

**Tina Tate**

## **Press Conferences in Statuary Hall after the State of the Union Address**

Historical background on the technical requirements and logistical operations for the television coverage of Members' responses in Statuary Hall following the State of the Union Address.

*Interview recorded December 4, 2009*

Aside from the Presidential address to the nation, Members of Congress—and both House and Senate—like to be able to respond immediately to what is—what the President has said. And Statuary Hall is right off the House Floor, it was wired for television—we started wiring it in the '80s—and we worked with the broadcasters as it developed. We went from having one or two organizations in there immediately after—ABC, I think, was one of the first to put a set-up in there—to, at one point, we had over 30. And we realized that was not working at all. It was too many people and too much equipment to make any of it work effectively. So we worked with the Sergeant at Arms to get it down to, I think, it's around 20 camera positions. And the ground rules for how the cameras work there—one of the things we had to insist on we realized early on—broadcasters are self-promoters, and they always want to promote what they do. We would see places in Statuary Hall—which was the original House Chamber—that would have the CBS Eye. And we said, “No, no.” {laughter} “We need to have uniform signage,” so we ended up making the signs so that Members could find where they were supposed to go, press secretaries could find where they were supposed to take their Members, and it wouldn't look commercial. It needed to look official. So, that was one of the things. Providing power—we worked with the AOC, the Architect's Office to—eventually they have increased the power that is available in there so we don't have to run cables all over the place because you have to light the area. So, there is a lot of logistical support: trashcans, chairs, just whatever it takes to make the thing. One of the things we have to do is be sure that they all have enough electricity to run their own small monitors, so they can see the speech because they're going to be asking Members of Congress what's happening and what they thought of the speech, so they need to have seen the speech as it happened. So, those were all things that developed over a period of time. Other press people were allowed to come in and work with the Members because they have every right to the same access, but because broadcasters have so many equipment needs, we would have to set it up very early, with security, with the AOC, and with the Speaker's permission, so that the room was—it was possible to have Members get to various locations, and actually express what they thought about the speech. And the reason it's so critical is the timing. The speech usually ends just about at the 11 o'clock—10 to 11 o'clock—so your local news across the country can carry their individual Members. You're always going to get a response from leadership that will be handled by the networks, and the leadership will make itself available to the networks. But this is for the rank-and-file Member to be on-air in their locale and express what they thought about the speech. So, that is really more the function of Statuary Hall.