Gwendolyn Mink
Daughter of the Honorable Patsy Takemoto Mink of Hawaii

Oral History Interview
Final Edited Transcript
March 14, 2016

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

"Well, I think that every little thing—or maybe not so little thing—that the women in Congress dared to speak about, whether it was, you know, not having gym access in the 1960s, or insisting that Anita Hill be heard in 1991, to insisting that certain kinds of women's issues get a full hearing—I think all of those things have been part of the story of women in Congress, and part of my mother's story of being a woman in Congress. I think that what she took from her service was a constant reminder to herself of how important it is that women serve in Congress. Because one woman can't accomplish what 218 women could, right? And so her goal was parity for women, for the whole full range of women's voices. I think she hoped that the legacy of being the first woman of color, and being a woman who was willing to talk about women, you know, that that would be part of what she would leave to the future."

Gwendolyn Mink

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Abstract

In this interview, Gwendolyn Mink reflects on the life and career of her mother, the late Congresswoman Patsy Takemoto Mink of Hawaii, the first woman of color and the first Asian-American woman to serve in the U.S. House of Representatives. Gwendolyn Mink's recollections provide a window into her family life and her mother's political philosophy and legislative achievements.

Mink recalls the unique story of her mother's journey to Capitol Hill, including her formative political experiences in Hawaii, her career in territorial and state politics, and her election to Congress as a Democrat in 1964. Mink discusses her teenage years, when she enjoyed extraordinary access to Capitol Hill, from visits to her mother's office to watching votes in the House chamber. She also describes her father's support for her mother's political career and her mother's views on the Congresswoman's Caucus. Mink's oral history highlights her mother's significant role in the history of women in Congress, from her consistent defense of Title IX of the Education Amendments of 1972, her commitment to women's rights and the rights of labor, her opposition to the Vietnam War, and her resistance to welfare reform when she returned to Congress in the 1990s.

Biography

Gwendolyn Mink was born in Chicago, Illinois, in 1952. Her mother, the late Congresswoman Patsy Takemoto Mink of Hawaii, was the first woman of color and the first Asian-American woman elected to the U.S. House of Representatives. After spending most of her childhood in Hawaii, she moved to the East Coast in 1965, residing for several years in Virginia and Maryland. Finally, the family settled in Washington, D.C., where Mink grew up immersed in politics. She frequented her mother's office on Capitol Hill, engaged in political discussions with staff, and observed votes in the House Chamber. Along with her mother, she became involved in the movement against the Vietnam War.

Mink completed a doctorate in government at Cornell University and pursued an academic career. A professor of politics at the University of California at Santa Cruz from 1980 to 2001, she also taught women's studies at Smith College from 2001 to 2008. Her academic work focused on American politics, women's history, and poverty policy. During the 1990s, she chaired the steering committee of the Women's Committee of 100, a collection of academics, activists, and policy experts committed to advising Members of Congress on welfare reform. She is currently an independent scholar writing about law, politics, and gender and American society.

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.

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— GWENDOLYN MINK —
A CENTURY OF WOMEN IN CONGRESS

MURPHY: This is Michael Murphy with Gwendolyn Mink, independent scholar and daughter of Representative Patsy [Takemoto] Mink. Thank you for joining us today for an interview that will be part of our Women in Congress exhibit to commemorate the 100th anniversary of the election of Representative Jeannette Rankin, the first woman elected to Congress.

I wanted to start today with your mother's story before she came to Washington. Where did she grow up?

MINK: She grew up on the island of Maui in the then-territory of Hawaii. Kind of a country girl, the daughter of a surveyor for East Maui Irrigation Company. She had one brother—grew up very close to her brother. The most remarkable aspect of their childhood came with World War II, which resulted in the surveillance and regulation of Japanese Americans who lived in the territory of Hawaii and, of course, the relocation of some Hawaii Japanese as well as the general relocation of many, many Japanese Americans on the West Coast of the U.S. That was a very vivid social and political experience that took place around her as she was growing up.

Other aspects of her youth that probably affected her sense of possibility involved her activism at the high school level, running for president of the senior class—or student body, I can't remember which, but whatever you run for in your senior year—and winning election. So, as a young woman in the 1940s, that was a barrier-breaking kind of enterprise for her.

MURPHY: And what did she want—did that make her want to pursue a political career right away, or what were her aspirations as a young person?

MINK: Actually, the person she revered the most growing up, the outsider that she revered the most—that is, outside of the family—was the family physician. She really wanted to be able to do what he did, which was to bring care and comfort and healing to people, and so her immediate goals after graduating from high school involved preparing herself to get a medical degree. So, she was kind of a science geek coming out of high school. While she was interested in politics and grew up listening to [President] Franklin [Delano] Roosevelt's fireside chats with her father and so forth, the idea of being a public servant—let alone having a legal career—was not at the top of her mind.

MURPHY: And did she take that opportunity and pursue that at the college level? Did she study medicine in college?

MINK: She did do pre-med. That was her college major, chemistry and zoology or some combination like that. Towards the end of her college work, I think she had some misgivings about how far she wanted to take her interest in medicine, but she did apply to medical schools and was rejected by all of them. In many of the letters, it was indicated that she was rejected because she was a woman. And it was at the point of that blow that she kind of recalibrated and reassessed what she was going to do in the world. She had a mentor who suggested that she think about law school, because she had been active at the University of Hawaii in student politics and in the student constitutional convention and things of that sort. The mentor told her that she was good at argument and had a great mind for reasoning, and that she should consider going to law school, which she did do. That then was really the catapult into a career of engagement in public discourse and, later, running for office.

MURPHY: So, she got a law degree and pursued that career before politics as well, or did she use that law degree to get into politics?

MINK: She got a law degree in 1951 at the University of Chicago with the intention, at least in the short term, of remaining in Chicago, where she had married my father and given birth to me. My father was finishing up his degree, also at the University of Chicago, at that time. However, no one in a Chicago law firm would hire her, and she sent out feelers to other northeastern and mid-Atlantic law firms, and nobody was interested in talking to her. I mean, she had multiple liabilities: She was female; she was Japanese American; she was from far away. So, they decided to return to Hawaii, where she thought she would have a better chance of securing employment with her legal degree. She found the same obstacles in Hawaii. Nobody would hire her; they turned her away saying that "Well, surely you're going to have more babies, we can't take on that liability." Or "As a married woman, your first responsibility is to your husband"—things of that nature.

So, eventually, she just went into private practice, setting up her own law office, hanging out her own shingle, which probably gave her a degree of autonomy to engage in other things. While she had a caseload of clients, she also was able to spend time getting involved in the real ferment of Democratic—big-D Democratic—politics in the aftermath of World War II as Japanese-American war veterans returned, ready to exercise their rights as citizens, having fought for this country.

So in the 1950s, as she was coming up both as an attorney and as a citizen, she became involved in various movements to try to democratize Hawaii, which had been under the control of the planter elites. Under the territorial system, the governor was appointed by the President, and there was very little that ordinary people could do to control their lives.

MURPHY: So what was her role in territorial politics and, later, state and local politics in Hawaii? She was a citizen, but then when she moved into becoming a formal part of this political system, what role did she take?

MINK: I guess they must have moved back to Hawaii in late 1952, something like that. So in 1953 and 1954, she became engaged in the growing Democratic Party, which was still a tiny, frail entity at this point, because Republican domination had controlled the local politics of the island. She worked for a couple of candidates, one of whom became a major figure, serving both as Delegate to Congress and then, later, as governor of the new state, when Hawaii became a state. So she worked for candidates, and then, in 1956, she decided to run for office herself. She ran for the territorial house of representatives and then, in 1958, for the territorial senate.

And then in 1959, which was when Hawaii got statehood, she ran for the U.S. Congress. She won the elections in '56 and '58 and so, served in the territorial legislature, doing some interesting things policy-wise. She lost the congressional election in 1959, so sat out of formal office for a couple of years doing other kinds of things, and returning to the full-time practice of law. Then in 1962, she ran again for the state senate and then in 1964, ran for Congress and won.

MURPHY: And were there other women involved in Hawaiian politics at this time?

MINK: There were other women involved in politics, but mostly not as candidates. When she took office—I believe the photograph I'm thinking of is of the 1957 territorial legislature—she's the only woman in that photograph. I think that on and off, there were one or two others who served—not Asian American. I think she was the first Asian American to be elected to the—or certainly the first Japanese American to be elected to the territorial legislature,

but [Asian Americans were] pretty few and far between. But in Democratic Party politics, there were many active women. I wouldn't say that they were anywhere close to proportional numbers in terms of where women stand in the population, but there were some very important figures who she remained in contact and friendship with throughout her life.

MURPHY: And do you think there was a sense that this was possible in Hawaii because of the particular circumstances there: the formation of a state, the uncertainty of the party system, the political upheaval of the era—or transformation of the era, I should say?

MINK: That [there] were possibilities for women? No, I don't think there were any more possibilities for women in Hawaii than elsewhere. It was just that there were activist women who were actively assisting in the development of the Democratic Party. Again, not anywhere near the numbers that would have been representative of the population. But they were important figures, sisters, allies to have participating at the same time she was. That did not mean that the party, the masculine establishment, was open to sharing power with women or open to the full participation of women any more than they were in any other state. The same kinds of sexist obstacles stood in their way, certainly, and expectations that the efforts of women in politics were auxiliary to their real jobs, which were to tend hearth and home and raise children.

MURPHY: So that's interesting that she became such an influential politician, first in the territory and then the state. So, were there any role models—women or men—that she looked to as examples for inspiration for becoming involved in politics, or was it a personal commitment to certain positions, or democracy that drew her to this?

MINK: I don't really know a good answer to that. I think that certainly it was a commitment to issues, to certain goals that she cared about. But I think the passion for the—it's really more about the passion for the possibility that government could affect positive change, that government could restore and preserve liberties, that government could promote equality, and so forth. Those kinds of ideas that really probably germinated in her subconscious, listening to the fireside chats of Franklin Roosevelt. That was the kind of thing that drove her deeply into politics, as well as the immediacy of certain kinds of issues, like nuclear testing in the Pacific, which was something that was an urgent concern of hers. Nuclear testing in the Pacific by the United States, as well as by Great Britain, was ongoing in the mid-1950s. There were all these efforts to develop the H-bomb [hydrogen bomb], basically. So, trying to make sure that the peoples of the Pacific Islands who were impacted by the nuclear tests, as well as the people of Hawaii—by Pacific Islands, I mean the Marshall Islands and the rest of the Trust Territory—was something that she was extremely eager to engage [in] as an issue.

MURPHY: Do you think that was because of the safety hazards or a larger conception of the—or her recent memory of the conflict in World War II?

MINK: I think it was both about preserving peace and the thought that all this nuclear testing was not preparation for peace, but for besting the other guy in the next war. That was a big part of it. But another big part of it was, yes, the consequences of the tests on the people who were exposed to the fallout, literally and figuratively. So, she collected a lot of—as a science geek from her college days, she read avidly in the journals and so forth about the effects of radiation and different, you know, sort of, concentrations of particles, depending on the wind flow and so forth, and what kind of contaminated products were most at risk of adversely affecting, especially, children. And so

if you look in her papers, you can see all of her notes about strontium-90 and all these other things. So that was a huge, huge concern that, you know, radioactive airbursts would float across the Pacific—across Hawaii—deposit their badness, and move on to the rest of the United States.

MURPHY: And what kind of reception was that met with in Hawaii? Was there a groundswell of support for this kind of opposition movement?

MINK: Well, her first legislative act, actually, when she first took office in 1957, was to introduce a resolution into the territorial legislature calling for the U.S. government to—I don't remember specifically whether it called for a ban on nuclear testing or whether it called for some kind of retrenchment of the plan for ongoing nuclear testing. It was a fairly strong declaration of the sense of the territorial legislature that was intended to be delivered and received in Washington by the President and Congress.

And the interesting thing—the reason I bring that up—is that in 1957, that resolution had very widespread support in the territorial legislature. But once it—and it was only a resolution, obviously—it wasn't like, you know, the territory of Hawaii was going to do something to the United States government if it persisted in its nuclear tests. But it was an important statement, and it was a call to the federal government to reconsider what it was doing, and it was widely supported in the territorial legislature.

But then, as soon as anticommunist activists noticed it, the whole issue became interlarded with this sort of fervor about defending the United States from communist aggressors. And as the anticommunist stuff picked up, people peeled away, so by the later '50s, by just a year later, in 1958, which was when the next big issue arose, people took less kindly to making

declarative critical comments about ongoing nuclear tests by the U.S. government.

MURPHY: And that seems like the rhetorical attacks on your mother's politics seem to be a trend, especially at the height of anticommunism, of course, in the '50s and '60s. So, many of these issues she was involved with were balancing that line, right? Like labor rights and civil rights and even women's rights—so, how did she approach that difficult prospect of making inroads on those issues without provoking harsh opposition?

MINK: Well, I think that her view was that you can't be afraid of provoking harsh opposition; that can't be the measure of how you proceed or whether you proceed. So, she was willing to say things that other people weren't willing to say and willing to take the flak for it, although it certainly wasn't pleasant. She didn't want to say things just for the sake of saying them; she wanted to link arguments that she might make to the possibility of change, either immediately or building towards change down the road.

Drive-time radio, which happened even in the 1950s, had this character whose name was Joe Rose who had a morning radio program, who like almost every day was calling her "Pink Mink" and haranguing about the communists in the territorial legislature and so forth. I would hear this at the age of six, and she would just sort of explain that some people have hysterical reactions when they don't agree, and left it at that. That kind of thing didn't ever make her want to—I don't know, retract or be quiet or anything like that.

MURPHY: And do you think those attacks like that one prioritized her politics, or were there some attacks on her because of her status as a woman or as a Japanese American at that time?

MINK: Well, I think they were all sort of connected. She wasn't so much explicitly attacked for being female as insidiously attacked for being female. So there would be little whispers about "Is she taking proper care of her child?" as a way of dismissing her aspirations to elected office. Or there would be sort of, you know, gales of laughter when she introduced legislation for equal pay for equal work for women into the territorial legislature in 1957, and people introduced "husbands' rights" bills, you know, so that husbands would have rights to some of their wives' equal pay, and junk like that.

So, on the gender thing, commentary was demeaning and trivializing and fun-making and disparaging, in contrast to the explicit attacks against anyone labeled "communist." The anticommunist attacks came over issues of war and peace, and military buildup, and whether or not we should have a nuclear test ban treaty, and things like that.

MURPHY: So, as she was working in Hawaii in the territorial politics and state politics, what made her turn to the possibility of coming to Washington? Was it a personal aspiration, or was it a belief that this was a position that could [allow her to] make substantial change by becoming a Member of the House?

MINK: I think the idea of serving in the national government appealed to her because it was a place where general change could perhaps transpire, or changes that would affect the country as a whole and the direction of the country as a whole. I think coming out of the territorial experience, where what Washington wants kind of really matters—there were no "territorial rights" in the same way that there were states' rights—the idea of having a say in that national government, I think, was important to a cadre of folks. I think that was part of it.

I think, also, part of it were her own experiences in national political activities. She was active in the Young Democrats of America, where she made a number of lifelong friends, like Phillip Burton of San Francisco, who served in Congress simultaneously with her, as it turned out, in the 1960s and '70s. And so going to national Young Democrats meetings and participating in discussions and debates about what sort of national policies were necessary for economic justice, for civil rights, for peace, and all of that, I think also invested her with a sense of the real possibility of making positive change through service in the national government. So, all of those things were at play in her decision to seek to go to D.C.

MURPHY: And did she have the support of the Hawaiian Democratic Party—the state party?

MINK: Not really. The Democratic Party appreciated her support work for the party but did not really want to welcome her into the corridors of responsibility and high office, shall we say. And so she won in a five-way primary at a moment when what became the two congressional districts were fused in a single at-large district that was represented by two people. So that made it possible for her to win. She didn't win because the Hawaii Democratic Party wanted her to. And she had an ongoing sort of push-pull relationship with the party establishment. And that's not to say the voters of the Democratic Party wanted to make mischief. The voters of Hawaii, the Democratic voters, were very supportive of her most of the time. But the machinery of party power was not exactly inviting.

MURPHY: Okay, so at this point, she's coming to Washington in 1964. I wanted to transition right now a little bit to your story, as you came with her to Washington at that time and—but even before that—your childhood. Your

mother's life at the time of your birth—this was in Chicago—was she a student at the time?

MINK: She had just graduated from law school, yes.

MURPHY: And then you moved to Hawaii and then, coming to Washington, what was that like when you arrived here as the daughter of a Representative?

MINK: Well, I don't think—[I'm] not sure what the emphasis of the question is, whether it's the arrival to Washington or whether it's "as the daughter of a Representative." Because the "as the daughter of a Representative" didn't directly affect my immediate experiences. The immediate experiences were most vivid in terms of the enormous change in culture and lifestyle, and so forth, from Hawaii to D.C. But obviously the only reason we moved here was because my mother was serving in Congress, and that meant that I got to be a witness to an incredible extended moment in history from 1965 forward as the country and the Congress went through all kinds of contestation over the future of what democracy was going to mean, and who had rights, and when liberties would be protected.

MURPHY: So when you arrived, you transitioned into a new school. You also had this connection to a prominent politician or someone who was becoming increasingly prominent in the late '60s. How did that affect your family life?

MINK: Well, family life was always interesting. {laughter} If I wasn't doing something that was requiring of a lot of discussion, she certainly was doing stuff that was interesting that everybody wanted to talk about. So, family life: Initially, we settled in Arlington, Virginia, still a place of racial segregation, and in some corners, white supremacy. So that was a difficult place to be. We only stayed there for six months.

It was also a moment before the Supreme Court had decided *Loving v. Virginia*, striking down the Virginia law that banned all interracial marriages. I don't really know, and I never asked—I should have asked—I don't know how that affected how my parents felt as a couple going around, but I certainly experienced the whispers in school and among parents and so forth for being the progeny of an interracial couple, and you know, especially nasty kids would throw around [comments] like, "Are you illegitimate, then?" and that kind of thing, since theoretically, my parents' marriage was not valid in the state in which we at that moment resided.

So, we fled to Maryland, and that was a better kind of situation. In seventh and eighth grade—or eighth and ninth grade, which were the only two years we spent in Maryland—I didn't spend that much time in my mother's office during the school year, except on certain kinds of particularly exciting votes or contested votes. Sometimes I would drive in with my father from Silver Spring, where I was in middle school.

But by 10th grade, we moved back into the city and were only three minutes from the Rayburn Building, where my mother's office was at that point. So, I came up to her office all the time—after school and on weekends and so forth—and really sort of soaked in the experiences of antiwar legislative activity and civil rights activity and, eventually, the burgeoning attempt to promote equality for women through legislation, from probably '68 to '72 or so. So, it was a very exciting bifurcated existence. I was half a really annoying teenage child and half a really politically invested person who just happened to be a child, a kid.

MURPHY: And why do you think you were so politically invested so early? It's interesting. You were drawn to these votes even in eighth and ninth grade. Was it because of your mother's role?

MINK: Sometimes it was because I knew that the issue was important to her or that an issue was a big risk for her. But I think even beyond those kinds of familiar, sort of, attractions to finding out what the outcome was going to be, I did always kind of have a deep attachment to political issues. I think it probably—I don't really know when it emerged, but I am most acutely aware of it emerging around the nuclear testing issue in 1957, '58, and partly that's because it was not just an issue—it wasn't just a question of would there be fallout? There were two things that happened that sort of brought it all home to me in a very vivid way.

The first was that a Quaker protest [boat] called the *Golden Rule* sailed first from San Diego to Honolulu, and paused in Honolulu to restock and so forth, before setting sail to its intended destination, which was in the middle of the Pacific, close to where the nuclear tests were under way. And its point was to try to stop the tests by being physically present. The crew was arrested while in Honolulu Harbor for planning to do just that. My mother was one of the people who volunteered to help represent them. My first visit to jail was at the age of five or six, going to visit the crew of the *Golden Rule* in jail while my mother and others tried to figure out the best way to support the crew, which intended upon [its] release to try again, basically. So, this meant that at a very young age, I was aware of civil liberties issues and the rights of protest issues, and the idea that the nuclear testing thing was a really, really, really serious issue—to such a degree that people went to jail. People were willing to sail and risk their lives by being exposed to the radiation and so forth. So, I think that was a major moment for me.

That moment was followed up by nuclear tests that we could see from Hawaii. And, that was just a reminder—again this was all in 1958. This was a

reminder of a very stark playing out of the dangers and the scariness of what could happen.

MURPHY: And then, when you were in Washington, did your mother's political debates come home with her? Did you speak about this at the table every time you ate together, that kind of thing? Was this an ongoing discussion?

MINK: Often, many things, many issues came up, partly because I was kind of an eavesdropper, and she would come home, and she would still have to work at night, going through paperwork, preparing for committee hearings, getting ready for whatever the next legislative day held, and so forth. Sometimes she would be on the phone to her staff or on the phone to Hawaii or whatever. I would hear bits and pieces of conversation about things and would want to know more. So, in that sense, I would sort of provoke the conversation, and we would get into extreme detail about things that I found fascinating and worrisome or important.

But also, as a teenager who was growing up as the civil rights movement was crescendoing, and as the antiwar movement was getting under way, I also brought issues home that potentially clashed with her issues, depending on where she stood on certain questions, about how you expressed opposition, and things like that. So as the years progressed, I became more fully a political thinker on my own terms. Even if she had wanted to not bring things home, that would not have been possible.

MURPHY: And is there an example of one of those cases where you clashed on tactics or strategy for the civil rights movement, for example, or any issue really?

MINK: I don't think there were any clashes around civil rights in the mid-'60s. I think that she had concerns about student protests against the war, and I was a high school activist against the war, so when the mobilizations occurred in

’69, especially, I was involved in mobilizing other high school students and going to the marches and things like that. And she was concerned about nonviolence. She thought nonviolence had to be the, sort of, rule for any kind of protest. And, of course, that wasn’t necessarily the first principle of student protesting against the war—certainly not as time wore on—and generalized movement tempers began to intensify as the government declined to respond in a way that was satisfying in terms of ending the war.

But other than that—which really boiled down to was I allowed to go to the march—there weren’t any really big clashes. I think in one interview in the ’90s she allowed that I was always kind of a little bit to the left of her, but we were still kind of in the same universe in terms of what we thought was desirable public policy.

MURPHY: It’s interesting that she emphasized nonviolence. Was that a political commitment about the philosophy of nonviolence, or was it the sense of orderly protest or perhaps [her conviction that] reform through the democratic process was the best way to go about things?

MINK: Probably both, yes.

MURPHY: And one more thing on your family life: What was your father’s role in your mother’s political career?

MINK: My father was essential to my mother’s political career. My father was a science guy with a whole range of political interests. And so it was not a distraction to him to take an interest in my mother’s political work. They were in some ways a real partnership in the political business of the family. He was her principal—electorally speaking—advisor. In the ’60s and ’70s, certainly, he ran her campaigns. Occupationally, after she was elected to Congress in ’64, he sort of divided his time between D.C. and Hawaii, and

so he was often in Hawaii to witness firsthand developments that she needed to respond to, and so she relied on him—certainly for that filtering of information that only somebody that you trust totally can provide to you. So, yes, he was totally involved.

MURPHY: And when you say "ran her campaigns"—fundraising, strategy, what do you mean?

MINK: We always had separate people who managed most of the fundraising, but strategy . . . he was involved with the folks who were trying to figure out how to raise money. In those days, it wasn't a lot of money—it wasn't like now. And assessing where she needed to go on her . . . especially once she was based in D.C. I mean, if you're a representative—whether it's in the House or Senate—from as far away as Hawaii, you have to be very strategic in your decision about how you're going to spend your time when you get back to Hawaii, because you can only be there most of the time for a couple of days if the Congress is in session. So he would sort of help her figure that out—what was good for the schedule and so forth.

And he would also, probably more so in the later years—like more so in the '90s than in the '60s—but even in the '60s he would go to events and represent her if she couldn't get back, if there was a last-minute vote or something and she couldn't catch her flight. He was good at that kind of activity, too, so he was counsel and surrogate.

MURPHY: And there seems to have been no issue in terms of her pursuing a political career. Some women who enter politics face obstacles from—even within their own family—to fully participating as political agents, and there seems not to have been any kind of conflict there.

MINK: He had no problem with her public role. Obviously, when he met her he knew she was going to be an attorney, so he knew that he was in for someone who was breaking professional barriers. In terms of breaking the political barrier of being a public servant, a full-time public servant? No, he found that a great thing for her to be doing and was totally supportive, and there was never a question that she should be doing something else, or no expression of regret that her time as a public servant was detracting from time that she could spend in other ways that were more beneficial to him or something like that.

MURPHY: And did he ever face criticism or feel a target—within the kinds of confines of gender expectations of the '50s and '60s?

MINK: Well, I think later in life, he was considered like a role model for how male partners should be when women are aspiring to public office. In the '60s and '70s, no, I don't really recall too much by way of criticism of him for "permitting" it. The criticism really went to her for doing it.

MURPHY: And one other thing on the connection between your mother's work here in D.C., and then the vast distance between Hawaii and D.C. How often could she travel, and did she travel back to Hawaii, and did she find it to be a difficult thing to connect between, because she wasn't representing a nearby state, like Maryland?

MINK: Right. She would go back once a week if necessary. I would say that in—I'd say the average was probably once every three weeks, but sometimes it was once every two weeks, and sometimes she did go back every week for, you know, short stretches of time. It was a long flight. In the '60s, for a while, there was a nonstop from BWI [Baltimore-Washington International Thurgood Marshall Airport], and that probably made it a little bit easier, but

still . . . However, she had the gift of being able to sleep on the plane, so if she wasn't working on the plane, she was able to keep herself refreshed. I couldn't do that. I just couldn't do that kind of travel, for sure.

But frequent trips home were necessary to—not so much to remain informed, because she had staff in the district who kept her informed and family who kept her informed and allies who kept her informed of things, but to really see on the ground and talk to people and get a sense of—not so much events that were happening, but circumstances that were affecting people's lives, regular people's lives. You can't really understand that if you're not there.

MURPHY: And you mentioned that you hung around the office a lot in D.C., and what was that like? What were the gender dynamics of the office, and what did you learn from being there?

MINK: Yes, I hung around the office an awful lot. In the summers, I hung around, and I actually tried to be helpful. Like when I was 12 and 13, being helpful meant being the person to go to carryout to get people's lunches and things like that. As I got older, I would, you know, pay attention to what was coming up for a floor vote and keep my mother informed about those sorts of issues. It was always fascinating to me, and, of course, I had direct access to where it was at in the office, and that is, my mother's little lair.

So, sometimes I would come up and do my homework. Sometimes I would just—in the summertime, I obviously wasn't so much about homework. It was following what was happening with legislative developments, or even state political developments and things of that sort. And other things, I mean, other things happened, too, that aren't directly congressional, but that a Congressperson needs to respond to, especially in the circumstance of being

one of the few women in Congress and a proponent of things that are receiving expression through movements on the outside. So, things might happen in the movements on the outside, or in opposition to the movements, that require a leaderly response. So, there were things like that that I got to witness.

MURPHY: And did you ever work for her campaign in any other capacity, or in any other office in the House?

MINK: Campaign-wise, the Hawaii primaries were late in the season—they still are late in the season—late September in the '90s, early October during my mother's first tour of Congress. So, that meant that the summer was really kind of the moment of ferment for electoral activity. So in election years, I would spend probably six weeks of the summer working on the campaign in one way or another. When I was a young adolescent, like, 14, 15, I really couldn't carry much responsibility, but I would go to the campaign headquarters and help do whatever volunteers were doing. I, too, was a volunteer, folding and stuffing envelopes and printing labels and amassing brochures for the house-to-house canvassing of the next weekend—things like that.

As I got older, I did more things again in that six-week period. That was usually, like, late July to the beginning of September, when I had to go back to school. And that was the case all the way through college, I'd say. So, every two years I would do something electorally relevant.

But I didn't live in Hawaii, because the nature of the job in Congress made it not such a good idea to have an absentee parent. So, the family moved to D.C. My father and I moved with my mother to D.C., which meant that for at least nine months of the year, I wasn't in Hawaii and therefore didn't have

the full appreciation for things that were going on, or stuff that was happening to people, that my parents had. So, it could be a little difficult for me to get my bearings in the proper way to do good electioneering on my own as opposed to, you know, just shadow electioneering.

MURPHY: And did you work in other offices in the House at all?

MINK: I worked for Senator [Edward Moore (Ted)] Kennedy on the Senate side for two months in 1969, a month in 1970, and the summer of '72. So, three internships doing different things, and that was probably my most extensive independent experience.

MURPHY: And were there other young women working as interns at the time? Was this becoming increasingly likely?

MINK: Well, in Senator Kennedy's office, yes, there were other women. In the summer of '69 and in March of 1970, I was still in high school. But there were women who were in college who were interning in that office, and there were young women who interned in my mother's office along the way. So, yes, I don't think I sensed that there was a gender exclusion in terms of internships, although I did sense that there was a gender bias towards valuing the male—not in my mother's office, but in other offices—valuing the input of the male intern or sort of spotlighting the male intern as the person who was being groomed for something more than just being an intern.

MURPHY: You mentioned Senator Kennedy, your mother—the office mattered, right? Or the officeholder mattered, and the party?

MINK: Yeah, I think the dynamic of the individual office and the concerns of the individual Member would certainly affect the institutional treatment of young people who were working there. You know, in the late '60s, too, in the

antiwar movement—or community, let's say, because they were all part of the movement—but in the antiwar community of young people, there were differences of opinion of whether you pursued reform through existing legislative channels—end the war through legislation, basically—or you protest militantly to force the government to take the action that you want the government to take. The side that thought that ending the war through legislation was a viable path often got internships, so there were lots of kids who had internships and sought internships in congressional offices because of their commitments to peace and demilitarization of Indochina and things of that sort. So, it was a little bit different than it seems to be now, where you have a much more kind of "professionalized" internship consciousness, let's say.

MURPHY: Well, I think that's a good point to stop for a few minutes.

END OF PART ONE — BEGINNING OF PART TWO

MURPHY: Okay, so I wanted to talk now about some of the specific achievements of your mother in the House and, also, her experience working here in the House, first in the '60s and '70s and then again when she returned in the '90s. So when she arrived in Washington, how did the press, colleagues, constituents—how did they treat her or react to her place in the House?

MINK: The media kind of exoticized her, you know, the "hula princess from Hawaii," "the girl in the grass skirt"; all of that sort of gendered exoticizing was, I would say, the primary media form of welcome to Washington, D.C. And in some ways that never really went away, at least in the 1960s, and even

as it became clear that she had a seriousness of purpose and a clear set of principles that she was committed to, and so forth, the press stories would start out with "Diminutive Patsy Mink," which diminishes her from the get-go—the significance of her ideas. So, I would say that that was probably the most memorable aspect of the media response. In terms of the response of colleagues, was that part of your question?

MURPHY: Yes.

MINK: The response of colleagues was, I think, probably fairly routine. There was certainly sexism, and that sort of thing, that a lone woman in a masculine institution at that time was certain to encounter. But on the other hand, in a certain way, everybody who was elected in 1964 for the first time, the freshman class, that Lyndon [Baines] Johnson-coattails class of Congress, the 89th Congress [1965–1967], were all on equal footing, right? I mean, they were all first-year Congressmembers. They were all paid the same, right? They all had the same kinds of concerns, which were serving their constituents, and serving their principles, and trying to figure out whether they would be able to return to office someday or in two years. So, in that sense there was a somewhat-level playing field.

But institutions that grew up as masculine institutions don't shed that right away, even if the entering terrain for women does put them on somewhat-equal footing, at least for everybody who's at the same level: first-year Representatives. You know, there were things like the House Gym that were off-limits to women Members of Congress, which was preposterous. And eventually a few of the women Members—there were only 11 women in the House of Representatives in 1965—staged a protest and demanded access to the gym, which was ultimately granted but only, like, on Tuesdays and Thursdays from 7:00 to 9:00 a.m. or something ridiculous like that. So, there

were clear sort[s] of obstacles and manifestations of the maleness of the institution. But at the same time, there was at least a toleration, if not a respect, for the presence of the women who did manage to get themselves elected to this body.

MURPHY: And did ideas about gender shape her ability to pass legislation or to propose legislation or to engage in political arguments on the floor? Did she sense that kind of resistance on that level, on taking that next step to be a forceful Member of the House?

MINK: I'm not sure what your question is getting at.

MURPHY: Just in terms of, let's say, debating with another Member of Congress, a man, or engaging in committee work, were there any kinds of obstacles she faced there? Or did she feel like she could present her ideas fully and not face resistance merely because she was a woman?

MINK: Well, I think that it depended on what the topic was. Her committees were Education and Labor, now known as Education and [the] Work[force, and] Interior and Insular Affairs. Mines and Mining was a subcommittee that she chaired. So, depending on the issue, gender could be a problem. If you're talking about strip-mining, it doesn't present itself as the principal problem in the debate. The principal problem in the debate was that she was for environmental regulation of strip-mining. And you know it could be her, it could be Mo [Morris King] Udall, they'd get the same flak for that.

On issues that she wanted to move forward that directly spoke to women's equality and women's status and so forth, that's where the gendered resistance would become more palpable because some people thought gender was a frivolous concern—gender equality was a frivolous concern. Some people thought, "Well, you made it this far, why can't every other woman

who wants to make it this far do it?" And other people just thought it was kind of a hilarious perversion of family values to want women to have independent credit records, for women to be able to open their own bank account, for women to be able to go to professional school without having to overcome quota restrictions, and things of that sort. So, the explicitly gendered agenda that she championed could provoke explicitly gendered masculinism, either trivializing or just rejecting kinds of responses.

MURPHY: And when she entered the House, did she have any allies or mentors that helped her become accustomed to this position?

MINK: Well, yes and no. I guess as a preface to my response, I just want to point out that when she enters Congress in 1965, this is a moment of ferment and foment. The women's movement is not fully off the ground at this point, and what we [have] come to visualize and remember as second-wave feminism hadn't fully congealed. There were lots of people at the grassroots levels sort of doing things, but it had not fully congealed. And so the women who were in Congress when she arrived—she was the only woman in her class in the 89th Congress, so everybody else who was here had been here for at least one term—were in some ways a different generation, and they were also less exposed to the sort of fermenting feminist agenda that was bubbling up and would become a major object of discussion and consideration in the late '60s and early 1970s.

So, what I can say by way of mentors—yes, the other women who were in Congress were very welcoming and very supportive and, you know, as much as any sort of formalized introduction that was available to new Members of Congress, the women were certainly people who provided that kind of guidance to my mother, in particular, Representative Martha [Wright] Griffiths of Michigan, who had been in Congress for a while; maybe she

already was in the mid-1960s one of the highest-ranking members of the Ways and Means Committee. She was a great mentor to my mother and a great ally and friend. But none of these people had roots in the feminist movement as we came to know it in the late 1960s and early 1970s. So, they can't mentor that relationship, and they can't really mentor even how to deal with the emerging policy issues that feminism brings to the fore, such as equality, constitutional equality, reproductive health and reproductive rights, equality in education, vocational opportunities, and on down the line.

MURPHY: And you said they were very welcoming. Did they ever have any informal meetings, or something like the Congressional Women's Caucus? Which hadn't been created while your mother was there the first time. Was there an informal network?

MINK: I don't recall hearing about regular, like, meetings or anything, but I do know that they would run into each other and chat, right? Maybe they would interact more or less with one another depending upon an issue. So, for example, when the whole question of constitutional equality emerges in '69, '70, Martha Griffiths is the person who's kind of in the driver's seat in terms of whether and how to proceed at the congressional level—when to introduce an amendment to the Constitution, how to get it out of the Judiciary Committee given the committee chair's [Emanuel Celler] hostility to even talking about women, and things of that sort. There would be strategy sessions convened among the women Members who were concerned about this issue. There would be discussions about whether an ERA [Equal Rights Amendment] was the best strategy, versus doing a statute-by-statute revision of law to specifically name the equal treatment of women as part of the statute, whether it was Social Security or Veterans' Affairs or educational equity or whatever, down the line. So, you know, there was confabbing, but

not in the sense of a kind of formal network and location of convening or anything.

MURPHY: And when she returned to Congress in the '90s, she was a member of the Women's Caucus.

MINK: Yes.

MURPHY: Did she ever talk to you about whether or not this was something she wished had existed earlier, or the limitations or the possibilities involved with that institution?

MINK: Actually, at this point, then, I can't answer what she said. I can't answer what she would have wanted. I can answer with respect to what I observed, which is that as a bipartisan caucus, it was not necessarily the best place for a feminist legislator interested in social justice to articulate and advance those goals, right? I mean, just because you are female does not mean that you agree on everything and certainly does not mean that you necessarily all support the same women for the same reasons on the same issues. So, I think just in a sketchy look backwards, that while the "sisterhood" aspect of the caucus—you know, having it as a place to talk about issues where there was agreement, and certainly there were those, too—was a great thing, I think she would have liked to have had that in the '60s and '70s. For some of the most contentious aspects of her tenure, it was not necessarily an institution that would have enhanced outcomes or made things feel better in the course of fighting for whatever was the policy of the day.

MURPHY: Much has been made—

MINK: And, actually, I should also say that another aspect of this was something that was actually extremely important. One of the reasons you could have such a

vibrant caucus that was frustratingly unable to come to an agreement on certain kinds of issues—because women have a range of opinions—was that the number of women in Congress had exponentially increased. And that was something that pleased her to no end. She was very concerned to have women's representation increase to whatever extent possible and wanted to encourage women to run for office of whatever party, but especially Democrats. And so some of the limitations of the caucus have to do with its size, but the fact of its size was actually a sign of progress.

MURPHY: And something else that changed from her first period in Congress to the second period of Congress was the diversity in Congress, and I think much has been made of your mother being the first woman of color in Congress. Did she consciously embrace this role, and consider the ways that race and gender intersected in her politics?

MINK: Oh, yes, absolutely. During most of her service, the numbers of women of color were not at satisfying levels from her point of view, even in the '90s. Although over the decade, it increased. The real boom in representation comes in the 21st century, at a time that she could not witness, but she would have been thrilled.

MURPHY: And did she see that as something that needed to be considered in the creation of policy and legislation?

MINK: Well, yes, in the sense—I mean not that you would necessarily write laws that were different for different groups of women, but your standpoint in how you centered your policy would vary with what perspective and life experience you privileged. And so the more disparate and diverse voices you have, the better the likelihood of coming up with policies that will serve broad groups of women, not subsume inequalities among women that pre-

existed the new policy under discussion, and so forth. So, the idea of the single white middle-class lens as the only lens through which to view the problem of inequality—or the lived experience of inequality—that was something that was pretty frustrating to her. That frustration played out in how she chose to go about working on issues that affected women, but not necessarily the women whom policy had previously been designed to primarily serve.

MURPHY: And did she have a relationship with some of the other women of color who entered the house in the late '60s and early '70s, like Shirley [Anita] Chisholm and Barbara [Charline] Jordan, Yvonne [Brathwaite] Burke? Did she work with them, did she consider them allies?

MINK: Depending on [the] issues. Now in the moment of the early 1970s, the issues of gender equality were constructed in a kind of global way. So, it wasn't—it was . . . I don't know how to say what I'm trying to say. Getting constitutional equality for women, which was a goal of many women's rights activists in the late '60s and early '70s, theoretically was supposed to benefit everyone, and so it was theoretically not a project that required unique voices to participate in designing [it]—theoretically.

By the time you get to the '90s, we begin to see the limitations of that strategy and how when you only talk about equality either in very abstract terms or in terms that satisfy the best-off strata, you end up leaving out large numbers of women and, so, cease being an actual feminist policy. So I think that there would have been more opportunity for alliance with Shirley Chisholm and Barbara Jordan in the '90s than there was in the '70s, because the driving discourse about gender stuff in the '70s was this kind of generic equality, which people would say, will "lift all boats." But if you are not being paid a minimum wage, and you do not have a basic income, your experience

of constitutional equality is going to be much different from the lady lawyer who wants to be sure that there are not any night-work laws that ban her from going to night court, or something like that.

But, in any case, so, Barbara Jordan, I think she was on Judiciary. Shirley Chisholm was on Education and Labor, I believe, at least part of the time. So, yes, there was overlap, and they certainly worked together and talked—Shirley and my mother. A lot of times, one's committee assignment is the basis for one's work. So, the other women who are on your committees doing that work are the ones who are most likely to be your allies. It's harder to reach across the jurisdictions. I mean, you can express your opinion. You can say, "Hey, I think that bill to change the Supreme Court's consideration of cases would be great if you add *X* provision." But you really don't have much of a say over that because you're not on Judiciary.

MURPHY: I wanted to talk a little bit about some of the issues she was really closely tied to in that first period, one of which was the Vietnam War and her opposition to it. I'm interested in how her decision to become a vocal critic of the war, which was controversial for many political figures at this time—if they could or could not say that they were against this war publicly—and when she made that decision. Maybe we could discuss, a little bit, her trip to France, I think it was to meet with—

MINK: Madame [Nguyen Thi] Binh?

MURPHY: Yes, the representative from the North Vietnamese, and how she made that decision, as well.

MINK: Well, I'm not sure that it was just a decision to say she was against the war. In Congress, you have to vote on funding for the war, so every time LBJ [Lyndon Baines Johnson] wanted an additional appropriation to pay for

some aspect of the war, one had to make a decision. You know, are you going to do it, or are you going to say, "Okay?" Or are you going to say "Not okay?" And so in a way, that aspect of the legislative involvement in the war was the timetable for coming out publicly, because once you decide you're going to be voting against the supplemental military authorization for dropping bombs on Hanoi, you have to say why. And that then becomes your statement and explanation of your antiwar position. So, I guess that's just to sort of rephrase your question away from making it a decision to come out against the war, into a decision to vote against her President, right, her Democratic President, and that was hard. I think that was hard for her to do.

On the other hand, we got to Washington in December of '64. In April of '65, the first national antiwar march transpired on the Washington Mall, and my mother encouraged my father and I to go, and we did. So, I think she already brought with her to Congress, certainly, a critical view of escalation in Vietnam. I would probably put money on her not voting for the Gulf of Tonkin Resolution had she been in Congress, but she wasn't yet elected.

MURPHY: And do you think that was a commitment to pacifism, or more an opposition to the particular circumstances around that resolution?

MINK: I think that the particular circumstances around the resolution she did—would not have wanted to give the executive under the circumstances carte blanche to continue military hostilities. She always thought that peace should be the first option, but she was not a pacifist in the sense of war can never be part of the solution—I would have to say that. Certainly, we had many conversations about World War II, and I don't think she would have been a pacifist in World War II or opposed U.S. military engagement against Germany. But she did think that peace was the primary value, and what she found untenable were situations in which unaccountable war-making was the

rule of the day. Then, of course, as the '60s unfold, it becomes evident that lies are part of the unaccountable war-making and that no effort at talking to each other is being made. She was part of a group—I don't know if the organization pre-existed the late '60s, but it certainly had life breathed into it around the war in Vietnam—with the Members of Congress for Peace through Law, which was an extracongressional, extra-institutional entity that a number of antiwar Congressmembers belonged to, which promoted the rule of law, rather than the rule of might, in international relations and military confrontation.

MURPHY: And is that what led her to engage in this trip to France? I think she was with one other Member of Congress?

MINK: Yes, her best friend in Congress at the time, Bella [Savitzky] Abzug, who was a very strong antiwar feminist. Well, I think Bella Abzug was elected in, I think, 1970 so, throughout the '60s, and through 1970, which also included Kent State and horrible things like that, I don't think my mother had a sister in the House who was quite as reliably opposed to escalation of the war in Vietnam. So, it was a great moment for her when Bella Abzug was elected in 1970 and came to Congress and was an ally on these matters. But throughout the late 1960s, my mother had voted for de-escalating, voted to—I don't know whether absolute withholding of funds, but certainly withholding of funds that would escalate hostilities—and had been a very active member of the antiwar group of Congresspersons, which was actually ever-expanding in numbers into the early 1970s. There were a number of amendments that were offered to military appropriations—military authorization legislation—the McGovern–Hatfield Amendment, the Medzi–Whalen Amendment. There was a Mink Amendment along the way. So, she had a long track

record of trying to not only express Congress' will that in a way the executive branch could hear, but also to try and do things that would end the war.

In 1971–72, the peace process—so-called—falls apart, and the reason Bella and my mother decided to go to Paris to talk to Madame Binh, it was partly gender solidarity—gender as a common ground, as an avenue for opening conversation. Madame Binh had made a speech, I think in early March—probably for International Women's Day of 1972—in which she appealed to women on gender grounds to become a force for peace. And my mother and Representative Abzug were extremely frustrated with the state of nonnegotiation, and so they went to Paris to—not so much to accomplish anything, because obviously they did not have the authority to negotiate, but to keep channels of communication open. And they did that, and I don't know what degree of flak Representative Abzug took for going, but my mother got a lot of it in Hawaii.

MURPHY: One of the other things she was very closely tied to was Title IX. Eventually it was renamed in her honor. And why was this so important to your mother? Why did she make this a priority, and one that she was consistently struggling to preserve in her career?

MINK: I think that securing Title IX, or what was named Title IX was an important goal for her, but not in and of itself. However, given the way women's equality policy unfolded over the years, or over that decade, really—which was the only decade in which we made significant advances towards equality, legislatively speaking—Title IX, or the educational equality component of the women's-equality agenda became a stand-alone. Her initial hope was legislation that would secure gender equity in all programs that received any kind of federal funding, whether they be educational or something else, it could be agricultural programs. This is 1969. She introduced a bill called the

Women's Equality Act which just enumerated a bunch of different realms in which the federal government spent money that it should no longer spend money in unless gender equity was a component of the program or policy. And again, it included things like Social Security, but it also included education and the like. So, I guess that's the best example of how at least at the beginning something like Title IX was not a stand-alone goal. Equality for women across the federal arena was the goal.

There was no way to accomplish equality for women across the federal agenda in a Congress that was even resistant to the 14th Amendment being interpreted to add protection on gender grounds. So things started to get carved up, and some things seemed to be resolvable by a friendly Supreme Court, which was beginning to interpret the 14th Amendment in ways that brought women's equality into the 14th Amendment as a principle of equal protection. Other things could be accomplished through separate bills, like the Fair Credit Act, which did not pass until '74, a couple years after Title IX. But I am just using these examples of the way in which . . . kind of an umbrella that covered many elements got broken apart. So, Title IX becomes its own singular goal as part of the Education Amendments of 1972.

The legislative conflict—that's probably even too strong a word—the legislative debate over Title IX in the Education Act Amendments of 1972 takes place mostly in 1971—in the fall of '71—and there's a little bit of controversy over whether or not private college admissions should be covered. And the conservatives win the day on that, so they exempt private undergraduate admissions, but all other forms of admissions are covered, and that includes private professional school admissions. Once that happened, there wasn't too much controversy over Title IX at its passage. It was a goal that had been incorporated in my mother's omnibus bill. It was a goal that

was part of Representative Edith [Starrett] Green's vision of a Higher Education Act Amendment, and it got folded into the omnibus Education Act Amendments which—and the Education Act Amendments included things like school busing and ethnic studies and stuff that affected the gamut from K through 12 all the way through college and graduate school.

I believe Title IX passed on a teller vote, which would signify that it wasn't even that big a deal because a roll call was not necessary. I remember being in the gallery watching the teller vote, knowing how important and portentous the issue was, but I think that a roll call vote was not called for. So, it passed the House in that way. I could be wrong about the lack of a roll call on that issue, but in any case, the conflict and controversy doesn't emerge until after Title IX is signed into law, and that's the point at which the NCAA and college alumni—especially in male institutions—college athletics enthusiasts erupt in opposition. Title IX was just 37 or 39 words, so it was going to be left up to the Department of what was then called Health, Education, and Welfare [HEW] to design the regulations and the college athletics community wanted to put pressure on the executive branch to exempt athletics.

So, that's the moment at which it is incumbent upon somebody who was an author and a supporter and a nurturer of Title IX to start fighting. And so it's at that moment in 1973 that my mother really has to take Title IX on, and its defense, as a major responsibility. It's in the context of the kind of opposition that was mobilized. So, she took on that responsibility to try to make sure that the HEW regulations would include athletics. That meant having to fight against every amendment that emerged in the House and Senate to all kinds of bills—riders that would prohibit Title IX from applying to athletics or prohibit Title IX from co-educating phys. ed. classes, and all

down the line. That became kind of the focal issue for educational equity, even though Title IX was really pretty comprehensive in that it affected all aspects of education within educational institutions.

MURPHY: And there was one particular story: I was thinking of the vote to avoid retraction of that element in 1975.

MINK: Right. Well, in the Education Act Amendments, in the original Title IX provision, Congress retained for itself the right to veto the regulations before they were promulgated. And so in addition to trying to influence the regulations by amending various—often non-germane—pieces of legislation with these amendments that said "Title IX shall not apply," and not winning those, but attempting [to]—the conservatives, the pro-male athletics, college athletic folks—in addition to that, Congress retained for itself the right to veto the regulation.

So the regulations were issued in June of 1975, and they could have quietly gone into effect if Congress had done nothing, but there were forces—bipartisan forces in the House of Representatives—who wanted basically to veto the regulations, to force HEW to go back and rewrite them to exclude athletics. And so in order to do that, they had to bring the issue to a vote. The full House of Representatives had to officially veto the regulations, which would have then thrown things back to the executive branch to perfect, before giving Congress yet another chance to accept or reject the regulations.

This was obviously the sort of Rubicon for Title IX, right? If the executive branch regulations that included athletics as a gender-equity issue were beaten back by the conservative forces—the sexist forces, really—then Title IX would have been very narrowly applied and would not have been the kind

of robust equality weapon that it became. And it would have opened up all sorts of opportunities and hopes of people who wanted to narrow Title IX even more in other domains to do so by legislative intervention or by pressuring the executive branch on this or that. So, it was a huge moment. The legislative-veto mechanism allowed Congress 30 days, or something like that, to veto. And so in the middle of July of 1975, the issue was brought to a vote in the House, and my mother was the principal advocate for a robust Title IX. She led the defense of the new regulations. Representative Green, who was the senior member of the Education and Labor Committee when Title IX was initially passed was, I believe, no longer in Congress or on her way out. I think she didn't run for re-election in '74. So, of the women on Education and Labor, my mother was the person. She was absolutely committed to making sure that a robust Title IX would be possible.

But just before the vote—or as the vote was beginning to transpire—just as whoever was in the Speaker's chair said "the Clerk shall call the roll," my mother was pulled off the floor with an emergency phone call telling her that I had been in a terrible automobile accident in Ithaca, New York, where I was in graduate school. And so she left without voting, encouraged by her colleagues—you know: "Go, go, go, go take care of your daughter." So, she ran out of the Capitol and grabbed my father, and caught a plane to Ithaca. And the result of that was that the people who wanted to veto the robust regulations won by one vote. And so it looked like the beginning of the end of the scope of equality that Title IX eventually came to promise.

Luckily, the kindness of Speaker [Carl Bert] Albert—I don't know, responding to pressures, perhaps, from other quarters in the House—invited the House of Representatives to cast a re-vote on the issue when my mother was able to leave the hospital and return to her duties in Washington, D.C.,

so a re-vote was called, and after some people got up and said things like, "Oh, she's such a nice daughter" as their explanation for changing their vote, the good guys won on the second vote by, like, I don't know, nine or 10 or a dozen votes.[1]

MURPHY: We are running out of time, but I was thinking maybe we could talk a little bit about her second experience in Congress, in the 1990s, particularly her work on the major issues at that time—mainly, welfare reform, and your connection with that as well, and then maybe you could end by discussing some of her thoughts on the differences between those periods.

MINK: Okay. So, you're just leaving that open-ended?

MURPHY: Yes.

MINK: Okay.

MURPHY: Wherever you are going to take it.

MINK: Well, let me start at the end of what you asked for, which is the differences, because that's kind of a starting point in a way for her, sort of, sense of possibility when she returned in 1990, which was that it was the end of the [President Ronald Wilson] Reagan era, and there had been enormous retrenchment of government and a real curtailment of the sense that government should—let alone, could—help provide solutions to a lot of society's problems. And that was a huge difference that was probably the most noticeable and demoralizing—in some ways—difference between the first period and the second of her congressional experiences. For people in the '60s and early '70s, even if you couldn't win the dramatic social change that you were interested in, you could put up a fight for it, because lots of people thought that it was not just the right thing, but also a possible thing to

accomplish. And so every step in that direction was a fruitful step, was a bountiful step, because it would take us that much closer to the achievements that a lot of people on the progressive end of the political spectrum thought were necessary for a true democratic order.

By the time you get to the '90s, it is a rearguard action. It's fighting back against the rollbacks of the Reagan era. It's fighting and—not all that really attaches to the Reagan administration, some of it was the [Supreme] Court—fighting back against the Court's narrowing of the definitions of discrimination, fighting back against judicial responses to efforts to retract the scope of *Roe v. Wade*. All of those things were what the agenda was; it wasn't an agenda about moving forward, it was an agenda about preserving things that had been won 20 years earlier and an agenda to prevent further disasters that had been prescribed by the opposite party. So, that was very different.

On the other hand, what was also different was the fact that actual comprehensive, gendered—but not only for women—gendered legislation was discussable now in a way that hadn't really been the case in the '70s. So, you know, issues like family leave, family medical leave, issues like violence against women, family violence—those kinds of things—were on the table, but they were actually the exceptions to the general rule that there wasn't much you could do to move forward. Most attention focused on stuff that you needed to do to prevent rollbacks to a much older era.

MURPHY: How do you think women like your mother changed the House as an institution over time, since their numbers began increasing in the 1960s?

MINK: Well, I think that every little thing—or maybe not-so-little thing—that the women in Congress dared to speak about, whether it was, you know, not

having gym access in the 1960s or insisting that Anita Hill be heard in 1991, to insisting that certain kinds of women's issues get a full hearing—I think all of those things have been part of the story of women in Congress and part of my mother's story of being a woman in Congress. I think that what she took from her service was a constant reminder to herself of how important it is that women serve in Congress. Because one woman can't accomplish what 218 women could, right? And so her goal was parity for women—for the whole full range of women's voices. I think she hoped that the legacy of being the first woman of color and being a woman who was willing to talk about women, you know, that that would be part of what she would leave to the future.

MURPHY: Great. Thank you very much.

MINK: Thanks.

NOTES

[1] On July 16, 1975, the House debated an amendment to a House appropriations bill (H.R. 5901), added by Representative Robert Randolph Casey, that would prohibit the application of Title IX to physical education courses in public schools. After Mink had left the Capitol to care for her daughter, the motion passed by a vote of 212 to 211. The following day, the Senate had stricken the amendment from a previous version of the bill in conference, and it subsequently voted 65 to 29 to strike the amendment from the bill and insist on its earlier position. On July 18, Speaker Albert and Representative Daniel John Flood described the circumstances of Mink's departure to aid her daughter, and Flood offered a motion "to recede and concur in the Senate position." The vote was in favor of this motion, 216 to 178. This preserved the application of Title IX to physical education in public schools. The entire debate over the amendment can be found in several passages in the *Congressional Record*. *Congressional Record*, House, 94th Cong., 1st sess. (16 July 1975): 23113-23127; *Congressional Record*, Senate, 94th Cong., 1st sess. (17 July 1975): 23330-23343; *Congressional Record*, House, 94th Cong., 1st sess. (18 July 1975): 23504-23510.