

**The Honorable Jill Lynette Long Thompson**  
U.S. Representative of Indiana (1989–1995)

**Oral History Interview**  
**Final Edited Transcript**  
June 15, 2017

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

“They did comment on how we looked, how we dressed, but here is something else that I discovered, and this is more serious. They would cover us in a more critical way in terms of our work, than they would a white man. And, for example, I had to prove to—and I know this story would have been planted by the other party—‘What is she accomplishing? Yes, she’s in Congress but what has she accomplished in her two terms?’ And then you’d have to provide the list of everything that you had accomplished. And, I had a predecessor that really had, had nothing to speak of to his name and you’d never see a story like that. And, so yes, they commented on how we looked, what our personalities were like, but then substantively, you had to constantly prove that you were getting things done.”

**The Honorable Jill Lynette Long Thompson**  
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## Table of Contents

Interview Abstract	i
Interviewee Biography	i
Editing Practices	ii
Citation Information	ii
Interviewer Biographies	iii
Interview	1
Notes	54

## **Abstract**

Jill Lynette Long Thompson overcame many obstacles to earn a seat in Congress. With service on the Valparaiso city council as her only political experience, she ran a solid, albeit unsuccessful, U.S. Senate campaign in 1986 laying the foundation for her future time in public office. After losing an uphill battle in 1988 for an Indiana seat in the U.S. House held by Republicans for more than a decade, she jumped into a special election the following year for the same district when the incumbent was appointed to the Senate. This time, Long Thompson came out on top.

During her six years in the House, Long Thompson faced unique challenges as a Democrat in a Republican-leaning district and as one of only four women to represent Indiana in Congress. Raised on a dairy farm in Indiana, Long Thompson explains in her oral history how her agricultural background shaped her approach to politics and her House service. She describes the connections between her academic career in business, her experience as a college instructor, and her views on fiscal responsibility and taxes. In her interview she also discusses her work with the Democratic Leadership Council as well as her personal connection to veterans' issues.

In 1995, she married Don Thompson, changing her name to Jill Lynette Long Thompson. While serving in Congress, she was known as Jill Lynette Long.

## **Biography**

**LONG, Jill Lynette**, a Representative from Indiana; born in Warsaw, Kosciusko County, Ind., July 15, 1952; graduated from Columbia City Joint High School, Columbia City, Ind.; B.S., Valparaiso University, Valparaiso, Ind., 1974; M.B.A., Indiana University, Bloomington, Ind., 1978; Ph.D., Indiana University, Bloomington, Ind., 1984; assistant instructor and lecturer, Indiana University, Bloomington, 1977–1980; assistant professor Valparaiso University, 1981–1986, 1987–1988; adjunct professor, Indiana University/Purdue University-Fort Wayne, 1987–1989; member, Valparaiso, Ind., city council, 1984–1986; business consultant; unsuccessful candidate for election to the United States Senate in 1986; unsuccessful candidate for election to the One Hundred First Congress in 1988; elected as a Democrat to the One Hundred First Congress by special election to fill the vacancy caused by the resignation of United States Representative Daniel Ray Coats; reelected to the two succeeding Congresses (March 28, 1989–January 3, 1995); unsuccessful candidate for reelection to the One Hundred Fourth Congress in 1994; fellow at the Institute of Politics, John F. Kennedy School of Government, Harvard University; Cambridge, Mass.; business executive; Under Secretary for Rural Economic and Community Development, Department of Agriculture, 1995-2001; unsuccessful candidate for election to the One Hundred Eighth Congress in 2002.

[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:

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## 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 JILL LYNETTE LONG THOMPSON OF INDIANA —  
A CENTURY OF WOMEN IN CONGRESS

**JOHNSON:** I'm Kathleen Johnson, and I'm here today with Matt Wasniewski, the House Historian, and the date is June 15, 2017. We are very happy to be here with Jill [Lynette] Long Thompson, former Congresswoman from Indiana. Thank you so much for coming in today.

**WASNIEWSKI:** Thank you.

**LONG THOMPSON:** Thank you. It's a pleasure to be here, thank you.

**JOHNSON:** We're in the House Recording Studio, which is in the Rayburn House Office Building, and this interview is part of a project that we've been doing for the past couple of years to commemorate the anniversary of the election of the first woman to Congress, Jeannette Rankin.

To start off with today, we're wondering, when you were young, if you had any female role models?

**LONG THOMPSON:** I had wonderful female role models, but they were not in politics because there were very few women in politics when I was growing up in the 1950s and 1960s. My mother probably is my greatest role model, and my grandmothers and aunts. I also had some teachers that were pretty amazing. And I can think of one in particular who was a young English teacher when I was in high school, and she really

had her act together. She was very professional, and I think that she probably inspired me to a higher level of performance.

**JOHNSON:**

What were the expectations for you as a young girl, about what you would be when you grew up?

**LONG THOMPSON:**

Well, I come from a family where no one had gone to college before me, so there really were no higher education expectations. It was just always expected that I would do my best at whatever I chose to do. I graduated from high school before my Senator, Birch [Evans] Bayh, had gotten Title IX into law—passed and signed into law—and so we didn't even have athletic programs of any magnitude for girls. I remember our high school basketball team and volleyball team. The girls' teams would play maybe two or three games a season.

And so the expectations were just so different for girls. The expectations were that I would keep a house clean and that I would be a good cook. I'm a pretty decent cook, and I keep my house clean but one step at a time, I started to realize what kind of opportunities there really are out there. I happened to come of age at a time when doors were starting to open for women. So with a National Defense student loan and an academic scholarship, I went to college and decided if I could get an undergraduate degree, I could probably do a master's and a doctorate. I went to one of my state institutions, and by teaching as a graduate student, I was able to completely finance my education. One thing led to another, and I ended up running for Congress.

**WASNIEWSKI:** Just to back up a little bit. You grew up on a farm in Indiana? Can you talk a little bit about how that shaped your later career, what lessons you took away from that?

**LONG THOMPSON:** Well, I think growing up on a farm, I really learned, at an early age, the importance of this democratic community involvement. One of the stories I like to tell is that when I was in the first grade, my dad was a precinct committeeman for the Democratic Party, which meant, of course, back in the 1950s, that my mother was taking care of all the registration and the records. I would come home from school, and I could either go out with her and register voters in our neighborhood, or I could go help my dad milk the cows. And I chose to go with my mom to register voters, which was much more fun. I have an older brother who would help my dad milk the cows, and he's a dairy farmer today. And I have had some success in politics, and so I think those early opportunities really do shape what our passions ultimately become.

**WASNIEWSKI:** You had mentioned earlier your mom was a role model for you. Can you explain that in a little more detail? It sounds like she was politically active. What lessons did you learn from her in particular?

**LONG THOMPSON:** She wasn't all that politically active, but she was incredibly gracious and very charming. She is very effective at getting things done, and whatever she sets her mind to do, she can accomplish it. And so I think that watching her there on the farm, whether it was canning 150 quarts of green beans or registering every unregistered voter in the precinct, she just got it done.

**JOHNSON:** How did you become interested in politics and decide that that was a career that you wanted to follow?

**LONG THOMPSON:** I was a graduate student at Indiana University, getting my Ph.D. in the late 1970s, and we had double-digit inflation and recession, and I would listen to politicians. Up until that time, I had no interest in running for public office, but I would listen to politicians talk about the economy, and I realized that I knew more about economics than most of the people who were trying to lead us out of this difficult economic time and decided that maybe I could have a role to play.

So I decided, when I was choosing my first teaching position as a college professor, that I would go to an institution where I might be able to—in Indiana, which is my home state—where I might be able to simultaneously get involved in the political process. And I ultimately ran for [Valparaiso, Indiana,] city council and won on my first try and then from there went on to other positions.

**JOHNSON:** Did you have someone that served as an early inspiration or perhaps a mentor?

**LONG THOMPSON:** In politics?

**JOHNSON:** Yes.

**LONG THOMPSON:** Senator Birch Bayh, I always looked up to him, as my United States Senator, and I just thought he was an incredibly effective, good person. He's a friend to this day.

Once I got to Congress, however, there were a number of people, and I always think of Congresswoman Lindy [Corinne Claiborne] Boggs, the late Lindy Boggs, who was incredibly effective and one of the most gracious—always kind and appropriate. As it's important to be a gentleman, I think, when you're in politics, she was always—if you're a man—and she epitomized being a lady. She was really someone who I found very inspirational. And inspires—she always inspired people to go to the higher level.

**WASNIEWSKI:** You mentioned being on the Valparaiso city council. How did that experience inform your later legislative experience in Congress?

**LONG THOMPSON:** I began to realize how complicated policy can be if you're on the city council in a small city, and you're working on a budget, or you're trying to ensure that you're growing your water and sewer system so that it can accommodate new industry, new residents. It was a city that was growing and has grown considerably since the time I served. You start to realize, even on issues that sound as non-controversial as annexation or how to expand a waterline or the cost of expanding a sewer line . . . you start to realize that these issues are complicated because no matter what decision you make, you affect some people positively and some people negatively. So I think the complexity of decision making in public policymaking became apparent in the position that I held on the city council in Valparaiso.

**JOHNSON:** You ran for the Senate in 1986.

**LONG THOMPSON:** Yes.

**JOHNSON:** Did someone recruit you to run for that position?

**LONG THOMPSON:** That was not something I was pursuing. I was actually running for Congress. We had a candidate running for the United State Senate. He was a state senator, very highly regarded, and he had a health issue and had to drop out of the race.

Someone who became a very good friend, the late Andy [Andrew] Jacobs [Jr.], who was a mentor throughout my career. He talked with me, and he said, “You know, it’s going to be hard to win the congressional district; it would be hard to win the Senate race.” But by the time the state senator had dropped out of the U.S. Senate race, I had a primary opponent, and Andy Jacobs said, “You could lose the primary because you’re running against somebody who’s in the state legislature and has a broader base than you have. And if you run for the Senate, you could very likely win the nomination because there’s no one else coming forth.” He was being very strategic. And he said, “If you run and win the nomination but lose in the general, that will still move you ahead in terms of the work that you want to accomplish in life, more than if you run in a congressional district and lose in the primary.”

I figured, really, what do I have to lose? I believe in this country, I want to serve at a higher level. I'll give it a try. And so the party then . . . and he was very influential in the process, as were others . . . but then they endorsed me to run. There was a primary opponent but not one who was a serious primary opponent. And that allowed me to travel the state and get to know lots of people, both Democrats and Republicans. And that ended up serving me very well.

**WASNIEWSKI:** Name recognition.

**LONG THOMPSON:** Yes.

**WASNIEWSKI:** I read somewhere where your nickname was "Jill Longshot."

**LONG THOMPSON:** Yes, it was. {laughter} In Indiana, in the 1980s, if you're a Democrat woman running for office, you're a longshot.

**WASNIEWSKI:** A couple years later, you ran for a House seat, against Dan [Daniel Ray] Coats. What do you remember about that campaign? Were there any kind of salient moments that stood out for you?

**LONG THOMPSON:** Yes, there were. The most salient moment was when the (later) President, George Herbert Walker Bush, selected Senator Dan [James Danforth] Quayle to be his running mate because that made the race then very difficult . . . because Hoosiers were very excited about Senator Dan Quayle becoming the vice presidential nominee. So everybody who was Republican or leaning Republican we knew

would come out and vote, and that was going to make it very difficult to do well.

But ultimately, that served me very well because he won the vice presidency, and because the numbers were so strongly in favor of Congressman Coats, later to be Senator Coats, people thought I couldn't win in a special election. And so they thought it was fine to appoint—the governor at the time appointed Congressman Dan Coats to the Senate, thinking, “Well, we'll hang on to this seat.” I surprised them and actually won that seat then, in a special election.

I'm now back teaching in higher education, and one of the things that I like to communicate to my students is you don't always get everything, and you don't always get everything on the first try.

<sup>1</sup> But sometimes things that look very bleak at the moment can actually be very useful in moving forward and advancing opportunities that you can then take advantage of.

**WASNIEWSKI:**

Was that the big lesson that you took away from those two campaigns where you were unsuccessful?

**LONG THOMPSON:**

I think those were two huge lessons, but I actually learned those lessons on the farm because you never know—you start the spring, you plant your crops, it can be very dry, and then you can have too much rain. Or you can have too much rain, and you can't get your crops planted at the time that you want to, and then you have a drought. So you just don't really ever know what's around the corner,

and what's important is just to be prepared for when there's an opportunity around the corner.

**JOHNSON:** You mentioned the election, the one in 1989, your third try, was a special election. How is that different from a standard or a typical election?

**LONG THOMPSON:** I actually thought it was easier because there were no coattails. And in Indiana, coattails tend to be Republican coattails, so it was just a campaign but for one office. There were no distractions, and without the distractions, I think it was much easier for me to communicate effectively my message.

**JOHNSON:** Was there a lot more national attention because it was a special election?

**LONG THOMPSON:** There was a great deal of national attention because it was a special election, but also because it was the Vice President's old congressional district because he had held that as his congressional seat before he went to the United States Senate. So it was a race that was very important to the Republicans. And initially, I was not able to convince Democrats in Washington that it was winnable, and even though I had very good poll numbers at the very beginning, they kept arguing that we would ultimately see a drop once the other candidate started becoming better known and was running his campaign. That didn't happen, and I was able to maintain support, not just for that election but for two succeeding elections.

**WASNIEWSKI:** To what degree was gender an issue in that first special election campaign?

**LONG THOMPSON:** It's always been an issue, and it still is an issue today, but when there's something negative associated with gender, sometimes there's something positive. At that time, and I don't know that the data still show this, but at that time, it was easier for voters to trust women candidates than men candidates. They had this perception that women were probably going to be more straightforward and trustworthy, and I think that certainly helped me running at that particular time. So I think there was an advantage as well as the disadvantage.

**WASNIEWSKI:** What were some of the disadvantages, specifically?

**LONG THOMPSON:** Well, it's always been more difficult for women to be taken as seriously, and at that time, there had been no woman to represent that district in Congress. I was the fourth woman from Indiana to even hold a congressional seat, and so it was a novelty.

But people were open-minded, obviously. I think people are more open-minded. A lot of it has to do—your success—a lot of it is dependent upon your ability to communicate your message.

**JOHNSON:** Matt had mentioned earlier, your nickname, about being a longshot and that the odds were against you, but was there a moment in that campaign where you felt like you really knew there was a good chance that you could pull off the upset?

**LONG THOMPSON:** Yes, and it came probably in the last 10 days to two weeks. The poll numbers had always been good, but then, of course, it got much, much tighter, and then he might be up a little, and then I would be up in the next poll. You can sometimes feel it, you can feel what's happening, and if what you're feeling is consistent with what you're seeing in the polls, you can feel pretty confident about how it's going to go. But I still wasn't sure, until the numbers started coming in, that I was going to be able to do that.

I remember my parents coming to Fort Wayne, and I had an aunt and uncle who came, and we were sitting in a hotel room in downtown Fort Wayne, and I said, "Now I want you—I know this will be hard for you." Things are always harder for your parents than they are for you, when they don't go well, and this is a very close aunt and uncle. And I said, "I want to point out to you that it may not be possible for me to win this district; it just may not be possible; we'll just have to see, but I'll be fine, regardless of what the results are." And then the results started coming in, and I was winning, and it was quite an evening, actually.

**WASNIEWSKI:** You mentioned earlier that this had been a safe Republican district for quite some time. What was your strategy, running as a Democrat in this rural Indiana district?

**LONG THOMPSON:** Well, I have three degrees in business. I have an undergraduate degree, an M.B.A., and a Ph.D. And I'm a fiscal conservative, and Hoosiers are conservative, but we are particularly conservative when it comes to spending money. So I made sure that it was clear that I

wasn't going to be raising taxes unless there was some kind of national emergency that required it. I took the no-tax pledge. And I think how you spend other people's money is one of the top priorities when you're in public service, and I think that message resonated. I never voted to raise taxes in the three terms that I served.

**JOHNSON:**

For those three terms, and this was still a really competitive district, a swing district. What's it like serving in a district like that?

**LONG THOMPSON:**

It's a real challenge because no matter what you do—and it doesn't matter, even if you're a Democrat in a very Democratic district—no matter how you vote on something, no matter what you say, there will be someone in that district or a group of people in that district who really don't like what you said. But when you are a Democrat representing a very Republican district or a Republican representing a very Democratic district, that's all magnified. Everything I did was under the microscope, and it was very challenging.

Keep in mind, I ran for election in 1988 and then in a special election in 1989 and then for re-election in 1990, so for three years in a row, I had really intense campaigns, and the latter two years of those were incredibly intense. It was very stressful, but it was very invigorating and rewarding, and it really was just an opportunity of a lifetime. It's sometimes hard for me to believe, growing up as I did on a farm in the '50s and '60s, that I got to do that.

**WASNIEWSKI:**

Can you describe the district a little bit geographically, also demographically, and then if it changed over time?

**LONG THOMPSON:**

The district borders Michigan and Ohio. It's northeast Indiana. Fort Wayne is the biggest city in the congressional district. And agriculture is very important to the district, not just production agriculture but ag processing. So one of the things that was really easy for me was to talk to farmers and rural families about issues that were very important in those communities: infrastructure, making sure the infrastructure stays strong, protecting commodity prices in a way that works in the long run, and so forth.

Fort Wayne gets a bad rap sometimes but it has some sophistication. It's a sophisticated city, and I think, having gone to Indiana University, getting an M.B.A. and a Ph.D., put me in a position that I could relate very well to the biggest city in the congressional district.

It's very conservative socially, and we believe that's good. I happen to believe, however, that while I believe in those social values that are conservative, I believe that the federal government should keep a distance and let us all decide for ourselves. That was sometimes a point of difference.

I just think it's a great congressional district. Hoosiers are friendly, and I grew up thinking that everybody talked to their neighbors. And I thought everybody waved to everybody who drove by their house because we only had a couple people drive by our house in a day. I just think it's a great place.

**JOHNSON:** You had said earlier that you had to convince some of the party people that you had a chance to win the special election. Was fundraising ever a barrier for your campaign?

**LONG THOMPSON:** It was a challenge but EMILY's List was incredibly helpful. That was a new organization at that time, and without that organization, I don't think I would have won.

**JOHNSON:** Were there other groups—especially women's groups—that supported you?

**LONG THOMPSON:** Labor, organized labor, was very, very helpful, the United Auto Workers. There was a new GM [General Motors] plant that had just been constructed, and the United Auto Workers, but the building trades, really all of the labor unions, organized labor, they were key to my winning that district and winning re-election the two times that I did.

And I think it's because we shared—it wasn't just that we agreed on the issues; it was the values behind the issues that we agreed upon. I have family that were in the UAW, the United Auto Workers. I'm now married; my husband is an airline pilot, in the Air Line Pilots Association, and I have been in the NEA [National Education Association].

**WASNIEWSKI:** When you joined the 101st Congress in '89, there were a little more than two dozen women serving in Congress at that point.

**LONG THOMPSON:** Yes.

**WASNIEWSKI:**

And then a few others elected in special elections: Ileana Ros-Lehtinen, and Patsy [Takemoto] Mink came back, Susan Molinari. Because there were so few of you, did you find that you gravitated toward one another?

**LONG THOMPSON:**

Yes, we did. The women, I think, had a very strong bond in the House, and it didn't matter what party we were in. It didn't even matter if we agreed on some of the issues; we just recognized the challenges that we all faced.

Let me also say that, for the most part, the men in the House were very respectful. I was pretty young. I was 36 when I was elected, and so many of the Members of Congress were from my dad's generation. They looked after us in a very fatherly or brotherly kind of way, and it was just such an honorable group overall that I was privileged to serve with.

**JOHNSON:**

Earlier you mentioned Lindy Boggs as someone that you looked up to. Did she or any other Members offer you helpful advice when you first came to Congress?

**LONG THOMPSON:**

They were always available, and I remember that no matter what I would be engaged in, if I called and asked somebody for help, they would be there for you. It really was like a fraternity, if you will. I can't think of anything specific today as I'm sitting here, but I remember just how helpful everybody was. All you had to do was place a call, and they would do what they could to be helpful.

**WASNIEWSKI:**

You described how welcoming the atmosphere was generally. Do you attribute that to that older generation in particular, that they're a generation that came along in the Great Depression and World War II?

**LONG THOMPSON:**

I think some of it was generational, and certainly, my parents' generation and my parents are very proper in how they dress and what they say. But I also think that the congressional districts—there were more swing districts at that time. And even the districts that were safely Democrat or safely Republican, or safe Democrat, safe Republican, you could still have an upset.

And I think the way we have drawn district congressional lines, I think that's been bad for the institution because you have people who are either pretty far to the left or pretty far to the right. That has become the norm, and there's not much room for compromise. But if you go out across the country, voters want you to compromise. The people who tend to be the most vocal are the ones who are on the left and on the right, but the biggest share of the population is in the middle.

I served, as you know, as national vice chair of the Democratic Leadership Council, and we were very, I just think, very open to bipartisanship and innovative solutions to old problems. We need to get back to that, but I think that's probably not going to happen unless we have a different process for drawing the congressional lines.

**WASNIEWSKI:**

You mentioned earlier, too, that you were the fourth woman from Indiana elected. By our count, there's only seven to date who have been elected from Indiana. What did that mean to you in 1989, to have been one of such a small group of women?

**LONG THOMPSON:**

I felt very fortunate, but honestly, I didn't give that much thought. It wasn't until later, when I looked back, that I realized what a challenge it was for me to come from a family that's not connected to—and many people who serve in Congress come from families that aren't connected—but it is a challenge when you're starting out, and you just don't have that network that goes much beyond your home county or maybe even your home township. I don't think I gave that much thought. I was just more focused on the work and trying to find real solutions to the problems that the country was facing.

**JOHNSON:**

Did you have a chance to get to know any of the other women Members that represented Indiana? So it would have been Katie [Beatrice] Hall or Julia [May] Carson.

**LONG THOMPSON:**

Yes. I did not know Katie Hall very well because she was out of Congress, but when I had served on the city council in Valparaiso, I had the privilege to meet her. Julia Carson became a very good friend, but we didn't have overlap in our service. But there really is a bit of a network. For example, yesterday I was up on the Hill, talking with two women from Indiana: Congresswoman Susan Brooks and my Congresswoman Jackie Walorski. I don't know if you'd call it a sorority or a fraternity, but we all like each other, and we have this bond that is pretty unique.

**WASNIEWSKI:**

One of the mechanisms for women coming together on the Hill, of course, was the Congressional Women's Caucus, and we're curious to know what your opinion of that group was. How often did it meet, who were some of the personalities?

**LONG THOMPSON:**

Olympia [Jean] Snowe was somebody who was very engaged on the Republican side, Congresswoman Pat [Patricia Scott] Schroeder on the Democratic side. We didn't have regular meetings, but when there was an issue that was coming up, we would convene and have discussions.

It was just a great caucus, because—I don't think that women are better decisionmakers than men, but women come to decisionmaking from a different perspective than men. That may not be the case individual by individual but certainly as a group. And so when we're looking at issues and we frame them in our minds, we probably are looking at them differently than most men are looking at them.

It was just really useful to sit down and talk about issues and talk about how we might more effectively communicate the perspective that we had. It was also very gratifying to have friends on both sides of the aisle. I had a lot of Republican friends who were men, but there just was a much stronger bond in the Women's Caucus.

**WASNIEWSKI:**

Is there any one particular issue that you remember discussing in a group?

**LONG THOMPSON:** Women's healthcare was an issue then as it is now, and who is going to make the decisions on women's healthcare.

**JOHNSON:** You mentioned Pat Schroeder and Olympia Snowe, and they were the co-chairs while you were in Congress. What do you recall of their leadership, and what were your impressions of how they led the caucus?

**LONG THOMPSON:** They were incredibly effective. They are very direct; they get right to the issue, and both just so gracious, strong—very determined but genuinely lovely humans.

**JOHNSON:** What role do you think, generally speaking, the caucus played in the institution, and how effective was it?

**LONG THOMPSON:** I think it was effective. It could have been more effective if we'd had more in the caucus, but there just weren't very many women in the caucus. We were able to communicate. If you get a couple dozen people in the House communicating with the same message, it's much more effective than 24 individual messages or a couple dozen individual messages, so it was effective. That doesn't mean we got what we wanted every time, but I think you start changing minds. You know it's a gradual process. I think that we made changes that led to greater changes down the road.

**JOHNSON:** In the 1990s, as in generations and decades before, women's reproductive rights was a very, very important issue. Specifically for women Members, how important do you think this issue was for their careers in Congress?

**LONG THOMPSON:** I think it was very important. My congressional district, however, was not a pro-choice district even though I am pro-choice and believe that the decision should be made by the woman and her family and her doctor and her clergy. Interestingly, we had some polling that showed by the time I left Congress, my district was slightly pro-choice from the government's perspective.

So I think the Women's Caucus was very important on that issue in particular but also on issues—I think the input that we had on family and medical leave, recognizing that even today, even though things have changed, it's the woman who takes more of the responsibility for raising children and oftentimes taking care of elderly parents. I think that the work that we did through the Women's Caucus was very helpful in opening eyes to what was really going on across the country in terms of the needs that families had, and the support that they needed to be able to take care of their children and aging parents, and so forth.

**JOHNSON:** Did you ever find that this specific issue—because it can be so divisive—that it served as an obstacle for women Members joining together to work on legislation?

**LONG THOMPSON:** The issue of choice?

**JOHNSON:** Yes.

**LONG THOMPSON:** It was. It was divisive then; it will probably be a divisive issue for many generations to come because people have such different beliefs

on the role that the government should play in that issue and why it should play the role that it does. I think it will long be a divisive issue, but I think that sometimes—today, it's not quite as divisive as it was when I was in Congress because people have found other issues that are equally divisive, and I don't know that that's a good thing.

**WASNIEWSKI:**

And how did that play out for you in a district that, as you said, was pro-life? How did you express that to constituents?

**LONG THOMPSON:**

The point that I always made was that it's not the choice that gets made, it's who makes the choice. And do you really want the United States Congress, do you really want the federal government, telling you what your decision should be in this very personal, very specific circumstance? If you believe that there are some circumstances where it should be legal and other circumstances where it shouldn't, then who should be the person that determines that? Should it be you and your family and your doctor and your clergy, or should it be the federal government? I'm personally United Methodist, and we believe that it should be safe and legal. I often talked about that in the context of my own religious beliefs and teachings.

**JOHNSON:**

A while ago you mentioned the Democratic Leadership Council.

**LONG THOMPSON:**

Yes.

**JOHNSON:**

And I know that you were vice chair. Can you talk a little bit more about that and what your responsibilities were?

**LONG THOMPSON:**

Well, I loved the Democratic Leadership Council, and I think it played an incredibly important role in our nation's history. I think that we would not have had President Bill [William Jefferson] Clinton and all those years of economic growth without the DLC, the Democratic Leadership Council. We looked for practical solutions to real problems, and we thought it was important to recognize that the Democrats didn't have all the answers and that there were a number of Republican proposals that actually were very good. Most of the issues that we focused on were economic issues, but we looked for balance in fiscal policy: fair taxation, reasonable spending levels, and welfare reform, for example.

Are there things that we can do differently and do better?

Reinventing government was a major issue for the Democratic Leadership Council. How do we run the government using business principles, so that we are more effective and more efficient? With my background in business, it just was really a natural fit for me, but I think it played a very important role in moving the country, shifting the country's direction a bit, economically. You know, we had balanced budgets in the Clinton years, and I just think the DLC and that approach was—I wish we could do more of that: where the Democrats and Republicans work together and realize you're not going to get everything you want, but if you get a lot of what you want and it's good for the country, we're all better off.

**WASNIEWSKI:**

During your three terms, you served with two Speakers: briefly Jim [James Claude] Wright [Jr.] and for most of your career Tom [Thomas Stephen] Foley. We're just wondering if you can compare

and contrast the leadership styles and your memories of those two Speakers.

**LONG THOMPSON:** Speaker Wright was just so gracious. He was very smart at counting votes, and he was very strategic and tactical. I didn't get to serve with him for very long, so most of my experience was with Speaker Foley. I said this to Speaker Foley one time—and I actually spoke with his widow, Heather, a week or so ago—and I really believe this about him: I think that he embodied what the Founding Fathers had in mind when they created our government. I think that he was very open to different opinions, different approaches. He had such a sense of fairness that it may not have always been the best thing for the Democratic Caucus, but he always did what he thought was the best thing for the country. He was really a very special Speaker, I think.

**WASNIEWSKI:** Do you remember any advice you had from him or particular interactions that would describe that?

**LONG THOMPSON:** I do, I do. {laughter} I remember talking with him one time, and he said he was critical of my having taken a “no-new-tax” pledge, and he said we need more flexibility. I said, “I hear you, Mr. Speaker, but it’s the right thing for the people I represent.” {laughter}

**WASNIEWSKI:** And that worked for him?

**LONG THOMPSON:** Well, he was in a lot more control than I was, so anything would work for him. Did it work for me, that’s the question.

**JOHNSON:**

One area which we're asking everyone about is their committee service. We know when you first came to Congress you were assigned to Agriculture and Veterans' Affairs. Did you receive any advice on committees, and then also, were these the two top choices that you had?

**LONG THOMPSON:**

Those were my first choices, and I think they make sense for somebody who comes from the background that I come from and represented the district that I represented. Agriculture is very important to Indiana and the Northeast Indiana congressional district. But as you probably know, rural communities have a higher proportion or a higher percentage of young men and women who serve in the military, so veterans' issues are very important to the district, very, very important to the country and to our national security. So those were my first choices, and I felt very fortunate to get those assignments.

**WASNIEWSKI:**

You were the only woman on the Ag Committee when you joined, in the 101st Congress [1989–1991]. We've talked to other women who served on the Ag Committee who said it was a little bit of breaking into the good old boys network, so I've got kind of a two-part question: How did you find your reception, and then also, did you feel that you had to work harder as a woman to succeed on that committee?

**LONG THOMPSON:**

Well I don't know how hard men have to work, so I don't know if I worked harder. I know I worked hard. I could speak the language, and I could talk Midwest farming, and so I think that I had instant

credibility. In my TV spots that were produced for my campaigns, I always had one with me driving a tractor. I actually think some of the men were intimidated by that because they hadn't, some of the men on the committee, hadn't driven tractors.

So I think I was treated very well actually on that committee. The chairman was [Eligio] Kika de la Garza [II]. He was very supportive. Then I was on the Conservation, Credit, and Rural Development Subcommittee. Glenn [Lee] English [Jr.] was the chair of that subcommittee, and he was a very supportive chairman. So I actually think I was received very well. I would make the point of staying in our committee hearings as long as it was necessary. I was always the last one to get to ask a question because I had the lowest seniority because of the special election. I was elected after everybody else had been elected in November. But I would just make sure that I stayed there and asked my questions. I took it very seriously, and I think that that all paid off.

**WASNIEWSKI:** You did your homework.

**LONG THOMPSON:** I did my homework.

**JOHNSON:** Eventually, there were a few other women that joined the committee. Did you have a chance to work with those women?

**LONG THOMPSON:** Yes, and I remember specifically Blanche Lambert Lincoln, Lincoln Lambert, I forget.

**JOHNSON:** Lambert Lincoln.

**LONG THOMPSON:** Lambert Lincoln, thank you.

**JOHNSON:** I finally remembered that.

**LONG THOMPSON:** {laughter} The two Ls make it difficult. Coming from Arkansas, her commodity interests were somewhat different from my commodity interests, but it was really nice to be able to serve with her and have another woman on that committee. We would work together on issues, and we both had an interest in rural development, and so we could work on those issues as well.

**JOHNSON:** Were there any issues specifically targeting women farmers that you tried to help with?

**LONG THOMPSON:** Yes. In fact, I was able to—and I cannot remember all the details of this—but in the farm bill that we were working on, women who inherited land from their families were treated differently than men in terms of the commodity programs, and so I was able to get a change. Everybody supported it; it was not controversial so that women would be treated the very same. Because there were limits, the programs were different than they are today, but there were limits on the amount of subsidy that you could receive, and women did not have the same rights as men in that particular program, so we got that changed. It's hard to believe that that would have been the case in the early '90s but it was.

**JOHNSON:** Right. It's really not that long ago.

**LONG THOMPSON:** No, it's not.

**WASNIEWSKI:** You mentioned the chairman, Kika de la Garza a little bit earlier. Can you describe his leadership style on the committee?

**LONG THOMPSON:** He had a unique leadership style. He was very gregarious and very charming and very direct. And he actually ran a pretty tight ship. He had a personality that would indicate that that might not be the case, but he really paid attention to detail, cared about his Members and was, I think caring of the interests of the minority as well as of the majority. He was a very charming chairman and very interesting, obviously cared a great deal about Texas and the district that he represented.

But he always wanted to make sure that—he had served, I believe, in the United States Navy, I believe. I remember him talking often about how long you can keep a submarine submerged—basically until you run out of food, and he would always use that as an analogy: we can keep this country strong as long as we have food. It was a driving concept for him. He really cared about people who struggled. That always came to the surface when we were working on legislation and in particular the farm bill.

**JOHNSON:** We also wanted to ask you some questions about Veterans' Affairs. We read that your dad was a World War II veteran.

**LONG THOMPSON:** Yes.

**JOHNSON:** How did that play into your service on the committee? Did you feel that some of the issues, that you had more knowledge or more of an insider type of opinion because of that?

**LONG THOMPSON:** Growing up, if one of your parents is a veteran, and I think just growing up as that being something that's just understood from the very beginning, you have an appreciation for the kinds of sacrifices that military personnel and their families make. Not only did my dad serve in World War II, one of his brothers served and was awarded a Purple Heart for an injury. That was just something that we didn't talk about a great deal in the family, but that we knew. I just always knew that my dad was willing to give his life for this country and knowing that makes you approach—when it's someone that close to you, and my dad and I are still very close—knowing that makes you approach veterans' issues, I think, in a way that it's so personal, and you're so passionate about it.

Then, having gone through the period of time, the Vietnam War—I'm just young enough that there weren't many young men or women from my time that would have graduated in the same high school class that I graduated from, but those who graduated a couple years ahead of us, so people that I knew—a cousin—were serving in Vietnam. And I knew when they came back that the adjustment for many of them was not easy. I felt that not just as a matter of national security, but as a matter of national character, we have to take care of

the people who put everything on the line to keep this country strong and to make it a leader.

**WASNIEWSKI:**

Similar to the Agriculture Committee, you were one of just a small number of women who were on Veterans' Affairs. One of the women who we've also interviewed in this series, Liz [Elizabeth J.] Patterson, we're wondering what kind of interactions you had with her on the committee and if you ever worked together on any issues?

**LONG THOMPSON:**

We did, and I can't remember specific issues that we worked on together, but Liz Patterson from South Carolina, another very gracious, just hardworking, very dedicated American. I always enjoyed working with her.

**JOHNSON:**

How would you describe the atmosphere of the committee? Because we know every committee is run a little bit differently and has a different feel.

**LONG THOMPSON:**

I think that I was very fortunate to be on both Agriculture and Veterans' because we really weren't very partisan. If there were differences in the Agriculture Committee, it was a difference based on commodities produced in the congressional districts, not based on political affiliation. On Veterans' we were pretty much all on the same page. Occasionally, there would be some disagreement on the amount of funding for something, but that was not usually—depending upon the program, the differences were more differences between World War II and Korean generations serving on the committee, and Vietnam-era Members serving on the committee, but

we all got along. We all really liked each other, we all respected each other. I just wish the Congress could get back to that kind of mutual respect that was so prevalent when I was serving.

**WASNIEWSKI:** That may have been because so many of the people who were serving in Congress at that time had served in the military, and they had that kind of common background.

**LONG THOMPSON:** Yes. There were a number of World War II and Vietnam veterans.

**WASNIEWSKI:** One of them was the chairman of the committee, Sonny [Gillespie V.] Montgomery.

**LONG THOMPSON:** Sonny Montgomery. Yes.

**WASNIEWSKI:** What are your memories of him?

**LONG THOMPSON:** Sonny Montgomery epitomized, I think, gentility: very strong and strong-willed. We had an issue in my congressional district, and in fact, this is how I met my husband. My husband was the squadron commander of the 122nd Wing. He flew F-16s in the National Guard, prior to that was a Navy carrier pilot. He came to talk with me about the BRAC, the Base Realignment [and Closure] Commission recommendations, and concerns that he had, national security concerns, and concerns about the mission of the Fort Wayne 122nd.

I went to Sonny, and Sonny worked with me, and we were able to save that fighter wing, and it operates today. They now fly A-10s. He was so incredibly effective, and I think it was that Mississippi charm. In addition to being a hard worker and being highly intelligent, he just had southern charm.

**JOHNSON:**

We read that as a member of Veterans' Affairs, you were able to help women in the Armed Forces. How important was that to you, and was there anything specific that stands out that you were able to accomplish?

**LONG THOMPSON:**

I can't think of anything specific. There were a number of issues because women were just starting to serve in combat roles. More and more women were enlisting and going through OCS [Officer Candidate School]. So it was clear that we had to make changes in how you accommodate, and I know one of the issues that we worked on, and again, I can't give you the specifics, but when you have a husband and wife who are both serving in the military, and they both are deployed, that's a real problem if they have children at home. So I know we worked on the issue of trying to ensure that only one parent would be deployed at a time.

And, of course, there was the Tailhook issue, from a Tailhook convention that we worked on. And both men and women were very much in agreement that that should be a completely professional convention. And that even in your own time, if you're in the military and you're attending a convention, that you should be very aware of how your behavior might be perceived by others.

**WASNIEWSKI:**

Another issue we saw that you were involved with was hospice care legislature for veterans. What was the inspiration for that?

**LONG THOMPSON:**

There was not a specific story but in working with—there were a number of stories from my congressional district—working with family members where they had someone who had limited time and wanted to be at home in the last months and weeks and days of their life. That just really was, for me, very compelling, that you should be able to do that. And we know that hospice care is so valuable. It was a newer concept when I was in Congress. Since that time, we've come to, I think, much more fully embrace how important it is. But I felt veterans, of all people, should have that option.

**JOHNSON:**

How important do you think it is to have a woman's perspective in all the different committees in Congress?

**LONG THOMPSON:**

I think it's 100 percent important because I don't care how much we open doors for women in careers that have been traditionally held by men or open doors for men into careers that have traditionally been held by women. Women and men are different, and our experiences are different. We make better decisions when we're honest with ourselves and we have all the facts on the table and when we understand other people's points of view.

I did not have this professor for a class, but a professor that I knew in graduate school one time said to a group of us, and he was—I think his wife was also a professor—he said the reason that we need to encourage women into positions that haven't traditionally been held

by women is challenges are great, and we can't allow ourselves to waste half the brainpower of the world. I believe that about public service; we need both men and women at the table so that we get all the perspectives. We know, research shows over and over again, you make better decisions when you incorporate more input. It has to be reasonable input but when you have more people working on the issue.

**JOHNSON:**

Is there anything specific that you can think of, in your experience, that either you or another woman Member brought to the table, that perhaps a male colleague wouldn't have thought of?

**LONG THOMPSON:**

This is what I think women bring to the table: I think that if you really want to include all the brainpower and all the talent, you'd have to recognize that women and minorities, as well as white males, have something to offer, and you get better decisions. When you bring women and minorities to the table and/or not bring them, we should just come to the table, that the stereotypes that we have get broken down. When you eliminate those stereotypes, then you actually get people in good positions to make good decisions.

But it's not just women. There's research out of Duke University, for example, that shows that CEOs actually have a similar look. It's a white male look, but they do have a similar look. And even within the group of white men, they have a similar look. There's some really interesting research on that out of the Fuqua School of Business at Duke University.

The more we can break down these stereotypes and actually see who can do the job and who can make a contribution in the best way, the better we're going to be led as a nation, the stronger we're going to be in government, in corporate, in not-for-profit. It doesn't matter the field. That's why it's so important to have women at the table, so we can break down the stereotypes.

**WASNIEWSKI:**

We also read that you had played an important role in the Rural Caucus. I'm wondering if you can describe, first of all, the importance of having a caucus like that, for the average person who might not be aware, and then also, your memories from having chaired the caucus.

**LONG THOMPSON:**

It was a very nonpartisan group, and we all, I think, worked together very effectively. We didn't care whether you were a Democrat or Republican. We just wanted to make sure that we were addressing rural issues. What I thought was particularly significant about the caucus was its focus was much broader than agriculture and even broader than the issues covered on Conservation, Credit, and Rural Development, that [Agriculture Committee] subcommittee. So we were able to come together, Democrats and Republicans, and talk about issues that are very relevant to rural communities and try to come up with good solutions, where the jurisdiction was broader than the Department of Agriculture or the Committee on Agriculture's jurisdiction. So we might raise issues that would be addressed by Energy and Commerce, for example, or by the Education Committee or even by Ways and Means in terms of tax

policy. I think it allowed us to bring to the forefront issues that rural communities and rural families were facing.

**WASNIEWSKI:** And the caucus is an informal group outside of the House structure?

**LONG THOMPSON:** Yes.

**WASNIEWSKI:** How important was it for you, as a fairly junior Member, a couple terms, to have chaired a caucus like that? What kind of experience did that give to you?

**LONG THOMPSON:** I think it gave me very good experience for my work that I was doing on the House Ag Committee and even the Veterans' Affairs committee because rural veterans oftentimes didn't have, and still don't have, the same access to healthcare that veterans in more urban areas have. I thought it was very useful.

**JOHNSON:** We wanted to switch gears a little bit and focus on some legislation involving women and some women's issues of the period. In 1991, a group of women Members marched to the Senate to urge that Anita Hill have the opportunity to testify about then Supreme Court nominee Clarence Thomas. What do you remember about that event?

**LONG THOMPSON:** I was not a part of that group because I do think it's important that the House does its work and the Senate does its work, and that's the way the rules are set up.

But I did something else. I had had a Member of Congress say something to me that was completely inappropriate. He walked up to me on the House Floor one time and said, "You look really good today, I think I'll chase you around the House Floor." So I actually did a one-minute remark on the inappropriateness of that kind of comment and sexual harassment and made the point that regardless of what the decision would be made in the United States Senate regarding the confirmation of now Justice Clarence Thomas, that we need to have strong sexual harassment policies and be aware . . . that even though a colleague of mine saying that kind of thing to me isn't intimidating to me because we're on the same level in the organization, that when you say something like that in the workplace, it can be debilitating, and it can make it very difficult for whoever is being harassed to perform their task and achieve their potential. So I just did my own statement on the House Floor.

**WASNIEWSKI:**

What was the reaction to that?

**LONG THOMPSON:**

It was immediate, {laughter} and you know the question that came. I didn't tell my staff I was going to make this one-minute statement, and by the time I got back to my office, the phones were completely lit up. Nobody really cared about what had been said to me. They just wanted to know who said it. I've never said because the point was not who it was, the point was it shouldn't happen. {laughter} He knows.

**WASNIEWSKI:**

Were there other women Members of Congress who then came up to you afterwards to show support particularly?

**LONG THOMPSON:** Of course, but both men and women, yes.

**JOHNSON:** Was the issue of sexual harassment—within the institution and then outside the institution—was this something that you discussed with women Members? This could have been a caucus thing or maybe just even informally.

**LONG THOMPSON:** No, it really was not, it was just this one Member. Other than that, I was treated with incredible respect and kindness by everyone. I don't think it was a pattern, and I never heard that there were Members. There may have been, but I certainly never heard stories of Members behaving inappropriately, but this one did, and I don't think I was the only woman he had ever said that to.

**JOHNSON:** I bet your response might have surprised him, you going to the floor like that.

**LONG THOMPSON:** He came to my office afterward. {laughter}

**WASNIEWSKI:** To apologize?

**LONG THOMPSON:** I don't know what he wanted to do.

**WASNIEWSKI:** In 1992, there were 28 new women, 24 in the House. That election was called the "Year of the Woman." What do you remember about that new group of women Members in particular?

**LONG THOMPSON:** It was exciting to have that many women, and that's still not a large number in total, but I just thought it was very exciting. The Women's Caucus became much larger. We became more of a force to reckon with. It was way past due, but things changed in the House of Representatives as a result of that large class of freshmen women coming in.

**WASNIEWSKI:** Because of individuals in that class, or was it kind of just the sheer numbers thing?

**LONG THOMPSON:** It would have been a combination. Some of the women were very forceful. But just the numbers, and you know there's always power in numbers. Ask anybody who has ever served as a whip: there's power in numbers.

**JOHNSON:** Did you observe any differences in your own career and then also with just observing your female colleagues, that it was more difficult to raise money as a woman candidate than it was as a man?

**LONG THOMPSON:** Well, I think that has historically been the case, and the research shows that it is the case. I think much has changed, though, because there are now more women in public office, and there are also more women in corporate positions that put them in a position that they can support candidates. Of course, much of your support comes from both men and women, but fundraising was always an issue.

I know that in the '80s and the early '90s that it was much, much easier because men had already had the networks that they were a part

of, through their work either in a law firm or in corporate or a country club that they belonged to. They just had networks of people who were accustomed to making contributions, and women didn't have those networks, and that's why EMILY's List became so important.

**JOHNSON:**

Were there other ways that you or again, your women colleagues, were able to overcome some of those obstacles, besides EMILY's List?

**LONG THOMPSON:**

I think we just had to work very hard at it. I was very disciplined about making phone calls and doing follow-up. You just had to be very strategic and tactical and stay focused at it.

**WASNIEWSKI:**

Was that something you found you got better at over time? Was that kind of a learned skill?

**LONG THOMPSON:**

Do you know, I think you do get better at it over time, but it's also, relative to the other things that you have to do as a Member of Congress, it's actually a relatively simple task. It's not an enjoyable task, but it's a simple task. Of course you can't make fundraising calls from the Capitol or from your office. So you would just schedule time to go over to the Democratic National Committee, or if you're a Republican the Republican National Committee, and try to carve out some time when there aren't votes and you don't have committee. Because your days, you're working 12- and 14-hour days, and most of that is dedicated to the job. But you could take an hour here or there a couple times a week and just go make your phone calls.

**WASNIEWSKI:** One of the reasons we're doing this series of interviews is to celebrate the Jeannette Rankin centennial. It gave us the opportunity to go back and do a lot of newspaper research on her, and we found that newspapers, the press, constantly were commenting on two things: her demeanor and the way she dressed.

**LONG THOMPSON:** Yes.

**WASNIEWSKI:** We're wondering if you found the same thing in the early '90s, when you served.

**LONG THOMPSON:** That I was wearing a powder blue suit and pearls? Yes, I read that in the newspaper. They did comment on how we looked, how we dressed. But here is something else that I discovered, and this is more serious. They would cover us in a more critical way in terms of our work than they would a white man. For example, I had to prove to—and I know this story would have been planted by the other party—“What is she accomplishing? Yes, she's in Congress, but what has she accomplished in her two terms?” And then you'd have to provide the list of everything that you had accomplished. I had a predecessor that really had nothing to speak of to his name, and you'd never see a story like that. So yes, they commented on how we looked, what our personalities were like, but then substantively, you had to constantly prove that you were getting things done.

**WASNIEWSKI:** A version of work harder because you're a woman.

**LONG THOMPSON:** Yes, yes.

**JOHNSON:** We know there was the spike in the 1992 elections, but as you mentioned, the numbers were still not that great for women. So because there were so few of you, did you feel that you were representing not just the women in your own district but across the country?

**LONG THOMPSON:** I did, and I always felt not only that I was representing women across the country as well as both men and women in my district, but that I had very little margin for error because if I made a mistake then that was going to be perceived as, “Well, she’s just a woman.” I’ve even had people say, “Well it doesn’t matter if she wins this race, she’s a woman. It won’t look that bad.”—People in my party, back in Indiana—“If she loses, nobody expects her to win anyway. And she’s a woman, it won’t look like we didn’t do a good job.” It just, it got old. {laughter}

**JOHNSON:** I can imagine.

**LONG THOMPSON:** “She’s just a girl.”

**JOHNSON:** Was that a role that you embraced, being a representative for women across the country?

**LONG THOMPSON:** I think so. I don’t know how much I thought about that. I just thought it was very important that I not make many mistakes and do the very best job that I could because if I didn’t, other women would pay the price.

**WASNIEWSKI:**

Are there any women staff, either from your office or from the House, from your career, that stand out in your memory?

**LONG THOMPSON:**

Yes, actually, and we're friends to this day. Her name is Inga Smulkstys. She is a graduate of the University of Chicago and then the School of Public and Environmental Affairs. She has a master's degree from there. I am actually teaching for the School of Public and Environmental Affairs now, teaching an ethics class. She is an incredibly pragmatic person who can cut to the chase. She also is probably about 100 percent honest, if not 100 percent, 99.9. I think you need that.

I think to be successful in life, you need to be able to sit in a room and have people tell you what you're doing wrong, and Inga likes to do that, and she does it very well. But she also tells you when you're doing things right. Having somebody whose judgment you trust, who tells you what you need to do differently, is incredibly valuable for being successful. She's very kind in the way that she does it. She also has—while doing this amazing career—she and her husband have raised two amazing children, and they are both doing well.

I think in some ways, when you're in public office, it's not all that different from being someone's child, where you have these advisors who tell you what you should and shouldn't do, and you don't always follow their advice, but you should always listen to.

Someone who is not a female, who was very helpful, actually two people: a gentleman named Chris Sautter, and we are still friends to

this day, he's very good at framing issues; and David Axelrod was my media consultant. The two of them were my media consultants. And as a college professor, I could spend hours on why I've taken a particular position on an issue. And those two would not allow me to do that. They would say, "You have to do this in 30 seconds. Cut to the chase, Jill!" {laughter}

**WASNIEWSKI:** Inga was the staff that you mentioned?

**LONG THOMPSON:** Inga.

**WASNIEWSKI:** Was she on your personal staff or the committee staff?

**LONG THOMPSON:** She was on personal staff and she actually ran my campaign in '89.

**WASNIEWSKI:** Generally, you served at a time when women were serving in more staff positions and more staff positions with responsibility and authority. What do you think the general impact of that trend was on the institution?

**LONG THOMPSON:** I think that's very important because as you know, Members of Congress take positions. We read the material, but we're like the face of the office. And we're more than the face of the office, but we can't get anything done unless we have staff who are doing the behind-the-scenes work and having women engaged in negotiating with other staff on various committees, talking about how you find some common ground between two differing positions. As a Member, you can't do that on every issue. You just have to make sure your staff

knows where you stand and what the limits are, what the boundaries are. But also, women advising Members of Congress is very, very important, because again, just as women Members of Congress bring a different perspective than the male Members of Congress, the same thing is true of staff.

**JOHNSON:**

Earlier we had asked you, when you came to Congress, if you had any political inspirations or mentors. What about the reverse? Do you think that you served as a mentor for any other Members or for staff?

**LONG THOMPSON:**

Do you know, I don't know that I have, and I certainly don't want to take credit for something that I didn't do. But I have worked, throughout my life, to try to encourage people to be engaged. I'm still doing that today as a college professor. I think we need everybody at the table, and we need people to be informed, and I always try to help people to realize that they may have more potential than they are now thinking. And if I can help them realize that, that's a good thing for the country and the world. But I can't take credit for it. I think parents get the credit.

**WASNIEWSKI:**

We just have a few post-Congress questions. For this project, we've been asking all the interviewees about their first and last campaigns, and in '94, you ran in a year that was very—the headwinds were against the Democrats, the “Republican Revolution” year. Can you describe that '94 campaign and other than the obvious, how it differed from the earlier ones?

**LONG THOMPSON:** It was just frustrating. It was so frustrating because my favorabilities, when we would poll my favorabilities would be very high, but the race was always close, and I ultimately lost. And so it wasn't whether people were approving of what I was doing; it was what they wanted the Congress to look like, and so it was just a very frustrating experience.

I love public service and would like to have served longer in Congress. That didn't work out for me, but I recognize that we don't control everything in our lives. I always tried to remind myself that I had an opportunity, I've had several opportunities, to serve in high office, and most people don't get to do that, and be thankful for the opportunities that I've had, to make the differences that I've been able to make. But it is very frustrating when you have a strong headwind.

**JOHNSON:** You ran again for the House in 2002.

**LONG THOMPSON:** Yes.

**JOHNSON:** What are your memories of that campaign?

**LONG THOMPSON:** That was another one where it looked like, at the beginning of the campaign, that it was going to be—I wouldn't have the wind at my back necessarily, but the air would be somewhat still, and as it turns out, that ended up being not a good year for Democrats either. But you know what? I made lots of friends and got to know lots of people, and they're still my friends today. And I think I did the best

job that a Democrat could have done, running in that district. So I don't think I let anybody down.

I grew up on a dairy farm, and milking cows is a good thing, but it's sort of the same thing day after day. I've just had so many wonderful experiences, and if I were milking cows every day, I would be happy doing that, if I decided that's what I was going to do. But I've been able to do all these things that I never imagined. So I try not to look back and say I wish it had gone differently and instead, look at what were the positives of every experience. I'm really, really blessed.

**JOHNSON:**

You were involved in campaigns—we asked you about the 1986 campaign for the Senate, and then all the way to 2002—what changes did you see during that time period, in campaigning?

**LONG THOMPSON:**

Well, the campaigns have less control today. Third party organizations are much more involved, and I don't think that's a good thing for the process, and I don't think it's a good thing for democracy.

But something else that has changed that has me very concerned is that the world has become much more complex. As we've become globalized and as we have all of this technology that allows us to know what's going on around the world, but we also have technology that allows people to very specifically and very strategically communicate false information through social media. As the world becomes more complex, to be a good voter you have to be even more informed and understand things like macroeconomics and

international relationships and foreign policy. We have a real task ahead of us, to make sure that voters are informed enough to cast good votes. That's a concern that I have today.

**WASNIEWSKI:** You talked about the diversity of experiences that you had. One of them was that you served as the undersecretary of Agriculture for six years. Can you describe that experience?

**LONG THOMPSON:** Yes. That was a great experience because I was working with rural communities all across the country. I also had charge of the rural component of the Empowerment Zone Enterprise Community Initiative of President Bill Clinton. And you could see jobs being created and people's lives being changed from the work that we did. Every week there was a story, and usually many stories, about things happening in rural communities across the country. That was a wonderful experience.

**WASNIEWSKI:** The issues were the same but the medium for you was different; legislative versus executive. How was that transition?

**LONG THOMPSON:** Yes. Do you know, something that was nice was I went from having about 12 to 15 meetings a day, to having more like maybe six or eight, which allowed me to focus more on the substance of the work, which I really enjoyed. I liked that a lot. When you're a Member of Congress, you need to go from one meeting to the next, and you're moving pretty fast, and sometimes it's fun to just spend a little more time focusing on one thing.

**JOHNSON:** Did you ever go into one of those meetings and forget why you were there, what the meeting was about?

**LONG THOMPSON:** {laughter} I didn't, but I ran into somebody in the elevator once, from another congressional district, and he had a really good sense of humor and he said, "I'm going to have to do a better job preparing for my meetings. I just gave my beer drinking speech to . . ." And he was kidding. "And I gave this speech to my beer drinkers." {laughter} Because brewers would come in, and it's not that they were beer drinkers, that I remember him saying. But no, I always knew what I was—I had good staff. Inga ran a tight ship.

**JOHNSON:** A lot of the people have talked about the importance of having a really effective staff because of the schedule that you had.

**LONG THOMPSON:** Yes. I remember one time, in a 10-day period, I had—this is right before an election—and so between official duties and campaign duties, I had 130 meetings and speeches in 10 days, I think.

**WASNIEWSKI:** That makes me tired even thinking about that.

**JOHNSON:** That sounds terrible.

**LONG THOMPSON:** It might have been 136, actually.

**JOHNSON:** You later ran for governor of Indiana, in 2008. Why did you decide to seek this office?

**LONG THOMPSON:** Economic development. Indiana is facing a number of issues with manufacturing becoming more mechanized, more roboticized, and I really wanted to work on economic development across the state. The Indianapolis area is doing well, and there are certain areas of the state that are doing quite well, but the smaller cities . . . I felt that we could develop tax policy and economic development policy that could be more effective than what we've had.

**JOHNSON:** Historically, women have had limited success.

**LONG THOMPSON:** Yes, for executive branch or executive office.

**JOHNSON:** Exactly. Why do you think that's the case?

**LONG THOMPSON:** You know, there's also some research on women running for executive office, and I think we saw some of this in 2016, in the presidential, that what people want in a leader makes them not like a woman if she has those characteristics. So that strength of conviction that is required to be a good CEO of a corporation or chief executive of this country or President of the United States, in order for people to vote for a woman, they have to like her, and the research shows that. It's not that hard to vote for a man that they don't like, and the research shows that. It's hard for a lot of people to like a woman who has the characteristics that they want to see in a leader, and I think that's why we need to keep pushing for more women in leadership roles, so that these stereotypes . . .

Sometimes you don't even realize why you don't like somebody. I actually have a minor in social psychology, in addition to my business degrees, and people don't realize why they don't like somebody, but they come up with a reason for it. Women can be saddled with challenges that men just aren't because they just don't quite like the woman. So then anything that you say against the woman: "Well that's the reason I don't like her." But really the reason they don't like her is that she's powerful and they just don't like women who are too powerful. But they don't realize it.

**WASNIEWSKI:**

A lot of Members, when they leave Congress, they go to fish or lobby. You though, stayed very active either in public service or trying to be. We're wondering what was your motivation for that, for staying that politically active?

**LONG THOMPSON:**

I like public policy. My last position, before going back into teaching, was as the board chair and CEO of the Farm Credit Administration. I think that these positions are very important. I think the work that needs to be accomplished is critical to the future of the country. I never really was interested in lobbying, and I like to work. My dad is going to be 92 this year, and he still works on the farm. It's just what we do. {laughter}

**JOHNSON:**

We just have a couple of retrospective questions to wrap up with. There are now 109 women in Congress—there's 88 in the House and 21 in the Senate. How many women do you think there will be for the 150th anniversary of Jeannette Rankin's election to Congress and service in Congress, 50 years from now?

**LONG THOMPSON:** I'm an optimist. I'm going to say it's going to be at least close to 50 percent—maybe a little over, maybe a little under.

**JOHNSON:** And how do you think we get to that point?

**LONG THOMPSON:** I think that it's going to require a multifaceted effort. It's going to require that we work to promote more women in corporate, that we work to promote more women in not-for-profit work, that we work to make sure that women who are qualified make partner in the big law firms and in other firms, and that we just, we need to make sure that young women—and I do think sports makes a huge difference. I think Title IX was so important because you get women playing varsity sports, and they get comfortable with the notion of competing. But it's going to have to be multifaceted. It's going to have to be—we have to do a lot of work in the private sector to make it happen in the public sector.

**WASNIEWSKI:** You must get asked quite often, most of our interviewees have, for advice from young people, young women, young men running for office. What advice do you offer?

**LONG THOMPSON:** I think the best advice a person can receive is act with integrity. You have to have integrity about who you are, what you believe. Everything that you say should be genuine, even in how you deliver your message. Sometimes people, when they're first getting started, think that the best way to make a speech is to shout. Actually, shouting works for some people if it's natural for them to shout. But if it's not natural for you to shout, don't shout. And stand there and

talk in a way that's comfortable for you, and just be very true to yourself. Integrity will take you very, very far. I always like to say integrity has the same root as integer, it's a whole number. And what you do has a wholeness about it, and be yourself, and work really hard.

**JOHNSON:** Do you think that your service has inspired or may inspire women to run for public office?

**LONG THOMPSON:** I do have young women come to talk to me about running for office, and now that I'm teaching again, I have students who do that. I've had people tell me that my serving in office inspired them to run for office, but I think, I hope, that I have been inspirational. But I think that probably, there are a lot of other people who have inspired—as many people inspired me, both men and women were inspirational for me. I think there are probably lots of people. I'm just trying to do my small part to make it a better world.

**WASNIEWSKI:** Was there anything about your House service that was unexpected or that surprised you in retrospect?

**LONG THOMPSON:** You know, I think I didn't realize the power of that office until I was elected to it. I wasn't seeking it for the purpose of power. I was seeking it as a way to be more effective with what I believed, but it is a pretty powerful office.

**JOHNSON:** The last question that I have is what do you think your lasting legacy will be in terms of your House service?

**LONG THOMPSON:** Well, I only served for three terms, so I don't know what my legacy will be. But I hope that I am part of a building block that results in a more diverse membership in the U.S. House of Representatives and maybe in the U.S. Senate. I really hope that someday we all know each other well enough that we don't have the biases that we have. I know that I have biases based on my own personal experiences, and I also know that the more I get to know people from different backgrounds, the more those biases just kind of fade away. We need to quit thinking in terms of us and them and just start thinking in terms of us.

**JOHNSON:** Great.

**WASNIEWSKI:** Thank you so much.

**LONG THOMPSON:** Oh, thank you.

**JOHNSON:** Yes, thank you.

**LONG THOMPSON:** Thank you. This was fun.

## NOTES

<sup>1</sup> Representative Jill Lynette Long Thompson serves as a visiting clinical associate professor in the School of Public and Environmental Affairs and the Kelley School of Business at Indiana University Bloomington.