The Honorable Susan Molinari

U.S. Representative of New York (1990–1997)

Oral History Interview
Final Edited Transcript

January 8. 2016

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

"We all bring our experiences to a discussion, and there are all different experiences, and so I did take very seriously the experience of being a female and bringing that to the discussion. I was not one of those people—sometimes I would go up to somebody and say they did this, and they'd be like, 'I am not going to be the female legislator.' And I totally respect that, but that was not me; I was going to be the female legislator. If there was something that was going on that was ticking me off with regard to women, anyplace, I was going to be the female. So, I took that very seriously. There was a reason I was there."

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Abstract

Raised in a political family, Susan Molinari's relationship with her father, Congressman Guy Molinari, greatly influenced her road to Congress. As the only Republican on the city council of New York, and the daughter of a well-known politician, Molinari used her notoriety and experience to win a seat in the U.S. House. She made history as only the second daughter to directly succeed her father in Congress. Her youth and political lineage garnered the attention of the Republican Leadership and the respect of her colleagues. In the 105th Congress (1997–1999), the New York Representative became one of the highest-ranking Republican women when she was elected vice chair of the Republican Conference.

In her interview, Molinari recalls how she and other Republican women had new opportunities—increased speaking engagements and plum committee assignments, for example—after the GOP gained control of the House in 1995. Embracing the role of a surrogate representative for women nationwide and abroad during her five terms in the House, Molinari describes how she used committee assignments and congressional delegations as a platform to address gender inequalities and to craft legislation to help women and families. In her personal life, Molinari made headlines when she married fellow Representative Bill Paxon of New York, chairman of the National Republican Congressional Committee. Molinari gave birth to a daughter while serving in Congress and speaks about the press attention this event received, as well as how she and her husband balanced being new parents with their congressional careers.

Biography

MOLINARI, Susan, (daughter of Guy Victor Molinari; wife of William Paxon), a Representative from New York; born in Staten Island, Richmond County, N.Y., March 27, 1958; graduated from St. Joseph Hill Academy, 1976; B.A., State University of New York, Albany, N.Y., 1980; M.A., State University of New York, Albany, N.Y., 1982; research analyst, New York state senate finance committee; finance assistant, National Republican Governors Association; ethnic community liaison, Republican National Committee, 1983–1984; member of the New York, N.Y. council, 1986–1990; elected as a Republican to the One Hundred First Congress, by special election, to fill the vacancy caused by the resignation of United States Representative Guy V. Molinari, reelected to the four succeeding Congresses, and served until her resignation August 2, 1997 (March 20, 1990–August 2, 1997); television journalist.

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.

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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 SUSAN MOLINARI OF NEW YORK —
A CENTURY OF WOMEN IN CONGRESS

JOHNSON: My name is Kathleen Johnson, and today I'm with the House Historian, Matt Wasniewski. The date is January 8th, 2016. We're in the House Recording Studio [in the Rayburn House Office Building], and we are very pleased to be speaking with former Representative Susan Molinari, from New York. Thank you very much for coming today.

WASNIEWSKI: Thank you.

MOLINARI: Very excited to be a part of this project.

JOHNSON: Great. This project that we're working on is to recognize and to celebrate the 100th anniversary of the election of Jeannette Rankin to Congress, the first woman. So, we have a bunch of questions that we wanted to ask you today, but first off, when you were young, did you have any female role models?

MOLINARI: No. I'd never thought about that question before, but I don't think so. I remember looking at the little autograph books that you have when you're really little, and you ask your grandmother and your mother and father to sign it, and the kids in your class. On it, it would say, "What do you want to be when you grow up?" And I remember, looking back, when I was in maybe second grade, it was flight attendant, which we called stewardesses at the time, or a ballerina. That was sort of my notion of what women could be. And so, no, it never occurred to me to, certainly, never to enter into politics or to be front and center. I cannot think of too many role models when I was really young that were females. That changed along the way, gratefully.

JOHNSON: So, how did you first become interested in politics?

MOLINARI: I come from a long line of politicians. My grandfather was in the New York state assembly. My father [Guy Victor Molinari] was in the New York state assembly, then a Member of Congress, then borough president. I'm an only child and very close to both my parents, and we would have Sunday breakfast, and we would have elections for who was going to be the president of the day. And so you would say, "Well, if I'm elected president, I will take us all to the zoo." And whatever you promised, you got to fulfill, and so you really learned a lot about making deals so that you could get that extra vote.

We would have elected officials come to our house all the time, so it was an area in which I felt very comfortable. My dad didn't run for office until I was in high school, but there was always that constant discussion of politics. He was always involved in campaigns. And then when my dad did run for politics, I continued to follow and nip at his heels, and just found the debates, the protests, so much of campaigning . . . My friends and I would go door-to-door with him and stick letters from him into doors. It just sort of became natural. Although never at the time—going back to the question of were there female role models—would I have thought that I would run for office. I just really enjoyed being a part of the [political] world.

WASNIEWSKI: Do you have memories about your dad's congressional office or attending any special events here on Capitol Hill?

MOLINARI: Oh, absolutely. I do remember my dad allowing me to come to the inauguration of Ronald Reagan and going to some of the great events that surround any inaugural. So, I have some very fond memories of that. I remember coming to the House Floor to watch my dad be sworn in, which was kind of an amazing thing years later—to have him come to the House Floor to watch me be sworn in.

So yes, I have very, very fond memories, both in going to Albany—not that I was a daughter that needed to be torn away from my father—but when he was in the New York state assembly in Albany. I went to the State University of New York at Albany, and so would meet him for lunch, and would find every opportunity I could to go down there and watch a debate. Oftentimes, he lived with two other members of the assembly, and he would invite my roommate and myself to dinner, which if you were eating college food, that was a big treat. And while we were cleaning up, we'd listen to them calculate the debate that they were going to have the next day, sitting by the fire drinking Sambuca or something but engaging in what the topic was going to be the next day and the roles that they were going to play. It just left an impression.

WASNIEWSKI: Do you have a favorite memory of your dad serving in the U.S. House?

MOLINARI: Oh, there's so many great memories. My father is very quixotic in that he does not see walls. He just knocks them down and gets things done. He took on Newt [Newton Leroy] Gingrich. He threw a party for Silvio [Ottavio] Conte when Silvio got into trouble for giving the Italian salute on the House Floor.

My dad was very bipartisan. He believed very much in the institution as opposed to the political party, and so a lot of the memories that I have of my dad was sort of teaching me the lessons of . . . He worked very closely with then-Congressman Chuck [Charles Ellis] Schumer. He saved a hospital that was about to close, a public-health hospital on Staten Island—and in several other areas as a freshman Member because he didn't know any better—that he wasn't supposed to be able to have that kind of clout and figure things out. And so those are the memories that I have of my dad, is my dad just saw

walls, but he didn't walk around them; he just took them down and still does.

JOHNSON: Why did you decide to run for Congress in 1990?

MOLINARI: Well, I was on the New York City council—that was my first elected office, and that was really more just an opportunity that came my way. Because I was always with my father and was raised—you grow up in my family and you'll go to a Republican convention at a county hall, and they'd say, "Guy Molinari is going to be . . . who's going to nominate Guy Molinari for the New York state assembly?" And my dad would say "my daughter." And so I learned to speak publicly before I knew I was supposed to be afraid of it. So, because I was always active in his campaigns, people came to me and asked me from a very young age to consider running for office. And when this position opened up for the New York City council, I thought, I'd been working in Washington, D.C., it would give me a chance to go back to New York City. There was no way I was supposed to win this race, but it would give me some good exposure, [and help me] to figure out what I wanted to do next, and sort of get to know the right people in New York City for a job in public relations. Once you go out there, and once you start to meet the people, and once you start to shake hands and hear about what their concerns are, once you start to figure out that maybe I can actually do this and fix their problems, you become so convinced that you have to win. So, I ran for the New York City council.

When my dad decided to run for borough president—Mayor [Rudy] Giuliani asked my dad to run for borough president to increase the participation of Republicans on Staten Island—my mother was diagnosed not that long before that with a muscle disease, and so it was kind of wearing on my dad to be away from home, so this sort of fit—the right thing. He ran

for borough president and won, which left open his congressional seat. This was always just a dream come true for me—after watching him and following him and following the discussions and the debates—that to have an opportunity to serve in the United States House of Representatives was about the highest honor I could think of.

JOHNSON: What was his reaction when you told him you wanted to run?

MOLINARI: All for it, although when I did tell him I wanted to run for the New York City council, he opened up his drawer and took out a card that had the quote "The Man in the Arena." He said, "Take this and keep it in your bag because you will need it. And it is a tough business, but it's a beautiful business." My father always—he is the true public servant, right?—and so he always thought that this was just . . . For his daughter or anybody who would ever say "I'd like to run for office," he would never discourage you, even though he would warn you that sometimes it would be rough-and-tumble. But the ability to serve your neighbors was just something, that if you had an opportunity to do it, that you had to.

JOHNSON: And what role did he play in your campaign?

MOLINARI: It was interesting. He was more my emotional advisor, if you will. Of course, I had his campaign . . . I was so blessed because I had his campaign manager, his fundraisers. I had a really great political apparatus. My dad was the guy that would say, "Oh, you've got two hours in the middle of the day, let's hit the train stations." He just—onward, onward, onward, onward! So, again, he was more the campaign cheerleader, or the person who would come to me and say, "I know it was a rough day, but you did really well." He had the perspective of being that candidate that stands out there sometimes, when

you're faced with that emotional uncertainty of how you did or how it's all going. And so he could really be a real place of calm, a little oasis for me.

WASNIEWSKI: I think every Member of the House has very distinct memories of that first election to the House. For you, were there any key moments or turning-point moments in that 1990 special election?

MOLINARI: It's a jumble, particularly being in a special election. Interestingly, I followed Ileana Ros-Lehtinen, who came in in a special, and so because you're in a special election, you are given all the intensities of your political parties. They send people in from out of town; everybody offers to come in to speak in your district or to do a fundraiser. It became wonderful, but heavily watched. The media focuses much more on those special elections, and so the intensity, I think, is just something that I remember. It is when I first took up running, because I needed to—showing how old I am I'd plug in my Walkman. As kids all now say to the screen, "Mom, what's a Walkman?" And I'd just go for a run because it was the only time I could be by myself, without everyone who knew better telling me what to do, what to say, how to dress. So, it was more the commotion.

JOHNSON: You mentioned that you were on the New York City council, and so you had that prior political experience.

MOLINARI: Yes.

JOHNSON: How did that compare with your House service?

MOLINARI: Interesting question because when I was in the New York City council, I was the only Republican in city government, and so I was the minority leader. I was 27 years old, and so I all of a sudden became ex officio on all the committees, including [becoming] somebody who had to negotiate New

York City's entire budget. I had a car and a driver. I was one of four people who had an office in city hall. I was really fortunate to serve under Mayor Ed [Edward Irving] Koch, who taught me a lot about politics, also. (I've had some great mentors along the way.) Very, very fair, even though I was the only Republican, and gave me access to his staff, his teams. So, I had to grow up fast in terms of that, right, because you'd have a debate on the floor over something that President Reagan would say. One Democrat would start, and I would have to stand up and defend [my stance], and then another Democrat, and I would have to stand up and defend. So, you got a real good opportunity to hone your debating skills because there was no one else there to do it.

The issues that you handle in New York City government—as much as it was great and it was a thrill—it didn't carry, I guess, the national and international, of course, importance of being in the United States Congress. I was privileged to serve, for at least my first year, under George [Herbert Walker] Bush, [number] 41, and really get to sort of sit at [the feet of] another master, who had such respect for Members of Congress. We were in and out of the White House all the time, negotiating things like a civil rights bill, transportation bills, the Americans with Disabilities [Act]. He really put forth some amazing pieces of legislation, and we were all very active in that as members of his political party. So, the issues just took [place] on a bigger stage. And, of course, we were all there for the First Gulf War.

WASNIEWSKI: You mentioned the fact that you were just 27 when you joined the New York City council, but you were in your early 30s when you campaigned for the House.

MOLINARI: Yes.

WASNIEWSKI: Was age an issue during the campaign?

MOLINARI: I got sworn in on my 32nd birthday, which was pretty cool. Age was very much an issue, particularly when I ran the first time. To those of you who can't see me, I'm five foot two, and so I looked shorter. No one ever told me to dress better than I was, so I dressed in a less mature fashion, and so I think age was [a factor]. When [I ran] my first campaign, the gentleman who ran against me, Bob Gigante, would constantly—this was for Congress—would constantly mention the fact that he was married, he had children, he had a house, he had a mortgage. So, he tried to bring in his life experience to say "and now here's this . . ." at the time when we were running, a 31-year-old who has only really known public life.

So, it did come into play and, of course, at 27, being in the New York City council I was a bit of a standout as the only Republican and being so young. There was a significant amount of women on the New York City council who were very strong and very smart, so ironically that was not an issue in my first job in politics.

JOHNSON: Was gender an important issue in your House campaign?

MOLINARI: It wasn't for me, but it was for my opponents. Gender, yes, always was an issue where there'd be the whisper campaigns about, again, "One's the younger female who is going to try and tell people what to do" was always sort of the whisper. On the other hand, the voters are pretty cool people, and the people that I represented in Staten Island and Brooklyn . . . I think to the older people, I was almost [like] their granddaughters or their daughters, and so I did not feel it from the voters at all.

WASNIEWSKI: Can you describe the district for us, geographically, and demographically as well?

MOLINARI: Sure. Now it's changed a lot. The district was Staten Island and part of Brooklyn: Bay Ridge, Bensonhurst. My logo was the Verrazano-Narrows Bridge because it connected the two parts of the district. At the time, it was predominantly Italian American, Irish American, a large and growing Jewish population. Very ethnic, very second, third generation—probably second generation of Brooklyn and maybe third generation by the time they moved to Staten Island. Really lively, really loving, just a terrifically warm place where everybody assumes they know everybody, and usually does. It is the one degree of separation in the district, as it was then. So, it was a really great and gracious place to live and serve and have my first babies.

JOHNSON: We asked about your dad and the role he played in your campaign. But what about once you were elected, did he offer you any advice?

MOLINARI: My dad and I worked together a lot, less on advice than coordinating, because again . . . so starting off, he was in Congress, I was in the city council. We would talk about needing a new ferry, and I would be able to say, "Look, I just talked to the appropriators. I think I can get such and such, can you match it?" When we switched, I was in the midst of building a senior citizen club in the basement of a church, which I was getting a hard time for, but I made Dad promise that he was going to take that up. My dad always fought for the Staten Island Homeport. Then it became sort of my job, before the base closure commissions.

Yes, my father would give me advice. My father has an amazing political acumen. He's 87 years old, and he is still one of the smartest political people that I know, and so it would not be unusual for him to call me and say, "Here, I think this is a great issue for you to jump on." Or, "I just heard that the mayor said this, why don't you offer to do this?" Most of the time, though, it was more of a collaborative relationship that we had in trying to

work together to bring the resources of the federal [government] and the city together, for Staten Island and Brooklyn.

JOHNSON: Were there any challenges or maybe obstacles, in succeeding your father? You talked about some of the advantages, but what about the other side?

MOLINARI: Sure. For me it's self-imposed, and I'm always afraid of tarnishing the legacy. He's just a terrific person, with an amazing background, résumé, ability to command, speak, passion, all those things. And what if I got up there and totally screwed this up? That was more my concern than anything in terms of the pressure, so that was something that I put on myself. I think the fact that I was female differentiated . . . Our styles were and still are so different that I did think it made it a little bit easier for us to sort of lay our own groundwork, if you would. And then, of course, I got the benefit of being in the majority, which he never got to be in all the years he served in Congress, and so that does give you a whole different opportunity to get things done.

WASNIEWSKI: What was it like to be there, be sworn in, and succeed your father directly? You were only the second woman in Congress ever to directly succeed a father.[1]

MOLINARI: It's amazing, amazing. I've been so blessed in my life for those moments. I think about—I'm going to start crying now—I think about standing there, giving the speech, and there's my dad, who . . . I'm sure we all have those moments right, as kids, where you were like, "Oh, I got an A, and my dad didn't say it was great." I remember going to him, saying, "I just got a free master's because they offered me a teaching assistantship." And he was like, "Great. Now, on to the next." He was always the person where you'd say . . . I remember being little, saying, "Dad, all my friends got a dollar for getting an A on their report card." And he'd say, "Well, I want you to get an A

because you want to get an A, and if you need a dollar, I'll give you a dollar, but there's no connection there." And so I always sort of felt that I wasn't good enough, and then there was that moment that I stood on the House Floor and could see that in his eyes. That was a game changer in our relationship.

JOHNSON: Another type of question that we wanted to ask you about was, there's a couple handouts that we showed you before the interview, and the second one there is from your dad, a [campaign] button. We didn't know if you had any sort of stories about, even if not that particular button from your dad, but just campaigning in general, and some of the materials that he might have used.

MOLINARI: We were big into the lawn signs and the pins. We didn't do the soaps or the nail files, but we did a lot of that stuff. You would have these grueling conversations about "A New Generation of Leadership"—what should be red, what should be white—and so you put a lot of thought into that. I do remember in one of my dad's first campaigns, one of the slogans I came up with was "Give Guy a Try." I was pretty proud to see that on his buttons. And we would have those conversations back and forth, about what would work, what wouldn't work.

I was given a great opportunity because my dad was so popular that when I did run for his seat, he was present in a lot of my documents. Rudy Giuliani wasn't mayor yet but was still extremely popular in the district that I ran in and would come in, and so I had some good people, [Senator] Al [Alfonse Marcello] D'Amato, at the time.

WASNIEWSKI: On the top campaign button, yours from one of your early campaigns, who came up with that "A New Generation of Leadership" slogan?

MOLINARI: All of us, I think. We were trying to do the generational thing, both to separate myself from my dad, but also to borrow a little bit on the Kennedyesque—not to compare myself to the President [John Fitzgerald Kennedy] at all, but the benefits of having someone younger, you know, getting into politics. I think that's really kind of what we were trying for there.

JOHNSON: When you first came to the House in 1990, there were 28 women. Did you find that because there were so few of you, that women gravitated towards each other?

MOLINARI: Yes, and I think we still do. I still consider [Democratic] Leader [Nancy] Pelosi a dear friend. There is much to be said about the conversation that takes places about women being able to sort of cross party lines and make things happen. I had always worked with Nita [M.] Lowey on the Violence Against Women Act. Of course, I worked with my male colleagues too, but when there were times when it looked like things just weren't going to move, we would have those conversations. We had a Women's Caucus where we would meet. Congresswoman [Patricia Scott] Schroeder really kept us all together on those issues. And, of course, we would disagree on a lot of these issues, but I think we disagreed with an understanding and respect.

JOHNSON: What was the atmosphere like for you when you entered the House? Was it, do you think a welcoming atmosphere for women Members?

MOLINARI: Yes. Honest to goodness, listen, it could be . . . Here's how I look at it: Everybody that we worked with had to rely on women to get elected, so whether they liked women or not or felt they were their equal, they learned to pretend, right? Discrimination, all those things that were happening to and still happen to women all over, gets a little veiled over here in the United

States Congress. And the real truth is, the rest of the country responds in kind. There were CEOs and other people who might have, under certain circumstances, had some issues with women in power, but because you were a woman in power, they would not treat you as such. So quite frankly, I never really felt discriminated against as a female until I left politics.

JOHNSON: Were there any parts of the institution that were maybe a little bit more difficult to get into or to somehow fit into, and if so, why do you think that was the case?

MOLINARI: No. I think it was just a slower change. Again, I think both political parties and the people who were institutionalists really recognized by the time that I got there that more women, more diversity in the United States Congress, was a good thing for this country. So, honest, I was welcomed. I was able to move very quickly in the Republican Party because I was a female.

I remember being called out to be a part of a press conference on a crime bill. I ran for vice chair of the Republican Conference, and even though I was a moderate from New York City . . . I think one of the reasons that I did win was that there was a recognition that they needed women in leadership and a moderate. So, I did enter this institution at a time when diversity was not present but was recognized as a necessity and a good political thing to have, and I benefited from that as opposed to being hampered by it.

WASNIEWSKI: Did you have any Members, female or male, who served as a mentor to you during your first term in Congress?

MOLINARI: Everybody kind of pitched in. I really can't pick one or the other—again, Ileana Ros-Lehtinen, later on Deborah [D.] Pryce. We all became very good friends, and we'd spend more time together. Sometimes you'd have a group that would consist of those two women, Dana Rohrabacher, Chris

[Christopher Charles] Cox, and my now-husband, Bill [William L.] Paxon, because of the age, and we would go out and do things together and spend more time together. But I never felt . . . Look, Gerry [Geraldine Anne] Ferraro helped to talk me into running for office and then came in and campaigned against me. So, I always felt that women would be there. Again, Nancy Pelosi, Nita Lowey, we'd do what we could. Would I count on them to help me politically? You get where the line is drawn, but those are relationships that I will always cherish. And then, of course, by the time you get married and have a baby, those words of advice from women who had been there were really very comforting and very helpful.

I think we stood each other up. I remember being at, I think I was getting an award at the Glamour Women of the Year Awards, and Pat Schroeder was there as a former [honoree], and Connie [Constance A.] Morella as a former [honoree], when we heard about—and I want to say it was either Tailhook or Aberdeen—and we met in the lobby. We all just happened to be going out at the same time, and we were like, "Did you hear this story that's breaking?" Pat, being on the Armed Services Committee, organized a meeting shortly thereafter. It must have been Aberdeen, because I had [my daughter] Susan at the time, and was able to organize this meeting where the generals had to come in and answer some questions about what was going on, and how they were monitoring it.[2]

I think it was that there were those issues, right, that just sort of allowed us to stand each other up to say we are going to challenge the way things have been done. So, yes, I learned a lot from Congresswoman Schroeder. She was great, and she was tough, and she was smart. But I think we all kind of stood each other up at those moments to say, "This isn't just for us." Then, once you

have a baby girl, all bets are out the window. You are so determined to change this world for her.

JOHNSON: How important do you think it was for you and the other women Members, to have a separate space in the Capitol, what's now the Lindy [Corinne Claiborne] Boggs Reading Room?

MOLINARI: I thought it was really important. Look, it was nice to just have those areas to go to when you had a headache, when you wanted to read something, maybe when you wanted to seek out some colleagues to have a discussion about a decision that you had made or a question that you had, and you wanted sort of that sacred space in order to have that conversation. I think it's helpful.

JOHNSON: Were there any other places that you would go to meet, either formally or informally?

MOLINARI: Every once in a while, the group, you know, we'd get a group—probably not very much bipartisanly—but we'd get all the Republican women together and we'd go out to dinner and just kind of hang out. Kay [Kathryn Ann] Bailey Hutchison, Senator Hutchison from Texas, threw me a party when I got engaged. You just do a little bit more of that stuff together.

WASNIEWSKI: You mentioned the Women's Caucus earlier, and we're just wondering if we could get you to elaborate a little bit on your memories of the Women's Caucus. Just basic things . . . when did it meet, where did it meet, how would you describe the early leadership?

MOLINARI: Well, we would meet in the Lindy Boggs Room, off Statuary Hall. It was a smaller group then, so we all fit. We would talk about some of those issues that . . . An example is, I remember there was an issue surrounding the efficacy of breast implants. And one of our female Members had breast

cancer and was talking about reconstruction, and the FDA commissioner at the time, we felt, was a bit cavalier and not understanding the discussion that was taking place, as opposed to just being purely cosmetic. We all kind of rallied around this one Member to say, "Okay, how do we help? How do we expand this conversation?" When there were some disagreements over the Violence Against Women Act, we would meet to say, "Okay, here's how we're going to handle this. We're going to move this through, and we're going to try to do these things. You guys have to stand down and not call us right-wing extremists for a few days." We would have those sorts of conversations that would allow us to actually acknowledge the difficulties, at any given time, of our political parties. And where we agreed to disagree, those conversations did not come up.

JOHNSON: A major issue that certainly has come up through women's history is reproductive rights. How did you, and then other members of the caucus, handle that issue?

MOLINARI: It would come up; it didn't come up as much as it comes up now. It would come up—Mexico City, some of these other issues, women in the military, on [the Committee on] Armed Services. Again, I think it was more just making certain that the conversation from both political parties recognized that we were speaking to the American people, with all the disagreements, and hoping to keep a level of dignity to the discussions. I think that was probably the biggest role that women played on both sides.

JOHNSON: Do you ever think that issue, or any other issues, undermined the effectiveness of the caucus—because you talked about the importance of the bipartisanship between the two.

MOLINARI: No. Listen, it's nice, we're all different people. We were different ages, we came from different political parties, different philosophies even within those political parties, [a wide] geographic spectrum. So, there would be issues upon which we would certainly disagree. But even on an issue like abortion or reproductive rights, I think we recognized that women needed to really be a part of that conversation, as opposed to just being the people who listened to the conversation or led the end of that debate—who had to deal with the impacts of those debates. So, I think more than trying to change one another's positions on these issues, what we did was respect and celebrate the fact that there were women who were part of this discussion now.

JOHNSON: How important do you think the pro-life and pro-choice debate was for you personally, especially within the Republican Party?

MOLINARI: Once again, I think it set me aside. For purposes, I was extremely pro-choice then; I'm pro-life now. But in some ways it very much hampered me because the very conservative wing of the party—not my colleagues, but the people who would make money off of fundraising—really targeted me. And when I ran for vice chair, went all out to campaign against me—Bella [Savitzky] Abzug without the hat, just whatever caricature that they could plan.

But at the same time, I think it also made me a fighter and made me . . . I was just forced to be tougher, you know? Isn't that just sort of the secret? At least it was back then. We were constantly being underestimated as females, and sometimes being underestimated is a good thing because you can always add to the element of surprise. I remember a lot of my debates, where the people who I was debating just didn't take me seriously until I got up there, and then it was too late. I think the same thing happens when you're negotiating across the table for a piece of legislation.

WASNIEWSKI: To just, again, look at the Women's Caucus in kind of broader terms, what role do you think it's played in the institution, and was it significant? Has it changed over time?

MOLINARI: It was very significant for me to be able to again, have . . . and sometimes it wasn't just those meetings, what happened in those meetings, but the relationships that developed as a result of those meetings. This isn't just women, this is human nature, but the more I know about your husband being sick, or your child having an addiction problem, or somebody having cancer, or great things happening in [your] life—your daughter expecting, whatever it is—it allows you to communicate on a much more honest and productive level, right? You can't demonize somebody who you know as a full person with all their faults, and strengths, and heartbreaks, and celebrations. So, I think more than anything, just taking the 435 and bringing all, at the end, 31 of us together, gave us an opportunity to get to know each other on a little bit more of a personal level, which made it a lot easier to then go ask for advice, ask for a favor, ask for floor time—pick something. It just made it a little more comfortable being a Member of Congress.

WASNIEWSKI: A place to meet that was somewhat removed from the political sphere.

MOLINARI: Exactly. It was a place removed from the political sphere, although obviously politics was discussed, but on a way-different level than you would when you were down on the House Floor.

JOHNSON: When you had an issue that the majority of the caucus really did rally around, did you feel that the rest of the Membership viewed the caucus as a group, as a force to be reckoned with?

MOLINARI: {laughter} There's no doubt, there's no doubt. The men would joke about—if they saw six women sitting together, they'd say, "Oh, here comes trouble." But you knew they were a little nervous. There was no doubt about the fact that if the Women's Caucus came out on something, that it was something that was going to have an impact. If we could all agree, if we could all unite, we were going to make it happen.

WASNIEWSKI: Shift gears?

JOHNSON: Sure.

WASNIEWSKI: We're going to shift gears a little bit and talk about your committee assignments. We're curious to know how you obtained the initial assignments on Small Business, Public Works, and Transportation. Also, did you get any advice in terms of committee assignments?

MOLINARI: Well, particularly back in those days, when you were a freshman, you didn't really have a lot to say, and you weren't going to go for the big committee assignments. It just wasn't happening then. It has since changed, largely thanks to my husband. Back in the day . . . so, my dad was a transportation guy, I'm a transportation gal. I love transportation, and so that was something that I really wanted and asked for. And then I did get on Education and Labor and had . . . That was very interesting. I had a great time with that and then eventually transitioned off Education and Labor. John [Richard] Kasich asked me to go on Budget when he took over chairman of the Budget Committee, and so that became a whole other ride. But we balanced the budget for the first time in a generation, so there was some really great history that was happening there. {phone rings}

BRIEF INTERRUPTION

MOLINARI: I digress into a female story. I was on Education and Labor, and we were debating family and medical leave. I was one of the proponents of it in the Republican Party, and I remember John [Andrew] Boehner at the time, who served on it, was eloquently waxing on how government should not be telling businesses what to do, and that this was up to the boards and the chairmen of the boards, and they should be able to make their own policies, and "he" and "he" and "he" should be able to . . . and so he just went on, and I responded. And I said, "I totally agree with you that in a perfect world that the boards and the businesses should be able to make their own decisions, but just based on your own discussion, where you consistently referred to the people in power as 'he,' I think until then we have to help out a bit." And the whole place went raucous! And good for Boehner, because he did not get mad at me. He took it in the spirit in which it was intended. That was one of those moments when you said, "I'm not sure anybody—I'm not sure any other man on this dais is hearing what I'm hearing."

JOHNSON: That's one of the questions we've been asking a lot of our interviewees—about how important you think it is to have a woman's perspective on a lot of these committees.

MOLINARI: It's important to have a woman's perspective; it's important to have an African-American perspective; it's important to have a Hispanic perspective. We all bring that portion of our lives to that table, right? And to not have that background, that experience, that specialness, that uniqueness, to any debate, we lose something as a country. And so the more diverse our legislature has become, the better it will be, because you hear things differently, you see things differently, you reflect on [them] differently, you represent differently.

So, things are changing. They need to change more rapidly, but I do think that the debate becomes better, and the decisions become fairer when as many people representing people come to the table. Good Lord, we're talking about women being 51 percent of the population; we should be doing this show [interview] about men, right? {laughter} It's kind of crazy that we're the majority electorate, and we're still considered representative of a minority.

JOHNSON: When you served in the 1990s—it's really not that long ago, at least historically—and quite often, you were one of the few women on these committees. So, what was the welcome, or the reaction, that you received in the committees?

MOLINARI: It was fine. Again, look, the overwhelming majority of the people who are here are good people and are here for the right reasons, and so, particularly back then, there was this sort of collegial level of respect. Again, I think there was almost a . . . they did get a kick out of me because I wasn't afraid to debate and get a little tough when necessary.

I never felt any resentment whatsoever for being the only female on a committee. The example that I just gave with John Boehner is just one example of where it was a time in which it was considered a challenge, a challenge we all took up and one that was pretty much accepted and taken well by our male colleagues.

WASNIEWSKI: We also read in your book that you had hoped to get on the Appropriations Committee at one point.

MOLINARI: Yes. Back in the day, that used to be a really good assignment.

WASNIEWSKI: Can you tell us a little bit about the story behind trying to get on, and how that worked?

MOLINARI: Appropriations was the committee where you could get a lot done for your district and bring a lot of projects and infrastructure. If you combined my interest in transportation and representing New York City, it was something that I really wanted to do, but I was up against another New Yorker for the position who was much more conservative than I. And as I found out in the debates about who was going to get this position, it was because I was moderate, pro-choice, [that I] couldn't get on Appropriations.

JOHNSON: When the Republicans took control of the chamber in 1995, you had the opportunity to chair a subcommittee on the Transportation Committee. What was that experience like, and how would you describe your leadership style?

MOLINARI: Oh, I loved it. I was given the opportunity to chair the Railroads Subcommittee. And that's, again . . . one of the things I loved about the Transportation Committee is, so much of what you do in Congress is really important conversations about changing human behavior, right? If you're having a conversation about reproductive rights, civil rights, welfare reform, you're having a conversation that is not as easy, and if you'll excuse the expression, concrete, as if we put the money in infrastructure, the trains will run better. So, I just sort of loved that aspect of dealing with transportation. What's more American in terms of the investment and the creation, than our railroads? So, I loved being that, I loved working with the rail CEOs. They're a tough group of risk-takers. I really enjoyed that as a challenge.

The only thing that I did which I thought was interesting compared to other people, is the way I would do my hearings is, we would have people . . . you would always have, let's say we're doing something on reforms on short rails. And so people would travel from all over the United States to testify, as well as like the head of DOT [Department of Transportation] and the Federal

Rail Administration. And the way things were supposed to be done in Congress is, the head of DOT would testify first, the room would be packed, the cameras would be in, and then half the room would leave. And then the Federal Rail [Administration], and then by the time these poor people who gave up their time to travel, left their jobs, didn't get paid to come testify—by the time they came to testify, the bell would ring, 27 people would leave to go vote. They'd be testifying before me and one other person, and I just would feel so awful. So, whoever came the furthest and had put the most effort in, testified first, and, so, the Federal Rail administrator or the secretary of DOT had to hear them. I thought that was really important, but it just constantly frustrated my friends in the federal government, that I wasn't whipping them in and whipping them out. I'm like, "You're doing your job when you're sitting here testifying, they're not." So, that was a little structural change I made there.

WASNIEWSKI: Was there any one particular issue before the subcommittee that you remember from that time?

MOLINARI: Certainly, all the time—and it just goes to show you how slow the wheels turn here—Amtrak reform. At the time when I got in, when I chaired it, I was dealing with a group of Republicans who wanted to defund Amtrak. Amtrak was, and still is, an operation that loses money. And so I was trying to negotiate a deal which would allow us to reform Amtrak [so that it would] work like a business, because right now so much is statutory, so even routes are written in.

So, I remember actually testifying before the Rules Committee, having a bill that basically gave power to the people at Amtrak to make their decisions as a business. I remember some old gentleman said, "So if I vote for this, will I still have my routes through my district?" I said, "With all due respect,

Congressman,"—this is a Republican—"with all due respect, Congressman, what I'm trying to do is to take us out of it and allow the people who have to deal with the bottom line and make it more efficient, make those decisions." He was, like, "So that could go away?" I was like, "Well, theoretically." And he looked at me and goes, "[Expletive], I'm not voting for this." And right then and there, I knew. I kind of knew anyway, but you know an important discussion to take place in terms of some of the things that govern our national rail system that make it impossible to not lose a boatload of money. That was something that I was really interested in, and learned a lot.

Aviation safety was something that was a big issue for my dad, and of course, coming from the district that I came from, with TRACON [Terminal Radar Approach Control Facilities], over-the-ocean flights coming from Kennedy, [aviation safety] was something that I became interested in, and then, of course, all the issues on rail safety and other things that came down the pike.

JOHNSON: Do you want to break here?

WASNIEWSKI: That would be a good point, yes. Can we take a two-minute break?

MOLINARI: Sure.

END OF PART ONE ~ BEGINNING OF PART TWO

WASNIEWSKI: We're back. We wanted to shift gears and move on to leadership. We're just curious: What was behind your decision to run for leadership after the 1994 elections?

MOLINARI: Well, I think part of it was my own personal ambition, but also feeling that I thought that there needed to be a woman in leadership. At that point, it was

so interesting, right, because Barbara [Farrell] Vucanovich ran also. And there was this general perception that only one of us could win because there would only be room for one female, even though the rest of the leadership was male. In tribute to our colleagues, both of us won, but there really was this . . . I remember once, I think I came up first, and once I won. The guy that was running against Barbara, everybody just thought shoo-in in, like, "We only have room for one [woman] here." It's funny, I haven't even thought about that in so long.

Part of it was I think it's good for the party. I think it's great to have additional voices, and dissent and discussion was not only tolerated, it was welcomed. The Republican Party felt it was kind of important to have people out there who had disagreements. Again, you don't ever get into the motives of why people disagree with you, but [just into] understanding the big tent. The people who nominated me were very conservative, from rural areas—again, to show the importance of bringing as many people under the tent as possible in order to have a majority, and a successful, working majority. Those were all the thoughts behind that.

WASNIEWSKI: You said part of it was your ambition, but also, were you recruited by anybody, and why did you select the vice chair position to run after?

MOLINARI: There were people who came up to me and said, "I think you should do this, we need a woman. We need somebody who is comfortable speaking, disagreeing," all those things. So I thought about it and decided I was going to give it a shot. I very much lived my life of . . . I'd much rather make mistakes than live with regrets—of course, as long as those mistakes don't hurt anybody but myself. And so this was one of those, just like that moment of, "Hey, you should run for the New York City council." And I'd say,

"Ooh, I'm kind of scared of that, so I guess I have to do it. I'm kind of scared of running for leadership and I could lose, so I guess I have to do this."

JOHNSON: Not much is written about the leadership races, it's really kind of an inside-baseball sort of thing. So, can you just describe, a little bit, your campaign and what that was like?

MOLINARI: You know more of it is just contacting people, asking for their support. Look, you don't get anywhere in life without asking people to help you, right? Certainly, as an elected official, what is the one thing that you have to learn? My campaign is driven by hundreds of people ringing doorbells and writing checks and talking to their friends, and if I get the job, they get the satisfaction of being on a winning team. I think those are the kinds of things that you do. Everybody likes to be asked. You try to have meetings with as many people as possible.

I do remember, I was running against a great guy from Florida named Cliff [Clifford Bundy] Stearns, and I had people who would come up to me and say—and who knows if this is true or not—"I'd love to vote for you, but Cliff and I are so, we've become such good friends at the gym." Hmmm, the gym I'm not allowed into? Back in the day, we had our separate gyms, and so there was that little . . . I don't necessarily need to work out with a bunch of sweaty men, but that was another one of those occasions where you interacted not as Members of Congress, but as people who are trying to lose weight or just [develop] the relationship in another area. Now, of course, they do exercise together, scandalous as that sounds. But [back] in the day, I wasn't allowed to be in the House Gym, and I had to overcome that from a relationship standpoint. It's just another difference.

JOHNSON: Did anyone run your campaign, or was someone really active in trying to push your candidacy?

MOLINARI: My husband was very helpful. I surround myself with strong political people, one happened to be my father, one happened to be my husband. Bill was helpful in it, but in general everybody was pretty helpful.

WASNIEWSKI: At the time, you were the highest-ranking woman in GOP Leadership.

MOLINARI: Yes.

WASNIEWSKI: What did that mean to you personally, and then also, from a larger perspective, what did it mean to the party?

MOLINARI: Personally, it was just, what a great, incredible honor to be that part of history, to be able to—and I know this sounds so schmaltzy right?—but to be able to . . . It's funny, because there's the age thing that goes on. But it is really cool when somebody who I think is close to my age comes up to me and says, "I remember watching you when I was growing up, and that's when I decided to go into politics." But there's that, right? There's that. You need to have that person who looks a little bit like you in order to inspire you, give you the confidence, give you the idea that you can.

Ironically, [this is] a conversation we're having in technology right now and still need to have in politics, Lord knows, but that was part of it. Part of it was, I'm going to make sure that young girls growing up can see somebody that they say, "That could be me; she's not that different from me."

WASNIEWSKI: And for the party?

MOLINARI: I think that's important for any movement. Any movement that wants to attract people to the movement needs to make sure that they are represented

by people who can connect with people. So, I think that's probably one of the reasons why I won, was because, again, those were the days of a really big tent and trying to get as many different faces as possible out there representing the party, speaking on behalf of the party, disagreeing with the party.

JOHNSON: Earlier we asked you about the importance of having women on committees, different committees. But what about in leadership, what do you think the importance of that is?

MOLINARI: I'm directing an agenda. You know part of what happens in leadership is you sit around the leadership table when the agenda is being formed. And so, I can remember, there was an appropriations bill that was coming up, that was to deny—I think this was it—to deny single people from adopting. And so I had to come to the leadership table and say, "Really? Are we the party that's going to say a single parent cannot parent well?" Which, of course, got all these—it was great because there were all these men around the table who had been raised by single mothers, and so they immediately were on my side. That was something that I think I had to bring it to their attention and then they reacted the appropriate way. That's just one example of being able to sit at a table where you could have that conversation and enforce change.

The Breast Cancer [Research] Stamp Bill, which I think is still active, was actually a creation of Vic [Victor Herbert] Fazio [Jr.]—one of his constituents. He came to me in the Republican Leadership, he was the sponsor, I was the cosponsor, and then we flipped. And I had gone to Newt and said, "We really should be supporting this. This is everything that we agree on. It's not mandated, it's voluntary, you know the stamps could go up to eight cents more, and it would go to DOD [Department of Defense] for a

lot of the tracking that they did with military personnel and breast cancer." This is like a . . . and we reach an audience that we're having a problem with.

So, Newt said, "Okay, fine. Great, great, great, great, but are there changes? The Post Office disagreed with us?" I said, "Well, the Post Office does want some changes." And he said, "Okay, fine, you go back and tell Vic Fazio that the Molinari–Fazio Bill will be reintroduced." And I was like, "I cannot do that, that's just awful. It's his bill." And he's like, "Vic is enough of a pol that he'll understand why I need to do this." So, I get him on the House Floor, and I said, "Your call. I'm horrified that I even have to have this conversation, but Newt says he'll bring it up on suspension, which means you don't have to go through hearings and everything, you just move it along. We have to make the changes the Post Office recommends, and it will be reintroduced as the Molinari–Fazio Bill." And I remember at that moment, somebody coming down the steps, saying, "Hey, Vic, what's going on?" And he looked, and he said, "Just learning to be a member of the minority." Which I thought was so gracious of him. And he said, "Of course, Susan, do whatever we need to do to get this moved."

WASNIEWSKI: What was your welcome in the leadership circle? What are your memories of working with the other leadership folks at that time?

MOLINARI: Great. I think there was this general understanding that we had just gotten to the majority. We didn't take it for granted. We knew it was something that we were going to have to work day in, day out. There was this kind of optimism of now that we could control the agenda, and to a certain extent our message, would there be an opportunity to sort of show the kinder, gentler Republican Party, the party that could do things like breast cancer stamps and move some pretty important pieces of legislation relative to women and minorities? So, I think initially in those days, there was kind of

this excitement about finally getting there, but not just getting there, like really working it, to make sure that we . . .

I brought in—which seems like not such a good idea now in retrospect—but I brought in the editors of all the women's magazines, and we had a day-long session. Newt came, and Dick [Richard Keith] Armey, and Tom [Thomas Dale] DeLay, and the committee chairs, and we did different tables. Of course, all the women Members were there, and we took them for a tour, and we just said, "We want to start to establish a dialogue with you all." I happen to think magazine [readers], and all those—it's not just the people who read the *Wall Street Journal*, the *Washington Post*, and the *New York Times*, it's the people who read *Redbook* and *Shape*, and *Elle* magazine, who get some of their information, political information [from women's magazines]. And so we wanted to—if you had an issue that you wanted to highlight—be able to have that relationship so you could call to say, "Hey, listen, we really would love for you to feature this." So, we all did things like that.

JOHNSON: What were your primary responsibilities as vice chair of the [Republican] Conference?

MOLINARI: I think primarily, it was, well, certainly—when Boehner was the chairman at the time, Speaker Boehner—the glorious thing about John Boehner is even though he was Speaker, everybody just called him Boehner, which I think says so much about him. Boehner was chairman at the time, and so sometimes he might have to be off, so you would run the meetings. People would come to me probably more than the other positions—if they had an issue that they wanted to bring up, if they weren't sure if it was appropriate to be brought up, if they wanted to talk through something—because the conferences are when you would really get together and air your ideas, your concepts, and your frustrations. So, a lot of times, you were kind of the first

line of—"Is this the appropriate place for this?" And so I would do a lot of that.

JOHNSON: Did you enjoy that?

MOLINARI: I did, of course.

JOHNSON: And how closely did you work with Speaker Boehner?

MOLINARI: A lot, very closely, and our staffs, very closely. Yes, yes.

WASNIEWSKI: Were you involved, to any degree, with the drafting and the implementation of the "Contract with America?"

MOLINARI: No, no. I was there as one of the people that they talked to, right? So the point of the contract was one of those things that would unify the Republican Party, as opposed to divide it. And so when Pete [Peter] Hoekstra and a group of others who came together to have this concept, I was somebody that they would sit down with. They talked to a lot of the Members at the time, to make sure that the way they were talking about it, the issues, how it was all placing out, that we didn't have any issues, or we weren't missing anything. So, it was really much . . . they were very good in making it a collaborative effort. And so, no, I was just somebody who would put my two cents in and then, of course, campaigned very heavily on it that year.

My husband and I got married the year that we took the majority, and so we were pretty high profile.[3] I think we went into 52 districts in like, three weeks; just, you wouldn't even know where you were. You'd be like, "It's really great to be here with you" because you just couldn't remember if it was Ohio or Illinois. But we would talk about the contract a lot, and it was kind

of a, it was a game changer, right? Because it was the first time . . . the whole point of the contract was to say to people, "We're asking you to change history, to give the Republicans a chance at a majority"—something that hadn't been done in a generation. "And so, we're not just going to say 'trust us on this'; here are 10 things that we're going to do within the first 100 days." And so, whether you agree with the contract or not, I think it's a pretty good way to govern because people knew what they were going to get when they voted.

WASNIEWSKI: Can you describe the atmosphere in the House during that transition to power and the first 100 days?

MOLINARI: Crazy, crazy, crazy, because literally, we were passing major pieces of legislation in a hundred days. I wear heels all the time; I've always worn heels all the time. I never wore heels during those times because you were just running between committee meetings, and hearings, and markups and on the floor. It was just insane. I remember there was actually a really funny *Saturday Night Live* clip with Chris Farley being Newt Gingrich, where they were just like, "Family Medical Leave, pass!" Like you just, there was . . . and again, with all the excitement that comes with being in the majority and the optimism and enthusiasm that came with that . . . but just think, about 10 major pieces of legislation happening in 100 days. It was crazy.

JOHNSON: What role did women Republican Members play during that period, besides you in leadership, but the rank and file?

MOLINARI: I think women on committees were certainly being spokespeople. There was never, ever an issue of . . . if there was a press conference to be held, that women needed to be there, and women needed to be spokespeople. And if a woman felt particularly strong about it, then we were going to just get that

woman out there. I don't mean to make this sound like it was all so great and easy, but you did not wait your turn because you were a female, right? They wanted you out there espousing and speaking and doing talk shows and getting on [TV], particularly CNN, and doing whatever you needed to do to get the message out there, to be a messenger for the Republican Party. Women did a lot of that.

WASNIEWSKI: One big example of that was that you gave the keynote address at the Republican Convention in San Diego in 1996.

MOLINARI: Yes.

WASNIEWSKI: What did that event mean to you, and how did you prepare for it?

MOLINARI: Well, certainly, the greatest thing it meant to me was that I got to speak on behalf of somebody like Bob [Robert Joseph] Dole, like, I just can't . . . you know, again, whatever your politics are, this is an American hero. And so, to be a part of that campaign was just such a terrific honor. To speak on his behalf and be a part of that convention was just glorious.

The story there is, it's the first time I've worked with teleprompters. So, from almost the day that I get to San Diego—and all my friends are there—they're having parties every night. I am in this little trailer, learning to read from left to right so you don't look shifty. So, that's all I did, and now the way they work it is the podium stays the same, and there's a little box underneath, and you go early in the day, and you get measured for how high the box has to be so that the teleprompters can reach you. So, the deal was [New Jersey] Governor Christie Todd Whitman, at the time, was going to introduce a clip of my district, Staten Island, the ferry, the whole bit, and [John] Kasich went on before me, and during that time of the clip, they adjust the thing. So, John gets all excited—Governor Kasich—and he goes much longer than he's

supposed to, and he runs right into my time. Now I'm up against the hard out, right? In California 8:00, but 11:00, done, done, done. "If she's in the middle of the speech, she's done. We're cutting off at 11:00."

So I get there, Governor Whitman can only run out and say "and now, Congresswoman Susan Molinari for the keynote speech." And I get out there, and the prompters aren't . . . I can't see the prompters. So, I do have my written [speech], but there's that moment that you're like, "Really?" You lose it, and for a second you're thinking, should I say, "Ladies and gentlemen, we're having some technical difficulties. We're going to take a five-second break." I know I can't do that, and while I'm thinking of all these things, I've already started the speech. So, that was a little, it was what it was. But to this day, every time my dad sees John Kasich on TV, he'll say, "I'll never forgive him."

But it was, again, what an amazing honor to be a keynote speaker, and to be a keynote speaker for Bob Dole was just—I loved working with Senator Dole on so many issues. And there's a guy, I got to know him because we worked closely together on several pieces of legislation, me as a freshman legislator. He does not see age, he does not see gender, he sees America. He's just a really super-terrific guy, and to have gotten to know him so well on legislation and to have gotten that shot of confidence from him was really pretty neat.

WASNIEWSKI: And his running mate, too, Jack [French] Kemp, your husband had a connection with him.

MOLINARI: And then his running mate, Jack Kemp, right afterwards, right, exactly, yes. It was a great, exciting time.

JOHNSON: Were you surprised that you were asked to give the address?

MOLINARI: Totally. Before the days of, I guess, cell phones, we were on a slash-baptizing the baby . . . So, the children, both girls, were born in Staten Island and baptized in Bill's district. So, sometimes we just couldn't collaborate, and we love our districts so much that we wanted that piece of history to be with them, and so we were, I think we were baptizing Susan, and Bill was on his announcement tour, right? Now, finally, the old guy is traveling with the wife and the kid, and we'd go to all his district. His district was so huge that he had like, maybe six or seven announcements. When we were in a bar with a bunch of friends having dinner, my mother-in-law was watching the baby. Larry King was on, and I can't remember, my press secretary, somehow, I guess we had beepers back in the day. People watching this are like, "Oh my Lord, how old is this woman?" And they said, "Call. Senator Dole is going to announce that you're going to be keynote speaker." I had no clue. I hadn't even been asked to speak at the convention, and I was really upset. I thought I was close enough that at least I'd get like the four in the afternoon when nobody . . . that would just be great.

So, they said, "Do you know who's going to nominate you? And he said, "Well, the only thing I can tell you is, Susan Molinari is going to give the keynote speech." Now, we do not have cell phones, and they were like, "Hey, Larry King, can we get Susan Molinari to call?" So, there's a cell phone that's outside the kitchen, where they're like yelling and screaming and dropping dishes. And I'm on the phone, "thank you, Senator." So, yes, it was a huge surprise, and, of course . . . My husband laughs because we had like three more announcements the next day for him, and all the [TV] trucks showed up for me. And he's like, okay, "We were here for me to announce that I'm running for re-election, but here's my wife, Susan Molinari."

JOHNSON: You talked about your marriage, and this, of course, took place while you were a Member of Congress, and it's rare for two sitting Members to marry. The first thing I wanted to . . .

MOLINARI: Get a few more females in there, and it might happen.

JOHNSON: Exactly. What was the reaction of your colleagues?

MOLINARI: Oh, they were so cute. So, Bill proposed to me on the House Floor. It was not publicly and it was during those times when Congress was in session but nobody was there. Mike [Michael Robert] McNulty, who was a Member of Congress from New York also, a Democrat, was in the chair. They were debating some bill when my husband and I . . . and we'd meet sometimes and chat in the back. We ran into each other, and we were sitting, and he said, "I just want to like, let you know that I spoke to your mom and your dad today." And then he got down on his knee and handed me the ring, and I was like, "Okay, but get up, get up, get up!"

But McNulty saw something. And then that night we had a break, and it was like defense authorization or appropriations, I'm pretty sure, and they had a quorum call because it was such a divisive bill at the time. And so they wanted the Members there to hear the closings of the debate, but before they did, Speaker [Thomas Stephen] Foley gave this beautiful, beautiful speech about, "I just want to share with everybody that before we get into this debate, where we show the differences, that there are some really great things that happen on the floor of the House of Representatives." And he just gave a beautiful little speech about Bill and I getting engaged. Then the next day there were all these one minutes and special orders, where Eliot [Lance] Engel said, "Oh, may you have a bunch of children, and may they all be

Democrats." And it was just really so heartwarming, to have the family of the U.S. House of Representatives congratulate us and be really happy for us.

JOHNSON: What about your constituents, what was their reaction?

MOLINARI: Oh, they were thrilled, they were thrilled, they were thrilled. We did so much press. We looked at this one picture where we're coming down the steps of the Capitol the next day, and there are all these tourists taking pictures of us from other countries. I look back now thinking, they must wonder like, "Who were these people?" Like they took pictures, figuring it was somebody important, and then they got back and were like, "I don't know who they are."

Oh, no, the constituents were so excited. First of all, by that point Bill was . . . I would go to a lot of his events, he would come to a lot of my events, and so my little Italians just loved Bill—the hugs and the kisses. They'd try and teach him how to say things in Italian—so, very excited, really excited. It was lovely.

WASNIEWSKI: Were there any challenges or obstacles to being married to another Member of Congress?

MOLINARI: No. No, because you understand. I remember like, one time I guess we were married, but Bill had come to visit, and we were going to go to a movie and go out to dinner, when all of a sudden I got a call that there was going to be this emergency meeting on something. And, so, you could look at somebody [like Bill] and say, "I am so sorry, but this just came up, and this is really important to my district, and we'll go out tomorrow night; I have to do this." And he'd be like, "Of course," like, he would totally understand that. And then you'd have to live with my dad, who every once in a while would be like, "I think my daughter is running for governor." My father would

announce this to the press before we would have a discussion, and so . . . no, so, to have somebody who understood it and respected it made it so much easier.

Once in a while the travel would be an issue, particularly once we had Susan, I would take her, but we'd go back to our districts. That was the only challenging part, but in terms of having people who understand what you're going through and needing help and needing patience, no, no, no, it's a gift.

JOHNSON: And just a couple years later, as you mentioned, you had your daughter, and so you're one of a small group of women in office in the House to give birth. What was the response of your colleagues when they heard that you were pregnant?

MOLINARI: Oh, my gosh, super. Right before me, though, was Enid Greene Waldholtz, who was pregnant right before me, and so it wasn't quite the shock because she had just gone through it. The colleagues were so sweet and the gifts would pour in, and people would say, "How are you feeling? Are you tired yet? You look great." And that's when you become really close friends with your women colleagues.

JOHNSON: Did you receive any advice from them, like you mentioned, from Enid Greene, that anything, that . . .

MOLINARI: No, not really. You know what? I think as women, we get that we are oftentimes barraged by advice that we don't want, and we don't need, that sometimes we're more reticent to pour it onto another. "You've got it together, you don't need me." So, no, just a lot of love.

JOHNSON: The unsolicited advice, yes. What about Blanche Lambert Lincoln because she also was pregnant at the same time.

MOLINARI: Yes. Blanche and I got to be good friends because we would do TV together. I remember some TV show came into my house, and we're there with the big bellies, and we're like, "Okay, let's go through the house. Do you have a smoke alarm?" Everybody would use this as an opportunity for TV.

I remember there was a Mother's Day right after Susan was born, and it was Mary [L.] Landrieu, with her adorable son sitting on her lap, was at that age where he was just going to totally upstage Mom for Mother's Day. Blanche Lincoln was pregnant the same time I was, and so it was great. Look, there's probably no easier job than being in Congress when you're having a kid because nobody's going to tell you not to bring your child around, and so our babies were constantly with us. I went back to work right away, but I had a crib in my room, and if I had a meeting and Susan was sleeping, I traded offices with my husband. Literally, I would go in and say, "I've got this meeting and Susan is sleeping. Can I meet in your office?" So, my life was really very easy, and I was very lucky.

WASNIEWSKI: What was the media attention like during this time period?

MOLINARI: The media attention, because not only was it two Members are married, but I gave birth the day before Mother's Day. So, now you have the entire media world who's looking for that Mother's Day hook—"John, get me something on Mother's Day." "I've got just the thing." So, literally, we had to have a press conference. Susan was [born after] 14 hours of labor and then a cesarean. And after they took her, I started shaking, so, was not over-medicated, but I woke up the next day and it was not pretty. And there's Mayor Giuliani, who is now with my father, feeding my kid, while I'm throwing up in the bedpan. And there's the world media outside ready to do an interview—but all good, all good, people should have such problems in life.

JOHNSON: It sounds like a happy Mother's Day.

MOLINARI: It was a wonderful Mother's Day. The interesting part, though, is so, I had Susan while I was in Congress, so the announcement is . . . I mean, we have reels and reels and reels of television coverage, newspaper coverage, coverage around the world. And then I had Katie, when I was out of office, and it's the Staten Island papers, "Kate Paxon, born to Susan Molinari, seven pounds." And she's like . . .

JOHNSON: You mentioned just a few minutes ago that you came back to work after only a couple of weeks. Did you ever talk about maternity leave with the leadership, or was it a topic ever discussed?

MOLINARI: No. First of all because I didn't work for them, I worked for the people of Staten Island, right? So, I don't think that it was an issue for me in terms of—these people were so wonderful that if I missed votes because I was home with my child, that would not have been an issue at all. These are glorious family people that would just never, never come in. I was given the gift of being able to come back to work and bond with my baby. I'm a big proponent of family leave and maternity and paternity leave; I just didn't have to make that decision. As I said, we took the closets where you hang your coats, and I got a piece of wood, and I made a dressing table. I had a crib there. There was no . . . if Susan couldn't sleep, I'd take her on the train, going back and forth between the House and the little—it's a little ride, but it would be, she just, she loved it. She would go right to sleep.

So, it did give me an opportunity, and one of the reasons was right after I had given birth, we had this moving Vietnam Wall, which is a miniature replica of the Vietnam Wall [in Washington, D.C.]. It was able to be taken to places around the country, and it was coming to Fort Hamilton, in my district. And

I really felt very strongly about having to be there. That sort of got me started getting back into work. There were days when Susan was sick, or whatever, and younger, that just . . . you do what you have to do as a mother. That just was never an issue. I went back early just because I could, because of my extraordinary circumstances.

JOHNSON: Besides your husband, were there other Members that might have helped you out in a pinch if you had to go vote or had to meet with someone?

MOLINARI: I do recall one time, being on the House Floor, and it was one of those nights when we were voting until—back in the day, you would vote until sometimes 11:00 at night. I had forgotten my card, and so I had to go to the well [of the House], and Susan was sleeping. Now I know this is hard for some people to picture, but I took the baby to Tom DeLay, and I was like, "Tom, can you hold her for a minute?" And he was great. But those are the things, right? There's nothing easier than making friends when you're holding a sweet little baby, particularly when they're sleeping.

WASNIEWSKI: Do you want to move to the next section?

JOHNSON: Sure.

WASNIEWSKI: We're going to shift gears a little bit now: some general questions about women in Congress. When Jeannette Rankin first served in Congress, there was a ton of press attention that was paid to her dress and her demeanor because she was a woman. We also read that you made headlines because you wore pants during your first floor speech. What was the reaction to that and did it surprise you?

MOLINARI: Crazy, right? Oh, it totally surprised me. I have always been one of those people who feel more comfortable in pants. I was giving a one minute on the

Staten Island Homeport and the need to stay vigilant with defense. I had nice black, like silk/satin pants; I wasn't wearing jeans. I remember, this day I had like, a very expensive black jacket on, it was like, one of my best outfits. And as soon as I got back to the office my chief of staff said, "The *New York Times*, the *Daily News*, and the *Kathie and Regis Show*, called." And I was like, hmm. I literally thought to myself, "I guess we're making news because young, female, pro-defense New York City . . ." because the Homeport was somewhat controversial. Then we started making the phone calls back, and it turned out that I was the first female to wear pants on the floor of the House of Representatives. Not against the dress rules, and the Historian will have to research this, but as best as I could determine, there wasn't as set out a dress code for females when they were doing those things because they didn't really think there'd be any females on the House Floor. But yes, that was . . . I made *Glamour* magazine, I went on the *Kathie and Regis Show*, and it was all because I had pants on the floor, for the first time.[4]

WASNIEWSKI: This was all external. Your colleagues didn't comment.

MOLINARI: No. No, no, not at all. I would be really surprised if they would have noticed, yes.

JOHNSON: Before we go too far ahead, I just wanted to give you a chance to talk about the story that you talked about off tape about the delegation that you led to Bosnia while you were pregnant. Can you tell us about that?

MOLINARI: Thank you. So I got to be very close with Bob Dole during the Bosnian, the former-Yugoslavia crisis. During the time, we had an arms embargo out against . . . and what was happening was that there still were arms that were going into Slobodan Milošević's area, but not to the Croatians and others throughout the former-Yugoslavian area.

And so I had visited there once. I had gone to Croatia and really became touched by what was going on there, which was very early stages of the genocide that was taking place, and became more and more involved and was that person who would . . . I remember going to the Vice President, I remember going to Secretary [of State Lawrence] Eagleburger, I remember going to meet with Madeleine Albright. I went to whomever I could and [would] say, literally, my speech was, "I will not be that person . . ." You always wonder how those people who were in power during World War II felt about their ability to have this near eradication take place, and now we are watching genocide take place. It's not even like we have to hear it through a radio; it's on the front page of our papers, it's on the news every night, and we have to do something, if at least just to end the arms embargo so it can be a fair fight. That was Bob Dole's position, too, and so that was actually how we got to be pretty close. We would pass resolutions together and get engaged.

So, I went to Newt when—I guess we were still in the minority—and I said, "I'm going crazy, Newt, and we have to do something about this." And he said, "Form the Balkans Crisis Taskforce." And I was like, okay. And so I did, which then, you'd get calls to be on TV, to go, and, of course, I would do it because I wanted to raise consciousness, but they were saying, "Susan Molinari, chairman of the Balkans Crisis Taskforce," which I just made up the day before. But it was good enough to get me booked to talk about an issue I cared passionately about.

And so I stayed. I went and traveled there a bunch of times and just never let up. Awful things, and the Women's Caucus would work very closely [on this]. There was this systematic rape, which, of course, occurs in every war and still is occurring in places around the globe. But because of the ethnic

tensions, the Serbian soldiers would come into a village, take all the younger women, would put them in a house and just systematically rape them until they got pregnant and keep them there until they couldn't get an abortion, and then would let them go. And they would not be welcomed back by their families because they were impregnated by a Serb.

I remember meeting one woman who said that she had to go to her daughters and her family and lie, and say my sister is sick in wherever, and so even though bombs are going off where my kids are, I had to leave them because I knew that my life would not be pretty there, and once I had the baby, I could go back. So, women's groups would bring these women over to talk to us so that we could understand just how horrific the situation was over there, without anybody doing anything.

Right when we were considering sending peacekeepers, Newt had come to me and said, "We're going to send a CODEL, a congressional delegation over, of about 25 men and women, and I'd like you to lead the delegation." I was about four months pregnant at the time, but they sent a doctor on the plane with me. But you know, still, I went over there. Interesting time, because I would be interviewed by Christiane Amanpour, who was very interested in this issue, and it was clear that I was pregnant. I would get the mail from people who were like, "How could you go to this area while you're pregnant?" I did certainly enjoy the fact that I got to go face-to-face with Slobodan Milošević as a female who wasn't going to take any of his crap. And I was pregnant, and you know, like this was this man's worst nightmare. "Where has the world gone wrong for me?"

But at the end we were moving into Sarajevo, to meet with President Izetbegović at the time, and all these people were standing outside applauding us and: "Send peacekeepers, send peacekeepers." They wanted the

U.S. to come in and help end the situation. So, as we were walking in, there was a woman who grabbed my hand, and she said, "Please, please do what you need to, we can't continue like this. You need to help us. America needs to help us." And I said, "That's what we're here for. We're going to take as many facts as we can and bring it back." She grabbed my hand, touched my belly, and said, "I just lost my only son. You're going to be a momma, you have to help me." Oh, so I got some criticism for going as somebody who was about to have a baby, but relative to the conversations that we were having, I think it increased my perspective for what needed to be done.

WASNIEWSKI: How influential was that CODEL for the colleagues who went with you?

MOLINARI: Oh, I think it was extremely influential. It was bipartisan and I think just the ability to give information back because we were talking to the world leaders. We were talking to our people and our State Department people, and [we wanted] to be able to let them know that we thought the situation was ripe. Look, we were still living with this concept that these people have been at war with each other for so long, and they will never learn to get along. And I actually remember saying—not to keep bringing up the mother fight—but I do not believe that there is a mother who loves their child less than they hate their neighbor, so nobody wants this to continue. So, we were able to be on the ground and see that everybody . . . we could end this war, and it would end. And so I think it was very influential, and coming back at that point we started working very closely with Vice President [Albert Arnold] Gore [Jr.] and Secretary [Richard] Holbrooke because they did want to make sure that they had Republican support for this. And I think we were able to make it a really nice, important, history-making decision.

WASNIEWSKI: Were there other women on that CODEL with you?

MOLINARI: I'm sure there were, but I couldn't tell you.

WASNIEWSKI: That's a pretty large group.

MOLINARI: Yes, it was a large group. Again, I think we wanted as many people to meet and to go back and be a part of the debate because it was a serious step we were taking.

JOHNSON: How important do you think those delegations were, just to try to see a different side of Members and to get to know each other?

MOLINARI: There's no doubt, there's no doubt that travel—I know which is something that people . . . now, I never went on any of the like, glamorous—I went right before the Persian Gulf War; I went to Israel. If there was action, that's where I wanted to be. I didn't do any of those air shows, travel. But look, there is something to be said for the fact—again, going back to the conversation of people getting to know one another outside the floor, being able to spend time together. You then travel as Americans, as Members of the U.S. Congress, not Republicans and Democrats, and it does make it a lot easier to collaborate once you get that personal time.

I also think where Members had their families here, when our wives or our husbands or our friends . . . when our kids go to the same school, right? That just sort of makes it a little harder for me to demonize you on a debate on the floor. I remember being at church a couple of years ago, when I was still doing some politicking, punditry, and it was Christmas Eve, and we were doing the Our Father. And I looked over, and it was Robert Gibbs whose hand I took, and I was like, no more picking on Robert Gibbs after this. Like, you have those moments when you're on a trip, right? There are times when you all cry together or you have a real serious conversation about where you're going to be sending those U.S. troops. Those are things that allow you

to come back and trust each other with a debate, and again, if I'm having that moment with you overseas or in a war zone, I'm going to disagree with you, but I'm going to disagree with you respectfully.

So, I think those trips were very, very important, not the least of which is to bear witness to what goes on in the world and to bring it back. I know there are people who had the tendency to brag that they didn't have a passport, but I think when you're elected to the U.S. House of Representatives or the United States Senate, we do call the President the Leader of the Free World, and it's nice to be able to get to know places outside the United States in order to make appropriate decisions.

WASNIEWSKI: To move to some wrap-up questions . . . when you served, there were relatively so few women in Congress at that time, did you feel that you didn't only represent your constituents, but that you represented a larger group of women nationally?

MOLINARI: No doubt about it, no doubt about it, you did; you felt that you were representing a larger group. I felt more—I don't want to say pressure, because I enjoyed it—but I felt very strongly about the need to get out there and be seen on TV, to opine on issues that I felt were important. I mean, again, it's twofold. We all bring our experiences to a discussion, and there are all different experiences, and so I did take very seriously the experience of being a female and bringing that to the discussion. I was not one of those people—sometimes I would go up to somebody and say they did this, and they'd be like, "I am not going to be the female legislator." And I totally respect that, but that was not me; I was going to be the female legislator. If there was something that was going on that was ticking me off with regard to women, anyplace, I was going to be the female. So, I took that very seriously. There was a reason I was there.

And so, yes, I worked on behalf of my constituents. I worked on behalf of the issues that I was concerned about, balancing the budget, all those things of the Republican Party. But women were right up there, and not the least of which was that there were . . . so that somebody would come up to me and say, "I remember watching you on TV," or "I heard you give a speech, that's why I decided to take this chance." It might not have even been that they decided to run for office, but that they decided to take a chance, and I think that's really important.

WASNIEWSKI: You've touched on a lot of legislative examples, but in that regard, as kind of political scientists call it a surrogate representative, was there one moment that sticks out in your mind, where you thought on this issue, "I'm speaking as a national representative?"

MOLINARI: Interestingly, during the crime bill, President Clinton . . . I was one of the . . . I voted against the rule because it was a closed rule. So, even though I was for the gun control that was in there, and it meant a lot of money for New York City . . . Mayor Giuliani, Police Commissioner [William] Bratton, everybody was all for it. But when the opposing party presents a rule that does not allow your party to present any amendments, I felt obliged to vote against the rule, which killed the bill at the time.

And so Newt, at the time, brought five of us together to say we were going to, who wanted to support the bill, and wanted to negotiate some amendments, and mine was prior rules of evidence. The basis of it was that—it's something we're living through right now with Bill Cosby. In the case of rape and child molestation, where it's kind of one word against the other, if there are so many similarities, as there oftentimes are, where the judge would determine that it's more probative then prejudicial to bring these instances in. And so all these cases where somebody would . . . a man was on trial for

rape, and you could prove that there had been allegations, or even convictions, of a rape that occurred—woman, same height, blonde hair, wearing tennis shoes, whatever it is—that there's just this pattern there. The guy would get convicted and it would always be overturned, and so that sort of became my thing in the crime bill.

So I had to negotiate with a bunch of people on that, including Vice President [Joseph Robinette] Biden [Jr.] whom I absolutely adore for many reasons. But one of the reasons was when we were having this negotiation, I had to negotiate with, like 20 people before they brought him in. He was head of the [Senate] Judiciary [Committee] at the time, and you could just tell, like they just wanted nothing to do with me. First of all, we were still in the minority, so here's like, a young female yanking the majority's chain over the President's [Clinton's] signature piece, and then they brought in Joe Biden. And he was tough, and he was fair, and he treated me like an equal, and I will—I love him for so many reasons, so many reasons, I think he is just such a gift to this country, but on a personal level . . . And by the way, I saw him in Croatia during the war when I didn't think anybody else cared.

But that was a piece of legislation that eventually passed, and that was part of the President's crime bill, and we were able to, I think, bring over about 55 to 60 Republican Members to support the crime bill once the rule opened up for five amendments.

JOHNSON: Some of the major issues that affected women, sometimes you were in the minority in the Republican Party; not all of your Republican colleagues supported as well. So what did you do to try to build support for Violence Against Women and the Family and Medical Leave Act?

MOLINARI: So, if I felt there was a way to actually influence it and pass it, I would work with the leadership to try and get it done. If I felt that this was just something that philosophically was not going to happen, I would work with Members, to discuss it in a way that was not off-putting—that sometimes "Father-Knows-Best" way of handling these conversations. So, I would try both ways: again, to try and get people to perhaps listen to where I thought they were wrong, where it could change their mind, but if that wasn't the case, to get them to speak more graciously about their disagreements.

JOHNSON: Were they often receptive to that?

MOLINARI: Yes, yes, I think they were. Again, most people here are here for the right reasons and are just bringing their experiences to the table.

I remember one time—and I won't name the individual, but one of the nicest, sweetest, kindliest gentlemen, who was very old by the time I was there, and he yielded the floor to me, one of the most gracious individuals who did not have a biased bone in his body, but he yielded the floor to the "little lady from New York." There were women coming up to me and saying, "Take his words down." You have to sometimes interpret where it's coming from, right? If it was a 30-year-old Member who did it, it would be taken in a much different way than somebody who had always been really kind and really fair, and that was just his way. Sometimes you have to—like with everything in life—you have to look at the person, not just the topic at hand.

WASNIEWSKI: In the late spring of 1997, you surprised a lot of observers by saying you were stepping down and going to retire and change careers. Why did you decide to leave Congress?

MOLINARI: A couple of reasons. Primarily, as if I have not talked about my father enough during this interview, my father took this job as a 24/7 job. My dad would be the kind that if we were done with dinner, and there was nothing else going on, he'd go through the phone book: "Hi, Mr. Smith, it's Guy Molinari, former president. No, no, really, how are things going?" Like, he just lived and breathed this, and this was all you did. And then I had a baby late, and I loved this job, but it's two jobs. While I don't cry for me, Argentina, when the media always says that Congress is back on vacation, they're not. They're back in their district, doing what they're supposed to do, and again, I never . . . I never loved it, right? If you want me to be at your kid's Eagle Scout award [ceremony], if you want me to throw out the first baseball at Little League Baseball, you are giving me . . . you said that I can vote whether to go to war, like this is a big deal. So wherever you want me, I am going to be all the time. So, I would do that, friends would come over, take care of my daughter. She had no idea, she was having a great time, but I missed her. And then I would be with her, and I felt guilty about not being out at your kid's Eagle Scout award.

And so, when I got the opportunity, which seemed like a good idea at the time, to anchor a show on CBS, which was supposed to be more political than it turned out to be, and work three days a week—sort of keep your hand in it, but not really—it just seemed like a good opportunity. I feel so strongly the need to say, that was a decision I made because of where I was in my life. I have had great friends who have raised their kids in the United States Congress, and their kids are great, and they were great parents. This is not—I hate the tutorial of like, who's a better mom in the mom books and the mom wars—it was just what was right for me at the time, and so that's why I decided to leave.

JOHNSON: I wanted to ask you a legislation question, a broad one. In all of your time in Congress in the '90s, what do you think was the most important piece of legislation passed that had a direct impact on women?

MOLINARI: I have to think about that one. Going back to the '90s—I think certainly, and it happened before, right? The Violence Against Women Act, but I don't know if young people can appreciate the fact that . . . I served on Mayor Giuliani's Commission on the Status of Women. I was chair of that, and it was at that time, mid-'90s, that we were actually dealing with the fact that there were mandatory arrests. I remember the discussions on domestic violence being something like this: "It's a family matter." You go to the door, the cops say to, usually, the gentleman, "Buddy, take a walk around, cool down." "Do you want to press charges?" And even if the woman was clearly, clearly incapacitated, and they knew she was scared, if she said no, done, end of deal, close the book. To think of where we have gotten today as a society . . .

And I remember as chairman, I did hearings in each borough on domestic violence, and I remember even my dad sitting there hearing female victims, being shocked by what they had to go through. It's a situation, it was that family secret, and then all of a sudden it became political, right? People wanted to cosponsor the Violence Against Women Act, people wanted to vote for it, people wanted to talk about domestic violence as a political issue, and that's what needs to be done in any of these things.

Right now, we're working on underage sex trafficking, and all of a sudden it's become an issue that has become political; the United States Senate passed a major piece of legislation on underage trafficking. It passed both the House and the Senate, Republicans and Democrats. But I think the Violence Against Women Act was really sort of one of those [pieces of legislation]—

and the reauthorizations—because it gave us an opportunity to talk about it [domestic violence]. It gave us an opportunity to highlight, it gave us an opportunity to give voice to those people who for so long felt like they had absolutely no voice, and brought it out of the closet and, again, made it political. That's how we make changes.

I bear no apologies to say that making something political is how you make changes in a democracy. So, when people want to discuss it, when people want to have town halls on it, that's when you're going to see the societal shift. I really think the whole issue of violence against women, "Buddy, take a walk around the block"; protective orders; just, society's response to acknowledging the helplessness that sometimes individuals find themselves in when they have kids, don't have kids. But just elevating that conversation every time it [the legislation] had to be reauthorized was a really important moment, I think, at least while I was here.

WASNIEWSKI: We've asked you a lot of questions about the past. Now we're going to ask you to look into the crystal ball and prognosticate. There's 108 women in Congress now: 88 in the House, 20 in the Senate. Looking out 50 years from now—50 years from Jeannette Rankin's centennial, which will be 2067—how many women do you think will be in Congress and how will we get to that point?

MOLINARI: Well, first of all, more women need to run—that's such a big portion of the problem. And I know it looks dirty and mean, and it is, but you know what? Anything that gives you an opportunity to be in such a life-changing position isn't going to be easy. Women need to be . . . so, I think we've gotten to a place where I was allowed because of my lineage, as a woman, to run, but there was a little bit of an apology there, right? "She's Guy's daughter, so we can do this." To a point where I remember when my husband was running

the National Republican Congressional Committee, they started to look for females. It wasn't just like, "Well, we'll let this one run because they've got the right lineage, they can raise the money, they have the right background." It was, if you had two candidates being equal, the female was going to be the one that the party wanted to go after. So, we are seeing change in just this short time.

Fifty years from now, I hope women are in the majority, as they are in this country, as they are in the electorate. If we want the United States Congress to reflect the United States, we've got to step on it.

JOHNSON: If one of your daughters told you that they wanted to run for Congress, what would you say, and what advice would you offer?

MOLINARI: And we have had these [discussions], oddly enough—in our family, what with a grandfather, a mother, and a father who were in Congress, this has come up from time to time—and I would certainly encourage it. It's not the easiest road. It's not easy to sometimes put yourself out there, but boy, the benefits . . . Look, you're talking to me and allowing me to be a part of history, like there's not many jobs where you can do that. To get the trust of your neighbors, to be able to make decisions with Presidents of the United States and United States Senators and leaders from around the world, generals . . . I look back on my life, the First Persian Gulf War, and I said when I walked into the [House Recording] Studio, the last time I was in the studio I was taping a show for my little show on Staten Island where we brought in all these human shields who Saddam Hussein had used to keep him safe during the First Gulf War. To be able to look back on being able to unite with some of my sisters on issues like Tailhook and Aberdeen, to have fights about funding [to combat] domestic violence or breast cancer, or

maybe doing a little part to bring peace to the former Yugoslavia, like where else could you sit back and say, "The glory days were pretty good."

That's not to say I don't like my job at Google right now, but it's a heady experience [to be a Member], and if my daughters wanted to do it, you have to be tough. It's not an easy path, but the payout is unbelievable. I would support them 100 percent, not pushing them in that direction by any means.

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

MOLINARI: No. I think if there was anything that surprised me—and I know this is going to sound ridiculous—is how easy it was. Like, if you wanted to get something done, it didn't always happen, but there was—you were gifted with incredible staff, brilliant people who are surrounding you. The thing that surprises most people when they come here is that, you know, this nation really is run by people under 30, but smart people, passionate people, and if you have a cause that you really want to pursue, and you're going to be dogged, you can usually get it done. I think that was sort of a surprise for me, and it was not a surprise for me, particularly then, on how bipartisan it was, because my dad was so bipartisan.

I remember my dad when I won: We were walking into the Fox Studio for something, and he said, "Now here's a guy you're going to work with because he's a good guy, and he's going to help you," and I looked, and it was Chuck Schumer. And he was right, because we were both New Yorkers—Senator Schumer now. But there would be times when we would battle, but there would also be times where as a delegation, you'd totally unite. And certainly, if you were from New York City, you had to fight a significant portion of the rest of the United States Congress, Republicans or Democrats.

JOHNSON: We've asked you a lot of questions. Thank you for answering all of them.

MOLINARI: Oh my gosh, I hope it was okay.

JOHNSON: Yes, it's great.

WASNIEWSKI: It's great.

JOHNSON: I just had one final question for you.

MOLINARI: Sure.

JOHNSON: What do you think your lasting legacy will be as a Representative of Congress? Years from now when people see your name, what do you think they'll say?

MOLINARI: Oh, my, I don't think they'll remember. I was there for so short a period of time, I was such a blip. If there were people who could remember, I would like it to be—so, if I were going to write my own legacy—let's do that. It would be that, "She could work across the aisle, and she could work with people with whom she disagreed but respected, and always felt really proud to be a part of this institution."

JOHNSON: That sounds like a great legacy.

WASNIEWSKI: Thank you so much for sharing your time.

MOLINARI: Thank you.

JOHNSON: Thank you.

MOLINARI: I want to come back. No, I don't want to come back!

NOTES

[1] Winnifred Sprague Mason Huck of Illinois made history when she became the first daughter to succeed her father, William Ernest Mason, in Congress, in 1922.
[2] Susan Molinari and Bill Paxon had two daughters: Susan Ruby and Katherine Mary. Congresswoman Molinari became one of a handful of Representatives to give birth while serving in Congress. Representative Yvonne Brathwaite Burke of California was the first woman Member to give birth while in Congress.
[3] Susan Molinari married Bill Paxon in 1994, the same year as the midterm elections where Republicans gained enough seats to take control of the House in the 104th Congress (1995–1997).
[4] According to a 1969 *Washington Post* article, Congresswoman Charlotte Thompson Reid of Illinois was the first woman to wear pants on the House Floor.