Patricia Saiki
U.S. Representative of Hawaii (1987–1991)

Oral History Interview
Final Edited Transcript
September 20, 2018

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

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Abstract

Patricia Saiki's path to Capitol Hill began in Hawaii, where she was born to Japanese-American parents in 1930. While raising five children, she worked as a teacher, union organizer, and state legislator before winning a seat in the U.S. House of Representatives in 1986. She was the first Republican and second woman to represent Hawaii in Congress since statehood. In this interview, she discusses her long political career, providing insight into Hawaiian state politics, her legislative strategies as an elected representative at the state and federal level, and the role of women in American politics during the 1970s and 1980s.

In this oral history, Saiki recalls her family's experience during World War II, when the federal government forced Japanese immigrants and Japanese Americans into internment camps—including her cousin in California. She describes her initial career as a teacher and her efforts to organize a union in her workplace, which she cited as her first step toward running for office. She went on to serve nearly a decade and a half as a member of Hawaii's state assembly and state senate, where she contributed to the growth of the Hawaiian Republican Party, added equal rights protections to the state constitution, and secured funding for women's education, health, and safety programs.

Saiki provides a firsthand account of her time on Capitol Hill in the 1980s, including her role in convincing her Republican colleagues to support the Civil Liberties Act of 1988, which authorized financial payments to survivors of the federal government's wartime internment program. She discusses her work to modify regulations on the Hawaiian fishing industry while on the Merchant Marine and Fisheries Committee as well as her travels abroad representing the United States in China, Tonga, and Japan. In addition, she speaks about her tenure as head of the Small Business Administration under President George H. W. Bush after her unsuccessful Senate campaign in 1990. Throughout this interview, Saiki emphasizes the importance of women in politics, demonstrating the ways women Members worked together and added new perspectives to debates that ultimately shaped legislation.

Biography

SAIKI, Patricia, a Representative from Hawaii; born in Hilo, Hawaii, May 28, 1930; graduated from Hilo High School, Hilo, Hawaii, 1948; B.S., University of Hawaii, Manoa, Hawaii, 1952; teacher; business executive; member of the Hawaii state house of representatives, 1968-1974; member of the Hawaii state senate, 1974-1982; unsuccessful candidate for the special election caused by the vacancy of United States Representative Cecil Heftel on September 20, 1986; elected as a Republican to the One Hundredth and to the succeeding Congress (January 3, 1987-January 3, 1991); was not a candidate for reelection to the One Hundred Second Congress in 1990, but was an unsuccessful nominee for the United States Senate; unsuccessful candidate for Governor of Hawaii in 1994.

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, 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.

Michael J. Murphy is a Historical Publications Specialist in the Office of the Historian, U.S. House of Representatives. He earned his Ph.D. in U.S. history from Stony Brook University in Stony Brook, New York, in 2013. Before joining the Office of the Historian, he was Visiting Associate Professor at the Joseph S. Murphy Institute for Worker Education and Labor Studies at the City University of New York.

— THE HONORABLE PATRICIA SAIKI OF HAWAII —
A CENTURY OF WOMEN IN CONGRESS

[On September 20, 2018, House Historian Matthew Wasniewski, along with Michael Murphy, interviewed former Congresswoman Patricia Saiki of Hawaii via telephone in the House Recording Studio.]

WASNIEWSKI: We'll start in with a question we've asked a number of our interviewees, which is to tell us a little bit about your background growing up and your parents and their backgrounds.

SAIKI: Yes, the greatest influence on my life has been my parents, both mother and father dedicated second-generation Americans of Japanese ancestry. My grandparents worked in the cane fields, the usual history of Hawaiian politics—the Hawaiian background. We're a mixed group of people from various countries. But anyway, my father was fortunate enough to work for a Big Five company, which is the largest five companies in Hawaii that provided economic stability. The company's name was Amfac, Inc. He was a salesman for that company. My mother was a seamstress. But my father, although a little disappointed that he had three children who were all girls, decided that each of us was going to be "sonny boy." We were going to be able to do anything we wanted no matter what. I mean, just because we were girls was no excuse for not obtaining any career we chose. So he was to me the original feminist, if you can say that.

He encouraged all three of us to participate in sports. My father was a tennis enthusiast, and he was actually a professional in tennis. So he taught each of us how to play tennis, participate in sports, move ahead in leadership, and encouraged us in every way to pursue a college career and become anything we wanted. He was an inspiration. My mother, of course, was a great

support. She backed us up on every decision that we made. So my high school and college careers were pretty standard for a girl who wants to achieve. So that was my background.

I already had a good beginning with the encouragement of my parents, but it was very curious that after I finished college I pursued a career in teaching. I started off teaching physical education and health. I minored in history, so I ended up teaching government and what we called "American Problems." And as I took my role as a teacher in the public school system in Hawaii, I learned that school teachers were very much discriminated against in the sense that they could not make decisions on their own. As school teachers, we were told what to do, when to do it, how to do it.

As an eighth-grade teacher, we were told from the head office that we would have to track our homeroom students. They were 13- and 14-year-olds. Tracking them meant you determined whether they were college material or not so that they can either be encouraged to enter college or go to shop and homemaking. I resented that, and I would not do it. I told the principal, "I am a mother of five children. I don't want anyone else in the school system determining whether each of my five children were capable of attending college, and I don't think any parent would want a person who is a school teacher to make a determination as to what their children are going to end up doing."

This voice against the administration was just the beginning. There were other kinds of conditions that school teachers endured—this is in the 1960s—that were shameful to me. We didn't have any free periods. We had to teach six classes a day, and in between we would be asked to monitor the recess to make sure that the students didn't get into trouble. We had no

teachers' lounge to make phone calls or anything, and we were prohibited from making phone calls from the administrative office.

At one point, my daughter got ill at the elementary school. I wanted to know what her condition was, and the school informed me that she was taken by ambulance to the hospital. I wanted to find out what the situation was. I went down to the office to ask to make a phone call. They told me, "Oh, yes, there's a public phone up on the corner of the street. We don't allow private phone calls to be made in this office." That was to me the absolute end. So I decided that we teachers have got to either get organized or we were going to get trampled on. We would not be educators but to be peons for the department of education.

So I went ahead and—as a Republican now—I organized the first big teachers' union in the state of Hawaii. Because the Hawaii State Teachers Association and the AFT [American Federation of Teachers], which were national organizations, were still not here in Hawaii. I went down to the HGEA, which is the Hawaii Government [Employees] Association's office, talked to Charlie Kendall, who was the president of HGEA, and said, "Hey, school teachers are public employees too. Why can't we have a chapter within your organization and have the support of other government employees to our cause, which is to improve the educational opportunities for our students by giving teachers a say in the way in which they can conduct their classes?"

He thought it was a great idea, so I then immediately went out and organized about 3,000 teachers who were anxious to form an organization. We then got the support of this Government Employees Association. I represented them at the legislature, and we began to ask the kinds of sensitive questions the Department of Education certainly didn't want to hear from any union

group. So that was the beginning of my involvement in politics to some degree.

WASNIEWSKI: Before we get too far afield—we have a lot of questions about your pre-congressional career—we wanted to ask a few more questions about your youth. One, again, that we've asked all of our interviewees—when you were growing up, what were the expectations for you as to what your role in society was going to be as a woman?

SAIKI: Oh, well, we could become either a school teacher, a nurse, a clerk, a typist, whatever is an administrative assistant-type role. This was destined to be our future—not the professions. We were sort of relegated to a second-class citizenship insofar as future professions are concerned. This is back in 1960. That doesn't seem too long ago, but that's the way it was expected of young girls to be able to be successful.

WASNIEWSKI: And it sounds like your father was very enlightened for a man of that era. Did he expect you to go into those fields? Did he push you towards those fields?

SAIKI: Oh, yes. He said, "You can be anything you want. You can pursue any profession you want." Naturally, I lent my talents towards education because I really wanted to be successful in teaching other young people. So teaching was a career for me, not one that was destined for females, but it was a career that I felt where I could make the most impact. But it was a very narrow field that we were expected to look at when we were teenagers.

MURPHY: When you were young, did you have any female role models?

SAIKI: No, not really because there were no female role models at that stage of the game that I could think of. I'm Japanese-American. We are very accustomed

to, shall we say, Asian expectations. Women walk three steps behind a man, you know, that sort of thing? That's a kind of a moral standard that women were expected to adhere to in the orient, but in Japan mostly. It was not expected that a woman would step up and choose a profession that was outside of the usual, so I didn't have many women mentors. As I said, my father was the original feminist.

MURPHY: That's a good way of putting it. So what motivated you to make that step from school teacher—you talked about the personal experience that motivated you into organizing the union in your school. Did that make you think about other ways of pursuing avenues for change like a career in politics?

SAIKI: Oh, yes. See, when I stepped up and formed this teachers' chapter of the Hawaii Government Employees Association, I then became a person to whom the teachers could look up to with suggestions of changes in the system that would help them be better in their profession. I then looked at the way—the only way that we can do this is to change the law.

At that time, the very first constitutional convention that the state was going to hold after statehood—in 1968—they encouraged me to run for that as a delegate to the constitutional convention to see whether we could make some permanent changes in the constitution as to how the educational system in the state were to be set up. I took the challenge and won a seat in the constitutional convention. That was the beginning of my political involvement.

MURPHY: Before this shift into organizing the union and then becoming involved in state politics, did you always have an interest in politics, or was this new to you?

SAIKI: No, not really interested in politics per se. I was always interested in organizing people so that we would have a say. And if that's what you call politics, then that's it. But it was always internal—at my tennis club or my high school class for which I was an officer, that sort of thing. But I assumed leadership positions because I wanted to move our status ahead, but I didn't think of it as a political career until I was faced with having to abide by the rules that were installed on me by an entity over which I had no control. So I felt that the only way to do this is change the control. That's why I ran for the constitutional convention. That same year, the same bunch of teachers encouraged me to run for the state house of representatives and therein began my political career.

WASNIEWSKI: How was it that you became involved with the Hawaii state Republican Party? What calculations factored into your choice of joining the party?

SAIKI: This is the interesting part. The Democratic Party and my Democrat friends of course wanted me to join their effort. My attitude was you're in control, this state needs two party representation. I don't want to be a creature of your bureaucracy. I want to be a loyal opposition. I want to provide a different strain of thought, if you will, and I want to work with you, not against you, but I do want to have independence. And if the Republican Party can give me that independence, I will join the Republican Party instead. So I guess this independent streak came through, and I became a Republican.

WASNIEWSKI: Were you recruited by the Republican Party at all? How did that work?

SAIKI: No, not really. I wasn't recruited by them, although I was influenced by my husband. My husband was a Republican. He was a physician, OB/GYN was his specialty, and he felt the same way I did about independence and being the loyal opposition. He was a watcher of the political movements in our

state and pointed out all of the discrepancies and the changes that needed to make life better for everyone. So he was a great influence on my being a Republican.

WASNIEWSKI: I have to ask because it kind of falls in this time period—did you watch Patsy [Takemoto] Mink's political career evolve during this time? She also wasn't exactly embraced by the Democratic Party in the beginning—although she ran as a Democrat. Were there any lessons [learned] or observations you made about her career?

SAIKI: No, I watched her. Naturally, she was a Member of the House of Representatives. By the way, it's very interesting because she promoted a lot of the concerns that I had providing equal rights for women, and she was a cosponsor of Title IX with my friend, Edith [Starrett] Green. And I watched her career. I found her very interesting. She was independent. She was a good thinker. And so we were in the same mode, shall we say, in that period. This was the period of Bella [Savitsky] Abzug, remember?

WASNIEWSKI: Oh, yes.

SAIKI: The burning of the bras, the whole bit. And at that time, President [Richard Milhous] Nixon was a very forward-thinking person who appointed me to the [President's] Advisory Council on the Status of Women nationally, so I attended these national meetings. We were actually at the base, or the crux, of the Equal Rights Amendment [ERA], which Congress then adopted but had to be ratified by 38 states. We ended up four states short.

But interestingly, Hawaii was the first state to ratify the Equal Rights Amendment, and it happened to be my legislation that was introduced in the [Hawaii] house of representatives—cosponsored by a Democrat in the senate. And we worked very hard, and we got the first constitutional amendment

passed in our state constitution. That was the beginning of my travels along the equal rights path, I guess, because I was then in the [Hawaii] house of representatives. I followed it up by looking at all of the existing state laws which were discriminatory against women and found 28 of them that needed to be amended. They involved everything from allowing women to have credit cards in their own names, to be able to have inheritance of their husband's government pension when the husband died. All of this was discriminatory against women. All of this had to be changed. So of the 28 bills that I introduced, 26 of them were adopted. [The law] even prohibited women who were assaulted with sexual attacks from having legal authority to charge their perpetrator with even a misdemeanor. That had to be changed.

So, much of it was done with that in mind—correcting the inequities that existed in the laws. And it was a fun time. People began to understand. Equal pay for equal work? People never heard about that. Well, I introduced it as part of my package. It was a period when we had much discussion, and it was with the help of the [Citizens] Advisory Council on the State of Women nationally that I got very much aware of the discriminatory legislation that existed in our state laws.

MURPHY: I thought that was interesting, the way that you were so involved in addressing these issues at the state level, but it seems like at first you had to deal with the federal ERA. That was the first item on the agenda in 1972. Did you play a major role in getting the Hawaii legislature to ratify the ERA?

SAIKI: Absolutely. It was my bill. I introduced a bill to ratify our constitution. My cosponsor was a Democrat because Republicans were in the minority. So I corralled a good supporter who happened to be president of the senate, and he was a Democrat. His wife was an avid pro-ERA supporter, so we worked together and got the [state] constitution [amended].

MURPHY: Why do you think you were able to do that relatively quickly in the state of Hawaii?

SAIKI: Oh, it was easy. Basically, all you had to do was approach all the people who voted—the legislators—by making it personal. In other words, if you had a daughter who was out working as hard as a man for the same job, do you want your daughter to get the same pay or not? And if the answer is, "Yes, I want that," I said, "Then vote for this." "Do you feel that your wife, who pays the bills anyway, should have a credit card in her own name rather than have to depend on putting her husband's name on the card?" Their answer is, "Oh, of course." "Well, then sign here." And if you took it on a personal basis and sold each one of these, shall we say, discriminatory laws which could be corrected by the Equal Rights Amendment on a blanket basis and then reduced to state legislation, you could sell it very easily. And that's what happened here in Hawaii. That's how we sold the ERA for passage.

And then when I introduced my 28 bills, which were also supported by Democrats, it was a bipartisan effort—not that you find so much of that today. In those days we could do this because we knew that there was a bigger mission than personal partisan issues. So it was a good period to live in, a good time for legislation to be adopted that would affect everyone.

WASNIEWSKI: Remarkably productive, too, considering you were in the minority.

SAIKI: At the same time this was a very interesting thing. See, my husband was very politically motivated and politically interested. Although he had his own profession, he was working with women most of the time—I always told him he paid more attention to his women. But nevertheless, he was chief of staff at Kapiolani Hospital, which is a women's hospital here in Hawaii. He came home one day and he told me, "Do you know that if a woman were raped

she was taken to the morgue to be examined by the doctor at the morgue?" I said, "Why? Why can't she go to the Kapiolani Hospital?" He said, "The reason is the police work with the morgue, and the physicians there determine whether she was raped because then that's a criminal offense." He said, "That is a terrible thing for a woman to go through, not to have the sympathy and the conditions which would help her to adjust this traumatic event." And I said, "Absolutely." So he said, "I've gotten together with the president of the Kapiolani Hospital." They came together and developed what they called the Sex Abuse Center. This would be a center where women who were abused—either physically, mentally—or raped, etc., could go to this center and receive the kind of attention that they so deserved and needed. He said, "We formed this organization called the Sex Abuse Center, but what we need now is money. We need support. We need to make it function." He told me, "That's your job. See what you can do."

So I introduced legislation and worked with my fellow legislators asking them the same question. "If it were your wife, your daughter, your aunt, your sister who was raped, do you want that person to be taken to the morgue to be examined—not to a center in a hospital which is a safe and sympathetic place?" And their answer was always, "Oh, of course." "Then sign here. We'll provide the money in the budget." So that was the easiest thing to create. We included the funding then in the budget and the center was created. And today it is very, very successful. They've expanded to all the neighbor islands, and they've taken it further to the anticipation for possible sex abuse among young teenagers. It has caught hold and has moved into a very large entity which helps women.

WASNIEWSKI: All these things that you're listing are remarkable, I think, for a lot of people who would listen to this transcript or read the transcript. They'd have a hard time believing this was only the 1970s that all this was happening.

SAIKI: Yes, just in 1973. This is when it's all happening. It's amazing, but a lot of this was oversight—in the sense of men being involved. They never really looked at this seriously. And the oriental culture here is, you know, "Caution, caution, caution. Let's not move too fast." But when you present instances or examples where they are personally involved one way or another, then the whole attitude changes. And in politics, that's what it is, isn't it? It's personal. You can take any issue, but it doesn't matter unless it affects you in some way or another. I always took that as a way to reach people. I don't care whether they're Republican or Democrat or independent. It takes the issue and the persons involved, and you can make changes if you have a positive way of handling any serious question.

WASNIEWSKI: That sounds like an important lesson from how you've become an effective legislator. We want to move on and talk about your House election and career, but just one closing question about your state legislative experience. Were there any other lessons that you learned along the way that you took and were able to apply to your experience in the U.S. House?

SAIKI: If I can digress a little, my experience at the house level and the senate level [in Hawaii] were quite extensive because I went into all kinds of areas of concern, especially in the area with Patsy Mink and Title IX. Here is Patsy Mink at the national level passing Title IX, which was well deserved. But it makes no difference whether you pass Title IX at the federal level if you don't implement it at the state level, right?

WASNIEWSKI: Sure.

SAIKI: So I then took the importance of the measure and applied it to the local situation. [At the University of] Hawaii at that point, we had, naturally, a men's athletic division, and under the men's athletic division was a subdivision for women athletics, but nothing set aside separately—either financially or physically. So then I went ahead and accosted, shall we say, the University of Hawaii's athletic program, and this was quite a test because they were very well entrenched. The football teams and the baseball teams were well entrenched, and they had no intention of sharing their financial resources with women. But under Title IX they were mandated to do so.

So I went ahead and moved with the committee on higher education—and remember now, I'm still a member of the minority, but I had a very sympathetic chairman who understood what I was trying to do. He joined in with me and we then took the university to task on this. To make a long story short, we created the first women's athletic program as a separate entity—equal to the men's athletic program. The women would have the same opportunities as the men did insofar as facilities, shower rooms, access to the playing fields, etc. We then pursued the finances with the committee on ways and means, and we attached to the state budget the monies that would be spent in the women's division.

We then appointed our first director of women's athletics—her name was Donnis Thompson. She was installed as the first head of the women's athletic division. So it was really progress as far as we were concerned. Since then, of course, the program has bloomed and our volleyball team has become very famous, and we have won many national titles. Now women are expected to be equal partners in the athletic world. So I take great pride in my early efforts to establish them as an entity that was of equal importance.

WASNIEWSKI: You did so much and had such an effective career as a state legislator. It's a good segue to ask what led you in 1986 to run for a U.S. House seat?

SAIKI: Oh, yes. Remember now, in between I've had five children.

WASNIEWSKI: You were busy.

SAIKI: Yes, through all this I had a very supportive husband and five children who were growing up. I had to pay attention to their careers, make sure that they were developing as I would want them to. And they all went to public schools. Although they had opportunities to go to private schools, I felt that the public school system is going to treat them well because we've made some changes now, and things are going to improve. So I put my money where my mouth is and got my children to attend all public schools. Well, it ended up very well. I have five children—I have two physicians from that group. The first two are physicians. The third one is a veterinarian. I've got two others who are in IT [information technology]. So they've selected their own careers, and they've moved ahead. I'm very proud. I did not neglect them for political gain or anything like that.

The 1986 situation was something that fell into my lap. Cec [Cecil Landau] Heftel, who was a Member of the [U.S.] House of Representatives, decided to resign his seat and run for the governor of the state of Hawaii—opened up his seat, creating a special election. At which point then, all of my supporters and colleagues wanted me to take a chance on running for that position, which I did. Fortunately, I won. The Democrats had a problem with the primary and I survived, of course, to the special election because I had no opponent. Then in the general election, I beat the Democrat candidate, and I began my congressional career. Not easy.

WASNIEWSKI: No. Especially the special election—can you describe how that was different from a campaign that's during the regular election cycle?

SAIKI: In a special election in our state, the competition is all on the Democrat side because they're in the majority. They're going to have candidates running against each other in the primary. On the Republican side, I didn't have any competition at all because nobody wanted to take me on in the primary. So I floated through the special election rather easily whereas the Democrats had a big battle. A fellow by the name of Neil Abercrombie won the primary. He went to Washington and finished Cec Heftel's two months in his term. Mufi Hannemann was the winner of the Democrat primary, and I ran against him in the general election. Fortunately, I won. Can I just interject another thing though?

WASNIEWSKI: Absolutely.

SAIKI: Besides participating in all the state work insofar as equal rights for women and creating opportunities for women, I also had the very distinct pleasure in 1972 of being selected to represent the American Women for International Understanding to visit China, along with 17 others from across the country. We were invited by the China Friendship Association, and we visited seven cities from what was Canton, Guangzhou, to Shanghai, Nanking, Xi'an, Beijing—all over. We were there to, I think, be the forefront of an insight into American and Chinese relationships among women to understand how women were developing in China.

It was a real surprise because when we went to China, then we found that women were being educated—of course not in the way that you and I would want to prescribe. But women or girls were taken from nursery school to the age of 18 and provided with an education. They all had to learn another

language. Most of them selected English. Women in general there all wore the Mao jacket because they didn't have a choice. They didn't have the shops and the opportunities to select what they wanted to wear. And of all things, we knew before going there that they were prohibited from wearing any facial makeup.

So before we left for China, we contacted these great cosmetic firms such as Revlon and Max Factor. We asked them to provide us with little kits with makeup—rouge, lipsticks, eye shadow, the whole bit. We had little kits with us, and as we went through and visited with these Chinese women, we sneaked them under the eyes of all their security people and gave them these little packets for them to use at home. And of course they were delighted. They couldn't believe that they were getting makeup from America. And they must have had a ball because they reported back to us with little stains of lipstick. And the men, of course, were confused about where they were getting all this stuff, but that was our way of having international relationships with other women from other countries.

But it was also enlightening because in our travels, we couldn't eat fresh vegetables because we didn't know how they were grown. We couldn't drink water because we didn't know how good it was, so we drank lots of juices and so forth. But we ended up in Beijing as guests of George H. W. [Herbert Walker] Bush and Barbara Bush—he was then a special envoy from the United States to China. He was then later elected as President of the United States, but they entertained us for dinner and provided us with fresh vegetables in a salad, and we could drink water. My gosh, for us it was the biggest treat you ever saw, and we were just so grateful for them. But it was an adventure, my dear, that I wanted to share with you that to me was eye-opening because then we saw how women were being treated in China. Of

course, they showed us the good things about how women were being treated. And I don't know whether the restrictive educational opportunities for young people were acceptable, but nevertheless the opportunities were there.

WASNIEWSKI: Your story sounds a lot like some of the Members we've talked to. We ask about the importance of CODELs [congressional delegations] and going overseas to see other countries.

SAIKI: One more thing. This is before Chairman Mao [Zedong] died, so his wife [Jiang Qing], the First Lady, entertained us for dinner at the Great Hall [of the People] of China. That was a real treat because I don't think many people have been treated by Chairman Mao's wife to dinner at the Great Hall of China.

MURPHY: Not many Americans.

SAIKI: There were 17 women from all over the country, and I happened to be the only state legislator. All the rest were bank presidents or involved in government or in very high positions in business. It was an awesome group of 17 women with whom I kept in touch for a long time.

MURPHY: That's a great story. I really like the way that informed your perspective on women in the United States as well. When you ran for the U.S. House, you had to run in a very different era. This was after you had accrued a lot of experience in the state legislature. You were running in a campaign in 1986 against your opponent, Mufi Hannemann. Was there a key moment or turning point you remember from your campaign? What was that campaign like?

SAIKI: The campaign was tough, naturally, because there was no Republican elected to the Congress [from Hawaii] before me. I was the very first Republican ever elected to the Congress since statehood. And I was only the second woman—I was only the second [woman] to be elected since statehood. Patsy Mink was the first one. But I was the first Republican.

MURPHY: What was more difficult in your campaign? As you approached voters, was it more difficult being a woman or being a Republican in the state of Hawaii?

SAIKI: Naturally, it was the fact of my record as supporting women was a big, big plus for me. I think the Republicans understood my sense of independence, and I won that election quite handily and became one of only 23 women at the time out of 435 in the U.S. House. Only 23 women were Members in 1987. So you see it was very important for especially Hawaii to make a choice. I did get elected. It was a tough race, but I made it. Of course, I ran—the second term was also challenging, but I won that one too.

I sat on the committees of Banking, [Finance] and Urban Affairs; Merchant Marine [and Fisheries]; and [the Permanent Select Committee on] Aging because I was curious about how senior citizens were being treated—especially senior citizens aging in womanhood—so it opened up a whole new area of concern.

The main thing that I did that I am so proud about—one of the very first things I did when I got elected was I asked Newt [Newton Leroy] Gingrich, who was then the Minority Leader, that I would like to have a private caucus of all of my fellow Republicans because I want to talk to them about something very, very important.[1] And he was curious enough. He said, "Okay, we'll do that. We'll have a special caucus." So I addressed this group, and I said, "Put on your seatbelts, gang, because I'm going to take you for a

rough ride, and I hope at the end of this you're going to feel so guilty that you're going to support what I'm going to recommend." Then I brought up the reparations act, the internment act of the Americans for the AJAs, Americans of Japanese ancestry.[2] That took place, and the fact is that there were efforts by the Democrats, especially in the Senate, to pass a bill called the reparations act to not only provide some kind of compensation for those who were interned and also an apology from the United States. I told my fellow colleagues in the House of Representatives to imagine themselves as American citizens, uprooted in their homes, taken with their families to a foreign state—a different state like Topaz, Utah—and installed there in a horse barn to survive while they had to pay the penalty for what happened in World War II. I gave them all of the details of what it was like because I had an uncle and his family treated this way. Now, Californians were interned in much more numbers than in Hawaii, but the Hawaii people that I knew of were treated in the very worst way that could possibly happen to anybody. And they had no recourse. There was no legal recourse to this. They were taken by families and shipped out, and all of their belongings were taken—all of their holdings, all their land, all their investments were taken from them.

So everybody sat there rather stunned. I learned quickly that one of the reasons why the reparations act could not pass is because the Republicans were against it. And I said, "I don't think you're against it. I think that maybe you don't understand the situation. Now that I'm providing you this information, I hope you will open your eyes and your hearts to see that this is not the United States. It's not our government. It's not like us to violate the Constitution, violate the rights of our people, and intern them under horrible conditions." This was done under President [Franklin Delano] Roosevelt. So after thinking this over—and I knew that the act would come up again. It was called the Civil Liberties Act in 1987. It finally came up, and this time

we had enough Republican votes to pass it. Now, it's interesting because the people in the White House understood the delicacy of this act, the sensitivity of this act, the history of this act, and what it has done to the reputation of the United States. This act would help to make things more palatable.

So they convinced the President to sign it. At one point he thought he would make it become law without his signature. Of course, I stuck my nose in there and added my support. Sure enough, he changed his mind and signed the bill, including an apology. It allowed for reparations of $20,000 per person including every child. Now we may laugh about it—it's a small amount of money—but nevertheless it was the intent with the apology.

So everywhere you look now today—whether it's at the Smithsonian or whether it's in a museum in Japan or a museum here in Hawaii—anywhere you see a picture of the Civil Liberties Protection Act being signed by President [Ronald] Reagan, you'll find me standing right next to him. The reason is his staff insisted that I be right there next to the President because they knew the history of this. That's the one thing that I am so proud about, that I had something to do with it and make things at least—not equal, but acceptable under the circumstances. That's one of the things that I'm very, very proud of.

WASNIEWSKI: Absolutely. Just a follow-up question on that: were you asked to come speak to the President, or did you just, on your own accord, go to speak to him about the importance of the bill? How did that work?

SAIKI: Yes, the staff called me and said, "The President is waffling as to whether he should let this become an act without his signature because he doesn't like the sense of the apology." I said, "The apology goes with the whole kit and caboodle. I think the Americans of Japanese ancestry, who were taken in this

illegal act, deserve an apology." So they asked me to say a few words, which I did. I don't know whether it was a turning point or not. I don't want to take credit for it, but the staff felt that it was helpful.

WASNIEWSKI: You've actually jumped to a topic that we have a couple of other questions about. You mentioned your uncle and his family being interned—or at least your uncle being interned.

SAIKI: No, the whole family. In fact, my cousin, who still is alive today, I still call him Topaz. His name is not Shigeto Narikawa. His name is Topaz Narikawa.

WASNIEWSKI: Can you just explain a little bit for people who aren't familiar with internment? In California and the West Coast it was wholesale internment if you were Japanese-American. Why was Hawaii different? Why didn't you go through that experience as well?

SAIKI: Well, I figured we were available. In Hawaii, the ones who were early victims were those who taught in Japanese language schools, those who were ministers in churches. These were logical people that would be taken.

Hawaii is the bridge between Japan and the states as an entity, but it's a logical place—it's easy, the Democrats can move fast. Because they're in the majority, they can do whatever they want. With the concurrence of the President of the United States, the local forces moved in quickly and took these people. Fortunately, in the case of my uncle, he knew what was to be expected, so he gave my father the rights to his holdings. The family was taken and moved to Topaz, Utah, where they spent the rest of the internment years. But when he came back, my father then restored his access to all of his businesses. But not too many people had enough foresight to do that.

WASNIEWSKI: And your immediate family wasn't interned, but did you experience any kind of discrimination during the war? How was the fact of internment communicated to the Japanese-American community in Hawaii? How did you learn about it?

SAIKI: We were very resentful because these are Americans. These are people that we know, we live with, they're related to us, and they were summarily removed without any legal proceedings, nothing. Just picked up and taken with no warning whatsoever. It was naturally a very resentful period for those of us who were left behind.

WASNIEWSKI: Absolutely.

SAIKI: It was a very tough time. But anyway, I had my day before my Members of Congress who were Republicans. I felt very good about sharing with them these horror stories—if you want to call it that—and asked them to correct an inequity. That's exactly what it was, an inequity. It's a wrongness, it's a violation of our laws, and that they were participating in it because they would not make any effort to correct it. I said, "This is the guilt that I want you to live with." Which many of them did, and I think it affected their thinking to some extent. It took 10 years for this reparations act to pass. Ten years.

WASNIEWSKI: It's a long time.

SAIKI: Yes, and it was in the House of Representatives, among the Republicans that were holding it up.

MURPHY: That was a significant legislative achievement. And you were there for the latter half of those years of struggle towards that achievement. When you arrived in the House, you mentioned earlier that you were one of 23 women

serving then. Did you find that the women Members gravitated towards each other because there were so few of them?

SAIKI: Oh, yes. We had meetings—the Women's Caucus. We met with each other, we were Democrats and Republicans, and we worked together for the good of the effort. There's no question about it. We didn't care what political affiliations we had, we were women who were fighting for our own rights. And so people like Barb [Barbara Bailey] Kennelly—many Democrat women. And those of us who were there, we laid aside our concerns for our party status and worked toward a common goal and that was to make things better, more equal, more legally viable for women. It's a wonderful period to have lived through and to have been a participant of.

MURPHY: So you worked across party lines in the Women's Caucus and there were other Republican women at the time that were elected—and one in particular who was elected at the same time as you, Connie [Constance A.] Morella. Did a special bond emerge between you two because you came into the House at the same time?

SAIKI: Oh, yes, Connie Morella was a very, very close friend. Marge [Margaret Scafati] Roukema of New Jersey, Barbara [Farrell] Vucanovich of Nevada. Olympia [Jean] Snowe was a special person with me, from Maine. Helen [Delich] Bentley, of course, of Maryland, and Lynn [Morley] Martin. She ended up being Secretary of Labor. We were all very close at that time together. We worked together with the Democrat women. I continued the relationship as I moved onto the SBA [Small Business Administration] later.

WASNIEWSKI: Outside of the Congresswomen's Caucus, did you socialize with that group of women a lot?

SAIKI: Oh, yes. It was very informal and very, shall we say, not only friendly, but we were sort of linked together with a common cause. And there were so few of us anyway, only 23 of us.

WASNIEWSKI: How would you describe the atmosphere of the House towards women when you were elected? Was it welcoming? Were there obstacles? Were there parts of the institution—

SAIKI: We were successfully ignored because there were only 23 of us. So the men could run things the way they wanted to. They didn't feel that we were any threat or anything. They welcomed our attention. They wanted to have us participate. No question about it. They didn't feel threatened at all, so it was very friendly. It's just that we wanted them to take our concerns seriously, which they did. So we moved ahead. They're political animals too. They know that half of their constituency is women and they couldn't very well take on a gender cause and win.

WASNIEWSKI: Did you have any Members—either male or female—that served as mentors for you when you arrived in the House?

SAIKI: Yes, I had people like Marge Roukema. She and Barbara Vucanovich, they were very special. They helped me through the adjustment period, taking a very personal interest. Because I'm from Hawaii, they consider that a foreign land practically in the middle of the Pacific, who knows about them, you know? They live in hula skirts. So they felt that if they could be of any help, they offered their services, which I took advantage of because they were such friendly people. I lost touch with them, but for years we did communicate.

WASNIEWSKI: What kind of advice did they offer you as a new Member of Congress?

SAIKI: Basically, their advice was, "Hey, we go along to get along. We are going to make our voices heard, but it's going to be as a group. We don't expect anybody to stand up and become the victim of any of this. We're going to work together." That was a very good and wise position to take for us. And I think it proved very successful in the end.

WASNIEWSKI: Yes, that's good advice. Before we get too far away from it I just wanted to ask, you were the first Republican woman Representative elected from Hawaii, but there had been a woman Delegate from Hawaii in the early 1950s, Mary [Elizabeth Pruett] Farrington. Did you ever cross paths with her in state politics?

SAIKI: No, she was gone by the time I got into politics.

WASNIEWSKI: Okay.

SAIKI: That was before statehood.

MURPHY: What about the Hawaii delegation during the time that you were in the U.S. Congress? Did you meet regularly with them?

SAIKI: Not too regularly. We met when we had a common interest. Dan [Daniel Ken] Inouye was in the Senate at the time. Dan was like a fulcrum. He was at the center of things, and we worked together very well. He helped me out on many of the issues, including the internment thing. We worked together on that because he knew the reasons why the doggone bill wouldn't pass. And he knew that I was a Republican voice in the Republican caucus that was holding it up. So we worked together on that. It was a very good relationship.

MURPHY: You were the only Republican in the entire delegation at the time.

SAIKI: That's right.

MURPHY: Did that hinder your work?

SAIKI: That's the only time.

MURPHY: Did that serve as an obstacle in trying to put into action your agenda?

SAIKI: Oh, no.

MURPHY: Did you not have a problem with the delegation or anything?

SAIKI: No, not at all. In fact, it was an asset because it was a voice in the other camp that they never had before. So it was a very successful time. It was also very interesting. For instance, we had an issue as a member of the Merchant Marine and Fisheries Committee. There was a real problem here in Hawaii, where tuna was being abused as a fish. Now, we had what was called the Magnuson Act, which still exists today.[3] The Magnuson Act allowed for the supervision of all fish that live in the ocean—all except tuna. And the reason why tuna was not included is because of the strength of the tuna lobby which was located in the area of Florida. They were a very substantial lobby. They wanted to control the movements of tuna, which is of course a transient kind of fish. They move everywhere.

And so the Hawaii fishing industry was very, very concerned because tuna was being abused in the sense that there was no control. There was no way of helping the fish to survive without any conditions being put on it. They wanted the tuna to be included in the Magnuson Act. Well, they never could pass it out of the House of Representatives. This is another one that Dan Inouye over in the Senate wanted to see adopted. So this is a real big issue. In Hawaii, tuna is very, very important—especially at New Year's time—to the Japanese-American community. Sashimi, we call it. And sashimi is popular

among all of the races, but it's Japanese-American based. There was real concern about it.

So Dan Inouye called me up on this issue too, and I got together with the chairman of the Committee on Merchant Marine and Fisheries who happened to be sympathetic. "Why not include tuna? Sure, the lobbyists may be strong, but I don't see that they have to have such a stronghold over one fish species." So the chairman of the Committee on Merchant Marine and I got together, and we adopted some legislative techniques where we could then pass it through the committee. I think he asked me to then go before the Rules Committee of the House to have it adopted by [unanimous] consent. By [unanimous] consent means there's no discussion of it on the floor, and you vote 'aye' or 'no' on the bill. And the committee reviewed the necessity of tuna being included, and they said, "Why not?" Why do we have to have a discussion on this? It's the only fish species that is being excluded from supervision. Go ahead, we will support you."

I think mainly though, to tell you the truth, maybe it was because I was a freshman at that time, and they figured I didn't know much about anything, and they thought it was a very innocent effort that had merit, so they passed it. So we got it on the floor of the House of Representatives on a voice vote. Of course, I did my lobbying. I drafted up all kinds of flyers and had my supporters on the two doors that open to the House of Representatives. We used the effort of preservation of the culture of the fish and we sold it to most of the Members who voted 'aye.'

We finally got the bill passed, but not before the lobbyists made an effort. They came down the hallway—*clunk*, *clunk*, *clunk*—in their Gucci shoes, their Gucci handbags, their Gucci jackets. They came down to my office and said, "Who do you think you are, freshman Congressman from Hawaii, that

you're going to pass this sort of thing?" I said, "I'm afraid you can't come in because you don't have an appointment. Maybe you can make an appointment next week." Which was rather audacious of me, but nevertheless somebody had to do something. So I kicked them out of the office practically and picked up the phone and called Dan Inouye and said, "Watch out, they're on their way to your office now with their Gucci shoes and their Gucci bags, and they're going to try to lobby you." And Dan said, "Okay, I'll be ready." So we had a little incident with the lobbyists. Nevertheless, we beat them. And that saved our tuna industry here in Hawaii, and today people can still enjoy sashimi. And still today I'm saluted by the fishing industry here in Hawaii for that little piece of legislation.

WASNIEWSKI: That's a great story about—

SAIKI: It's a great story.

WASNIEWSKI: —a delegation working together. That he would come to you, a Republican freshman, to go convince a Democratic chair of Merchant Marine and Fisheries, and then the Rules Committee. That's a great story.

SAIKI: Like I said, sometimes there's an advantage to being fresh behind the ears and looking very innocent, being a freshman. I guess people are not afraid of you. You must have something to say.

WASNIEWSKI: Absolutely.

SAIKI: I got away with it.

WASNIEWSKI: One question—and it's just about the mechanics of your job at that point—what was it like for you to represent a district that was so far from

Washington? How often did you make it back to your district, and how did you balance those two different worlds, DC and Hawaii?

SAIKI: Oh, I'm telling you, my second home was in Chicago. I came home every three weeks. Every time there was a recess, a short break, I was on an airplane. Fortunately, my husband enjoyed flying, so he came with me, but we came back and forth. I had my home here in Hawaii. My parents moved out from Hilo to stay in my home. The kids were all grown up by this time. They were in college.

So every three weeks I would fly home. I had a local office which was manned by extremely loyal people who took my efforts in Hawaii and managed to give it the attention necessary. But in those days we had to stop in Chicago, and then I would land in Washington, DC. So like I said, Chicago seemed like my second home. Every three weeks for all those years. It was worth it though because I'd come home, and I'd have meetings with people, and I'd assure them of what is going on and bring them up to date with what is pending and so forth. And it provided my link to Hawaii and always be aware of the issues that are pending.

Because there's another thing that came up—and maybe I'm rambling here—but after my period with the Congress then I think you know that I was asked to run for the United States Senate. I had won two elections of the House of Representatives. I had a nice safe seat, so to speak. Even as a Republican, my record proved very helpful and I don't think it was going to be too much of a problem to win a third term. But then Senator [Spark Masayuki] Matsunaga died. He was the alter ego to Senator Inouye, and he happened to die in April.

And so the state of Hawaii's Governor at the time, [John] Waihee, named Daniel [Kahikina] Akaka, who was a Member of the House, my colleague in the House, to become United States Senator. Well, the troops back home and my friends, my loyalists, my loyal supporters, including President H.W. Bush—he called me into the Oval Office and asked me to run for the U.S. Senate, that I was a viable candidate. This was in May and the election is in November. I said, "It's a real tough choice because it's going to be a tough campaign. I'm going to need lots of money, I'm going to need lots of help, but the fact of the matter is if I can try to be an effective voice as one out of 435, look at what I can do for my state as one of 100." And political efforts or being in politics is not my essence in life. In other words, I was not intending to stay in politics and be a state or congressional candidate forever. I'm going to do what I have to do and get the heck out when I've done my job.

So with my husband's encouragement and my children and everybody, I decided, "Okay, it might be something that's worthwhile, we'll give it a try. Win-win, lose-lose, you know? Go for it." At the same time, when the President called me into the Oval Office and asked me to run I said, "Well, Mr. President, I'm going to need help. You're going to have to help me if I'm going to win this one." He said, "Of course, what can we do?" I said, "The first thing you can do, Mr. President, is stop the bombing of Kaho'olawe." He said, "Kaho what?" I said, "That's a little island in the Pacific right next to the island of Maui that is being used by the RIMPAC [Rim of the Pacific] exercises to bomb the heck out of the island for trial, for practice. Every time they use bombs on that island the windows on Lahaina, which is on Maui right next door, rattle. One of these days one of those bombs is going to land on Maui, and it's going to affect the population of the whole island. Now, that cannot continue, and it has been a sore spot for the Hawaiian

community because it is demolishing and negatively impacting one of their islands." He said, "Okay." He turned to [John H.] Sununu, who was chief of staff, and he said, "Get the spelling of this island properly and see what you can do."[4]

It's interesting too because the Democrats had for years and years and years tried to stop the bombing of Kaho'olawe, but they didn't do their homework. The island was declared as a possible bombing site by presidential [executive] order. So all that had to happen was for another President to come along and negate that order and they could stop the bombing, but they didn't do that. Instead they were trying to fight it legislatively, and they couldn't for years and years. So when I went in to see the President and talk with Sununu, they agreed. They checked it out and they said, "Yes, she's absolutely right. We will take a look."

Then the President said, "But then they need that island to practice their bombing." I said, "Well, sure, but isn't there another island they can bomb that's not so close to Hawaii?" I said, "That's your problem, Mr. President. You're going to have to find something else if that's what is necessary in the RIMPAC exercises." So it took a couple of months, but they did their homework—as I had suggested—and rescinded the presidential order and stopped the bombing of Kaho'olawe. To me that was worth the whole election.

It's interesting because my Democrat friends naturally are not going to give me credit or give that President credit—President Bush—because he's a Republican. But President Bush did get some publicity from the local papers when he stopped the bombing, and I got some credit too with cartoons that were proffered by interested independent cartoonists that showed me standing on the island of Kaho'olawe with an airplane overhead with

President Bush in it to stop the bombing of Kaho'olawe. So that to me was worth the whole effort.

WASNIEWSKI: That's a great story too.

SAIKI: Yes, it is a great story, isn't it? It's a great story and, like I said, I don't get much credit for it because in this state when you're in the minority you don't get credit. But the reporters did not care. The reporters wrote all these articles and called it like it was. So I've got my picture on the front page of the paper.

WASNIEWSKI: We've skipped ahead a little bit, but because you raised that campaign I just want to ask a follow-up question or two. One of them is, Daniel Akaka was a very popular person on the island—

SAIKI: Oh, yes, he's a royal Hawaiian.

WASNIEWSKI: Were there any memories that stood out for you about that campaign as a turning point, or was gender a role in that campaign?

SAIKI: No, it was muscle. It was Democratic Party muscle. They joined hands. They knew they had to keep that U.S. Senate seat. They had five months. They had all the money they needed from the lobbying groups and so forth and the unions, and they joined together and pushed it through. It was a tough race in the sense that a Republican under those circumstances really had no chance, to tell you the truth. I gave him a race though. I mean he did win by only nine percent. It was a race. It was tough, but I lost that one. And Dan Inouye is a nice guy. He just recently died, but he was a nice fellow. He always meant well. Never had any evil word to say about anybody. But neither did he do anything. Because he was a Hawaiian, and so he had the support of the Democratic Party and the machine that can elect you in this state.

Let me put it another way. At the same time that this was going on, President Bush did agree and did comply with my wishes. He came to Honolulu and he held a fundraiser for me. Now, Presidents just don't come into states and do fundraisers. They've got to have a reason. So I said, "Mr. President, I have a perfect reason for you to come to Hawaii because there is a void here in leadership in the Pacific region." He said, "Oh, really?" I said, "Yes, you have many leaders of the Pacific islands here, which includes everyone from Guam to the Marianas to Tonga to all these other small island nations. They have leaders and they want to get together and protect the region, and they want a voice from the United States or a leader to pull them all together. And, Mr. President, if you were to call a meeting of all of these Pacific island states, I can ask the East-West Center"—of which I am a member of the board anyway, and that's another story I want to share. With the assistance of Charles Morrison, who was the president of the East-West Center, they did get together and got about 11 Pacific nations to meet at the East-West Center with President Bush declaring the organization as valid and that the United States will be at the core of this organization to protect the region and develop economic progress.

It was a really tremendous effort that was launched by President Bush which continues today. It's called the United States-Pacific Island Nations Joint Commercial Commission. That's the name of it, and it still exists till today, but finally the United States has a footprint in the Pacific region, especially as far as economics are concerned. I think it's the beginning of a good relationship among those 11 nations. It has expanded by numbers, but nevertheless it was the beginning of a move that needed to come. The United States had to develop leadership in this region which is of course critical for the existence of the world, to tell you the truth—where all the action is now with North Korea and South Korea and Japan and all of the other nations.

This group meets annually today and this was the beginning of it, when he came over to campaign for me for the United States Senate.

Now, the night of the fundraiser I couldn't be here. I was still in Washington. The reason is the big federal budget was up for a vote, and I couldn't miss that. Sadly, the budget presented had to be adjusted with President Bush's sense of, shall we say, hesitancy. Remember at that time he had made the announcement, "Read my lips: no new taxes." But we were in such a great deficit position in the United States, so serious that if he had not allowed for the tax increases in that budget we would have been in a very serious situation. So he had to. As a responsible leader of the United States he had to change and take back that, "Read my lips: no new taxes." And I swear till today that he lost the election because of that. Now, that's my personal opinion, but some will agree that is the cause of one of the downfalls of his campaign. And that happened to some degree while he was doing a fundraiser in Hawaii for me, and I was in Washington voting against the bill.

It brings back memories that are sometimes very sad, but nevertheless, so went the race. I lost that one to Dan Akaka and in a way it's okay. Dan Akaka was a loyal Hawaiian Democrat. And I came home then. I thought I'll take a little break. No sooner am I cooking breakfast and the phone rings. My daughter answers the phone. She says, "Mom, the President wants to talk to you." I said, "Okay, what president is that?" She goes back to the phone, comes back and says, "The President of the United States wants to talk to you." I said, "Oh, my God." It was the President and he wanted me to come back to Washington. He said, "No, you've got to come back to Washington, and you can have a choice of whatever position you would like. I want you in my administration." This is prior to his departure. I said, "That's fine." So he listed for me the choices I had, and one of them was the administrator of the

United States Small Business Administration. Well, 95 percent of the businesses in Hawaii are small businesses. So rather than Secretary of Labor or any of these other high-flown cabinet positions, I felt that being head of the Small Business Administration would do the most for my state. I said, "Okay, I'll do that one." So back we went to Washington and that's how I became head of the Small Business Administration. Now isn't that a story?

WASNIEWSKI: Yes.

SAIKI: When I look back on it, strange things happen sometimes under strange circumstances, and some of them not so favorable, but it turns out pretty well.

WASNIEWSKI: Yes, it's a command performance when the President calls.

SAIKI: Yes.

WASNIEWSKI: We just wanted to back up a little bit and touch on a few things here as we're looking through our question list, to get a little bit more of your House story. So Mike has some committee questions he's going to lead in on.

MURPHY: I was interested in how you received your assignments on the Merchant Marine and Fisheries and Banking, Finance and Urban Affairs Committees. Were these your top choices when you arrived in the House?

SAIKI: I wanted to be on the Banking, Finance and Urban Affairs Committee because that's where—you follow the money and that's where big decisions are made. And at that time, we had problems with the federal budget. I don't know whether you recall this, but the Gramm–Rudman Act was front and center for discussion because that was the only way we could save this country from total disaster.[5] So we then moved in the area of sequester to

hold back the spending that we had in our country. But nevertheless, all of this was boiling, and so when it came to selecting the committees, I said, "I want to be on the Committee on Banking, Finance and Urban Affairs." And the subcommittees that go with it. But also, I wanted the appointment to the Committee on Merchant Marine and Fisheries because I'm in the middle of the Pacific. Heaven knows what happens out here in the Pacific is critical to my state. So I got that as another assignment, and that's how I made those selections, purely for the purpose of representing my state and for what I looked at was the future of the country.

MURPHY: When you joined that committee, the Merchant Marine and Fisheries Committee, in 1987 there were two other Republican women on the committee, Helen Bentley and Claudine Schneider. What were your impressions of—

SAIKI: Yes, I remember Claudine and Helen.

MURPHY: Did you work closely with them?

SAIKI: Oh, yes, of course. Claudine, I think, ran for the Senate after that and unfortunately lost [in 1990]. We were very close, no question. So I had a core group of Republicans supporting me on the tuna bill, for instance.

WASNIEWSKI: What are your memories of Helen Bentley? She was one of the people that we had a chance to interview a few years back. She had a lot of experience with merchant marine issues.

SAIKI: Yes. She was a steady, solid supporter of monitoring the activities of the species in the ocean, and she really was dedicated to it, no question about it. And she was very knowledgeable, so it was very interesting to work with her.

Helen was an outstanding person, a great personality, and I remember her and Claudine very clearly. They're favorites of mine.

WASNIEWSKI: A lot of the Congresswomen we've talked to, when they talk about committee work a lot of them have said how important it was for them to really do their homework. They felt like they came to committees very prepared.

SAIKI: Oh, yes, you better be.

WASNIEWSKI: And almost that they had to work harder than the men to prove themselves.

SAIKI: Oh, absolutely.

WASNIEWSKI: I'm wondering if you had the same impression.

SAIKI: Absolutely. You better do your homework and you'd better know the answers to all the questions that might be asked. Not the ones that are asked, but also the ones that might be asked because you are expected to be very knowledgeable. People expect more from women than men. And I think that's true even till today. But in the Congress especially, I mean, God, if you didn't do your homework, you're not going to get anywhere. There's no question about that.

MURPHY: Were there other issues that were you were able to work on through this committee for your district and for your larger legislative agenda besides the tuna issue you mentioned? Was there authorization to add land to a national wildlife refuge, for example?

SAIKI: No, I had specific legislation for saving some parks here in Hawaii, but that didn't require so much legislative input as professional support at the local

level. But as far as legislation is concerned, the critical one for me was the tuna bill.

MURPHY: How important do you think it was to have a woman's perspective on these two major committees that you served on? They were historically dominated by men, so how important was it to have that woman's perspective?

SAIKI: At the committee level, you're a member of the committee, period. Whether you're a woman or a man, it doesn't matter, but you're expected to perform like any other person would no matter what your gender. And the respect I think that I had and I think I felt from all the other men and women was equal. In other words, we knew each other as colleagues. I didn't sense any necessary need to be defensive or be aggressive. As long as you knew what you were talking about, you could get your point across. Of course, a little bit of "aloha" does help. A little bit of camaraderie does help, but nevertheless when it comes to business, it's do or die, you know your stuff or you don't.

MURPHY: That's an interesting perspective on committee work. One thing that we wanted to talk about quickly is the congresswomen's caucus [Congressional Caucus for Women's Issues] in terms of working together with women from across the political aisle, for example. How did that play a role in your political career on Capitol Hill?

SAIKI: Again, to me it was very easy, very warm, very open, very clear that we had the same purpose in mind. As members of the Women's Caucus, we were out to pursue equality for women in every aspect that there was. So we were joined together at the hip on that, and so there was no real quarrel as to how we were going to do it. We were just going to find the best way to do it and support it. That kind of relationship doesn't exist in all organizations, but in

the Congress I noticed that the women are more dedicated than not. I mean we've been through a lot, and we got there for a good reason.

MURPHY: Certain women's issues were important for the caucus to address and were important to the careers of many Congresswomen. How important was the issue of women's reproductive rights to your own career?

SAIKI: Oh, boy, now you're hitting into a very interesting situation. The whole issue of women's—abortion, let's face up to it. When it came to abortion in the 1970s, in Hawaii all abortions were illegal. Now, my husband was an OB/GYN. When you get awakened at 2:00 in the morning by your husband who's received a phone call from a patient who went to an illegal abortionist and is now losing blood and is going to die without his help, you know that something's got to be done. He would wake me up and we would go to his office. We couldn't put on the lights because then we would signal that something was going on. The police would come. So we would then use flashlights, and I was the lamp holder. In other words, I held the lamp over the patient while my husband then cleaned out the situation to save her life and save her from the ramifications of the illegal abortionist.

Now, you do that two or three times, and you get to the point where you feel, what the heck is going on? These women chose to have an abortion. They had nowhere to go, so they went to an illegal abortionist under unsanitary conditions, and they became victims. Then they were going to lose their lives because of the illicit activity which we in government force them to accept because we would not respect their rights to choose what's going to happen to their bodies.

So what I did was then take that to our state legislature. This is when I was still in the legislature, of course. A Democrat senator had introduced a bill

called the Hawaii Freedom of Choice Act in 1970, where you could obtain an abortion of a nonviable fetus or when a woman's life and health were in jeopardy. In other words, a limited form of abortion, but it was a limited form of choice. Now, all the efforts being made on the other side of the square were there. People were then saying, "If a woman is going to get pregnant and she doesn't choose to have an abortion, does she have other alternatives?" Yes, she has other alternatives. She can choose adoption. She can put the baby up for adoption. That can be a choice that she can make. But nevertheless, it's her choice.

So this whole question of choice came up in the legislature while I was there. When this measure came up in the [Hawaii] house of representatives I had a very difficult decision to make because I am against abortions, but I am also supportive of a woman's right to choose. But if she's going to choose, then it has to be a limited choice where things are not going to get rampant. In other words, people are not going to use abortion as an answer to control population growth. And so with much discussion—even the Governor [John A. Burns], shall we say, emotionally supported the effort because of the dangers that our condition allowed for women. He supported the bill. He would not sign it because he was a Catholic, and he felt he couldn't sign the bill. The bill did become law.

So we did pass the Hawaii Freedom of Choice Act of 1970, and I was in support of it because of my experience with my husband. I mean he's a physician. He tried to save the lives of these women who chose to have an abortion. It's already done, but if you put on the lights and police came in, he would be arrested for violating the law. This was to me inequitable. And this woman who chose then to have her system cleaned up after the illegal abortion would not be able to use sanitary conditions at a hospital where she

should go for help. So it put me in a real quandary, but I had to make a choice then, and I chose to go with the choice. Today I still have to accept to some degree being called an abortionist or whatever, but to me it was a relatively difficult personal decision which I still think is correct.

WASNIEWSKI: Just to follow up, did that position cause any friction when you were in the U.S. House with Members in your own party? Did it make things more difficult for you to achieve your legislative goals?

SAIKI: No, it really wasn't. It did not come up. It was discussed, but it was never—*Roe v. Wade* and so forth, I was not there at the time that all that came up. I was gone by that time.

WASNIEWSKI: Just one more general question about your areas of focus on legislation. Because there were so few women in Congress at the time that you served, did you feel that you not only represented your constituents in your Hawaii district but that you were in some ways representing women nationally?

SAIKI: Oh, definitely. The women in Hawaii were no different from the women in Idaho. We're women, period. So whatever affects women in Hawaii is going to affect people in Idaho or Arkansas or New Jersey. So whatever legislation you're considering is going to be respected and adhered to by women everywhere. You're not just writing legislation for one state. The concerns of my state came to the forefront because I was much more aware of it, but nevertheless, the answers or the results affected everyone.

MURPHY: That's an interesting way of looking at the role of a Representative. When you were in the House, was there a bond among the Asian-American and Pacific Islander Members while you served?

SAIKI: No, there were so few of us. I think I was the only one. So nobody really cared, I guess. Maybe they just accepted it, but no, there was no sense of discrimination or hesitancy or anything of that nature. I guess I'm third-generation American. In other words, much more than most of them who were second-generation.

WASNIEWSKI: We've got a little less than 15 minutes left, and we wanted to move to a retrospective section of questions and ask you to take a broader view of your career. One last question related to the topic of women in Congress—we started this oral history project to commemorate the centennial of Jeannette Rankin's election and swearing in, now a little more than 100 years ago. In doing research, we noticed that there was a lot of press attention that was paid to her dress and her demeanor simply because she was a woman. And in dealing with the press and in dealing with the national attention that you get as a Member of Congress, was it your perception that that had changed by the time you came to the House, or did you feel that you were scrutinized a bit more because you were a woman as well?

SAIKI: Personally, I didn't feel that way. Maybe it was because I grew up with my father's attitude. My father's attitude is I'm as good as anybody else and that I'll do my own thing, and I'll be anything I want. Nobody is going to force me into a corner to do something I don't want. But maybe it's my attitude, maybe so. I don't feel that I was discriminated against or made uncomfortable. If anything, I was a kind of an oddity, a newcomer from this Pacific island in the faraway place called Hawaii. {laughter} Isn't that wild?

WASNIEWSKI: Yes.

SAIKI: I do want to add a few things though. In all of the years that I served, I had the privilege of being appointed and requested by Presidents to represent

them at various functions. For instance, President Reagan could not make it to the birthday of the King of Tonga, his 70th birthday. And so he—

WASNIEWSKI: This was in 1988.

SAIKI: Yes. And they designed a beautiful American eagle, very delicately built, and I had to carry the doggone thing in a separate seat next to me all the way to Tonga. But it was a beautiful thing. I picked up a few key people from the Pacific along the way, the President of American Samoa and the President of Fiji.[6] I picked them up along the way and attended the King of Tonga's birthday for a whole week and was treated like a queen. I was treated not just because it was me, it was the President of the United States. They wanted to have the President of the United States feel like a very special person, and I happened to be the one that was representing him. It was a marvelous trip.

The other visit that I represented the United States House of Representatives was at Emperor Hirohito's funeral. I traveled on Air Force One with President Bush to attend the funeral of Hirohito. So I've had experiences that go beyond the congressional, go beyond the administrative, go beyond the personal—and I've enjoyed every minute of it. So now I can rest and go back to playing golf.

WASNIEWSKI: Quite a career.

SAIKI: Yes.

MURPHY: What advice would you offer or have you offered to any women thinking of running for Congress, looking back at what you experienced?

SAIKI: Going back to what I experienced, I would say if you want to run for office, be sure you know why you're running. It has to do with what you want to

correct. It's what you want to impact on the rest of the state and the world. It's not personal. It's not for personal aggrandizement or personal popularity or personal notoriety. You have to be willing to make the sacrifices that are necessary to be effective. In other words, don't run if you don't have a mission.

WASNIEWSKI: Good advice. Also looking back on your career—and you served at a time when women's representation in Congress was smaller—how would you describe the role over the years that women have played in Congress? And do you think they bring something different to Congress than men do?

SAIKI: I would think overall there is an impact. Women do bring a different perspective on things as they are being discussed issue-wise at the local level, at the committee level. And I think that is important because after all, women make up half the world and half the voters, and they should be represented. Their thinking is a little bit different in many ways. They're much more concerned about the impact on their family. They're much more concerned about the social, emotional issues. And they're not as committed to, shall we say, forward progression as seeking power and so forth. You'll find exceptions, of course, but nevertheless I think most women who run for office have a purpose for running. And I think they add to the discussion that is so necessary at not only the state level but at the congressional level as well.

WASNIEWSKI: Another question we've asked everyone who we've spoken to—we've asked you a lot of questions about the past, I guess now we're going to ask you to prognosticate a little bit. There are now 113 women in Congress. There's 90 in the House, 23 in the Senate. Looking out, so if we get to the 150th anniversary of Jeannette Rankin in 2067, how many women do you think we'll have in Congress 50 years from now, and how will that come about?

SAIKI: I haven't really given that a thought. I think what progress has been made is substantial, and I think it should continue. The progress may be up or down depending on the emotional and financial situation, but I think more women will step up. I think this #MeToo effort that exists today has put women in focus and made them feel like they're important enough to run for office, and I think this will continue for quite a while. So I think there will be a slow progression of more women involved in politics, and I think that's very healthy for this country.

MURPHY: Do you think your time in Congress would have been different if you were a part of this Congress with 90 women in the House instead of only 23?

SAIKI: Yes, I think it would be. We'd have more voices. More muscles, so to speak, because it's the votes that count. So it would be different today because they have more in numbers and they can affect more legislation if they work together.

WASNIEWSKI: Just a few more questions. Looking back on your career, do you think that your service at the state level in the U.S. Congress or in the [Bush] administration has inspired other women to run for elective office?

SAIKI: I sure hope so because locally we have more women involved now in politics than ever before. Now, I can't say whether I had that much to do with it, but I think I broke some barriers and set some examples, and I think that has made women feel like they can do it too. And if that is so, then more power to them.

WASNIEWSKI: Just a final question that I've got. What do you think your lasting legacy is going to be specifically in terms of your service in the House?

SAIKI: My legacy would be never give up. If you're right, you fight for what you think is right. And never get pushed around by any organization or any person, but do make your own decisions after much research and thinking.

WASNIEWSKI: Thank you very much. This has been a real pleasure. Thank you for taking the time to speak with us.

SAIKI: Yes, you too. Thank you very much.

NOTES

[1] Newt Gingrich was Minority Whip from 1989 to 1995 and Speaker of the U.S. House of Representatives from 1995 to 1999.
[2] For more information on the Civil Liberties Act of 1988 and the Aleutian and Pribilof Islands Restitution Act, Public Law 100-383, 102 Stat. 903 (1988), see "Long Road to Redress," in Office of the Historian, U.S. House of Representatives, *Asian Pacific Islander Americans in Congress, 1900–2017* (Washington, DC: GPO, 2018).
[3] Magnuson–Stevens Fishery Conservation and Management Act, Public Law 94-265, 90 Stat. 331 (1976), was sponsored by Senators Warren Grant Magnuson of Washington and Theodore Fulton (Ted) Stevens of Alaska.
[4] John H. Sununu, former Governor of New Hampshire (1983–1989) and father of John E. Sununu, a former Representative and Senator from New Hampshire.
[5] The Balanced Budget and Emergency Deficit Control Reaffirmation Act of 1987, Public Law 100-119, 101 Stat. 754 (1987), was sponsored by Senators William Philip (Phil) Gramm of Texas, Warren Bruce Rudman of New Hampshire, and Ernest Frederick (Fritz) Hollings of South Carolina. This was a revised version of the Balanced Budget and Emergency Deficit Control Act of 1985, also known as Gramm–Rudman–Hollings or GRH, Public Law 99-177, 99 Stat. 1037 (1985).
[6] The President of the United States is the Head of State for American Samoa, an unincorporated territory of the United States. The Governor of American Samoa leads the territorial government.