

**Judy Lemons**

Secretary, Subcommittee on National Parks and Insular Affairs, Interior and Insular Affairs  
Committee (1975–1981)

Staff Assistant, Subcommittee on Labor (Education and Labor Committee) (1981–1983)

Legislative Assistant, Representative Sala Burton of California (1984–1987)

Chief of Staff, Representative Nancy Pelosi of California (1988–2002)

**Oral History Interview**

**Final Edited Transcript**

July 19, 2016

Office of the Historian  
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“But one of the things is leave your ego at the threshold. When you cross that door, be prepared for anything, and nothing is beneath you. You can get your hands dirty. You can work in the trenches and you do everything you can to reach success. You set a goal and go. I was so fortunate to have this kind of public service opportunity and to work for this noble institution. Particularly for me, as a child of poverty, and to be able to walk these halls and serve this nation, and to work with the brightest minds and kindest hearts and the people that I have been so fortunate to be associated with and the opportunities that have opened for me. Create a fertile ground for opportunities, be malleable, be agreeable, but also know how to fight.”

**Judy Lemons**  
**July 19, 2016**

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## **Abstract**

Growing up in a “dyed-in-the-wool” Democratic family led Judy Lemons to a career on Capitol Hill. From 1975 to 2002, Lemons worked for three Representatives from the same San Francisco district: Phil Burton, Sala Burton, and Nancy Pelosi. In her oral history, she traces her path from being a secretary for the National Parks and Insular Affairs Subcommittee (Committee on Interior and Insular Affairs) to chief of staff for Congresswoman Pelosi.

Lemons’ diverse legislative focus, ranging from National Parks to student visa laws, provides a unique perspective on how Members create, negotiate, and pass bills. Throughout the interview, she reflects on the careers of the Representatives she worked for, including their relationships with other Members, how seniority shaped their political life on the Hill, and the results of Phil Burton’s 1976 Majority Leader race and Nancy Pelosi’s successful 2001 campaign for Democratic Whip. Lemons describes the changing role of women staff in the House since the 1970s, including the significance of the 1992 election, known as the “Year of the Woman.”

## Biography

Starting on Capitol Hill as a secretary, Judy Lemons worked for three Representatives from the same California district, eventually rising to the position of chief of staff. Over the course of her 27-year career, she learned the inner workings of the United States Congress and became a skilled advocate for the San Francisco community.

Born in 1945, in Santa Paula, California, Lemons is the youngest child of Anna (Clepper) and Elmer Lemons. During the first 10 years of her life, her family moved throughout California, residing wherever her father could find work as a manual laborer. The family built a home and settled in Bakersfield, California, where Lemons graduated from South High School in 1964. Lemons earned a degree in psychology from California State University, Bakersfield in 1970. After graduating, she spent the next two years traveling the United States and Europe.

Following the death of her mother, Lemons moved to Washington, D.C., in 1972. She took a job at a political consulting firm and worked there for a year and a half.

The House Democratic Caucus, led by California Congressman Phil Burton, hired Lemons as a secretary in 1974. After two years, she briefly left the Hill to work for California Governor Jerry Brown, but was invited back by Congressman Burton in 1976. Lemons worked for the Subcommittee on National Parks and Insular Affairs (Interior and Insular Affairs Committee), which Burton chaired, until 1980. Burton then became the chairman of Subcommittee on Labor (Education and Labor Committee), and Lemons worked with him until his death in May 1983.

When Phil's wife, Sala Burton, decided to run for the open seat she asked Lemons to help her campaign. Sala Burton was elected to Congress in June 1983 and assigned to the House Rules Committee. Burton hired Lemons as her staff liaison for the Rules Committee, a position she held for four years until the Congresswoman's death in February 1987.

Nancy Pelosi won the special election for the open seat in June 1987. For the next 13 years, Lemons worked as Pelosi's chief of staff. She oversaw the office's response to the Tiananmen Square massacre in 1989, organized legislation for the preservation of the Presidio in San Francisco, and aided Representative Pelosi with her ascent to leadership.

Lemons retired from the Hill in 2002. She remains involved in politics as a legislative consultant in the Washington metropolitan area.

## 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:  
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## **Interviewer Biography**

**V. Grace Ethier** is a researcher, writer, and oral historian for the Office of the Historian, U.S. House of Representatives. She earned her B.A. in history from Guilford College in Greensboro, North Carolina. She has been with the office since 2014 and leads the web production for the oral history team.

— JUDY LEMONS—  
A CENTURY OF WOMEN IN CONGRESS

**ETHIER:** This is Grace Ethier with the Office of the Historian, U.S. House of Representatives. Joining me this morning is Judy Lemons, longtime House staffer for Representatives [Phillip] Phil [Burton] and Sala [Galante] Burton and former chief of staff for Democratic Leader Nancy Pelosi. The date is July 19, 2016, and we are in the House Recording Studio in the Rayburn [House Office] Building.

Judy, thank you so much for being here today. This interview is part of an ongoing project to recognize the 100th anniversary of the election and swearing-in of Congresswoman Jeannette Rankin of Montana, the first woman elected to Congress.

To start off, I'm wondering where you grew up.

**LEMONS:** Thank you, Grace. I want to also mention that it's quite an honor for me to participate in this program and thank you so much. I've enjoyed our conversations and really appreciate the work of the House Historian and the value that it adds to completing the picture for those of us who have been here, and for those of us who will come after. Thank you very much.

**ETHIER:** Absolutely.

**LEMONS:** And my story—my folks were Dustbowl Okies. They got blown to California. And, of course, this was on the heels of the Depression. My last name, as you mentioned, is Lemons. My father had no education but his first job was picking fruit in California. So, he was a Lemons picking oranges. It

was a childhood of poverty. We lived in a trailer. He was a migrant laborer. We went wherever he could find work.

It was really a blessed life in so many ways because in my childhood I never knew we were poor. I thought that we had so much because we were always doing things for other people and thinking about other people. And even though we weren't considered religious, we really believed in and followed the creed of, "Do unto others as you would have them do unto you." That was just a principle that was ingrained in our lives. Those were my roots.

I went to four first grades because we moved around so much and were finally settled. We didn't have our own home until I was about 10 years old and my dad built it out of cinderblock, which cost a total of \$4,000. But finally, we had a house. I lived there for the next nine years, until I graduated from high school.

During that time, I was studying psychology because I thought that I wanted to go into special education. So, in a way, in the long view, it was sort of fitting that I came to Congress because a lot of those qualities that you strive for—understanding, and patience, and nurturing, and dealing with difficulty—those were some of the things that I could, in the end, apply in working for Members of Congress. It wasn't always an easy situation.

I did get my degree in psychology, but my mother had become ill and died when I was 25. My father had happily remarried and settled. I thought, "Gee, I'll just head back East." I loved to travel. When I was 21 I'd gone on an Italian freighter from L.A. through the Panama Canal and toured with a friend. We had a VW bus camper. That was the dream. That was the life. There was a little bit of hippie in me, although I hadn't expected that in life.

I mean, there were so many twists and turns with my mother being ill and then dying. So, I was basically a country girl. But those experiences of broadening my world and having the opportunity to travel, and by freighter, were so unexpected and amazing.

It was a six-week voyage across the southern Atlantic and the crew couldn't speak English. I couldn't speak Italian. But it was just such a mind-expanding experience to have that communion with people, and you realize how much hand gestures can really communicate. The rest of the trip was about three months on land, five weeks in Greece, and coming through the Mediterranean and the former Yugoslavia, which was just the most beautiful coastline. But my mother was ill, so I came home from the trip early. And that was the beginning of my coastal change.

In terms of politics, I was just born a Democrat. My grandfather was a really, really, dyed-in-the-wool, yellow dog Democrat from Oklahoma. He was a big fish in a small pond. But at that time before the Depression he had a nice ranch. He had barns. He was fairly prosperous on a small scale. And then, of course, the Depression came. But before that he was a leader in the community. And he was also a big drinker. So, he would go into town on Election Day. When lots of drinks were being shared around. But he went in because he wanted to see who had voted Republican.

This is a story my uncle tells because they rode into town on Election Day. I think he was about six years old, on the horse with him. Papa went into town and pulled his gun out of the holster to shoot someone who had voted Republican. Luckily my uncle riding behind him hit his arm and Papa was so drunk they both ended up falling off the horse. That was the kind of fervor,

that was the kind of intensity that came with my life as about being a Democrat.

My family, so solidly believed in FDR [President Franklin Delano Roosevelt] and the New Deal. The same uncle, years later, was interviewed by an author who was writing a book on the Oklahoma migration to California. And throughout that interview—his part of it is 21 pages—he talks about FDR and what the New Deal meant for poor people and people who got left behind.

And, of course, coming to California, we were discriminated against. Some of this was before I was born, but in a letter that my mother had written to her father she said my dad had gotten into a car accident with a police officer and it was the policeman's fault. But because we were “dumb Okies” and my dad had an accent, they didn't bother to help replace our car. We had no way to challenge that. And that was just an example of what you faced being uneducated, being poor, being at the bottom of the ladder, like so many people before us, and even now people in America with those experiences.

So, throughout my uncle's interview he talks about FDR and what he did. He went to a CCC [Civilian Conservation Corps] camp. I think it was in Colorado and he sent his \$2 a week home so that his family would have clothes and food. And every time in this interview my uncle talks about having a disagreement or a fight, it's always about FDR, {laughter} because he was defending the President he believed in and the President he believed lifted America out of sheer poverty for so many people and through a war. And that is, in more than a nutshell, a little bit of my background.

**ETHIER:** During this time did you have any female role models?

**LEMONS:**

Well, I came from a very matriarchal family of strong, independent women. So, I think they were probably my role models. My grandmother lived with us for a while and I looked upon her as someone who had humor, intelligence, was hardworking and loved to play with us children. In a way, she never grew up and just always enjoyed her childhood. It's never too late to have a happy childhood. She was a role model.

And my teachers, of course, were always role models to me. I always looked up to authority and I loved all of my teachers except one in first grade, the first, first grade I went to. But I really admired people who took on that role to help cultivate the minds of young people.

As I grew older there were people like Margaret Mead, Pearl Buck, Amelia Earhart, women who had sort of struck out on their own and really carved out a territory that was meaningful to the world, that they devoted their entire lives to. And, of course, Eleanor Roosevelt, through the eyes of my family. The teachings and preachings about the Roosevelts were just unending. There was no one like them in the world. So, I think those were probably my main role models.

We always lived in the country so I wasn't exposed to a lot. There weren't kids nearby to play with. If you had a play date, such as it was, it was eight miles away and that was a big event. It meant you were going to stay overnight—have a sleepover. That's sort of the environment I grew up in, with people who weren't educated but proud, with strong will and sheer determination.

My father, even as a fruit picker, worked so hard that he became foreman of the entire ranch and they gave us a house when I was born. But he wanted to

go on to greener pastures. He thought, oh, he could do this job with his brother and they could haul pipe and do something else. So, he forfeited all of that, which might have been kind of a nice beginning. But then that's when we went on to traveling and living in a trailer.

**ETHIER:** What did you think society expected of you as a woman? Or to be as you were growing up?

**LEMONS:** Well, my personal expectations and what I thought in the traditional sense was that it would be marriage and the mundane. Not that that's what marriage is. But that's what I thought. "Oh, I'll just get married, drive a station wagon full of kids and go to the bowling alley to watch my husband bowl on Saturday nights." But that's not who I was. I wanted to be a teacher. All my life I wanted to be a teacher. So, that was something that I always had as a goal and thought would materialize someday.

But I really thought that I would be stuck in Bakersfield. That's how I viewed it. I didn't view it as the world of promise. I viewed it as traditional. "I'll do what my mother did." But inside I didn't feel that way, so I couldn't adopt that in my spirit. Then I just kind of struck out on my own. Went on a freighter trip, traveled around Europe, and then after my mom died, drove my Volkswagen Bug across country. So, I had a streak of part hippie and just being independent and wanting to carve out my individual territory in life.

**ETHIER:** So, then how did you end up working for the House? If you want to start that.

**LEMONS:** Well, when I came to Washington—after that journey in the Volkswagen Bug across country—I only knew one person, who was chair of the

psychology department when I'd been at Cal State Bakersfield. And I did get my degree, my bachelor's degree, and worked on part of my master's. But then my mom died. I lost interest. I was really in an emotional upheaval and worried about my dad. And so, this friend who chaired the psychology department where I'd been studying, said, "Well, look. I'm moving East. I'm getting a big job at NIH [National Institutes of Health] and you've been my daughter's babysitter. You all are close. You love to travel. You've never seen the East Coast. Why don't you come along?" So, I thought, "Okay." And I came back. I stayed with them for a while, until I could get my own place and a job.

I signed up with three employment agencies and I had 20 interviews in four days. I had no idea how to get around D.C. So, I'd drive my Bug around and I'd think, "Okay, I'm going to 15th and H." Okay, so I'd park in a lot there. And then I'd go to my next interview, not even understanding or realizing that it was just half a block away. But I'd go get my car out of the garage, go to another garage. Because I had always lived in the country. I'd traveled, I'd seen cities and foreign cities, but I'd never tried to immerse myself and actually thrive in a city. So, all of this was pretty challenging to me.

But by the end of the second week, I had three job offers. And at every place I went the question was, "How fast can you type?" Nothing to do with anything else. This was the early '70s. So, in that day and time it was all about how fast you could type and everybody wanted a good typist, except Wayne [Levere] Hays. {laughter}. We'll get to that, I guess. But I was the fastest typist in the West and that opened a lot of doors. And I thought, "That's all I need. Get my foot in the door and I'll figure it out from there

because I know that I can be determined and I can succeed if someone will just give me a chance.”

I ended up with this political consulting firm. It was called Matt Reese and Associates. And there, I met my very first friend in D.C. Her name was Stephanie Beard at the time. But she ended up marrying one of Tip [Thomas Philip] O’Neill [Jr.]’s sons, Christopher, who’s called Kip O’Neill. She became my very first friend in D.C. and I loved the environment of the office because it was in the thick of the Watergate hearings. They were casual. It spoke to my California feeling. They all had jeans and everything was just messy and books stacked up and papers and I thought, “I can’t believe they’re at work and they’re watching television.” But it was the Watergate hearings.

Stephanie and I became really close friends and she was my very first friend in D.C. And then, when I left Nancy Pelosi’s office I hired her [Stephanie Beard’s] daughter, Catlin. So, I got to work with mother/daughter and it was just wonderful because that’s where I started and that’s where I ended, at least on the Hill.

I liked that job a lot. It lasted about a year and a half because they folded. But they did political consulting. They did John [Herschel] Glenn [Jr.]’s first campaign. They did mayor’s races in New York City and all over and they were Democrats. I met a friend there and she had worked for the DNC [Democratic National Committee], was a freelance writer. I was out of work for a while but I traveled during that time. I had a friend who had been one of the partners in the political consulting firm and he was doing a campaign in Venezuela. He said, “Hey, why don’t you come, you haven’t been there. Let’s go check that out.” So, we did.

Then when I came back, this friend I'd worked with, Pat Krause said, "Judy, you know, Phil Burton's chair of the Democratic Caucus now and he's looking for a leadership post and we're trying to put a small staff together. You're not doing anything right now. Would you be interested?" I thought, "Well, of course." By that time I was getting serious about looking for a job.

She mentioned my name and I went to interview with Phil and he was like supersize. Supersize. Just a real powerhouse, an intellectual and physical powerhouse. He was about six-three or four, 250 pounds, and his staff director was the same. They said, "Well, would you come—walk over to the Rayburn Building and have an interview?" So, I sat between them and his staff director's here and Phil's here. I mean, I'm just enveloped by these two giants. And they start saying, "Well, you know, the job would entail this and the job would entail that and you could do this."

Well, the job entailed nothing. It was a basic flunky. That's all the job was going to be. And I was very naïve. So, for a moment, Phil turned to me and he said, "Well, you know, we'll even get you down on the floor sometimes." And just for a flash I didn't know what that meant and I thought it meant the worst of all things. These two big monster guys here. But I thought, "They're saying something I don't understand. I'll just hold my tongue."

After I was hired—I told Phil's wife, Sala. I was laughing with her and told her about it. She said, "Oh, Judy, that's funny because back in the state legislature, somebody would call and say 'Is assemblyman Long available in his office?' And they'd say, 'No, he's tied up on the floor.' And then they'd say, 'Well, can I talk to his assistant Shirley?' And they'd say, 'No, she's tied up on the floor with him.'" So, it's funny how these terms you're not familiar

with, and then suddenly they jump out at you like, “What in the world is going on?”

So, Phil hired me and I did nothing—absolutely nothing except crank the mimeograph machine and do the typing. But there wasn’t a lot to do because he was chair of the caucus. There were monthly caucus meetings and you geared up for that meeting. And, of course, that was after the Watergate class of ’74. So, there were lots of reforms. Phil was trying to hang onto his territory and climb beyond that and there was a lot of palace intrigue. Dick [Richard Walker] Bolling, what was he up to? They were absolute rivals but so alike in their intellect and in their goals, but they despised each other. Because Phil had a very brusque, coarse nature, that turned a lot of people off.

**ETHIER:** So, were you in his Member office or were you working on the committee at that point?

**LEMONS:** In the caucus.

**ETHIER:** Okay, okay.

**LEMONS:** Yes. And we had a staff. Let’s see. I was there and Pat Krause, who had recommended me, and then there was another man there who had been active in D.C. local politics. This was really just a structure for Phil to run for leadership and he was a oneman walking computer. He didn’t need us. Phil kept everything in his own brilliant brain. That probably led to his loss as Majority Leader, because he didn’t rely on too many people. Although in the end he said, “I learned to do all my own counting now.” So, maybe he was relying too much on his lieutenants.

But as far as his staff, we were sort of irrelevant except to bolster him, be there with him in the evening when he started drinking Stolichnaya. But he had a very, very soft heart. For all his brusqueness, for all of his bravado, for all of his grabbing somebody by the shirt collar and practically lifting them off the ground, he had the most tender, tender heart and he would cry over a person who was disabled, a dog that had been injured. He had this magnificent heart and I think that is what drove him to work way beyond his district.

The scope of his legislative achievements are scattered all over the country. The farm bill, the mining bill, working on minimum wage. I mean, that was his goal. He said, "You know, I didn't come here to worry only about the ecology and the stratosphere. I came here to lift people out of poverty and raise the minimum wage and make sure that people have a fair earning and a good job." So, that's where his heart always was. And the passion came from that. He was pretty amazing to behold.

**ETHIER:** Backing up a little bit to the Majority Leader race in 1976. As a staff person you didn't have much of a role in that?

**LEMONS:** No, he had a staff director. He had two. One left because they got into an argument about whether or not he could paint his office and that's when Phil's wife interfered a little bit. It was very petty. But he decided, "Enough, I'm gone."

So, then Phil hired another staff director. And even that staff director would trail Phil and be with him when he had conversations. But Phil was a 24-hour machine. So, you couldn't be with him the rest of the time when he was on the phone at home and talking to people and calling people. We had

Monday night dinners at his house. But I basically did not play any role in that race except to observe and support.

And then when he lost he called me and I had gone to work for [California] Governor Jerry [Edmund Gerald] Brown [Jr.]. Phil lost and he called me and he said, “I want you to come to the office,” because he just wanted comfort. He just wanted someone to be there. I’ve always had a quiet manner, a quiet sort of peaceful manner with people. He just wanted me to sit there. But he took it really well and I was there right after the vote and he didn’t even allow them to take a second vote. It was a one–vote loss.

The interesting thing is that, like 30 years later Nancy—well, it wasn’t even 30 years later. She won her first leadership race by 23 votes and only off by one person in her count. And Phil missed one. So, Nancy was a much better counter!

Phil was pretty devastated. You could sense it. He wasn’t really caught up in the loss, like, “Now what am I going to do?” You’d never see that out of him. And I think one of the quotes he used is, “A man’s character is his fate,” and he—fully taking into consideration and realizing that who he had been had caused this and that he couldn’t control his nature. He couldn’t tame it down. He couldn’t tame that extreme passion for helping the disenfranchised and the disadvantaged. There’s no way he could have tamped that down.

Tip O’Neill appointed him to head the delegation to the North Atlantic Assembly. That gave him something to do. And then he just became totally, totally immersed in the Parks Subcommittee. He got that chairmanship and then he was trying to reform the committee with [Wayne Norveil] Aspinall as chairman and thought that the chairman had too much power, so he was

responsible for, of course, increasing his fiefdom and giving more power to the subcommittee chair and more staff and control over salaries.

But when I worked for Phil in the Democratic Caucus, you'd have an amount of money, a fund for your staff. And that was totally flexible for him. He paid me \$13,000 a year. Then he called me in one day and he said, "I'm going to start paying you into next year because I've got extra money and I don't want to turn it back to the leadership for them to play with." He said, "I'd rather have my own staff, use it to pay my own staff into the next year." But, again, Grace, this is how naïve I truly was because he was doing that and I was getting the money but I didn't feel right about it.

I went in to him one day and I said, "Mr. Burton, I can't take your money anymore. I can't be paid in advance because what if I decided to go back to California? Then I would owe you that money and I would have no way to pay it back." I truly felt that. I mean, I was serious. He had big, big sort of buggy eyes anyway and those eyes just bulged out like, "Oh, my gosh, I can't believe I've got a wild one on my hands. Now, this is totally insane." So, I asked him to stop paying me into the next year, that it made me uncomfortable to have money that I hadn't earned. So, he did but he just thought I was the looniest person around, you know?

But he was very generous. He had a kind heart toward his staff. He would go into rages. He would just diminish people to a pile of nothing. But I never was the recipient of that kind of rage. But I saw it and it was pretty scary and it was always after he'd had some drinks. He lived on California time, so that's when he got on the phone, made all of his calls.

But in terms of the palace intrigue and some of the things that went on during the whip race, I think he underestimated that Jim [James Claude] Wright [Jr.] would be the dark horse and that Bolling would actually switch. And even some of Phil's people switched on the second ballot to throw everybody off, and thinking they'd come back on the third ballot and recover. When they saw the votes being counted and the last ballot box put him under by one, and I know that he was just in total shock. But at the same time he said, "It is what it is. I'm not going to ask for a recount. I'll take my medicine."

**ETHIER:** And then eventually you started working on the Parks Subcommittee.

**LEMONS:** Yes.

**ETHIER:** How did that happen?

**LEMONS:** Well, then I had gone to Governor Brown's office and Phil called me and said, "I want you to come back and work here."

**ETHIER:** So, you left the Democratic Caucus?

**LEMONS:** Yes, yes.

**ETHIER:** Okay.

**LEMONS:** I hadn't been in the governor's office for very long. But, again, it was not challenging. There were four of us staff. It just wasn't very dynamic. There just wasn't enough going on as far as I was concerned. But it was okay. I wasn't actively looking for anything else. But Phil called me one day and I went up to talk to him and he said, "I really want you to come back and

work for me.” He said, “And your salary will be \$20,000.” I thought, “Well, it’s an opportunity to work on the parks.” I always appreciated the environment and in California had considered myself an environmentalist. My family came from the land. We revered the land. We had respect for it. I thought, “Wouldn’t that be fascinating to be able to work on national parks.” And, of course, the subcommittee included territories, which became his absolute passion. Well, everything he was immersed in was his passion.

I did come back, worked on the Parks Subcommittee. There was a clerk already there so I was second fiddle and, you know, picking up the pieces that no one else wanted to do. But I gladly did that. I mean it was a job. I loved the subject matter. I admired Phil’s courage, character, and conscience. Those were things that meant a lot to me.

We had some wild times because within the first year I was there, in 1977 is when we had field hearings up in Ely, Minnesota, for the Boundary Waters Canoe Area. And, in fact, the Congressman who represented part of that area, Don [Donald MacKay] Fraser, was a good friend of Phil’s and his daughter is now going to be the new CEO for the Presidio Trust. So, that’s an interesting merging of history.

So, we went up for those hearings and we had to have police escorts everywhere. I’d never been in a situation like that— a near riot. They were hanging Phil Burton in effigy. There were, “Kiss my axe, Sierra Club,” signs. It was just wild, wild. And the really devoted people who were trying to preserve this area—and, again, it was always the environment versus the economy. It was preserving jobs versus preserving nature. When those things are combined, those are really, really hard decisions because you’re thinking

about someone's livelihood in the present and you're thinking about future generations. That's a really difficult mix of things to consider, but that's where Phil's genius came in.

The same thing happened when we went to Eureka and had hearings on the Redwood National Park. We took an overflight in a helicopter and you could just see these denuded hills, clear cut, everything just gone and it was, "Wow, how could they just—" Then the siltation that would come down and clog the creeks. We went to see the oldest redwoods. And it is like being in a cathedral, the way the light filters in. You look up without seeing the end of them. It was just a very moving experience, and to think that those trees could be wiped out by these same timber practices.

It was the Simpson Timber Company involved at the time and I think— from reading *Rage for Justice* you know part of that story, how he brings them in and he just tells them they're gone. Shows them the maps and says, "We're taking this, and we're taking this, and we're taking this." And they're just mortified. Then he says, "Well, you know, maybe there's something else we can work out, something else we can do." But he's not really talking about working it out. Then he shows them the real deal, which they then accept because the other proposal just would have destroyed them.

Phil was really striving to look for a way to protect the workers. So, with the Redwood National Park Bill, where he added 58,000 acres to the park in 1977, it was the first time that labor and the environment came together on a major bill. He included a worker compensation package that probably cost billions of dollars. But in those days we were willing to pay for those things and we were willing to pay people for compensation in that way, for lost

labor, and to acquire the National Park. So, that ended up being a good marriage. But even when we—it was Don Clausen’s district in Eureka and we went to a dinner that night and I couldn’t believe that we were even allowed in the room. Don Clausen was a Republican. But Phil didn’t want him to go under either. They liked each other. But Don Clausen saw Phil as just a complete menace.

### **BRIEF INTERRUPTION**

#### **LEMONS:**

Here was Don Clausen, a Republican, and Phil was trying to help him and trying to help workers because Phil had always championed workers and the working class. This was a perfect deal for Phil and he tried to make it perfect for the environment and for Don Clausen. Don Clausen considered him a menace, a terror, but in the end they worked it out. That was one of Phil’s great qualities, great defining qualities, is that he could figure things out where other people would say, “Well, you can’t do this. It’s either black or it’s white. You either protect the environment or you protect the workers.” But he could always see another approach, another way to make it all work together. And he did this with black lung legislation.

He did this in everything that he worked on, that he was just a mastermind and he could build very bizarre coalitions. Even working with what we called the Boll Weevils at that time, and they were like today’s Blue Dogs. It was always 35 to 38 renegade Members. But Phil could work with them. I think that was a mark of his great leadership.

It’s really too bad he didn’t get into leadership because in the years that followed—and I admired Tip O’Neill so much as a Speaker. But even in Jim Wright’s tenure, Democrats started caving more and more to the Republican

agenda and Phil would never have done that. So, I think that his leadership was just a real missed opportunity for the House and for our nation.

He had his first heart attack when he was 48 and he only lived to be 56. So, he was on a downward spiral in terms of his unhealthy habits. As a heavy smoker—three or four packs of unfiltered Chesterfields a day. At least a bottle of Stolichnaya every night. We probably wouldn't have had him as a leader for very long. He and Tip O'Neill were just the antithesis of each other—did not like each other. Tip O'Neill was a gentleman. Phil was not a gentleman. And that was just a real contrast in their personalities, but also in their legislative styles.

Pat [Patricia Scott] Schroeder had talked at one point about coming to Congress and saying that, "Even Tip O'Neill didn't understand how difficult it was for a woman to come to Congress." People made fun of her, saying, "Oh, Pat Schroeder. They must have thought they were voting for a guy. They didn't know it was a woman they were voting for." A lot of ribbing like that. She said that at one point she had to actually sort of reprimand Tip O'Neill because he would always introduce her husband and talk about everything but her. And so, she said she got up one time and had to introduce Tip and his wife, and spent the whole time talking about his wife. And then evidently he looked at her and said, "I get it."

But Phil and Pat Schroeder were very, very close. She came a couple of years before—in the Congress—before the Watergate class and they connected because they had that same liberal tenacity and championed many of the same goals.

**ETHIER:** So, back to your time on the parks. You were finding your work more engaging at this point.

**LEMONS:** It had become more engaging and I was being used more frequently but I wasn't a decision maker. There's no way I can inflate my role. But I went on all the field hearings. We went to the Virgin Islands, we went to Hawaii, we went to the Delaware Water Gap. We were just branching out all over the place, having field hearings. In Hawaii it was the Native American Hawaiians Act and in the Virgin Islands, St. John's Island. Of course, Phil liked that environment, too. It was a nice trip. But this is what you had to contend with when you went on a trip with him.

Then he assigned me to staff the North Atlantic Assembly to be part of that trip twice a year overseas. Everything was taken care of by the North Atlantic Assembly. But you'd fly all night. We sometimes we flew in planes with no windows. So, you're hurtling across the Atlantic in a big cardboard box. We'd arrive at maybe 6:30 a.m. and you were on the job at 8:00 a.m. So, it was demanding. I mean, all of it was demanding. You were working, working, working. I did feel more challenged in the Parks Subcommittee because I loved the subject matter and I loved that we could accomplish so many things.

They called it the park barrel bill that Phil passed in 1980, the omnibus parks bill. It included more environmental legislation to protect rivers and wilderness areas and parks than had been passed in the history of the entire Congress combined. And this was Phil. So, park barrel? Call it whatever you want. I thought it was a great, great thing to have in our legislative history.

But you were there until 8:00 or 9:00 at night and there wasn't anything happening at 8:00 or 9:00 at night except you're sitting there listening to Phil make his calls to California. But he always wanted company. He always wanted someone there. And he would be so distracted if you started taking notes or doodling. You had to just sit there, whoever you were, me or his staff director, or a Member of Congress. You had to sit quietly there until he was ready to do his thing.

I don't think he was being cruel about that. I think it was just a matter of how he could focus and concentrate and he needed to know that someone was there if he wanted to make a comment or if he needed something. There were many, many hours passed like that, where you'd get home at 9:00 and there was time to do nothing except get ready for the next day. But I loved him. I really cared for him. All the three Members I've worked for, they've all been from San Francisco, and in my book they were all courageous giants in different ways.

**ETHIER:** What did you learn about the House as an institution while you were working on the subcommittees under Phil?

**LEMONS:** Well, it takes coalition building. It takes the kind of smarts where you can be prepared to outsmart someone else and be prepared for every argument. I think it helped me prepare for the battle for the Presidio, working with Nancy [Pelosi], because you had to be able to have your heart and soul in it, but you also had to be able to justify it. You had to be persuasive and work across party lines. That was one major, major thing I learned from Phil, is that you can talk to a Republican and you can make a deal. Now, today I'm not sure that's true. But in those days you really felt it because there was

enough middle ground. You had the left and the right but there was this larger area in the middle where both crossed over, and in that area you could make peace and try to do good.

I think that is one of the important things that settled with me in dealing, especially with the Presidio, and in all of my work. I never considered Republicans the enemy. I always felt like there ought to be common ground and there ought to be a way you can still make good things happen. And with the [Newton Leroy] Gingrich Revolution of 1994, that changed the atmosphere. That just electrified everything in a very negative way.

But it was in a Republican Congress that we got the Presidio bill passed. We didn't in a Democratic Congress. It failed right at the end. It seems like it should have been possible but it wasn't. And then starting off with that, I worked closely in the Democratic Congress with a Republican staffer who worked for [Frank Hughes] Murkowski on the Senate side. His name was Jim O'Toole. I said, "Jim, things have changed now. You said, you promised me we could get this Presidio bill done in the next Congress." He said, "That's right." I said, "Well, I want two things from you then. I want you to walk over and meet personally with Nancy Pelosi and I want you to tell her that, because if I tell her that and it doesn't happen it's on my back. I want her to hear it from the horse's mouth, that you and Mr. Murkowski are on board in the Senate."

I said, "The second thing I need from you is I want you to meet with me and the lead Republican staffer on the Resources Committee and introduce us." I mean, we knew each other as bomb throwers. In those days it was the battle of the, "Dear colleague." It was all paper. You were—"Oh, I'll say this."

“Well, I’ll say this.” “I’ll say this.” We were just throwing, “Dear colleagues,” out every day and trying to respond to these ridiculous accusations about the pet cemetery at the Presidio and other falsehoods. But anyway, he did those two things. He came over and talked to Nancy and he said, “I’m committed.” Nancy said, “Good, that’s what I want to hear because,” she said, “I’m committed.” Then he sat down with me and Steve Hodapp, and Steve and I met every week from practically that day on until we agreed on a bill. And we became friends. Not socially but that’s the kind of thing that you try to cultivate and then nurture and hang onto to be successful.

And I remember on 9/11—I had been diagnosed with breast cancer at the time and I was on my way to radiation. It was early in the morning. I always planned it early because I thought get it done and not think about it all day. Just do it. And so, I actually was on the phone calling a Republican staffer to thank him. This was after the Presidio Trust bill. But this was Mr. [James Vear] Hanson, who was then chair of the committee, wanted to add an amendment. And so, I was working with his staff on it. So, I called his staff and said, “I just wanted to thank you for all of your help with this. It’s been great working with you.” He’s the one who told me about the first plane in the World Trade Center. I just made a point of making an effort. And so that, I think, is something that came from the original work on the subcommittee.

Then later I was on the Labor Management Subcommittee in 1980 to ’83 when [President Ronald] Reagan came into office and Phil was so concerned that he needed to hold the line on labor laws—because of what Reagan had done with the air traffic controllers. He was trying to hold the line and make sure that these worker protections could stay in place. So, we went to that

subcommittee and I think my experience in both of those areas, before I'd ever worked in a personal office, was that you needed cooperation.

When I did become Nancy's chief of staff, I always called it the three Cs that meant a lot to me and that I wanted to impart to the staff the importance of these principles: communication, coordination, and cooperation. I just said, "You know, if we can try to master these, we won't be perfect but these are the three things that will help bind us together as an office and help us in our relationships with other offices."

**ETHIER:** We're going to get to your time with Leader Pelosi because I'm very excited to talk about that. But I want to just back up real quick. Phil Burton is such a character in the House. Reading about him is fascinating and kind of terrifying.

**LEMONS:** Yes.

**ETHIER:** I'm wondering what reputation you had as a Burton staffer when you were walking around the halls, if any.

**LEMONS:** Well, in those days, I have to be very blunt about this. There was entrenched paternalism and crude sexism—these were powerful men and you had Wayne Hays and Elizabeth Ray and that whole scandal about paying his girlfriend to work for him. Then you had Wilbur [Daigh] Mills with Fanne Foxe ending up in the Tidal Basin. Phil wasn't as close to Wilbur Mills, but Wayne Hays was one of his close buddies because Wayne Hays, as chair of House Administration, controlled the office space, the parking spaces, and a lot of perks that Members wanted. And, of course, Phil seemed to have an office in every building, other than his personal office. There was a subcommittee

here, there, and then the DSG [Democratic Study Group] was directly up from our office. I did not get on the groupie circuit. That was not my style but there were many, many women who spent every night at the Democratic Club courting favor with these powerful men. That wasn't my style. I had a life and it wasn't chasing after these men who were married and in my view, obnoxious in the afterhours.

I think you had some built-in respect because you worked for Phil but people, I think, also may have felt sorry for you. Then on the Interior Committee, it was called Interior at the time that I was there. The chairman was Mr. Aspinall and he was just very conservative and he had the majority of the staff on the full committee. So, they resented us because they resented Phil. There was some of that. It wasn't like you had a lot of clout just walking next to him, folders in hand. Sometimes they looked at you and thought, "Oh, that poor thing." Or sometimes they're like, "You know, I can't believe she thinks just the way he does. He's trying to take away our perks. He's trying to reform the committee and everything." So, you just kept your head down.

**ETHIER:** Piggybacking off of what you said about women staffers in the House at the time, was there any part of the institution that you felt was closed to you as a woman, that you couldn't access?

**LEMONS:** Yes. I felt like we weren't held in high regard. Well, Pat Schroeder tells a story, too, about when she came to Congress in 1972 and she—Phil helped her get a seat on the Defense Committee [Armed Services]. But I think the chairman wanted Ron [V.] Dellums on the committee. So, Steering and Policy, or whatever apparatus was in place at the time, chose both of them to

be on the committee. But the chairman was so upset he only provided one extra chair. So, they had to share the chair because he didn't want Pat Schroeder on that committee.

There weren't that many women Members. Shirley [Anita] Chisholm certainly was an example, Barbara [Charline] Jordan. They were just amazing with great depth. Phil was very close to Patsy [Takemoto] Mink. He liked her a lot. He thought she was a heavyweight. When Phil and part of the DSG members were opposing the Vietnam War, they decided to form an offshoot committee of the DSG, an anti-war sort of subcommittee. They invited Bella [Savitzky] Abzug. She was too strong for the men and they decided they had to disband the committee, the subcommittee. They couldn't do it because she was Phil Burton with a hat on. It's like, "Wow, I can get away with this but how can this abrasive woman get away with this?"

I felt like no one was looking out for opportunities for me and I just felt like they weren't there. I wasn't going to be Phil's chief of staff. I mean, that was a male world. I wasn't going to be his clerk because the woman had been there before me. So, there was really no way for me to try to move up. But I just worked very hard at whatever I did and Phil had a lot of respect for me. And where he would go into rages and be obnoxious it never was directed toward me. I respected him but I think he knew there was a line that couldn't be crossed with me.

**[A 57-second segment of this interview has been redacted.]**

But I didn't think there were many opportunities for women really. I think in some ways Tip O'Neill made more room for women in his operation, it was always Leo Diehl and other people like Chris Matthews and Bill Cable. It was always a bunch of big guys walking around with other big guys. You didn't see that many women accompanying the men anywhere. So, I didn't feel like there were many opportunities for women.

**ETHIER:** Was there anyone that offered you advice when you first came of how to succeed in this institution as a woman?

**LEMONS:** Well, I think maybe Pat Krause, the person who initially suggested I come for the interview. I worked with her for eight years, and she gave me some very cautionary advice and most of it was not how to succeed. But it was mostly how to stay out of the way. You know, keep your head down, do not be curious, do not ask too many questions.

In those days, of course, you had the wives. There was Sala, who was Phil's wife. And then the entire staff would be running around picking up the fur coat at the furrier and taking her to her hair appointment. You were at full disposal for whatever their needs were. I know that Hillary [Rodham] Clinton was criticized at one point for using this term, "the last plantation" but that's what it was for women really.

Pat, I think, was the one who probably gave me the most support and said, "Judy, hang with it. Just hang with it." And I was close to Phil. I became close to Sala.

The thing about working with Phil—this is another lesson I learned, not so much from working on the subcommittee, but Phil was a total straight arrow

when it came to ethics. Every year, Sears & Roebuck would send a Member a carrot cake for their birthday, and we could never accept that carrot cake. We'd stand at the threshold of the office door and say, "No, thank you." That's how he was. He would tell us, he said, "There's no such thing as a free lunch." We never went to lunch with anyone. We barely had a lunch. You could not go to dinner with anyone who had business before Congress.

In Phil's world, he felt like all of the business and corporate leaders at that time were Republicans, so why waste your time with them? They're not going to vote with you. They're not going to cooperate with you. What he saw was people like Simpson Timber just trying to massacre the world for their own personal greed.

That's one of the things in his statue that's in the Great Meadow at the Golden Gate National Recreation area in San Francisco. There's a piece of paper in the pocket of his bronze statue—it is a replica of a note. At the top of the note it says, "When you deal with exploiters..." and that's all you see on the note. But underneath is the rest of Phil's quote, which was, "When you deal with exploiters, you terrorize the [expletive]." That was his motto. He thought the corporate world was not for our common good. That was another thing, he took contributions from labor and the environment and that's basically it.

There were other examples of women, I think, at that time, like Joan Claybrook with Common Cause. She was, to me, a giant and was just so steadfast. She really had principles that you could admire and she was so dedicated. And then there were people like Dolores Huerta with the farm workers. I loved Dolores and she was just an amazing person for peace and

helped lift the farm workers across America and, in particular, California. They were still working in the fields with their short hoe. Imagine bending with a hoe this long. That's how you had to weed and work the soil.

With Phil, that is something that I learned about—being generous with the staff. He would always give us a bonus. He'd give us a little slip of paper and that would list our bonus. If he knew someone on the staff was having a hard time he would put a little bit extra in their salary that month. There were times when I would go to him and I'd say, "Phil, Rose has had a really hard time. This happened and this happened," and he'd take care of it.

So, he had a big heart and he was generous with us. But by the same token he'd say—I heard him say to a Member of Congress, "I pay them to abuse them." Sometimes we were there until 2:00 or 3:00 in the morning, just waiting for something to happen. But the mixture of his courage, character, and conscience, and who he was inside made it all worth it because, I'll tell you, there was intense staff loyalty toward Phil. And he was a master at dispersing his staff—anytime they left, making sure that they were in positions where they would be his ambassadors for life.

Like Adrian Winkel, who became the high commissioner of the Pacific Trust Territories. Adrian was on our Territories Subcommittee. Eni [F. H.] Faleomavaega was Eni Hunkin at the time but then he took his chief's name and went through the whole ritual to be tattooed from his waist to his ankles so he would be a chief and then adopted his Samoan name. Phil wrote legislation to create a delegate from American Samoa. Eni didn't win the first time but eventually did. And that's how Phil dispersed his staff. One of his former press secretaries, of all things, became communications director at the

Department of Interior. Well, what better source of information for Phil in dealing with the Parks Subcommittee and trying to keep up with what was happening at Interior. He was a master at that, too.

Those were things that you learned about. Being generous to staff, watching out for people who were totally about serving their own self-interest in terms of padding their pockets and working with a strong principle of greed. I benefited from him in that way that really helped prepare me for running Nancy's office.

**ETHIER:** I want to transition into your Sala years and also your Nancy Pelosi years. We're about an hour in. Do you want to take a stretch break or are you good to go?

**LEMONS:** No, I'm good. I'm good. Thank you.

**ETHIER:** Transitioning to Sala Burton. What were your impressions of Congresswoman Burton before you started working for her? She was, you've told me, in and out of the office. What role did she play and what were your impressions of her?

**LEMONS:** Well, she was always sort of grandmotherly, but you had to be careful because she would come in all smiles and her purse on her arm and ask you how you were doing, but in the meantime she was looking at everything on your desk to make sure that you were doing your work or to see what were you working on. You just knew that she was going to be the observant wife. But we got along tremendously and I just enjoyed her company. I thought she was very savvy and you could never underestimate her. People could never, ever underestimate that aspect of her because she could be tenacious

and as politically astute in every way Phil Burton was. She might not have the way to deliver because he had been there for 19 years when he died, but she had all the makings. She had the sweet personality where, as people would say, she could pick lint off a suit coat and then just be delivering the worst news in the world to you, but being very motherly, “Oh, yes, and how’s your wife?” and *bam*. “Are you voting with me on this California wilderness bill or are you going to oppose this?”

She had her own unique personality that was dear but she had a great softness and a sense of humor. I liked her sense of humor. Phil had no sense of humor. He would make you laugh but it was never intentional. He had no idea what humor and fun could be.

But with Sala, she had a playful way about her and you could relate to her on that level and she took some strong stands, even against her Senate counterpart on home porting the *Missouri* in San Francisco with nuclear missiles. She said, “You know, we don’t want that in our city—and, by the way, you’re docking it near an African-American neighborhood, where they will be the most vulnerable people.” You had women fighting women at times, as well as women supporting each other.

Sala was very, very supportive of me. And that, to me, was a breakthrough and another lesson to be learned—women working to support and promote other women. I saw a lot of that, even though she might have clashed over the *Missouri*. With Sala, there was still this sisterhood that existed and I thought was really, really meaningful, and I got to be part of that sisterhood as time went on.

The other thing that Sala was wonderful about in her short career is that she took up the mantle of the Golden Gate National Recreation Area, even if most of the time it wasn't in her district. But it was like hers because Phil had created it in 1972 and then added and added and added amendments down the way. She was very competent.

**ETHIER:** How did you start to work for Sala?

**LEMONS:** When Phil died Sala picked up the phone and called me and she said, "I want you to stay with me." And I said, "Okay, Sala, I'd like to do that."

But I was on the Labor Management Subcommittee at the time and Bill [William Lacy] Clay [Sr.] had immediately come in and taken over when Phil died. When you work for a Member and they have died in office, you're out of a job. You have no job. You don't know if you're going to have your next monthly salary or not. Bill Clay came in and said, "You all have 30 days." So, I wrote him a thank-you note because I thought he could have said, "You go now," or, "You go next week." I thought, "30 days, that's a gift. It could be worse." So, I wrote him a thank-you note. And Phil, in those days, had been an honorary member of the Black Caucus and in Bill Clay's office he had all the members of the Black Caucus with their pictures framing the wall—and Phil, the only white member in this wall of Black Caucus members.

Unbeknownst to me, Sala went in to talk to Bill Clay. And said, "Mr. Clay, you know that Judy works on the Labor Management Subcommittee and she has accrued a lot of vacation time. I would like for Judy to have her vacation time." He said, "Well, what's her name?" And Sala said, "Judy Lemons." And he said, "Oh, that's funny. I just got a letter from her. I just got a note from

her.” He said, “Well, no one else bothered to send me a note like that. I thought that was pretty remarkable. No wonder you want her to work for you.” He said, “Yes, as I recall Judy has about two months vacation time.” {laughter} This is how the deal worked. So, then I went out for two months and worked on Sala’s campaign during my vacation.

**ETHIER:** Wow.

**LEMONS:** And then we spent a lot of time together and I picked her up at the airport when Phil died and was with her when she had to come home. And that was just so, so horrific, Grace, really, because they had been such soulmates in so many ways. I didn’t think I could bear to be there and watch her cross that threshold and walk into the house knowing that he would never be there again. I just can’t imagine that kind of pain. She knew that I would do everything I could to take care of her.

Then there was a special election and they had a runoff. She won and we came back and she had an opportunity to be on the Rules Committee. Now, here’s a good example for you. The succeeding chief of staff (from Phil) Sala kept. Tip O’Neill wanted to offer her a place on the Rules Committee. She said, “Wouldn’t that be great? And I’ll be on the Rules Committee.” She talked to me and she said, “Would you like to do that?” And I said, “Sala, I’ll do whatever. It would be wonderful. It would be an honor. Whatever.” And she said, “Or would you rather be chief of staff if he wants the Rules Committee?” And I said, “Either way. It’s your call. It would be a wonderful opportunity for me.” She talked to the male chief of staff and asked him which one he would choose. And he said, “Oh, I can do both.”

There you have it. All those years. That infuriated Sala. She got it. She totally got it. She came back to me, which has now put me in the middle of staff tension. She asked me, "What is your first choice? You are now going to choose because his answer was totally inappropriate, not to allow someone else an opportunity in this office, and especially a woman." And I thought, "Well, I don't know which way to go because I don't want to upset the apple cart. He's chief of staff. I'm sure he doesn't want to change that. I don't know how much he wants to be on the Rules Committee."

But Sala said, "You tell me right now and I'm going to call him and I'm going to tell him what his job is and what your job is." I didn't want to disturb his territory, so I said, "Well, I'll do the Rules Committee." She picked up the phone and she said to the chief of staff, "You're going to remain chief of staff and Judy's doing the Rules Committee." That didn't make for the best relationship, but he created a difficult situation for all of us.

Then I worked with Sala on the Rules Committee. I picked her up every morning. I took her home every night. If she went to a reception I went every night with her. I was at her full disposal. When she had her colon cancer and was diagnosed, I was the one who was there for surgery. She had a daughter living in Spain who was unavailable. I went with her to surgery and as they took her in I kissed her and held her hand and said I would be there when she came out. She said, "The doctor's authorized to tell you whatever the situation is." And so, I waited and waited and I'd use the bedside phone to check in with the office and let them know what I knew. Let's see. They thought it was just some kind of minor surgery. I think that's the way we played it.

The doctor came out and he told me everything and he said, “She doesn’t have a year to live.” So, when Sala came out she was hooked up to every kind of tube and apparatus. We talked and that was our secret. No one knew. She lived just a little over a year, maybe 13 months. I took care of her completely during that year and took her to all of her doctors’ appointments.

We had emergencies and Ed [Edward R.] Roybal was a Congressman who lived next door to her. Her bedroom was on the second floor. She wouldn’t call an ambulance. The doctor wouldn’t come and see her. He said, “If you’re sick enough, you get an ambulance.” She wouldn’t get an ambulance because a Congressman lived next door and would know she was sick. So, I went over and sort of braced her as much as possible on my back to get down the stairs and into the car and to the emergency room so that no one would be aware of anything. This had gone on and on for over nine months.

Finally, I was desperate because she was running for re-election and she couldn’t make events in San Francisco. She was a no-show. I was totally at my wits end, so I called John [Lowell] Burton, Phil’s younger brother, and said, “John, I have to tell you something. I’ve kept this secret for almost a year. But I’m very, very worried now that the end is coming and that it’s becoming so entwined in the politics of San Francisco and her future as a Member of Congress.” I said, “I have to tell someone who can help make sense out of this.” I told John then and he kept that secret. But Sala and John weren’t on good terms either because John had left Congress and she thought he had left Phil in the lurch because Phil had gone to so much trouble to gerrymand this special district for him that he could only reach by boat in some areas. So, she was pretty resentful. But John was the only one I knew to

talk to. I didn't want to talk to anyone on the district staff because that would have been a zoo.

I bowed out of things a little bit, thinking that maybe John could take care of next steps. Sala went out to San Francisco, and then, lo and behold, my dad became seriously ill. That was in December and I went out and spent three weeks with him, and he died. I never saw Sala again because I thought I had spent so much time with her and taking care of her, doing for her and making her my priority and here my dad was sick, and now I'd lost him. It was now in the hands of her family.

But the last day I did see Sala she was carrying this big purse. And I said, "Sala, that purse looks so heavy. What have you got in there?" She opened it up and it was totally empty. She was so weak by that time. But I learned later that she had been to the Rules Committee and talked to the staff director there and had asked that my salary be increased to the max for a staff associate level, whatever that max was. That was the last time I saw Sala and that's what she was trying to do for me. Then the rest unfolded with John Burton coming back and Nancy getting her blessing and things moved on from there. Sala died in February.

**ETHIER:** How did working for Sala prepare you for working for Leader Pelosi?

**LEMONS:** Well, they were good friends and they understood each others' personalities so well and Nancy stayed with the Burtons quite a bit when she came to D.C. and Phil adored her. He called her every Sunday morning to get the pulse of San Francisco from her.

Nancy tells this story about Phil calling one day when she's in the middle of her daughter Christine's birthday party. She said, "Phil, I can't talk. You know, it's Christine's birthday." And he said, "Put her on the phone." So, Christine gets on the phone and he sings the first refrain of happy birthday then says, "Put your mom on the phone." When Nancy comes back, he says, "Okay, I took care of it." {laughter} She's in the middle of a birthday party with probably 30 kids and he thinks, "Okay, that's done." They were close.

With Sala, I had to start a freshman office. Then when she died, I was out of a job again. But this time the Clerk of the House appointed me to be the keeper of the office until Nancy's election was sorted out in June.

Nancy called me with the same message Sala had and said, "Judy, I don't want to jinx my chances, but if I win this, I'd like for you to stay." I said, "Well, Nancy, I could be the kiss of death. I don't have a great track record here. Are you sure?" {laughter} But she was just so good natured and so vibrant and just a very classy, amazing person. I already liked her and knew her family, and was close to her daughters, Nancy Corrine and Christine—I loved the kids and the family.

She was elected. With Sala, I had to start a freshman office and that prepared me because now I was working for a second freshman. And that's hard because you get the dregs of the office choices. You're back on the fifth floor of Cannon [House Office Building] again and you have a cage that's considered your storeroom and that's where you have to put a desk and a bare light bulb for somebody to work—compared to Phil being in the Rayburn building. He did not have a view of the Capitol, but he had a nice view. I had always said to Nancy, "I'm not leaving until you get a view of the

Capitol.” When I left she was in the Capitol. That was even better. Trying to work out committee assignments, how Sala wanted to create her niche and what Nancy wanted to do to make her statement in Congress were new challenges.

In Nancy’s opening statement on the House Floor, after she was sworn in, one of the priorities she mentioned just right out of the box was that she was going to fight AIDS, that she had come to Congress to fight this scourge, an epidemic that had hit San Francisco and so many large cities. That was something that I knew right off was going to be a major priority for her. And then so many things developed after that. You know, in ’89 there was the earthquake and the Gulf War and all of these things that took place at the same time. Then Tiananmen Square in ’89.

**ETHIER:** So, you became her chief of staff or administrative assistant. What challenges did you face being a woman in that position?

**LEMONS:** Well, times were better by then, because I’d been on the Rules Committee and there were other staff associates on the Rules Committee who were women, although the committee was run by men. I had enlarged my circle and the number of women who were involved was growing.

For instance, the Democratic Study Group at that time was run by two women, Debbie McFarland and Pam Barry. You were just seeing the emergence of more women in Congress and those women were hiring women. It’s like Ellen Malcolm with EMILY’s list always said. She said, “We need the opportunity. If there are only a certain number of seats and most of these Members are incumbents, they’re likely to win and so we don’t have the

opportunity there.” To have 88 open seats in 1992, the “Year of the Woman,” that was incredible. And a third of those went to women.

But Nancy always said that you can’t be what you can’t see and that you need to have those examples, and you need to have those role models to understand how important it is to further your own goals and to advance as women across society.

**ETHIER:** You mentioned the “Year of the Woman.” Let’s see, 24 new women Members were elected to the House and four in the Senate.

**LEMONS:** Right.

**ETHIER:** Did you notice a change in the atmosphere of the institution?

**LEMONS:** Oh, yes. It got really revved up because look at what they call The Magnificent Seven marching across the Hill to Leader [George John] Mitchell’s office saying, “Anita Hill has a story to tell. By the way, can she have the opportunity to tell her story?” And to walk across the Capitol grounds and to walk up to the leader of the Senate and deliver that message. People got really frisky and it was wonderful to see. Wonderful to see that kind of energy and people engaged and not just standing back and taking no for any kind of answer, but just being ready to challenge and to step up to those challenges.

Look at the women who tried in leadership in the House. Barbara [Bailey] Kennelly. It took forever and then she became the first Whip and the first woman on Ways and Means.<sup>1</sup> Look how long that took. And the first woman on the Intelligence Committee. All of those places had been out of bounds

for women. I think that it really stirred up a lot of new reality. Women knowing their power and men beginning to get it.

There still is a lot of sexism on the Hill that isn't talked about so people think it doesn't exist. It's still there. It's alive and well. But women have made so much progress and have been teachers to men and that's one thing that I think by example and by trying to teach men that we have intelligence, we have so much to bring to the table, and to have the opportunity. Some of that has changed. Look at Nancy now. So great. But then what happens when Nancy leaves? It's all men in the lineup again.

**ETHIER:** What were your impressions of the Women's Caucus while you worked in the House?

**LEMONS:** We had a staff person who handled most of the Women's Caucus issues but it is very active. In Nancy's leadership race, of course, the first priority was to corral the Women's Caucus and then move through every caucus—Blue Dogs, new dogs, old dogs, yellow dogs, the Hispanic Caucus, the Black Caucus, etcetera, to solidify support.

But the Women's Caucus was very vibrant, very active. Of course, I'm not as intensely involved on the Hill but I haven't noticed that they have the same kind of presence that they did for that stretch of time where they just seemed really, really punching it out. Maybe it's more difficult in a Republican Congress. I don't know.

But I thought that they were really essential, vital players on the scene and bringing important things to the table about children and families. And not just women's issues, but taking a stand on war, and a whole spectrum of

issues where women would stand up and have an equal say and that they weren't just subservient and they weren't just saying, "Oh, we're just going to ask for more WIC [Women, Infants, and Children] money and we're just going to do this and this." I mean, the whole spectrum of interests expanded.

**ETHIER:** Would you say that they were working across party lines?

**LEMONS:** To some extent. I think when Olympia [Jean] Snowe was in the House, I think she was someone. And Marge [Margaret Scafati] Roukema on the Education and Labor Committee. Phil worked with her. And in redistricting, Bobbi Fiedler from California, he worked closely with her. And with Nancy, I don't know. She came in '87. The Gingrich Revolution was seven years later. Then things were really kind of off-limits across the aisle. Things started to really deteriorate.

I just saw him, former Congressman Bob [Robert Linlithgow] Livingston [Jr.] and talked to him in the elevator. He was chair of Appropriations for a while and then they did a rewriting of the ethics rules, where I staffed Nancy. He was the chair and, of course, it's a Republican Congress but she was the co-chair and it was supposed to be bipartisan. You'd see instances like that where you could see across the aisle.

But in terms of the women I didn't see much of that because it was, "We won this revolution and we're holding the party line," which was the beginning of the sort of dogma that has played out now, where it is so stringent and so strident that you can't get beyond that.

**ETHIER:** Moving around to Leader Pelosi's Whip race in 2001. How did gender play a role in that race?

**LEMONS:**

Well, it's interesting because when Nancy became Speaker most of the male comments were, "She's an attractive lady." But Nancy had proven herself with China.

And here's a similarity. I think about some of the differences and similarities between Nancy and Phil Burton. Well, he liked liverwurst on white bread with no crust. She liked BLT with no B. He was a smoker. She banned smoking in the Capitol. He was an alcoholic. She was a chocoholic. You can just go right down the line in thinking about the two of them.

He made his mark, his initial foray as a freshman Member in Congress by a stand he took on the House Floor and so did Nancy. Phil's was raising an objection to a bill that would have otherwise gone under unanimous consent. And he stood up as a freshman and objected because it would have increased the funding for the House Committee on Un-American Activities. He came to Congress to fight that battle, to get rid of that particular committee.

And Nancy's vote, which caught the eye of Mr. [John Patrick] Murtha [Jr.], was when Austin [John] Murphy from Pennsylvania had his vote recorded but wasn't present. They were going to reprimand him on the floor. Nancy's a freshman Member and she votes against the reprimand. I think were only 30-some people in that group. Mr. Murtha walked up to her and he said, "You got some kind of guts, lady, to take that vote as a freshman Member of Congress." Both of them got their start by these renegade stands, with no fear. That's one of the things I admire so much about Nancy—no fear.

The thing that she and Phil Burton had in common so much is how they gave a strong expression to the struggle for human dignity and human rights. To me that meant everything. They could have any kind of wart, mole,

blemish, or anything, but to think that ultimately that's why they came to Congress. Not to enrich themselves ever. Phil died penniless. Nancy has money and devotes herself to this noble endeavor. I think that those are marks of greatness.

And for me, in my personal experience and career on the House, to think that my career has been framed by these two bookends of greatness—he, a Congressman from San Francisco who wanted to be Speaker ending years later with the Congresswoman from San Francisco who would become Speaker. It's just so amazing and just phenomenal. But back to your question.

**ETHIER:** How did gender play a role in the—

**LEMONS:** Oh, okay. The women were going to be for Nancy. That was pretty clear. They locked in really, really quickly. I think that in setting up Nancy's goal for leadership, Members saw how she handled herself on China. That she wasn't afraid and that she could count votes. She made her argument, she lined up support, did her homework, and was really a pretty phenomenal expert on China.

I remember when Tiananmen Square occurred—I think it was on a Sunday evening. I had sort of this false sense, that maybe China was going to let their young people bid. It wasn't going to be like Berkeley or Kent State, that they were just going to let them be. Then the tanks rolled in.

When I went to work on Monday, it was just simmering inside of me, this kind of pain. On Thursday, I went to the staff person who handled Asia and the one who handled immigration and—Nancy had left town Thursday

afternoon and on Friday morning—I said, “You two are going into Nancy’s office for the day. You handle Asia, and you handle immigration. She represents the largest Asian-American community in America and you can’t think of any role for Nancy to play in this?” They were locked in the office all day to come up with a response.

They told me later, because we’re all friends—we’re having our 30-year reunion, next June at my house—and they were two young men. They said the first hour they talked about how they were going to be able to pay their rent because they knew they were losing their jobs. Then the second hour they talked about what they would have for lunch. Then the third hour it became California time so they could start making phone calls to attorneys there, for someone to provide a suggestion.

At 4:00 the door opened, they called me in, and said, “We have an idea.” That Hope Fry and her husband Martin Lawler were going to be in town on Sunday and they were going to have brunch with them to discuss expanding the J-1 visa. This was the concern. That there were a lot of pro-democracy students here in America who didn’t want to go home and face an uncertain future. That was one of the things that concerned me but I didn’t know how to approach it. But I thought if we had our minds on it, that we could come up with something, a way to do it. They got their minds on it and they did a great job.

When Nancy came back to town she wasn’t convinced. But then there was an intern who was working across the hall in Jim [James Prather] Jontz’s office and he had a friend who had been in Tiananmen Square and was riding his bike at the time. The bike had a basket on it. He had a camera in

the basket with his coat over the camera and he would ride through the square and just punch the coat, punch the coat. He smuggled out all of these absolutely violent, horrible, horrible atrocious photographs of young people slaughtered in the square.

I asked him—his name was Chao—“Chao, can I borrow these?” He said, “You can only have them for 24 hours because I think *Life* magazine wants them.” So, I had them for 24 hours. That was all the time I needed to show Nancy. She immediately walked over to Jack [Bascom] Brooks’ office, he was head of Judiciary Committee at the time, and that’s where the whole visa legislation would have to go through. And that just kind of launched it. She was convinced.

That’s, in the beginning, how Nancy could be portrayed. She was always a fighter but this gave her the platform to portray that and to show Members what it takes to fight and lead, even though you may be on the losing side.

She got the visa legislation but then she would oppose most favored nation status for China every year. The vote would always come up in May. That was a losing battle against Bill [William Jefferson] Clinton, against George [Walker] Bush. But she was fearless and I think that provided the first legislative platform for Nancy.

She had been to Central America on human rights missions before she ever came to Congress. That was a natural for her, it was just ingrained in her. She was going to be fighting for human rights around the globe forever. Then the China situation came and then she had the AIDS epidemic in her district. So, these were all things that she was really, really going to champion.

**ETHIER:** You touched on this when you said that when Leader Pelosi became Speaker, the newspapers were saying how she was an attractive woman. When Jeannette Rankin was elected a lot of attention was paid to her dress and her demeanor. I'm wondering if you think that changed by the time you came to the House or if women Members, and also staff, sort of faced the same scrutiny of their dress.

**LEMONS:** I think Nancy became an attractive target for people simply because she is so attractive. She's an eye-stopper. When she came to Congress she was in her late 40s and she just had a glamour about her and such a style that became the first impression. Then it became incumbent on her to prove herself beyond that: "I'm not just a pretty face. I am also a serious contender."

John Jacobs wrote an article that appeared in *San Francisco Magazine* and the title was "Nancy Pelosi: Party Girl." Well, he meant party, not "party." That really, really upset her because she wanted to be taken seriously, and it was a sexist reference.

To get beyond that first impression, which is just visual, and to be able to show who you are—by your stamina, your tenor, your stands—is monumental. I think she probably had to work harder because she is pretty. You would hear Members make comments, all kinds of comments about her and how much her clothes cost. She'd be speaking and I'd be sitting behind these Members. One Member would say, "That suit she's wearing is what my wife would spend in five years on her wardrobe." They weren't listening to her speech. They were focusing on her appearance. Nancy had a longer distance to run in that regard, where men did not have to face the same challenge.

Now, Geraldine [Anne] Ferraro, she was a very strong force in the House and she was under Tip O'Neill's wing and people got it. It was the same kind of thing with her. Attractive. How do you get beyond that and say, "I'm a hell of a fighter." It's more work.

**ETHIER:** We have about 15 minutes left.

**LEMONS:** Okay.

**ETHIER:** And I have a couple of general retrospective questions for you. What kind of impact do you think women Members have on the institution?

**LEMONS:** I think they used to have more of an impact. Admittedly, I've got a little distance to things, so maybe that's mischaracterizing. I don't get the sense that there is that force that they might have had for a while. And I know with Nancy's ascension to leadership, and especially to Speaker, and now as Leader, I know she is always promoting the caucus and trying to widen its influence and participation. That's one thing that Nancy has been absolutely steadfast about, is inclusiveness and unity. Those are things that have been priorities to her from the very beginning, when she ran for leadership, and that's what she said all along.

I think that we used to have a stronger delegation, even from California. That's probably sacrilege. But I just think they were a stronger force overall when you had Pat Schroeder, Geraldine Ferraro, Patsy Mink—real stars out there. I don't know who those stars are now. I know Zoe Lofgren is one of my favorite Members. I think she is just one of the smartest, most measured and devoted Members. Anna [Georges] Eshoo. I've always been impressed with her.

**ETHIER:** Are there any women staff or women Members that stand out in your mind that you want to mention?

**LEMONS:** Well, I guess Zoe Lofgren and Anna Eshoo. I mean, current Members, those are absolutely two of my favorites. Former Members, I admired Barbara Kennelly so much. I just thought she was a great Member of Congress and really smart and took her job so seriously and yet seemed to have a good time doing it. But it wasn't easy. It was always a struggle. And, of course, Nancy is my primo love in terms of women in Congress and what she's accomplished. She's amazing.

I think you do see a lot of women taking care of women. I took care of Sala with her cancer. When I was diagnosed with breast cancer Nancy did everything she possibly could to help me. And then when I was diagnosed again last year, who's on the phone? Nancy Pelosi. I think that kind of practice, that's part of your person and your humanity, to look out for other women.

**ETHIER:** What lessons did you learn from your time in the House?

**LEMONS:** Well, I think one of the things, and, of course, this comes from my background and doesn't necessarily provide a recipe for everyone. But one of the things is: leave your ego at the threshold. When you cross that door, be prepared for anything, and nothing is beneath you. You can get your hands dirty. You can work in the trenches and you do everything you can to reach success. You set a goal and go.

I was so fortunate to have this kind of public service opportunity and to work for this noble institution. Particularly for me, as a child of poverty, and to be

able to walk these halls and serve this nation, and to work with the brightest minds and kindest hearts and the people that I have been so fortunate to be associated with and the opportunities that have opened for me. Create a fertile ground for opportunities, be malleable, be agreeable, but also know how to fight.

That's one thing that Nancy has always said. "Do not let friendship leave your voice." Even though you're fighting with someone, circle back and what you really want is unity and understanding. I think that it's also important. You can be humble, you can leave your ego. Those may seem like sort of trite platitudes but I think that you can never give up. You always have to be ready to fight. There are always new battles around the next corner.

When I talk to staff today, they're so defeated by the lack of opportunity to get legislation done, to do anything, to work across the aisle. I had a friend who said, "Oh, my gosh, I'd give anything if I could have had a project like the Presidio. I'd give anything if I could have had a project." That was a nine-year project and it's still ongoing. But just to have that and to have some result like that is incredible. You have to be creative. You have to find ways to do things. It's not always easy but I think, again, those three Cs come into play: communication, coordination, and cooperation—if you can continue to utilize those principles and enlarge them. It was an amazing experience for me. I had such a good time.

**ETHIER:** What do you think your lasting legacy will be?

**LEMONS:** Oh, I think in terms of the people I've worked with, like the first four people I hired, and we're having our 30-year reunion next year. I mean, we took our work seriously, but we didn't take ourselves seriously. We had so much fun

and we made a lot of mistakes that we had to recover from as a group but that's where we did it together. You worked together. You mess up, you made up. We just have so many fun times and stories to remember. We'll never forget each other. We're the first five and we've hung together all of these years, 30 years. I hear from them almost every week, something about their families or about politics and, "Can you believe this?" And, "Can you believe that?" That's just been an immense pleasure in the investment of friendship. Kindness towards others and appreciating others and appreciating the opportunities you have are all important.

But I also think a sense of humor goes a long way. When you're down and the deck is stacked against you, you're going to war, there's the Gulf War, there's an earthquake or whatever, you work really, really hard to find the best response. But you also have to find ways to have some kind of release that's pleasant for you. I think we did that in the office. We had a lot of good times. Most of it Nancy doesn't know about. {laughter}

**ETHIER:** It'll stay that way. Well, those are all of the prepared questions I have.

**LEMONS:** Thank you.

**ETHIER:** Is there anything that you want to add?

**LEMONS:** No. I was thinking about Jeannette Rankin and the hundred years and the similarities between Nancy and her backgrounds. And, of course, she came from Montana and that kind of hardcore western life and Nancy originally is East Coast. But one of the things, and especially in light of all this talk about going after ISIS and the divisions that exist in our country today. To think that these women had such peaceful approaches—I love this quote by

Jeannette Rankin where she said, “You can’t win a war any more than you can win an earthquake.” And then Nancy’s quote during her opposition to invading Iraq and going to war with Iraq was, “America must shed more light and less missiles on the world.” I think about these two pacifists in this hundred–year span.

Hillary Clinton’s quote, “It’s the women, stupid.” {laughter} And that there’s a lot to be brought to the table. A hundred years from Jeannette Rankin and look how women lead the globe with [Angela] Merkel, [Theresa] May, and maybe [Hillary] Clinton. So, pretty exciting.

**ETHIER:** Thank you so much for this.

**LEMONS:** Thank you, Grace. This has been an honor and a real pleasure and I’ve enjoyed working with you and I’m so happy to be part of celebrating the hundred years.

**ETHIER:** We’re honored to have you as part of this project. Thank you so much.

**LEMONS:** Thank you. Thank you.

## NOTES

<sup>1</sup> Representative Barbara Kennelly was the first woman to serve on the House Intelligence Committee and served as vice chair of the Democratic Caucus in the 105th Congress (1997-1999).