

**The Honorable Beverly Barton Butcher Byron**  
U.S. Representative of Maryland (1979–1993)

**Oral History Interview**  
**Final Edited Transcript**  
June 15, 2016

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

“My problem was that the party powers that be, said, ‘Well, we will nominate her, and then next year’—and I’m quoting numerous of them—‘and we’ll get a real candidate next year, in two years, somebody that we can run.’ I don’t think they knew me very well. There’s too much work. There’s too much potential for wonderful things to happen to your constituents not to work it hard.”

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## Abstract

Beverly Barton Butcher Byron married into a family with deep political roots. Her husband Goodloe Byron and his parents William and Katharine all served in the U.S. House of Representatives. Beverly Byron, much like her mother-in-law Katharine, did not pursue a political career. Rather, both women won election to Congress after their husbands died in office. In her oral history, Byron discusses the transition from a supporting role in her husband's career to her own position as a Member of Congress. Byron also touches upon the prevailing opinion at the time that she—like many other congressional widows—would serve as a temporary placeholder. The Maryland Representative explains that once she came to Congress, she had no intention of stepping aside for someone that party leaders deemed more qualified.

In her interview, Byron compares how she and her late husband approached the job. Both enjoyed constituent service, but she observes that her strength and interest lay in policy work. The first woman to chair an Armed Services subcommittee, Byron describes her leadership style and discusses her work for the military during her seven terms in Congress. Byron also discusses her interest in physical fitness, her work on the American Discovery Trail legislation, and the bond that formed among the women representing Maryland in Congress.

## Biography

**BYRON, Beverly Barton Butcher**, (wife Goodloe Edgar Byron and daughter-in-law of William Devereux Byron and Katharine Edgar Byron), a Representative from Maryland; born Beverly Barton Butcher in Baltimore, Md., July 27, 1932; graduated from National Cathedral School for Girls, Washington, D.C., 1950; elected as a Democrat to the Ninety-sixth and to the six succeeding Congresses (January 3, 1979–January 3, 1993); unsuccessful candidate for renomination to the One Hundred Third Congress in 1992; appointed to the Base Closure and Realignment Commission, 1993.

[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>.

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

## Citation Information

When citing this oral history interview, please use the format below:

“The Honorable Beverly Barton Butcher Byron Oral History Interview,” Office of the Historian, U.S. House of Representatives, June 15, 2016.

## 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 BEVERLY BARTON BUTCHER BYRON OF MARYLAND —  
A CENTURY OF WOMEN IN CONGRESS

**JOHNSON:** My name is Kathleen Johnson. I'm here with Matt Wasniewski, who is the House Historian. The date is June 15th, 2016. And we are very happy to be here with former Representative Beverly [Barton Butcher] Byron of Maryland. Thank you so much for coming in today.

**BYRON:** Oh, thank you.

**WASNIEWSKI:** Thank you.

**JOHNSON:** This interview is part of a series of oral histories that we're doing to commemorate the 100th anniversary of the election of Jeannette Rankin to Congress—the first woman to serve in Congress. And to start off with today, we were wondering if you had any role models when you were young.

**BYRON:** I was raised in Washington, D.C., and so consequently, I was aware of Congress as a young child. My father [Harry Butcher] was vice president of CBS early in the days of radio. So it wasn't at all unusual for the house to be filled with people that were just friends but they happened to be working at the White House, or they happened to be in the center of government, or they happened to be in Congress. So, it really didn't make an impact on me. It was just a friend. And so, I would have to probably say no.

**JOHNSON:** When you were young, what were the expectations about what you would be when you grew up?

**BYRON:** Oh, growing up in the '40s and early '50s, a woman's place was in the home, but not in the [U.S.] House. Today that is totally different. I think we have

88 women that are in the House today, and I think 20 in the Senate, so everything is changed.

### **BRIEF INTERRUPTION**

**WASNIEWSKI:** You married into a family with deep political roots. And one question that we wanted to ask was about your mother-in-law, Katharine [Edgar] Byron, the first woman to serve in Congress from Maryland. What are your memories of her, and then also, did she talk with you extensively about her time in the House and that experience?

**BYRON:** She did not talk extensively with me on her time in the House because I don't think it ever occurred to her that I might be in the House. She served for, I think, a year and a half. Her husband [William Devereux Byron], who was a Member of the House, died in a tragic aviation accident with Eddie Rickenbacker, crashing into Mount Story outside of Atlanta.<sup>1</sup> He was on his way to—at that point in time, it was not the Armed Services Committee, it was the Military Affairs Committee—he was a Member on his way down to Mexico.

She did not at all describe . . . her race, she described, that she was a widow with five children. She campaigned. It was back in the days when the smoke-filled backroom would make the decisions on who was going to be the nominee, or who was going to take his place in Congress. She was selected. She campaigned in widow's garb: the black dress, the black veil. A different time, it was 1941. And so she served for one . . . not quite a full term. But she was told by the same people in the backroom with the smoke-filled that there was another candidate that was going to run, and did. And so she served only one term.

**WASNIEWSKI:** We read, in looking at your background, that you became interested in politics in college with the Young Democrats.

**BYRON:** Wrong.

**WASNIEWSKI:** Okay.

**BYRON:** Not in college.

**WASNIEWSKI:** Okay.

**BYRON:** I didn't go to college. After I got out of high school in Washington, D.C., I went to work for three doctors. I then, interestingly enough, was aware of the Washington media. I was in the office one day, and my mother called me, and she said, "What are you doing?" And I said, "Well, I'm looking at some blood of a patient that has just been in." And she said, "Oh, how's the blood?" And I said, "Well, it's got some problems." I said, "The name is really very familiar." And she said, "What's the name?" I said, "John Foster Dulles." And I'm a 19-year-old tech working in a doctor's office. And you look today, about the Secretary of State, and I don't think you would find a physician's office or anybody that would permit a 19-year-old to have that kind of an impact on doing medical work.

So, I then got married the next year [1952], and my husband [Goodloe Edgar Byron] was in the service. And, well actually, he was in law school, and then he was in the service. And then we, with two children, moved to Germany for almost two years when he was in the army. So, that was the farthest thing from my mind—political aspect. Interestingly enough that when we returned, we moved to Frederick, Maryland, and they had a regulation that military people could vote in the elections. But spouses, if they had not been there for a year, could not have a vote. That didn't bother

me because I grew up in Washington, D.C., which didn't have a vote anyhow. The next year is when he became the state president of the Young Democrats. And the following year, I became the treasurer of the state Democrats. So that was the early on.

**JOHNSON:** And your husband went on to serve in the U.S. House during the 1970s.

**BYRON:** He first of all, in 1962, ran for the Maryland house of delegates. In 1966, he ran for the Maryland state senate. In 1968, he ran for Congress for an open seat because [Charles McCurdy] Mac Mathias [Jr.] was running for the Senate. And he ran against J. [James] Glenn Beall from Cumberland, who was elected. In the '68 election, my daughter was three at the time. We were at a store when Spiro [Theodore] Agnew went on the national ticket. And my reaction to that was, "Well, that's the end of our campaign. That is enough in Maryland to push the election to the Republican Party."

Interestingly enough, I got a promise out of him that that would be it. He was no longer going to be involved in politics. It seemed to me that every several years, he would be either running for the Maryland legislature or the Maryland senate. And he was a practicing attorney in an office of one. And financially, it did not do very well to us to have him continuing to run. So that was it. He was never going to run again, until the next year when Glenn Beall decided to run for the Senate seat, and there was an open congressional seat. And I said, "Yes, but you promised." Needless to say, I lost that argument. He ran again.

**WASNIEWSKI:** How involved were you in his campaign for the House?

**BYRON:** I was involved because I had become involved when he was state president of the Young Democrats. One night I can remember vividly. We lived in

Frederick, and the meeting was in Harford County [Maryland]. And I thought, "That's too far for him to drive by himself, so I'll go with him." And I sat in the back of the room and read *Time* magazine, not at all involved in politics. And then you come to the realization where you can do one thing or another. You can be totally opposed to it, not involved, or you can get very much involved. Well, needless to say, I guess I got very much involved.

**JOHNSON:** Once he was serving in the House, how involved were you in his office?

**BYRON:** You know, you looked, and you talked to Members that live outside of the area. And they have a debate on whether to move the family to Washington, or whether to stay and be gone every weekend, or whether to keep the family at home and then come home every weekend but be out campaigning. We lived in Frederick. He drove in every day. Traffic was not what it is today. And he was able to work that. My reaction was I would keep the house going. We had three children. They were fairly young. And commuting in was fine. There would be times when he would not get back in time for a meeting, but you worked through those things.

What you lost in that, though, was the opportunity to know your colleagues and to work with your colleagues, because he was back and forth. Whereas when you have a Member that is here during the week, or a Member that moves their family here, you get a much better working relationship and understanding of the issues that those Members bring with them.

**JOHNSON:** For the times that you were here on the Hill visiting, or maybe just helping out if you had the chance, are there any memories that stand out in your mind of your husband's office or anyone that you came across at that time?

**BYRON:** It was a very congenial group of people across the aisle—which we spend a lot of time today talking about it with former Members and some of the leadership that’s there today. It’s not the same. And that transcends into the time that I was here. For the 14 years, we worked very closely together across the aisle. That has sort of seemed to be lost at the moment, which is unfortunate for the country.

**WASNIEWSKI:** Do you have a favorite memory or anecdote about your husband’s service in the House? One that stands out to you?

**BYRON:** It isn’t exactly an anecdote, but it is . . . To me, when I was elected after his death—and that’s an interesting story, which we’ll go into later—but I enjoyed the legislative process. He did not. He enjoyed to be in the district, one-on-one with constituents. I loved my constituents, but I also enjoyed the reaction of being able to get things done legislatively, which I don’t think he was that comfortable with.

**JOHNSON:** Were you able to attend any special events while your husband was in office?

**BYRON:** Oh, yes.

**JOHNSON:** State of the Unions? Is there anything that—

**BYRON:** Bicentennial with the queen.

**JOHNSON:** That’s a special event.

**BYRON:** We were in Israel at the point in time when [Anwar] Sadat made the commitment that he would be willing to go to the Knesset for peace. We took the invitation. I happened to be talking to—and I’m a spouse so I had nothing to do with anything that’s going on—but I was talking to Ezer Weizman, who was the Israeli defense minister. And I said, “We have a great

big plane. Why don't you come go with us tomorrow?" And he said, "Well, yes, I will. That's great." I said, "You don't need to bring much other than just your toothbrush." At which time the military person said, "What are you talking about? He can't go with us." And I said, "Well, he'd like to go. And they've made the offer to the Egyptians." As it turned out, I said, "Well, okay, you can't go tomorrow. But we'll work it out."

By the time we got to Egypt, the Egyptians were saying, "What is the reaction in Israel to Sadat's commitment to go to the Knesset?" And I said, "Well, the only thing I can tell you is that they were shining the silver, getting out the good china. And so they're waiting for you." The irony there is that it happened within a week. We were back in the States by the time the Egyptian delegation left. And yet, Goodloe's congressional district, and my congressional district, has Camp David. And it was my daughter's 13th birthday, September 17th, when the President and Sadat and [Menachem] Begin left Camp David on a Sunday night at 9:30—flew over our house in helicopters. And no one knew what had happened. No one was aware at all whether there had been an agreement between the two countries, which Jimmy [James Earl] Carter had committed to getting in place. And I can still visualize us standing there. We had a bunch of people there for crabs in the yard. And we looked at the helicopters going over and thinking, "I wonder what's happened." On the 11:00 news, it was announced that he had come up with an agreement, and that they were going to finalize it.

As it turned out—this is a long story, but it's an interesting one from my perspective—that following spring, I was a Member and was in a [congressional] delegation that was in Egypt. And talking to Sadat, I said, "Well, when are you coming back?" Because they were due to come back to the States for the signing of the agreement. And he said, "Well, when do you

think I should?” And I said, “Well, the only thing I can tell you is, I would wait until spring because my local nursery has just planted 5,000 tulip and daffodil bulbs up at Camp David, and it will be gorgeous.” He said, “That’s good enough for me.” And so he said, “I’ll be back in the spring.” As it turned out, he was assassinated before spring.

But one of the things that he told me at that time—I said, “You know, we were all quite surprised that you were able to come up with an agreement.” And he said, “Well, you don’t understand that President Carter took our suitcases away from us when we got there. And we could not leave until we had come up with an agreement because he wouldn’t give our bags back.” Little-known things, and yet, when the—Arena Stage did a Camp David Accords play last spring, it was very accurate and a wonderful production. You ask a quick, short question, and I gave you a very long [answer].

**WASNIEWSKI:** That’s a great story.

**BYRON:** But you ask what things you remember.

**WASNIEWSKI:** Absolutely. So we want to transition to your time in Congress.

**BYRON:** Okay.

**WASNIEWSKI:** Your husband Goodloe passed away suddenly [on October 11, 1978]. And you were approached pretty quickly by Democratic officials in the district.

**BYRON:** It was an election year. Maryland—I believe he died on a Tuesday evening. The [Maryland] governor at that time was Blair Lee. He came to see me on Thursday and asked me if they could put my name forward . . . the primary had transpired. The night Goodloe died, I could hear people in my house, on the first floor, saying, “Well, we’ll get a real candidate to run for this slot.”

Because the attorney general in Maryland had looked at the law and stated that the central committee would have the authority to nominate somebody to replace Goodloe on the ballot. But it had to be a duly constituted meeting of the central committee.

Well, we had a new central committee for the state. They were having their first meeting on Friday of that week, and so the governor came and asked if I would put my name forward. And I said, "Oh, I can't possibly do that." My two sons, who at that time were 22 and 23, said, "She'll run." And I said, "Oh, I can't do that." They said, "Yes, you will. Don't pay any attention to her."

So the governor left. My name was presented to the central committee on Friday night, and by Saturday morning I had become a widow, a single parent of a very expensive 13-year-old, a candidate for Congress. And it all transpired very, very quickly.

**JOHNSON:** In that moment, and in the weeks following, did you have any concerns about how you were going to pull all that off with your family responsibilities, and then leading a career in Congress?

**BYRON:** I probably am the only Member that has ever been elected that never took a stand on an issue. I had one campaign contribution of \$100 from Til Hazel, who'd been a friend of ours from years back when he and Goodloe were in the army together in JAG [Judge Advocate General] school in Charlottesville. So, I used my \$100 campaign contribution to pay my filing fee. And that was it. I got 92 percent of the vote in that election, and as it turned out, the Republican candidate was an indigent who was in jail for beating up a bus driver in Baltimore. There was a TV show in Baltimore that was kind of

geared on his behavior. So, it was an interesting time. So I came in, simon-pure, not taking a stand on any single issue, which was kind of nice.

**JOHNSON:** Did you see this as something that would be temporary? That you were there maybe to finish out some of your husband's work? Or did you see it as a potential career for yourself?

**BYRON:** Anybody that comes into Congress and thinks that they're not going to be working hard is wrong. And there have been several people who have come and decided, you know, they weren't going to be in Washington. They were going to do—they'd be there for two years. My problem was that the party powers that be said, "Well, we will nominate her, and then next year"—and I'm quoting numerous of them—"and we'll get a real candidate next year, in two years, somebody that we can run." I don't think they knew me very well. There's too much work. There's too much potential for wonderful things to happen to your constituents not to work it hard.

My daughter, still, to this day—and she's 51 years old—will tell me that she lost, in her mind, both her mother and father that same year, because I left to go to work, and was leaving Frederick every morning at the crack of dawn. And then I had somebody that would—a Hood College student—that would take care of her at night when she'd get out of school. I'd come home at 10:30, 11:30, 12:00, and she'd still be up at Hood College. And I'd think, "She's 13. She's got to be home." So she then, the next year, came and lived with her godparents here in Washington. But her life was totally changed.

**WASNIEWSKI:** What in particular about your background, do you think, helped you make that transition to Congress? How do you think that worked?

**BYRON:**

I guess I won't say my problem was that growing up in Washington, Congress was just another part of government. To be able to—it never occurred to me ever that I would serve here, and let alone serve here for 14 years. And yet, there is an awe-inspiring opportunity as a Member, when you walk the halls. And we would, at that point in time we were in session late a lot of times—2:00, 3:00, 4:00 in the morning. And sometimes a colleague and I—or a couple colleagues and I—we would go walk through the [Capitol] Rotunda over to the Senate side, and you could feel the history of the people that had walked those halls and walked that marble before you.

And so, having been in Washington, and [when it was] not at all unusual to go to the Washington Monument, I grew up in a point in time where things were quite different. I, as a four-year-old, would be called down to the White House to play with Diana Hopkins, who was living there. I'd get home, and Mother would say, "Well, now, what did you do for lunch?" I said, "Oh, there were just four of us for lunch." And it was FDR [Franklin Delano Roosevelt], and Eleanor, and Diana Hopkins, and myself. You got two five-year-olds. Can you imagine in this day and age the President sitting down at lunch with two five-year-olds? So, it wasn't that spectacular for me.

Now, when I was elected—the Carters hosted a reception at the White House for the freshman class. Colleagues of mine that were classmates of mine said, well, "What does my wife wear? What do we do at . . . ?" You know. I said, "I don't know, just kind of a 5:00 cocktail dress." So, we get to the White House, and I took my son with me. And we're going through the receiving line. And I get up, and I look, and Rosalynn Carter had the same dress on that I had on. And I'm thinking, "Oh, I can't run home and change, but she can go upstairs and change." She didn't. And I didn't. But a couple

of my colleagues kept saying, “Well, I’m glad we asked you because you obviously had this figured out with the cocktail dress.”

**WASNIEWSKI:** Was there anyone when you first arrived, who offered you advice? Any of the women Members or male Members who were mentors, in a way?

**BYRON:** Women Members—when I first was elected, there were 16 women Members, four of whom were from Maryland. Barbara [Ann] Mikulski sort of took me under her wing. We had Barbara Mikulski, Gladys [Noon] Spellman, Marjorie [Sewell] Holt, and myself out of the 16. There’s a wonderful article that the Hagerstown paper did, and it said, “They are four peas, but they’re not in the same pod.” And we were all quite different. We were all good friends, but we were all quite different. But when you look today, there are 88 women in the House, and it looks like Maryland will have none [in Congress], which I find is really sad—with Senator Mikulski leaving and Donna [F.] Edwards leaving.

**WASNIEWSKI:** What was some of the advice that they had to offer to you?

**BYRON:** Pick your committee assignments carefully. My reaction was, knowing myself, I’m not going to get on a committee where I’m not interested in, and it isn’t something that you look at . . . not only represent your district, but also represent you as an individual to be working there. One of the first things the Members do is they pick their committee, and the Steering and Policy [panel] picks committee assignments. And I thought, “Well, okay. I know what I want. I know what I don’t want.” So I put down Judiciary. And I made sure they knew I didn’t have a law degree. But I didn’t have a college degree either. And I thought, “I’m safe on that one.” I put down Armed Services. I put down one other, one other one which I knew I wasn’t going to get on. And Interior. And surprisingly, I got Armed Services and Interior.

Isn't that amazing? You look at Ways and Means, Appropriations, you know, Members come: "I want Ways and Means. I want Appropriations. I want Judiciary." And then they end up on something which, really, they're not excited about. I was excited about both of those two committees that I served on.

**JOHNSON:**

Why did you want to serve on those two committees?

**BYRON:**

First of all, as having six national parks in my district was important. But also, as a family, every summer we would go backpacking in one of the parks out West. And so it's an area that I was very much involved in and was very concerned about.

Armed Services, I grew up in a household during World War II. When my father left—and he was in the navy and his close friend happened to be General [Dwight D.] Eisenhower—and Daddy ended up as the naval aide to General Eisenhower for three years. And he had no place for Mamie [Eisenhower] to go during the war, because they didn't have a place. So she lived with us for those three years. So it was a very exciting, interesting time with a lot of military aspect.

The wonderful story is that Ike was on his way to London, and he went down to see Admiral [Ernest] King, who was the CNO [Chief of Naval Operations] of the navy. And he said, "I want Harry Butcher as my naval aide." And Admiral King said, "Well, he's in the navy. You can't have him. You're in the army." And Ike said, "Well, show me." And he called somebody, and they said, "Well, we can't find a reg at all where you can't have a naval aide." And Ike said, "Thank you very much. I want him in London next week."

On Armed Services—when we were doing [Barry Morris] Goldwater–[William Flynt] Nichols, I used the analogy that my father was probably the first one that had ever served in a joint assignment, as Goldwater–Nichols was. That was legislation that was drafted when I was in Congress—to address some of the things that I had seen as a child.

**JOHNSON:** We're going to have more questions about your committee service, but before we get there, I just wanted to ask you a little more on being a congressional widow—and especially about Lindy [Corinne Claiborne] Boggs. Did she reach out to you at all?

**BYRON:** Oh, yes. Lindy, very much so. Actually, [Thomas] Hale [Boggs, Sr.] was still in the Congress when I was elected.<sup>2</sup> But the interesting thing is when my mother-in-law was here, and when Hale first came to Washington, she took them under her wing, and Katharine spent a lot of time with Lindy. And today, Cokie [Roberts] still remembers my mother-in-law as part of when they were first in Washington.

**JOHNSON:** And that historically was an early and a common path for women to gain election to Congress—if their husbands had passed away—and for them to win election. What role do you think that those widows played in the institution? What kind of effect do you think they have?

**BYRON:** I think when you look at the ones that early on, they were there for a year, maybe two terms, and then moved on as they got a real candidate to run. I think Barbara Mikulski was one of the first ones that was elected to Congress in her own right on an issue in Baltimore that she felt very passionately about.

**WASNIEWSKI:** Before we get too far away from your first election—and it’s a question we’ve asked of everyone—can you describe your district both geographically and demographically, too?

**BYRON:** {laughter} Sure. My congressional district was from, as I say, the end of the Cabin John Bridge in Potomac, and it went to Pittsburgh and into Baltimore, with Social Security. So you had Appalachia, you had agriculture, you had coal mines, you had high-profile—the new town of Columbia, and all of Howard County. So, I used to be able to say on up, with a clear conscience, that whatever legislation we have in front of us, I can vote any way on it and make a constituency happy. And so, it gives you a lot of freedom. Whereas you listen to certain Members that say, “Well, I’m beholden to this group, or this group, or what have you.” But I had unions in Cumberland and Hagerstown. I had a tremendous amount of agriculture, and dairy, and orchards. So, it was a very diverse [district].

As a conservative Democrat in a Republican district, it was interesting. In the part of Montgomery County the Republicans said, “Well, she’s a Democrat. We’re not going to support her.” And the liberal Democrats said, “Well, she’s a conservative Democrat. We’re not going to support her. We really need to get her out of the party.” But surprisingly enough, I was able to—for—with the first time, 92 percent of the vote. The next time we went down to 80-something. And the third election, I think it was 70-something. And I said to my AA [administrative assistant], I said, “Brent, we’ve only got one more election. Otherwise we’re out of here.” As it turned out, it settled down, and I was very, very fortunate to serve for 14 years.

**WASNIEWSKI:** At any point in your first campaign, or subsequent campaigns, was gender ever an issue when you were running?

**BYRON:** Only in the fact that western Maryland has a large number of sports clubs, and they were all male-dominated. And the Rotary, at that point in time, was all male-dominated. And the local Rotary, on a yearly basis, had the Member of Congress come to speak on what was going on in Congress. So in the first three or four years, I said, “Well, how come I don’t get invited?” “Well, you’re a woman.” And I thought, “Oh, okay. But my paycheck is exactly the same as my male colleagues.” And the sports club said, “Well, we’re a sports club. You know, what do you know about shooting and hunting?” And I said, “Well, a few things.” But those were basically the one or two areas. I think at that point in time when you found campaign financing, it was easier for the male colleagues to raise—I say, “substantial,” but in this day and age, it’s a drop in the bucket compared to what they’re talking about today.

**JOHNSON:** Did you have any women’s groups that supported your campaigns?

**BYRON:** Not necessarily, *per se*. I was not—no, never mind.

### **BRIEF BREAK**

**WASNIEWSKI:** We have a picture of a campaign button from one of your campaigns. It’s in the House Collection. And this is something we’re asking of all the interviewees.

**BYRON:** That’s not mine.

**WASNIEWSKI:** Okay.

**BYRON:** That’s my husband’s.

**WASNIEWSKI:** All right. Well, we will tell the [House] Curator. That's very important, then. Interesting. Okay. Is there a story behind that particular button?

**BYRON:** Well, he was, as I said, he ran for the Maryland house of delegates. Maryland colors are orange and black and white. He ran for the state senate—orange, black, and white. He continued that color scheme when he ran for Congress. I switched. Mine was a light blue, and red, and white. Mine was totally different because I felt I was a different person, and I was running as myself, not as him. So, that's a nice . . . and I've got some of those buttons at home. But mine are quite different.

**WASNIEWSKI:** Good.

**BYRON:** So you got his.

**JOHNSON:** Were you very involved in, obviously, with that—with changing the colors and the theme—but were you involved in your subsequent campaigns as well, with your campaign materials and what you wanted out there?

**BYRON:** Yes, yes. We had certain things that we used. Everybody has a brochure. And then you got . . . back in those days, they used to use emery boards. I've still got some emery boards from Louis Goldstein, who's been deceased for a long time. I wish people would use emery boards again, because I need them.

We had something that started out when he first ran for the house of delegates with "Dine with the Byrons." And we'd have the front cover of the brochure of all the family. And then inside would be a series of recipes—just one meal. And I still have people that come up to me and say, "Do you have any left of the such and such? I've lost my recipe for rock cake, or some salad, or something." So, theory being, we want to give somebody something that

they would not pitch in the trash as soon as you hand it to them, as [they would] a card. And so that, I was very much involved in that.

And then also, baseball cards. I played in a game with the Hagerstown Suns. So, I've got my Hagerstown Suns . . . and then you do the flip side, and it's got some of your history as far as your legislation's concerned.

**JOHNSON:** You'd mentioned how, when you were describing your district, what a diverse and spread-out district that was. So how did you approach campaigning, knowing that your constituents were coming from such different backgrounds?

**BYRON:** In this day and age, people tend to use television. I did not have a lot of funds. And for me to use television in the . . . what was the Sixth Congressional District, at that point in time you'd have [had] to buy Washington, Baltimore, Hagerstown, Cumberland, Pittsburgh, and Harrisburg media. That didn't seem like it made a lot of sense. So we didn't. We didn't use television at all. You look at a campaign that . . . a primary that just finished in Maryland. Well, one of the candidates put \$12 and a half million of his own money into the campaign. Didn't win. But he put the money in. And you know, to me, that is . . . I'm thinking what he could have done with that \$12 million—\$12 and a half million—to help an awful lot of people within the district. Don't get me started on that one.

**WASNIEWSKI:** So, we're going switch now to your House experience. As you had previously mentioned, when you first arrived, there were 16 women in Congress at that point. Did you find that with such a small number of women, that they kind of gravitated toward one another? Across the aisle?

**BYRON:**

People worked across the aisle. I was very, very fortunate because some of the senior Members sort of took me under their wing and were really very, very helpful. And, I mean, I look at some of the committee chairs. Interesting story is that Sonny [Gillespie V.] Montgomery, Bill Nichols, Sam [Samuel Studdiford] Stratton, Mel [Charles Melvin] Price were ones that I worked with on Armed Services. I wrote a note to John [Richard] Kasich when he announced that he was running for President. And he was a young, fresh-eyed Member of the House when he was first elected. Impetuous. Interesting. And Mr. Nichols—a wonderful gentleman from Alabama—took him under his wing—John being a Republican, Mr. Nichols being a Democrat. And I wrote him a note. I wrote John a note and said that “Mr. Nichols would be so proud of you the way you have matured. And I don’t think he thought it would be possible. So, he is sitting, smiling down at how you have changed.”

But, it was a different time. People took the time to work with one another. Sonny Montgomery taught me more about veterans’ issues. Doug [Douglas Kent] Bereuter and I worked on legislation together—the American Discovery Trail. I had the legislation ready to go, and the last night we were in session, he had a problem with an amendment. So I stood at the desk at 3:00 in the morning with scissors and scotch tape and put together the changes that needed to be on the American Discovery Trail Bill. And it went in. It passed at quarter of four.

So, interesting on that one was that the Senate, or Phil [William Philip] Gramm, had a hold on all legislation. Phil came in with me as a Democrat, became a Senator, and became a Republican. And I called him on the way—at Breezewood [Pennsylvania]—from a telephone on the side of the highway. And I said, “Phil, can’t you just let this one go?” I said, “I won’t be back. I’ve lost an election, and I won’t be back. But it’s a major piece of legislation.”

“Oh, well, you know, I got a hold on everything.” And I said, “Well, I know, but,” I said, “you can’t send it back over for conference because we’re gone. And you all are still in.” Passed. Legislation I’m very proud of.

“Okay. Okay. I’ll release the hold on it.” He did. The legislation passed the Senate, and Bereuter and I had worked it out in the House, so it passed the House and passed the Senate.

**JOHNSON:** Another question that we’ve been asking a lot of our interviewees, because we’re looking at women Members’ experiences, was what kind of environment you felt the House was when you came here as a woman; if you felt marginalized or if you felt welcomed? And maybe how that changed during your career.

**BYRON:** I think one of the first things that I noticed on Armed Services, I was in the second row. But they had two seats down in the first row. And the perception was that a woman was the secretary, as opposed to being an active member. So, I think that’s no longer the case.

**WASNIEWSKI:** When you first arrived, how would you describe interactions with the press? Can you recall any memorable questions you received from reporters that you may have gotten?

**BYRON:** No, because I was kind of quiet, and nobody paid much attention to me. We had two or three women Members that made great copy. I didn’t make great copy. And so consequently, that was not a high-profile issue on a national level.

**WASNIEWSKI:** How about dealing with the local press when you became a Member?

**BYRON:** I had no problem with local press, yes. My local press could jump on the Metro and get down here.

**JOHNSON:** Were there any specific rooms or areas in the Capitol that you either didn't have access to, or it was difficult for you to access because you were a woman?

**BYRON:** Swimming pool. {laughter} The gym—they finally got a women's section. I think there was some kind of a comment that women's/ladies' restrooms were not conveniently located to the floor. But I think those were just probably the main ones. I don't know if anybody else had some other ones that I missed?

**JOHNSON:** The Speaker's balcony is one area that people talked about. The balconies—some of the balconies that men would go out on and smoke.

**BYRON:** Oh.

**JOHNSON:** And the cloakrooms.

**BYRON:** I didn't smoke, so it didn't bother me.

**WASNIEWSKI:** And certain areas of the cloakroom. Not that they were off limits, but that traditionally, men would be in those areas.

**BYRON:** Well, it's like the floor of the House. If you go to the floor, and you're looking to talk to so-and-so, you know about where they're going to be sitting. The House does not have assigned seats. But I use the analogy of talking to groups on the floor of the House about how when you go to the movies, you usually tend to go down the certain aisle and sit around a certain area. When you go to church on Sunday, you tend to go into the same area. And that's true on the House Floor. If you're looking for a certain person from a district or a legislative issue, you kind of know where they—if they're

on the floor, where they're going to be seated because they always tend to sit there. And I tended to sit with people that I was philosophically in agreement.

And yet, I can remember one day we had a major piece of legislation on the floor. And Rosty [Daniel David Rostenkowski] had come to my office to talk about the tax bill. And I said, "Well, basically I am not in favor of it as it currently is. But, I will look at it if it's close." And so we were on the floor of the House, and they're having a debate. And I feel this great, big hand/paw come over on my shoulder. And this head nestle down in my shoulder. And the voice said, "I just don't have the votes. I just don't have the votes." And it was a very emotional time for him. But in other words, "Do what you have to do. I don't need to count on you." But for that type of a person in leadership to work with some of the younger Members, I don't know that it's that way today.

**WASNIEWSKI:** Want to shift to the Women's Caucus?

**JOHNSON:** Sure. Or do we want a break?

**WASNIEWSKI:** It might be a good time to take a two-minute break. Are you okay to keep going?

**BYRON:** Yes, I'm fine. Go.

**WASNIEWSKI:** Okay. So we wanted to ask you a few questions about the Women's Caucus, which when you came in, was a very new organization. Had only been around for about a year.

**BYRON:** When I came in, they didn't have one. And then they had one.

**WASNIEWSKI:** What were your impressions of the early organization?

**BYRON:** I think I went for the first couple meetings. And then when they started letting men in, I thought, “You know? We each have so many dollars to spend for our offices and spend for our caucuses and our meetings.” And I said, “You know? I think I can spend mine better for something else for my district than the Women’s Caucus.” And Steny [Hamilton Hoyer] was the first male to join.

**JOHNSON:** As a more conservative Democrat, did you ever feel at odds with some of your women colleagues who tended to be more on the liberal side?

**BYRON:** Not really, because there weren’t that many women in Congress then.

**JOHNSON:** And even with not being a part of the caucus after a while, were there any issues that you worked on with the majority of women that were in Congress? Were you able to find common ground?

**BYRON:** Yes, yes. We worked on a lot of legislation for health care of women in the service. Health care was an area that I was involved in. I served on the Committee on Aging. And that was a lot of women’s issues there.

**JOHNSON:** As women Members, did you from time to time get together as something, maybe, less organized, a little more informal?

**BYRON:** No. I think when Mikulski went over to the Senate, she started a very proactive group of the women Senators, which today is bipartisan and still very much involved. It was interesting. When I was first elected, there were 76 new freshman Members. Three of them were women: Olympia [Jean] Snowe, Geraldine [Anne] Ferraro, and myself. And that was not a good percentage out of 76.

**WASNIEWSKI:** You talked a little bit earlier about the number of women Members who were serving from Maryland at that point. So, Marjorie Holt, Barbara Mikulski, Gladys Spellman, yourself. Connie [Constance A.] Morella comes along a little bit later.

**BYRON:** Helen [Delich] Bentley.

**WASNIEWSKI:** And Helen Bentley. Forgot Helen Bentley.

**BYRON:** Oh, don't forget Helen. How could you forget Helen?

**WASNIEWSKI:** Can you talk a little bit more about the bond between that group? And then also, why is it that you think Maryland was able to elect so many women Members at that point?

**BYRON:** You know, I don't know why. Barbara [Mikulski] came out of a Baltimore political arena. The thing that I find fascinating is looking today on Armed Services. Maryland has no Members on Armed Services. And at that point in time, we had three—two women, and then Roy [Royden Patrick] Dyson. All of that's changed. I think the dynamics with the women is as interesting.

I, as a Member on Armed Services, was given a great opportunity to look at, see, go out, kick the tires, fly in the aircraft, go in the submarines. I took Mikulski out on a submarine once, and she said, "Well, now, what about mail?" I said, "Well, they don't get any mail." She said, "What do you mean, they don't?" I said, "They go submerge for 90 days." And she said, "Well, what do they do? Who do they talk to?" I took her out on an aircraft carrier. And she said, "There are 5,000 men on this?" I said, "Uh-huh." This is before women were permitted to go on many of the ships. And she said, "Well, it's about 5:00. Don't you think we ought to go have a beer with the

boys?" I said, "Barbara, there are no beers on board." She said, "What do you mean, there's no beer?" So it's an education process.

Then there was a point in time where Howard County [Maryland] was divided up between three congressional districts. And all three of them were represented by women. So, Connie [Morella], Barbara, and I divided up the county. And we spent a day visiting two different sections in each of our congressional districts. And it was very interesting dynamics because they were quite different.

**JOHNSON:** ERA [Equal Rights Amendment] was an important issue for women in the 1970s and the 1980s. What was your stance on the necessity of an amendment of this nature?

**BYRON:** Probably not high profile. I was not one that was out championing the issue. I think Pat [Patricia Scott] Schroeder and several others were very much involved in it. My reaction was that I've got a full plate. I've got a district that's close to Washington. I had a lot of constituents that could take the Metro down, or take the bus down, or would be here on a regular basis. I was probably higher concerned about the things that they were, issues that they were concerned about: Social Security, military retirement, income tax issues, small-business issues.

**JOHNSON:** We did read that there was a vote in the House in the '80s about ERA and that you were quoted as saying that up until the last day, you weren't sure how you were going to vote. What ultimately came to mind, and why did you decide to back it?

**BYRON:** I think one of the things [was] that I used to argue with Barbara [Bailey] Kennelly, who was a whip at the time. I was on her whip agenda, and she

finally got to the point, she's: "Oh, I'm not even going to ask you because you won't tell me how you're going to vote tomorrow." I said, "Barbara,"—and this is what I truly believe—"You have to look at the legislation that is finally before you because two days before, it looks one way. There are amendments put on. There are changes that are made. And so therefore, you have to look at what is finally being voted on." So I would not make—I mean, I would have some idea how I was going to vote on legislation, but I had to see the final legislation before I would vote. And I think that was a case in that point.

**JOHNSON:** Was that an issue that you ever talked about with your daughter, or any issues affecting women, or younger women, at the time?

**BYRON:** Not really. She was just angry at me because she thought I left.

**WASNIEWSKI:** Move on to committee service?

**JOHNSON:** Sure.

**WASNIEWSKI:** Sure. You talked a little bit about how you got on to Armed Services in terms of requesting your committees. But did you have to lobby for that at all, or was it just a request that was granted? How did that work?

**BYRON:** They had to give me a committee assignment. And I can assure you, they weren't going to give me Judiciary. And I can assure you they weren't going to give me Ways and Means. So they had to give me something. And the rule is that you get one of the assignments that you ask for. So I thought, "Well, my mother didn't raise a dumb child. I can figure this out." And so I put in what I wanted. And surprisingly enough, I got it.

**JOHNSON:** You spoke about the seating when you initially were on Armed Services being in a different row. But what was the welcome like, overall? Were there any Members that openly welcomed you, or the opposite?

**BYRON:** Oh, yes. Yes. I never had trouble working with the Members. Ron [Ronald V.] Dellums and I are close good friends. And so, I'll tell you a quick Dellums story. We were debating the Black Caucus budget. My son was in the air force and was getting commissioned with his pilot's wings in San Antonio. I'm standing on the steps of the Capitol, and Dellums comes down. He said, "You look upset." And I said, "Well, I've got to make up my mind in the next five minutes whether I'm going to San Antonio to pin on his wings tomorrow because if I don't leave in five minutes, I can't get the plane to get there on time." He said, "Well, why are you standing here?" I said, "Because we've got the budget votes coming up tomorrow, and I can't miss it." He said, "What time will you be back?" I told him what time I would be back. He said, "I will talk the Black Caucus budget until you can get back. Go." And I did.

There was a Saturday, probably a year or two later, where we were on the floor of the House, and it was 3:30, and we were doing legislation. And we were under the five-minute rule. And people went on, and on, and on. Ron was standing there in a tuxedo. His son was being married at Chevy Chase Circle at 4:30. I said, "I'll take care of that." I went over and talked to the Republican Leadership. And I said, "Hey, his son's getting married. Don't you think he should be there?" Gaveled it. And he was able [to leave].

So those are the kind of things that you don't make a lot of headlines on. And no media is even paying any attention to it. But those are the kind of

things that you do because it's the right thing to do. He did for me. I was fortunately able to do something for him.

**JOHNSON:** Armed Services was certainly a male-dominated committee for many years. But you served with two other women when you first started. Pat Schroeder was on the committee and Marjorie Holt, as well. What were your impressions of them on the committee?

**BYRON:** We worked well together. Yes.

**WASNIEWSKI:** And you also served with two chairmen, Mel Price and Les [Leslie] Aspin during your career. And we're just curious, now how did you compare their leadership styles?

**BYRON:** Very different. {laughter} Les became a good friend of mine, was a good friend of mine. Mel Price was from a different generation. Staff director John Ford ran a good bit of the committee. I can remember we were in Kenya, and I was a spouse, Goodloe as a Member. And the Members were going to Somalia. It was just as the Russians were being thrown out of there. And spouses were not supposed to go. I think I probably was the only one that wanted to go because the rest wanted to go shopping. And so, later on, when I was a Member, John said, "Well, you were with us when we were in Somalia. I said, "No, John, I wasn't." He said, "Oh, yes, you were." I said, "No, no. I was a spouse, and you wouldn't let me go." So, I have a long memory. I think if I'd asked Mel Price, he might have let me go.

**JOHNSON:** You made history as the first woman to chair an Armed Services subcommittee. Can you describe what that was like—how you were able to get that chairmanship and then also, what it meant to you?

**BYRON:**

I talked earlier about selecting committee assignments. Well, once you get on a committee, then the next thing you do is pick your subcommittees. I went back to my office after we had picked subcommittees on Armed Services, and I said, "Well, I got on Procurement." "Oh, that's great." "I got on MilCon." "Oh, that's wonderful." I said, "Why? I don't have any military bases in the district." And I said, "I got on Personnel." They said, "Why did you get on Personnel? You can't raise any money off of Personnel." I said, "Well, I hadn't really thought about it that way. But I care about people. And I'm interested in helping those that are wearing the uniform and their families." And so, it was an area that I had a great deal of interest in. And we were talking earlier about where your interests are. Well, I've always had a very curious mind and [been] very much involved in who's where, and what they're doing, and whether they're well taken care of. So, I still run into people today that say, "Mrs. Byron, thank you for doing what you did. I fly airplanes because you put women in the cockpit of tactical aircraft. I got a health care plan that was an outgrowth of your committee." So those are the kind of things that really are wonderful to look back on and to be able to say you did.

**JOHNSON:**

How would you describe your leadership style as a subcommittee chair?

**BYRON:**

There are those who tell me I was tough. I ran into a retired Marine Corps general yesterday, I see him frequently. But he was not real happy with the way I ran the committee. You're given certain things. I found it fascinating that we would have the military—the leadership would be at the table speaking. And I found the way to find out what was really going on is to talk to the people two rows behind them, because they're the ones that when you'd ask a question, they say, "What's the answer to that?" Or they would ask for the piece of paper.

And so I also found that we did a lot of travel. People today don't travel, and I find that very sad. Members have come into Congress that pride themselves on not having a passport, never having a passport, never going to go anywhere. Well, I look at the time with the leadership throughout the world, that I find fascinating. And how in the world can you work without knowing your enemies, or friends, or what have you? You build allegiances that way. But you tended to work on those things. And it's a relationship that I get from those involvements.

**WASNIEWSKI:** You served on Armed Services after the period of détente. In the '80s, tensions escalated with the Soviets again. And we're just wondering, can you describe some of the dynamics on Armed Services? Because it was divided between people who wanted to have a hard-line military approach versus those who were talking about the escalation.

**BYRON:** I chaired the Arms Control [panel], which was a fascinating point in time with the Soviets—back and forth to Geneva for Arms Control. And I can remember my contention was that when you would have periodic meetings, if the same people showed up each time, on a hard line, nothing was going to change. But when there was a new face at the table, something had changed, and you can work with that. I remember sitting in Geneva, overlooking the lake, with a Soviet counterpart. And we ended up talking about our grandchildren, and our children. And what we were doing today, or had to do today, to put in place a world for them to be able to live in and to grow up. And so, when you look at the counterparts, people by and large, a lot of them, have the same concerns long term.

**JOHNSON:** We've been looking at a lot of firsts. We talked about you being the first woman to chair an Armed Services subcommittee. But we also read that back

in 1985, you were the first woman to fly in the military's premier spy plane at the time, the Blackbird.

**BYRON:** Yes, SR-71.

**JOHNSON:** Do you have memories of that?

**BYRON:** Absolutely.

**JOHNSON:** What was that like?

**BYRON:** Well, we went up to 84,000 feet. We went Mach 3+. At that point in time, I was the only woman that had flown in it. Subsequently, there has been a test pilot that flew in it. The plane is now retired, so that's my claim to fame. No one else will be able to do that. {laughter} The military was unbelievably kind to me and gave me an opportunity.

I used to debate with Jim [James Fredrick] Lloyd from California, who was a fighter pilot, and Duke [Randall] Cunningham, who was "Mr. Fighter Pilot." And I have had the opportunity to fly off of aircraft carriers and F-14s and F-18s and what have you—A-6s, flown with the air force in the B-1, most of the inventory. And so, consequently, it has given me a credibility with an understanding of what weapons systems we're looking at and we're producing. I still am doing work for the navy on the CNO's [Chief of Naval Operations'] exec panel. And my male counterparts get a little irritated. And I say, "Well have you flown in an F-14?" "Well, no." I said, "Well, I have." "Have you gone off of an aircraft carrier?" "Well, no." And I said, "Well, I have." So, it gives you a little bit of credibility that you don't find most places.

**JOHNSON:** Do you think that given your service on Armed Services, and then also just some of these experiences you're describing, that you served as a role model or certainly an advocate for women in the military?

**BYRON:** Yes. There were a lot of things that I think I was able to . . . I remember when we were having a hearing, and there was a proposed amendment to put naval aviators in tactical aircraft. The secretary of the air force at that time, Don Rice, called me in the middle of the committee. He said—No, it was air force. “Why are you picking on the air force?” And I said, “Well, I’ll take care of that real fast.” So I put forth an amendment that all tactical aircraft in any branches of the service should be open to women. Now they need to be qualified. Not all women should be qualified, but those that are should be given the opportunity. There are a lot of men that aren’t qualified to serve in tactical air. So, it was—[Robert Kenneth] Dornan was on the subcommittee. He voted for it. [Pat] Schroeder was on the subcommittee. She voted for it. Sonny Montgomery’s on the subcommittee. He voted for it. We go to the floor of the House. Dornan and Schroeder are not going to vote for it. I said, “Wait a minute. I hate to tell you all, but you’re on record voting in subcommittee and voting in full committee. I would suggest you think about this long and hard before you make that decision.” And those are the kind of numerous women that I run into today that are in leadership in the service. [They] said, “I was not in a tactical aircraft. My husband was, but I wasn’t.” And that was an issue. We had a lot of issues over joint assignments for husbands and wives. In the navy, in two; in the army, in two; in the air force were easier. But when you have cross-service jointness, you’ve got some problems.

**WASNIEWSKI:** You also served on Interior and Insular Affairs, and we don’t want to neglect that.

**BYRON:** No, no.

**WASNIEWSKI:** Can you talk a little bit about your experience joining that committee and some of your memories?

**BYRON:** Sure. I was on Water and Power [Resources Subcommittee]. I ended up, after I got out of Congress, going on the board of Baltimore Gas and Electric, which became Constellation Energy, which today is Exelon. And that tied in with the work that I had done on Armed Services and nuclear power. When we had . . . the navy was the only place that you found training for our nuclear people to run the power plants. We subsequently got a training profile that people are going into that area. But when we look today about energy, we look today about learning. I remember the Israelis were one of the first that used solar panels for energy. I go all over my district now in western Maryland and you'll see barns, and you'll see farms that have solar energy issues. We're looking at cars today that are powered differently, electric cars. So, it's an outgrowth that has gone on. And that's not to even talk about the national parks. I mean, the national parks are just such a fabulous opportunity here.

**JOHNSON:** What were your impressions of Chairman [Morris King] Udall at the time when you served on the committee?

**BYRON:** Well, he was wonderful. Yes.

**JOHNSON:** How would you describe his leadership style?

**BYRON:** Tough. Good. I was involved in the "d-2" land withdrawals in Alaska.<sup>3</sup> I can remember being out in Las Vegas when we were talking about underground storage for nuclear waste. Those were issues that still are hanging around. It's taken a long time to get through those.

**WASNIEWSKI:** Throughout your career you were interested in physical fitness, and also improving recreational areas. Can you talk a little bit about that aspect of your career?

**BYRON:** Sure. I come from a family that—well, Goodloe ran the Boston Marathon, I've forgotten how many years. Both of my sons have run it. I've got a grandson now in California who is involved. Talked to him yesterday. He was on his way back from spinning class to get to work. I said, "Oh, it's only 7:00 out there." He said, "Yes, I've just finished my spinning." But it's something that we as a family have been involved in, in fitness. I chaired the Maryland Commission on Physical Fitness for a good while, until finally I didn't have time to do that anymore. But I think it's something that is important to this country.

I remember in the Frederick County [Maryland] School System, in the elementary schools, we tried to get a program where once a year, on National Fitness Day, the classes would go out and just run around the school. Run around the block. "Well, you can't do that." They don't need any equipment. I've never seen a kid at school that doesn't wear sneakers or running shoes. They don't have to do that. They all have a pair of shorts and a t-shirt. And so, we need to get children geared to fitness early on. I'm very fortunate that my children all were—my two sons played lacrosse and soccer in high school and college. Grandchildren have played . . . active in it. It's just kind of like a way of life.

**WASNIEWSKI:** Title IX had just been implemented a few years before you came into Congress.

**BYRON:** Yes.

**WASNIEWSKI:** Did you feel, as a Congresswoman, that you needed to make a special effort in that regard, to get young girls and young women interested in athletics and recreational sports?

**BYRON:** I think if you take a child in the elementary schools, the whole class works together. It makes an impact early on; you got to get them early enough. We had the Nike Challenge, and I saw Bart [Barton Jennings] Gordon, who always won it for the House, a while ago. And he still runs. Goodloe, when he first was here, he wouldn't go run, but the staff would go run. And we were able to get a place for the staff to shower. When my AA would go out at lunchtime and come back, he could shower.

**JOHNSON:** I wanted to wrap up the committee section and get your thoughts on how important you think it was to have women on committees, especially the ones that had previously been male-dominated, like Armed Services.

**BYRON:** Yes. I look at Armed Services today, and there's a large number of women on there. There are too many Members that are on the committee. You can't get anything done with 60-some Members. To me, a board or a group, to get a consensus with 60-some Members is very difficult, if not impossible.

**JOHNSON:** Do you think that women bring a different perspective to House service and then, specifically, for committee service?

**BYRON:** Oh, sure. Yes. Absolutely. They come from different views. Different ideas. But, you know, things have changed so much. It isn't at all unusual in this day and age to find women on boards, women in leadership, women as corporate CEOs.

**WASNIEWSKI:** We just have a few sections of questions left to kind of frame your thoughts, and looking back—this is a retrospective of Jeannette Rankin—and then also

some retrospective observations about your career. When Jeannette Rankin served in Congress, came to Congress in 1917, there was a lot of attention paid to her dress, to her demeanor. That was something that kind of continued into the 1920s with the early women Members. And we're curious to know what your perceptions of that were by the time you came into Congress in the late 1970s. Do you think that was still a factor? Issue?

**BYRON:**

Not really. No, I think it was just kind of accepted. I can tell a story on a colleague of mine who was running for the other body. And three of us got her in the back and told her that she couldn't possibly run in a polyester pantsuit, she had to upgrade. And she said, "Well, what do you mean?" And I said, "Well, you've got to go get some shoes. You can't run in Docksidors. You're going to the United States Senate." So she comes back and puts her foot up and says, "Look at this shoe." And I said, "Yes?" She says, "It's Ferragamo." I said, "I know." She said, "Do you know what it costs?" I said, "Mm-hmm." "My mother could have bought a suit, a hat, pocketbook, and coat for what I paid for these shoes." I said, "Mm-hmm. But your mother wasn't running for United States Senate." So, yes, there's a dress code, but there's also . . . it also changed. It's like I said earlier: My mother-in-law, when she ran for Congress the first time, she campaigned in a black veil and black because she was the new widow, mother of five children. So, it's changed.

**JOHNSON:**

Some of the women that we've talked to, and certainly others that we studied that went further back, expressed an idea of feeling that they weren't just representing their constituents, but they were really representing women across the state and across the country. Did you ever feel like that?

**BYRON:**

No. No. And my staff used to get really furious with me because we would, on a regular basis, get the local media person who would say, “Can we ride with you today for . . . follow you along?” I said, “Sure.” So they’d get in the car, and we would go wherever we were going in the district. And they said, “Now, Mrs. Byron, you had always wanted to be in Congress.” And I’d say no. “Well, you didn’t?” And I said, “No.” They said, “Well, when did you decide you were going to run for Congress?” I said, “Well, I was very happy raising my family. I was very happy with my household, involved in my husband’s career. And so, I came out of my kitchen to go to Congress.” And Brent would go like this and say, “Oh, don’t say that again.” And I said, “But it’s true. It’s true.”

Now, that is not to say that anybody that is given a set of circumstances cannot transfer from one type of life to another and be productive. And so, consequently, when they thought I would serve one term and disappear, I didn’t. And they were surprised. I mean, the year after I lost a primary to a very liberal Democrat and was replaced by a very conservative Republican, the people that worked hardest to defeat me begged and pleaded with me the next term to run again. And I said, “Why? Why would I run again? I mean, you guys got me last time. I’m not going to give you another shot at it.” And I said, “Frankly, when I left Congress, I put together some things that are exciting.” I did base closing—BRAC [Base Realignment and Closure]—which was probably one of the hardest things that I ever did. And there were six of us on a BRAC of ’93. I did some other [things]—I went on a bank board, went on Constellation Energy, went on McDonnell Douglas, went on a couple of other boards. And I’m thinking, I’m doing all sorts of things that are exciting and different. No. And I said, “I had a terrific, terrific staff. My staff are all gone. They’re working for other people now. You want me to go

back and start from scratch? To get at the bottom of the list and find an office? I don't think so." So, you move on and do different things.

**WASNIEWSKI:** In the 1980s, women were just beginning to move into leadership positions in Congress—subcommittee chairs—a few chairs; later, elected in the caucus to maybe the secretary position.

**BYRON:** That's always where they start.

**WASNIEWSKI:** And within the '90s and 2000s, we would have women move into leadership. We're curious to know about your reflections on that process, and then also we want to know, did you ever have leadership aspirations during your time?

**BYRON:** I have friends that had leadership aspirations. And I have friends that are in leadership. And I had an opportunity. It was interesting. When Nancy Pelosi was first elected [in 1987], I was given the opportunity to introduce her on the floor of the House. And I had a little bit of fun with it because I said, "For those of you from California that think she belongs to you, I hate to tell you, but she learned everything she knows about politics at the knee of her father [Thomas D'Alesandro, Jr.], who was the mayor of Baltimore. So she is our ninth member of the Maryland delegation." And they all looked at me like, "What is she talking about?" I said, "Well, anybody ever heard of the D'Alesandros? Well, that's where Nancy learned her political background."

One of the things that I think is really important is that if you were a Member, because you work extremely hard, but you might as well have fun with it. Tweaking Pelosi on being a member of the Maryland [delegation], that was fun. And so people tend to get so serious that they miss a lot of the innuendos that make it pleasant.

**JOHNSON:** Do you have a follow-up?

**WASNIEWSKI:** No. I'm good.

**JOHNSON:** We'd asked you earlier, when you first came to Congress if someone had served as a mentor or taken you under their wing. But what about the reverse towards the end of your career? Did you mentor any younger Members that were coming in?

**BYRON:** I think when Members live in Washington, without their family there, they tend to have more time to mentor younger people. I had a couple colleagues, and I would go to dinner with them periodically. And we would go over to The Monocle, and we would see [Newton Leroy] Gingrich there with his group, strategizing. And we'd go to enjoy a dinner. And so, I think there's a difference there. The mentorship is something that is different. I remember talking to colleagues that had a new Member that moved into their neighborhood. And so, they would drive back and forth to the Hill on a regular basis. That was a mentorship, sort of—not in the truest sense, but it was kind of trying ideas and talking about different things that way.

**WASNIEWSKI:** In retrospect?

**JOHNSON:** Sure.

**WASNIEWSKI:** So just a few wrap-up retrospective questions.

**BYRON:** I was going to say, you've got to be coming to the end of your list.

**WASNIEWSKI:** We're about to stop torturing you. You served under three Speakers while you were in Congress. So [Thomas Philip (Tip)] O'Neill [Jr.], [James Claude] Wright [Jr.], and [Thomas Stephen] Foley. And we're just curious to know—

**BYRON:** Different. All different.

**WASNIEWSKI:** Yes. Yes. How were their leadership styles, and do you have any memorable stories about them?

**BYRON:** Well, I have the letter from Tip, who asked me—because 16 of us voted against the leadership on a bill. And Tip wrote a note to say that he wondered why we were staying in the Democratic Party. In fact, I had fun tweaking Chris Matthews on that because I was very much involved in [his wife] Kathleen’s race for the 8th District in Maryland [in 2016], which, unfortunately, did not turn out the right way. But he said, “Oh, I remember that letter.”

**WASNIEWSKI:** How about Speakers Wright or Foley?

**BYRON:** Tom Foley was a good Speaker. Jim Wright, I think, was under kind of a cloud and wasn’t . . . one of the things that I found fascinating—and you haven’t talked at all about the presidential impact on Congress—as a new freshman Member, in 1979—elected in ’78—having taken no stand on any issues, the Carter leadership could have worked me very easily. I never had—I’d go in, and I said, “What’s the administration’s view on this?” “Oh, we don’t have one.” And, you know, this is the guy at the door. And I’m thinking, they didn’t work it well. The [Ronald W.] Reagan administration worked that extremely well.

When the Carter administration—and I think it was September before the election in November—had all the Democrats over to the White House . . . and the President said, “I have a file of all of your voting records. And I know how you voted on each of my pieces of legislation. And don’t come calling to me to ask me to send Rosalynn [Carter] out to campaign for you in your district unless I look in that file.”

Well, I'm a freshman Member, and I've been there maybe a year and a half. And so, at the end of the wrap-up, you know: "Any more questions?" I raise my hand and I said, "Well, Mr. President, I have a comment to make, not really a question. Camp David is in my congressional district. We had a race up at Camp David where there were about 800 people running. And you ran in it. And you didn't do very well. In fact, you collapsed. And my two sons were running in that race. And any one of those 799 people would have been only too happy to help you and to pace you, because you went out too fast and you didn't finish the race. Now, in this room are a lot of Members that know their district, and any one of them would be only too happy to help you in their district. But you have to ask them." And I sat down, and I thought, "I can't believe what I just said." But I had three or four people come up to me afterward and said, "Mrs. Byron, thank you for saying that. It needs to be said." Needless to say, he didn't ask. He didn't win.

**WASNIEWSKI:** Great story.

**BYRON:** That's my problem. I'm full of too many stories. But they're accurate. And you could have heard a pin drop in that room, in the East Room.

**WASNIEWSKI:** Was there any kind of response from him?

**BYRON:** Not from him, no. Oh, and I started it out with, "Don't bother to look in your drawer because I don't come out very well in your drawer. But, I also had the opportunity to shoot the gun that started the race that you never finished."

**JOHNSON:** We've asked you, as you know, a lot of questions about the past. But in this case, we're going to ask you for a prediction.

**BYRON:** Oh, no.

**JOHNSON:** So there are 108 women in Congress now. Eighty-eight of those women are in the House. And this is the 100th anniversary of Jeannette Rankin's election. In 50 years—50 years from now—how many women do you think there will be in Congress? And how do you think we'll get to that?

**BYRON:** I have no idea. If Maryland's any indication, that's not a good indication. If Armed Services from the state of Maryland is an indication, that's not a good indication. When you look at the change, and you look at the number of women that are in leadership positions throughout the country, the . . . I used to feel that it was much easier for a woman to be involved in local legislation—county commissioners, aldermen, mayors, state legislatures—because of the time constraint. In this day and age, it is very difficult for a woman with small children, or without the infrastructure, to be able to handle going to Washington at the same time. When you, on weekends, are back in your district campaigning, and so you miss something. And to me, it's something that I wouldn't want to miss when my children were younger.

**WASNIEWSKI:** You must get asked this question a lot, or versions of it. But if a young person were to come up to you and say, "I'm interested in running for political office," whether it's Congress or whether it's local.

**BYRON:** I have one of those.

**WASNIEWSKI:** What would your advice be?

**BYRON:** Do it. Know that the commitment . . . know that your time will not be your own. But it is an opportunity. I have a granddaughter who was a law graduate. Worked for Martin O'Malley.<sup>4</sup> She used to come to meetings with me, and [people] said, "Oh, you've got to be—you're the granddaughter." I

now go to meetings with her, and they say, “Oh, you must be Molly’s grandmother.” And I’m thinking, “Boy, have times changed.”

She had a great job after January when O’Malley went out of office. She was doing great in the job. He called her back to work on the presidential campaign. She quit the job. And I said, “Mol, you’ve got a good job.” She said, “I know. But I’ve never worked on a presidential campaign before.” I said, “Yes, but how long do you think you’re going to be around?” I said, “What are you going to be doing when summer comes?” She said, “Oh, well, I’ll be all right.” She was deputy campaign manager for him. She’d go to New Hampshire. I said, “Well, Mol, you’re going to be sleeping on somebody’s floor.” She said, “No, I’m not. I’m going to get a hotel room.” And she was back and forth to Iowa. It was a marvelous experience for her. And then all of the sudden, when he announced that he wasn’t going anywhere, she said, “Well, what do I do now?” I said, “Well, you can go back to that good job you had.” She said, “Yes.” So she ended up working for Chris [Christopher] Van Hollen in his campaign. She subsequently is now working for the National Conservancy. I said, “What you’re doing is solid.” You can still do politics on the side. But she’s got the bug. And it’s a disease. And she will run with the disease. And heaven knows where she’ll end up.

**JOHNSON:** I would think it runs in your family.

**BYRON:** It does. I’ve got another son that it’s just killing him he’s not running.

**JOHNSON:** Was there anything unexpected or anything that surprised you about your time in Congress?

**BYRON:** I think the intensity of it, which you don’t find today. I looked at the schedule they keep today, and I’m thinking, “Man, that’s an easy schedule.”

And we're listening to them complaining about the pay scale. Now, when Goodloe first went into Congress in 1970, the pay scale was \$32,000 a year. And we thought, "Man, that's great." We're on easy street because the Maryland general assembly was \$2,400. The Maryland general assembly today, I think, is \$43,000, \$44,000 a year—for 90 days, and congressional [pay] is \$170,000. And they're complaining. I think the time constraint is one that I found interesting.

**WASNIEWSKI:** What do you think your lasting legacy will be in terms of your House service?

**BYRON:** She survived. I don't know. There's a lot of things that I'm proud of: rails-to-trails legislation—which I was reading an article on it the other day—the American Discovery Trail, childcare for military families. We had no childcare facilities. We've got wonderful childcare facilities. A lot of the work in the medical arena that I was involved in. Still involved on the Henry Jackson Foundation board, which funds USU [Uniformed Services University], which is the military medical school. So those are the kind of things that are not earthshaking. The media doesn't pick up on them, but they're things I'm really proud of.

**WASNIEWSKI:** A great career.

**JOHNSON:** That is all we have for questions, unless you want to add something else.

**BYRON:** No. They keep coming. You got everything you could think of.

**JOHNSON:** In two hours.

**WASNIEWSKI:** We really appreciate you taking the time to sit down with us.

## NOTES

<sup>1</sup> Eddie Rickenbacker, a World War I American fighter pilot, survived the crash that killed Representative William Byron and six others.

<sup>2</sup> On October 16, 1972, a plane carrying Majority Leader Hale Boggs and Congressman Nick [Nicholas Joseph] Begich disappeared during a flight from Anchorage to Juneau. The two Democrats were en route to a campaign stop for Begich's upcoming re-election bid. Boggs' widow, Corinne (Lindy) Boggs, won the special election to fill her late husband's Louisiana House seat.

<sup>3</sup> Reference to a provision of the Alaska Native Claims Settlement Act that allowed Congress to designate land in Alaska for national parks or wildlife refuges.

<sup>4</sup> Martin O'Malley served as the governor of Maryland from 2007 to 2015.