

**Tina Tate**

## **Background on Speaker's Press Conferences**

Detailed history of the Speaker's Press Conferences and ways in which the House Radio-TV Gallery assisted broadcasters in their coverage of Congress.

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In the original Speaker's press conferences were usually fifteen minute Q&A right before the House went into session. They were not on camera, and they were just usually direction of what the legislation was going to do that day—what was going to be on the floor that day or that week, or what was coming. Tip O'Neill really moved that along to being more of a news conference. It still stayed fifteen minutes, it still was not on camera, but the wide-ranging conversations, that was where members of the press—and not just broadcasters, but members of the press—could assemble with the Speaker every day and get some question asked about the process and about the legislation that was coming, or any other political issue they wanted to ask. It was not restricted to that. Generally, the schedule would be given, and then questions would ensue, and we would keep notes about that. Once again, that was one of our things to do, was to send a staff person down to always take notes, to be sure that broadcasters who couldn't be there would know what questions were asked, and we would have a transcript of that available to press people. When Newt Gingrich was Speaker, they opened it up to television coverage, and that was another level of coordination that we needed to do because it was covered live. Or it could be carried live if they chose to, but it was frequently used—that didn't last forever. That lasted for a short period of time in the early days of Speaker Gingrich's Speakership. But, as the communication of the Speaker, who speaks for the House and has the legislative schedule for the House, and what is going to be allowed and what is moving through committee is a critical part of covering the House of Representatives. So, there were a variety of ways that we helped, both by increasing when they wanted television coverage, and by providing transcripts when broadcast coverage wasn't allowed.