# The Honorable Linda Smith

U.S. Representative of Washington (1995–1999)

**Oral History Interview**
**Final Edited Transcript**
September 18, 2019

Office of the Historian
U.S. House of Representatives
Washington, DC

“I’d already said no. I said no many times because of the special interest money. I knew I could not take the amount of money to raise the millions that I would need. Well, when I came back we were driving into town and I saw a sheet on the top of a building up on the freeway and it said, ‘Write-in Linda Smith.’ It had spontaneously started. People were starting to make their own signs, put them in their cars, in their yards, and on the roofs. And the first thing I thought was, ‘Who’s that?’ I really could not think of it being me.”

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## Abstract

Linda Smith never planned on a political career, but instead found herself answering the call to run for elected office at both the state and federal level. Before making the jump to Congress, Smith, upon the urging of her husband Vern, won a seat in the Washington state house of representatives in 1983. A few years later she ran a successful campaign for the Washington state senate where she served from 1987 until 1995. While considering a return to the private sector, Smith switched gears to campaign for the U.S. House after voters organized an effective write-in campaign that quickly gained momentum surprising many, including the candidate herself.

In her interview Smith describes the valuable lessons she learned as a state legislator, such as the importance of building coalitions, which she applied to her time in the House. She also discusses issues she endorsed in the Washington State legislature—a major spending control initiative, campaign finance reform, curbing the influence of lobbyists—and how she continued to rally for "clean" government while on the national stage at the U.S. Capitol. During her two terms in Congress her tenacious and unswerving support for institutional reform often led to conflict with the Republican leadership. Smith shares insights about the Republican majority during the 104th and 105th Congresses (1995–1999), her relationship with then-Speaker of the House Newt Gingrich, and how her outspoken opposition to abortion paved the way for alliances with several influential Members of her party. She also explains why she ran for the U.S. Senate in 1998 and her transition from politics to her role as a public advocate for abolishing human trafficking across the globe.

## Biography

**SMITH, Linda,** a Representative from Washington; born in LaJunta, Otero County, Colo., July 16, 1950; graduated Fort Vancouver High School, Vancouver, Wash.; manager of seven tax preparation offices; member, Washington State house of representatives, 1983–1986; member, Washington State senate, 1987–1994; elected as a Republican to the One Hundred Fourth and One Hundred Fifth Congresses (January 3, 1995–January 3, 1999); was not a candidate in 1998 for reelection to the U.S. House of Representatives but was an unsuccessful candidate for election to the United States Senate.

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

## Citation Information

When citing this oral history interview, please use the format below:
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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 LINDA SMITH OF WASHINGTON —**
**A CENTURY OF WOMEN IN CONGRESS**

**JOHNSON:** Today's date is September 18, 2019, and we are here today with former Representative Linda Smith of Washington. Thank you so much for coming in to speak with us.

**SMITH:** This is an honor.

**JOHNSON:** Thank you. My name is Kathleen Johnson. I'm here with Matt Wasniewski, the House Historian. This interview is for a project, *A Century of Women in Congress* to celebrate the 100th anniversary of the election of the first woman to Congress, Jeannette Rankin. So, to start with today, when you were young did you have any female role models?

**SMITH:** I had a grandmother and she was strong, and I was with her until I was five years old. And I remember the strength of grandma and, whether I was with her or not, I always knew that I was part of her. She'd say, "Look up at the stars and know I pray to those stars, up to God and you can know that my prayers are with you no matter where you go." We were transient. I needed that strength, and she would remind me every letter or any time she contacted us and caught up with us in the world that I was strong like her and that I could just do anything.

**JOHNSON:** When you were young what were the expectations for you as you grew up, as a girl growing up into a woman?

**SMITH:** My mother was a lot like my grandmother and she didn't take any excuses. I remember one time it was time for school. This is La Grande, Oregon, and it was cold and kids were coming to school with shoes, but at that point she

had no way of getting me some shoes. We wore what are called now flip flops, but they were called something else then. And you'd tape the bottom of them after a while or go barefoot. She said, "That's what you're going to wear." I said, "Mom, they'll look at me funny." She looked at me and she said this to me, and I never will forget it and it was simply, "Linda, you're a leader. You just watch their feet hurt and the next day they're going to go, 'She's wearing them and we can too.'" And sure enough by the next day a lot of the kids were wearing sandals or open-toed shoes. Yes, their new shoes were hurting their feet and they wanted to be like me. And it reminded me what a leader is and that people will follow you. You can't pull them along, but you can stand and do the right thing and stand with your head up no matter what and people will follow that.

**WASNIEWSKI:** How was it that you first became interested in politics? Was it something that you talked about around the dinner table?

**SMITH:** No. {laughter} I thought politics were dirty and I thought it was just about—and I didn't want to be in something dirty, and I remember thinking that I want something noble. I want to reach up and reach higher. And I didn't have a very good opinion of politics. My husband came home one day and he—I was in business. I was in my mid-20s, late-20s—and he said he had become interested and he didn't understand, we should do something. It was about an issue, which is not really the issue that I work on now, but he had become pro-life. He actually saw an ultrasound of an unborn baby and realized that when our children—when we found out we were going to have a baby, that his belief was scriptural that that was a child. And so he became very strong in that. I resisted. I wasn't anything. I was a businessperson, I was a Sunday school teacher. I did a lot of things, but I wasn't politically active.

But he would organize in my home—the Catholic population and the Protestant population that had that belief and he formed coalitions that became statewide coalitions around that belief. Democrats, Republicans, Catholic, nothing, evangelicals, that had that belief and medical folks that had started getting that belief. And all I could think of when I'd come home and they were organizing, and there were all these children because they were Catholic, a lot of them, around my house, was, "Oh my goodness." So I made sure everything was fine, that there were snacks, but I would go out and run. I would go out and jog. It just seemed so foreign. But finally I didn't want to be separate from something my husband was doing so there was an opening. He said, "One of us needs to run. We need to run for office." And he kind of implied that I was better suited in PR, etc., in what I did and I kind of implied I would be happy to support him. But that's a long time ago and that's how we started. He always stood beside me. He passed away last year—50 years married.

We've done a lot of things: we moved to the clean government movement, we ran initiatives to clean up government together, we ran initiatives to control spending so we could have savings accounts at the government level so they could be used for those vulnerable populations that we both served. We both dealt very much with people on the street. We cared deeply about helping people that had fallen with alcoholism or that were in jail and came back out. Our life was focused on that together and so we ended up more focusing on the needs of people that the world had marginalized or they had marginalized themselves than any one issue.

**WASNIEWSKI:** I'm sorry to hear about your loss.

**SMITH:** Oh, thank you.

**WASNIEWSKI:** Did your husband ever consider a career in politics?

**SMITH:** Yes. At one point I was targeted because I was the first Republican in 30 some years to be elected at the local level. He ran against an unopposed candidate, so the guy couldn't give the money to the one running against me. There was a Republican a few miles or a few districts over, but it was very unusual because it was a blue-collar labor district and it was very Democrat, very Democrat and had been for years. And so when I was elected they said, "Oh, that was just kind of a mistake." I challenged somebody after a death and that was when my husband said, "One of us needs to run for this open seat." There was only going to be one year left in the term and I thought well, the economy of that is I'll have to run again the next year, let Vern. Let somebody else because that doesn't sound very efficient. But I did run and I did win. Now that meant immediately that was a seat that went to the other side in the house of representatives in the state level [Washington] and so it was, we have to fix that. So I was targeted as a main kill. I always felt like I had a target on my back, and it was because it hadn't been traditional when you start lining up the number you need for majority. They were still going to have majority, but this one was an embarrassment to leadership because some of the leadership were from my general area, and so they decided to lay bets on they would get me the next time. Well, they didn't.

I did win again the next year, but then two years from then, I had a year in between, and then I ran again, but then there was a senator that died and there was this process that happened and I challenged the person appointed. I actually ran '83, '84, '86 and '87. And by '87 I won the senate seat and then had to run again the next year because it was the end, one year left in that four-year term. That is not something you would plan to do to begin with, but it moved me quickly because when I won the senate seat in the '87 it was

another first. The Republicans, again, had not had control of the senate or the house for many years. Washington State is pretty Democrat.

When I won I became the swing vote, 25 to 24, 49 members. And it shifted to the Republicans, but because I'm pretty independent I had a gavel and I wanted a chair if I ran. I wanted a chair and I wanted to be in leadership. I wanted to be on rules and on the budget committee. Well, I got most of that. I got the children and family services committee. I was in leadership, one of the top five, not the top, which I didn't need, but they got leadership because of me. They got the gavels. And in that I wanted to make sure whatever I did mattered so I could control what came through committees. I could bargain with other committees, but I also could have a position in what the budget started looking like.

In rules I could potentially either move something along or kill it depending on the other members of rules. It's a lot of power and I wanted it quick because I intended to get out of politics. So I didn't. I ended up being written in for Congress in '94 and I actually spent another four years after that. So 15 years total when I thought I would just get in a little bit. I didn't know. It's one of those one-year-at-a-time [situations] and I did have a husband that thought it was a really good idea.

**JOHNSON:** What lessons did you learn from your state service that might have helped you in your career in the House?

**SMITH:** Oh, no question. My career in the House and what I'm doing now. The variety of places I was. So I was first in the minority at the state house level, so understanding what it is to work from the minority, you end up working really smart. If you're going to accomplish anything you've got to do two things: You're going to watch for opportunity and you're going to build

coalitions. You're going to build friendships, you're going to watch those friendships, and you're going to back your friends. Figuring that out really quick was important to me. Making sure that I understood how much power I had and when I used it. I was called "the woman that didn't blink" by the Republican Leadership. You've probably seen that.

It was so important to me that we cleaned up the political system. I didn't have all the answers, but I just knew that us getting trips and gifts and things here was just, it just really looked bad. Why would they give them to us and our staff? I had trouble hiring staff. They were so used to senior staff also getting perks here that it was a problem, too. One man finally said, "At first I wasn't going to come over to your side. I liked your issues"—it was Natural Resources—"and I liked what you were focusing on." And his Member had left. "But some of those benefits of being senior staff were pretty good and you had made it very clear that you weren't going to take special interest money, trips, or gifts, and then you started talking about passing a bill and that was important to me." And so standing on that and saying, "I've got a coalition." It took about four months to build friendships with certain Democrats. Whether they would have stood with me on a challenge if I had exercised that coalition, I still don't know to this day, but I simply said we will vote down an appropriation bill if you don't allow a vote on our bill. So it was not until after the [first] 100 days, it wasn't until the time they said the bill would come up for a hearing and a vote, but it was time to keep my commitment to others.

When you're new it's one thing and you know you don't get everything, but when you've been at the top before in another realm and you know how to do it, you know when you keep your commitment, they should keep theirs. And so exercising that, knowing that you'll have consequences if they have

enough power, whether it's Democrat or Republican, if they make a decision they're going to use that power. You just have to know that there are costs to that. But that's okay because if you're not elected again or you lose a committee chair or whatever, if you've done the thing that you really believe is right, and that was one of my issues coming in, the clean government initiative that we passed in Washington state. It had gone to initiative, people had passed it, supreme court of Washington state had upheld it, it simply said you can't take gifts, trips, money, anything, 30 days before, 30 days after any vote. So it really shortened the sessions for those incumbents that really wanted to go out and run again.

But the principle of not applying money on votes is just logical and yet I do know this place was built on that and it still happens. And I know there's a lot of good people that do take special interest money and they're not corrupt or horrible. They're working in a system and they feel that that's what they have to do. But for me I could not come here after the write-in and not stand for what I stood for at home for so many years.

**WASNIEWSKI:** I want to talk a little bit about that election in '94. You mentioned it was a write-in. It was a unique election. Were you recruited to run in that race? Can you talk a little bit about the background?

**SMITH:** The recruitment was odd. We had had the two initiatives. One was a spending control initiative and the other was a clean government initiative. Had them one after another, ran petitions to the people after trying to pass them as a state senate leader, and I thought if you can't in this group of people pass something to clean up government or control spending when you're in control of the senate—now, the house wasn't in Republican control, it was Democrat, I understood that. But if we couldn't get those through as bills, they would have to go to the people and we have an

initiative process that would go to the people. So you had to get about a quarter of a million, probably you want to get closer to 300,000, petition signatures. And we raised up this group of people. I just basically didn't believe that we should be paying people. If they want this in an initiative process it shouldn't be paid signature gatherers. That doesn't mean somebody didn't pay kids somewhere along the line. They might have. But in general we did not. It was not budgeted. We didn't have the money. So we raised up what was about 10,000 people overall and they called that "Linda's Army." They literally got the petitions, we turned them in, and the petition was then passed by the people.

Immediately one controlled the size of government. Who gets money from government? A lot of the unions came out against it, but also the people that build roads that get money from government came out against it. Anybody that got government money. We have this great big group of people over here that were people that wanted it, over here everybody got money from government. And so it was really quite a challenge, but we did win it and in the [Washington] supreme court challenge we won. And then this spending control initiative, the same. The supreme court did the same thing. Basically, if the people gave the power to you, they have the ability to limit that power and so we won both initiatives.

I went away with my husband for the September holiday for the longer weekend, and I was exhausted and basically telling him, "I'm getting out of politics. It's time. You know, I'm right at the age where if I don't get back into a career this is killing us." And you give [up] so much money when you can have a career and then you do something like this. I remember at the time we didn't agree and coming back home though—and he just said, "I thought we said that we'd do everything together." He was a very strong

believer and he said, "You know, I thought we said that we would wait for God's direction. I've heard it." Something like that. I dropped his hand and didn't talk to him for hours because I was just so tired and I knew what was wanting. They were wanting a congressional run. I'd already said no. I said no many times because of the special interest money. I knew I could not take the amount of money to raise the millions that I would need.

Well, when I came back we were driving into town and I saw a sheet on the top of a building up on the freeway and it said, "Write-in Linda Smith." It had spontaneously started. People were starting to make their own signs, put them in their cars, in their yards, and on the roofs. And the first thing I thought was, "Who's that?" I really could not think of it being me. Got back and found out that a small group of people had taken their postage machines, their copy machines, and they made a simple mailing that folded into quarters or thirds and taped it and over the weekend they had all been preparing a 30-some-thousand-piece mailing to the top voters. Now, who had the vote on this were both Democrats and Republicans. With an open primary they had to write, "Linda Smith Republican for Congress" and many of these old Democrats just couldn't do it. But they could because they saw my husband and I, who was a blue-collar engineer on the railroad, they saw us more like them. I think at that point when they saw us more like them than our party we started getting people that moved over on their various beliefs versus partisanship. Very much interesting. Very challenging to the people that were opposing us because how do we identify these people? We've always just if they had a "D" people just elected them and now they've elected a woman and a Republican and she's kind of different. Well, that was the same thing I got when we first ran in '83. They didn't know us from Adam because we weren't involved in the Republican Party. My husband had basically just started getting involved a little bit, going to the meetings, and I

showed up and got elected to the convention because I happened to be in the room and they needed an alternate and I was going with him everywhere that he was going.

So I really bungled into most of this. And these people that did the write-in were very diverse—all kinds of different people. I'd say mostly they were aligned to the Republican connection, but some of them were just aligned to me. So up and down the I–5 corridor up towards Olympia, all the way to the beach, all the way to the Columbia River Gorge and around Mount St. Helens these people started forming quickly and raised nearly $700,000 in, I think, about a week. It just started coming in. They put out the address on the mailing. People voted and sent money. I don't think anybody ever sent a fundraiser. I think it just started happening. Truly, I imagine there's very few people that were elected, basically the decision was made while they were out of town unwilling and without any money. Couldn't have done it the other way. I mean, think about it. How could you raise that much money, the $5 million that was on the other side or how many million in such a short period of time? But you can't spend very much money in a short period of time either.

**JOHNSON:** Once that was in motion and people were pushing you to run, this group, what was it like being in a campaign that was so quick and so unique?

**SMITH:** What I knew clearly was it was beyond me how many people—have you ever thought about organizing 40 people to do anything in that amount of time if you're an employer or you organized any process or project? It just doesn't happen. You don't get consistency. If you've got that many people, there were 40-some-thousand people that wrote my name on the ballot. Close to 40 [thousand] did it right. Some were running me for Senate thinking I was a Senator. And so a whole lot were disqualified. I still got nearly 40,000 people

in about a 10-day period because the write-in happened halfway through the primary. You had to get the write-in votes with the rest of the voters.

If you think about the ballots going out in that state and this would have been when we had all September elections for the primary, the ballots went out early and you started your voting process and it was getting them back in, I think it was about three weeks. A lot of the Republicans, people working on the race, they'd already voted. They couldn't even vote for me. They'd already voted. So that's pretty much a miraculous happening. I have a belief in a great big God and I'll tell you at that point I'm going, huh, I'd love to see men happen to do this.

But at the same time you asked the way I felt, at first it was like do friends really do this to friends? I was still tired. When we won that like a week before we went away, won the state supreme court decision to not remand it to lower court, I knew I could not take another appeal because it would just be too much raising money—too much physical. We would just lose. When I got done it was like, "Whew, we're done." I'd had two state supreme court challenges in a row and before that two initiatives in a row and a campaign for senate again. I was pretty tired and these were toughies because it affected people that I cared about.

Other Members, when I would work on clean government issues, took it personal. It would be like, "How dare you do this; we're not corrupt." "No, I don't think you are, I just think it's wrong. I have to operate on what I believe and I certainly am not judging you." Well, by what I said, if they were doing whatever it was that I said I don't think is right, we should change it, they would personalize it. The spending control initiative, everybody has their own special interest. Whether it is an elderly group or it is a disability group or a labor group that has disability, and I was really representing all of

those, so many of them, because they came before the health care, and children and family services committees, or because I was a member of leadership. They were my groups and they were going, "What are you doing? They're saying you're limiting the money we're going to get."

These were not easy positions to manage. In big part I must have managed them fairly well or I wouldn't have been written in for Congress. A lot of these people would understand enough, but in general I was saying control the spending because if we have reserves then when revenue really dropped we had money for those who really needed services—and I guess you could say the budget, the biennial budget, was going up close to 20 percent every two years for a while there. But the revenue could sustain that. So when it went down a little bit it was a decrease in the increase, but the bow wave on the increases could not be sustained in the next budget and so we needed to level that a little bit—not down, always let it go up by population and inflation, but don't spend the peaks. Save these peaks. It's just reasonable. We all understand it. We all know as policymakers we need that. But it's awful hard to put a spending limit on when you have a special interest group that is screaming at you for whatever they want—and it can be Republican or Democrat.

It can be builders. It can be certain groups that are funded through certain ways through the government, but they're business too. Or it could be just your basic unions that represent all the public employees or the teachers' union and they're all wanting something and they say any inability to spend it all then it is harmful to them. Well, I don't believe that, didn't believe it. But the people of our state didn't believe it either and so it passed by very large numbers and gave us a reserve, stabilized our bonding rating for a long time, and allowed there to be some sense to not threatening those that really

did need government services that, "Oh, you're going to lose whatever it is." Because the reserve was to be able to be tapped for those times as well the good bond rating meant we paid less interest—it helped with the schools because it allowed for school construction without bonding because you could get into the reserve in certain cases, but it also changed our bond rating for the state. So you're going to get whatever debt service you'd need at a cheaper rate. It was good for the state and after a while people said it was. Yet at first it would be like pulling a tooth. But that didn't make me the most popular person at times. And being popular, everybody wants to be liked. Everybody wants to say, "I'm so sorry I made you mad." But at some point you just have to say, "This is right and I'm going to pay the consequences."

Fortunately, or not, for me, the history of that over the 11 years I'd represented them in the house and senate of the Washington state created enough trust that they just trusted me. And so you saw when you looked at the vote people that were different than me on some things, the same as me on some things, but when they polled it was you will know, you do know where she stands, you don't have to guess and we will know. They wanted that assuredness that they could trust me more than they wanted any one issue.

**WASNIEWSKI:** So you have a successful write-in during the primary and then in the general election, which is you're facing a three-term incumbent, another woman [Jolene Unsoeld], and that's also the year of the Republican wave. Any memories from the general election and any key turning points in that that you remember?

**SMITH:** I don't think there were any turning points because I was just on for the ride. When I got back and I found out they had this 30-some-thousand-piece mailing done, that they'd done in three days, I'm a conservative economically, I thought you can't waste that. And then it was kind of like, "Well, it won't work; write-ins never work." But you guys have already got them stamped; you'd waste the stamps. I said, "Okay, you get me qualified and I'll run." I really didn't think it would.

But the night of the election the returns came in slow and then they came in really heavy Democrat. Well, it took about 10 days to count the write-ins and it held out all of the other Republican votes. So they were all thinking they were losing, but then when they counted, I had raised everybody some. Not everybody that voted for me voted Republican or even Democrat. Some just came and voted for me. And so you started seeing that wave affecting them thinking they'd all lost. They had about 10 days of heartburn and then disappointment for the Democrats that thought they'd won. Yet when I heard the first numbers it was kind of like well, that answers it, no, it didn't work.

So we went down. Somebody was at election [headquarters]. My husband and I drove down there and she came out and she said, "They're using drawers, they're pulling out empty drawers, they're using everything, all of the garbage cans, there's not enough room. They're stacking them now on the floor at the back." She said, "I don't know how many there are." But I think in that county alone there were 20-some-thousand. It's the biggest of the counties. I thought at the time really—because I'd not experienced any of this—I wonder if that'll really work? I still questioned it working even though we knew that there were, I think, 40-some-thousand ballots there that they had to hand count.

I think the issue with it, too, was until that happened I didn't have an election. When it was counted was clear into October. I don't know what the final—in my brain it's the timeframe as I remember it, but you don't have very long. I really only had less than a six-week election. She [Jolene Unsoeld] didn't want to debate me and I didn't know the federal issues so I wasn't so sure, but everybody wanted that debate. We finally had one she agreed to and I prepared the best I could. She would very much know more about the federal issues. I just intentionally knew what I knew and decided not to go into technical and say, "I'm a fast learn. You know that from these other things that I will learn and I'll learn all of it. I'll learn the budget of the B-2 bomber. I will understand the expenses. I'll understand their history because that's what I've done, that's what I do. You can trust me to do the work that needs to be done and yes, I'll commute home. I'm not going to live there." And I did. I would come home just about every week, partially because I really didn't want to be living in DC, and my husband would come here quite a bit, but I wanted to be with my husband. It was kind of like, do friends really elect somebody to send them away from who they really like a lot and love a lot? So relational.

But I had so many towns. I had so many jurisdictions, and I knew fully I had to outwork whoever was there because I still wasn't going to take special interest money. And if I could identify the lobbyist, if I could identify the PAC [political action committee], my campaign staff just didn't take it. I knew that that probably in many ways just meant that I had chosen to work harder. I also felt that those people who wrote me in, I owed them being as close as possible. Just like I always had, but I had a lot bigger area. So I had to schedule, really every weekend, several events. I made sure I got into all the areas, and I'd done that at the senate level, but this was a bigger level. And it was fine. You know, it was fine. The election was just kind of like a blur. I

remember standing there and going these people did this, they really did. Maybe write-ins do work.

**JOHNSON:** How important of an issue was gender for you, and then you're running against a woman candidate and that still is unusual in the '90s. Were people excited that there were two women running? Do you remember anything about that?

**SMITH:** [Julia] Butler Hansen had been a woman, one of the first, and she'd been from our area, so they had elected a woman before.[1] Then they had had men for quite a while. And the district's slightly aligning, but they had had women, unusually so, and in a blue-collar area that was different because often you have a tendency for them to be more likely to vote for men.

We had already had women in that area. And yet in the senate—when I was elected to the state senate—they didn't even have a women's bathroom off of the floor and I had to make a motion and push to take the Lieutenant Governor's office to make a bathroom. And the first thing that was said to me is, "If you want to be like a man then you go in the members' lounge. You're a member." And these are all men that will have no privacy then and the idea that that would be the answer. Then someone else said, "This is inconvenient. There is a bathroom." And really it was a closet where all the mops and things—janitor's closet—and there was a toilet behind. And I said, "Well, no, not really, we're not going to do that." I ended up proceeding to make a very loud noise about it and make motions and it happened. We did end up with a women's lounge and yes, the Lieutenant Governor has an office, just not there.

**WASNIEWSKI:** Do you want to move on to objects?

**JOHNSON:** We have something for you just to take a look at today. So that is in the House Collection, a voting ID card. I guess the first thing we wanted to know about was how did you learn about electronic voting when you first came to the House? Was this something [covered] in orientation? Was this something you were familiar with?

**SMITH:** I think the first vote. You ran out there and somebody says, "Okay, do this, this, and this." I don't remember it in the orientation. Now, it could have been. But hey, I went from not even knowing anything about this place, to being elected in a short period of time, to being here in two months. So I think somebody just showed me, one of the colleagues there.

**JOHNSON:** What was it like for you to see your name up on the board in the [House] Chamber for the first time? Was that something remarkable for you or was there any sort of memory linked to that?

**SMITH:** I think everything was—that was remarkable. I remember the first time at the state house and senate—in the senate you have your name on your desk and how it's kind of like is this really me, did this really happen? But because of the write-in campaign I had no dreams. It wasn't fulfilling a dream because that wasn't my dream. Politics weren't and being a Member of Congress wasn't. So it kind of ran together a little bit. It wasn't probably as dramatic for me being in office and being a senate leader at the state level as it might have been for somebody that hadn't been in office. But still what an honor and to be right in that—the [House] Floor. I looked around and I'm going I'm where so much has happened in our governance and to assure our freedom and freedom of others, right here. And I was, and am still pretty much in awe, when I go out on the floor.

**WASNIEWSKI:** So in the '94 elections the Republican, the incoming Republican majority, had run on the "Contract with America." What were your impressions of the contract and how did you align with that during the election?

**SMITH:** Clearly, I knew nothing about the Contract with America during the election. That short of a time I could get the concepts, but I wasn't going to speak on somebody else's contract. I knew that people were writing me in because of who I was. So literally the only campaign commercial that I had was I was standing right here and there was kind of a hill coming up over and all of a sudden one person came, then another person, then another person. They called it the trickle. And they said, "First one person came, then another, and we chose who we want and it's Linda Smith." So it was called the trickle effect. Basically, my whole election was on I'm going to run if the people want me. I will do the best I can to explain my positions in the time I have and you can see what I've done for 11 years so you know who I am. I didn't run on anybody else's anything.

When I got here and I understood the players and we had leadership elections I had a different candidate than Newt [Newton Leroy Gingrich], but I'm a team player also. So from the state senate level of being the only swing vote, the one that gave the Republicans the gavel, I understood how tough it would be and how important it would be for me to have any leverage, even in the majority, with as many old bulls, as many people that always wanted to chair a committee but never could. So there would be a lot of competition. I knew that.

I had to get into a position where I could be with certain people of power. The pro-life position helped. Henry [John] Hyde became very close to me as did Frank [Rudolph] Wolf. So some of these people that became friends that I knew had power, it was very important for me. Now, I was aligned to them.

On the human rights issue I literally all the way through have fought for civil rights, human rights for women. I have helped women build lives since I was practically a teenager. And so everywhere I go if I have a company, I have a program for women to get back on their feet. Now it's Shared Hope—trafficked women that are in prison or trafficked as children, helping them rebuild their lives. As much as four years they have worked next to me to try to build to where they could have a life. I was used to that program in business and that was really, really important to me at Shared Hope.

Well, the Human Rights Caucus worked on international rights for women and children and others, but that was my passion. And so getting into those caucuses, often you would find those two men, Henry Hyde and Frank Wolf. Now they were also pro-life. There were not very many pro-life women at that point and it had taken me a long time till I was in my 30s to make a decision that I couldn't—I've called my babies anything other than my babies. And so when I made the decision it was a hard decision because I had worked for everything for women and still do, and yet I find a lot of pro-life women are also really strong advocates for women so it isn't a hardcore dividing line for women. But here it was.

When you get to the issue of any bill that had the Hyde Amendment in it or anything which would be about funding there would be this war.[2] And I just became the, I'd say, rather quiet female voice that would stand and say, "Well, I appreciate all the arguments because I've made them until I was 30, I understand, but there are people who don't have that same position, so let's find a way in this bill to do as much as we can to get as close as we can to protecting both." And sometimes I got them to move some and it was a voice in the room of power.

But those same men also protected me when it came to the budget. So if somebody was pushing me and saying, "You're going to lose stuff if you do not move off of your campaign reform position" or something like that, that was one. Then you're going to lose say your chairmanship or whatever. And this is just politics. Or you're not going to get this particular bill to go through, this amendment that was stop the ocean from crashing in on all the cranberry bogs that are in your district. Very quietly these people would rebuild my district needs back into the budget and they'd use their power to be able to make sure I didn't need anything more than what was important for my district, but some of those the federal government needed to deal with. The ocean erosion and all those things were under the jurisdiction of the federal government. And so they took care of me.

So this kind of relationship, Democrat and Republican in these committees, whether it be clean government, and that was very bipartisan, and the pro-life movement was very bipartisan, not as much as the clean government, we protect each other. And it really went back to learning how to do that in the house as a minority member at the state and as the swing vote in the senate at the state level.

**JOHNSON:** [The year] 1994 was certainly a historic election in Congress. It was the first time in 40 years that the Republicans took control of the House Chamber. What do you remember about the environment or the atmosphere with so many new Members and a new party in control?

**SMITH:** It was very similar to what happened when I won at the state senate. It had been 30-some years since Republicans had had control of the state senate. The minority had to learn how to become the majority and so people were kind of bumping around. Extreme competition for finally getting to be the chair of something. Entering Congress knowing that we should be able to do

something, a group of the freshmen got together and decided we would work as a bloc because we knew if we did we had a chance of getting something for each of the freshmen. So started pulling the freshmen in to work as a bloc to be sure that freshmen got something. We gave them the majority, they needed to not step on us. Now, that was a constant. You had a little turmoil at every level, right? And then here's the Democrats going, "We always made the decisions. What's wrong with this?"

I'd gone through that at the state level in a big way with that not quite 40 years but 30-some years. And that was so entrenched that I think actually when you're in the majority you get a little lazy. You know, the adage is when you're the minority you talk, when you're in the majority you shut up and vote. Because you don't need to talk; you've got the vote. Well, I think that causes less need to work together and I think that that change was so big though they needed Democrats a lot less than we did at the state senate level. The senate level in the state, one vote meant if you had two—we had two that would go all over to the Democrat side from the 25 Republicans side and three on the Democrat side that would go all over the place. You just better assure that when they landed you were up one vote. So that was much more difficult.

I find it very amusing. I don't mean funny, but it was curious to me. It was like I was living a historic experience. I knew that. I was there because I hadn't done anything. Everybody was pretty tired but me. I hadn't run this long race. And I'd done some of this before. John [Richard] Kasich actually, we met with him, a group of us, mornings. We requested it because us that were more budget oriented, we needed to understand the base. So he taught that to us at the crack of early because there was no more time for some time. There were people that I knew I needed to learn from and I needed to have

people that really understood the budget and people said he's the one. Now the other new Members who had been watching or wanted to run or had run before who finally made it were very far ahead of me in knowledge. The write-in campaign kind of brought me into them as well. "Where'd you come from?"

And everybody was watching the races and so at the very end, in the last few weeks, people came into my congressional district that were going to run for leadership who said they were going to help me. I'm going to different people or they were calling me and all the people running for leadership. And I'm going, "Boy, this is interesting." But I didn't understand. They wanted my vote. Didn't take me very long to figure that out, though.

**WASNIEWSKI:** Were there any freshmen in particular that you worked with that you remember from that class?

**SMITH:** Oh, a lot of them. Yes, a lot of them. Lindsey [O.] Graham was one that was in that small group. Sam [Dale] Brownback was in the small group. Let's see who else. There's quite a few Senators that were in that small group. We became close. Some are not there now or in politics, but because we were new we knew we had to help each other. Very clear here, people were going to take care of themselves and if they wanted a leadership position they were going to do everything they could, but it was more important than the relationships around them in general. Which was, I was used to that because I'd been in politics 11 years, but it still, you'd hoped there was a little bit more nobility. But if I was there and I'd been here all those years and some of them had been here 30 years and they'd never been a chair of a committee and you got that opportunity, you might think it's my turn. Maybe it was and maybe they had the experience, maybe they should have been. But at some point we needed something too. I think those people, and Sam now is

an ambassador and Lindsey I watch, and I go, "Yeah, go, guy." I don't always agree with either one of them all the time, but I remember those special times together.

**JOHNSON:** You just mentioned relationships and one of the questions we were wondering is your relationship with the Speaker at the time, Newt Gingrich. How would you describe that?

**SMITH:** Interesting. No, first of all, looking at style I didn't originally choose him because I didn't know him. I didn't know the [first] 100 days strategy. I think though in retrospect if you're going to pull together a minority you better have a plan. If that minority is going to become majority you better have a plan and you better operate very, very strong. He was and he did and he had a team that did.

Tom [Thomas Dale] DeLay was another one. We didn't agree on some things such as campaign reform, and that would be the issue that didn't come to the floor that we had some controversy around, which is where I was named "the woman that didn't blink." Campaign reform did finally get into some votes, but it still was not much—Newt always wants to win and didn't want campaign reform. So there were some things there. But I'm a team player. I played well if I could vote with the team, if I could keep the bills moving, but if there was something I just didn't agree then their job is to push me—I don't know if it's always this way, but it probably is still. You get beat with a hose, but you don't get beat where you see it. You're going to pay for independence to some extent. They understand you're serious enough, they're going to pick their fights, but I'm not going to always fight and I'm always not going to always have to have the issues that—all the issues are not as important.

The issue of clean government is, was, and still is [important] to me and so that was a friction. The issue was the Democrats had always done it that way, which was true, and if we don't do it the same way we won't have enough money to keep the majority. Now, that is consistent, right? I mean that's consistent today. What do you see on the news—how much each person has raised. Do they actually say how much from special interests and how much from individuals? No. They just put this money up and say, "This person is succeeding because at this point in the race they've raised this much money." The system is so driving this that it would be very difficult for people to not take special interest money. I resolved to do it and just believed that the write-in itself was a miracle and if I was to be there, I would be there on my terms. Yet I'm not everybody and that's not saying that anybody that takes special interest money is a particularly bad person. I just believe they're all operating—Democrat and Republican—by the rules the people are allowing them to have. They can criticize them for that, but as long as we have the ability to have unfettered special interest money and independent group campaign funding, these large groups that come together to hide who they really are, then we'll have what we have and that will be competition based on money and power.

**WASNIEWSKI:** Before we get too far away from it, you had mentioned Henry Hyde and Frank Wolf. It sounded like they were in some ways mentors for you, watched out, maybe advised you on how the institution worked. Did you have any mentors? Am I reading that the wrong way?

**SMITH:** No, you're not reading it the wrong way. What I would say is I have no trouble asking for help, but both of them just seemed to be there for me. One night it was pretty early, we were finishing the first budget, my first term, and the campaign reform issue had angered certain people and they took out the

things from my district just in the appropriations process. And I couldn't do anything about it. I watched it happen and it was people and they were just making it very clear there were two things. My not taking special interest money and my issue of standing against gifts and trips that I was ending up with paying consequences for.

Later that night I was sitting in my office and it was like well, I don't know what I'd tell the cranberry growers, but we've got a problem. And I get this call and it's, "Linda?" And I'm going who is that? It's late at night and it was Frank Wolf and he said, "I saw that today. Don't worry, I'm going to take care of it." Then he said, "I want you to not talk to anybody about this. I just want you to trust me." I did and he put the money back in. He used his ability in the conference to fix it, just very quietly put it back in. And so he made my district whole in what was a huge issue with the erosion of the ocean. Then we'd had the Columbia River issue also where there's a lot of things with silt and redirecting different waterways eventually causing coastal change. It was endangering the cranberry bogs, but he just fixed it.

It really taught me what I guess I'd known over the years in politics, but sometimes what you do is not seen. Now, this wasn't an issue that people didn't know about. It had been vetted. There had been hearings and the taking the money out was the secret part and the putting it back in could be just as secret. Now, often we say we have to see everything that goes on behind the scenes or it's not transparent. How would you ever explain that one? A man of integrity that said it was just wrong and he fixed it. But he used a certain amount of his power because you only get so many of those in a conference committee. Everybody gets something in a conference committee to come out and so you can finally bring it to the whole. And Frank Wolf was just always there for me.

Henry Hyde, it was just like when I realized how powerful he was {laughter} I didn't know. I mean he was kind of like the old bull of bulls. He was like, "Frank wants that?" Or like, "Henry wants that?" Well, Henry Hyde was just a little more known than Frank, I think. If I needed something he was just there—didn't have to ask. It was like he was just there, which is cool. I had two powerful people that liked me. That was good.

**JOHNSON:** With campaign finance you had said that you wanted this to be bipartisan, you wanted to build bipartisan support. How did you go about getting those alliances, building those alliances, especially in a partisan era? How did you cross the lines and get people to join you?

**SMITH:** I got groups that would not normally be together. Like I got Common Cause to join with the coalition and use some of the traditional and then started going to groups that would not normally be traditionally in this that were supportive of me. They could be social action groups, disability groups, I didn't care who they were. And then in Congress, though, the Members, it was more important to me to see who stood with me. So it was very unusual. If you look back at the kinds of people, some are U.S. Senators now, Democrat, Republican, we had this kind of interesting coalition—so both Senate and House. It was a very interesting coalition. I entered the same bill. It was the [John Sidney] McCain [III]—

**JOHNSON:** [Russell Dana] Feingold?

**SMITH:** Yes, the McCain-Feingold bill.[3] And so I had the parallel bill in the House. A little bit different because I incorporated some of the language that I had used at the state level to insulate votes. But in general, the same, and we traveled together. There were those alliances that sometimes went with other Members to their state but not always. And then you start one by one

building relationships. It was very unusual coalitions of people and that built relationships into other things because they were very legitimate and that would be the kind of group that I would put together and say, "I think I have enough votes to rock. Maybe you can get through me, but do you really want to get through me as being the new write-in candidate and the first woman that's ever chaired a committee (the Small Business Committee) in their first year or term?" And I think that's both true—the second one. I go, I think that's true. I don't think there's been another freshman woman with a committee in their first term. You might check that.

They were very proud of some of those things to show but I've never liked to be a token woman. I don't know that that was totally true, but I had chaired committees and I'd been involved enough that I came in with also the write-in campaign. So it was very unique having me have some of those things and say, "See? We include women and freshmen." It fit a lot of, checked off a lot of boxes. Do you really want to slap her down right away or maybe later? {laughter} I think that could be Democrat or Republican. Leadership needs to keep their team in line and obviously I was just a little off the line.

**WASNIEWSKI:** When you came in in '95 the women were still vastly outnumbered by men in Congress. I don't know the total number [of women] but 50 or 60 or something like that total. Did you feel because there were so few of you that women kind of gravitated towards working with each other? And were there any women in particular that you worked with?

**SMITH:** Yes. There were a lot of women and there were things that the Women's Caucus did and, yes, it would become most all the women. There were things that would be honoring of women, they were more token though. So most of us were used to working in, I'm going to say, a man's world. We're used to where we were the only woman. I was one of a handful of women in the state

senate leadership—well, there were two or three of us, but as the total number of women in the Washington state legislature at that time wasn't very high compared to what it is today. So you're used to working in gender as a minority walking in a room and having your chief of staff, if you walk towards a group, they think that he is the senator simply because he's a male. You're kind of used to that kind of thing because you've lived with it. It causes you to really be defensive for women to get that bathroom in, to require certain things happen. And that never changed. This was very interesting for Democrats and Republicans.

When I was elected they said, "Ms." when they just called our names, "Ms. Smith." And I went up and said, "I'd like it to be changed to 'Mrs.' That is who I am, what I want to be called." They changed it. Woman after woman came to me and said, "How did you do that?" I just told them what I wanted to be called. So it became a combination—walking in and being who you are sometimes points to elevating—or not elevating—positioning women where they should be.

And more often you're more interested—I was very interested in natural resources. I had Mount St. Helens in the middle of my district, timber industry, minerals, water and it was a big issue for us, fishing. That had to be for our economy really high and that just consumed a lot of time. The Human Rights Caucus consumed a lot of time and it was men and women. So focusing on specific—to me—women's issues is everything that affected the families in my district, and I would imagine a lot of women are the same way. Men don't focus on men's issues. We shouldn't have to focus.

When we do, we're very powerful like we were in the domestic violence movement. We're more likely to change the language. The language was "domestic disturbance," right? Changing that one word to violence and

making sure that language got in the criminal law of each state, requiring that change came from women all over of all different backgrounds. The understanding that a home, it could be conservative or liberal, and there could be violence in that home and the woman would probably not be able to have an income because she probably traditionally raised children. Even if she had a degree she wouldn't be able to raise enough money to get those children raised by herself and the courts would not lean nicely to her anyway. So if he leaves, he takes everything. That led to the pension reform.

That was women, all kinds of women, and we're very powerful and we're organized. And you saw that really in the drunk driving movement, Mothers, Mothers against Drunk Driving [MADD]. And so you watch the organizational efforts. I would say we're better at organization and we have to be because we can't lose the children and still get to work. We have to organize a lot of things and traditionally we have—still traditionally we do, which means when you hire a woman you have a lot more of those kinds of things that help her adjust in her job, organize well, delegate well, and she probably has more experience of that and normally as being a wife and a mother.

**JOHNSON:** You mentioned the Women's Caucus. Did you join the Women's Caucus while you were in the House?

**SMITH:** Yes. I'm trying to think if we joined or if [we] just were in it because—I went to Women's Caucus things. Really the caucus was more the lounge. To me it was where I got to meet more people and spend more time was in the women's lounge.

**JOHNSON:** And did you find that the institution was a welcoming place for women Members when you first came into the House in the '90s? Did you feel

welcome as a Member? We've had some people we've talked to have mixed answers about that.

**SMITH:** You know, I don't know that I've ever asked to be welcomed anywhere I've gone. If I felt that it was the right place to be, I felt it was my responsibility to figure out how to live there. There are things, again, that were institutionally male that automatically put most of the leaders as men. Just because you put on a suit and were born a man are you really a better leader? Well, no, but the men were electing. So the likelihood—they put a token, they would try to get one woman in leadership, but the reality is that was still very difficult because knowing I wasn't lesser just because I was a female is something you carry with you.

But I had no time to carry anything on my shoulder because I had a job to do and people trusted me. You think about it, all those men in that Democrat blue-collar district wrote, "Linda Smith Republican," probably Republican for the first time in their life, and so they expected me to represent them and that was going to be a big job. I don't think I came in watching that or thinking about it.

**WASNIEWSKI:** You had mentioned earlier that the pro-life/pro-choice debate here on the Hill caused great divisions and consternation. How did that affect the women Members cooperating with each other? Was that an issue or an obstacle?

**SMITH:** Oh, obviously it can be an obstacle on certain bills and there's no question. You always look for Members that can set that down, whatever the opposition is, and come back together on something you agree with. Our coalition on child trafficking, when we passed the initial bills it was Democrat/Republican. We drafted a lot with the Senators and to get in the issue of just domestic minor sex trafficking and that took both. And there

was nothing there that would go to any real dividing issue until you got to certain things and then you ended up with a very rare want to legalize it all, it'll be better. Well, we know legalization is a thin veneer of cover that causes great victimization for vulnerable women that have no power. They will be the product as long as there's a buyer, the product will be delivered. So you had that but you could pull them together. I guess you could say in that environment women are really good just like men are.

Then there are those particular issues that there's a heartfelt issue for, and usually you'll find them on environment, the life issue, sometimes you will find it in capital punishment. There are people passionate for certain issues. I could be standing by a priest who's there for pro-life and he's passionate also to abolish the death penalty. "Can we stand together on the one when we differ on the other?" I do that pretty well. Some don't. Sometimes people will think I'm just dumb. You know, I'm not changing. And that's true too. So, yes, those heart issues like that can get bloody, and if they do often when you embarrass someone or they feel diminished in any way it's awful hard to keep any kind of a relationship. Coming through in a way those debates can become difficult, but keeping them non-personal allows you to go back through that door. They are the most difficult. There are people that will not work with you if you're on one side or the other of that issue because they're so hard on one side or the other. But that closes 90 percent of the possibility of ever communicating with them on something else and we'd hope that—I think my history is shown now in all my relationships with the Senators and the House Members that I still am in relationships with.

**JOHNSON:** You had mentioned the Resources Committee and you also served on Small Business. How did you receive those assignments when you first came in? Did you request those?

**SMITH:** I wanted the Small Business Committee. I wanted to chair something and so the Small Business Committee, the chair [Jan Meyers] was going to leave in my first term and she was going to retire. It was not a high-visibility committee, but it had a lot of potential for airing certain issues around small business, which in my district small business is the engine. It creates more jobs, the jobs off of the major aluminum or timber industry that go out through that community, and I think that way. I think business; I understand small business needs advocates because big business doesn't always align in a way that cares about small business.

So it was people-oriented, and I could possibly get that committee and I would chair a committee. Being able to do that allows you the gavel and you can have hearings. I have felt that the inheritance tax seemed very unfair, especially to small business. And so over the years as I've looked at it. It seemed like as my husband and I worked to make more money coming from nothing, both of us, and that we all of a sudden were seen as somehow evil, and they were going to take 50 percent of whatever we had gotten after we'd already put close to 50 percent in every year. It was like, "Wait a minute, when did we become evil and why should we accumulate any wealth?" Government thinks they should take it. It didn't seem fair, but it also for small business, it could actually collapse the business. So it could take a family business, and by the time you had to get rid of enough assets to pay the tax it could collapse the actual business. That was important to me. That was an issue important to my district and to the people I represented. I could more likely get hearings. I didn't think that I could pass it, but I could maybe get hearings and do something in my first term or my first few years instead of having to wait 10 or 20 to become a chair of a committee. By the way, that was a shock to get the chairmanship, although they did take it away from me.

**JOHNSON:** So that was the Tax and Finance Subcommittee that you're talking about, correct?

**SMITH:** No. The Small Business Committee.

**JOHNSON:** How did you get that chairmanship? Did you ask for that or it was given to you?

**SMITH:** It was aligning. Everybody in the freshman [class], we were going to get something, but the chairman of the committee, she was advocating for me because not many people have a committee that they truly—oh, no, that's true, some do, but—have experience and background and come into a committee with actually what I'd say was an agenda for small business and to be strong enough to get a voice in and when big business is ruling this place. You know, they come in with tons of lawyers and tons of lobbyists and lots of money and contribute a lot. The small business coalitions are pretty low-level funding for campaigns compared to the biggies.

**JOHNSON:** And that was Jan Meyers that was advocating for you, that was the chair? What was her leadership style like on the committee?

**SMITH:** I wasn't with her long enough. She was congenial. It was very enjoyable to work with her. There were people it was not enjoyable to work with, the hostility. She was a lady. I'll use that term in that she was nice to people. She was not combative with people that came before the committee. I never saw her require anything of anybody that would come before a committee. And sometimes to get your group before a committee there's the backside of all that, of making sure that you align to making everybody happy financially. But that's the way it's gone for probably 100 years. I know it's been that way before the Republicans had it, probably still going the same way with

Democrats—had gone that way with Democrats. It is if you're going to play you make sure that we stay chair. I don't think I ever saw her do that.

**WASNIEWSKI:** How would you describe your own leadership style with the subcommittee?

**SMITH:** I hope it was the same as hers. I really do believe in the people and representing the people. I know that sounds just like probably what everybody says, but I was written in for Congress. I was written in by those same people, and I took it very, very seriously. If they had a coalition that wanted to present something to Congress, I tried to do that. I wasn't a long-term chair because after a couple of years I wasn't making some people happy so somebody else got that chairmanship.

**WASNIEWSKI:** On either committee, on Resources or Small Business, did you ever have the impression that you needed to work harder on either of those committees simply because you were a woman, to stand out or to be recognized?

**SMITH:** No. I just worked hard. And I had been in long enough, I was beyond feeling like I had to prove who I was.

**JOHNSON:** I just wanted to follow up on a gender-related question. What role do you think women played in the Republican Party when you were in the House and then how do you think that has evolved over time?

**SMITH:** I think they were starting with the freshmen to get into committees that they wouldn't get on normally because of all of us saying, "We're going to get something we want." And so getting some of the freshmen on the more powerful Appropriations or other committees was a requirement of this group of freshmen. I think it in some ways started ushering people in, jumping them up a little bit further than they would have gone if they'd just come in and worked their way up in committee structure.

I think women affected that because there were some of us. There were more women. I think there were five or six new Republican and six or seven Democrat. I can't remember. I think they were a total of 11 percent, but you check my numbers. But there were more women as a result of the '94 elections. It still was, when I looked at the numbers, of the total, I think it was 11 percent of the total were women and a few more came in in that class, but I don't know if it changed that percentage very much.

But I think that there was a uniqueness of the time that gave us opportunity that some of us took. And no, I didn't plan to come in on the '94 change. I didn't plan being elected. The write-in campaign put me in office, but I saw the opportunity more as a legislator. If there was sympathy for me as a woman, that's fine. I don't know if there was. If Henry Hyde looked at me and went, "That cute little girl looks cute." He was, what, 70, and I was 45 and maybe I looked like a little girl. I think he did call me something like that one time. And it was okay because it was kind. But sometimes I think that male/female can play to a female's advantage. I don't play that. I literally am who I am and if I am treated inadequate to my position then I make sure that the person corrects whatever they're saying or doing. I do that either private or publicly depending on what they've just done, but I don't just let it sit, and I think there were a lot of women like me in Congress then that had started making a way for this new wave that has grown and grown.

**JOHNSON:** And as you've been outside of politics for a while how do you think possibly this role has evolved within the Republican Party for women? Has it changed at all, do you think, since you were in Congress?

**SMITH:** I watch TV. I'm not here enough to know. There's more women, right? There's a Speaker that's a woman [Nancy Pelosi]. I don't know that that had ever happened before. She was and then got it back, but I don't know. That

has been probably different. So no, I don't know. I watch it, but when I'm here, when I'm in the halls of the Senate and the House, I'm talking to people about domestic minor sex trafficking or the prostitution of America's children. I am dealing in that issue wherever any bill will affect that issue or I am ushering or pulling coalitions to strengthen those laws and then take those laws to the 50 states. I have a tunnel vision totally for that and that allows me to not step into these other issues. Socially, I do not socialize with a lot of the people I would have socialized with because it's getting so deeply sharp. My life, my issue, needs to stay about those children and those young women.

**WASNIEWSKI:** How would you describe the Washington delegation when you were a freshman or during your two terms? The '94 election changed it quite a bit. Tom [Thomas Stephen] Foley was voted out of office and there were more Republicans on the delegation. How did it work together? How did you work as a team?

**SMITH:** I think it was fine. I think we were all in our different places. Jennifer [Blackburn] Dunn had opposition to get into leadership and that was important to her, and I think we all played a part of helping her. I think it was fine. I had no experience before that with them because I hadn't been involved with Congress. I think it was fine.

I think when I ran for the U.S. Senate and Jennifer wanted that, I think that was difficult for me to beat her in the primary. I don't know what happened there, but I think that that was difficult. I think when I did not back off then that was a problem. But I think our delegation was good. When it gets into competing here some of this just doesn't make any difference. You can be in the same state and compete for a leadership position and they'll cut each other off at the knees. I said there's something in the water here, you know.

You can be a friend today but, man, if I want your position tomorrow. {laughter} Even the elevators when I first started, there was competition of the elevator operators when they were operating for the Members. Getting on the elevator today I started to get on and this man moved over and said, "You can't go on there. It's only for a Member." I said, "Well, I am a Member." And I felt this certain—I don't know who he was or what right he had to do that, but it was very interesting, the hierarchy of elevators. {laughter}

**WASNIEWSKI:** Just one question before we go to a brief retrospective section to close up, but you had talked earlier about returning to your district often. That's a lot of travel. How do you balance that? Particularly as a freshman Member, freshmen are interested in constituent services and remaining connected to the people who just elected them. How did you balance that traveling back to the district and all your responsibilities here?

**SMITH:** I made a decision that if my husband hadn't also made it and decided he would adjust his life to where when I was home, either Thursday night to Sunday night or whenever we had votes. We usually had votes Tuesday, Wednesday, Thursday, maybe Friday morning. If it weren't for him, I wouldn't have been able to do it as comfortably. But the first three or four months after my election he just stayed here and he became the person that greeted constituents or people called saying, "I know Linda." Because there was just so many of them. The write-in had so many people that felt close to me, and some were, and so he could move in and deal with larger issues and he would come here to receive. When we got home, he basically was a second me. He could go and be there and people loved my husband. And so it leveraged my ability. I didn't have to go home and do family and congressional. My children were gone out of the home so I didn't have to worry about that.

My staff, I just have to say that I've had just awesome, awesome people. I needed a very organized environment. I wanted to read much of it myself. I needed so many hours a week. That would be 10 hours flight time and it actually fit pretty well to a time where I could work. I could literally work that 10 hours and that was very helpful for me and help me get my base information a couple of times a week. And so, whether it was something coming out of the district or going into the district, most of my heavy lifting work would be here. If I left Friday morning the staff here could then see to the other end. When I arrived, I could have my work to come back or I might take it all with me. It was just fine. Very, very hard though to change time zones once a week all the time. I got used to it, but I realized two years after I left that there was something here that always ached that was gone. I was a little jetlagged, I think.

How wonderful though. I can't even imagine going to the pressure here and then not being able to be with the people who elected me. I love people. I enjoy all of this interaction. It's tough, they always want something, but all I can do is listen and try and then be with the people that worked for me on the other side and that was all the constituency work. And with all those people—the people—I wouldn't have been able to do this side in Washington, DC. And that fed me. It was not as dragging as you might think in the travel. It was more like, oh, I get my people fix and they don't want anything but me or they're not carrying something for a signature or sign onto my bill. A different pressure, yes, but one that I liked, I think, more than the pressure here.

**JOHNSON:** We only have a few wrap-up questions. To begin with, why did you decide to run for the Senate in 1998?

**SMITH:** I actually decided I would get out of politics. But if I won the seat then that would make some sense. It would mean I could take the issues further. I ran for office like 12 times and never lost, but I just knew that you run without really believing every time that you'll win because I was always the odd one. I never was the one that was preferred. {laughter} And the wonderful part about it is my clean government movement that 35,000 people gave me money for my campaign, about $5 million. My opponent [Patty Murray] had over $10 [million], I think, at the time. And for that race I raised such an army of people giving from the all over the United States. Well, I started Shared Hope International. Shared Hope needed to have funding because I committed—my husband and I committed—but the people closest to me and our money wasn't going to build the village for the children we'd found that were in prostitution in India or Nepal. Later those same donors helped to launch the American effort to change the law on prostitution, that children should never be arrested for prostitution, they should be victims. It just became a huge, huge thing and it started back there with my political donors and supporters.

And I'm going, oh, I need a lot of people. I just gave all of my assets that would be a 35,000-piece donor list gift to Shared Hope, had it appraised because you can sell your list. People do sell their personal list after Congress, and if you give your name or you agree to do so many mailings, it increases the value. I donated that money, rolled that money forward on my personal taxes, so we could have money for starting Shared Hope. That allowed me then to send a mailing to thousands of people saying, "I'm no longer going to do this political thing. I had this much money left in my account and you could keep it for certain costs or give it back, and I chose to give it back and I have a check here for you, but this is what I'm going to do." Many of them signed it, sent it back to support the new nonprofit that simply was dedicated

to helping women and children in forced prostitution or trafficked women and children. That became the base list for Shared Hope to build safe houses right away. Most people in nonprofits spend a lot of time raising up enough donors to start. I had those donors and who were all value-driven people.

A whole lot of them were the clean government people. They wouldn't necessarily always agree with the pro-life people, but it didn't make any difference. They supported me anyway. That launched the rescue movement that today includes the Institute for Justice and Advocacy, Shared Hope's institution, two blocks from the White House, and we've worked to change all the state laws to make it illegal—the child is no longer—there is a child law, federal law, that simply says that that child is a victim of trafficking if they're in commercial sex and the men or people that buy, solicit, sell, or facilitate are involved in trafficking. That institute has now changed all state laws to say the men that buy are criminals, all of the states. And 31 states have said the child is no longer in the prostitution law. But we still have 19 states where they arrest the children for the crime committed against them and that shows a deep bias that we as women come together on. You find very few women that say it's okay to label a child a prostitute because a man brought money to the crime scene and then he walks or is seen as less than a child rapist and the child is put in jail for the crime of prostitution or related crimes, too. There's slavery. We're changing that, but it's really hard.

When you talk to women all I have to do is tell them what's happening and they say, "Sign me up." I believe we've changed this culture now. We've spent 10 years working on the state laws, 10 years of bringing this issue of children being sold to the forefront in the United States, and now it's time to see more headlines of people being put in jail for buying sex with children and more children being protected and served as victims of a crime. I believe

it's not very far when people are going to say, "Do you remember when they used to put kids in jail for being prostituted? Do you remember that? Wow." And it will be, "Do you remember when women could be killed in their home because of the domestic disturbance laws, that the police wouldn't go through the doors, the police wouldn't, and now we have domestic violence laws?" I think that's what's going to happen and it's just going to take a rallying cry for women. Even though men should be leading this because men are creating this problem in big part, I think women will. I think when we do it the culture will be thoroughly changed in every state, we'll get every jury to understand, and every judge.

We just had a judge overturn most of the penalty on a jury trial for a man that bought a 13 and 14 year old. And when it got to the sentencing the judge said, "I see this different than the jury." Set down out of range the sentence and said, "The 13 year old was a predator. She walked in and took off her shirt." That deep bias that there are just some bad girls is so deeply in the culture in some levels that that's going to take elections, that's going to take women standing and saying, "That judge did that?" And by the way, women usually bring their husband along to that, but they're the ones that lead. We're not going to vote for them this time. I believe it'll go to that eventually and we'll change the culture just like with drunk driving, just like with the smoking movement, and just like with domestic violence.

**WASNIEWSKI:** We've asked you a lot of retrospective questions and now we want to get you to prognosticate on one which is there are currently 131 women in Congress, 106 in the House and 25 in the Senate. As Kathleen mentioned, this whole oral history project was to celebrate the centennial of women in Congress.

**SMITH:** That's 25 percent in the House then.

**WASNIEWSKI:** It's close, yes.

**SMITH:** That's great.

**WASNIEWSKI:** So on the 150th anniversary of Jeannette Rankin's seating in 2067 how many women do you think we'll have in Congress and how will we get there?

**SMITH:** I think we'll get there the same way men did. Seniority is how and women will start being elevated. As they're elevated it'll become more common. So as they see more women in office, they'll also be helping women get into Congress and the Senate. I believe it just starts growing the same way as what they call the "old bull" system. If you're in leadership, you can do a lot of things. And so it'll change.

The other reason is I think we're changing as a culture to where women are now engineers, women are in other places that they didn't use to be either. And so it's becoming—but there is a glass ceiling. It's still very unusual for me to be in a room of executives and have very many women. There are some. There used to be zero, practically. It's starting to happen to where it's okay. So if in my district there have been women, people were kind of used to it. Because of Julia Butler Hansen?

**WASNIEWSKI:** Yes.

**SMITH:** I think she probably in a way helped those old blue-collar Democrats—she was a Democrat—go, "Well, if we've got Julia, we can have Linda." You know? "I know her husband." I'm just kidding, but I think that she probably helped me and would she have wanted to help a Republican? Yes, I think so because I think she was more bipartisan also.

**JOHNSON:** What advice would you offer or what advice have you already offered to any women who are thinking of running for Congress?

**SMITH:** Usually I say be very good at something so you can show you have something to offer. So usually young people and it's usually become good at something. We need very good teachers, we need good lawyers, we need everyone with all the experience of life that represents our country and our districts. "How do I get a political degree and run for office?" Don't. Be valuable somehow. Just because you're in politics doesn't mean that you're valuable. Know business, know something well because then you can actually represent at least some of the people with good knowledge. Because most of us don't know everything, we just don't. We have to get it from other Members or we have to get it from people in our district. There's no way you can understand something like the chiropractic regulatory law or whatever, or what the base is, and how much is federal and how much is state. I just made that one up. So, obviously, I would need to understand that. The best thing for me would be to have a colleague that could help explain that or explain it to the caucus. Doctors, I noticed that they were very helpful in many different ways as we looked at a lot of things. They didn't have the same opinions all the time, obviously, but they could at least bring in a bit of the practice. So be good at something and then offer some service to the country, but don't think you're worth very much if you've not done anything.

**WASNIEWSKI:** You mentioned Julia Butler Hansen smoothing the way a little bit for women like yourself in Washington politics. Do you think your service has inspired or eased the way for other women to get into elected office?

**SMITH:** You would hope so. The current Representative [Jaime Herrera Beutler] doorbelled for me with her parents when she was a child. I think she could see being a part by seeing me. So I think so. I think, though, it's a part of life

that we have to know someone's looking at us, I don't care what we're doing, and that we carry a responsibility for the people around us to see a good way to go and I would hope that I would affect people and that they would make decisions with something to offer. And I do believe that if you're ever going to ask me how we did it, I'll always say other people that believed in me brought me to Congress. But why did they do that? Because I always did what I said I would do, and I think that that's what they need to decide, too. Don't just go to school to be a politician. Become good and know what you believe, whatever that is, and then offer it to people and make it very clear, and then some people will want to follow you in that. And I think that that's a responsibility that I do still have, whether I'm asked or somebody's looking at me that I don't know.

**JOHNSON:** What do you think was your most significant accomplishment as a Member of the House?

**SMITH:** I have a tendency to think that it was the clean government because I kept bringing the issue up and started a coalition and started the conversation. And then the issue of taking gifts was voted out so the House—that was voted down. I mean it passed actually. So some would say it was just a problem that would not help us get majority or whatever. No, I think it was a time for some of us to say, "This is something we want to change," and I think that some would call it bullheadedness. My determination was what brought it to the floor.

**WASNIEWSKI:** Final question?

**JOHNSON:** Yes.

**WASNIEWSKI:** Looking back on your House career, was there anything unexpected and something that surprised you about your time in the House or maybe has informed what you do now in your role with Shared Hope?

**SMITH:** I knew from being over the state senate children and family services I just have a natural inclination to get up and think about kids on the streets, or if I go on a trip I want to find where the homeless kids end up at night, things like that. That's just me.

But I think the surprise for me was how many human rights violations there were. So when I started working with Henry Hyde and Frank Wolf and others like Chris [Christopher Henry] Smith, they were always in the fight for human rights all over the world. It was just that issue that was so much a part of them. And I think when I saw the video of Chinese murdering, actually shooting in the undercover, the prisoners and they were harvesting their organs for organ transplants, and it was an awful investigation that we were a part of in a congressional inquiry. We found the machinery for transplants was being shipped out of New York to China and found out that they could run DNA checks, they could get an idea, and then just hold them until there was a purchaser. Money was going to the military. It was just about over the top for me. It was like I can't think of anything worse and then child organ harvesting. I started seeing trafficking then. I knew children were trafficked for sex, they were sold for horrible things, but it was just about overwhelming. And I was surprised that I was getting to a point where some of these atrocities were maybe more than I could handle.

So when I privately funded a trip to India when I heard about children in sex slavery, and we didn't call it trafficking then because that wasn't the word yet, I actually went to my room after I saw it that night and I don't know if I threw up, but I was just physically sick. I thought I can't stand hearing about

it, much less seeing it. Well, it was clearly I had to do something so literally had to step beyond my comfort zone, way beyond, because I'm not the softest marshmallow in the bag. I'm not a counselor, psychologist, I'm just there it is, do it, you know. And it was like okay, I'll do it, I'll find a way. I called my husband and another friend and I said if that's the thing, if these two people—and actually I was talking to God that night. It was because—have you ever talked to God and go, "I don't want to be here, I'm getting out of here, this has to be wrong"? And it was. It was like, "Ugh, I can't do enough. There's too many."

But I had heard that day, I'd had one day there, that one of the groups thought maybe there could be a rescue house created. We started talking about it. Okay, what are you going to do with the moms? You have the little boys. What about the moms? They're teenage moms. A five year old still has a teenage mom. You know, what are you going to do for them? Well, you know, that's hard because they're considered prostitutes. Well, if we did it, if we had a place that could even run, what would it look like? So I put together a budget in a very short period of time, looked at the economics, and also looked at what it would take to lease something. I think the lease cost alone for one place was $10,000 because so few people own everything in India, they can do whatever they want. And made two calls—called my husband and another woman and said, "If they answer yes, I'm going to start a safe house. Don't know what it means. I'll put it under this group." But that launched this Shared Hope and it launched this passion.

And when I was in Congress, I didn't think I could take another step towards these issues. I thought I finally have met my match emotionally, that I cannot see these things without closing my eyes and it's just horrible. It affected me emotionally. It affected me when I was there. It took me actually starting the

homes, within about six weeks or so, women, guess what, you don't have to rescue them. There's a way for them to get away. They just disappeared and left, took their children. These homes were far enough away from the brothel area that it started to be just a, you know, it wasn't a rescue movement. It was rescue by having a place to be. Then we had to move them up into the country. Bought property to add to other property, built a village, and then found out a quarter of them were from Nepal. And then realized as we were moving some of them back to Nepal where they were from, and these were usually still teenagers. They were very young women and sometimes with their children or pregnant, that I could understand more because I was a woman.

Now, that's really odd because it was more like I understand them. They want to get back where they were before they were a 13-year-old bride that then was sold because she didn't have a male child into prostitution 1,000 miles away. They still want to go back to their own culture. They're just humans that need to smell the food, feel the air, be in the culture, the sounds, the clothes, and India was just different than Nepal. Before long I had two villages and we built out two. I ended up raising the money with those people that had started with passion with me in politics. But I think I had a revelation as I sat there in Congress that I had to do something, but an overwhelming feeling that I just didn't understand it, but a willingness just to show up. I would show up in what I believe God laid in front of me because this was too weird for me. This was not something that was in common to me to seek out a foreign mission or something.

**WASNIEWSKI:** Thank you so much for your time. We're a few minutes over our time and we need to let you go.

**SMITH:** And you.

**WASNIEWSKI:** We really appreciate the interview.

## NOTES

[1] Julia Butler Hansen represented the state of Washington in the U.S. House from 1960 to 1974.
[2] Reference to legislation spearheaded by Representative Hyde of Illinois that prohibited the use of federal funds for abortions.
[3] Signed into law in 2002, the McCain-Feingold Act sought to reform campaign financing.