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Technology in the House

Account of the changing technology in the House during the 1970s.

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And I suggested to Congressman Charlie Rose, who later became chairman of the House Administration Committee, but he was kind of...we always kind of called him the bionic Congressman, because he loved the technology. Really, he was as responsible as anybody for bringing a lot of high-tech to the House, sometimes kicking and screaming, but after it happened they were happy enough to get it. But he was always on the cusp of what was going on with new technology, and had the foresight to see how it could be applied to the House. And, so if I had an idea that related to technology, I always had a receptive audience in Congressman Rose. And so I said, you know, "Could we get a pilot program where we get Motorola"—who was at the time the only one who was really manufacturing those things—"to give us a demo system, and maybe get a dozen, two dozen units that we could let Members try out?" Hopefully those who would not be opposed to carrying around a beeper. Because there were a lot of Members who really wanted no part of it. This is one of those things when people see somebody else that has something they don't, they get kind of interested in it. It's sort of envy, which is not unknown with a lot of things in our society. So he said, "That would be a great idea, let me call some people at Motorola and see if they can set up a demo system." So they put a temporary antenna up on the roof of the Cannon Building and put in a transmitter, and put in the base station in the cloakroom, which was a fairly large box. Nothing was compact in those days. And, I got some of our Members, and Charlie Rose talked to some of his colleagues, to try out these beepers so we could give them a live voice message from the House Floor, wherever they happened to be. They didn't have to leave a I-can-be-reached-at number. Of course, sometimes you want to be reached, but you don't want people to know exactly where you are. So they kind of liked it. And then other Members saw the Members who was part of the test using these things, and they got interested. And, before long, we had a groundswell where the Members, for the most part, wanted these beepers.