The Honorable Lynn C. Woolsey

U.S. Representative of California (1993–2013)

Oral History Interview
Final Edited Transcript

March 7, 2016

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

"But my staff, after I got elected, my staff would say, 'Well, you can't go down there and talk about being a welfare mother because that's all you're going to be known for.' And my answer was, 'If I don't do it, who will? I mean, come on! You've got to show by example. You can't just, talk about things.' And it turned out that that wasn't all I was known for, and I would stand on the floor, and I could—and I remember this, and I was part of the welfare reform, well, I was one of the co-chairs of the Welfare Reform Caucus in the House . . . . And I would stand on the floor and be talking about my experiences, and the place would be, you could hear a pin drop."

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Abstract

Elected in 1992—the "Year of the Woman"—Lynn C. Woolsey joined 23 other freshman women Representatives in the 103rd Congress (1993–1995). Woolsey used her experience as a member of the Petaluma city council in California to mount a successful congressional campaign and to build a two-decade career in the U.S. House. In her oral history, she reflects on her first Democratic primary—a crowded, competitive race where she distinguished herself by sharing her experiences as a single mother on welfare. As a Member of Congress, Woolsey continued to talk about her time on welfare, seeking to educate her colleagues and to bring a new perspective to the debate on government assistance for women and children.

During her 20 years in the House, Woolsey often called upon her activist roots—something she describes in her interview. A leading member of the Progressive Caucus, for example, the California Representative promoted a more active role for the growing organization in the institution. A staunch opponent of the wars in Afghanistan and Iraq, Woolsey provides background on the founding of the Out of Iraq Caucus and her persistent efforts to draw attention to the growing anti-war movement, including her many floor speeches on the topic. In her oral history, Woolsey also speaks about the bonds formed among women Members, the ways in which they mentored and encouraged newly-elected female Representatives, and her observations about the Democratic whip operation.

Biography

WOOLSEY, Lynn C., a Representative from California; born in Seattle, King County, Wash., November 3, 1937; graduated from Lincoln High School, Seattle, Wash.; attended the University of Washington, Seattle, Wash., 1955–1957; B.S., University of San Francisco, San Francisco, Calif., 1980; human resources manager and personnel service owner; teacher, Marin Community College, Indian Valley, Calif.; instructor, Dominican College of San Rafael, Calif.; member, Petaluma, Calif., city council, 1984–1992; vice mayor, Petaluma, Calif., 1989 and 1992; elected as a Democrat to the One Hundred Third and to the nine succeeding Congresses (January 3, 1993–January 3, 2013); was not a candidate for reelection to the One Hundred Thirteenth Congress in 2012.
Read full biography

Editing Practices

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

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

The first reference to a Member of Congress (House or Senate) is underlined in the oral history transcript. For more information about individuals who served in the House or Senate, please refer to the online *Biographical Directory of the United States Congress*, http://bioguide.congress.gov and the "People Search" section of the History, Art & Archives website, http://history.house.gov.

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Interviewer Biographies

Matt Wasniewski is the Historian of the U.S. House of Representatives, a position he has held since 2010. He has worked in the House as a historical editor and manager since 2002. Matt served as the editor-in-chief of *Women in Congress, 1917–2006* (Washington, D.C.: Government Printing Office, 2006), *Black Americans in Congress, 1870–2007* (GPO, 2008), and the *Hispanic Americans in Congress, 1822–2012* (GPO, forthcoming 2013). He helped to create the House's first oral history program, focusing on collecting the institutional memory of current and former Members, longtime staff, and support personnel. He earned his Ph.D. in U.S. history from the University of Maryland, College Park, in 2004. His prior work experience includes several years as the associate historian and communications director at the U.S. Capitol Historical Society, and, in the early 1990s, as the sports editor for a northern Virginia newspaper.

Kathleen Johnson is the Manager of Oral History for the Office of the Historian, U.S. House of Representatives. She earned a B.A. in history from Columbia University, where she also played basketball for four years, and holds two master's degrees from North Carolina State University in education and public history. In 2004, she helped to create the House's first oral history program, focusing on collecting the institutional memory of Members and staff. She co-authored two books: *Women in Congress: 1917–2006* (Washington, D.C.: Government Printing Office, 2006) and *Black Americans in Congress: 1870–2007* (GPO, 2008). Before joining the Office of the Historian, she worked as a high school history teacher and social studies curriculum consultant.

— THE HONORABLE LYNN C. WOOLSEY OF CALIFORNIA —
WOMEN IN CONGRESS ORAL HISTORY PROJECT

JOHNSON: Today's date is March 7th, 2016, and my name is Kathleen Johnson. I'm here with the House Historian, Matt Wasniewski. And we're in the House Recording Studio in the Rayburn Building, and we are so pleased to have joining us today former Congresswoman Lynn [C.] Woolsey of California. Thank you for coming in today.

WOOLSEY: Oh, it's my pleasure, Kathleen.

WASNIEWSKI: Thank you.

JOHNSON: This interview is part of a series of interviews that we've been conducting in honor of the centennial of Jeannette Rankin's swearing in and election to Congress—the first woman elected to Congress. So we have a lot of questions to ask you today, but first off, what we wanted to know is when you were young, did you have any female role models?

WOOLSEY: Well, absolutely I didn't. {laughter} And I didn't ever even think about it until people started asking me, "Who were your role models?" And I have to let you know that I did not have a role model until my daughter became a woman, an adult woman. And she's a lot like me, only she's way evolved and way better. And it's like I watch her, and I go, "Oh! I could be like that. I could be less anxious and less edgy." She really is my role model.

JOHNSON: And when you were growing up, what were the expectations about what you would be as a woman, career-wise, or as you matured in your life?

WOOLSEY: Well, okay. Remember, I'm 78 years old. So I grew up in the '50s. *Good Housekeeping* magazine was my Bible as a young mother, and it was important that I be popular, that I be pretty, that I dressed well. And there were no expectations for work or a career. I, on my own, knew I was going to go to college, and did with support from my family, but it wasn't because they thought, "Well, of course she goes to college." So I'm kind of unique that way, but not too different than most women in the '50s. We grew up to be wives and mothers.

JOHNSON: How did you first become interested in politics?

WOOLSEY: Well, I've always been an activist of sorts. If I'm interested in something, I get involved in it, and I always have, for some reason. And I was elected in the ninth grade to be the vice president of my junior-high-school girls' club. But to me, that wasn't politics; it was just because I was interested in what was happening. It was a big school. And over the years, if I'm part of something, I'm a really good team player. But when the team starts falling apart, or the leadership isn't going right, eventually I become the leader.

JOHNSON: Did you have an early mentor or someone that might have inspired you to pursue a political career?

WOOLSEY: No. I didn't. When I was well, I was well into my 40s, when I ran for the Petaluma city council, and then one of the city council members adopted me, and he was a great help. And he became a terrific mentor. But I was already into it, and he just helped make it happen.

WASNIEWSKI: You were on the Petaluma city council for a number of years in the 1980s, and we're just curious: What from that experience helped you when you made the move to Congress? What did you find most useful from that city council experience?

WOOLSEY: Well, first of all, it was a huge step, from city council for a city of less than 50,000 people to here, to the Congress. But actually, I learned that every vote is not the end of your career. And it all measures out in the long run. It's what people can trust in you and believe in you and that you are who you say you are, and that shows, when you're making decisions.

WASNIEWSKI: What prompted you to run for Congress in 1992?

WOOLSEY: Well, Barbara Boxer announced that she's [retiring from the House] she called a bunch of Democrats to her home, that were activists, and she said, "I'm running, I'm going to run for Senate." And she'd been our Congresswoman for 10 years. And I knew that that was the only chance I'd ever have because it was an open seat. I would never have run against her. It would have been stupid.

And so I waited for the redistricting to come out. Where I lived—I lived in Petaluma, Northern California, 40 minutes north of San Francisco. My town was the very northern edge of Barbara Boxer's district. And she had San Francisco—some of San Francisco—and she had Vallejo. And there was no way you could live in Petaluma and run in San Francisco. They'd have laughed. Like, "Huh?" So I had to wait and see what happened. And for some reason—nobody knew I was running, so it had nothing to do with Lynn Woolsey—my house was the very center of that district. The new district: no San Francisco, no Vallejo, all of Marin County, and most of Sonoma County, which was the larger population. And that's where I lived. I mean, things happen for a reason. Timing is everything, and it was my time.

WASNIEWSKI: You mentioned hearing from Congresswoman Boxer in a meeting that she was going to run for the Senate. Had you known her in that decade prior, when she was serving in the House?

WOOLSEY: Well, I knew her because I was a follower. And if there was—actually, shame on me for saying I didn't have anybody that I looked up to. I really looked up to Barbara. But no, she wasn't a personal mentor or anything like that. But I so respected and admired that she could stand for her beliefs. And she was so fiery, and she was great.

JOHNSON: When you decided to run for her seat, did she offer you any advice?

WOOLSEY: No, she actually really wanted somebody else. And there were nine people in the primary, so it was a really impacted group. There were two women. The other woman was a bit of a plant because there was one outsider that came into town, Bennett seemed, Senator [John] Bennett Johnston [Jr.]'s son [J. Bennett Johnston III] came to Northern California to run for Barbara's seat. And they were very smart, and they thought, "Well, we can't just have one woman in the race," because it was the "Year of the Woman" [1992].

So I had to figure out how I differed from all these people, outside of being a woman, because that's . . . you don't run on, "Look at me, I'm a woman." That's obvious; you're a woman. You know, just sitting and thinking, "Why am I so different from all these people that were up here, having all these debates with?" We had hundreds of them. And I went, "Ding! You were on welfare with your family, when . . . none of these people have experienced anything like this. You need to talk about it and tell what that experience meant and what you learned from it."

And that did it. That identified me as somebody who had walked her talk, who knew . . . And running in one of the wealthiest counties in the country, Marin County. But they really respected the fact that I'd struggled and prevailed and knew what I was talking about.

JOHNSON: Was there one turning point? And perhaps that was that people could relate to you or a specific memory, something that really stands out in your mind from that first campaign?

WOOLSEY: Well, it was the "Year of the Woman." Lucky me really. And my base support came from the women's movement in Sonoma County. I had been the chair of the commission on the status of women when it was first formed, and I went to my friends that I'd served with in the '70s, on the commission, and said, "Okay, here's what I'm thinking of doing"—once the [district] lines were out. And they said, "Oh, well, yes, we always get behind the people we want. Nobody ever wins, but sure, we'll do this." And those {clap} women got {clap} busy, and I had a terrific campaign. And when I won, it was like, "What? We never win!" When I won, I won the primary because one person dropped out, so with eight people in the primary, I won with, I believe, eight percent above the next person, and that's pretty good with that many impacted. So we did a good job, but they did it.

The day after I met with them they had buttons out, "Another woman for Woolsey." And then men started saying, "What do you mean, 'Another woman'?" And they put tape over the "W-O," and it was good. And they had all the right energy of grassroots, and we really had a good campaign. I had no money. I spent $78,000 on the campaign. I got no support from D.C., except for NOW [National Organization for Women]. They were the only national group that endorsed me. But I was so naïve, I didn't really know that that mattered, so that was lucky! {laughter} I knew so little about here that it was . . . Now that I, after I was here for a while, it was kind of a surprise. "Wow, you didn't know anything. How did you get here?"

WASNIEWSKI: You mentioned the "Year of the Woman," and in your opinion, now, looking back on that, why was 1992 the "Year of the Woman?" Why was there such a surge in women elected to Congress that year?

WOOLSEY: Well, the Supreme Court Justices were . . . Gosh, I can't remember—Anita Hill, okay? That just made women in this country furious. And it was the "Year of the Woman," and then the next election, two years later, all the women that were—had been elected that I went to dinner with—every Thursday night, we had the most fun. There were only two of us left. Women lost. They won, and then two years later, they lost. So it was a short year, it was short season for women.

JOHNSON: Did you notice that when you were campaigning? Would you have women that would come up to you and talk to you about running, especially in that particular election cycle?

WOOLSEY: Right, well, they liked that I . . . Yes, it made a difference to them that I was a woman. And the thing was to not have men *not* like me because I was a woman. I was an executive; I was the only woman executive in a group of, at a start-up company, and I've never been a threat to men. Other than I always tell them when they're being sexist or inappropriate, not—they've been chauvinistic, you know? So I helped in that regard, taught a lot of men how to grow up that way.

JOHNSON: We've been asking all of our interviewees about campaign materials and how they chose buttons or bumper stickers or if you have any sort of memories or stories that go along with what you chose in that first campaign.

WOOLSEY: Well, I had an artist friend—a graphic-artist friend—who made my first bumper sticker when I ran for city council, and he designed it. And it was, it stuck. It was just my name, "WOOLSEY." And the way he did it, it worked,

and it was red, white, and blue, and it was good. And that's what I used forever. And we'd fight. Then later in life, later on, it would be time to reprint and everything, and his zero—that was the unique part. He was an artist, and he had the O-Os in "WOOLSEY," he had them just a certain space, and so I'd have to insist that my staff would keep that spacing for the future all the way through. Because it's easy to go, "Oh, well, who cares now?" But, yes, it meant something to me that it was his art, and it was good.

JOHNSON: When you were on the campaign trail, the first campaign and beyond, was that something that you enjoyed doing?

WOOLSEY: Nobody can enjoy campaigning. I mean, it's hard. It is really hard. Personal to me was, I didn't realize this, but I was absolutely not a public speaker. I'd done all these things, all these years, burned in my belly and got things done, but I wasn't out there on the platform, talking to people and convincing people. And it scared me to death. And people would say, "Oh, who, that's not Lynn. That's not the person we know. Who is that person on the platform?" And I was just scared out of my wits. And so I had to say . . . No.

So this nice lesbian couple said, "We can either give to your campaign, or we can send you to a person we want you to meet, to talk about your fears on the stage." I said, "That would be great." And I thought, "Oh, God, I'm going to have to have speech coaching and stuff." But I need it. Well, this woman didn't do that. She just took me, and she said, "Tell me what happened to you when you were a kid that scared you to death." We talked about it, and she said, "Okay. Here's the deal. When you start getting up on that stage, you're going to say to that little four year old, 'Hey! I'm in charge. Don't worry. I know what I'm talking about. You don't have to carry the burden at four years old.'" And it worked. My heart would start pounding and I'd go, "Hey, it's okay." The little girl in me, yes, and that little girl got

to grow up. So what a gift that was! Wasn't that a gift? And that was women, to another woman. And women willing to say, "She's no good up there. She can't win if she's going to be scared to death." And they helped me.

WASNIEWSKI: That first campaign must have been difficult for you, too, because your opponent developed cancer and had to quit campaigning a couple months before the election. What was that like?

WOOLSEY: Right. Well, that was the Republican. Yes, once we got through the primary, it was obvious that I was up against a really popular Republican. And he was a good guy. And he's the one that once I started talking about my welfare experience, pulled me aside—he'd come to our debates because it was obvious he needed to find out what we were all saying. He'd come to—he said, "I want you to know, you've found the perfect thing to be talking about, and you're really doing it well." See, that's a nice guy.

He had brain cancer. He should have pulled out of the race. They should have run somebody else. But he didn't. But his campaign manager was really nasty. So I didn't have to worry about not being nice to Bill Filante because his campaign manager was so awful to me. He'd say things in the newspaper about, "Bill Filante, with no brains, has twice more brains than Lynn Woolsey." Can you imagine being that stupid? But they thought they'd run, the Republicans thought they'd run him, and he'd win on name recognition, and they'd have a special election. But it didn't work. So timing's everything.

JOHNSON: Before we move on, you touched upon your district, describing it a little bit, but for people that aren't familiar with Northern California, can you just explain a little more about the district, demographically and just a description of it as well?

WOOLSEY: Sure. The Sixth Congressional District started halfway across the Golden Gate Bridge, coming north from San Francisco, and it's two full counties, the Pacific Ocean on the west coast of both counties, and the San Francisco Bay on the east part of it, and then up to Sonoma County, where it's the wine country and ag[riculture] and cows and chickens and sheep. It's really a beautiful district. High tech, but in the appropriate places; lots of green spaces, and Marin County is one of the wealthiest districts in the country. And Marin and Sonoma are equally progressive. They're very progressive. So as one of the most liberal Members in the Congress and the most liberal in many years, when they do those comparisons, it was, if I wasn't, I would have been in trouble. I didn't have to pretend I was, because I absolutely am, but I just had the best constituency on Earth, and very well-educated. I'm absolutely clear that the better-educated you are, the more you care about your world.

WASNIEWSKI: A new shift to that House experience for you. There were 24 new women elected to the House in 1992. Five were from California, so Lynn Schenk, Anna [Georges] Eshoo, Jane [L.] Harman, and Lucille Roybal-Allard. Did a special bond develop between that group of you in particular?

WOOLSEY: Yes. We were all good friends, and particularly the Northern Californians because we flew together every week. We flew to D.C., and we flew home from D.C. every week. So we got to know each other very well, right. And Nancy Pelosi was part of that, you see. She was on that plane with us, and she taught us a lot.

WASNIEWSKI: You had mentioned—before we get away from it too far—you had mentioned the dinners that you had with that group of women that were elected in that class. Who were some of the people who participated in that, and what were those dinners like? Informal?

WOOLSEY: Karen Shepherd from Utah, Karan English from Arizona, Lucille Roybal-Allard, myself, Lynn Schenk, sometimes. I can't think of who else. And then some guys came along. We had men in the group. When the Democrats ran the Congress, when I first got elected, you never knew when you were going to go home. They were really not very well organized. I don't know if you were here for that, but oof! That's the only good thing, as far as I'm concerned, the Republicans have brought to the Congress. {laughter} They run a tighter ship for coming and going. You knew when the day was going to be over and when the week was going to be over. But we never knew.

But Thursday, we always knew we'd be there Thursday night. And we'd either vote that night or not, but in between, we'd go out and have dinner. And we, it was such good camaraderie. And when we broke for the first election in '94, I sort of stood on the House . . . women all hugged each other goodbye and stuff. I watched the Members just walk out and not say goodbye to each other and, "See you." And I thought, "Wow. That's cold." Well, after that election, I got it. Because all the, such a great group of their friends don't come back. So they don't get close. You know, why invest—this is a very male thing, and I'm being very sexist saying this, but a generalist—you go, and you represent your island, your district, and you don't have to get close to other people. I don't work that way. I could never do that. But I got the lesson right away.

Karen Shepherd was one of my best friends. Oh, the other one: Elizabeth Furse was with us, but she didn't lose. She almost lost; she just barely hung in there. It was Elizabeth Furse, Lucille Roybal-Allard, and I were still there, when it was over.

JOHNSON: You mentioned Nancy Pelosi, and she had come in the late '80s, into the House. Did she serve as a mentor to you?

WOOLSEY: She served as a mentor to all of us. She was really a good mentor. She would show us just by example. She would push us up front at a press conference, and she'd stand back. She is so gracious that . . . and it was a lesson. And it was a good lesson: That you can be on the other side of something with somebody, and you can still be gracious. You don't have to be all fiery and hateful. She really taught me a lot.

JOHNSON: Did you have any other mentors, either other women or men?

WOOLSEY: Patsy [Takemoto] Mink was one of my mentors. She actually came in and campaigned for me when I first ran. We became just really good friends. I ran—one of the reasons I ran—was because I saw a news report of Maxine Waters trying to get into the White House for a meeting that she should have been part of that she hadn't been invited to, and I thought, "She needs—Maxine Waters—needs me." {laughter} I mean, I would . . . she did! And we—Maxine and Barbara Lee and I—became what we called "the Triad" because we really became good friends. But I learned a lot from the women that I respected.

Pat [Patricia Scott] Schroeder and I are friends. People all thought I was Pat Schroeder at first. They'd stop me in the hall and start talking to me: "Oh, I adore you!" and I'd say, "No, you don't adore me; I haven't been here long enough to be adored. You think I'm Pat [Patricia Scott] Schroeder, don't you?" I learned how to say that. And they'd go, "Oh!" A car passed me on the street one day, honking, and "Pat, Pat!" and then started swearing at me. I didn't know they were even calling me because I'm not [Pat Schroeder]. And then I went, "Oh my gosh, I should have waved, so they didn't think she was being rude." So just before she retired, she came up and she said, "Lynn, Lynn, Lynn, you won't believe this. Somebody just came up to me and said, 'Are you Lynn Woolsey?'" {clap} And I said, "I made it." {laughter} But we

all, friendships are important. Coming here and just being all by yourself just would be, I can't imagine it because this can be a cold place.

WASNIEWSKI: It can also be a place with a lot of scrutiny at times. When you were with that group of women Members, what was it like to have that kind of press attention and that during that "Year of the Woman?"

WOOLSEY: Oh, no one paid any attention to us. We were just . . . First, we weren't Senators. Second, we were freshman women. Nobody cared. Nobody followed us around.

WASNIEWSKI: Did you find any difference between dealing with the local press, back home, and national press from time to time, if you were trying to push an issue?

WOOLSEY: Oh, well, yes. For me, my main newspaper didn't endorse me and never in the 20 years I was in Congress, they never forgave me, ever, for having beat their boy. So yes, they would . . . their first endorsement they spent three-quarters of the column saying why not to vote for Lynn Woolsey, and they endorsed the person they wanted. And one of the things they said was, "She's not up to the rare air of Washington, D.C." {laughter} And that incensed people. They just didn't get it, why people liked me or would even think about voting for me because they, I just wasn't what they thought I should be. And then I got elected 10 times, and if they could find, if there was anybody running that they thought might beat me, they'd always endorse that person.

And the national press didn't pay a whole bunch attention to me. They did for the [Iraq] War, and they did on labor issues. It was easier for me to deal with them, half the time, than my own newspapers. And one of my newspapers that always endorsed me didn't endorse me one time, and the editor's family didn't talk to him for a week. {laughter} So well, you know,

politics is politics. It can be hurtful. Truth be told, my ego was never really in—my real ego, the real Lynn Woolsey—my ego was with my family and me as an individual. I mean, this politics stuff—it's harsh. If you buy into it to a point where it is all you are, that doesn't work.

JOHNSON: More generally speaking, did you notice a difference between the way the press would ask questions of women versus male Members or just in how you were treated as a woman Member versus how the men might have been treated?

WOOLSEY: Not particularly the press. Because I probably wouldn't have let that happen. When I first got here, and I had, I told you that I'd helped people I'd worked with, the guys and all that, become current on how to treat a woman, and how to . . . everything wasn't him, and all this stuff. When I got here, in 1993, it was like, "Oh my gosh. This is a real male clique." And I knew I had a choice. I could keep on teaching all men how to be good humans, or I could get something done for my district. And so I let the teaching go. I stopped. I stopped correcting men that said the wrong—called women "girls." I stopped it all. Just it was too much. It was too ingrained here. But I didn't, wasn't able to go home and tell my women friends, who would—in the women's group—"How has it been?" "Oh, it's fine. We're all the same," because it would have broken their hearts that I didn't go there to change these dudes. Because I just, it would, it was not possible. And little by little, younger men started getting elected; things got better. But, yes, oh, it was tough at first.

JOHNSON: Were there parts of the institution, particularly, that were difficult for women to be a part of?

WOOLSEY: Well, the gym. Yes, yes. And men go out and golf, and . . . it's the same in corporations. You hang around people you're comfortable with. And women were left out, just left out, because they weren't part of the gang. But it was starting to change. See, it was just starting to change by the time I got here. There were the ones before me. Pat Schroeder didn't have a chair on the first [Armed Services] Committee [meeting]. She and Ron [Ronald V.] Dellums had to share a chair. That was gross.[1] And they started making changes. And Maxine Waters was already here, and Patsy Mink was already here. They were making changes. And so I can't imagine what it was like then.

JOHNSON: Did they offer any advice to you? The women Members that had been here for a while, when you faced something like you were saying, if a male Member maybe wasn't treating you the way you should be treated, did they offer any sort of advice?

WOOLSEY: They offered advice about issues and politics. I can't remember ever saying, "A male Member didn't . . ." No, I remember asking for something in an Appropriations Subcommittee, and the chair calling me "Missy Lynn." And {laughter}, yes, I mean, he really liked me. He was a darling Southern gentleman, and he liked "Missy Lynn," and you know what? I let it go. "Well, Mr. Chairman," and went on. So I don't think anybody would do that today. It's 25 years later.

WASNIEWSKI: Women's Caucus?

JOHNSON: Perfect.

WASNIEWSKI: Okay, we'd like to get your general memories of the Women's Caucus during your first term. How would you describe the leadership of the caucus at that point?

WOOLSEY: Well, Pat Schroeder was the leader at that point, and it was vital, and it was exciting. The Democrats were in charge of Congress. We were in the majority and had been forever, so Democrats ruled. And then it all changed. So the caucus ended up being a nonentity for me. I'd go to a few of their things to show support for whoever was the Democratic chair of the [caucus]—then they had the co-chairs. So they just didn't get anything done. We just couldn't agree on anything. Everything that was important to women, the R's wouldn't do. So once in a while, the two co-chairs would find something that they could do together, and we would all support it. But it was, it just was not what I thought it would be when . . . But after, but when we first got here, and Pat Schroeder was the chair, the head of it, that was like a dream come true for me.

WASNIEWSKI: So just to be clear, was it the caucus itself that became more partisan, or was it just the fact that the caucus' agenda didn't then align with the new majority?

WOOLSEY: Well, when the Republicans took over [in 1995], they first of all changed the caucus system and the committee system—the informal committees. So nothing had any support, for one thing. And they made the . . . the women's caucus was bipartisan. I suppose it was just partisan in the first place because there were no women Republicans for a long time. But I don't know what the cause and effect was. The line was drawn on, even not just abortion but any kind of pregnancy preventions, and it just became kind of meaningless.

JOHNSON: There were some issues that, as an organization, that you did back and had some success with. Do you remember any, in particular, for you that might have been important, that you thought the caucus really worked well together?

WOOLSEY: You know what, no. I just don't have it up here in front of my head. If you brought them up, I'd probably remember and can talk about them, but I, they just, it just wasn't that important to me. Things that were important to me, for women, were the Convention to End Discrimination, through the UN. I took that and introduced it my, I think, second day in Congress. And had to fight the Democrats, the, excuse me, the Republicans in the Senate, forever. But that, and women and work was very important to me.

And I had legislation on making it easier for women to take time off and have, take care of their families and things like that. It was called the Balancing Act. I'm having a hard time sitting here remembering all that stuff, because I don't think about it anymore. But the Balancing Act. And somebody, I think Carolyn [Bosher] Maloney, has it now. So there were . . . And Carolyn—the ERA [Equal Rights Amendment] was very important to me—but Carolyn Maloney is totally perfect and has her teeth in it, and I'm a hundred-percent supporting. See, I'm a person that thinks, "If somebody else is doing good leadership, you do your part of what they need. You don't go up and compete and try to be the leader of something that's being handled." And she's always, she was great.

JOHNSON: What about the Family Medical Leave Act? We had read that that was something that you strongly supported.

WOOLSEY: Right. I did. Actually, as a freshman, I did a lot of TV for them because I had been a human-resources manager for a decade and knew what it meant to companies and knew that companies could do it, even though they said they couldn't. {laughter} Goodness gracious! And then later got the veterans, I got that act expanded for veterans' families and friends so that veterans could get the help they needed, even though it wasn't the individual leaving; they left

to go help their veteran—a friend or a family member. And I think that's the only time the Family Medical Leave Act has been expanded.

JOHNSON: How did that issue, that particular part that you just mentioned, about veterans, how did that become important to you? Is that something that was brought up among your constituents? Or is that just something that you knew that there was a need for?

WOOLSEY: Well, there was a need for it, yes, and we had constituents who needed, yes—had to leave their jobs and go to a veterans' hospital and sit with their husband or kid or boyfriend for months on end. And it was so clear that veterans were coming back, and they needed a lot of help. And I was not for the wars, ever, but I certainly was for veterans. And that was something they, that could help. That's all we . . . at that point. See, there's not a lot of places you can go and make, and actually help. And so, we found, we decided that that would be a place we could weigh in, and Republicans voted for it, too.

WASNIEWSKI: Another piece of landmark legislation during your career was the Violence Against Women Act. Do you have any memories of Congresswomen rallying around that and the caucus and its role?

WOOLSEY: Right, yes. But, no, not that I can talk about. I just don't have a, it's just not right there, you know?

WASNIEWSKI: Sure. Okay.

WOOLSEY: Yes. I mean, see, all of that I was part of. I'm not saying I—because I didn't care, and I didn't do it.

WASNIEWSKI: Absolutely.

WOOLSEY: I just, I did it. And I wouldn't have thought not to be part of it. But it wasn't . . . There's so much you have to make important, and in our offices, every two years, we would put together our action plan of what we hoped to accomplish. One was the marine sanctuary that has been, finally got accomplished. And we know those were our priorities. And it didn't mean we didn't do the other stuff because we did it all. But it could not, it just . . . you can't have a, everything can't be a priority.

WASNIEWSKI: Right.

JOHNSON: Women Members face certain scrutiny, as you would know, and some issues, no matter what, if you took a vocal stance or not, you were going to be questioned about, and certainly one of them was women's reproductive rights.

WOOLSEY: Yes.

JOHNSON: So one of the things that we're just wondering is, for you personally in your career and then for all the women that were in Congress, how important this debate was, the pro-life/pro-choice debate, and how that might have influenced your work as a legislator?

WOOLSEY: Well, it was never a question for me of how important that was for women, that they have a, that the choice be theirs. And it was something I'd been working on way before I became a Member of Congress. I had to learn to accept some friends who couldn't vote for abortion and still, and not totally, I had to learn not to disrespect them on everything else, just because of that. It was hard, because that's one of the places where I would draw a line.

But I can remember going over to the Pennsylvania guys for—John [Patrick] Murtha [Jr.] held court in the back, and they wouldn't vote for it. Okay, stop

this, but—for birth control, okay? They wouldn't vote for it! And I'd go over there and say, "Okay you guys. I know you won't vote for abortion. You don't have to have an abortion if you have birth control." "Yeah, Lynn, we know, and we know you're right, but our Catholic constituents won't hear of it, and we're just not going to put the effort in it. And we know you're right." I just hated that.

I just thought that was . . . Okay, because for me, if you knew something was right, you went out there and you argued for it. And you debated for it. And you tried to convince people because they elect somebody to go to Congress, to go to the Senate, to go to their city council, to represent them, and they think that person knows something. So they will listen, at least, to what you have to say. They might not change their mind. And there are a lot of people that are just nonplussed. They don't have an opinion one way or the other. And they'll listen to the person they respect. And they would have listened to those guys, if they said, "You know, I know we're against abortions, but you don't have to have an abortion if you don't get pregnant." But they wouldn't do it. So yes, it meant something to me.

But you know what I found disappointing, okay, is we would have an abortion—they would bring them up, once the Republicans ran the show again, they'd bring stuff up. You know, late-term abortion and all—and they'd just go on and on and on. And the outside groups quit scoring those votes. "Well, we're not going to score this." "Well, okay. Then why should anybody pay attention to you?" Why should these guys that tell you, "Well, I will vote for . . . I won't vote for abortion, but I will vote for family planning." And then they don't. Why did you let them get off the hook? But they do, and that disappointed me.

WASNIEWSKI: Committees?

JOHNSON: Sure.

WASNIEWSKI: We're just curious to know, because committee assignments are always important for particularly a new Member of Congress, how it was that you received your initial assignments on the Education and the Budget Committees, and Government Operations as well.

WOOLSEY: Well, Science was . . . My two committees were Ed and Labor and Science. And then we were big enough [California delegation] that I got to get on Government Relations, I mean Government Operations.

WASNIEWSKI: Operations, at that time, yes.

WOOLSEY: Yes, Operations. Okay. Remember I told you I was really naïve when I came? I knew nothing about any of this. But I was a good personnel [manager], a human-resources executive, is what I was in the outside world. So I knew how to hire people I knew, and I knew right up front—quickly, that I didn't know much, here.

So I hired people that did, so okay, so I came to Congress because I wanted our country to be better educated. I thought that was—and I still do—I think that's the core of this country knowing what it wants, needs to be doing. So I campaigned for Ed and Labor. And I wanted to be on that committee. Nobody believed me, when I would say, this is the committee I want to be on, and I want to be on it the entire . . . this is what I want, period. Because it's a stepping-stone committee—I didn't know that when I come here. I didn't know that big money doesn't go the Education and Labor—well labor helps, because of labor unions, but I didn't know that. I know none of that. I just know where I want to be. And I got on it, thank heavens. I wouldn't have, but I had no disappointment there, and Science

because we wanted Science because of all the technology in my district, and I came from a high-tech company.

And then the Government was—there were—the Government Operations. That was a gift, because it was . . . They had room, and they asked me, did I want to go on it, and I loved it. But then we lost so many seats I didn't get to stay on it. But I stayed on those two committees [Education and Labor and Science] the entire 20 years.

Now Appropriations came up, about six years before I left. And it was my turn, and I was the one that would get it from California, Northern California. And I got the letters out, and I did all that I needed to do to get the support I needed. You learned. Believe me, you learned how to do all this. {laughter} You don't stay naïve for more than two-and-a-half seconds because it's a campaign. Every one of these things is a campaign. It was good, it would have, it was going to be my seat.

And I started thinking, "Do I want to do that, compared to making a different, making law?" And I changed my mind. And I wrote everybody and said, "Thank you for your support, but I'm not going to do it. I'm going to, I want to stay where I am." Because I was the ranking or chair of the Labor Committee or Workforce Protection, but I always called it "Labor." And I loved that. That's where I belonged. Since, I've been places, someplace where Nancy Pelosi was speaking, and she referred to me (I was in the audience), "Lynn Woolsey gave up the big-money committee because she wanted to be where her heart was." And I didn't even know she knew that. Yes. So, yes. That's why I liked being in Congress because I could make those choices.

WASNIEWSKI: When you first joined Ed and Labor, there were just a handful of women on the committee at that point. Patsy Mink was one of them.

WOOLSEY: Right.

WASNIEWSKI: What was the reception like for you in that committee?

WOOLSEY: Well, I liked the chairman, I got along with him. He, speaking of men that don't know {laughter}, but I always knew how to do that without . . . It was okay. We had a nice relationship. And so I, yes. There weren't very many women up here anyway, and I was pretty used to being the only woman executive—I was the only woman on our city council for many, many years, and when I left, it was all women and one man. {laughter} I don't take all the credit for that, but that was not all that strange for me to be just a lone female.

But I learned a lot. You just have to learn, and you have to learn so fast when you don't know anything, like I didn't. I knew where it burned in my belly. I knew it was important to me. I didn't have a clue how to say it and how to get it done. But boom, boom! We learned, yes.

WASNIEWSKI: When you think of someone who was really involved in education issues, Patsy Mink, of course, comes right to the top.

WOOLSEY: Yes, yes.

WASNIEWSKI: So what was it like having her on that committee, and what kind of advice did she offer, specifically about the committee and getting legislation through the committee?

WOOLSEY: Well, she was . . . I followed her. I watched her, and I knew what was important to her, and she knew I was her comrade. She knew she had me listening and caring and learning because she was terrific. Yes. Fiery . . .

Actually, just before Patsy got sick and died [in 2002]—it wasn't even two weeks before that—we went to a professional women's basketball game, here in D.C. And she was honored; it was something—oh, they were honoring her for something, I can't remember right now, but it was little Patsy and those big, tall women, and you just knew what she'd accomplished. Yes.

JOHNSON: What did you learn from her, either on that committee or just as how she was a Representative in the House?

WOOLSEY: Well, as I'm talking, I'm realizing, the people that I was most in awe of and the people who fit Lynn Woolsey most were the ones that would stand up for what they believed in. Barbara, certainly, Boxer, and all that she did, and Patsy. I mean, she was fiery. She could say it, you know? {snaps fingers} And people respected her because she had her facts, and she knew what she was talking about. But she was passionate about what she believed. And Barbara Lee is that way. She's one of my best friends in the Congress. Pat Schroeder.

And that's who Patsy was to me. And she could come to me and say . . . We didn't, there were some things that we didn't agree on that she had to do for her district, but we all know that about each other's districts. Like, somebody who wouldn't think of drinking a drink or having a glass of wine would never support the stuff I would support for the wine industry in my district. But I got it, and they, we all knew that. Those are things . . . But I kept, I would always tell Patsy she needed to be taxing marijuana in her district. And she'd go, "Oh, Lynn!" {laughter} She was so darling. Oh, she was a great woman.

JOHNSON: How important do you think it was to have women on all the House committees, but in particular what you can talk about with Ed and Labor and Science?

WOOLSEY: Well, women on every committee, because we bring a perspective that wasn't under consideration until women got there. Title IX that Patsy passed—that wouldn't have happened, without a woman saying, "Well, we need to do this." Yes. It's very important to have women. But not all women think the same, and so I . . . Believe me. It's not like, "If you're a woman, you're going to do the right thing." Or "if you're a man, you're going to do the wrong thing" either, in reverse. But just because people or an individual is female doesn't make her care about less-fortunate females and things like that.

WASNIEWSKI: When Democrats took control of the House in 2007, you had the opportunity to chair the Workforce Protection Subcommittee. I'm just curious what you remember about your experience, and how would you describe your leadership style of that subcommittee?

WOOLSEY: That was a good time for me. One, it was just a tiny [sub]committee. It didn't have a lot of respect from our leadership and from the chairman of the committee, actually, and because there didn't seem to be a lot of interest. But I was very—when Major [Robert Odell] Owens was the chair of it, or the Ranking Member. And I was always on the committee, on the subcommittee. It was important to me. And so I had a chance to go out, to chair another subcommittee, and I chose this one, and I thought, "Oh, I hope I didn't make a mistake." But Donald [Milford] Payne came on the [sub]committee, and he had such respect from everybody, and the committee was made up of people that I got involved in what was happening and talked to and got them to let them know I was disappointed if they didn't show up for the subcommittee meetings. Because they don't, you know? And they came.

And little by little, the staff and my leader, George Miller, started referring and respecting what I was doing. But it took a while. There was, you got to

earn it, you . . . I'm telling you, you really have to work to earn respect around there. And for me, it was by producing and by doing what I was supposed to do. But in being able to fight and do it right. I don't mean respect just because you are somebody or something. So it became my committee.

JOHNSON: Did you feel like women Members had to work just a little bit harder to earn that respect?

WOOLSEY: Oh, gosh yes! Oh, heavens. Yes.

JOHNSON: Did that change over time? Did it get a little bit easier?

WOOLSEY: I think it's getting better. I truly do. I believe it's getting better. But there's no question that women have to work harder for, to raise money and, you know, the whole thing, in politics.

JOHNSON: You mentioned George Miller.

WOOLSEY: Yes.

JOHNSON: What were your impressions of him and his leadership of the committee?

WOOLSEY: Well, he really knew his stuff. He was a big, big leader. But he didn't have a lot of patience. And he's a good friend. And I had to prove myself to him. And I know, I feel without question, that I did, so I don't have to worry about that. I think pretty soon there, they would say, "Well, George can't do this. Lynn, he'd like you to do it." And that's, then you start feeling like, "Okay, I'm there."

WASNIEWSKI: Was there one particular piece of legislation or business before the committee that you felt like, "Okay, I've finally had turned a corner with the chairman?"

WOOLSEY: Yes, but I was trying to think of what it was. I don't have—see, I'm always going forward. I don't remember stuff like that. I remember the incident. Something was going on, and we were fighting like mad with . . . it was a hearing. And it was a setup, and the Republicans had set it up so that something was going to—oh, that doesn't make good TV, so I can't say that. It was a hearing; there was a battle; and George sent his staff in because they were afraid I wouldn't be able to handle it, and I said, "No, I'm fine." And I was. And afterward they all [said], "Whew." You know, they were . . . And I got a lot of compliments for that, and from then on, nobody worried, could I, or did I have what it took to deal with whatever these issues were?

JOHNSON: There's a quote that we came across that we just wanted to ask you about. You were quoted as saying that it takes 10 years for you to stop being a teenager and to become a full adult in Congress. Can you explain what you meant by that?

WOOLSEY: Well, yes. You are learning and learning, and it's trying and testing and experimenting and seeing what other people are doing to make your decisions, and then, all of a sudden, boom, you know who you are. You start making your decisions totally on your, without having to worry about your chairman, your mother, your father. You know what I mean? You're a leader. You know who you are in the process. You're no longer scurrying around being a teenager. Teenagers are trying and learning. It's hard. It's much harder to be a teenager than an adult, I think.

WASNIEWSKI: Well, that's a great breaking point, because we're an hour in, believe it or not.

WOOLSEY: Oh my gosh, aren't we through? {laughter}

END OF PART ONE ~ BEGINNING OF PART TWO

JOHNSON: Throughout your career, you reminded people that you had been a single mom who had been on welfare. How did this experience shape your future career in Congress?

WOOLSEY: Well, it was very important to my career in Congress, of who I was as an individual, because for one thing, I have never been the kind of person that, "Well, I made it, so why can't you?" But what I got out of this was, because of circumstances, my three children, they were one, three, and five years old, and I, were on our own. And I went to work, but my work didn't cover all of our needs, so I went on aid for dependent children, as well. I didn't stop working. And it was so difficult for me, and I was educated. My children were healthy, smart. We didn't have any horrible problems. And I got a job, the first job I applied for. I mean, all these things. And I kept thinking, "How do they—women that have so much less than I—get through this? How do they do it?" And then, with all the criticisms and all the, "Women, Cadillac Welfare mothers," and all this stuff, it just became something that was very important to me to try to set straight, at least, and help people know that people that they know and respect have had hard times and come through them and needed help and, believe me, have paid back.

But my staff, after I got elected, my staff would say, "Well, you can't go down there and talk about being a welfare mother because that's all you're going to be known for." And my answer was, "If I don't do it, who will?" I mean, come on! You've got to show by example. You can't just, talk about things. And it turned out that that wasn't all I was known for, and I would stand on the floor, and I could—and I remember this, and I was part of the welfare reform, well, I was one of the co-chairs of the Welfare Reform

Caucus in the House, when I was a junior, about that, now that I think, it was the fourth year I was in Congress.

And I would stand on the floor and be talking about my experiences, and the place would be, you could hear a pin drop. And I heard somebody say to somebody else, "Yeah, but she's different." And I said, "The picture of a welfare mom, the average welfare mom is Caucasian, has two kids"—I had three—"and they're on welfare, and they've been abandoned by the father, and they are on the system about four, five years." And I was three years, I think. And you know, when you make people realize that, then they start maybe paying attention.

But because I always go forward, I hadn't even thought of it, and when I started talking about how I had been a welfare mom when I was running for Congress, one of my sons said, "We were never on welfare." He had no idea because it was just something—I wasn't ashamed of it, the least little bit. But I was on the way to the next hurdle and get something else done, get it done. It made a difference.

JOHNSON: It sounds like you really embraced talking about your experience, but was it ever difficult for you to talk about, either when you were campaigning or on the floor?

WOOLSEY: Well, no, except for at one point, my opponent in the general election, the first time around, they found the house that my husband and I had lived in, which was . . . We were a very successful young couple. And I was a stay-at-home mom, but he was very successful. And they started, put it all over the paper, that I . . . "Yeah, like, she says she's a welfare mom. Look at this house." Well, yes; that house was gone. And barely was it taken away from me. So, that was embarrassing. I fought for it and said, "Look, here it was

one week from being repossessed, when I moved my kids out, and we got $500, and that was it for that beautiful house." So, that was embarrassing. No, it wasn't, no.

When Barbara Lee came to Congress, she'd never, ever told anybody about her, she raised her—and she watched me, and then she went down on the floor, and she started talking about it. And when she talks about it, people really pay attention, too, because she's somebody who people respect a lot.

WASNIEWSKI: When you were first elected, as you mentioned, in '92, Democrats were in control of the House, and in '94, Republicans took the majority. How would you describe the shift in atmosphere into the 104th Congress and that first Congress under Republican majority?

WOOLSEY: Oh, yuck. It was awful. When I was first elected, people would say, "What's your impression of the Congress?" I'd say, "The good is how polite and respectful people are to each other, across the aisle. Talk to each other, listen (or at least pretend to listen), but talk with respect and kindness. That's the good. The bad is our schedule is so helter-skelter it's enough to kill anybody. I mean, it's horrible." And that was under the Democrats, okay?

Republicans take over; we lose all that respect. It all disappears—worse and worse, year by year. And they take care of running the trains on time. I mean, we had a schedule. That was the good, but I would have traded it back for, in a minute, but it just changed. And it made, it was harder to get things done. I had some very meaningful to some, but really meaningless in the big picture, legislation to honor a school administrator level that the clerks and the nurses and, not the teachers, and the Republicans wouldn't vote for it. That had never happened before. You honor, little . . . Anyway. It was not good. And it's worse now. I can't imagine what it's like now, how they can stand it

there. Except for—I want to tell you. My successor is really terrific. I'm really lucky. And he's getting stuff done because he's able to talk to the other side a little bit. So I give him credit.

JOHNSON: With all the changes, the back-and-forth between Republicans and Democrats controlling Congress, you remained pretty consistent in your progressive beliefs and were outspoken, an outspoken liberal. You had the opportunity to chair the Congressional Progressive Caucus. What was that like? How would you describe that experience?

WOOLSEY: Well, the Progressive Caucus was just there, ready to . . . Well, remember I told you, I'm a good team player, but when the team can be better, I quite often end up being the leader. Well Barbara Lee and I decided to lead it together, so it could be real diverse. And we took the caucus that had about 20 members and built it up into the 80s. And it became a force to be reckoned with. The Progressive Caucus finally was invited into the leadership meetings, when all the—they wanted views from all the entities that made a difference, and so it became, and it's still very vital. So it was a good experience. And I co-chaired it with other people—Barbara two years and Raúl [M.] Grijalva for one term, for two years). So I co-chaired it for six years. And I carried that as a badge of honor.

JOHNSON: What did you do to build that much support in that short period of time?

WOOLSEY: Well, we asked people, and we had started having real meetings, and we started having issues. We wrote a budget, the Progressive Caucus Budget, and introduced it, and we started making a difference, and we started speaking out, from the progressive perspective, on issues, as a group. The Progressive Caucus, because there was the Black Caucus and the Hispanic Caucus, and

we needed us. And there was the Blue Dogs. We had to balance some of that. Yes.

And we were really key to the healthcare movement, when we passed the healthcare bill and trying to get the public option. We really worked hard on that. Stepping back, had I known that what we passed wasn't going to have a chance of getting better, instead that we, what did they have, 78 votes or something, to dismantle it? I would have put all that energy into a single-payer. But we didn't because we thought that was a nonstarter. And we really thought we could get the public option. But it didn't work.

WASNIEWSKI: What do you think the larger role the progressives were in the institution? Why was it important to have that voice?

WOOLSEY: Well, because Democrats were becoming too centrist. And we need that anchor to pull to the left or to show that there was a left edge to the Democrats. And otherwise, we were floating so that centrists were left, and then everything goes right. And then what was this country going to have for, who was going to represent the progressive part of our country—the people?

JOHNSON: We read that you were an assistant whip on the Democratic side. What were your responsibilities in this role?

WOOLSEY: To count how the people were going to vote. I was a great whip. I really was so good! {laughter} I mean, voom! Because, it was my job; I did it.

JOHNSON: But what made you so good at it because not everyone's a good whip.

WOOLSEY: Because I do it. See, a lot of people, they just don't want to. I don't know why. If I have a chore, I do it. And so I didn't—I wasn't out there to convince people. I was out there to count. "Are you going to?" "Yes," "No,"

"Maybe," you know? "Undecided." That's what we did. And then, and we'd go back over it. But we'd have the same group. That would be our responsibilities. And then, once in a while, go and try to convince somebody to, especially if they were undecided, find out why and report back and do . . . That's a good way to get to know people and be moving on the floor. I don't think I ever sat down on that House Floor. Yes. I was all we had, always had something I was supposed to, needed to be doing.

JOHNSON: Do you have a good story or a memory that stands out from your time as an assistant whip?

WOOLSEY: Well, one story was whipping somebody who asked me for a lot of detail about what we were doing, what the bill was, and I realized I didn't know. So I had to go . . . That was a learning experience. "Oh, well, if I'm going to do this, I have to know in depth what's going on with the bill." Oh, yeah, okay.

Another story was just I was personally whipping people because I had a Boy Scout issue, and I didn't want . . . I had a bill that said, "The President of the United States has to stop supporting the Boy Scouts and giving them—the federal government has to quit giving them free space when they discriminate." So, I got around to all the people that I thought should be voting with me on this. Well, I didn't intend to have it be a vote. The Republicans found it, and went, "Oh. We know how to embarrass these guys." So all of a sudden, it was on the floor. So I went, I didn't want to be the only one that voted for it. Oh, my God. So people voted for it because I asked them to.

Oh, they got in so much trouble in their districts. It took years before they wouldn't come up to me and say, "You're not Boy Scouting me on this, are you?" I mean, yes. It was not good. I was right. It shouldn't have—but they

didn't—nobody knew enough about it. I whipped them, and they did it. And they looked and went, "Oh, Lynn Woolsey's running for it; it must be okay." {laughter} Yes.

But one of the most fun things about being a whip was when Nancy was our [Democratic] Whip—Nancy Pelosi—we'd go to whip meetings, and she would have the most wonderful array of food. Ah! I started getting to be a fat person. She really, she made it so people really wanted to come to those whip meetings. But no, I don't have any experiences for individual . . .

JOHNSON: No, that's fine. Exactly what we're looking for.

WASNIEWSKI: You've alluded to this already. In 1999, you were part of a group of Democratic Congresswomen that went over to the Senate to protest a Foreign Relations Committee hearing. Can you tell us that story? What were you protesting, and how did that play out?

WOOLSEY: Well, we wanted to have a meeting with the head of the Foreign Relations Committee, Senator . . .

WASNIEWSKI: [Jesse] Helms.

WOOLSEY: Helms, thank you. Senator Helms, and I have tried and tried, and it was for the convention to protect women against all discrimination—the UN Convention. And that was my legislation. Every woman in Congress signed on to it. But he wouldn't. I wanted to talk to him about why he wouldn't pass it or even have a hearing on it. So he wouldn't see us.

We knew he was having a hearing on something else. Nancy came, Nancy Pelosi, and me, and Patsy, and a bunch of us. And so we made a poster, a big old poster, and it's CEDAW (Convention to End Discrimination against All

Women).[2] And we said, "Vote for CEDAW." And so there was no place to sit in his hearing room, because it was full, so we stood across the back with our poster, and he said {laughter} to me, "You sit down, young woman, or I'm going to call the Capitol Police to come in here and remove you." And we said, "Well, we're just standing. We're just standing here, Mr. Chairman. We were waiting to have a meeting with you." Oh! Well, so the Capitol Police started coming in, so we left, but he didn't want us . . .

He would not talk about it. And it was because they had some conviction that if they passed this, we'd be saying all women in the world could have abortions. And it had nothing to do with that. But he wouldn't even hear us out. We almost passed it once, when Madeleine Albright was Secretary of State. The Senate almost got it that far, but then they didn't. It's hard to make the Senate do what the House wants sometimes. I don't think anybody thought the opportunity was so narrow, either, because who thought that in the next time around we wouldn't be in charge?

JOHNSON: It was the "Year of the Woman," when you were elected, the numbers spiked. They went up dramatically. But still, overall, you were—women were a small minority of the overall representation. And this example that you just provided, with the international treaty—did you feel like you weren't just representing your constituents but you were representing women in the U.S. and around the world?

WOOLSEY: Oh, around the world. No, I had a . . . But this is for the United States to not ratify that convention. And then we're, well, we were in company with some—Libya, I think was one, [Muammar] Gaddafi. About three other countries that you just—talk about embarrassing. And the United States of America! It was mostly American, but there were women all over the country that were part of this, and they were . . . Methodist women sent letters to

every single Senator—because it's a Senate thing—saying, "Do this, do it now, please," all kind and handwritten and all different, not postcards. But none of it—just didn't move them.

JOHNSON: And with other issues as well, did you feel as if you were representing, again, women across the country outside of your district and the world, as a Member of Congress?

WOOLSEY: Yes. Yes. Education and health care, all of that is all women, not just women I worked for.

WASNIEWSKI: You also mentioned earlier that you came out against the wars in Iraq and Afghanistan. And we're just curious to know if you can explain who came up with the idea for the Out of Iraq Caucus and talk about what you hoped to accomplish with that.

WOOLSEY: Okay, yes. First of all, there was the Afghanistan vote that Barbara Lee was the only one that voted against. And it didn't take 15 minutes before a group of us knew we'd made a mistake. We really should have voted 'no' on that. And she tried to convince us, but it all went so fast, and I can still see Leader [Richard Andrew] Gephardt coming through the room to convince me that I had it wrong. It didn't mean there were no . . . What it meant was "Afghanistan." Well, Barbara knew it didn't. But we didn't . . . I went with the group. I didn't go with her. I wish I'd gone with her because it would have been easier for her not to be just on her, alone, with all the terror that came at her after that. But anyway . . . and, she was right. Okay.[3]

But that also, having not voted for that, gave us a little bit of room to speak out against the war as it was going and against Afghanistan, without . . . It just gave us some room. And when that Afghanistan stuff started, Maxine Waters . . . Well, the Progressive Caucus, I thought, would be the caucus to

take the anti-Iraq. But you know, the Progressive Caucus is made up a lot of Jewish Members. And they were into, at that time, thinking that if Iraq was under control, then Israel would be safer. I felt just the opposite. The Progressive Caucus would not take it up because we were too split. So Maxine Waters said, "Let's start an Out of Iraq Caucus." And she and Barbara and I started it. And I coined us "the Triad": Woolsey, Waters, and Lee, and we just . . . That started a real movement.

Then from that, I had the first piece of legislation on the floor to tell President [George W.] Bush to get out of Iraq. And it got on the floor, and people would come up to me, good liberal Democrats, and say, "Oh, Lynn, take that off. I mean, talk about, debate it, but then don't ask for a vote, because we'll be so embarrassed because we're going to lose so badly. And it'll take us backward." And I said, "Ah, come on. If I'm the only one that votes for this, I will not be embarrassed. You just do what you want to do." Well, we had 156 bipartisan votes. And that was the beginning of Members of Congress knowing they could be against that war and not get killed by their constituents because the country was way ahead of us. They were against the war. They didn't want us in there fighting for something that wasn't even real.

So that's what that caucus was about. And we had hearings. Not formal hearings because none of the House committees would do it, but we had hearings, and we did press, and we traveled around the country and spoke and went to rallies and marches and stuck to it. And I spoke on the House Floor over 450 times, for five minutes, during our five-minute speeches—either against the Iraq War, against Iraq and Afghanistan, and for peace. It wasn't always . . . But it was always there, on that. And I don't think

anybody's ever done that in the history of this Congress, on the same subject. They have spoken 450 times, I suppose.

When I had announced my retirement and I was leaving, some of the Republicans, who would be over on the other side, waiting for their five minutes, and there were regulars, of course, a lot of them came over to me and said, "You know, I've never voted with you, and I probably never would, but I want to tell you, I really respect your determination." And that was really, and then they were people that we were friendly anyway, but it was, that was nice to hear. But you know what? We're still there. So, I'm not carrying that as, "Look what I did." We were talking about the effort, and we're still over there.

JOHNSON: Another topic we wanted to ask you about was the Democratic Caucus' Task Force on Children and Families. And we're wondering how this fit in to your legislative goals and what this experience was like, serving on that task force.

WOOLSEY: We never did anything. So, it was a task force that was good to be on because that would certainly be one I would be on, but I don't know that we accomplished all that much.

JOHNSON: Okay.

WOOLSEY: Okay.

JOHNSON: We've been asking our interviewees about historic firsts or something that was a different part of their career. Something that we came across was that you were the first woman Member to play in the annual congressional basketball game. This is in 1993. What are your memories of that event, and why did you play in this game?

WOOLSEY: Well, first of all, you have to remember that I was elected in '92, on my 55th birthday. So I was not a young, spry, athletic woman, but I was certainly in decent shape. I thought that would be fun. And so I got on the team, and they played real basketball—hard basketball. They put me in and threw the ball at me and broke my finger. But worse, they broke my fingernail. I was stunned. I had no idea they played, that was real ball. I wasn't up to that. But I loved being part of it and everything. I think my picture was in *People* magazine or something, I don't know what. But, yes.

I just thought women should be on it. I wasn't, I'd played, but not like you did, in high school and stuff. Yes, it was fun. And so they were so good—fun for me and with me on it—respectful and fun. But I didn't need to take up one of their places, so we recruited. I stayed that first year. I stayed the whole year and went to the games, but if they were going to be breaking my fingernails, I wasn't going to do that.

JOHNSON: Did you face any resistance, or was it pretty welcoming?

WOOLSEY: None, no. None whatsoever. No. I remember, now Governor [Jay Robert] Inslee, in Washington State. He was my biggest supporter. And he just made sure I got to play and that they set it up so I got to shoot. We didn't . . . they were playing real ball, so I didn't need to be a distraction.

JOHNSON: How important do you think it was for women Members to be part of events or traditions that were typically reserved for men?

WOOLSEY: Well, it's very important because a lot gets done during those practices and during games. People get to know each other. They get to talk about what's going on. And in life, in corporations and in business, women have been left out of all of that for so long. But it's less and less now, but it's . . . the basketball court was not the place for it because, unless . . . Now, a really

good female basketball player could play with them, but I was not that. And I knew that. I just thought it was going to be for fun. Heavens! Nothing short of fun {laughter} around there. It was really competitive.

JOHNSON: What did the other women Members say? Were they supportive of you being on the team, do you remember?

WOOLSEY: Yes, they kidded me. They liked it all right, yes. What you have to know is everybody doesn't know what everybody else is doing because they're so busy doing their own thing. It's hard to even, when somebody has real needs, to really . . . Then people reach out, but that's about it. There's not a lot of mutual interest because it's, one, so competitive, and two, you're there working for your district, and then you go home. In the olden days, on the weekends, people stayed and did stuff together. I actually did stuff with friends because I can't work that way and made friendships and had a group of . . . We'd go out to dinner. [Bernard] Bernie Sanders was one of, part of our dinner gang. We'd have fun. People have to go and talk to each other and humanize. But it wasn't bipartisan. But in the olden days, it was.

WASNIEWSKI: Talk about breaking barriers: In 2007, Nancy Pelosi is elected as Speaker of the House. What were your impressions of that event? What did it mean to you, as a woman Member of Congress at that time, and particularly one from the California delegation?

WOOLSEY: Oh, it meant a great, great deal. I was always one of Nancy's lieutenants when she ran for Whip, and I couldn't think of a better person to be the first groundbreaker on these things than [Democratic] Leader Pelosi. She was good. I was proud, as proud as I could be of anything ever, when she was sworn in as Speaker. And my grandson came with me, my oldest grandson.

He was about 11 then, I think. And they were friends, he and Nancy are friends. It was just wonderful to share that with him.

WASNIEWSKI: Having watched her move up that leadership ladder—Whip, Leader, and then Speaker, how would you describe her leadership style?

WOOLSEY: Firm and fair, and she's not even close to wishy-washy {laughter} ever. She knows her stuff. She's really good. I didn't always go with her. And I'm from the Bay Area and blah, blah, blah, blah, but we have mutual respect of . . . Actually, I really like her, and I think she likes me, too.

But I watched her through the first, when she was Speaker and President [Barack] Obama was first elected, and the Senate couldn't get anything done. And I'll tell you, none of the—what happened those first two years of Obama's administration—none of the things that got passed would have been passed without Nancy. I mean, she did it. And nobody could deny it. It's just such a shame she's not still the Speaker, but she isn't. But now she does it differently as the Leader, of keeping the Democrats together, because we can't afford to be going, they can't afford to be going in a thousand directions. Because then we'd look like, what's {laughter} going on on the other side of the aisle. But no, she's a really good leader. That's all I can say.

JOHNSON: How important do you think it was to the institution to have a woman Speaker and then in the future to have more women in leadership positions?

WOOLSEY: I think it's essential, and I think she was the perfect first Speaker, woman, because she has a way of, she's gracious, and she's smart, and she's firm, and she knows what she's doing, and she's very organized and has set a good example. I think that was important. And I think Hillary [Rodham Clinton] will make a great President.

JOHNSON: Did you have any leadership aspirations?

WOOLSEY: No. And that's . . . No, none whatsoever. And I knew that because I didn't, that's a distraction from, and it's not . . . I don't fault anybody that wants it. And you have to raise so much money. It was hard enough to raise money in a fairly safe district, where people say, "Oh, you, you're safe." But, no, I just did not want to do that. I wanted to run my [sub]committee. I would have wanted to be chair of that little subcommittee for life. That would have been fine with me because we were getting some stuff done, until the tables turned.

WASNIEWSKI: So we're going to move to a wrap-up section, some retrospective questions, but as we do that, we just want to know: Why did you decide to retire from Congress after 10 terms?

WOOLSEY: Well, I was 75 years old. {laughter} And, really, it was because I had to get off that airplane. We flew to and from, every week. And I'd had two major back surgeries while I was in Congress, and I was going to have to do it again if I kept that up, or be in a wheelchair. And I didn't want to do that. So I just knew I had to go home. And I also feel that there's a time and a place for everything, and it was my time not to be there anymore, and I'm not, I just don't know about staying forever at something like that. Anything, you know? But for me, it was time to go. And I had a good successor, so that made a difference.

JOHNSON: We've asked you a lot of questions about the past and asked you to be retrospective, but in this case we're going to ask you to do a little prediction. So there's now 108 women in Congress. But how many women do you think there'll be in Congress when it's the 150th anniversary of Jeannette Rankin's election to Congress, so 50 years from now?

WOOLSEY: Half.

JOHNSON: And how do you think that will happen?

WOOLSEY: Well, it's, there was 57 when I was first elected. Now there's a hundred and . . .

JOHNSON: There's 88 in the House right now.

WOOLSEY: Isn't that nice? Yes, okay. It's going to happen—this is very cynical. For one thing, they don't pay anything anymore. It's {laughter} important for it . . . to be a Member of Congress, it's a very expensive job pay-off, unless you are independently wealthy, of which, of course, I'm not. People aren't going to, good, regular people are—men are going to not do it, because they're going to want to do something. They're going to make big money. Unless they want power, and right now it's not such a powerful place to be either. So I think women will want to do it, and they'll do it. And they'll get elected now.

WASNIEWSKI: What advice would you have to offer any woman or man who came and asked you about the prospect of running for Congress? "Should I run for Congress?"

WOOLSEY: Well, believe me, many have, so I'm just really honest. What I say is, "Make sure you have a support base. Make sure that your district fits you and you the district because if you're going to get elected and then try to change yourself to be somebody you're not, or you're going to wish your district wasn't whatever way it is, then you're going to be miserable forever, through the whole thing, and you'll eventually lose. So, just know who you are and know who your district, who they are. And if you're a good fit, it's the best thing that could happen."

JOHNSON: Throughout your career, you were often referred to as "a person of conscience" in the House.

WOOLSEY: Ah! Isn't that nice?

JOHNSON: Do you agree with that characterization?

WOOLSEY: Absolutely, yes. That is the nicest compliment I could get.

JOHNSON: And do you think that this is a role that women tend to play more, or do you think it's something that men and women equally, depending on the person, can aspire to?

WOOLSEY: I'm not sure you aspire to it. I think you either are, or you aren't. And I think it's both men and women are and can be.

WASNIEWSKI: During your time in the House, what piece of legislation that was passed by Congress do you think had the most impact on women and why?

WOOLSEY: I think the health care bill, because women could . . . women are the least-wealthy, have the least in the country, and they can have good health care, for themselves and their children.

JOHNSON: Do you think that your congressional service inspired or may inspire other women to run for elective office?

WOOLSEY: I do.

JOHNSON: Has anyone ever shared that with you before?

WOOLSEY: Yes. And not—yes, not always Congress, but elective office, yes.

JOHNSON: What does that mean to you?

WOOLSEY: I think it's a nice compliment.

WASNIEWSKI: Was there anything unexpected about your House career or that surprised you about your time in the House, as you look back on 20 years?

WOOLSEY: Well, the biggest surprise was at the beginning that I knew nothing about this job I'd just gotten. I didn't know anything! I knew—and I'm a smart woman, but how little I knew about what I was going into. That was a huge surprise. The next surprise was how well I fit the job, once I—how it just all, it was really a good thing for me to have done.

JOHNSON: Was there any kind of orientation for new Members?

WOOLSEY: Yes. It was. Harvard, we'd go to Harvard. And it was bipartisan. I don't think they do that anymore. It was very important. They don't tell you nearly enough. We didn't know . . . I was on my way to lunch someplace, in the—you don't leave the Hill, I mean the Capitol. One day, and somebody a couple terms more senior than myself said, "Where are you going for lunch?" And I said, "Well, there's some . . ." And then he said, "Well come to the congressional lunchroom." What? {laughter} I didn't know there . . . and none of us knew. And, of course, I, because of who Lynn Woolsey is, I told everybody I knew, all the rest. And none of us knew, and we'd been there for months! See? {laughter} I guess, if you get elected, they think you're clever enough to figure it out, or they don't want you taking their seat or something, I don't know.

JOHNSON: Earlier in the interview, we had asked if anyone had served as a mentor, and now we're wondering if you might have served that role for a younger Member, someone new who had been elected.

WOOLSEY: Yes. I think I was helpful to a lot of the younger, new Members. They were—might not have been younger, well, everybody was younger than me in age, but they weren't kids. Yes, I was intentionally helpful, when I could be, because I realized how hard it was to be so alone, when you get there.

JOHNSON: This is for men and women Members?

WOOLSEY: Oh, mostly men. Excuse me, mostly women, of course. No, mostly young, I had some "little sisters" there, yes. So, and I just was protective of them.

WASNIEWSKI: What do you think your lasting legacy is going to be, in terms of your House service?

WOOLSEY: Well, for sure, my biggest accomplishment, that will last forever, is the National Marine Sanctuary along the coast of Sonoma County. It's 25,000 square miles of the additional ocean protection. And in the middle of 2015, it happened. And the President [Obama] committed to me that he would do it before I left. And it is done. And it was mine. And I'm very proud of that. I think most people think of me for my stand against the war and all my speeches and all of that. And that's fine, but the war's still going, and the real legacy will last forever: no oil exploration, no gas exploration, and protecting that absolutely beautiful coast.

WASNIEWSKI: It is beautiful.

WOOLSEY: It is.

WASNIEWSKI: Is there any, was there any one turning-point moment, in that struggle to make that come to fruition that you recall?

WOOLSEY: Well, yes. Well, one, it passed the House unanimously, and it couldn't get out of the Senate. So then when I told Nancy Pelosi privately that I was

going to retire, she said, "What do you want for your legacy?" And boom, I hadn't even thought, but I knew. I said, "The marine sanctuary." And she said, "Okay, let's make it happen."

And I had to first prove that it couldn't happen through the congressional, it just wasn't, never. Everything was wrong; nobody was ever going to let that happen, because Republicans ran everything. And so I had to prove to her that it couldn't be done that way and got a group of people that were with me on it: Ed [Edward John] Markey and Sam Farr and people that cared about the coast and Nancy, and we worked out whether it should be—go through a sanctuary or it could—should be a monument. And Nancy, oh, and I got Vice President [Joseph Robinette] Biden [Jr.] and Secretary [Kenneth Lee] Salazar both talked to the President, and then Nancy talked to him. And he said he would do it, but he had to do, he wanted to do it administratively, and it was going to—so then it took a year and a half. But he would tell the Department of Commerce, give it to NOAA [National Oceanic and Atmospheric Administration], and tell [them] it was their number-one priority for protection. And they did it—hearings we had to go through, everything we'd done before. And I'm not in control anymore, now, remember? I'm not a Member. But they kept me involved and kept me part of it, and when it was all signed, they gave me credit for it. So it was nice.

But it would not have happened without Nancy. So she took that and got that commitment from the President. And Barbara Boxer had a companion bill, of course, but the Senate just couldn't do anything. So we did our stuff. We did it, yes.

JOHNSON: Well, that's all we have for prepared questions. We asked you a lot of questions today. Thank you so much.

WOOLSEY: All right, thank you, you guys.

WASNIEWSKI: Thank you.

NOTES

[1] Reference to the House Armed Services Committee organizational meeting in 1973 when the committee chairman, Felix Edward Hébert, left only one chair for Representatives Ron Dellums and Pat Schroeder in protest of losing his bid to House leadership to block their membership on his committee.
[2] In 1979, the United Nations General Assembly adopted the Convention on the Eliminations of All Forms of Discrimination against Women (CEDAW). The United States is one of a handful of UN member nations to not sign the treaty.
[3] Reference to the House vote granting President George W. Bush the authority to use force against the perpetrators of the attacks against the United States on September 11, 2001. Congresswoman Barbara Lee was the only Representative to vote against the resolution on September 14, 2001.