The Honorable Sue Myrick

U.S. Representative of North Carolina (1995–2013)

Oral History Interview
Final Edited Transcript

March 14, 2016

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

"But I think there's still a lack of mentoring among women, not just in politics but in general. That's kind of sad because somebody else paved the way for me, I certainly didn't do it. I mean, yes, I was the first in a couple things, but somebody else in the national scene made it possible for women to be here—Jeannette Rankin, for example. I still can't believe that that long ago she was able to get elected to Congress. That's phenomenal. We talked about that type of thing a lot. How in the world did she get elected when she was definitely in a man's world?"

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Abstract

Spurred into action by a local land dispute, Sue Myrick began her political career on the city council before making history as the first woman mayor of Charlotte, North Carolina. Myrick used her experience and name recognition to win a seat in Congress, achieving another milestone as the first Republican woman elected to Congress from North Carolina. In her interview, Myrick recalls her time as freshman class liaison, a position that provided unique access to the leadership during a monumental period that saw Republicans gain control of the House for the first time in 40 years.

In her oral history, Myrick reflects on how her personal fight against breast cancer influenced her legislative career and strengthened her resolve to draw attention to women's health. She also describes her successful challenge against an institutional tradition that discouraged women Members and staff from wearing pants on the House Floor. During her nearly two decades in the House, she emerged as a spokesperson for conservatives in her party, earning assignments on the influential Rules, Intelligence, and Energy and Commerce committees. In her oral history, Myrick reflects on the role of women in her party and shares her memories of chairing the Republican Study Committee.

Biography

MYRICK, Sue, a Representative from North Carolina; born in Tiffin, Seneca County, Ohio, August 1, 1941; graduated from Port Clinton High School, Port Clinton, Ohio; attended Heidelberg College, Tiffin, Ohio, 1959–1960; at-large member, Charlotte, N.C., city council, 1983–1985; mayor, Charlotte, N.C., 1987–1991; unsuccessful candidate for nomination to the United States Senate in 1992; elected as a Republican to the One Hundred Fourth and to the eight succeeding Congresses (January 3, 1995–January 3, 2013); was not a candidate for reelection to the One Hundred Thirteenth Congress in 2012.
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 SUE MYRICK OF NORTH CAROLINA —
A CENTURY OF WOMEN IN CONGRESS

JOHNSON: My name is Kathleen Johnson, and the date is March 14th, 2016. I'm here with the House Historian, Matt Wasniewski. We are in the House Recording Studio of the Rayburn House Office Building. Today we are with Sue Myrick, former Congresswoman from North Carolina. We are delighted to have you here today.

MYRICK: Thank you.

JOHNSON: This interview is for a series of interviews, a project that we're doing to celebrate the 100th anniversary of the election of Jeannette Rankin to Congress—the first woman ever elected to Congress. So, to start off with today, when you were young, did you have any role models?

MYRICK: When I was young I never thought about politics, so it wasn't something from the standpoint of what you're talking about, no. Really, my mom and dad were the only people that I kind of looked up to, and some teachers and whatnot, but I was never political. I had no political aspirations. I wasn't involved in any way.

JOHNSON: When you were young, what did you think you would be when you grew up?

MYRICK: I thought I'd be a teacher. I started out to do that. I actually went to college for a year, and then my mom and dad sat me down because I had three younger brothers, and they said, "We really can't afford to send you to school, and it's more important that your brothers get the education because you'll just grow up and get married." And at that time, many, many years ago, you didn't really have the advantages you have today, where you could

get grants and scholarships. And I went to a small country school, a small town, and so you didn't have the counseling that you do today to say, "Hey, anybody can do it. You can do it on your own." And so I ended up going to work for an army depot in the town where I lived.

JOHNSON: How did you first become interested in politics?

MYRICK: I didn't become interested in politics until we had a problem with the city. And we were trying to buy a piece of land in a redevelopment area and, quite frankly, we went ahead and just made the bid on it, like you're supposed to do, and the highest bidder gets the land. The end result was we were the highest bidder, and they did say we were going to get it. But then they had to be approved by city council.

And so I heard through the grapevine that another council member wanted to have his buddy get it to build apartments, and they were going to do a zoning thing—that this was a better use of land than our house and office that we wanted to build. So, totally ignorant, I didn't know you had to sign up to speak. I didn't know anything. I went to the city council meeting, and finally the mayor called on me because I knew him from business, or I wouldn't have been able to speak! {laughter} And he said, "Do you have something to say?" And I said, "I sure do." And so I kind of gave him a piece of my mind. I just said, "Hey, we played fair and square." So, end result, we got the land, but it made me start looking at how government has an effect on your life because, before that, I really hadn't thought about it.

JOHNSON: Did you have any mentors early on, when you first became involved in politics?

MYRICK: Not really, because I was a grassroots volunteer, totally out of the norm of the people who run for political office. And I had a friend who was active in the party—the Republican Party—and he said, "Why don't you run?" And so my husband and kids encouraged me. I had no money, no organization, no experience, nothing, but just an interest in being a public servant. And I ran and lost by only 200 votes against four male incumbents. So, that gave me the next year, the next two years, to run again, and then I was elected to city council. So, I say I got into politics by the back door, not the usual route that everybody else takes.

WASNIEWSKI: And you also served as mayor of Charlotte for two terms.

MYRICK: I did, I did.

WASNIEWSKI: Specifically, in that regard, what about that experience helped you when you decided to make the transition to Congress?

MYRICK: Well, mayor, at the time, I thought was a difficult job. I was the first female mayor [of Charlotte]. And I was the first mayor, really, outside the system. Again, I was a grassroots volunteer, and at that time Charlotte was still fairly small, and there was this—a group of about 11 people who get together every time, and they decided who was going to run for mayor. It was pretty much cut-and-dried. {laughter} So, I wasn't part of their plan. And I ran against a very popular incumbent at the time. And so I thought it really was difficult from the sense that the media just—they used to write articles about what I wore and how long my hair was and all this kind of thing. Until finally one day, I said to them, "Hey. You never write an article about my opponent, he's got on a navy suit and a blue tie and whatever." And there was this dead silence. This was the editor of the paper. And he said, "Well, you're right." So, they finally stopped that.

So it was that kind of thing all the time, you know? If I did something, it was everybody was critical in a different way than they are today. This was kind of a first for the city. And so I learned, kind of the hard way, but once they realized I was serious and had an agenda to really accomplish something after I was elected, I was taken seriously. People came together—and Charlotte's known as a city that works together—so the things that I accomplished as mayor were because lots of people came to help. I was like a vehicle or a vessel that all of this happened through.

But it was a great experience because, first of all, it gave me a grounding in the political process. At that time, I had no plans to run for further office. I ran for two terms and term-limited myself. So, when I look back on it, it was really a good time, and it was easier than serving in Congress. {laughter}

WASNIEWSKI: In 1992, you decided to run in the Republican primary for a U.S. Senate seat. Why did you decide to make that transition, and were you recruited by anyone to do that?

MYRICK: Well, it's interesting because that was a decision—it was a bad decision on my part, but I had spent a lot of time up here. When I was mayor, I was very active in the Mayors Conference. I led CODELs [congressional delegations] abroad. I did a lot of testifying on issues before Congress, and so it kind of seemed like a natural progression to do that. Big mistake because, again, I didn't have a lot of money, and I was running against a self-funded millionaire who just poured everything he could into the race, including all this underground stuff that was a very nasty, bad experience that was really hard on my family. And at that point I decided I wasn't going to run again.

JOHNSON: So why did you run for a House seat two years later?[1]

MYRICK: Well, interesting, I really did not plan on doing it, and people at this point started calling me and asking me to run. And I didn't want to because of the bad experience. And so finally I said to them, "Look, my negatives have got to be in the basement, and there's no way I could get elected dogcatcher." And so it kept on, and finally I said, "Okay, you raise the money and do a poll, you'll find out." So, the poll came back, and my negatives weren't bad, and my name ID was 98 percent, and my positives were very good. So it was like, "Okay, now what do I do?" {laughter}

So, as a family, we sat down and talked about it, and decided if we could give a few years of our life to try and make a difference for our grandkids, very frankly, we would do it. And so that's how I ran, never intending to serve as long as I did. That wasn't part of the game plan either. I just—once you get here, everything moves so slowly. It takes you a while to accomplish what you want to do. And so it's kind of like you go from year to year, and all of a sudden it's 10 years and you just, you don't even realize it. I was very blessed to have the job. I'm very thankful that I had the experience and was able to serve the way I did, but I'm also glad, now, to be gone. {laughter}

WASNIEWSKI: Were there any key moments in that first House campaign that stand out for you, any major turning points?

MYRICK: It was . . . again, I was the fifth person in the race. All the money that—political money had been committed to the other four candidates. So that was challenging in itself. And then one of the candidates who was supposedly leading had an experience where he actually was accused of . . . and then later they said he had lied on his résumé. And so he kind of dropped out. Anyway, I ended up winning. {laughter}

WASNIEWSKI: Was gender an issue at all in that campaign?

MYRICK: In that campaign it was not. Gender had been an issue before. It was an issue when I ran for city council, when I was mayor, but in the congressional race, really, it wasn't. And after I got here, gender really wasn't an issue either, in some ways. I came in with the class that Newt [Newton Leroy Gingrich] was the Speaker, and Newt was very good about promoting women. He pushed us out front, whether it was with the press or whether it was on committees or things. He really was very open to giving women a shot at being a part of the process in a way that sometimes they hadn't been in the past.

JOHNSON: Did you have the support of any women's groups in your campaign, either local or national?

MYRICK: No, not really, because I'm a Republican. And most women's groups don't support Republicans, interestingly enough. I happen to be a conservative Republican, which makes it different, too. And so I had the support of the Republican women and the groups like that [and], of course, women friends and organizations, business organizations, that type of thing. But not really the typical women's groups per se because it's pretty rare that they support a conservative Republican.

WASNIEWSKI: So, was fundraising an issue in that first campaign for you?

MYRICK: Oh, sure. Fundraising was very difficult. Again, because there's only certain people that give politically, and the money had been committed, so it was really friends and others that I knew who stepped up to the plate to help me in that campaign so I could get my message out. But there were some issues that we dealt with that also helped. It wasn't easy by any stretch, but I ended up here, and I believe that's where I was supposed to be at the time.

JOHNSON: For people outside of North Carolina, can you describe your district geographically and, also, the demographics at the time?

MYRICK: Well, the district changed a lot. We had redistricting challenges, which North Carolina today is going through again with our congressional races. So I had four different districts while I was in Congress. But basically, the base of the district has always been Charlotte and then the surrounding areas. And then the counties around Charlotte would change. Sometimes they were to the west and the north, and I had the eastern counties and the southern counties. And it just, really, there wasn't any rhyme or reason, it's whatever the legislature decided to do when they were redistricting.

But Charlotte was always the base, and it's a very compact district because of the population, so I was very fortunate. I could get from my house, living in Charlotte, to any point in my district within an hour, compared to some people who drive hours and hours just to cover their district. So, again, that was very fortunate; it made it easier to serve, as well.

JOHNSON: What about the constituents that you had, how were they represented?

MYRICK: Basically, at that time I would say that it was a split district, but people voted Republican on a national level. And at that time the Republicans were in charge of the city, and we had had Republican mayors for a long time. It's flipped completely now, and so Charlotte is a Democrat city, and I think there are two [Republican] members on city council. And until this year there had never been another woman to run for mayor, which is kind of unusual in a city that size.

WASNIEWSKI: One of the things we've been asking our interviewees—and we have an image here for you of a campaign button of yours, which is from the House

Collection—and we're just curious, is there any particular story that's attached to that campaign button, or a personal memory?

MYRICK: No, not really. We just always use my name as—"Sue" was something that was easy for people to remember. So that's when it—when we did our advertising, we just always did "Sue." And that's who I am. I told people, "I was Sue before I got elected. If I'm elected, I'll be Sue in office, and I'll be Sue when I leave. And if I'm not, I don't deserve to be here." And I think that's one of the problems with office today, and especially on the federal level, is people get up here, and they forget who they are. They forget their roots, and what they become is a politician, and they get into this system, and they aren't real people anymore, and they don't live in a real world. This is a bubble up here. And so unless you've got people around you who can ground you . . . everybody's saying how wonderful you are. And your staff idolizes you. If you don't have a grounding and a level head, it can go to your head, and you end up being an egotistical whatever.

And that bothers me, because today it seems like people get into politics for political reasons, like they've wanted to be a Congressman since they were 10 years old or something. They don't get into politics for public service. And if you look at the great statesmen we used to have in Congress—think about it, there aren't many statesmen left because it's all political. It's Republicans against Democrats and supporting a party instead of trying to work together. That's one of the reasons I got so frustrated and finally decided to leave.

And I'll give you one example. We had a group of women who had met for quite a long time informally for dinner—no politics, just get together and laugh and have a glass of wine, have a good time—Democrats, Republicans, always. And it started to kind of die out. And so right before I left, I went to

one of my Democrat friends who had been involved, and I said, "Let's get people together again before the end of the session." She said, "Great idea." I said, "Well, I'll get nine, and you get nine," knowing we wouldn't have that many, but we'd have a decent group. So, a week before, I hadn't heard anything from her, and I went over and said to her, "How many people do you have?" And she said, "It's just me." She said, "It's so divisive right now that nobody wants to do this."

All that did was solidify for me [that] I made the right decision to leave, but it made me very, very sad because I always tried to work behind the scenes. I wasn't an out-front person, but working behind the scenes and talking to people and, and pulling people together to get something done and make a bill move because you could get enough people on both sides of the aisle—that's what doesn't happen anymore. I hear that at home all the time, you know? "Nobody wants to work together." And it's kind of like it's based on power, because whoever has the power wants to keep it. And whoever doesn't have it wants to get it. And so instead of working together so you could make the country move forward, you've got this standoff, which has been for quite a few years now. Consequently, that's why you see the anger you do out there today. People are saying, "Nobody gets anything done." Well, it's very obvious why. And it's not the . . . I mean, politics has always been about compromise. People hate that word, but it's been about compromise. Look back over the years. You're a historian, you know how it used to work. It worked that way early on when I was here. And so, just gradually, we've seen this shift, and I don't think it's healthy for the country because the people are the ones that suffer.

WASNIEWSKI: The effects here on the Hill are self-evident. What do you think has contributed to that shift over the course of your career?

MYRICK: Yes, I've thought about it a lot because you wonder why people don't really get along like they used to, and I think a lot of it started when you got younger and younger Members being elected to Congress, and they didn't want to come to Washington or move their family to Washington. And so you'd go home every weekend. I was one of those that went home every weekend. The first couple years my husband was here. He hates Washington. He left in '65 vowing never to return, you know? {laughter} Little did he know. But anyway . . . sorry, I lost my train of thought. We'll stop.

WASNIEWSKI: It was just a question of why that change, and you had mentioned the families being here.

MYRICK: The change, I think the change took place when people started going home instead of living in Washington and/or staying here for periods of time. They would have their families at home, so every weekend you would go home. Well, consequently, your kids didn't go to school together, you didn't socialize together, and at that time we were working nights—10:00 at night. If I got home at 10:00, it was an early night. It was just all the time. And so you didn't really have that opportunity to have a normal life with a family and get to know people one-on-one. And I think that helped to contribute.

And then Congress is a lot younger than it's maybe ever been. I'm not sure; you would know. And when you get that, most people will do the same thing because they want their wife to have a support system at home with family or friends or whatever, and not be alone because you're gone so much. And it's always been a dilemma for everybody because if you move your family here, on weekends you go home if you're doing your job right, to take care of your district. And then if you're home, your family lives at home on weekends. It's

also you go home and work, but at least you can see them and be with them. So, there's no easy answer.

And I don't know that there ever has been, but years ago because of no air conditioning, maybe, and other things, people stayed in Washington or they left for the summer or whatever, and it was totally different. And so they did establish those relationships. The women got to know one another, and of course the men would work together, their kids would go to school, play ball together. And so there was a camaraderie there, and if you know somebody, it's pretty hard to get up on the floor and call them a you-know-what because you do respect the person as a person. And, see, that's what's missing today. We don't—you don't have that same level of respect, in my opinion, that you used to have in Congress.

JOHNSON: Another big change—and this was at the beginning of your House career—was when the Republicans took control of the House for the first time in 40 years; this was back in 1995. What do you remember about the atmosphere during those first few months?

MYRICK: Oh, it was wild. I always remember because Newt [Gingrich]—after the election, because it was a hectic election—after the election, my husband and I were going to go to the beach for a few days and get away for a break. We had no . . . we had just gotten to the beach and literally walked into the condo, put the bags down, and the phone rang, and it was Newt. And he said, "I want you to be on the transition team." So I thought, "Well, what does that entail?" He said, "Well, we're just going to handle the transition, and you . . ." Well, anyway, I said, "Well, when do I start?" He said, "Tomorrow. I want you here right away." {laughter} So it was like, literally, we picked up the bags. My husband took me to the nearest airport; I flew to

Washington, he went home to Charlotte. And that was the beginning of the inauguration into Congress, I guess.

And so it was interesting, and I was really glad to be a part of that process because there were rooms in the Capitol, literally, that Republicans hadn't been in in 40 years. And I'm not saying that to criticize Democrats. It probably would have been the same way if it was the other way. But it was really interesting because we'd find these rooms: "Hey, wow, look at this!" Didn't know it was here. And so there was a lot of that type of thing.

But then, also, we sat down in the very beginning, and Newt said, "Okay, how do you want to handle this?" And we all said, "We want to be fair." Now, some of the Members who had been here for a while said, "The heck with that, we're going to treat them the way they treated us," you know? And Newt was very good about this because he said, "No, we're going to be fair. We're going to treat people the way we wanted to be treated." And so when they did the divisions of the committees, and when they were dividing up, deciding on office space and who was going to do what and all that, they really were fair. And I always remember that because the older guys complained like crazy that that didn't exist before. And so we tried to set a tone that way. But because this was a 100-day agenda, it was very, utterly intense. We all told Newt, "If you ever do this again, we'll kill you." Because we were all sick, we were tired. Everybody was getting angry for—obviously just on edge because it was like a march. It accomplished, I guess, what he wanted to accomplish at that time, which was good, but we were all glad when it was over.

But I just remember that there was no orientation, per se, of how you do things. You just jumped in and did it because we started on the floor right

away, and it wasn't like this slow beginning, like some years you have, and you've got time to get organized. We didn't have time to get organized at all. And we got offices—we were wandering the halls, picking furniture out of the halls, literally, to find something to put in our offices. And I know there was one piece we took and put in my office, and the next day somebody came knocking on the door and said, "You can't have that, I want it." {laughter} And so they took it, a more senior Member. But it was that kind of thing. There really was kind of a quiet chaos in the sense that it wasn't—people weren't at each other's throats or anything, but it was just really different, in the way all that happened compared to the way a normal year goes, where it's organized.

JOHNSON: And that was such a large freshman class; there were more than 70 of you.

MYRICK: Oh, yes.

JOHNSON: And you, we read, were a liaison between the leadership and also the freshman class. So, how did you stand out so quickly among that class?

MYRICK: Well, I didn't think I did. I didn't run for anything, and some of the guys in the class came to me, and they said, "We want you to run for this," and I said, "I really don't . . ." I didn't want to. I literally didn't—that's not me, I'm an introvert. So I'm not one to want to step out there and do that. I've always tried to be a leader, but quietly, by bringing people together, as I said before.

So, anyway, they said, "We would like you to run." And there was somebody else running that they didn't feel would be good to get the job, very frankly. There were several people running at the time. And so I said, "You can put my name in, but I'm not going to do anything. I'm not going to campaign

for it. I'm not going to do anything." And that's the way it started. I had no intentions of wanting to do any of that, but then they ended up having me be a liaison, along with David [Martin] McIntosh on the male side. There were two of us.

And it was a great experience because we were able to communicate with the leadership about our class, and it was so large, and so many different . . . Everybody, pretty much, was together. But it was just a good opportunity to have that voice at that table because it was totally different than the other voices that had been at the table before. So, there was a lot of back-and-forth and give-and-take in those leadership meetings. It was an interesting, interesting experience, but I was very blessed to have that job.

JOHNSON: What were some of the challenges that you faced being in that position?

MYRICK: Well, the challenges were trying to communicate to leadership exactly what the Members of the class thought, wanted to see done. And a lot of times there were people who were in the class who would say, "No, you're not doing it right." Or, "You're not strong enough." Or, "You're not communicating." So, there was always that give-and-take, but basically they were very supportive.

And we had a good group. Roger [F.] Wicker was the class president then, who's now in the Senate. But we had good people, and basically everybody was supportive of one another. It was a cohesive class partly because we were thrown together the way we were, so quickly. And there were a lot of women, which was nice. Of course that has dwindled over time, dramatically.

WASNIEWSKI: In that class, you were one of eight new Republican women who were sworn-into Congress, and we're curious to know—Sue [W.] Kelly, Helen [P.]

Chenoweth-Hage, Barbara [L.] Cubin, that group—did a special bond emerge among that group of you who were elected in '94?

MYRICK: Oh, yes. Yes, very much so. We became very close friends, all of us, and stayed close friends for years. Now Helen Chenoweth left fairly early, if I remember correctly. Barbara Cubin was here until the mid-2000s. Sue Kelly got defeated [in 2006], which was really a shame and hard on her. She took it very hard. I felt so badly for her. We all did. But she always had tough races in her district. It was one of those districts that can change easily.

But the good thing was we were all different, but it was complementary because we would meet and talk things through and get the opinion of one another. I learned about Western issues from Barbara Cubin and Helen Chenoweth because I'm not from the West. I knew nothing about the West. But they would educate us on why they were doing these bills for specific things, like water or whatever it may be, and so we learned a lot that way. And the same with us: Being on the East Coast, they weren't familiar with that. So, that sharing that we did as women was very helpful.

But the other thing we learned early on, as women, was that we were pretty much all alike. Because one time we were together, and some of the older women who had been here before—Nancy [Lee] Johnson, Tillie [Kidd] Fowler, and some of the others—and we were talking, and I said something. One of us said, "Well, I've got to go because I take my work home." And the other one said, "You do that, too?" And somebody else said, "You do that, too?" And we learned—what we realized was, we took our work home and went home at night and worked. And the guys went out and had a good time. {laughter} Not all of them, but that's really what happened. Or they played golf, or sometimes in the afternoon they'd go to a matinee, while

we're working all the time. We realized, as women, that was the difference. And it's probably still true today. But you just have a different . . . I think because there's always this, been this—you have to work harder and try harder to be accepted in a man's world, as a woman. I think there's a lot of that that doesn't really exist today, but it's kind of built into you if you came along through all those years of having to do that.

I'll never forget—this is not Congress—but when we were in business—my husband and I were in business together—and we had a client, a new client, and my husband said, "Well, Sue will come meet with you to go over this, blah, blah, blah, whatever." And he said, "Oh, no. Uh-uh." He said, "I don't meet with women." And so my husband said, "Well, either you meet with Sue, or we don't work together." End result was I met with him. He understood that I knew what I was talking about. He accepted me. We became great friends.

But there's been this bloc out there, and I think some of it still exists. I see some [evidence] of it, in the corporate world even today, that it does exist. There is kind of this ceiling that you can go so far in a lot of areas and then you don't go any further, as a woman. And that's always been kind of sad, and especially in politics, with the President. There haven't been that many [women] that have run, right? Elizabeth [Hanford] Dole ran—recently, I'm talking about—Elizabeth Dole, and I'm trying to think who else. Of course, Hillary's [Rodham Clinton] running now, and Carly Fiorina ran. But it's hard for a Republican woman to kind of be accepted in that presidential field, I think. And just kind of watching it, I don't know. You hope someday that's going to change.

But the other thing, I think, that's missing is that women don't run. A lot of females won't take the risk. And it is taking a risk, to put yourself out there and fail. And so we need to do a better job of developing farm teams of women who are willing to put themselves out in front and run. And I think the Republicans have always done a bad job of that. I think the Democrats do a much better job of nurturing and bringing up the farm team than Republicans do, very honestly. And so I've always wondered why more women don't run. But then I stop and think about the fact of look what you have to go through and how negative it is today, and I think, "I wouldn't run today if I had to go through—knowing what you might face with all the junk they throw at you." True or not, doesn't have to be true.

I've had some rough campaigns, but really, I think that's because it's a negative atmosphere. A lot of women just say, "I'll raise my kids and do my job and whatever it is I'm working at, and not volunteer." But one thing that women bring to the process is a willingness to work together. And I think it's because we raise our kids to get along and not fight. You try and have harmony in the home, whatever it may be in that sense, and guys kind of are raised to be confrontational. And so it's like this. And it's harder, I think, for a guy to say, "Okay, how can we work on this?" Because they feel like they're giving up something compared to the way we look at it, like, "How can you bring the people together?" And, quite frankly, the way I used to deal with guys was I'd think, "They're some mamma's little boy, they get up in the morning and put their pants on the same way I do, one leg at a time. They're no different." And so that was kind of my psychological thing to deal with guys who wanted to lord it over women for whatever reason.

WASNIEWSKI: How about the House? When you first came, were there parts of the institution you found it hard to enter as a woman, and did you have to integrate any parts of the institution?

MYRICK: Well, let me tell you two things. One, we learned very quickly what seats you didn't sit in because some of the guys had certain seats that they had had forever, and you never sat in that seat. That was a no-no, big-time. The other thing that—when we got here—was women couldn't wear slacks. You had to wear a skirt. And so a lot of us didn't like that because we were raised in a world where you wore pantsuits or slacks, you know? And so we went to the leadership and said, "Can we start to wear slacks?" Well, the answer was no, whoever's in charge of that in the House. And so some of us just decided, "We're going to start wearing slacks on the floor and see what they do." Well, anyway, we did that for a while, and finally they relented and said that we could wear slacks or pantsuits on the floor. {laughter} But it was a matter of forcing the issue.

Then I used to sit there, and the women who do the recording, and they weren't allowed to wear pants, slacks. They had to wear dresses. Well, they would wear dresses, and they were kind of short, and you could see the guys sitting there and looking at them. So, I went again to leadership, and I said, "Why aren't they allowed to wear slacks?" "Well, it's always been the rule." So anyway, we went through . . . it took about three years, but we got those women the right to wear slacks on the floor instead of wearing dresses. So it was that kind of thing that was—it was a challenging fight to get done but it was part of the institution. That's the way women were. You had to wear a dress; you didn't wear slacks.

JOHNSON: You were the first Republican woman elected from North Carolina and one of a handful of Republican women that represented a Southern district. Do you feel like that distinction was that important, and did it give you a special role to play while you were in Congress?

MYRICK: No, I always felt like whatever I did in politics, I was a role model for other people—for other women, in particular—and tried to mentor other women. But I never felt like that was—I never looked at myself as being the first of something or the only one. I always looked at myself as being capable and [thought] people should accept me for my capabilities and what I could do, not the fact that I was a woman, per se. So I guess maybe I've looked at it differently.

Mentoring was very important, it still is important, and it's interesting because you never know what kind of an effect you're going to have on somebody. And I still have women who will come to me today and thank me for "such-and-such" that happened 20 years ago, which just kind of blows my mind because I wouldn't remember it. But it was some little thing, generally, or something you did to help them, or a letter you wrote for them, a reference, or something that you did that made a difference in their life or helped them to achieve something they were trying to achieve. And that's a good feeling when you can do that type of thing and be a mentor to others.

I always looked at my office that way. My office was a training ground for both men and women. And I would tell them, "If you have an opportunity to move up and take another job that's going to better you, take it." And so I tried to encourage them to find their wings and to fly, simply because this is a place where you have to keep moving as a staff person, or you're stuck in a job forever in the same place. So, we didn't have much turnover in my office.

I was very blessed to have a stable staff. Some of the people that were with me—my district staff was with me the whole time. And up here, I had really good people who were very loyal and stable without a lot of turnover. But that type of mentoring, I think, a lot of women don't do that. Women don't really like women. Have you ever noticed that?

JOHNSON: On occasion.

MYRICK: And so women don't reach out and help in the same way that sometimes a guy will. When you're, when you do things together as a guy, and play golf or you're in the gym, whatever it may be, there's kind of a camaraderie that builds there, and then people will help one another. But women—and part of it may be that you've . . . with a lot of women, you had to fight to get where you were, and so that's what you're busy doing. But I think there's still a lack of mentoring among women, not just in politics but in general. That's kind of sad because somebody else paved the way for me, I certainly didn't do it. I mean, yes, I was the first in a couple things, but somebody else in the national scene made it possible for women to be here—Jeannette Rankin, for example. I still can't believe that that long ago she was able to get elected to Congress. That's phenomenal. We talked about that type of thing a lot. How in the world did she get elected when she was definitely in a man's world?

JOHNSON: And before women had the right to vote nationally.

MYRICK: That's exactly right—really strange. But she obviously was a well-respected person. And, again, I go back to being a person, not a woman.

WASNIEWSKI: You mentioned mentoring and how important that is. Was there anyone who offered you advice when you first came? And what kind of advice did they give you?

MYRICK: Oh, some of the older women Members were really wonderful to us. Nancy Johnson—I hope you're going to talk to Nancy as one of the other people because Nancy is just a dear—but she really paved the way for a lot of us. I'll never forget one of the first things she told me was, "This is the loneliest place in the world for a woman." And she was right. It's a very lonely place. You know that old expression "It's lonely at the top"? But it really is a lonely place for women.

Again, go back to the same thing: the guys can play golf and go to the gym. Now women can go to a gym, too, don't get me wrong, but it's just not the same. There's this camaraderie that's been built up, and it's kind of accepted that that's what happens, where women have to kind of build their own. So, it's a different situation.

But Nancy was very good to all of us. Tillie Fowler, she was a dear in mentoring. Jennifer [Blackburn] Dunn, Jennifer was a very good mentor to so many people. She really . . . and they would sit down and talk to us about some of the history of things, how the place worked, and how you got things done as well as just personally being friends. That was important. Barbara [Farrell] Vucanovich, she was another one who was very good about reaching out and helping all of us in various ways. They would always offer to help, come campaign if they needed to do that, or whatever.

But it was just more the day-to-day. You could go to them if you had a question about, "Now, how can I work this bill through?"—whatever it may be. And they could tell you from experience what they had done, which almost always was very, very helpful. So there was a lot of that back then, you know? Today, I don't know. Before I left, it didn't really seem the same because, as I say, it was hard just getting women together.

Everybody's so busy, though. I don't know if you've noticed that, but it just seems like life is a lot more hectic and busier than it used to be. Technology was supposed to change that, but I think it's made it worse. {laughter}

JOHNSON: We had read that you were part of a group called the Breakfast Club? What was that, and what were the primary goals of that group?

MYRICK: {laughter} I had forgotten about that. It wasn't an official breakfast club, but there were a group of probably eight of us or so—I think I was the only female—who used to get together for breakfast, generally at the Capitol Hill Club because you could have a little privacy. And we'd talk about what we wanted to get done. So, it became—people would see us meeting, and they'd think we were plotting. So then it became kind of a fun thing because Newt would walk by. He'd come by, and he'd say, "All right, what are you all up to now?"—this type of thing. Or Dick [Richard Keith] Armey, one of the leaders, because we were meeting for breakfast, but we did it on a regular basis.

A lot of us became really good friends—Tom [Thomas Allen] Coburn and John [B.] Shadegg. I'm trying to think of some of the others—Mark [Edward] Souder, David McIntosh, some of the people who were very involved in our freshman class. And so the Breakfast Club was named by others, not by us, but it kind of got a life of its own after that. And we tried to—we would just decide things that we thought should be done. And then we'd take them to the full class and talk to them about it, and then it would proceed the other way. So, it was kind of like a nurturing group with each other. But it was also an idea, a place for ideas to be presented and then see whether they would fly or not.

JOHNSON: Was this something that went beyond your freshman year? Did you keep meeting after that?

MYRICK: Yes, we did. And a lot of us stayed friends for years, and are still friends even though we're not in Congress. We still communicate and get together when we can.

WASNIEWSKI: You mentioned that you'd acted as a liaison between the freshman class and Speaker Gingrich. By 1997, there were a fair number of people in the party who were not happy with Speaker Gingrich. How did that make your role different, or difficult?

MYRICK: Yes. It was hard. Newt was very good at being a general in the war. He got us here. Not me, so much, because I pretty much ran on my own. But he helped a lot of people to be elected to Congress for the first time. And he was very good at that. But Newt had a very difficult time leading. Whoever—and he'd probably kill me for saying this, {laughter} but it was like we would wait to be the last one in to see him at night because whoever was the last one in, that's what he'd do. {laughter} It was—he'd change his mind. It was frustrating to those of us in leadership. We'd have a leadership meeting on whatever day before we left. We'd go home, turn on the TV, and there's Newt. We had decided in leadership we were going to do A, B, C. Here's Newt saying we're going to do X, Y, Z. And so this was a problem all the time. He's a wonderful idea man. He thinks, he's full of ideas, but that got him in trouble because he would change his mind. And so after, it would, it got to be very frustrating, very frankly, and he knew it. Obviously he knew it. But that's why the effort started to have him not be Speaker anymore, because it was just very difficult. He wasn't leading in the way he should have been leading. And it was hard on the other members of leadership, too.

WASNIEWSKI: What was your role in that—communicating with the freshman Members, the newer Members?

MYRICK: Well, I was very involved in all that, and it was challenging. A lot of us felt very strongly about what was going on, and change needed to happen. Some of the others didn't, and so there was always this undercurrent of trying to do things the right way without it being what ended up being called a coup. It really wasn't planned as a coup. That wasn't at all part of what it was. It was a lot of people from different levels in Congress who were very frustrated with the way Newt was leading. And it got to be a real problem in trying to get something done. It was not a fun time. You look back on those times, and you think, well, it ended up accomplishing what it set out to do. But then it was kind of sad on the other hand, and there was a lot of dissension because of it, and so it really caused some hard feelings. As I say, Newt was aware, so he understood and realized that he didn't have any choice but to step down and somebody else take over.

JOHNSON: You ran for leadership in the Republican Party a couple of times, and I think for most people, they don't know what goes into those races or those kinds of campaigns, so can you talk about that?

MYRICK: Yes, those leadership races—both times I ran, I shouldn't have run. I ran because other people encouraged me to do it, and that's the wrong reason to run, seriously. You need to have a commitment on your own part to do it, and I was never one that wanted to be a part of the leadership. I ended up there, not through anything I did, but I wasn't one to go out and seek that, per se. And anyway, I was encouraged, one time by other Members and the second time by my staff, to run. And both times it was not . . . It's not a fun experience to begin with, and then you have . . . you're running against

people that you like and know. And I wasn't willing to do some of the things that you need to do, very frankly, to win. I just—it's not me. It was a bad experience from that standpoint, and I made up my mind I would never do it again. Like I say, I shouldn't have done it the second time. Leadership races are, I guess, a necessary evil of what you have in Congress with both parties, naturally. But they're not always pretty.

JOHNSON: What did you learn from those races that might have helped your career, maybe helped you understand the institution a little better?

MYRICK: Stay out of it. {laughter} Just try and do your job and be a good Member, and I've always looked at it as public service. To me, it was never politics because I didn't come from that background; it was always public service to me. And I felt like I had an opportunity to help, and that's really what . . . See, the pleasure I got from the job was what I did one-on-one. The people that I could help with a problem—somebody who had been fighting the government for years, a veteran, or somebody who needed benefits that they were due them, and they couldn't get them, and they'd been going through red tape and red tape—I could pick up the phone and make a call and get it done. And that was the thing: You shouldn't have to do that, but that's a fact of life, that's the way it is. And that was the joy I got from the job, was helping people one-on-one in the district to solve problems. It was kind of like what I did up here was part of the job, but that's really where I felt like I was being, not just helpful, but that I was really doing what I was supposed to do to be a public servant for those people. And so I concentrated on that part of my job really heavily. That was an important part of what I did all the time, was solving problems, and it's interesting.

Again, you go back to that: people today who will come up to me and say, "I had such-and-such a problem, and I came to you, and you solved that." I hear that in the district, and it's like, I don't remember doing that because I didn't keep track. My attitude is I always, I do something, I move on. So, I'm really bad—like talking to you today and recalling things, I just put them out of my mind and move on to the next thing. So I don't recall a lot of those, probably, stories that other people can tell you unless somebody jiggles my brain and reminds me. Then, "Oh, yes. I remember that."

I had one of those about two days ago. I ran into somebody who came up to me, and he said, "Do you remember when you came to the store, and we showed you around and blah, blah, blah, blah?" And I did, but it must have been 15 years ago. {laughter} I remembered him. But those things—and something I'd done that caught his attention. So it's that type of thing. And that's why I say you never know when you'll have an effect on people.

Women, young women—I used to love to have young women be interns in my office because you could help to mentor them when they were trying to figure out what they wanted to do in life. And it was always great to watch, then, what happened to them. A lot of them became really successful, and you had a lot—you like to think that maybe that little bit of whatever it was you did in their life made a difference. And so it's that type of thing, and trying to help other people along. I think that's an important part of this job.

WASNIEWSKI: You weren't in an elected leadership position, you were a liaison. But there were other Republican women—Susan Molinari, Jennifer Dunn, who you mentioned—who did hold elected positions. And so what was the importance, do you think, of having a woman sit at the leadership table,

whether they were elected or not—someone like Nancy Johnson, for instance, a very senior committee member?

MYRICK: It's important that women be at the table because, again, we look at things differently, we bring a different perspective to it. And I think it's extremely helpful in the discussions because a lot of times you'd be sitting at the table, and somebody would bring up something that was totally never thought of before, I guess you'd say, because it wasn't in the realm of how you usually do things. And then somebody would say—and it was usually a woman—"Well, why don't you consider doing this?" And it made a difference.

Women, though, in leadership, have always had a hard time. It's not easy. Because even though there are women in leadership—and, yes, Nancy Pelosi has been a Leader and a Speaker—it's been difficult for women to have their voice heard, even if they are in leadership. And I don't know why that is, quite frankly. But I know that all the women who have been there in the past—I don't know about today because I'm not here, but in the past—complained about that. You know, "They don't listen to me."

We didn't have many committee chairmen. You know, when I first got here, the only woman who was a committee chairman was Jan Meyers—remember Jan Meyers?[2] She was a dear, too. And nobody else at that time. And then, of course, Nancy [Johnson] and some of the others, but it was really a fairly—even though Newt was very open—it was a slow process for that to happen because the Speaker doesn't make those decisions on his own. As you well know, it's a committee that does it. There's still a long way to go, I think, relative . . . let me back up.

Because we were treated very well, I'm not at all criticizing anybody. The males were very kind to us, always. That wasn't a problem. But it is not easy

for women, then, to move up to those positions, like we're talking about committee chairmen, key leadership positions, etc. And I think that's where we have a long way to go, I really do. But then, again, women have to be willing to run for those things, and a lot of women aren't—and especially if you're young, and you have families, and you've got kids to take care of, you're . . . you have so many dual roles. You're always torn.

I don't know how women today that have young children are doing it, very honestly. I wouldn't have . . . my kids were grown at the time I ran for office. They were still home when I was on city council and mayor, but by the time I ran for this office, to be away from home? They were grown. Because I was torn enough just not being there. And I missed a lot of my grandchildren's lives. I regret that because a lot of times I couldn't be there to go to school plays, and I missed their ball games. You look back on it, now, and I feel very bad about it. At the time it bothered me, but now I really think, "Gee, look at all that time of their life I missed because I was here serving." But my kids don't feel that way. They all feel that what I did was what I should have done. So, there's none of that with them, it's just me.

JOHNSON: You mentioned Speaker Gingrich and how he was welcoming to the women in the party, and you even said pushing them out in front of cameras and into important positions. What about the other Speakers that you served under?

MYRICK: Oh, Denny [John Dennis Hastert] was good about that, too. I have to go back. Denny was a totally different Speaker, as you well know, and it was kind of interesting in the way people ran the House. But he was good at the time he was here because he was a calming influence, and he helped to right the ship, I guess you'd say. But Denny was always very open to everybody.

He was very respectful of women. He included women, so there was never a problem. It's just, again, going back to the same thing: You have to be willing to volunteer sometimes and to serve. Does that make sense?

JOHNSON: Definitely.

WASNIEWSKI: You had the opportunity to chair the Republican Study Committee. Were you recruited for that position?

MYRICK: I was. I had no intentions of doing that, either.

JOHNSON: It sounds like you're very popular. {laughter}

MYRICK: Well, I wasn't trying. Like I say, I'm quiet, basically. Yes. They came to, some of the guys came to me and said, "We would like you to chair the committee." And I said, "Why?" I was caught off-guard by it because I didn't expect it, and I wasn't so sure at first because there hadn't been a woman to do it before. I don't know if there's been a woman since, I don't think there has been. But, again, I think it was because they knew I had a level head and common sense, and they respected the fact that I could work together with people and bring people together, and that's probably why it came about. I never asked anybody why they did that. But there was a group of them that came to me and said, "We want you to do this." And so then I said, "Okay."

And that was a tough job—a really tough job because I was head of a conservative group at the time when we passed Medicare prescription drugs, and that wasn't a popular subject with a lot of my colleagues. I happened to support it because I thought it was a good thing, and that's what I always tried to tell people. Right now Medicare will pay $28,000 to cut off somebody's leg, but they won't pay a couple hundred dollars a year to have them get their medicine that they need or their insulin or whatever it is. It's

just common sense, right? But that was a real expansion of Medicare, they felt, an expansion of government, and so it was really a fine line. And my dealing with them and dealing with leadership to work something out . . . and we finally came to an agreement, in a so-called compromise that was acceptable. However, it passed and worked for about two years; it didn't hold.

But anyway, it was another good experience. I was very blessed to have that opportunity to lead that group and try and—again, my concern had always been that the Republican Study Committee should be a part of conference, and not a set-aside from conference. And so that's what I tried to do, was not to say anybody shouldn't stand on their principles in any way, to stand for the conservative principles we believed in, but to find a way to work together with leadership. So it could be a group that leadership could work with and depend on in a sense of trying to move legislation forward, and not just be a group that stands out here and says no to things. So, and I think we accomplished that at that time, I really do.

WASNIEWSKI: You anticipated my follow-up question. {laughter}

JOHNSON: A major topic that we've been asking a lot of our interviewees is about the Women's Caucus. How involved were you in the caucus, and what were your overall impressions of the organization?

MYRICK: Well, the Women's Caucus served a good purpose and probably still does, again, not being here. It was always hard . . . as Republicans, it's a little harder to be a part of the Women's Caucus because a lot of them think differently on issues that are—really shouldn't be issues but they are, and they become emotionally charged—like abortion, pro-life, pro-choice, that type of thing. And so there was always some divide there between the two,

but we would try and find issues that we could work on together, and come together.

And it really depended on who the two people were leading the caucus as to how successful the caucus was, very frankly. Some years it was a really good, positive influence, and other years it was not. And I can't go back and tell you years. I'm just saying from looking back on it now, the two people who were the key leaders were the ones that set the tone and the ones that would help to bring people in, because some years the caucus barely functioned. And in other years, it was very healthy. But it depended on what they were doing and how they were addressing the issues. If you could stay away from the emotionally-charged ones, then it can be successful, or could be successful.

JOHNSON: Is there an example that you can think of, an issue that you all were able to rally behind and have some success?

MYRICK: Well, if it came to, like, health issues—not the hot-button issues, but health issues in general—women's health and that type of thing—yes, we would work very well together. Golly. Again, trying to go back and think, it's been a long time. We always tried to look at issues not as women's issues, but as issues that affected women. And so sometimes that would cause a divide, too, because then something would be a women's issue when it really wasn't a women's issue; it would affect other people, too. And I go back to health as an example. I can't think of a specific one, I'm sorry I'm not helpful there.

JOHNSON: That's fine.

MYRICK: But it ebbed and flowed.

WASNIEWSKI: Move on to committee service?

JOHNSON: Sure.

WASNIEWSKI: Okay. So we're curious to know if you can describe your assignments to committees as a freshman. You were on the Budget Committee—big committee—Science, and the Small Business Committee. We also read you tried to get a seat on the Ways and Means Committee as well.

MYRICK: Long time ago. I don't know why. {laughter} I guess somebody told me it was a good thing to do, probably, back then. I was on the Budget Committee, had a really good time because we did the balanced budget. And I always felt very good about that. It was like you did accomplish something, and we stayed with it for four years or so, which was good. So that was a very good time. The Science Committee, if you really are into science or you have things in your district, then that's a very important committee. I was more attuned to Small Business, coming from a small business background, than Science, very frankly.

Then I went on Rules because, again, Newt asked me to. The woman [Enid Greene Waldholtz] who was on Rules was leaving, and he wanted another female there, so he asked me if I would do it. And it really wasn't where I wanted to be, quite honestly, but I thought, "Well, this is good training. I'll learn the background, and I'll learn how the House runs and all that." And so I did that for, I think, eight years. And finally one day I woke up, and I thought, "Why am I doing this?" {laughter} It was during the time when we had no order to it. We would meet at 10:00 at night, you'd meet at two in the morning, you'd meet at six in the morning. You'd wait until midnight for a bill to get done, and it wouldn't get done. So you'd go home and grab a couple hours' sleep, and it—4:00, you'd have . . . I mean it was just, it was

insane. It isn't like that now, I understand. It wasn't like that after they finally got some order to it, but it had been really bad.

And so I asked to go on Energy and Commerce because North Carolina had always had a seat on Energy and Commerce, being an important part of what North Carolina does. And so that's when I requested Energy and Commerce and was fortunate enough to get it, and moved on. And that committee, I loved, that was a very good one for our interests at home.

But my favorite was Intel. I loved the Intelligence Committee, and that was one of my hardest decisions when I left, was leaving the Intelligence Committee. It's a phenomenally well-working committee; Democrats, Republicans worked together. You could get something done; it was so nice, it really was. And, plus, I felt that was a big part of national security. I started the Anti-Terrorism Caucus after 2001. That was a very important part of where I believed I could make a difference. And so I didn't like leaving that committee, very frankly. And they still work good together.

JOHNSON: On the Rules Committee—just wanted to ask you a quick question about that. There were only a few women that were on that panel when you first were on it—Deborah [D.] Pryce and Louise [McIntosh] Slaughter. What was the welcome like for you, and then also, did you work together as women at all?

MYRICK: Yes, we were all good friends. Deborah and I had been friends before, and Deborah was another one that was a mentor to people as well. And Louise and I were always good friends. Interesting because philosophically we're as different as you can get, but we get along very well. And we could sit and talk, frequently we would do that—or have breakfast together or something—just, she was a very nice woman. And she is a very nice woman.

I can't believe she's still here serving. It's amazing to me. She's been through some health problems, and she just keeps soldiering right on. But I always liked Louise. And she was somebody I could sit down and talk to, yes, in answer to your question. She's a good person.

You know, the Rules Committee's a little different because it is the Speaker's committee. But I didn't always agree with that. So, if I didn't agree with it, I would go to the Speaker and tell him, "I can't vote for this. This isn't something that I can support." So, he was always good about it. He didn't really pressure me because generally they had enough votes without me, so it didn't matter.

WASNIEWSKI: You served with two different chairmen on Rules, Jerry [Gerald Brooks Hunt] Solomon and David [Timothy] Dreier.[3]

MYRICK: Yes.

WASNIEWSKI: What are your memories of those two chairmen?

MYRICK: Oh, totally different. Jerry was just a ball of fire. Jerry was like, "Whrrr" all the time, you know? And David was calm and cool and collected. But Jerry was, that was part of—when Jerry was the chairman, that's when we had all the chaotic hours. And just, it was just unreal. And, in fact, it's interesting because his daughter now lives where I do. {laughter} And I talked to her not long ago, and she said her mom was just down over Christmas. She didn't know we had moved there. When I found out she was there, I called her and she said, "Oh, my mom would have loved to have seen you." She says, "Next time she comes, we'll get together." But he was a wonderful man, a really wonderful man. And he was a military guy to the core, so this was the way he

wanted to run things. But he was dear to everybody—really, really a good man too, and the way he treated everybody.

And then David is the one that helped to bring—after some period of time—some semblance of order and say, "If we don't have a bill done by 11:00 at night or 10:00," whatever, however it happened to work out, we'd go home, come back at seven in the morning—and boy, what a relief. That was wonderful. Because I was on Rules when I had breast cancer, and that was really hard. And so there were some times in the middle of the night, I just couldn't come back. It was too difficult, but they were very understanding of that.

JOHNSON: You've certainly alluded to this, but I wanted to make sure to ask you directly. How important do you think it is to have women on these committees that you served on, and just all the committees in the House?

MYRICK: Women should be on all the committees in the House because, again, there's a different perspective that they bring to the table. It provides a balance in the way that the thought process is different. A lot of women don't want to serve on certain committees. They pick and choose where they want to go, and that has a lot to do with it, too, I'm sure. But there needs to be a balance there on—no matter what committee it is, and in leadership as well. There needs to be some balance with women being at the table. And it's hard because when you're here, you want to work on the issues that you care about. So those—that's generally how you want to choose your committees. And so sometimes if they need certain people or certain states or whatnot, they will ask people if you're interested in serving on a certain committee, which will then help to bring about some of that balance. But most of the time, they try and give people their preferences as to where they would like to

work and serve on what committees. So, kind of the way it's done doesn't lend itself to looking at it from the perspective of having women on all the committees. And I don't know how that changes, unless as a whole, the steering committee, on both sides, starts to look at that.

WASNIEWSKI: You've alluded to your own battle with breast cancer, and we're curious to know how that battle with cancer changed or affected your career here on the Hill.

MYRICK: Yes, it was a tough time. When I was diagnosed—when you're in politics you don't want anyone to know you're not 100 percent. You have to be strong all the time and all of that, and so I thought, "What do I do, because this is pretty obvious, that I'm going to have to have treatment and be gone and whatnot." So, my husband and I talked about it and decided that we would be open and honest and just say, "Hey, I've got cancer, but we're going to beat it." And so I went ahead and had my surgery, privately, and then I had a press conference at home, with my surgeon and my oncologist. And we said, "This is something that's very prevalent today among men as well as women, and she's going to be fine. We're going to do treatment, and blah, blah, blah." So, we were very open about it.

Then one of the television stations at home came to me and said, "We'd like to tape your journey." And so I wasn't really sure that that was a good idea. So, I knew Cokie Roberts well, so I called Cokie up and I said, "Well, Cokie, what do you think about this?" Because I knew she'd give me a fair assessment. She said, "Well, I think you should do it, but you should let us do it because we can do it nationally, and you'll reach more women that way," So, they provided a camera to my husband, and he filmed me every day, good and bad. And then they put together a documentary. And Diane

Sawyer actually—I went up and interviewed with Diane Sawyer. And they were very good about . . . The whole idea was you know your body, as a woman. You need to not let somebody tell you something's all right if you don't, if you think it—if something's wrong, you know it, and you shouldn't take no for an answer. And, anyway, that was the message.

And it changed what I did here in D.C. It changed me as a person, of course, like everybody says it does, because you start to look introspectively. First thing you think is, "Oh, I'm going to die," which isn't the case. And so you start looking at life a little differently, and it becomes a lot more precious. Each day, time, family—all of that type of thing. But what it did here was get me more involved in those issues, and I started to work a lot more on the health issues. I had worked in mental health because that's something that's totally ignored most of the time up here. But the Cancer Caucus, I became very active in the Cancer Caucus.

But the main thing that I felt proud of was the fact that after I was diagnosed, and people knew that I had cancer, I started getting women calling me and saying, "Can you help me with treatment? I can't afford it." And so I would, piecemeal, try and put doctors, get doctors to donate their services to them, to help them. And it became apparent to me that here in Congress, we had this bill through Medicaid that you could be diagnosed at the Centers for Disease Control [and Prevention], which was at the local county health departments. But if they said, "You have cancer," the answer was, "I'm sorry, there's no treatment available. We can't help you." And all I could think about was, "Now, I was fortunate to have insurance, but how would you face that if you were a woman, a working woman who had no insurance, and somebody said, "I can't help you?" In effect, you're going to die.

And so we started working on a bill that said if you're diagnosed through the Centers of Disease Control at your local health department, you can get treatment under Medicaid. This is for women who are working with no insurance. And it had to be passed, ratified, by all 50 states. And so we passed the bill in the House with only one person dissenting. And it passed the Senate. It was ratified by all 50 states. And so I felt like that was something that was a really good thing that happened while I was here, a way that I could contribute that, if I hadn't had breast cancer, I wouldn't have thought about.

JOHNSON: Was this something that the Women's Caucus was able to also put their clout behind?

MYRICK: Well, the caucus was behind it, I'm sure, in the process. It didn't start out that way. It was just myself and a couple other Members who started it. And then everybody was very supportive, and we got people to sign on to it, and so there really wasn't—like I say, there was only one dissenter, so that was pretty good. But cancer is a tough thing for a lot of people, and the thing that I found amazing was, after I had it, I learned that there were women that I knew well who had had cancer in the past 20 years and never said a word about it. They just went through the treatment and everything by themselves. And then there was one woman here in Congress that I was a good friend with—she happened to be a Democrat—and she had breast cancer, and she wouldn't tell anybody. She wanted no one to know. And then there was a second one, later on, that also had breast cancer, and she wouldn't tell anybody until she was done. And then she came back and said, "I had breast cancer." So, everybody has to handle it differently.

But I just thought, if I can help other women—and I still, literally, again, today, up until, like, at least a year ago, I was still having women come up to me and say, "You saved my life. I saw you on television. You said, 'Go get a mammogram.' And I did, and I had breast cancer." And it's that type of thing that, when you have a position where you're a public figure, you also have a responsibility to use that in a way, for good. And so that was one thing that happened, through the breast cancer, that I was able to do.

But I got my treatment at home. And my chemo treatment was rough, and I'd be home a week, and then I'd come up here and stay two weeks and then go home. So I did that, which really worked out well. And then, when I had my radiation, I got it at home, too. I'd go at seven in the morning to get my radiation and get on a plane and fly up here, and fly home at night and do it the next day. But two of my six weeks were during Easter [district work period], so I only had to do it for four weeks, but I was very blessed. God gave me the ability and the energy to be able to do that, so I could still do my job, so I was really fortunate.

JOHNSON: There was something I wanted to ask you. You sort of mentioned before—but it's such a private and personal issue, and you came out and certainly made a really big difference—but what was the reaction of your colleagues, especially your women colleagues at the time, when you came out with that news?

MYRICK: Oh, everybody was so supportive—it was unbelievable—I mean, really, really supportive, very much so. Debbie Wasserman Schultz and I became good friends after that because she came to me when she had cancer and asked me if I would help her sponsor a bill, which I did. And so it's another way of pulling people together across party lines because you have a common

interest. And there, again, I think a lot of that's missing today. Even though you have a common interest, people don't reach out and work together.

WASNIEWSKI: You alluded to the fact, just a minute ago, too, that you were also an advocate for reforming mental health services. What got you into that issue, and then, also, were there any other women in particular that you worked with on that issue?

MYRICK: Yes. I got involved in mental health because we have a granddaughter who's bipolar. Fortunately, she's fine now. She's been through some real horrible years in her life, but she's fine. And so I started to—because of that and dealing with her—to really become more aware of the issue in general. And then I saw Kay Jamison on Larry King back when we were dealing with our granddaughter and I was serving here, so I called Kay, and I said, "I'd like to come talk with you." And she was doing a series on mental health with young people. And so I did, and she was very gracious to help me, and so I started getting involved nationally. I always admired Patrick [Joseph] Kennedy because he and I had worked together on this, too, but he was willing to come out and say, "I've got a problem, and I dealt with it."

But the thing that always disturbed me was, most Members of Congress, even though they have somebody in their family who has a problem, and you know it, they won't be public about it. They don't want anybody to know. And, see, that's what's wrong, because unless you put attention to an issue, it's not going to get it. And it's not going to get the funding that it needs to be on the front burner. Look at the problems in our country today. They say how many . . . what's the percentage of people who suffer from depression and anxiety? And you go on down the list, let alone schizophrenia and bipolar [disorder] disease and the others. It's huge. And the money that it's

costing us in health care, lost jobs, lost productivity, lost lives—destroyed because people don't, or can't, get help. It's crazy. But we don't, as a society, really want to deal with that. And there is a caucus, fortunately, that works on those issues. But it's still—people don't want anybody to know.

JOHNSON: Do you feel like a national representative because you were a woman Member? So, you weren't just representing your constituents, but you were really representing women across the country?

MYRICK: Right. Yes, I think so. When we're talking about the breast cancer issue, there wasn't any question, because of being able to affect women, no matter where they were. And, as I say, the other women Members were so supportive. That was, none of that was ever a problem, but it really was a gratifying experience. I've always said cancer was the best thing that happened to me. And people say, "You've got to be kidding me." I say, "No, because it gave me the opportunity to help all these other women that I wouldn't have had any idea were out there." I got involved in all the—Relay for Life, and Komen [Race for the Cure], and all the organizations that take part in raising money and doing research and all that for breast cancer, too. And it's like, women—when that happens, women come together unbelievably well. Locally, nationally, there's this camaraderie that you're a survivor. So, it's a good way to get people involved.

WASNIEWSKI: We talked about the importance of mentorship earlier. Did you find that late in your career, that you served as a mentor for younger Members of Congress, men or women?

MYRICK: Yes, I usually would try and pick somebody out of every class to kind of take under my wing. Jo Ann Davis was a very dear friend of mine. She died of cancer, but she wouldn't go get checked. She knew she had lumps, and she

wouldn't go because her son was getting married, and she didn't want to spoil the wedding. And by the time she went, after he was married, she was at a very, very bad stage, with a very aggressive cancer, and she didn't stand a prayer. But anyway, when she came to Congress, I took her under my wing and mentored her, and we found out we both had similar backgrounds and a lot in common that you wouldn't have known otherwise. And so I tried to do that with women each year. Not officially, but just finding somebody that I thought maybe I could help by sharing my life experiences with them, and helping them to navigate the place up here.

JOHNSON: Another part of this project that we're focusing on is women staff and the role that they played in the institution. How important do you think it is to have women in key staff positions on the Hill?

MYRICK: I think it's very important. I had two women as administrative director of the D.C. office. I had a woman legislative director. I tried to hire women every chance I could. Sometimes, if they don't apply, you don't have a choice. But I always tried to do that because, again, it's that mentoring, of giving them the opportunity. Because that's really good on a résumé to go on and do something else if you've been a chief of staff of a Member of Congress or a Senator or whatever it may be. So, yes, that's extremely important, mentoring staff and trying to include women. I tried to promote them, move them up every chance I got. And, actually, a couple of them started out with me as interns and moved on up the ranks.

And one of them became my—we didn't call it COS [chief of staff], we called it an administrative director back then in D.C. And then I did have a chief of staff in the district who was a good friend that I'd known for a long while, and so that's why I kept my chief of staff in the district. To me, it was

important that he be there and be the eyes and ears when I wasn't. But for my office up here, we had women. And there are more of them now than there used to be. When we first came up here, there weren't many women chiefs of staff. That has improved.

WASNIEWSKI: We're coming up on the end of our time, so we just wanted to ask a few retrospective questions. One is: You retired in early 2013. Why did you decide to retire from Congress?

MYRICK: When I first came here, again, Nancy Johnson said to me, "You'll know when it's time to retire," which was wise, sage advice. And I knew. Two reasons, mainly. One, I felt like I wasn't being effective. I couldn't get people—no, that sounds terrible, I don't mean it that way. But people just wouldn't, weren't willing to work together, which is what I'd always tried to do—cross party lines, intra-party, whatever it is—really pulling people together. It just wasn't happening anymore. And everything was so divisive up here. And it was like, I found myself being unhappy. The last couple years I wasn't happy here. I'd find myself getting angry, which isn't me. It's not my nature to do that. And it was like, I'm not accomplishing anything. I felt like I was beating my head against a wall.

And so I finally decided, "It's time for me to go." And I always wanted to go on my own terms. And so I just said, "I'm not going to run again." And I was always comfortable with the decision. The day I left, I loaded up my car, never looked back, and I haven't looked back since. It's been good. There is life after Congress, and it's a good life. {laughter} You can be normal, and you can do what you want to do instead of somebody else telling you what to do all the time. It was a good decision for me, and it was the right time.

JOHNSON: So, as you know, we are historians. We are asking lots of questions about the past, but on occasion we have questions that we think are kind of fun because we're going to ask you to predict the future in this case. There are now 108 women in Congress, 88 in the House. How many do you think there'll be for the 150th anniversary of Jeannette Rankin's swearing-in to the House in 2067?

MYRICK: I hope there will be a lot more. You know, it would be wonderful if there were twice as many. I doubt that will happen, but another 50 percent anyway. And if we can encourage women to run, that can happen. But, again, they've got to be willing to step up to the plate, and I think that's missing today. They just aren't willing to serve because of the things we talked about before.

JOHNSON: So, what do you think needs to be done to encourage women to take that next step?

MYRICK: Well, I think that they need to understand that you can get here. They need to understand that you can take risks and still survive, and if you fail it's not the end of the world. You pick up and you start over again. It's a matter of this mentoring going on at the local levels and the state levels. And I think that is where we've dropped the ball in trying to mentor some of the women. Like women will run for city council, or they'll run for state legislature, but then they don't want to run for a national office because first, they think they can't raise the money. It's harder for women to raise money. It was always hard for me to raise money. It's interesting because I have a son who's now in politics, and he raises a lot more money than I ever did, from some of the same people. {laughter} And I say that because I just sit back and watch. He's

good at what he does. Not because I wanted him to be in politics, I tried to discourage him every way I could. {laughter}

But my point in saying that is, there is a difference. And I think if you talk to other women, you'll find men are more apt—because more men give more than women do—they're more apt to give to a man. They're more apt to give him more money than they'll give to a woman. It just kind of falls that way. And so it's up to women to get more involved in the process. If they do, then, and keep moving up the ladder, in effect have a little bit of experience behind them, they can get elected. But we've got to encourage that, and I think the political parties, on both sides, need to do a better job of encouraging women to run, and, again, move up from local level to state level or either way. But, move so they can run for a congressional seat or a Senate seat, whatever it may be.

WASNIEWSKI: What advice would you give to a young woman or a young man who came to you and asked about running for Congress?

MYRICK: Well, there have been times when I said, "Don't do it," recently because of the rancor and what they have to go through. But then I've told other ones, I say, "You're the one that has to decide that. If you really want to be a public servant, and you're running for the right reasons, then you should do it. If you're running because you want to be in politics, and you want to move up the ladder and be in leadership someday or whatever—don't do it because you're running for the wrong reasons." And this isn't a political job, this is a public service job. But it's become political, and I think that's a mistake.

And so when I mentor somebody and talk to them—because people will call and ask me, "What do you think? I'd like to run." So, I try and learn more about—if it's somebody I don't really know well, then, more about their

background, but their motivations for doing it. To me, the motivation's the key. And then, either encourage or discourage them, quite frankly. I try and encourage everybody I can, but I also have to be honest with them, and I say, "Are you willing to make a 100-percent commitment? Are you willing to have your life, literally, turned upside-down from the standpoint of you have no control of your life?" You are at the mercy of the people who elected you, and your job is to serve them. And are you willing to make that commitment? This isn't a nine-to-five job; it's a seven day a week/24 hour [job], for all [intents and] purposes. And unless you realize that going into it, you're going to have a big, rude awakening if you get that far.

And so I try and be realistic with them and make them realize that this is really what it's like. It's not this glamour job. Everybody thinks you go out and wine and dine and party. I never did that stuff. If I went to dinner with somebody, it's because I wanted to, because I liked them—and I paid my own way, so there was never any question. I'm not a party person, and I didn't do all that stuff, but I think that's what puts people on the wrong track once they get here. They get in awe of all these things that are available to them to do, and they lose track of, again, who they are inside and why they came here.

And the grounding. If you have a good spouse, the spouse is going to keep you grounded. I had one of those who would tell me how stupid I was if I was doing something that was. But that was good because you need that balance. And a lot of people don't have that balance, and so that's the other thing. And then I try and find out about young people, what kind of support do you have—family support, whatever it may be. You need to know how they're going to be encouraged or supported in what they're going to do, because if you have a spouse who doesn't want you to do this, you're in deep

doo-doo. When we came here, I know there were—I think—seven of the new Members who got divorced the first term. Their marriages just split because the woman couldn't take it. And she couldn't take being home with the kids and him being gone all the time. She just didn't plan on what it really was and how it turned out, and so that's a real challenge. And, then, you're always going to be torn.

I'll never forget sitting in the airport one day, and there was a young Member beside me. He was talking on the phone. And when he got off the phone, he was just like . . . And I said to him, "What's wrong?" He said, "Well, that was my son." I said, "How old is he?" He said, "He's 11." He said, "I didn't get home in time for his ball game—our flights were delayed. So I was asking about his ball game, and he said, 'What do you care? You're never here anyway.'" Next term he quit.

And so you're always torn with that—what you're not able to do to be with your family. And a lot of young people who want to run for this job have no idea that it's like that. So, I try and tell them, basically, this is what you have to plan for. This is the way it is; it's not what it looks like. Here's what you have to do to get there: You have to raise all this money, you have to be committed to make all the phone calls, you have to go see people. You have to do the things that most people today aren't willing to do because it's hard work. So, I don't know. It's not an easy job, there's no question. You know that because you're here. But it's a very gratifying job.

JOHNSON: I just had one last question. In terms of your House career, what do you think will be your lasting legacy?

MYRICK: I don't know. In all seriousness, I don't know, I really don't. I would just hope that it was that I was respected as a Member who tried to do the best she could and help others.

JOHNSON: What was your proudest achievement?

MYRICK: I think the breast cancer bill, out of all the things that I did. I think that was because I knew it helped a lot of people. I knew that it was going to have results, and sometimes when you do bills—it's great to do them, but you know that it's really not either going to make a difference, or you know that maybe it won't end up the way you thought it would or something. But in this case that was done, ratified by all the states, and it really turned out to be a good thing.

WASNIEWSKI: Thank you so much.

JOHNSON: Thank you.

MYRICK: You're welcome.

WASNIEWSKI: We appreciate your time.

MYRICK: You're welcome. I'm glad you're doing this to talk to the women because it's important, and it's kind of like a forgotten thing.

WASNIEWSKI: We're excited about it, too.

JOHNSON: It's fantastic.

NOTES

[1] In 1994 Sue Myrick ran for a North Carolina House seat that was vacated when incumbent Representative John Alexander McMillan III (Alex) chose not to run for re-election.
[2] Congresswoman Jan Meyers of Kansas chaired the House Committee on Small Business during the 104th Congress (1995–1997).
[3] Gerald Solomon served as the chairman of the Committee on Rules during the 104th and 105th Congresses (1995–1999). David Dreier chaired the Committee on Rules from the 106th to the 109th Congress (1999–2007) and also during the 112th Congress (2011–2013).