The Honorable John Dingell, Jr.

Page, U.S. House of Representatives (1938-1943)
U.S. Representative of Michigan (1955-2015)

Oral History Interview
Final Edited Transcript

February 3, 2012

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

"Well, I think the Congress is one of the greatest educational institutions in the world. And a bunch of kids had the chance to participate in that. If they study history, and read—and of course, I was always a tremendous reader—they could learn. And they could add to the learning that they got by reading, by watching, by seeing and listening to debates and reading the papers. So, it made a remarkably educated bunch of Americans. And not only did it do that, but it gave them an understanding and an appreciation of the ideals and why and how the country was created. . . . And it had a life and a meaning to it that you don't see if you're just taking this in a course. And the teachers of government, they do their best to put it into understandable ways, and to describe it as it should be described, about what is going on when this happens. How does a bill move from the hopper, to the committee, to the floor, to the President's desk? But there you'd actually see it work, and you'd get a feeling of what is happening here, something that you don't get out of looking at a book."

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Abstract

This interview with Representative Dingell, recorded on February 3, 2012, focuses on his recollections as a House Page. In addition to assessing the value of Page program to the institution, he recalls his appointment as a Page, various duties on the House Floor, and education at the Capitol Page School. Dingell shares his memories of witnessing President Franklin Roosevelt's request for a declaration of war against Japan on December 8, 1941, Montana Congresswoman Jeannette Rankin's vote against war, and his own role in allowing a radio reporter to broadcast from the House Gallery (in contravention of House rules) part of the debate after Roosevelt's address. Dingell also recalls prominent Members of the period including: Sam Rayburn of Texas, John McCormack and George Holden Tinkham of Massachusetts, and Louis Rabaut of Michigan. Also included are his reflections on the culture of the House in the World War II era, based on his unique perspective as the child of a Member of Congress and as part of the community of congressional families that lived in Washington, D.C.

Biography

John David Dingell, Jr., was born on July 8, 1926, in Colorado Springs, Colorado, to John and Grace Bigler Dingell. John, Sr., a newspaperman, also engaged in natural-gas pipeline construction, beef and pork wholesaling, and organizing the Colorado Springs Labor College. In 1932, Dingell, Sr., a stalwart supporter of President Franklin Roosevelt's New Deal policies, won election to the U.S. House of Representatives in a district including the city of Detroit.

John, Jr., served as a House Page and attended the Capitol Page School from 1938 to 1943. In 1944, he enlisted in the U.S. Army, where he served until receiving an honorable discharge in 1946 after World War II. In 1949, he earned a B.S. degree from Georgetown University in Washington, D.C.; three years later, he received his J.D. from Georgetown. Dingell briefly worked as a research assistant to U.S. Circuit Court Judge Theodore Levin (uncle of future Michigan Senator Carl Levin and Representative Sander Levin). In 1954, he became the assistant prosecuting attorney of Wayne County, Michigan.

When John Dingell, Sr., passed away in 1955, John, Jr., won the special election to succeed his father in the House on December 13, 1955. Though decennial reapportionment reshaped the borders of his district over time, Dingell was re-elected to office for an historic 29 additional terms. During his House career, Dingell rose to the powerful chairmanship of the Energy and Commerce Committee (97th–103rd Congresses and 110th Congress; 1981–1995 and 2007–2009). As such, he played a highly influential role in legislation ranging from the automobile industry and energy policy, to the environment and health care. When Dingell retired at the end of the 113th Congress (2013–2015), he held the record as the longest serving Member in congressional history—with a total of 21,572 days in office—approximately 58.9 years (surpassing Jamie Whitten of Mississippi's mark for House service in February 2009 and Robert Byrd of West Virginia's record for total combined service in the House and Senate in June 2013).

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

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Interviewer Biography

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.

— THE HONORABLE JOHN DINGELL, JR., OF MICHIGAN —

INTERVIEW

WASNIEWSKI: I'm Matt Wasniewski with the House History Office, and today's date is February 3, 2012. And we have Mr. John [David] Dingell, [Jr.], Representative John Dingell from Michigan, who's here to talk about his memories of his time as a House Page in the late 1930s and into the 1940s. Thank you for being here.

DINGELL: Thank you.

WASNIEWSKI: I want to start off with a question about how you were inspired to become a Page. You, of course, had a connection to the House before you became a Page.[1]

DINGELL: Well, Pages were a wonderful opportunity, a wonderful institution. A great place for a young man to learn about his government and the way it worked. And I think that, plus the things I read about when I was in school, or the things that I heard, I just said, "This would be a wonderful experience, a chance to grow, a chance to learn about my country, a chance to learn about what the Congress did, what were our rights and privileges as an American." It turned out to be all that I hoped for and a great deal more.

WASNIEWSKI: Your father [John David Dingell] was elected to Congress in 1932. Did you spend a lot of time in the Capitol prior to becoming a Page? Do you have memories of that? Being in the galleries, or being in his office?

DINGELL: Well, I used to help in the office. I handled—for Dad—I'd address envelopes and do all kinds of things like that. Run errands around the Hill and sort of try and help him along because he had a tough job, and a very small staff.

WASNIEWSKI: How were you appointed as a Page? Did your father appoint you?

DINGELL: Yes.

WASNIEWSKI: Do you recall your first day as a Page? Your first week?

DING-ELL: Well, yes, the first day was a period where, first of all, you signed in, you got taken around to sort of learn what you were supposed to do, to learn the grounds of the Capitol, and the responsibilities you had. And it was—the Capitol facility—was rather smaller then. They had two office buildings, as opposed to three. [2] And the Library of Congress had one big building [Thomas Jefferson Building], and not more. It was a very interesting experience in time. There were kids from all over the country who were working there.

I was assigned, for reasons that I can't explain to you, to the Republican side. And the chief Page over there was a wonderful gentleman by the name of John McCabe, from Indiana. He was a very small man. He was probably about four-foot-five, or something like that. And he was almost as big around as he was high. But everybody loved him. They called him "Johnny." But we all called him—the Pages all called him "chief." He had a farm out in Virginia, where he used to let us come out. And he'd let us work for half a day on the farm, and by that we earned the right to hunt squirrels, and

crows, and turkeys. And it was a wonderful, wonderful experience, that in addition to all else.

You ran errands, and carried messages, and got bills for Members. There was a great sense of humor up on the Hill. They would send us off for bill stretchers, or check stretchers. And nobody realized, at least among the new Pages, that that was a game that was very much like going snipe hunting. And they would—with which, you'd go one place, and they'd say, "Well, we don't have them today, but if you'll go on down there and . . ." So some days, you'd spend about a half a day running around before you finally realized, "I've been had."

But we had different responsibilities. I—because of the fact that I've had a great interest in it, and served for a fairly long time—had responsibilities of doing more than just running errands or answering bells when Members pushed the button to call for a Page to go do an errand for them. I would have responsibilities like showing people around the Capitol and telling them the history, or having responsibilities over somebody who was doing something inside the House like a broadcaster or something. It was my job to see to it that he complied with the rules of the House and obeyed the standards of decorum and things of that kind. But it was a wonderful experience.

You got your education. We'd report to Page School in the morning at seven. And we'd work until 9:00 [a.m.] and then we'd go up to the floor. Then we'd come back for an hour after the Congress adjourned and finish off our classes and homework and school there. And then, of course, you'd run errands. We used to make—this was before we had trolleys over here—we'd

sometimes make 14 or 15 what we used to call "H.O.B.s"—trips to the House office buildings to deliver bills or carry messages or copies of the [*Congressional*] *Record* or whatever it was. We'd file copies of the *Record* under the seats of the Members so that they could read the *Record*s when they were on the floor, and see what had happened the day before if they were reminded. We also had the duty of doing what we called "stripping the *Record*"—taking them out and taking them down to be stored in a place that was called "the hole."[3]

We worked at night sessions, of which they had a fair number in those days. And we would serve as tour guides for the Members who, if they had a guest, they wanted to see what was going on. There were Pages in the House, or Pages in the Senate, and there were a few Pages in the Supreme Court and there was great rivalries amongst them. We had baseball teams, and it was *de rigueur* that you, if you were a House Page, you played baseball or football with the Senate, you won, or you had trouble with your colleagues. I served with a great bunch of them. We hunted together, and fished with chief McCabe out at his place, which is where Dulles Airport is now. We also had the privilege of learning the history and seeing what all went into the building of the Capitol, and the history of the buildings.

We saw some rather great things. The President [Franklin D. Roosevelt] declared war the day after the Japanese bombed Pearl Harbor [December 8, 1941]. We saw Winston Churchill on the 26th of December, 1941, when he came to address the Congress. We saw the President give State of the Union messages, and, not infrequently, to address the Capitol or the House on other matters. It was a very enriching experience. Something that the kids today do, and friendships were created which lasted for years.

I've pretty well lost touch with the guys I served with as a Page, because a lot of them were killed in the war. So they were not here when the war was over to go back to school, and college, and things of that kind, the way those of us who came back from service after the war did. Some of them came back and ran for Congress. I saw two, or three, or four of them who had done that, and you'd see others who were serving in other capacities, practicing law, or in business, or doing something like that. Very few of the Pages went bad. They were remarkably good, a well-behaved bunch of kids, and they were all proud. A lot of them went into the military without being drafted. I waited and got drafted two months after I turned 18. But as I said, a lot of my colleagues got killed in the war. And that was a rather sad experience, because there were some pretty good friends of mine there.

WASNIEWSKI: I'm going to come to the war in just a few minutes, but I want to back up just a second, and ask you, were you a bench Page to begin with, or a documentarian Page?

DINGELL: I did everything. I was a documentarian [Page] for a while. I handled the doors. They had Pages on the doors. I had the responsibility of, as I say, taking people on tours of the Capitol, if a Member had that. I had the responsibility of running errands from the bench when I started. That was usually where you started. Sometimes I worked in the cloakroom, which was where you handled the telephones. That was a pretty responsible undertaking. I did just about everything that the Pages did. It was a wonderful opportunity to learn what happens in the Congress, and about the Members, and watch the Members, and see how the smart ones conducted themselves. I remember a lot of the Pages would stand at the railing to watch

to see what was going on in the debates, and try to understand what all happened.

WASNIEWSKI: Was there anyone you watched in particular? Any Members who you particularly admired for their debating skills?

DINGELL: Well, I always, always kept an eye on my dad, who was one of my great heroes. The only President I served with was President [Franklin D.] Roosevelt. He died while I was in the military, early in April of 1945. And then I started to serve with [Harry S.] Truman—although he was another of my great heroes. People like [Samuel Taliaferro] Rayburn, or John [William] McCormack, may God rest his soul, were great heroes of mine. And there was an old fellow by the name of George Holden Tinkham, of the Tinkham Watch Company. He had an office full of African trophies. All the Pages loved to go over to his office, so that they could look and see these stuffed trophies that he had. There was a lot—and he was a great hero. Congress would adjourn, and all of the sudden he was gone. He was over in Africa hunting and he would come back as soon as they were getting ready to convene.

Before I came here, it was the time that they ended what they called "lame duck sessions," when the Members would come in after the elections, and some of them were not any longer Members, although they held office until the point where their successors were sworn in. They finally stopped that, because that was quite an abuse. There were all manner of responsibilities that were conducted by Members who were no longer Members, engaged in, quite honestly, some rather curious processes. And, so, we would come in—at first, you would come in about the 20th of March—then you'd adjourn—

the Congress would adjourn the first of June, because there was no air conditioning. Then the Congress got to the point where they were taking longer, and longer, and longer, because we had a combination of the Depression and deficit, and the country was getting ready for war. And, of course, Roosevelt had all the New Deal legislation that he had to move through, to try and get the country over the terrible, terrible Depression, which is worse than anything I've ever seen around this town, until we saw the 2008 recession. That was pretty close to being as bad as the '29 Depression. Everybody would get out then and go home. And then, if there was more business to be done, either the President or the Speaker would call a special session, which took place—started the first of October, and usually go until sometime around the first of December, or maybe a little later.

WASNIEWSKI: You had mentioned some of the traditions that Pages had—sporting events, annual dinners, adjournment dinners. We've talked to a couple of Pages from the '40s and '50s, who mentioned to us that quite often there would be impromptu singing performances, or music in the well when the House was either in recess late at night, or at the end of a session, waiting for the Senate to come back.

DINGELL: It was usually waiting for the Senate. And the House continuously waited for the Senate. The Senate was never, never ready to go. And so, there was a wonderful old gentleman by the name of Louie [Louis Charles] Rabaut from Michigan. He was a Belgian, a great friend of my dad's. He was elected two years after Dad. And he would go down into the well, and every delegation would come down and sing. He loved singing. His one son and about eight daughters, with the exception of one daughter, all became priests or nuns in the Catholic Church. And we would, every once in a while, go over to dinner

over to the Rabauts, and my mother would always say, "Now, Jack, no singing at the table!" And so the first thing that happened is, Louie Rabaut would get up and say, "Well, we're all going to have a song." So he'd start singing. Louie was a very close friend. When I was elected to Congress, he was part of a very close-knit delegation. He was the Dean of the delegation.[4]

We had a wonderful colleague of ours by the name of Tad [Thaddeus Michael] Machrowicz, who represented the first district [of Michigan]. Tad had a big dinner in his honor, over there in Hamtramck, which was the center of his district. He was Polish. Hamtramck was about a 95 percent Polish community, and about a 98 percent Democratic community. So they had this big celebration of him being appointed the first Polish federal judge in the area. And Louie got up to speak, and he looked awful. He was, sort of had kind of a chicken-fat yellow look to his face. He got up to speak, and he was having trouble speaking, so I ran over and said, "Louie, sit down, you're sick." And at that point, he just collapsed. So we got him down on the floor. And he died there in my arms.

But the delegations were very close in those days, much more so than we are now. And the Congress was much closer to one another. The Page bench was rather smaller, it had a lot . . . And when they terminated the Pages—they had an awful lot of Pages—we had much smaller benches.[5] They were very proud that they were—you could—Page School had kids from, oh, the seventh or eighth grade up through graduating from high school. And we put out a yearbook, and somewhere or other I've still got my yearbooks from those days.

WASNIEWSKI: What was the interaction like between Republican Pages and Democratic Pages? Was there competition there? Friendly competition?

DINGELL: Well, the Republicans didn't let us have many Democratic Pages when they ran the House. And, of course, we did the same thing. I don't think we really understood—at least the little ones—really understood the difference between the two parties. But by the time that we had been there a couple of years, they pretty well understood the issues. We saw things like Social Security, there was a great battle over anti-lynching legislation, which tends to show how far we've come. We finally had to get rid of that, but much later than this, which occurred in about 1936 or 1937. Pages generally got along, and became very good friends. And they pretty much ran their own affairs. The chief Page was the boss. We had one on the Democratic side, and one on the Republican side. And we had also overseers who were Pages, and assistant overseers. I was an assistant overseer for a while, but I began to move off to work in the cloakroom or to work on a door, or to handle special chores. That was one of the rewards of being a more senior Page, and having a reputation for being a hard worker.

WASNIEWSKI: I want to back up, just to the Page School for a little while. This is the Capitol Page School, at this point, that you were a student in. Do you remember anything about the curriculum?

DINGELL: Yes.

WASNIEWSKI: Any of your teachers?

DINGELL: Standard, regular curriculum. Teachers were pretty good. It was a qualified school in the District of Columbia. And their credits were accepted when you went home. The fellow that ran it was a Mr. Ernest L. Kendall, and he was a very quiet gentleman, but ran a good school. He was from Iowa or Nebraska, as I remember it, and dressed in a black or a dark blue suit all the time.[6] And essentially became a very substantial influence in the lives of the different Pages. Then the teachers that he got were oft times folks who were teachers from the District of Columbia school system, or something like that. Some of them were employees on the Hill who did it. They gave a pretty good education. I learned, and we used to work—they worked us pretty hard.

WASNIEWSKI: One of the things I've learned, reading about the Page program over time, is there were a number of instances where Members of Congress would come along and say, "Well, we need to reform the Page School; we need to have a residence." Do you remember any discussions like that, in the '40s, during your service?

DINGELL: No, I don't remember any attempts to reform the Page system. They had a big reform that they put on, must be about 20 years ago. There was a rather nasty incident [in 1983] involving two Members and some of the Pages that I don't like to discuss or remember. And they set up dormitories for the Pages, and they began to supervise them much more carefully.

When I was a Page, kids lived around in boarding houses and things of that kind. There were a lot of boarding houses in this town, because, frankly, Washington was full of a lot of single people, and that was the way you lived. With the Depression going on, people didn't have a lot of money to spend on fancy living.

And so, the reforms, I think, were generally helpful. The kids, I think, responded. We, I think, were generally content with what was done, which is one of the reasons that I was so thoroughly outraged that they did away with the Page program. Because that was a program that gave a lot of kids a chance to understand their government and their country. It's a great shame we lost that, because those youngsters would go home and talk to their classmates in school, in Iowa, or Detroit, or San Francisco, or down in Texas, or Oklahoma, or someplace like that. And it was good, because kids began to see and understand, and then they had this learning experience that they could go home and talk to their classmates.

I always told my kids not to talk about their experience as Pages until they were done. And then I said you can do anything. I had a pretty hard rule. My rule was—I'd tell the kids this. We'd sit down, and I'd say, "Now understand, you're getting a privilege that very, very few young Americans are going to have. And I give a message to the chief Page that I'm going to tell you about. And that message is that, if you get in trouble and I hear about it from him, he's going to be all right, and you're going to be in trouble. But if I hear about it from somebody else, and not from him, he's going to be in trouble and you're going to be in big trouble, too." So I never had any trouble with my kids. And we never asked anything of the kids we made Pages. I said, "You do a good job and as far as I'm concerned you will earn your keep."

And, by and large, my kids became pretty good successes. They were successful lawyers, successful businessmen. Then when the girl Pages came along [in 1973], they became lawyers, and businesswomen, and mothers, and

housewives, and they were generally . . . Teachers, a lot of them became teachers. And they were a great credit to themselves, and, quite honestly, to the Page program. It was interesting to me to note that they would form friendships that would last for years. They didn't just end when they went home. And I still see some that were Pages 20, 30, 40 years ago. And they'll say, "Oh, Mr. Dingell, what about 'so-and-so?' Do you see him?" And some of our kids we've been able to keep track of.

WASNIEWSKI: You mentioned girl Pages, and I'm glad you did. Because your service overlapped with one of the firsts for the program, which was, in January of 1939, Gene Cox, who was the daughter of a Member from Georgia [Edward Eugene Cox], served as Page for a day. And she became the first girl to serve in that capacity. Do you have any memories about that day?

DINGELL: I was here. I don't remember the event. I remember Gene Cox. He was rather a turbulent fellow.

WASNIEWSKI: What were your recollections—and this is somewhat related—you touched on living in D.C. But at the time that you were here as a Page, I assume you lived at home with your folks. There were a number of congressional families living here in D.C. What kind of environment was that? And how has that changed over time?

DINGELL: Well, that was one of the unfortunate changes that has taken place. When my dad came here, he had one room, on the fifth floor of the Cannon Building. It was called the Old House Office Building. He had one secretary, one typewriter, and one electric fan. There was no air conditioning. And they gave him one round-trip ticket back and forth between here and home. And

he would load the family in the car, and we'd drive down here. When the House would adjourn, he'd load the whole family in the car and we'd drive back home. And so the wives got to know each other, the kids got to know each other, the kids got to play together, and the kids sometimes would go to school with each other, they'd date each other, they'd get married across the aisle.

We don't have that anymore because Members are too busy. Now you've got a plane ticket back home, and so they're kind of looked down upon if they come down here and spend too much time here. But coming down here and spending time and getting to know each other made the Members work together and get to know each other. And so the trust that was necessary to have a functioning organization came to be. We had things like the House Gym, where the Members would go to work out. And great friendships were made, a few enmities, but great friendships. And so the Congress worked much better. You had certain mores that were very important.

I served in three capacities where that was very important. The first was, when I got commissioned to be a Second Lieutenant in the Army during World War II. And we were instructed that you are now an officer and a gentleman. Your word, your integrity, your behavior has to be impeccable. Then I got to be a lawyer, and the rules for lawyers at that time—and I don't see this being the case anymore today, at least not to the degree that it was then—were that your word was good, your integrity was of extraordinary importance to you. So when I got out on my own and joined a firm, we had a little three-man firm, the senior guy in the firm said, "Now, Dingell, integrity is everything in this. And you are expected to know that your word is good, and that you're going to behave with the highest standards of good

conduct in all events." And then, of course, when I became a Member of Congress, the same thing: your word is good.

I remember when I was practicing law, you'd give your word and that was honored at whatever cost. Same thing when I was a Second Lieutenant in the Infantry. I don't see those things having the importance that they used to in the old days. That's even true, unfortunately, with regard to the House and the Senate. The world has changed there, and I think not for the better. Now, there still are fine men, and still integrity is respected. But a lot of people who come down here don't understand this when they walk through the door.

WASNIEWSKI: We're jumping around a little bit, but I want to go back to the Pages. There weren't so many when you served. And they were all, at that point, boys. Can you describe a typical Page during that time period?

DINGELL: Typical American boy. Usually around 12 to 16, 17, 18, somewhere in there. Modest means. Generally very interested in government, public service, the Congress. A lot of them would go home and would involve themselves in politics. A fair number of us used to go over and work in the Congressman's office, just to help and settle up, show our appreciation for what they had done for us with the appointment. And they were, generally, athletic. They were very interested in flying and aircraft and things of that kind. A whole bunch of them enlisted early on, when the war came. A lot of them got killed.

WASNIEWSKI: Just to follow up on that—they resigned their Page positions to enlist?

DINGELL: No, most of them were too young to go immediately into the service. But they got in just as soon as they could. I don't remember anybody resigning to go into the service. But everyone who could go in wound up going in. I don't remember any of the youngsters that I served with who didn't go in just as quick as they could. I did. I went down to see about enlisting, and they said, "Well, Dingell, we aren't going to let you enlist. We're going to tell you when we want you to come, and you'll come." So I did. And they asked me, they said, "Now, what do you want?" And I said, "Well, I want to be in the Army, and I want to be in the Infantry." And they said, "Well, that's exactly what you're going to get," because that was what they needed. They were scraping the bottom of the barrel at that particular time. But I was always very happy I went in the Army, and went in the Infantry.

WASNIEWSKI: What kind of interaction did you have with your father and his office while you were a Page?

DINGELL: Dad was always very busy. He worked very hard at his job and he worked very hard at his politics. I had a chance to learn about how the job impacts the Member, but also how it impacts the family. It does impact the family, very hard. And a lot of sacrifices are made by the wives and the kids. So I learned about that, and I was in the pretty much the same situation. I didn't have a lot of time for my kids. But I remember what Dad did. Dad was real tubercular, and his health was never robust. But he would always see to it that my brother and I had the means of hunting, and fishing, and enjoying the out-of-doors. That was one of his great gifts to us. That was a tremendous gift. Made a conservationist out of me. So I tried to learn from that with regard to my own kids.

I remember one time I was talking to Christopher, my number-two son. And I said, "Well, boy, I've been kind of sorry I've not been able to have more time to do things with you." He said, "Well, Dad, you haven't had a lot of time to give us, but the time that you gave us was quality time." I'd take him hunting, and fishing, and camping, I'd take them mountain climbing, I'd take them traveling around the country. I'd see to it that they learned judo, or other defensive mechanisms. I'd take them home in the summer and we'd see to it that they had courses which were for fun, and courses which were for serious business. Things like advanced math, or creative writing, and things of that kind, or judo, because that was part of the rounding that they could get. And fortunately, at those times, we lived in Dearborn [Michigan], which had a great school system. So we could give the kids the advantages that would come with that kind of a school system.

WASNIEWSKI: We may have touched on this before, but I'll ask it again—people who you came to know as a Page. Are there Members or staff who may have served as a role model for you later on in life?

DINGELL: A lot of them, a lot of them—my beloved friend John McCormack, Cecil [Rhodes] King, chief Page John McCabe. A lot of other Members who were great heroes of mine: Tad [Thaddeus Michael] Machrowicz, who was one of my dear friends, now dead, God rest him. My dad's two secretaries. One of them was named Fanny L. Sheldon; she was a magnificent woman—English teacher. I always called her Miss Sheldon then. Then the woman who became my first chief of staff when I got elected to Congress, her name was Jeannette Cantwell. Raised six or seven kids, and every one of them turned out to be just great. She was one of the best chiefs of staff or AAs [administrative assistants] that I ever had. She was so good.

WASNIEWSKI: You mentioned Mr. McCormack. When did you first meet him, and do you have any particular memories of him from your Page service?

DINGELL: Yes, yes. John McCormack had the heart of an Irish poet. He was tall. He was very grey. He didn't have much color to him. A fabulous Speaker. And the things he did as a Member were all—he was a "southie" [South Boston]. He was the predecessor of Tip [Thomas Philip] O'Neill, [Jr.]. He understood that he was down here to help people, and he did. And he taught me about that. He and my dad were great believers in a thing called social justice. You'll hear that no-good Rush Limbaugh denouncing it from time to time. But what it means is that we work for a just and a humane and a decent society, where everybody has a chance to amount to something. And where we don't give handouts, but we give hands-up, so that people can grow. And to abate the suffering and misfortune, which we have a great deal of in this world. So he was one of my great heroes.

Then Rayburn, who was a giant, but who was rather aloof. If you look at the statue of Rayburn you'll find he was just a little guy. There's one in the front of the building here—and he's up on a pedestal. And you think, "God, he's a shrimp." But I always saw Rayburn as about 11 feet high. He had an enormous presence. And nobody ever called him anything other than "Mr. Speaker." Some of the more senior Members would call him "Mr. Sam." But he was a very good-hearted man. He was a Texas populist. And he understood how tough it was to live, and to make it. Texas was a harsh place in the days when he and [Lyndon Baines] Johnson were coming up. Those were probably my two great heroes. And of course, President Roosevelt, he

was a giant. And Harry Truman, and, of course, Churchill was one of my great heroes. They and my dad.

WASNIEWSKI: I could ask you names all day long. I want to ask you about two in particular. Again, this would have been from your Page service. Joe Sinnott, the Doorkeeper.[7] Do you have any memories of Joe Sinnott?

DINGELL: Yes, he was a funny looking old guy. Sort of skinny and stringy and didn't seem to have any meat on him. He was always addressed by the Pages as Mr. Sinnott. He was the Doorkeeper, and the Doorkeeper was a big guy in those days. And he ran the security for the [House] Chamber and the Pages worked for him.

WASNIEWSKI: What about South Trimble, who was Clerk at the time?[8]

DINGELL: He was the Clerk, Clerk of the House. He was from Kentucky, if my memory serves me correctly. He was an old-fashioned Southerner, and Washington was a southern town. Sinnott was a Southerner, too. The restaurants served southern food. And it was referred to as "The Little Town in the Woods." Washington had trees all over the place. It was a lovely place to grow up.

South Trimble used to take a .410 shotgun and he would shoot starlings off the back porch of the Capitol. And nobody bothered about it. It was just done. When I was a Page boy and I was going down to hunt squirrels or turkeys with chief Page McCabe, I kept a shotgun in my locker at school so I could sneak out and go hunting. That was a big deal. And I thought enough of it I'd clean chicken houses to have the pleasure of doing that. And chicken

houses are not exactly my idea of fun for cleaning, but if you could get out in the woods and shoot squirrels and turkeys, it's a fair trade. They were important men.

WASNIEWSKI: Officers had a lot of responsibility in those days, because Congress wasn't here as much.

DINGELL: They do have much less now than they did. And they're more functionaries than they were really people of position, and prestige, and power. The House did go away, and they ran the place while the House was gone. And the Members would go home, and they'd tend to their elections. My dad ran all the time, continuously. He was paying off his first campaign 10 years after he was elected. Finally got it paid off. You didn't get much help then, particularly when you were a Democrat. It was kind of interesting, because Henry Ford, the elder, got mad at my dad one time for something or other. And he put out 400 people to beat my dad. Pop worked awful hard, but he beat old Henry Ford. He came back. But you were home-oriented. You couldn't go home during the time the House was in session because you couldn't afford it. But when the House adjourned, you were home. And you were looking after your people. And my dad was very much that way.

WASNIEWSKI: I could go on all day. I know you've got another commitment. I've got about five or six more questions, is that okay?

DINGELL: Go ahead.

WASNIEWSKI: World War II. What was your reaction? Do you recall your reaction, and that of your fellow Pages, on December 8th?

DINGELL: Well, everybody was outraged. And that was a time where everybody remembers exactly what they were doing. My folks lived over in the Methodist Building, 110 Maryland Avenue, over there. I was out playing around the neighborhood, and all of the sudden somebody came out and told my brother and I that the Japanese had just bombed Pearl Harbor. They sank every battleship we had out in the Pacific. Some of them we were able to raise, to put them back to work. Some, maybe there were two or three, we couldn't. But they also thought at that point that the Japanese were going to invade Hawaii. We thought that they would probably invade the West Coast. They actually had submarines bombarding the West Coast. They invaded Attu and Kiska islands up in the Aleutian chain. And there really was concern as to whether or not we could win.

We were totally unready. Roosevelt had known that there was a Depression, and had spent a lot of time on it. But he also knew that a war was coming. So he spent an awful lot of time on that. And Roosevelt didn't get to complete the New Deal. He intended to pass a National Health Insurance Bill in '36. That was going to follow immediately on the heels of enactment of Social Security. But he didn't do it because he ran out of money and had an economic downturn. They had to start building cruisers and battleships, and developing an aircraft industry and everything else. We had 100,000 men under arms. We had, I think, the 15th or 16th largest army in the world. We were somewhere down around below Romania. Everything changed, just like that, because they had to continue helping the British. Roosevelt had gotten Congress to pass Lend-Lease [in 1941] because he was worried about whether the British could survive. If it hadn't been for Roosevelt, and for the friendship between him and Churchill, Britain would not have survived. It

was interesting to note that we did pull them through. We did not declare war on Germany, but on December the 8th, which was a day after—the Monday after the Sunday on which the Japanese bombed Pearl Harbor—the President came up here and made that famous "Day of Infamy" speech. I had the responsibility to give these kinds of tours—because I was a rather senior Page—the responsibility of tending to a very conservative radio commentator by the name of Fulton Lewis, Jr. He was permitted to tape the recording of the President's speech. He wasn't permitted to tape the proceedings of the Congress afterwards. But I thought it would be useful to history if he was able to tape the proceedings of the Congress. They shut off all of the movie cameras that they had up there recording this. And you'll still hear it played from time to time.

There was a woman by the name of Jeannette Rankin from Montana. She voted against World War I, and got defeated. And then she came back here, and she voted against World War II, and got defeated. There's still a statue of her over in the Capitol, and there's a picture. They wouldn't let her speak, and she was just outraged. And they finally let her speak when we declared war on Germany. Churchill was worried sick about this. Hitler declared war on us a couple of days later, and then the United States responded. And the upshot of the whole business was that they let her speak then. And so she made her speech, and that was the end of that particular thing.

But Churchill went to bed the night of the declaration of war by the United States, and he wasn't much comforted because his problem was Germany, not Japan. Although it all turned out he had a big problem with Japan, too, which, very frankly, came very close to winning the war in the beginning. The upshot of the whole thing was that, when Wednesday came around and

we had declared war on Germany, Churchill said he went to bed and slept "the sleep of the saved" because we had come into the war.

Roosevelt had a close relationship with Churchill. They were great friends. And Churchill kept trying to get Roosevelt to push us faster. Roosevelt got the draft extended by one vote, about 30 days before Pearl Harbor. And he had to do other things like that, including Lend-Lease, or the trade of the 50 destroyers for the bases. And Roosevelt was a fox. He was what Machiavelli, I think, would have described as *The Prince* about whom he wrote. He was always very good at knowing what he could get, and what he should do. And he was very attentive to the thoughts and the concerns of the people, who loved him.

I remember when he died [in 1945], I wrote Dad a letter. I was in Infantry OCS [Officer Candidate School] at Fort Benning. I wrote my dad a letter and I said, "Dad, what kind of guy is this new President going to be?" I didn't even know his name. Of course, I was in the military, and we didn't have much time for reading newspapers. So when I was up reading my mail, the guys—the whole platoon, two sections—were at the foot of my bed, and they were saying, "Dingell, your dad's in Congress, isn't he?" I wouldn't let Dad write to me on his letterhead, because I didn't want anybody to think I was getting any favors on this. And I said, "Yes, he is." They said, "Well, what does he say about this new guy, Truman?" I said, "I don't know, I'll write him and ask him." So I wrote Dad and I asked him, I said, "What's he going to be like?" Dad wrote back, and he said, "Son, he's going to be a great President." And it turned out he was right. So when mail call was over, all of a sudden, bang, the whole platoon was at the foot of my bed, saying,

"Dingell, what's your dad say?" So I read the letter to them. I wish I had that letter, but basically it said he's going to be a great President.

And if you saw the pictures of the train when they were carrying his body [President Roosevelt] north, people would be standing out there and they'd be crying. And there was one wonderful quote. There was a little African-American man. Somebody said to him, they said, "Why are you crying, and why are you concerned? You didn't know Roosevelt." And his response was very good. He said, "But he knew me." And of course his fireside chats were, everybody shut down, had them all crowded around the radio listening to that wonderful voice of his.

WASNIEWSKI: I want to back you up, and just follow up on your comment about working with the radio host in the House Gallery. You just did that of your own authority? Just let him run?

DINGELL: Oh, yes. It was my choice. I just let him run. I thought it would good for history, and as events turned out, I was right. You'll still hear it on public radio, every once in a while they play it.

WASNIEWSKI: Jeannette Rankin. Do you remember the reaction in the chamber when she cast her "no" vote?

DINGELL: Well, she sputtered. It was kind of an incoherent speech, and they just weren't going to hear her. It was kind of an interesting day, because America was very much divided at that time. And you had a lot of, quite frankly, Fascist lovers in this country. And you had a huge population of people who were very supportive of Germans. And you had a German-American *bund*.

You had a guy by the name of Fritz Kuhn, up in New York, who was pushing that. He would go over to Germany and come back. They had big rallies up at Madison Square Garden, marching in behind the swastika. And they had a big picture of George Washington up on the wall. And so they had a lot of these America Firsters and others. There were a lot of those who had to go down and, quite frankly, purge their soul and purge their politics by making these great patriotic speeches. There was an evil old right-winger by the name of Hamilton Fish who got up and all of the sudden became a great patriot, and denounced what he had been doing and saying before, and about how we'd all be united. And they did pull together.

The Japanese—and this is well-documented history, I'm not telling you anything you don't know—but they screwed up thoroughly. They bombed [Pearl Harbor]. They'd had, apparently, a big drunken party at the Japanese embassy the night before, so they were all hungover. And they had a great huge message of 14 sections, and they were supposed to deliver it precisely at 1:00. The Japanese were going to start bombing then at 1:30 this time, but that was a different time out in Hawaii. And they got behind. And so when the two Japanese emissaries—the ambassador, and then a special ambassador that they had—came in to talk to Cordell Hull.[9] They came in a half-hour after the bombing had occurred. And he just reamed them out and told them, "Leave." And the United States felt particularly bad, angry, and hostile about this. And [Isoroku] Yamamoto, who was the Admiral, said he had a terrible fear that he had "awakened a sleeping giant," and that the consequences were going to be terrible.

WASNIEWSKI: One more question about the House and your Page service during the war. Do you remember any security changes at the Capitol during the war? Anything stick out?

DINGELL: Well, we used to hunt rats in the basement with an air gun and a rat terrier when I was a kid. Some of my fellow Pages and I. Yes, they had them there. Darn things were about as big as housecats. I know when I was going down to the chief Page's [farm], I'd stand out in front of the Capitol with a .22 rifle or my shotgun, and stand up on the steps. And he'd drive up, and I'd get in. Sometimes the [Capitol] Police would come by and say, "Oh, that's a nice-looking rifle. What is it?" And I'd show it to them. He'd work the action, and say, "It's very nice, thank you," and go on his way.

And then all of the sudden, of course, when the war came on, they had machine guns on the top [of the Capitol roof], and they had armed guards walking around, and they really were scared that there'd be an invasion by the Germans or the Japanese or something like that. And this all went on pretty much through the war, and that security never really after that relaxed.

WASNIEWSKI: I know you're short on time, so I just want to ask two wrap-up questions. And that's to get you to tell me what the value of the Page program was for individuals who served as Pages.

DINGELL: Well, I think the Congress is one of the greatest educational institutions in the world. And a bunch of kids had the chance to participate in that. If they study history, and read—and of course, I was always a tremendous reader—they could learn. And they could add to the learning that they got by reading, by watching, by seeing and listening to debates and reading the papers. So, it

made a remarkably educated bunch of Americans. And not only did it do that, but it gave them an understanding and an appreciation of the ideals and why and how the country was created.

For example, we used to go down to the [National] Archives and look at the Constitution and the Declaration of Independence and the Bill of Rights. How many kids have the chance to do that? And we'd see all of these buildings. When the President came up and made the State of the Union, we'd see it. When the President came up for his Inauguration speech, we'd see it. When Roosevelt was buried, we could see some of the ceremonies associated with that. When the debates on important bills were going on, the Declaration of War or the other events that were associated with that, the extension of the draft or the American Firsters' debates on any of the issues there when I was a Page boy. Or more recently the debates when the Pages were still here. They had a chance to learn and see. And it had a life and a meaning to it that you don't see if you're just taking this in a course. And the teachers of government, they do their best to put it into understandable ways, and to describe it as it should be described, about what is going on when this happens. How does a bill move from the hopper, to the committee, to the floor, to the President's desk? But there you'd actually see it work, and you'd get a feeling of what is happening here, something that you don't get out of looking at a book.

They made a pretty good movie one time, at Tip O'Neill's say-so, about some of the things I was doing—*HR 6161*.[10] He hired a wonderful guy to make a movie. And it turned out to be a very, very fair presentation of how the House worked. Showed it as a human undertaking, which this is. You can't make this less than a human entity. It's going to be that, whether you

like it or not. And so it showed how the rules tie in with the human events that take place. And so we saw that at work when we were Pages. It was true in my day, when this was a much different and simpler place. And then the kids who were the last of our bunch, they saw it too.

WASNIEWSKI: Final question. What did the Page program mean to the House as an institution?

DINGELL: Well, I always had a pretty special interest in the Pages. And I think most Members did because the kids who were Pages were a big part of the future. A lot of them were known to us, and we'd appointed them. So we always had a rather special interest in them, and seeing to it that they were doing well. And it was almost like having adopted kids, or something like that.

WASNIEWSKI: Very good. That's all I have for prepared questions. Is there anything else you can think of you'd like to add?

DINGELL: No. If you've got some other questions, I'll try and respond. I'm not sure I answered your questions.

WASNIEWSKI: Okay. I think you did.

DINGELL: I'm not sure I answered them the way you wanted them, but we did our best.

WASNIEWSKI: I don't have a predetermined way I wanted them answered, so you did great. Thank you very much. I hope maybe sometime we can sit down on another date and talk to you about September 11th, or another event, if you have the time.

DINGELL: We'll try and cooperate.

WASKNIEWSKI: Okay. Thank you very much.

DINGELL: Good.

NOTES

[1] John Dingell, Jr.'s father, John David Dingell served in the House from 1933 until his death on September 19, 1955.
[2] The first two House office buildings, Cannon and Longworth (originally called the Old House Office Building and the New House Office Building), opened in 1908 and 1933, respectively. The third House office building, Rayburn, opened in 1965.
[3] In his April 7, 2006, oral history interview with the Office of the House Historian, Joe Bartlett, a former House Page, reading clerk, and clerk to the minority, also spoke about the practice of "stripping the *Record*" and called the storage room for the House documents a "dungeon full of steel lockers."
[4] An unofficial title given to Representatives with the longest continuous service in the U.S. House of Representatives or from a particular state delegation.
[5] On August 8, 2011, the House Page era came to an end when House Speaker John [Andrew] Boehner of Ohio and Democratic Leader Nancy Pelosi of California jointly announced the decision to end the program, citing the manner in which technology had made paging obsolete and the ongoing costs of maintaining the program.
[6] According to the 1945 Capitol Page Yearbook, Ernest Kendall resided in Oklahoma before coming to Washington, D.C.
[7] Joe Sinnott served as House Doorkeeper from 1911 until his death on January 27, 1943.
[8] Before his tenure as Clerk of the House from 1911 to 1919, South Trimble served as a U.S. Representative from Tennessee during the 57th through the 59th Congresses (1901–1907).
[9] Cordell Hull, a Representative from Kentucky, served in the House from 1907 to 1921 and from 1923 to 1931. Hull also briefly served in the U.S. Senate before resigning to become Secretary of State in the President Franklin D. Roosevelt Cabinet, a position he held from 1933 to 1945.
[10] Released in 1979, *HR 6161: An Act of Congress* documented the committee process and final enactment of H.R. 6161, a bill to amend the Clean Air Act.