stamp to legal immigrants, and we did. That allowed us to consider the same requirements, but to extend this to a new class of people. And that costs money, and we did. The opportunity again was to write the farm bill, is where you continue the authorization which you've already passed. You see, the authorizing committee is not the Appropriations Committee. But the authorizing committee is aware that as you open up this opportunity more money will be required from the Appropriations [Committee], and they were right.

Food stamps did cost. Just like SNAP [Supplemental Nutrition Assistance Program] now costs a lot. Interesting how things change and become the same. Right now they're trying to cut SNAP from poor people, billions of dollars. Same thing when I was there. We're giving poor folks too much. They didn't say it that way, but that's what it meant. But at the very same time they were asking me, and all members of the committee, would we authorize a buyout for tobacco farmers, authorize a buyout for peanut farmers? I had tobacco farmers in my district that I wanted to make sure they got all they needed. But that very same time they were asking me to do what

they wanted to cut poor folks out. Some of those checks were for $5 million, $10 million. An average food stamp person doesn't get more than $2,000 all year, if that much, depending on the number in the family. The audacity to think that I would sit there and allow that to happen. My conscience wouldn't allow that. It had nothing to do with me being a woman. But it's certain because there were women in the Congress that I also knew would be supportive in Appropriations. As I said, Rosa DeLauro was certainly there for me in Appropriations. She was on the agriculture appropriations [committee] and was helpful.

But, see, if I had allowed the authority to be contracted, then the appropriations would be contracted. Well, my tobacco farmers, my peanut farmers, wanted their money. That got to be a very good negotiating strategy. "So let's help each other out. You help the poor folks." And these weren't in my district, this was America. So I was advocating for not just my district. My district compared to I think Mississippi, Alabama, South Carolina. Actually we, at that time, were certainly not getting the most money because the severity of the poverty and the utilization of food stamps weren't that high in my district, although we had a poor district. So we were actually fighting for poor people in the U.S. and to have the opportunity to do that.

So my serving on the Agriculture Committee was good. In fact, as I look at it, my service on the Agriculture Committee, and even my Members' resistance to me, but finally their acceptance of me, and they did. They did. I earned the right. I wasn't on that drafting committee only because I was a Ranking Member. I was on there because I made a contribution. Also their acceptance of me as their equal and many of their acceptances of me as their superior allowed me to know that I can negotiate with the best of them—whether male or female. Sometimes I tell this to my children and people I

lecture to. Part of your strength is not just what you do with friends and people who support you. Part of your strength is what you do with people who oppose you and resist you, and how you win them over.

In many ways, the Agriculture Committee helped prepare me, that not only what I do nationally but globally. I became the assistant director general for the Food and Agriculture Organization, the largest UN agency in the world. And in that role I had the opportunity of organizing partnerships and alliances around the world—24. I was both blessed and fortunate to either have nurtured, or supported, or encouraged 24 different partnerships to fight hunger around the world, including the U.S.

And, I must say, serving on the Agriculture Committee and the resistance of my male colleagues strengthened me. Now, should they have done that? Of course not. But, hey. But because of that, I think more because of my response to it, my growth. Now everybody will not have that same peace, but that certainly was the end result for me, that I was stronger. And I think, too, I came from the South, so I had come from a segregated community, grew up in a segregated community, knew what segregation was, went to segregated schools, and had to overcome that. So overcoming that helped me also to overcome the male resistance that I had. Should segregation have been in? No, absolutely not. Should male resistance be to their equal colleagues who happen to be female? Absolutely not. Were they trying to help Eva be stronger? Absolutely not. {laughter} But, hey, the result is what the results are.

JOHNSON: Did that resistance surprise you at all? Or did some of those women mentors, and other women who had been on the Hill for a while, did they warn you of that?

CLAYTON: Some of it, yes, they did. They did. Also some of them not only warned me, but also told us how to overcome that. Some of them said, sometimes there is more resistance when they are together than when you have one-on-one. In other words, some of them are kinder, more gentle of a person when they're talking to you one-on-one. But when they're in a group, I'm not sure whether they're trying to prove something to each other or what, I don't know. But if you know how to approach them, some of our colleagues knew them better than I and said, "Why don't you talk with this person perhaps before he gets in the committee?"

JOHNSON: So some good specific advice in that case.

CLAYTON: Oh, yes. Oh, yes. And we did, we talked. Naturally, interesting, when we talked to some of them, they would tell me how to approach their colleagues who were male. They said, "Here's what you say. He's not as bad as you think he is." Anyhow, I would take their advice. I'd go knock on that person's door. Now I wouldn't say, "John Doe told me you're not as bad as you are, but here you are." You have to find people where they are in that area. But, yes, some of the women told, advised us, indeed. Not only on the Agriculture Committee. I think that is generally true [for all committees].

END OF PART ONE ~ BEGINNING OF PART TWO

JOHNSON: We're back with Eva Clayton for part two of our interview. We've asked you a lot about more of the formal networking that women Members did, but we also wanted to ask you about more of the behind-the-scenes and kind of the informal networking. Were there any clubs for women or sporting events or lunches or regular events that you could attend?

CLAYTON: There might have been sporting events that women could attend. I didn't attend them, I must confess. There were opportunities, and I took the opportunity when women would go for dinner or be invited out, in terms of that, so I did do that, and sometimes we women would get together and go out. More times those were women who were part of the freshman class, and you came together with that.

Informally, too, there was an opportunity for me to network with churches in that area. I would go home most of the time, although my kids were matured and grown. My husband was back home, although he would come here. So much of my weekends were going there, and we would not spend time here. But the opportunity, when you knew, when the schedule would allow, sometimes we would gather together, even while we were waiting to vote, for informal dinners or something together in that area. The sporting events I wasn't [interested in], unless I was attending. I must confess I didn't go to many.

JOHNSON: Were there any groups that were male-only, just for male Members that you or your female colleagues tried to integrate?

CLAYTON: I don't know of them. I'm sure there might have been, but I don't know of them. No, what I do know is the incident about, obviously, the gym. What I know about, the incident where on an elevator some male said some things to some of our colleagues, and not to them, but to say, imply that, "You chicks are here, it livens up the place," something of that sort. And I do know about that. In fact, some of those were written up. But I don't know of any specific club, at least not to my memory that women tried to enter that were denied.

JOHNSON: The impetus for this project, as we've told you, is to recognize and celebrate the 100th anniversary of Jeannette Rankin, the first woman elected to Congress.

CLAYTON: Right. Right.

JOHNSON: So when she served in Congress there was a lot of attention that was paid to her dress and her demeanor because she was a woman, and she was the first woman. Do you think that that changed by the time you came to the House, or do you think that women were treated a little bit differently in that regard?

CLAYTON: Well, I think it had changed, but I do remember an incident where people would make remarks about someone being overly dressed or really too fashionable for the House. But by and large most women kind of dressed similar. I think unfortunately Rankin, she had the distinction and the disadvantage of being the only one, so they had to find, they want to find something. She also had the distinction as a woman of conscience who had the audacity to vote for peace, so they had to find something wrong with her. But I don't think that we, in 1993, were that far removed for not being scrutinized for some reason. I don't think the dress was as much the issue, as some would say demeanor, not acting with the regular order, not knowing how to conduct yourself, or some would say she's too fashionably dressed for the floor or something they saw. But most of us dressed very similarly in that era.

WASNIEWSKI: How would you describe your interactions with the press during your time as a Member? Do you recall any memorable questions that you received from reporters about being a woman Member of Congress?

CLAYTON: I thought the press treated me with interest just simply because I became president of the class for a while. I didn't get a sense they were really

interested in me. They kind of raised the question. I don't think they said, "How come?" but "Why you?" But the press has already determined this is the "Year of the Woman," and they just filled in the blank. "She became president because this is the 'Year of the Woman'." True enough. I thought that the press was a little superficial. I still think that, to be honest with you. But I don't think they did anything negative towards me.

I thought they failed to understand the depth of me or understand the depth of women, [and they] had too high expectations of women. In fact, I think we ourselves had high expectations. But the press would say, "Oh, now you're here. Boom. How do you change this institution?" We, too, came to make a big difference, but I think the press wanted a quick fix. I think the press wanted flashy pieces. "You're here today and, boy, everything has changed." So they would have a flashy report or headline. Personally I thought they were okay with me. Back home I do remember getting a lot of press for an issue they raised, I thought, negatively with me.

I had an incident to happen to me, not an incident, but just an interaction on Monday before I came here for this occasion. It was a press person who had covered me on the farm bill. Just incidentally, a friend who knew of my interests in international [issues] sent me a report—I can't remember this reporter's name—sent me a report that he recently had done on IFAD. He works for the *National Journal*, and he'd be disappointed I can't recall his name, but I recall him fondly. My friend said to him, "I'm going to share this report with Eva Clayton." He said, "Eva Clayton? Oh, I remember her. I covered her in the farm bill, and she did not get credit for the work that she did. Little will people know of what she did in terms of black farmers or the poor in that area." Now that was the press covering me. His beat was agriculture. Apparently now his beat is international agriculture, if he's going

to this international piece. This IFAD is the International Fund for Agricultural Development. It's one of the UN agencies in Rome that he covered. And apparently the director of IFAD had come to the United States at the request of the Department of Agriculture, and so he was covering it. But by and large, I think the press covered me as well as they probably covered anybody else who either wasn't a chair.

JOHNSON: Because there were so few women in Congress when you served, did you ever feel as if you were not just representing your own constituents, but you were representing women in North Carolina and across the country?

CLAYTON: Oh, yes. Oh, yes, I did. You know obviously your constituents come first. You want to say that because they elect you. But when you come to this body, you recognize that you cannot help your constituents unless you also help others. As a woman, you found yourself not only coalescing with women here (in Congress), but also national groups who would bring issues to you.

I probably had as many national organizations coming to me as I had local coming to me from my district. I certainly had national women's groups coming to me to talk about issues, whether they had an auxiliary or a chapter in my state or in my district. Once you're here, people begin to see you're not only representing your district, but also representing the nation. Women groups certainly took advantage of that.

A larger number of women groups are far more active now, but they were active then. Not only in terms of EMILY's List in terms of money, in trying to raise [money], but groups who were concerned about health, groups who were concerned about education, pro-choice groups. All of those groups

nationally would use the opportunity to lobby all of us, as women in those areas, and not limited it to where they were located.

JOHNSON: Was that a role that you embraced, because that in a way sounds like a lot of pressure, if you're representing women across the country?

CLAYTON: Well, I eventually did embrace it. I didn't see it as pressure as such. Actually I saw it as an opportunity. Just as I began to see the opportunity of women in Congress helping me with the legislation I wanted. I began to see national support. Now, did I support all the things that women brought me? No, I couldn't, obviously. But I saw it as an opportunity that I would understand the broader needs of certain issues. As they would bring them, they would be helping me to expand my understanding of these issues. Now where I would have some pressure, difficulty, if what they were asking me to do was in conflict with issues or positions that I was taking with my district. Obviously I would have to make the judgment call on that. But I saw that more as an opportunity to expand my understanding and also to expand my influence.

WASNIEWSKI: Earlier you mentioned a few of the colleagues that you'd served with, and we're curious to know, particularly for ones who were in leadership positions—Barbara Kennelly was a chief deputy whip at one point, and then at the end of your career Nancy Pelosi became Whip. What were your observations about women like that and their leadership style?

CLAYTON: They were very embracing. My observation is that they were aggressive, and they were supportive. When you are in a leadership role, you begin to know that you need support, so they were very supportive. I must say, Nancy was very supportive of me financially, in terms of my campaign, and I don't think she was limited to me. I think she was appreciative and understood that women had difficulty in raising funds. Barbara Kennelly embraced me

personally, and both in terms of advice. I'm not sure I remember too much money coming from Barbara, but she and I were probably friendlier than myself and Nancy. But Nancy came down for me, in my campaign. She was very, very supportive for me. I couldn't have asked for more.

JOHNSON: We haven't talked about the role of staff at all. But were there any women staff from your office, or maybe committee staffers, that really stand out in your mind?

CLAYTON: Yes, my chief of staff, obviously. She had worked before with other Members, and that was a big help for me in that area. My Agriculture staff happened to be a male. In fact, he ended up being the legislative director for Senator [Thomas Richard (Tom)] Harkin, and he was Agriculture chairman when I left. But he was very good. The advantage for me having a female staff who was experienced, who knew what regular order meant, but also who understood the nuances of knowing how things worked outside of the regular order and relationships. That was very helpful. Not that men don't have the nuances in things, either. I don't want to suggest that they don't have. But being a woman and getting it from a woman, it did help, yes.

JOHNSON: What type of influence do you think these women staffers had on the institution? Because there was a growing number of women Members that we talked about, but also women staff as well.

CLAYTON: Well, I think the growing number of women Members provided the opportunity for the women staff. Not that men wouldn't hire women, but it certainly gave a greater opportunity for women to be here. I think once they came, people understood that they were just as competent and just as aggressive and just as determined as anyone else. In fact, could be more determined than their men staff. Even I've had men to tell me that their

women staff executive were far more determined than some of their male staff they had. So once they're given an opportunity to demonstrate what they can do, I think there's no question about their abilities to do that. And you begin to see, I'm told, a number of women who head up these congressional committees, not only just chiefs of staff, but also of committees as well.

JOHNSON: We wanted to end today with just a few questions, kind of a retrospective section. How would you describe the role that women play in Congress, generally speaking? What do they bring to the institution?

CLAYTON: Well, I think they bring a sensitivity. I think that sensitivity not only comes from just being a woman, but also some instances of being a mother, being a sister. We bring insight. This sounds sexist, but we bring a more caring attitude. And, I'll say in my own instance, I brought a matured, determined, and confident mind that I could handle things. I think women bring a sense of "I can fix it." Now that may be a little misplaced around this institution, but I still think having that attitude is still better than "I can't fix it." You bring a willingness, an openness, that it's not impossible. We bring a sense of the possibility. We bring a sense of hope. We bring a sense of "You can't tell me what to do. I'm here, and I got as much right as you have."

I think the larger number of women who come think men also are accepting that. I think sometimes men, in certain environments, accept differently—men in separate environments may act differently in that. Men in their homes know how they're accepting their wives. And then they come here, and they act different, even the men who come from corporate America where women are executives. So I think the more that we are here, the more men will act in the same way they do in the private sector and within their families.

I also think there is change. Maybe this is hopefulness on my part, but I do see it. The Agriculture Committee now has more women than they've ever had, both sides of the aisle, Republican and Democrats. I don't want to just say that Agriculture for women is the worst committee, by any means. I was pleased to serve on it. I'm very grateful, as I said earlier. But I do think that, for me, it's an example that if men are becoming far more open in agriculture and rural areas, they are becoming far more open in all the other committees. I think having women adds to the democracy, adds to the representation, adds to the diversity of our society here, and it represents America.

JOHNSON: We've asked you a lot about being a woman and the role of women in Congress. But what about being an African-American woman? What do you bring to the institution in that position?

CLAYTON: Well, it actually brings diversity. I think all of us who are of a minority bring a representation of a sector of America that was not here. I'm pleased to note the increased number of Hispanics and the larger number—not large number, but certainly Asian Americans that are here. So I think we bring a representation of that diversity, and to the extent that Afro-Americans haven't been, or to the extent Afro-Americans need an increased voice, as a woman.

Afro-American women in society are in a unique role, and sometimes they're playing the only role as the provider in families. Many families are headed by Afro-American women, and they have special needs to be able to articulate what that means, but also to represent the strength of those women because they are indeed providing for these families. We also want to make sure that they have an equal opportunity in terms of employment and education. I would say that—I can't speak for Hispanics and Asians—but I respect the uniqueness of our culture, the uniqueness of our strength, the uniqueness of

even our oppression. All of that needs to be a part of the dialogue and the debate, and to the extent we're here, we have an obligation to articulate that or to add strength in that way.

JOHNSON: When you first came to Congress in 1992, did you feel that you had any extra obstacles because you were a black woman?

CLAYTON: Well, I came to Congress with the realization that as a black woman I had to fight harder. When I came to Congress—I had that attitude before I came to Congress—that if I were to achieve, I had to put extra effort in it, and I couldn't take the first response as the response, whether I liked it or not. The realization of my development has told me that if I'm going to get from here to here, I can't let your resistance or your first attitude towards me be my determinant. So I came with that. But Congress didn't make that. That's just who Eva Clayton happened to be and also the culture and the era in which I grew up in. Those of us who achieve knew we had to achieve in spite of resistance, and some cases because of the resistance, okay, or whatever you want to call it.

Also, as I indicated earlier, my mother instilled that in me, yes. Both my father and mother wanted us to have, and they sacrificed for us. (I had one brother.) They were determined that we were going to college. It wasn't a question. But what they said, that, "I don't want to waste our money, and you need to do well." Now, I wasn't an "A" student by any means, but I did do well.

JOHNSON: And you came to Congress so that must have made them very proud.

CLAYTON: {laughter} And I came to Congress. And I came to Congress. My mother would be—she wasn't living when I came. However when I was elected county commissioner, she was very proud of that. She was very proud of that.

It's interesting, as you mature you begin some reflection of what your parents did. Early in my school I attended, because of my age and also the segregation, we didn't have a lunchroom. I think kids carried food from home or wherever. But my mother became the president of the PTA, and she was insistent that there be a lunchroom. They made a lunchroom out of almost a school closet where they kept books, and she and one other person, they would rotate. Finally the school began giving oranges and fruit, and that was the beginning of a lunchroom. So part of my evolution to food and hunger was my mother.

WASNIEWSKI: When you first began your career in the House, as we were saying earlier, there were 36 women, roughly.

CLAYTON: Before. Yes.

WASNIEWSKI: Before. Believe it or not, now there are 108 women in Congress.

CLAYTON: One hundred and four.

WASNIEWSKI: There are, most of them in the House, 20 in the Senate.

CLAYTON: Right.

WASNIEWSKI: We're curious to know, looking forward—because this is a retrospective on the centennial—looking out at the 150th anniversary in 2067, how many women do you think will be in Congress? Do you think they'll reach parity?

CLAYTON: Sixty-seven?

WASNIEWSKI: Fifty years from 2017, how many women do you think will be in Congress?

CLAYTON: Let's hope that out of 435 Members that we have at least half. How about that? Let's go for the max. You notice I went to half, right? I didn't even say

one more than half. Hey, half would be great. We want to be here in equal numbers and equal leadership and equal opportunity. What do you think about that?

WASNIEWSKI: I think that's great. How will we get there?

CLAYTON: Well, {laughter} that's the question. But I think we will get there by instilling in women that this is an opportunity. I think we will get there by instilling in women that there will be people to support you. I think the first part is confidence. I think the second part is support. I think the capacity to do it is there. I don't think that's the issue. I think we come as women equally equipped to serve as any man. Some of us not as good as others, some of us as good as others, and some of us are superior to others. So I don't think this is capacity. I think it's confident and it's support. Confident that women of capacity would say, "This is worthwhile. Why should I go through all this when I can go to corporate America, I can go to become a president of an institution? Why should I go through all the scrutiny and have to beg for all this money and then be mistreated?"

I think there are women who would embrace this if we could tell them, give them confidence, that this is something you can do. But not only something you can do, this is something you want to do, this is something you may enjoy. This is something in spite of the headaches that you will look back with gratitude that you had the opportunity to do it. Because making money is great—because I wish I had a little more. But listen, making money is not the end of the game.

We as women have to say to other women, "Hey, it's a headache, but it's a headache worth having. Yes, you have to raise money, but you'll learn how to do it, whether you like it or not. And by the way, there are people and

institutions and organizations who are willing to give you that money. Now you may have to keep calling, you have to keep writing, you have to keep insisting, but they will do it."

JOHNSON: What role do you think minority women will play in this in the next 50 years?

CLAYTON: Oh, in 50-years? Well, I think there will be more than double of what they are now. Sixteen, I believe there are, Afro-American women? Sixteen or 17? I think there's 16. I think they will more than double what they are. You said 50 years from now?

WASNIEWSKI: Fifty years.

CLAYTON: Oh, no. They will triple that. Let me correct that. In 50 years we can do three times better than we are doing now. We want to do it in proportion to our population, yes. Yes. And I think the Hispanics will also. They may outdo the blacks because their population is growing. But they ought to do it in proportion to their population. I think you will find far more minority women coming because we are growing in population, and we're growing in interests. So I think the opportunity for leadership for minority women will be significantly increased here, both in terms of coming, but also in terms of their leadership. I predict you will have a minority Speaker one day, and she will be female. How about that? I may not be here to see it, but they're going to be here.

WASNIEWSKI: What advice would you have to offer any woman who was considering running for Congress?

CLAYTON: Well, I would suggest that if you are interested, to try to study individuals or converse with individuals you know who are here, whether male or female.

You need to have a sense of the kind of personal relationship they see in that. But I would suggest that you ought to do your own research before you run. At least give yourself the benefit that you've researched this like you would research any job that you may want to look at. What is the result of serving in the House? The bills mean what? They do what? What's the end result of serving, or what's the purpose of this institution? Why would anybody want to serve here? And then an opportunity for looking at what the cost is. I understand the cost keeps going up, but you need to know that. You need to know that. You need to know the rules of the game before you get in the game a little bit.

JOHNSON: In the beginning of the interview we asked about people that served as mentors for you. What about the other side? Did you serve as a mentor for any women Members or anyone else that served in Congress?

CLAYTON: Well, I think Alma Adams will say to you that—I don't know if I'm a mentor because we're close in age—that I assisted her in terms of Congress. Some people I didn't know I supported financial, [Terri] Sewell and those who happened to be related to relatives of mine in Alabama. When new Members came, I certainly tried to help them. When women came on the Agriculture Committee, I reached out to them. I wasn't successful in keeping them on the Agriculture Committee, but certainly—Jill Long Thompson reached out to me, and I would reach out to women as they came on the Agriculture Committee. When I served as chair of the Congressional Black Caucus Foundation, we would reach out to new Members in terms of how they could get interns and programs in their areas.

JOHNSON: Do you think your service in the House inspired some women to run for Congress, or maybe will inspire some women someday?

CLAYTON: Well, I would hope that. I would hope that. I've had people to tell me generally that I've inspired them. I can't say that anyone in Congress has told me that, but I certainly have had people in the state house and people who are now presidents of colleges or who are in corporate America.

WASNIEWSKI: Looking back on your career was there anything unexpected or surprising to you about your time in the House, something you didn't think on the front end would happen?

CLAYTON: Well, I didn't think I would become president of the freshman class. I didn't campaign for that. I'm glad it happened. I wasn't prepared for the long schedule, I must say. As I said earlier, you ought to look into the rules of the game. I certainly didn't do my investigation there. I thought more that you'd be out by 8:00 p.m. Sometimes you'd do 12:00, and I wasn't prepared for that. Some of the perks I knew nothing about. My husband certainly enjoyed the fact that we could travel.

I'm a good Democrat, and I'm strictly a party person, but I wasn't prepared for the kind of demarcation between Republicans and Democrats as strongly as it was. In fact, interesting, when I first registered, I registered as a Republican. My parents were Republicans. In fact, my husband and I both registered as Republicans, when he was in law school. But when we moved to this rural area to participate we became [Democrats]—and I'm a Democrat all the way, and I want to make a declaration of that. But early in the black community many of the older blacks all felt an obligation and an appreciation of what [President Abraham] Lincoln had done, and I think that's the reason why they were Republicans in that era. So you had many of those who registered early in their lives were, and that was the case with my parents. So I saw both sides of it, and neither Republicans or Democrats were

that embracing, when I was growing up, to blacks. It was just what party you were in, in terms of voting.

So I was a little surprised how strong was the partisanship. But fortunately for me, I had the ability to communicate on both sides of the aisle. It had nothing to do with my having been a Republican. It just has something to do with my demeanor. To achieve something, I know I have to talk to people I don't agree with, okay, or people who don't agree with me, or people who are not necessarily in my party or necessarily in my church. So it was surprising how much that was departed, and how the divisions were in that era.

JOHNSON: What do you think will be your lasting legacy in regards to your House service?

CLAYTON: I would think my role in nutrition. One of the comments that Alma Adams shared with me on her first meeting—she's on the Agriculture Committee, and by the way she represents more of an urban area than I did. But she's on the Agriculture and Education [Committees]. Her first committee meeting the Ranking Member of Agriculture said to her, "I hope you can fulfill Eva Clayton's legacy." Interesting.

WASNIEWSKI: I just had a follow-up question, because this came up in the conference yesterday [Association of Centers for the Study of Congress] in all three of your prepared remarks when we were talking. It was the partisanship in the House, and how Congress has become much more partisan over the last three decades, particularly. I was just curious to know what you think the role of women is in that kind of environment. Can women make the Congress less partisan?

CLAYTON: I would hope so, but I don't see that happening right now. You know, it happened. It was less when we were there, but it seems to be more now. I

don't know if it's as much of a female issue as it is an ideology issue. I think it's more of a political issue, and it's not just Republicans and Democrats. It is the ideology of the extreme that says . . . and I may be misjudging this, but from where I sit it seems like there is conflict within, and it may be extreme in both parties. Maybe we have extreme liberals. I don't see that. But I think there is the pulling away of the traditional Republicans that were here, and therefore that is why you have probably less communication across the line because they haven't been communicating within.

For instance, I shared with someone that John [Andrew] Boehner is someone I know, or think I know, or whatever. I think he was on Agriculture when I first was here, and he finally got off too. But we've traveled together on trips we made. And I came back—I think it was for the 50th anniversary of the Civil Rights Act a year ago. I'm not sure when I came back [2014]. I happened to see him, and he looked over. "Eva Clayton." I said, "John Boehner." So I got out of my seat, and he came and hugged me. My friend who was with me took a picture of it, and she said, "Eva, I'm going to blackmail you back home where nobody would believe this." She said, "You hugging John Boehner?" So I said, "This is probably going to blackmail John Boehner in his party." {laughter} I hope you all don't record this, but anyhow.

So I think it's that kind of stiffness that allows it, and I think it's more of a pulling to extreme on either side that doesn't allow you to be human beings. But I think women are more open. I also think even those that may be extreme in the Republican Party, if you could get to them—now this may be again my ego—but I think if you can get to them, I think they will care about the same issues. I think you can make them see the value of them working together because they do care about the same issues. They do care

about children. They do care about family. In order to do that, we have to give, each other. But because you're standing in a group over here, whether you're women or men, you have made up your mind that you're not going to budge.

Now Eva Clayton believed that she could get some of them to budge, and I think it's not only Eva Clayton. I think women, too, if they could get to them, if Democratic women and Republican women could come together individually and then one or two, they will begin to see the commonality and see the reality and the advisability of working together. But these artificial barriers are in order to be perceived as strong. Nobody gets anything done. Tell me, who wins in that? Help me understand. Who wins in that? The Democrats have to give, and the Republicans have to give.

And I think women have the ability to make the case for the common sense, just as we do in our families when we bring them around the table. That's who we are. That's the sensitivity when our kids are getting out of order. Sometimes they even get out of order at 40 and 50, you have to bring them together. The old folks say, "You're never too old for me to tell you what to do." Common sense makes sense. Women have that instinct. I think God has given us that instinct, and those of us who are not shy in telling mature people what they ought to do will do that. Now those who say, "It ain't my business, and they're not going to listen to me. . . ." Well, whether you listen to me or not, I'm going to tell you. I'm going to put it on the table. You can walk away from it now. You're going to get it now. That's what I tell my children. And I'm not into the business of "I told you so." I'm going to tell you now that it makes more sense for you all to work together.

Well, the same thing goes for Congress. It's just the same basic principles are in life, regardless of what you do, whether in politics or family or corporate

America that you have to find a way. You find a way of making progress by understanding that you don't do anything by yourself. You make progress indeed if you find the ability to get the strength from each of us and work. And I think women have that ability to make the case for that. I think women respond to women, too, whether you're a Republican or a Democrat. The matriarch in us suggests that.

JOHNSON: Is there anything else that you wanted to add? That's all we have for our questions.

CLAYTON: I'm going to end the sermon on that because I felt like I was preaching, but I apologize for that. But anyhow, I have great hope for this institution, and so I want them to come to their senses and be the great institution they're designed to be. I think women can be a part of that, bringing that sensitivity and that potential.

WASNIEWSKI: Well, we thank you for spending time with us. This has been delightful.

JOHNSON: Yes.

CLAYTON: Well, thank you.

JOHNSON: Thank you so much.

CLAYTON: Yes.

NOTES

[1] Reference to Anita Hill's testimony to the Senate Judiciary Committee in 1991 about then-Supreme Court nominee Clarence Thomas.
[2] Congresswoman Jill Long served as the Under Secretary for Rural Economic and Community Development, Department of Agriculture from 1995 to 2001.