# Deborah D. Pryce

U.S. Representative of Ohio (1993–2009)

**Oral History Interview**
**Final Edited Transcript**

August 9, 2018

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

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## Abstract

Growing up in northeast Ohio, Deborah D. Pryce worked in her family's pharmacy. In her interview she describes how her mother—a pharmacist—and grandmother served as early role models in her life. Pryce opted not to follow in her parents' professional footsteps but instead chose to study law. As a lawyer and later as a judge she found herself drawn to elective office. Pryce explains how the resistance she faced when being considered as a candidate for probate court judge in Ohio, fueled her desire to ultimately seek and win the seat. She also discusses the challenges she faced on the campaign trail after she received her party's endorsement to run for an open House seat. Elected in 1992 during the "Year of the Woman" as one of three Republican freshman women in the 103rd Congress (1993–1995) Pryce talks about the factors that led to the spike in women seeking office.

From the beginning of her House tenure, Pryce gravitated toward the leadership in the Republican Party. With her election as Republican freshman-class president followed by a position on the influential Committee on Committees (now the Steering Committee), the panel responsible for making Republican committee assignments, Pryce shares her thoughts on how these early leadership roles, as well as her time as deputy whip, provided a unique opportunity to build relationships with her Republican colleagues. Her ability to work closely with a diverse group of people helped her advance in the Republican Conference. After serving as secretary and vice chair, Pryce was elected chair of the Republican Conference for the 108th and 109th Congresses (2003–2007). She talks about how she made history as the first woman to lead the Republican Conference and discusses her leadership style. In her interview Pryce also details her work to recruit Republican women to run for Congress, the rigors of balancing a House career while raising children, and the importance of her time on the Rules and Financial Services committees.

## Biography

**PRYCE, Deborah D.,** a Representative from Ohio; born in Warren, Trumbull County, Ohio, July 29, 1951; graduated from Champion High School, Warren, Ohio, 1969; B.A., Ohio State University, Columbus, Ohio, 1973; J.D., Capital University, Columbus, Ohio, 1976; lawyer; administrative law judge, Ohio state department of insurance, 1976–1978; first assistant city prosecutor, senior assistant city attorney, Columbus City Attorney's Office, Ohio, 1978-1985; judge, Franklin County, Ohio, Municipal Court, 1986–1992; elected as a Republican to the One Hundred Third and to the seven succeeding Congresses (January 3, 1993–January 3, 2009); was not a candidate for reelection to the One Hundred Eleventh Congress in 2008; House Republican Conference Chair (One Hundred Eighth Congress through One Hundred Ninth Congress).

Read full biography

## Editing Practices

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

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

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## Citation Information

When citing this oral history interview, please use the format below:
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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, DC: Government Printing Office, 2006), *Black Americans in Congress, 1870–2007* (GPO, 2008), *Hispanic Americans in Congress, 1822–2012* (GPO, 2013), and *Asian and Pacific Islander Americans in Congress: 1900-2017* (GPO, 2017). 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. Matt earned his Ph.D. in U.S. history from the University of Maryland, College Park. 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 DEBORAH D. PRYCE OF OHIO —**
**A CENTURY OF WOMEN IN CONGRESS**

**JOHNSON:** My name is Kathleen Johnson. I'm here today with the House Historian, Matt Wasniewski. The date is August 9, 2018, and we are with former Congresswoman Deborah [D.] Pryce of Ohio. Thank you so much for coming in today.

**PRYCE:** It's my pleasure, thank you.

**JOHNSON:** This interview is for a project we've been conducting for the last few years to commemorate the 100th anniversary of the election of the first woman to Congress, Jeannette Rankin. To start off with today, we were hoping for a little bit of biographical information—the names and occupations of your parents.

**PRYCE:** My parents were Richard and Ellen Pryce, Jr., and they were both pharmacists. They went to college on the GI Bill when my father finished the Navy in 1946, I think, '47 perhaps. I was born right as they graduated and started a small family business. They had five children. I'm the oldest one, and we all grew up in the pharmacy, working and learning about our community and that business. It was a great work ethic, and I'm very glad that they instilled that into me because it was a wonderful way to grow up and gave me a sense of what America is all about.

**JOHNSON:** When you were young did you have any female role models?

**PRYCE:** My mother was definitely a professional woman, and back then, there weren't that many. She was certainly a role model to me. There was another female pharmacist that I would spend a lot of time with, working in one of our stores, and she also was a role model. My grandmother was as well. She

never worked in the pharmacy industry, but she had been an abused woman, and, eventually, my mother, who was the oldest, convinced her to leave the abusive relationship, and she moved in with us. I never really knew my grandfather, but she was definitely a role model for me. She never had learned to drive or do much for herself, and I watched as she acquired those skills late in life to develop her own sense of self. She was a tremendous influence on all of the children in my family and gave us a lot of hope that no matter how old you are, you can still change things for yourself.

**JOHNSON:** What were the expectations for you as a young girl about what you would be when you grew up?

**PRYCE:** Since I was the oldest, there was no doubt I would go to college. Of course, they thought I would always be a pharmacist, but then along came chemistry class, and that didn't work out so well. I eventually found my way in law school, and the rest was history.

**WASNIEWSKI:** Did you have an early interest in politics? Was it something that the family talked about?

**PRYCE:** We talked about it a lot. I grew up in northeast Ohio which is a very Democratic stronghold. My parents were both Republicans, and so we did talk about it a lot. I remember I came of age back in the late '60s when there was a lot of campus turmoil. The country seemed like it was being torn apart, not unlike today, only for different reasons. The war in Vietnam was on everyone's mind then. I was at Ohio State University. We had some violence at Ohio State University but not as extreme as the killings at Kent State.[1] They closed the school, and we all had to leave. So it gave me an inkling of what was yet to come. I didn't really admire politicians too much, and I never thought I would enter politics, but it colored my vision of it.

And then I spent a summer in Cape Cod. I followed a boyfriend up there, and my father said, "You can't go unless you get a job." So I got a job the summer of Watergate [1974] as a housekeeper at a hotel up there. And so I would watch the hearings all day as I was cleaning rooms, and that was very fascinating for me. That was really my first glimpse of Washington at a very troubled time in our country's history. And it didn't give me a very positive look inside of politics. I was kind of turned off by it, but life doesn't always take you the direction you think it will.

I later became involved in politics when I went to work for our city attorney, who was an elected official, and he encouraged me some years later to run for a judicial position. He didn't encourage me, he said, "We need to round out the ticket, you better run for this." And no one expected me to win. I was just one of those kind of placeholders, you know, we have to advance someone, and so the someone was me. But I ended up winning the race, and then my political career took off from there.

**WASNIEWSKI:** What was it that convinced you to run for Congress?

**PRYCE:** That's a funny story because I think I was convinced when somebody told me I couldn't do it. As a matter of fact, it was a position before that: a probate court judge was stepping down, and at that time, I was on the bench as a judge, and I wanted to run for that seat. Some of the men in the party had different ideas about who the candidate was going to be, and so they said, "No, you won't, he will." And that got my blood boiling, I guess. I didn't know how much it was boiling though until my predecessor decided to retire earlier than we anticipated. That was back during the [Daniel David] Rostenkowski days, and there was the House Bank scandal. So there was a very small window of opportunity for our party to find a candidate, and that was not long after I'd been told, "No, you can't run for probate judge."

So I threw my hat in the ring, and after five ballots, I won my party's endorsement by one vote. And I know that if I'd had time, more time than the two-week period, to think about it and really examine what it was going to be like and all the reasons I shouldn't do it, I probably wouldn't have. But I still had this in the back of my mind: "No, you won't; no, you can't." And so I did at the next opportunity. It was a much different position, and I was a very naïve candidate. It was a hard race for me because I really didn't know much about legislating. I had been a judge, and I'd been part of the judicial branch most of my life. I was a trained lawyer and a prosecutor. But we won that election, too, and then I was there for 16 years.

**WASNIEWSKI:** Just to back up a little bit. You mentioned the probate judge. You were told, "No, no, you're not the right candidate." Did anyone, though, recruit you for the House position? Did you get advice?

**PRYCE:** There was some behind-the-scenes messaging going on. I don't even know if I was smart enough to figure that out at the time, but nobody actively called me and said, "You should do this." But once I threw my name out, I got some encouragement, not necessarily public but privately.

**JOHNSON:** In that first campaign, was there one key moment or something that stands out in your mind where you felt like you really could win the race?

**PRYCE:** It was really a difficult race. It was a three-party race. I had a Democrat opponent and then a very conservative Republican ran in the general as an independent. And so it was the same year [1992] that Ross Perot and [William Jefferson] Clinton and [George Herbert Walker] Bush ran, and so there was another three-way race going on. But we ended up with the same exact margins of victory. I had the same as Clinton.

But it was a long road, and it was hard for me to campaign even though I had to run for office as a judge. It was just one district, it was much different than this big national "Year of the Woman" [1992] kind of election with all the national attention. And I remember going to—it was the Greek festival in our county, Franklin County—and I'm not natural at interrupting people and shaking their hands, and I thought, "Oh, everyone's eating, I don't want to impose." My husband said, "Deborah, I'm not attending another one of these events with you unless you shake every hand at every table, and they're going to like you regardless of what you think." And so I think if there was any moment that I learned how to do it, it was that moment. I did it, and I actually enjoyed it. I got over, I think—my mother imposed upon me that it is rude to interrupt, and so it didn't come natural, but my husband knew how to motivate me, and he got me going, and after that it was much easier.

**WASNIEWSKI:** Did he and other family members help out in that first campaign? Were they active?

**PRYCE:** Yes, he did, and his father did too. We called him my secret weapon. I think he had missed his calling. He just was so proud of me and happy to help, and he was going way overboard, standing in grocery stores and things that I didn't even want him to do, but he didn't tell me he was going to do it. He just did it. And so that was great. Then I have a big family, my sisters and my parents—everybody pitched in. It was a wonderful effort, friends and family.

**WASNIEWSKI:** One of the things that a lot of the women that we talk to, especially in their first campaign, said was a barrier was fundraising. And we're wondering what that was like for you. Was that a difficulty?

**PRYCE:** Raising money isn't any fun, but some people are good at it. I was never very good at it. I was very lucky that I had people around me that wanted to help

me do it and teach me how to do it. It wasn't a golf course buddy thing, but we managed to raise a lot of money and all the money that we needed. But it was a big learning process for me. If I didn't even want to shake anybody's hands, I wasn't going to be a natural at picking up the phone and asking them for money. That was another learned skill that every politician needs to learn, but I also had some wonderful people helping me learn how.

**WASNIEWSKI:** Did you have any support from women's groups?

**PRYCE:** Back then there weren't really many women's groups. I had been a judge and worked on domestic violence issues because of my grandmother for one thing, but also because it was just becoming very evident that we really needed to change things, and I was in a position to be able to help do that. So I worked hard, and I think I had some notoriety in women's circles, but there weren't really a whole lot of women's groups then, especially Republican ones.

**JOHNSON:** How did your previous experience as a lawyer and a judge prepare you for your time in Congress?

**PRYCE:** It was a wonderful background to have, being first a lawyer and then a judge. First, when you're legally trained, you learn that there's usually merit in both sides of the issue, and you learn how to argue both sides of an issue. Being a judge, you know for sure that until you hear the second side, don't make up your mind. I think that's really important as a legislator because you're always bombarded with so many people—lobbyists, activists, and special interest groups—and people who think they know it all, or at least their portion of it all. You always have to search for the other side and understand both sides before you make up your mind. I think being on the bench was a wonderful way to learn that. Even though you might not hear it, there's always another

side whether it's a downside or an upside. There's always more to the story than you're going to hear out of the first person who talks to you.

**JOHNSON:** You mentioned that 1992 was the "Year of the Woman." So how important of an issue was gender in that first campaign for you in Congress?

**PRYCE:** Because there was another woman in the race, it didn't really become an issue. I think that there was national attention to it though wherever there were women candidates. Sadly for my party, the Republican Party, we only elected three women that year: Tillie [Kidd] Fowler, Jennifer [Blackburn] Dunn, and myself. The Democrats really had the "Year of the Woman."

**WASNIEWSKI:** Can you just describe the district during your first campaign, the demographics, geography of the district?

**PRYCE:** The district is pretty diverse, but it was held for 26 years before me by the same Republican, a white male who was always in the minority the whole time he served. He was the one you called for military academy appointments and for help with your passport, but by being in the minority, he wasn't really one to be able to get much done legislatively. And so when he retired, it was just a matter of picking up the ball from there and taking the district to a new level. We represented the western part of Franklin County, Ohio. I shared Franklin County with now-Governor John [Richard] Kasich. He was in the House of Representatives then. Then I also had Madison County, which was to the west of it. Madison County is all very rural, agricultural. Franklin County is more a center of education and finance, insurance, banks. So it was fairly diverse. We had Ohio State University right in the middle of my district, which is a huge academic and medical center, and so we had a lot of liberal-thinking folks out of the university, but also a lot of wonderful

resources and terrific thought coming out of Ohio State, and it was a real honor to represent that institution.

**JOHNSON:** I wanted to ask a follow-up, just continuing with the "Year of the Woman." This, of course, is when Anita Hill and Clarence Thomas, the hearings were taking place right before you ran for Congress. Did that play any kind of impact in your campaign? Did you feel like it affected it at all?

**PRYCE:** I remember knowing about it. I don't remember it being a big issue in my race. Like I said, it had been a Republican district for 26 years, pretty solid, so I don't know that it made a huge impact in my district. But then again, that was a long time ago.

**JOHNSON:** That's fine. And there were more than 20 new women that were elected to Congress. Why do you think so many women ran and then also were elected during that period?

**PRYCE:** I think Anita Hill probably had something to do with it, and I think it was generationally time. I mean, when I went to law school, there were just a handful of women. By the time I ran for Congress, law schools were 40 percent women. People were just professionally and in their family situations evolving into a different type of society. I don't know that there was any one, single thing that drove it. I think it, just demographically, was finally time. And once you hear about one woman running, it sounds less daunting for the next woman to run. So, the "Year of the Woman," got momentum. The women candidates encouraged each other as the group got bigger, and there was more media focus on it.

**WASNIEWSKI:** What was it like to be a part of such a historic group? I mean, you pointed out there's three Republican women, but you also mentioned that there was a

lot more national press attention. Did you sense that? Were people coming to the district to cover you?

**PRYCE:** Yes. Like I said, I was pretty naïve candidate, and when we started getting calls to come to Washington for interviews and panels and people coming into the district to follow the race, it was very daunting. I was very nervous about it all. But it was a wonderful way to break me in fast. Once you have your first national interview, you just watch it over, not too many times, and you learn by it. It's just a matter of spending time in the trenches and learning how to be a better candidate.

**JOHNSON:** Earlier you mentioned that you were one of three Republican women that was elected. So how close were you to Tillie Fowler and Jennifer Dunn? Did you have a close relationship because you came in at the same time?

**PRYCE:** Yes. It was wonderful to have them. I wish there had been more of us. Jennifer was amazing. She was really wonderfully political. She had a great political sense because she'd been, I think, the Washington State chair. Tillie Fowler was just a wonderful human being, and she had been in the Florida legislature, and they both helped me learn my way around Capitol Hill. Coming from the bench to the legislature, I didn't have the first clue.

And there were other women here too that really helped me a lot. Nancy [Lee] Johnson, Connie [Constance A.] Morella, Susan Molinari. I remember sitting in her [Susan Molinari's] office, just kind of getting the lay of the land. And many men, too—John [Andrew] Boehner especially. I felt like his little sister for a while because he was a leader in the class ahead of mine and a fellow Ohioan. He helped me learn the ropes.

**JOHNSON:** For any of those people that you just mentioned, was there a piece of advice that stands out in your mind that you recall as especially helpful?

**PRYCE:** No, I can't say that. If I think of something, I'll come back to it.

**WASNIEWSKI:** Just kind of following on that question too, but the total number of women in that 103rd Congress [1993–1995] were 48. So did you find that women tended to gravitate towards one another because there were relatively so few?

**PRYCE:** Yes, it was amazing how well the women worked together. Now, I tell a story, it's a little bit long, I'll try to abbreviate it, but I was the Republican class president. So as a class, we wanted to get together to take our thoughts, our ideas, and what we would like to see accomplished to the leadership. So I remember chairing those meetings of our Republican newly-elected freshman class to come up with a list of what would be important to us. We did this through orientation when we first met as a class, and we spent hours and hours, literally days, just to finally, finally come up with a small list of things to demand.

But the women Members, both Republican and Democrat, met to do the same thing. The women Members met in the Speaker's Room at the time, and I just remember being there for less than an hour and a half and doing the same task, boom, boom, boom, getting it down, getting it agreed to, sending it on to the Speaker's Office, and then we all went on to do other business. What a different dynamic it was for the same task when everyone was a woman. So what that says I'm not sure, but take it as you would.

**JOHNSON:** How did you become class president? Was that a position that you sought out?

**PRYCE:** No, I did not seek it. I remember being approached by a small group of colleagues in the class, Peter [T.] King and Jack [John Francis] Quinn and Rick [Enrico A.] Lazio and some of the northeastern, more moderate, Members who were newly elected with me and encouraged to run. I just

remember, "Oh, I don't even know my way across the street; I can't be the class president." And perhaps they just wanted a fresh approach. Maybe they didn't want somebody else. I just remember taking it home, and my husband telling me, "Are you kidding me? Don't do that, you're crazy." But I ended up doing it, and I became the interim class president. It took us through orientation and the beginning organizing days.

And then we had another election and elected someone else, but through that process, I became the freshman class representative on what used to be called Committee on Committees, and now it's the Steering Committee, which was really a more important position. So I learned fast how to deal, and it worked out very well for me. I was always on the committee after that.

**WASNIEWSKI:** For people who might not know, can you just describe what the Committee on Committees was?

**PRYCE:** The Committee on Committees is the group of Members that decide who gets on which committee. And it's a very important position because there's a lot of competition for the more powerful committees: Ways and Means, and Appropriations, and Commerce. The [Steering] Committee is the one which decides who goes where and in what order they go on the committee. Seniority on the committee could determine who may be chairmen five or so years later. So that was all done by the Committee on Committees. It was a great position, to be in to learn that process at such a tender age in my congressional career.

**WASNIEWSKI:** And a great way to meet people, too.

**PRYCE:** Yes, a great way to meet people. Everyone came to me, and it was a fabulous experience. Just learning how, watching how it worked, watching how

Members tried to advance themselves and advance their districts too, of course, and the right ways to do it and the wrong ways to do it.

**JOHNSON:** Before we get into more of your leadership and more specific information about your career, I just wanted to ask a couple more questions about gender. So when you first were elected and came to Congress in 1993, did you find that it was a welcoming environment for you as a younger woman Member?

**PRYCE:** I never found it unwelcoming. I found it intimidating. But I never felt anyone intentionally intimidated me. I felt that there was a lot of cluelessness about gender issues—a lot of it. And it never would have changed but for the fact that more women became elected and women that would help the guys understand that our world isn't just white men. And I saw that gradually change some during my 16 years. There were some visionaries. Newt [Newton Leroy] Gingrich, when he became Speaker, was very conscious of the fact that our party had a long way to go and needed to advance women, needed to put them in the front row at the press conference, etc. We had lightyears to go. And he saw that and acted on it in many ways.

Sometimes it made it harder. Like the first 100 days of the Republican majority was just a horrible experience for women [Members] with children. And there weren't a lot of us, but even men with children, it was hard on families. It was excruciating, those first 100 days, and I just remember how painfully homesick I got and how I just wanted to be back home. I wanted to be with my daughter and my husband. I was lucky though that I was in a leadership role at the time. I was on the committee, and I was on Newt's transition team also. Because those are the people that were extremely busy for those first 100 days. A lot of the folks who didn't have leadership roles were just here waiting and waiting to vote on something and waiting and not

being real participants. That would have driven me to distraction. I don't know how they did it.

**JOHNSON:** What were your responsibilities during that period?

**PRYCE:** I think that we met regularly, almost daily. Jim [James Allen] Nussle chaired that transition—we did a lot of reforms. Some of the little dumb things like no more ice delivered to offices, but also things that really needed done. You know, the House Bank was eliminated. We developed the agenda for the "Contract with America." We opened a family room on the third floor of the House. We established term limits for committee chairmen and redistributed committee jurisdiction.

**WASNIEWSKI:** I just want to back up to follow up on a question Kathleen asked about the atmosphere of the House and if it was welcoming. And not to put you on the spot, I'm not looking for names, but when you say cluelessness, what do you mean by cluelessness? Can you provide an example or two? Is it in committee work, or is it just in everyday interactions?

**PRYCE:** I have never been one to have felt put upon because of my gender. And I don't know why that is. I don't know if I'm really lucky. I don't know if I just have some force field that says, "Don't you dare" or what. But there have been incidents in elevators and just things that weren't necessarily terrifically professional. But not necessarily on committees. I never had the Pat [Patricia Scott] Schroeder 'no seat for you' kind of thing happen to me.[2] I think those days had passed thanks to the women that went before us.

But I sometimes felt that it was hard to get a word in edgewise. You have to learn how to catch your moments and how to speak up a little louder than you would normally.

**JOHNSON:** One question we've been asking all our interviewees is about the Congresswomen's Caucus and what your impressions were and how involved you were in the work of the organization.

**PRYCE:** The Congresswomen's Caucus came from another reform of the Newt era. We used to have—what were they called? I can't remember what they were called. We used to have these organizations that were run from the congressional budget.

**WASNIEWSKI:** LSOs [legislative service organizations], I think.

**PRYCE:** Yes, okay, LSOs. Those were funded by federal dollars, and they really served their own membership. They didn't really serve the public. And so he did away with those. And the Women's LSO came from the dissolution of the Women's Caucus inside the Congress. And so they had to raise their own money and get their own membership and sponsors, but it was one of the most successful offspring of this process because it grew into a wonderful supportive group with great sponsorship, bipartisan. And Cindy Hall and others have worked tirelessly through that. Cindy Hall, I think, used to work for Connie Morella when it was an official group. She took it outside. I was never a leader in that group because I had my own House Leadership responsibilities, but I always loved the work that they did, and I think it's still a very valued group.

**WASNIEWSKI:** One question we wanted to ask is, I'd come across this in an article, it was related to a group called Chowder and Marching.[iii] We heard that you were one of the first women to join.

**PRYCE:** Yes, but I'm not allowed to talk about that. {laughter}

**WASNIEWSKI:** Not allowed to talk about it, okay.

**PRYCE:** I was, and so was Tillie Fowler as was Ileana Ros-Lehtinen. Basically, it's just a fraternity, and it's a great group, and I still attend on occasion.

**JOHNSON:** Were you invited to join, or was this something together that you—

**PRYCE:** No, you have to be invited to join. It's like a fraternity, and it's got a great membership of super, super people. I was very fortunate.

**WASNIEWSKI:** One other question related to CODELs [congressional delegations]. Again, we'd read that you had—in 2003—had led an all-women delegation to Iraq. I wonder what you remember about that trip and then also if you can speak to the importance of CODELs and traveling with your colleagues.

**PRYCE:** I think that with all the reforms that took place, this is one of the things that we didn't take away and for good reason. I think that there's no better way to get to know Members of your own caucus, but more importantly of the other side of the aisle. And this was during the Iraq War, and there had never been a congressional delegation of all women, and I thought it was high time that women did this. We had a great group to go to Iraq and Afghanistan, and we were looking at the sex trafficking issues. But also when we were in Iraq, we were talking to the Iraqi women about their newfound right to vote and how they were going to be covered in the new constitution. And it was a wonderful feeling to have solidarity with those women who were finally coming into their own in terms of participating in their government!

I just remember one wonderful picture I have, surrounded by these beautiful Iraqi women and their children, and they all have their thumbs up in the air.

And then another one that has a picture of me with the ink stamp from voting. It wasn't election day, but it was just a symbolic picture. It was a great way for the women Members to be together to talk about things that were really important to us and travel with a professional staff and look at these issues that are very meaningful not only to us but the rest of the world.

And so I was very proud to take that first step. I don't know that anybody's done it again, but I hope they have. I just remember us all in our flak jackets taking a helicopter ride with General [David] Petraeus. We had a fascinating experience, but nothing was more meaningful than when we visited these Iraqi women in their own homes. They would serve us a very meager little tea service and that type of thing. It was just a wonderful, wonderful way to participate in what's going on in our world.

**JOHNSON:** You were involved in a lot of different aspects of Congress, so we're excited to ask you about all these different types of questions, but another one was when you served as a deputy whip in the House. Especially for people that don't understand what whipping entails, can you describe what your responsibilities were?

**PRYCE:** I don't know how it ever got the name, but I'm sure it's for a good reason. But a whip is, for the Republicans or the Democrats in whatever legislative body they're in, it's a vote counter. And there's two kinds of whipping. One is that you count the votes to see who's with you and to make sure that what they say is what they mean. And the other kind of whipping is to grow the vote and is to try to convince people that aren't with your side of things why they should be and how to get them to yes.

So, it's a fascinating experience for an individual Member because you learn so much about the rest of the membership of the conference. You learn about

their districts, what they need, what they're willing to trade for, what votes they can withstand in their districts, what their pet peeves are. You just hear a lot from them because you talk to them a lot. And so it gave me wonderful perspective.

Then the whips would all meet at least once a week and share this information. So I not only picked up my own, but it was the radar net for all the conference, and so everybody shared information about their whip group. And it was a great experience. I wasn't the best one at twisting arms, but I could get the truth out of people.

**JOHNSON:** What qualities do you think make for an effective whip?

**PRYCE:** I don't think I was stern enough sometimes, but I always knew when I got to that point to call in the next guy who could be.

**JOHNSON:** Did you see any sort of difference in the style that women legislators used versus male legislators when it came to whipping?

**PRYCE:** No, I don't think so. Once you understand how the process works and that some people, whether they were men or women, always were against the vote until they were given something. And you got to know who those people were. I don't think that's the right way to play, but that's how it worked on occasion. I don't know that that's gender specific though.

**WASNIEWSKI:** You were part of a pretty formidable whipping operation with Tom [Thomas Dale] DeLay as the Whip and Denny [John Dennis] Hastert as the [Chief] Deputy Whip. How would you describe that operation? How did that work?

**PRYCE:** It worked pretty effectively for the time it was in place. A lot got done. And I think that it just worked because of the personalities. There were the people

like me who could soften up the Members, and then Denny could go in and like talk sense, and then Tom DeLay was called the "hammer" for a reason. He was the final arbiter of these things. But there were so many Members, we couldn't talk to everyone individually, and that's why he had to cast the net with his team.

**WASNIEWSKI:** How was it for you to work with both those gentlemen in particular?

**PRYCE:** It was great to work with them. I learned a lot from them. I hope they learned some from me too, especially Tom DeLay. He was a very strong Texas conservative, and I was a Midwest moderate and a woman and had completely different districts and somewhat different ideas of how we should govern as a Republican Party in control of the House. And so I'd like to think that I got him to moderate sometimes. I mean I'm sure I did, I know that I did, because I worked with him every day and his staff. And often they would come to me and say, "Thanks." Sometimes it's things that just need said, and others just won't say it. But Tom was a very strong Whip, and that was a positive thing, but in most of the things we passed, I agreed with him.

**JOHNSON:** You said you learned a lot from that process. Was it also something that you enjoyed?

**PRYCE:** I enjoyed it because it made it more of a community. I love people, I love the Congress, I love people on both sides of the aisle. That's back when you really could have friends and really strong relationships between Democrats and Republicans. I think it made me a better Member to be on the inside. Information is the key to everything that's done legislatively no matter where you are, and the sooner you know it, the stronger you are, and if you are discerning enough to know when to share it, the stronger you are. And I

think it blended well with the person I am, maybe curious and maybe nibby, but I liked to be on the inside of the people part of the process.

**WASNIEWSKI:** You eventually ran for Conference Secretary in 1997. Were you recruited to run for that? How did you decide?

**PRYCE:** I don't think I was recruited. I don't really remember how that all came about. I don't even know who had the job before I did, but I don't think I ran against an incumbent for it.

**WASNIEWSKI:** I think, was it Dunn before that?

**JOHNSON:** Jennifer Dunn, yes.

**PRYCE:** Okay, she must have moved up. And so that calls into question whether it's the woman's position, and I don't know that I looked at it that way. I just looked at it as an opportunity, and so that was when I first got to sit at the leadership table, and it was very eye-opening. It was—now this is the part where my memory—I believe it was right when Newt [Gingrich] discovered the coup [in 1997]. And then I had not been at the leadership table until the very time that all that came down. And I remember when we were all sitting around, and he was so angry, and he told me to set up a conference, and I didn't have a clue what to do or how to do it, but he put me in charge of this process, and that was where all the soul baring and teeth gnashing and "come to Jesus" and the Sonny Bono speech and the Bill [L. William] Paxon resignation. It just all happened in the little conference I had to plan. It was quite a beginning.

**WASNIEWSKI:** Trial by fire. {laughter}

**PRYCE:** I wish I had a video of that!

**WASNIEWSKI:** Do you remember anything about the campaign for that position? You ran against Sue Myrick and Randy [Randall (Duke)] Cunningham, were the two candidates.

**PRYCE:** Golly. I remember it now that you mention it. Oh, geez.

**WASNIEWSKI:** Maybe you could just describe a little bit about what's it like—what a leadership race is like. Again, for someone who's on the outside because they understand elections, but these are not normal elections, are they?

**PRYCE:** No, leadership elections are very internecine war play. You have to pit colleague against colleague, and that's a very touchy thing to do. I remember Sue Myrick was really standup during that election. We had a good heart-to-heart standing in the hallway of Cannon [House Office Building], and she said, "You know, I have nothing against you, this is just how—somebody's got to have these positions. If you get it, I'll be with you." I didn't have that conversation with Cunningham, but then I knew Myrick better. But it's hard to run against your colleagues because the next day you have to work with them again. And so it's pretty touchy, and you have to do it right or else you'll have enemies that will remember.

**WASNIEWSKI:** Did your experience in the Whip's organization help you at all to know?

**PRYCE:** Yes. The experience in the Whip's organization helped me in all my leadership races just because I knew the Members, and I could eyeball them, I could meet them on the floor, in their office. And I knew them, I knew about their families, I knew about their districts, I could talk to them about things other than just my personal ambitions. And so it was very helpful.

In this business, you can't know too much about people. It's really important that you understand each other because you're finding yourself oftentimes

holding different positions than your party—than the other people in your caucus. And if you understand them and you understand their districts, there's usually a pretty good reason. So you don't take it personally, or you don't hold it against them personally.

**JOHNSON:** You moved up to vice chair, were elected vice chair of the [Republican] Conference and you were able to work with J. C. [Julius Caesar] Watts [Jr.] when he was the conference chair. Can you describe that experience, what that was like for you?

**PRYCE:** Yes, J. C. was a great conference chair. That was another very good thing for our party. He had a real natural political instinct. I think that he did great in terms of the face of our party obviously. Republicans didn't then and still don't have the minorities in our party that we need, and J. C. did a nice job with the conference, and I worked with him on many initiatives. But the leadership really works all together. No matter who holds the position, except for conference chair and Whip, they have definite specific jobs, but everybody is just in there to help and support and do whatever the Speaker assigns you to do.

**JOHNSON:** And then when J. C. Watts didn't run for re-election, you were able to run for his position as [conference] chair. Do you remember that campaign at all?

**PRYCE:** That was the real race. Jerry [Gerald C.] Weller and I went—and I don't know if there was anybody else in the race, but he was the arch opponent, and I think my old chief of staff has hanging on his wall the vote count of that election. It was pretty close, but it was very hard fought. It was a very high honor to have been elected by my peers to chair the [Republican] Conference. It was the first time a woman had ever held that seat, and I was very grateful for all the support I got from the conference.

**WASNIEWSKI:** What was your pitch in campaigning for that position? How did you present yourself as being the best person?

**PRYCE:** I think it depends on who you're pitching. You have to know your audience. And so the message was always tailored, but I think if I'd had any campaign overall themes, it was that we need to look more diverse, we need to be more diverse, not only in our gender and our race, but also in the type of politics we practice. I was a moderate, and it was really important, I thought, to have a moderate in the leadership in a high position so that we didn't get dragged too far to the right. And so I think that served me well.

I also had a family, and I brought those perspectives that were important. The men in the conference who tended to get a little younger, they had families, and they understood how important it was to deal with more than just defense and agriculture and banking. That there were issues that Republicans could be for and be for in a very big way that weren't traditional. And I would always try to make the case that we needed our tent to be a little bit bigger, and this is one way to do it.

**JOHNSON:** You were the highest-ranking Republican woman and the first one to hold this position. What did that mean to you personally?

**PRYCE:** I was really very humbled by it. There were so many women who had gone before me who had made it possible. I've named a few, but trailblazers that really suffered to make women accepted in the House of Representatives and then in the Senate. I didn't have as much of that, and it was only because they did. Timing is everything, and I happened to be there, and my party called. And it was a very humbling position and experience, but I was really proud, and I hope that my daughter and everyone's daughter could look to

see that the Republican Party actually does stand for more than just aging white men.

**JOHNSON:** And in this particular case for you, and then also any time that women are in leadership, what do you think that means for the women in Congress? How important is it to have women in leadership?

**PRYCE:** It's vital to have women in leadership. It's vital to have women in all ranks, you know. Women have been a very big part of the Republican Party forever, but they have never been noted to be real leaders in the party. Now, there have been exceptions to that, of course, but they are more known for their hard work in the background and stuffing the envelopes and making the phone calls and doing the grassroots stuff that makes politicians run. And it gets done, and it gets done well, but that's invisible. That's totally invisible. We need people out front that can inspire others and future generations to stand up and make more of us.

**WASNIEWSKI:** And as [Republican] Conference Chair what were your responsibilities primarily?

**PRYCE:** We were in charge of communications in concert with the Speaker's Office. We coordinated communications for Members. We got them on TV and radio, and we had a whole network of booking. We also ran the weekly conference, which was the most enjoyable part for me. Because I'm such a people person, I could stand up in front of this big group every Wednesday morning at 8:00 or 9:00, and I could just read people. I could read people's faces and knew that day who we were going to hear from and who was upset and what it was going to be like, if it was going to be a calm conference or a rocky conference.

And then we had a series of events, and we ran the retreat every year. We got that all together and booked the place and the transportation and our speakers and our agenda and set up whether we did it with the Senate or we did it by ourselves. So it was a fascinating job. It was very all encompassing. Anything could have been dropped into one of those categories. But what I enjoyed the most was just once a week standing in front of that crew and just I felt like the mother hen really, honestly, to just kind of try to keep everybody calm and focused. It was great. I enjoyed it a lot.

**WASNIEWSKI:** Again, for people who might not be familiar, what was a typical meeting like? How did it work? How'd it run?

**PRYCE:** The typical meeting started usually about 10 minutes late, but everybody sat down in HC-5, which is a big room in the basement of the Capitol Building. Then I would call the meeting to order. The Speaker would always make brief remarks and then any of the other leaders who had anything to say, and most mornings they did. Then depending on what the agenda was, we would hear from perhaps the chairman of the bill that was up, or if we had some kind of crisis, we would hear about that, usually from one of the leaders. And there were lots of crises. That's the nature of the work.

Then the Members would take the mic one at a time, and I would have to recognize them for two minutes or three minutes, however we set the time depending on if we thought it was going to be a very busy morning or not. So I would recognize them as they came up to the mic. Some of the hardest things was to always remember their names right. So I always had a staffer that was fairly senior to be there with me. I almost always got the name, but when you can't remember, it's really tense because he's coming up next, what is his name? But it was all good. I heard a lot of complaining, a lot of people bitter and unhappy depending on the issue of the day, but also compliments

along the way. It was like a family—family breakfast once a week with everybody's getting to air their stuff. The important thing was to air it among each other, keep it in the room and not in the press.

**WASNIEWSKI:** Coordinating all that must have—did you ever find it was hard to balance your work in leadership with being a Member of a district like the other Members?

**PRYCE:** Yes, sometimes it was. It took a lot more time away from my district. And my seat was fairly safe for a while, meaning I didn't have really tough, tough elections. But then after the war and President [George W.] Bush became less and less popular, it began to interfere, not just the time away from my district but the fact that I was working with Tom DeLay who became a big lightning rod for some who weren't so conservative. And so I just remember in my last campaign six months before the election even started—even more than that—they started running ads with me next to a really bad picture of Tom DeLay. So that's when it started to really interfere. When it became obvious that some of my work for the conference wasn't in line with how my district felt, and so it was difficult to do them both, and in my last term, I didn't.

**JOHNSON:** Did that ever present any other obstacles for you just within the leadership team, the fact that you were moderate? Did that hold you back at all?

**PRYCE:** Oh, I'm sure. As a matter of fact, I said I was naïve when I came to Congress, and this is how naïve I was. I was a pro-choice Republican, but it was fuzzy because I had just adopted a child, and those things really color your opinion on some issues. But since I had been a judge, I thought oh, I'll be on the Judiciary Committee. That's the committee I asked for. And, of course, Henry [John] Hyde was the chairman of the Judiciary Committee. I had no

clue that abortion was one of the major issues and one of his very most important issues.[iv] The Hyde Amendment was his. I woke up fast!

Moderates were definitely in the minority on our leadership team. And so I don't know that I could ever have become the Whip or the [Republican] Leader. In our conference, moderates were—and they still continue to decrease to the point they hardly exist anymore. And so it was an obstacle in terms of rising any further, but it was also a very important place to have a moderate because the tent has to be big enough to have all the Republicans under it, and if you don't have them all somewhere in leadership, you're not going to be represented. I think our conference had the good sense to understand that.

**JOHNSON:** And then on a larger scale, outside of the leadership team, what role do you think moderates played in the House when you were in Congress?

**PRYCE:** They played an important role. The moderates banded together in the Tuesday Group, which was an informal luncheon group that moderates went to every Tuesday and developed a strategy to keep our conference from going too far to the right on any given issue. That developed into the Main Street Group and larger outside groups that now fund campaigns and do policy work.

**WASNIEWSKI:** Somewhat related to the question about being a moderate in leadership, did being a woman in leadership, do you look back on that now as having been to your advantage in some instances or maybe disadvantage? How did gender play out on the leadership team?

**PRYCE:** I think that it depends how you use your gender. I think I have usually been able to use it to my advantage, and it's because it's a different voice, and if you speak civilly, you will be heard. I was never shrill in my approach. I was

never dogmatic. I always tried to be rational and reasonable in how I would present things to the other leaders and became appreciated because that was a perspective that wasn't always heard.

But I have to say that it was wonderful to work with intelligent and resourceful staff members too because oftentimes they would be the ones that would pick up on things I would say and talk the other leaders down or help me in my approach. Because in positions of power, people don't always just give up in a public setting or concede. I had the ability to work kind of quietly in the background with staff. After I said my piece at the table, it had been said. When it's said, it means something, and so we could always go back and have the hard work done other places than right at the table where egos were at stake.

**JOHNSON:** Did you find that you were welcomed among the leadership team as the only woman?

**PRYCE:** I always felt welcomed. And I don't know if I was just lucky enough to serve with personalities that were accepting and genuinely interested, or what. We traveled together on CODELs, we did so much planning together, we spent so much time, whether it was at the Whip's table or the leadership table, that we were genuine friends; and even if our politics didn't agree 100 percent, I felt to the last person that everyone respected me and that we had a kinship that few people are lucky enough to experience in this life. I mean, what an honor to serve with some of these folks that made such a big impact on our country.

**WASNIEWSKI:** Before we get too far away from it, you had an upfront seat to two different Speakers, Hastert and Gingrich, could you just do a compare and contrast in terms of leadership style?

**PRYCE:** Oh, boy. Newt Gingrich and Denny Hastert were completely different kinds of leaders. Newt, a little history lesson here, was a back bencher in the minority of the Congress for a time. But he was the bomb thrower from the back bench. He was the one that really brought the Republican Party out of 40 years in the wilderness into the majority finally in 1994. And he did that because of his brilliance. He has so many ideas, and he is such—he just is overflowing with his thoughts. Now, Denny Hastert is quieter, and he will listen more, and he will be a good implementer. So the great team was when Newt was Speaker and Denny was Deputy Whip and Tom DeLay was the hammer [as Whip]. Everybody had the perfect role to play.

Then it mixed up. When Denny was Speaker is when I was the chairman of the conference, and so I worked more closely with Denny. He had a way, a patient way about him that Newt just didn't. Newt was impulsive, and his ideas came so fast. You could hardly keep up with him. But Denny was a real implementer. And so when people brought ideas to Hastert, he was better at making them happen. It kind of happened in the reverse with Newt. He would have the ideas, and somebody else would make them happen. And dare you give him an idea because then you would have to make it happen. But they had very different styles. I think they were both very effective Speakers.

**JOHNSON:** During that period when it was Speaker Hastert and you were [Republican] Conference Chair, did you work to try to recruit more women candidates and also to have women play a bigger role that already had been elected as Republicans?

**PRYCE:** Yes, we used to have regular dinners at Nancy Johnson's house, and it was a wonderful time once a week or once every other week that we would invite the Republican women Members and Senators, and we would invite a guest

to come in and speak, sometimes members of the press, sometimes Members of former administrations, but mostly women, and try to just get some camaraderie, build the morale. It's kind of lonely for a woman on Capitol Hill.

One of the things I'm proudest of is starting a group called VIEW PAC and that's a PAC that stands for "Value In Electing Women." It's a group that raises money and recruits candidates to run for Congress or Senate, you know, House or Senate. It has grown so big now and it has helped so many women candidates that we're way on the map. It's nothing like the Democrats' EMILY's List because our group doesn't have a litmus test; it's not tied to any issue at all; it's just supporting viable women Republican candidates for the Congress. So I spent a lot of time on that, and we've had many victories; we've had many disappointments, but it's been a tool that Republican women never had before that's been instrumental in many elections.

**JOHNSON:** Great legacy to have.

**PRYCE:** I know. I'm very proud of it. I'm very proud of how well it's still doing. We just celebrated 20 years of VIEWPAC!

**WASNIEWSKI:** I'll just follow up on that because it's really interesting. If I'm remembering correctly, Sue Myrick made much the same comment in terms of having a dinner party with women Members, and she said how lonely it was for women Members of Congress. Can you elaborate on that a little bit more, what you mean?

**PRYCE:** I think that because there were fewer women, there was less social life for women. Guys can go out alone and feel pretty comfortable. I don't think a woman Member of Congress would want to do that. Guys team up at the

gym and go out for a beer. So the women really had to make their own social life on Capitol Hill, and we did that and I'm really proud of it. We also had a bipartisan group that would go to dinner regularly. And I made some great friendships there. We also had a bipartisan prayer group that met fairly regularly, and those friendships are ones that I still have, and it's wonderful to be able to still reach across the aisle even though we're all no longer in the business.

**WASNIEWSKI:** And if I'm remembering too, a couple of other women had mentioned how they just didn't get to socialize because they went home and did homework, and you were working really hard.

**PRYCE:** That's right.

**WASNIEWSKI:** And the men went out and socialized. {laughter}

**PRYCE:** I'm not going to comment on that, but a lot of women did take work home because they didn't do anything in the evening. And so when you're here in Washington away from your family, away from your constituents, what better time to read the legislation, to get caught up on your inbox and just to finish it up so you feel prepared for the next day. Because women really, in the past and probably in the future, are always more prepared than the men just because I think they're more comfortable when they are. They're not as adept at shooting from the hip because we don't want to fail, we want to succeed.

**JOHNSON:** You talked a lot about milestones and some of your milestones that you made. While you were in Congress Nancy Pelosi became the first woman Speaker. What do you think that meant to the women in Congress on both sides of the aisle?

**PRYCE:** I think any milestone for a woman in terms of shattering the glass at the top is very, very important. When Speaker Pelosi took the gavel, it was a great day for womankind all over the globe, and so we were all very proud for her.

**JOHNSON:** So while you served in the House, you were a mother of young children. What was it like balancing those responsibilities, the public life that you had here with all of the juggling that you do as a mom?

**PRYCE:** They were two very different experiences. One, my first daughter, Caroline, was two when I was elected first. I was married, and my husband was a great support and wonderful caregiver, and it was a lot easier because when I came here, I knew she was in good hands and everything was fine at home. I would get homesick and lonely, but I knew that they were fine. That first 100 days was miserable, but after we all survived that, and fathers with children have to survive it too. It was fine. We balanced a lot better. The schedule started to become a little more regular at that point. Now, John Boehner is the one who brought the schedule into the right century because at least we knew what day we were coming, and we knew what day we were going home. Newt started in that direction. But it was hard.

And then my daughter Caroline, who was my first child, passed away. Then my marriage broke up like they often do when there's a death of a child. And then I adopted my Mia. Then it was just the two of us, so it became a little trickier. Mia would come to Washington with me until she was two because she was a lap baby, and she could fly for free. And so I had the extra stress of packing her up and getting her here and screaming in the airport, but it all worked out. I had a babysitter for her here, and this young woman brought her son, and she had a playmate, and she would come to the office sometimes, and my staff loved her, and it worked out fine.

I think that, like any job in the modern world for women, mothers, and fathers, it can work. Sometimes it gets a little complicated, but you can work it out if you have the right support structure, which I was very lucky to have. I have a big family; they could help me. I had a wonderful godmother to my daughter Mia who helps and still does to this day. I'm very, very blessed, but I can't say that it wasn't hard, especially on Mom. I don't think Mia suffered too much because she was around a lot. I remember she used to think the House was our house. So when I would talk about the House or the floor of the House, that's our Washington house. She grew up here to a large extent and still has many friends. She lives back in Ohio now, but she remembers those days fondly.

**JOHNSON:** For you, with some of your women colleagues, was there a network, especially with your colleagues that did have [younger] children? There weren't a lot, but there were some of you that did.

**PRYCE:** Yes, we did, and we would pass things around. Cathy McMorris Rodgers got Mia's crib when she had her first child. I remember we all—Ileana and her girls and Sue Molinari and her girls—we all went to the zoo one day. We stayed here a weekend and did all those kinds of things were fun, and then we would travel some for political things, and our kids would go. So they had a whole different world outside of their school friends. They had their Washington group, and I think that that was a positive thing. It gives kids insight that most children would never ever have, and it opens their eyes at an early time in their life. That is a positive.

**WASNIEWSKI:** How did being a mother influence or have an impact on any of the legislation that you sought to undertake?

**PRYCE:** Being a mother had a tremendous impact on everything I did. Everyone brings their own experience to their work whether you are a fireman or a Member of Congress. You have what you have in your heart and your mind. So nobody can deny parenthood as being a huge piece of their life, and so even fathers bring parenting perspective. But mothers just seem to have a lighter touch about it.

I never thought there were issues that were women's issues or children's issues, but there were issues that affected women more, and that affected children more, and I always thought they were very important. I was never on a committee of jurisdiction because I sat on the Rules Committee. So I never was in the weeds to the extent that I amended legislation or that type of stuff, but from a leadership perspective, I could weigh in on the Violence Against Women Act or the pediatric cancer bill or things like that that meant a lot to me and meant a lot to children. I was very close to the Children's Hospitals Association and understood what great work they did.

But to add a little bit to that answer, the main thing that I learned from being a mother that affected me as a person and as a legislator was when my daughter was sick. She had cancer, and she was eight years old, and I was with her in Memorial Sloan Kettering cancer ward, children's ward, when the House Republicans were impeaching Bill Clinton. I watched those hearings on the TV in the kids' playroom or wherever it was that we happened to be, and I came away with such perspective, different than any of my colleagues had, about what is important in our government and what isn't. And I'll never forget, and I will always have it, and I'll always cherish it, in terms of, really, what we're here for and why we're here and the significance of what's important and the irrelevance of what isn't.

**JOHNSON:** Were you able to take some of that experience that you were talking about and then carry that over to your work as a legislator?

**PRYCE:** I think so, yes. I looked at everything with a renewed perspective. Are we doing this for the right reasons; are we doing this for political reasons, and do the political reasons make sense, and do they outweigh whatever else happens because of what we're doing? And so it just lit up my life. Out of the tragedy that was my daughter's death really illuminated my life in terms of who I was and how I legislated. It informed everything from then on.

**WASNIEWSKI:** Can you talk about some of the bills that you sponsored that focus on children? We're thinking about the Caroline Pryce Walker Conquer Childhood Cancer Act in particular.

**PRYCE:** Yes, that was a very small bill, but it was to honor her, and it was to help other kids in her situation. It definitely sprang from her death, but it also was a testament to how caring and how loving my colleagues were on both sides of the aisle. They came together to help me with this small piece of legislation but a piece that would never have passed without them. And they were a part of my experience when she was sick, and it was more a testament to their support and their love than anything else, and I will always love this body. I hate to see where it's going now because it's nothing like it was 20 years ago when we did and we could and we wanted to work together, both sides of the aisle, and the politics came second. This is a good example of what can happen when you do.

**JOHNSON:** Another area that we've been talking to all of our interviewees about is their committee service, which, of course, is critical to congressional careers. And we know that you served on the Rules Committee. Can you explain how you

got that position when you came in and then also what it was like to be on the Rules Committee?

**PRYCE:** The Rules Committee was a fascinating experience. When we became a majority in my second term, I got a phone call on the night of my election from Newt Gingrich, who was going to certainly become the Speaker. He said, "I want you to serve on my Rules Committee." And I said, "Mr. Speaker, I have all this banking and insurance in my district; I really like them; I don't want to be on the Rules Committee." And he said, "Yes, you do. Think about it; we'll talk more." The next day, I get a call from [Chester] Trent Lott, who had served on the Rules Committee when he was a House Member, and he said, "Deborah, you have to do this. This is the best committee; this is a leadership position." And so the deck was already stacked against me, and I was going to be on that Rules Committee. There was no sense resisting. I said yes to the Speaker.

Then I went to my first committee meeting, and Gerry [Gerald Brooks Hunt] Solomon, a former hard guy Marine, tough as nails. He was a wonderful chairman; I loved him, but he would work that committee into the dead of night. We were there sometimes till three in the morning just because of his work ethic and his Marine background. As soon as a piece of legislation was ready, we got called in no matter what time of day or night it was. He said, "Get out of bed, and come to the Rules Committee."

So we met in the dead of night so often just to have it ready for the floor the next day because of how Gerry operated. And then David [Timothy] Dreier became the chairman, and we had a little more reasonable schedule. But they were each great leaders. Our party is really fortunate to have had both of them.

The Rules Committee was fascinating because you don't hear from any witnesses except for Members. The Members of Congress bring their legislation to the Rules Committee, explain what it is, explain what amendments they would like or not, and how much time they needed to debate them. Then the other side of the aisle would grill them or vice versa, but it was only Members that testified. So it's another opportunity for me to get to know the Members even better, and that served me very well when it came time for my election to the conference chairmanship.

**WASNIEWSKI:** You described Gerry Solomon a little bit. Can you describe David Dreier and his leadership style?

**PRYCE:** David Dreier was a great leader, and he was really smart. He was quite close to the Speaker, which he should be because it's the Speaker's Committee. And he always knew exactly the outcome before we got to the outcome. He was a strong enough leader to almost always get it to turn out the way the Speaker expected it to.

I remember once, and I don't remember the bill, but I had it in my mind that Speaker Hastert really didn't want the Rules Committee to do it this way, that he just had to because of Member pressures, and I was going to be that lone holdout and sink the bill. Well, Dreier told me the truth, "No, that is really not your job here. Your job is to do what you're told." I did. But I learned about every committee, not only the Members but I learned about the work of every committee in more depth than most Members would hear about the legislation. We would get the preview to the bill before it was debated. We would know what was going to be heard the next day, and we would make the decision about what amendments would be allowed, if it was a closed rule or not, those types of things. And the Rules Committee is really one of the most basic differences between the House and the Senate because

the House has the Rules Committee, and the Senate does not. And that's why everything in the Senate has to have the majority vote and in the House it just needs the Rules Committee stamp.

**JOHNSON:** Sue Myrick was on the [Rules] Committee for a while when you were there and Louise [McIntosh] Slaughter, but there weren't too many women. Can you talk a little about their role and just being a woman on a committee like Rules?

**PRYCE:** I think that every member of the Rules Committee was respected by the chairman and by each other. Those were hard-fought battles in the Rules Committee. They were very partisan and very meaningful because what happened there really does almost determine the outcome of every bill. And so that was the preliminary salvo in every fight. But all the women had strong voices there, and all of us had her say.

**WASNIEWSKI:** You chaired a Rules subcommittee during your tenure. How would you describe your leadership style?

**PRYCE:** I think I was a pretty easygoing chairman wherever I was. And there were times when it is a very partisan committee. And so you have to be a strong person to chair anything in the House of Representatives, but I think that everyone got along fine in my subcommittee, and we didn't have any knockdown drag-outs. I think everyone was just very civil and respectful of each other.

**JOHNSON:** How do you think your service on Rules impacted your House career? Did it play any sort of role in how you were as a legislator?

**PRYCE:** I don't know that it really helped my House career except in terms of rising in leadership. I don't know that it helped my district all that much because I

didn't have any original jurisdiction. No legislation really could start in the Rules Committee unless it was just administrative stuff for the House. That's why I was reluctant when I was asked to leave what was then called the Banking Committee, where I served as a freshman. Because we had such a huge constituency of financial institutions in my district. And when I went back to that committee when my service in Rules was over (I begged to be released), it was fun to have some substance to do again.

**WASNIEWSKI:** When you went back to Financial Services, at that point Mike [Michael Garver] Oxley was the chairman and Barney Frank, I think, was the ranking.

**PRYCE:** Yes.

**WASNIEWSKI:** Yes? What are your memories of their leadership styles?

**PRYCE:** Barney Frank and Mike Oxley were both great men. Mike, sadly, has passed on. Barney is still with us. But they both had a tremendous sense of humor. They're both strong and capable, smart. It was a fun committee to be on just to hear the banter and to see how legislation was really done. I mean, I was out of the loop because I was in Rules for so long. To get back to actual, the real legislative work of the Congress, was fascinating for me, and I enjoyed it.

**WASNIEWSKI:** On both Rules and Financial Services, there were just a handful of women really serving at the time. How important do you think it is to have a woman's perspective on a committee like Financial Services or Rules?

**PRYCE:** A woman's perspective should always be valued no matter what committee it is; we are 51 percent of the population. You don't always get complete representation if you don't have diversity, and in terms of race and gender and all the other things that we consider now that we wouldn't even have thought of back then in terms of diversity. So it's very important because it's

not that women are different in any articulable way, it's just that we're not men, and maybe we think different, or maybe we act different, or maybe we have different life's experiences. But whatever it is, we are different, and we have much to bring to the table. I'm not a student of diversity, but all I know is harkening back to the story of when I tried to get the men to agree to something, and I tried to get the women to agree to something, and the women did it a lot more efficiently and with a lot less talk and a lot less—well, just more efficiently.

**JOHNSON:** You ready to tackle the wrap-up questions?

**WASNIEWSKI:** Sure, yes.

**JOHNSON:** We just have a couple more questions. Thank you for being so patient with us. At the beginning of this interview, you talked about some of the women and some of the men that offered advice and maybe helped you learn the ropes a little bit. As you became more experienced, did you mentor any younger Members or any new Members that were elected to Congress?

**PRYCE:** Yes, I think that we always invited the newly-elected women into the Supper Club and the VIEW PAC events. Actually, we knew many of the Members through their campaigns, and so they were already a bit of the family once they finally got here. And so it's the whole process that I was happy to be involved in. Then when they get here, it's nice to just be able to ask the dumb questions of a friend. We all come from different places, and I'm the best example of not understanding a legislative process, and so no question is too dumb to ask me. So as women were elected and came in, we all surrounded them with support as much as we possibly could.

**WASNIEWSKI:** As Kathleen mentioned at the top of the interview, this series of interviews, we kicked it off to celebrate the centennial of Jeannette Rankin serving in

Congress 100 years ago, 2017. One of the things we noticed in doing research on her was that there was so much—the press focused on her because she was a first, but so much attention was placed on her, the way she dressed and her clothing. Do you feel like that had changed by the time you were in Congress, or did you feel like you were scrutinized in ways that male Members of Congress would never be scrutinized in the press?

**PRYCE:** When I got here, I remember there was a controversy about Susan Molinari wearing a pantsuit on the House Floor, and I was just aghast. I could not believe that. I said, "What?" There was a rule against it. I said, "There was not." And so I never really knew if there was, but by the time I got here, they ignored it because there were plenty of pantsuits on the House Floor, and if there was somebody who didn't like it, too bad, I don't like your tie either.

So men have been lucky because in their professional life they basically have a uniform to wear. It's a suit and tie and blue shirt or a white shirt. Women have a little more flair, and so there's more to talk about. But I know that in the press that I read throughout my career, there's always mention of women's clothes no matter what the story is, almost always, and men don't. I like to think that's because women dress more interestingly. Personally, I never minded it.

**JOHNSON:** Because there are so few women in Congress, did you feel that you not only represented your constituents in Ohio but perhaps you represented women across the country and maybe in some cases across the world?

**PRYCE:** I did. I think it's important for women to know that until we are on parity, that we need to stand up for each other, and we do represent each other in that we are examples. And you know, you see all the scandal and the trouble that has happened through the years, not just now but through the years, and

you don't see many women involved in that kind of stuff. And it's a wonderful thing because we do set an example for those that are coming behind us, and I'm glad that so far it's been such a positive one. But when I was in Iraq and was with those Iraqi women, there was a solidarity. It was a wonderful thing.

**WASNIEWSKI:** During your career, were there any women staffers who you remember as being particularly effective, sharp?

**PRYCE:** There are so many. There's too many to even start mentioning. The women staffers were exceptional and often not rewarded like they should be. That's changing too. But the staff in the U.S. House of Representatives, male and female, are just so wonderful. They're exceptional people. They're so smart. And what I like to see is that they respected each other, and they all worked together whether they were men or women. And you see more and more women chiefs of staff and more and more staff directors that are women, and they're really competent.

Right before this, I had lunch with Lori Salley, who was my chief of staff for some time, and we were just talking about names in the past and where they are now and how well they're doing. And many of them are women, and so they have gone on and passed their time on Capitol Hill into more lucrative jobs. The only thing I wish is that the people who work here could be paid more because they're worth so much and they give so much. If Members of Congress think they have it hard and they don't get to be with their families, well, the staff that are with them all the time have it even harder, and a lot of women leave their children to do a good job for our country, and we should be grateful to all of them.

**JOHNSON:** One question I don't want to forget because we always need to ask if it's someone's last campaign, or if they decided not to run for Congress. So what went into that decision for you to retire and to not seek re-election?

**PRYCE:** I'm glad you asked this because I have something to say on this. My last election was a really tough election. The hardest thing for me to have lived through was not the pain of the negative ads or the hard work of the campaign or the money I had to raise; it was realizing how those millions were being spent. It was being spent the only way it could be to make me win and that was on negative ads. And when it was all said and done, I knew I would never, could never do that again. You could feed a city on the money that we spent on negative ads. You could do so much good with the money that we spent, and I was never going to be a part of it again. And sometimes that's the only way you could win, and as long as that's sometimes the only way you can win, I'm going to leave it to somebody else because I couldn't do it again. It was a morally reprehensible thing in my mind that I signed off on. When I signed up to run, I signed up to win, but I knew that if I ever got in the position again, I couldn't, and so that's when I retired, so I never had to.

**JOHNSON:** That wasn't true for all of your campaigns. What caused the change?

**PRYCE:** We never had to do it for any of the other seven [campaigns]. The last one was just the dirtiest, awfullest campaign. My other campaigns were fairly positive and not that difficult, but it was right after the war and [Donald Henry] Rumsfeld, who got fired the day after the election. It was just something I just didn't want to have anything to do with anymore. The district had changed, and I knew I'd never be able to win it without that kind of activity.

I wish there was a way to educate Americans that they need to look for the positive, that they need to look for the truth, and that they should not be swayed by negative ads. We didn't start the negative ads. Democrats ran a "big red hand" ad against me—like caught red-handed—for six months, and then they did the Tom DeLay ad, and they did many things that just caused us to drop in the polls and drop in the polls until we finally started to fight back. We did some positive ads, but they didn't move the needle at that point. I just think that it would be hard for me to go through that again in terms of seeing how the money that I asked for people to give me was spent. I'd rather ask for a charity, or I'd rather ask for a good cause than for this. So I'm on all these groups that emphasize civility and less money in elections and positive campaigns. But until we educate the American public about why they shouldn't listen to that nonsense, how they should judge people on not paid political advertisements but on the truth wherever they can find it, I don't know that it'll ever change.

**WASNIEWSKI:** Kind of stepping back from that, how had the institution itself changed between 1992 and 2008? The House has always been partisan, but . . .

**PRYCE:** Things began to change after the Democrats had control for 40 years, and the Republicans, aka Newt Gingrich and company, fought so hard for Republicans to get a chance at governing—they didn't call it bomb throwing for no reason. It started then, and it has become increasingly political every term since.

When I was first elected, I was part of setting up bipartisan retreats. We would go off together, Republicans and Democrats, to Williamsburg [Virginia] and be actually in the same room, the same conferences. We would do an orientation of freshmen together. That doesn't happen anymore. So

things have changed significantly, and it's very disheartening to see an institution that I really did come to love turn into what it is today.

There are Members in the state of Ohio, Steve Stivers and Joyce Beatty, who have a group that's trying to bring bipartisanship back. There are a lot of people working on civility issues, but until we start living it—I just don't know what the answer is. I'm hopeful. I hope 20 years from now, somebody's watching this and says, "What is she talking about? This is a great institution. They work together wonderfully." I really hope that that happens somehow.

**JOHNSON:** Talking about the institution, was there anything unexpected or something that really surprised you about your service here?

**PRYCE:** It's hard to say. I can't think of any one thing that after all that time was surprising. It might have been at the time, but I can't put my finger on anything. One pleasant surprise, I think it surprised everyone, was after 9/11, how everybody in the country came together and how we did feel like one country then. I remember all the rest of the leadership got swept away to the undisclosed location. I was the only one still on the ground, and there was no coordination, and, oh, it was an incredible time. But we all came together that evening on the Capitol steps and sang 'God Bless America.' But I'm amazed how fast that dissolved. And there are many reasons for it, but I was very disheartened.

**WASNIEWSKI:** What advice would you offer to any woman thinking of running for Congress?

**PRYCE:** That you don't have to be asked to run for Congress. You can just want to be in Congress, and you don't have to wait for somebody to beg you to do this job. It's a great job, it's an honor to do it. Men promote themselves. Women don't have to wait for the call to come. They can just get right out there and

jump in with both feet, and they should. They should learn how to promote themselves.

The big joke was that a woman voted for herself when running for class president. Well, why not? You want other people to vote for you. And we need to encourage other women to do it. Maybe it is just that one phone call that you make to somebody who you might have an inkling would be a good candidate. Maybe that's all it would take. Call her and tell her, "You'd be great, I'll help you."

**JOHNSON:** Here's another question that we tend to end with or come near the end with. There's 113 women in Congress now. How many women do you think will be in Congress on the 150th anniversary of Jeannette Rankin's election to Congress?

**PRYCE:** Oh, dear.

**JOHNSON:** And then how do we get there?

**PRYCE:** The way we get wherever we're going is for women to help women and then men to help women, too. For men to understand that to have good government we need to be a representative body. I don't know how many women will be here. I don't think we'll reach parity by then. Women just have a different life trajectory than men, and sometimes it's hard to work being a Member of Congress into it. If you're going to have children and you're going to raise a family, those things sometimes just—it's just too daunting. But I'm here to tell you it's certainly possible! It's the most gratifying wonderful experience you could possibly have to serve your country from this perspective, and there's a lot of good you can do. It might not look easy, but it's certainly doable.

**WASNIEWSKI:** One final question just to wrap up. What would you like to be remembered for, for your time in Congress? What do you think your legacy would be if you could choose it?

**PRYCE:** I would hope that my legacy is to be remembered as someone who helped other women get their footing in the game. To know that I helped recruit solid candidates, to help raise money for them, to help get them here, and to see them on their way to becoming good solid Members of the U.S. Congress.

**WASNIEWSKI:** Thank you very much.

**JOHNSON:** Yes, thank you.

**PRYCE:** Okay. That was a lot of talking. I haven't talked that much for a long time.

## NOTES

[1] Reference to the violence and killing of four unarmed Kent State students during a campus protest in 1970 against the U.S. bombing of Cambodia and the expansion of the Vietnam War.
[2] Reference to the House Armed Services Committee organizational meeting in 1973 when the committee chairman, Felix Edward Hébert, left only one chair for Representatives Ronald V. Dellums and Pat Schroeder in protest of losing his bid to House leadership to block their membership on his committee.
[iii] The Chowder and Marching Club organized in 1949 out of opposition to a veterans' pension bill backed by Veterans' Affairs Committee Chairman John Elliott Rankin of Mississippi. The group's membership boasted many prominent congressional leaders and included future Presidents Richard Milhous Nixon and Gerald Rudolph Ford, Jr.
[iv] Representative Henry Hyde led the legislative battle in Congress to prohibit federal funding of abortions.