

A SENATE PAGE

Interview #1

Wednesday, November 8, 2006

RITCHIE: The first question I wanted to ask was where were you born and raised?

JOHNSON: I was born and raised in Washington, D.C., right down the street from here, about nineteen blocks at D.C. General Hospital. I was born in 1954, and grew up around Capitol Hill. I lived down near the Marine Barracks for a while, and then moved up off of 10th and Penn [Pennsylvania] Avenue, and then subsequently in and around the Hill as I began to work on the Hill.

RITCHIE: What did your family do?

JOHNSON: Actually, that's an interesting question—I was raised by a single parent, my mother. My mother was a housekeeper at the Shoreham Hotel, and she was one of Senator Warren Magnuson's housekeepers. I was selling newspapers in the Senate to Senator Magnuson and my mother was helping keep his apartment at the Shoreham clean. That's what she did. My father was cab driver, although my mother and father never married. He fought in World War II and came back to D.C. and he drove cabs until his death, Yellow Cabs.

RITCHIE: And so you went to school on Capitol Hill?

JOHNSON: Yes, I did. I went to elementary school down from the Library of Congress at Watkins Elementary School, which is located at 12th and Penn. Prior to that I attended Van Ness, which is located off M Street, in the Southwest Area, where the Waterfront is getting ready to be developed. I graduated from Watkins to Hine Junior High School, located at 7th and Pennsylvania Avenue, SE Washington. In the ninth grade I was appointed a page and I went to Page School, although I did not graduate with my class. I repeated the eleventh grade in Page School and at that time I was too old to continue to be a page, so I repeated my eleventh year, as probably the only Senate staffer that's ever attended the school that wasn't a page. I was working for Senator John Tower

at the time. After I repeated that grade and got to my senior year, I transferred to McKinley Tech High School in NE Washington, DC, and I completed my senior year there, and graduated.

RITCHIE: Well, how did you get to be a page?

JOHNSON: That's an interesting story, Don. I started out selling newspapers in 1961 on Senate side of Capitol Hill. At that time the Russell and the Dirksen Buildings were the Old and the New Senate Office Buildings, so we called it the OSOB and the NSOB, that was the acronyms that I would see on the facility carts around the building. As I sold my newspapers in the offices, I got to know a lot of staff and a lot of senators personally. People like Senator [George] McGovern, Senator [David] Pryor, Senator [Walter] Mondale, Senator Kennedy—both Kennedys, Ted and Robert—Senator [Robert] Bennett's father [Wallace Bennett], and Senator Gaylord Nelson of Wisconsin. In fact, Senator Nelson helped me start my first savings account and would match what I put in it. One particular senator I got to know exceptionally well was Senator [George] Aiken of Vermont.

I kept looking at these young kids about my age running around the Hill in the afternoons while I sold newspapers. I was thinking, "Who are these little kids with these suits and ties on?" So I inquired and a few staff said, "Oh, those are pages." I said, "What do they do?" They said, "Why they work in the Capitol, they go to school in the Library of Congress, and they get paid." I said, "How much do they make?" At the time they were making about five thousand four hundred a year. That was the salary. So I asked Senator Aiken could I be a page, and he said, "Well, Mike, if you get your grades up, I'll think about maybe giving up my elevator patronage position and bring you on as my page." And that's what happened. In December 1969 I showed the Senator and Mrs. Aiken my report card from my first semester in Junior High at Hine. I had all As and one B. He said, "Okay, good enough." I got appointed in December 1969, so when the Senate came back in session in January from their recess, I was sworn in and got on the payroll in January of 1970.

RITCHIE: Just one question about the newspapers. Did you sell the *Washington Evening Star*? Because you said you did it in the afternoon.

JOHNSON: I sold the *Evening Star*. I brought a couple of photos to show you of me selling the newspapers. I lost a lot of them. This particular one, I had my papers and Senator Mondale's birthday was that day. Senator Mondale was another senator that I would go in his private office, like Senator [Mark] Pryor's father, to sell papers. They would leave their private offices unlocked. "Bring my paper right to me, Mike, because those staffers don't always buy the paper." Plus the senators tipped very well. This picture was when Vice President [Hubert] Humphrey was visiting Senator Mondale in the Russell Building for his birthday. That [picture] was taken on the fourth floor of the Russell. And Mondale said, "Let my paperboy in here. I want him to meet the Vice President." I just couldn't believe it. So I'm looking in awe, and the next day or a couple of days later this picture was published in the *Minnesota Times*. It was on the front page saying "Mondale's Paperboy Meets the Vice President." Of course, I don't know what I ever did with that paper—he gave me a copy of it.

This is another picture of when I was a paperboy. I left my newspapers in the hallway, and Senator [Ted] Kennedy would give me a dollar for every A I got on my report card, to help kind of influence me to do good in school. So one day I asked him, "Can we take a picture?" He said sure. A lady on his staff pulled a Polaroid camera out of the file cabinet and snapped this photo of us. Recently, we took another of us, holding my picture with him, and we talked about my Senate career. So that's how I got my start as a Senate page. I have plenty of stories from then. It was a great, great experience.

RITCHIE: How did you come to sell newspapers in the Senate Office Building?

JOHNSON: Well, that's an interesting story. My brother actually had the paper route. He was getting older and I guess becoming a teenager and didn't really want to work anymore selling newspapers. The truck would pick us up on the corner of Seventh and Penn., right across the street from Hines. There was a People's Drug Store there. We would get on the truck and it would bring us up to the Senate and House buildings. When he gave up his route, the driver asked me, "Do you want your brother's route?" I said "Sure." So he gave me the paper route and I kept it until '69, when I was appointed a page.

[Picture on the following page: Michael Johnson with Senator Edward M. Kennedy, then and now.]

RITCHIE: So you would just walk up and down the halls and knock on doors and say, "Who wants the *Star*?"

JOHNSON: Yes, that's exactly right. I would say, "*Star* newspaper." I developed permanent customers, especially in offices like Senator [J. William] Fulbright's, Lee Williams, and people like that. And Tom Korologos in Senator [Wallace] Bennett's office. Tom and I are very good friends to this day. I've known Tom for over forty years. These people took an interest in me as well as just buying the newspapers. I would write down my permanent customers and then I would sit a stack of papers right at the door, and people would leave their change, staff and visitors going in and out of the building, and I would sell papers that way as well. That's how I developed my client base. [chuckles]

RITCHIE: The *Star* was a pretty big paper in those days, the big afternoon paper.

JOHNSON: It was. It was a very big paper, yes.

RITCHIE: Everybody wanted to know what the breaking news was, this was before cable news on television.

JOHNSON: Exactly. As a matter of fact, the *Star* printed two editions. It printed an early edition and then the evening edition. The edition I brought in was the evening edition that would come out about 3:00 P.M., because I got out of school at 3:00, and it would take about an hour to get your papers and get into the building—it was the latest breaking news, it was the newest edition, it was the evening edition and everybody wanted it.

RITCHIE: You mentioned Senator Aiken in particular. What did you like about Senator Aiken out of all the senators that you went to him to become a page?

JOHNSON: It was really his wife who I got to know well, and that was Lola, as you probably know. Mrs. Aiken—I never called her Lola, but that was what Senator Aiken called her, and she called him the Governor, because he was a two-term governor of Vermont. She would just talk to me, and told me, "Make sure you stay in school. You need to do better." Because I grew up very poor. We were on welfare. It was a single

parent family. My mother worked two jobs. As a kid, I had to work to make my own money. Mrs. Aiken would just talk to me everyday and ask me my interests and things like that, just like Senator Kennedy would. "How are you doing in school?" "Okay, let me see that report card." She went in and she said, "If you do very well, I'll talk to the Governor about you." I would see him all the time anyway, when I sold him my paper.

One thing I *really* liked about him was the fact that he fed the pigeons and squirrels on the Capitol grounds all the time. He would come out of the Russell building, and pigeons would flock to him. People would wonder, "Who is this old man with this head of white hair with all these pigeons around him?" If you didn't know better, or couldn't see his suit and tie, you'd think he was homeless, but he was a senator. He'd feed the birds and they *knew* him—the birds would just flock to him as soon as he walked out of the building. He just was a genuinely very nice and giving person, and I admired him a lot, I really did. I saw him about six or eight months before he passed. I was in Vermont, on business and went to Putney to visit. I spent the day with him and Mrs. Aiken.

RITCHIE: I never met him, but I have met Lola, and she's continuing on.

JOHNSON: That's what I hear. I talked to Senator [Jim] Jeffords on the subway, who said that in his previous campaign Mrs. Aiken had helped him out. I think she's living in Montpelier now, that's what he told me. I haven't written her for a while, but she would be surprised to see I'm actually the Deputy Assistant Sergeant at Arms. She would probably say, "What?" [laughs]

RITCHIE: Well, you came in as a page in 1970. What did they have you doing as a page?

[Following page, top: Michael Johnson's mother with Senator George Aiken and Lola Aiken in the Senators Dining Room; below: Johnson with fellow Senate pages.]

JOHNSON: I came on board, I had just turned fifteen years old, because my birthday is December 6th, I have to get the years correct on it. But I was appointed at that time. There were no other African American pages on the Republican side. There were a couple on the Democratic side. That's when I met Mark Trice [the Republican Secretary]. Mr. Trice sat me down and read me the rules of the book on what I would be doing. I started off as a floor page. The floor pages were responsible for setting up the desks in the morning with the *Congressional Record*, the *Daily Calendar*, that type of stuff. Then as I proved to be really a good worker and a hard worker, I was promoted to be the cloakroom page. The cloakroom page gets to sit inside the cloakroom with the cloakroom staff and you run errands for the cloakroom staff, as well as senators that were inside the cloakroom. So I did both. I did the floor page duties and I did the cloakroom page duties. Both of them were very exciting and very rewarding.

RITCHIE: You know, Mark Trice started as a page himself.

JOHNSON: I did know that. He would often talk about that. He was a very astute person. He was a no-nonsense kind of guy. [laughs] But I learned a lot from Mr. Trice, as well as his assistant Mr. [William] Brownrigg, he was really nice. And of course Howard Greene, who became Sergeant at Arms later on. Howard was on the cloakroom desk at the time I was a page. I watched Howard move up through the ranks as well. Howard and I talk all the time on the phone.

RITCHIE: Well, what was it like suddenly coming into the Senate chamber, and being called on by senators to run errands?

JOHNSON: Phew. I really can't describe the experience. It was beyond belief. It was remarkable in the minor sense and in the major sense it was just astounding to be working at that young an age in the world's greatest deliberative body, as they refer to it. Back in that time we were living in some turbulent years because the Vietnam War was going on. There were a lot of protesters that would stand up in the galleries all the time and shout things like "Stop the War!" And sitting on the floor as kids we would be somewhat afraid. It was intimidating also in certain aspects because here I was working with giants, people like Senator [Edward] Brooke, like Senator [Howard] Baker, who was coming up. Senator [Bob] Dole had just gotten elected. He was a junior senator and I remember him coming in after he was elected because he sat in the back row where they

put all the freshman senators. People like Margaret Chase Smith, Hugh Scott, Mark Hatfield, Bob Packwood, and then of course on the Democratic side you had [Robert C.] Byrd, you had Kennedy, you had all of these great men that you were working with. Senator [Mike] Mansfield, a very, very great person. I was just overwhelmed.

Everyday was just a great experience coming into that chamber and knowing that I was a part of the institution and helping to prepare their workday, everyday. And we stayed until the end. There was no shift work or anything. We got up in the mornings, went to school, and when they went in session early we cut our classes back to fifteen, twenty minutes a class, we would adjust them so we could be over in the chamber. We had to be there half an hour before each session started. So anytime they went in at 9:30, 9 o'clock, whatever, we had to cut our schooldays back.

RITCHIE: Where did you go to school then?

JOHNSON: The Page School at the time was located in the attic of the Jefferson Building of the Library of Congress, which is the oldest of the three library buildings. What a lot of people don't know is that the Page School at the time was actually under the D.C. public school system. I knew that because the principal when I got there was just resigning and the new principal was my previous principal at Hine, Mr. Hoffman—Jack Hoffman. He got hired or transferred to the Page School and I think one of the teachers said, "Oh, we've got one of your students up here from Hine that's a page." He said, "Who is that?" They introduced me. He didn't know me, because I wasn't necessarily one of the great, outstanding students. I could do the work when I wanted to, but I was more interested in selling newspapers in the evening.

The school was in the attic and we had to be there at 6 o'clock in the morning. Classes started at 6:15 and they were 45 minutes. We did two classes in the morning. We had a break from 7:45 to 8:15. And then we completed the other two classes. We only took major classes like bio, history, English, and a language or typing. Miss McGoffey was our typing teacher. We didn't do phys. ed. and all those types of courses. At the time, the schools were combined—the House and Senate pages. We all went to school together. There were also Supreme Court pages that went to school with us. I understand they dissolved that program, but I knew a lot of the guys who were Supreme Court pages. One particular guy who was a brilliant person, Richard Holland, is now a

nuclear physicist, and he lives in New York. He and I did our undergraduate work at Cornell together. He's from D.C. He was a Supreme Court page.

The unique thing about Supreme Court pages was that they normally were appointed for four years, so they could go from ninth all the way through the twelfth grade, whereas for the Senate pages the patronage varied. I think Senator [Strom] Thurmond had the shortest. He would rotate his pages out every three months. Senator Aiken allowed me to stay as long as I kept my grades up. But most senators gave kids no more than six months to come in, do the program, and then rotate out of the program. So it was under the public school system and it was one school for House, Senate, and Supreme Court pages.

RITCHIE: In those days, pages had to find your own lodging, but your mother lived on Capitol Hill so you had an advantage.

JOHNSON: That is an interesting question, Don, because actually, yes, my mother lived on the Hill, but as I said, we grew up very poor. We never owned our home, we rented homes. My house was very crowded. We had cousins and everybody living with us. So when I became a page and was making some money, I moved out. I moved out on my own. I was fifteen, and I've stayed on my own ever since then, except when I went back for the one year at the senior high school, McKinley Tech. I rented rooms down on 6th and Penn. I shared houses with pages across from the Friendship House, down there at 6th and D Street, Southeast. I lived right across from the Hart Building, right next to what is now the Club 116, with a gentleman and his mother, Joe Doss, who was Senator [Marlow] Cook's page, Cook of Kentucky. Joe now is the president of the International Bottled Water Association. He's an attorney. He and I are like brothers. I stayed with him and his family for about a year. So I moved around and sort of went out on my own. I really didn't stay with my mother.

RITCHIE: Well, I know that there were a lot of boarding houses on Capitol Hill in those days.

JOHNSON: There were.

RITCHIE: A lot the pages used to live in these boarding houses.

JOHNSON: Exactly. They had the English basements and separate bedrooms.

RITCHIE: There were quite a few of them. I lived on Capitol Hill in the 1970s when I was a graduate student, and I remember there were a lot of group houses.

JOHNSON: A lot of group houses, all along Seward Square and down on North Carolina Avenue. Just all over. I think a lot of people figured out how to make money back in those days, renting to interns, pages, college students.

RITCHIE: So you earned enough from being a page that you could get by on your own?

JOHNSON: I did. My first place was right there at 6th and Penn., across from Mr. Henry's [restaurant]. Back in those days Roberta Flack was getting her start, and she started out at Mr. Henry's, right there on the Avenue. I rented a place right across the street for \$21 a month, an efficiency in the basement. I had a kitchen, and a bed, and for \$21 it worked for me! [laughs]

RITCHIE: You mentioned that you became a cloakroom page, and that it was different than being a floor page. What was the difference?

JOHNSON: The cloakroom page was seen as a senior page that knew the buildings, knew the routes to deliver letters and important documents very quickly to the offices. The cloakroom page also had an advantage because he got to sit in there with the guys who were running the cloakroom, so you got to see how the cloakroom operated. You not only were serving the senators, but you went down to get lunch for the cloakroom guys. You helped out answering the phones if one of them was off. So sometimes you got to sit in one of the chairs and answer the calls coming in from the offices. "How long tonight?" "What time tonight?" You know, "What's up?" I was able to experience seeing the first recording system put in, where they started recording the status of the votes and when the Senate went out of session. I remember Howard saying, "I can't understand this machine!" [laughs] Because, prior to putting in that machine, they didn't have anything automated.

The other thing was you really got to see senators in a more relaxed environment, so senators would get to know you personally. Senators like Bob Dole, who at the time—he doesn't remember this, I asked him—but he used to like to drink carbonated water. He would always say, "Mike, bring me some of that bubbly stuff." I'd get him a glass of carbonated water. Senator Goldwater liked drinking it as well. Senator Thurmond loved those hamburgers from the basement shop. He would always want to get a hamburger with everything on it, and he'd sit in the cloakroom and chow down on that hamburger, and then he'd be back on the floor with his speeches. So it was unique in the sense that you got to stay around the floor and you didn't have as many runs out to the offices. You also got the chance to work the policy luncheons on Tuesdays. You got to eat a free lunch on those days if there were any leftovers. That's how I met Senator George Murphy of California. I didn't know he used to be a movie star. I got to know the senators, I got to know the cloakroom staff, and of course I worked very closely with Mr. Trice and Mr. Brownrigg. That's why it was different.

RITCHIE: And the senators were more relaxed when they were in the cloakroom than when they were on the floor, I assume.

JOHNSON: They were more relaxed. Again, they tended to laugh. I would see them laughing, and joking, and slapping each other on the back and stuff like that, calling each other by their first names as opposed to when they were out on the floor, where everything was formal. They really didn't address each other, they addressed the chair. I didn't see them in a relaxed environment until I saw them in the cloakroom. We would also see them relaxed in the reading room, at the back of the chamber, where the newspapers were. They would have papers from all over the United States. Of course, in those days you had the AP and the UPI tickertapes, so I'd see them there reading the tickertapes in the back, and I'd see them relaxed there, sleeping, or making a phone call. The pages, we were responsible for changing the paper on the tickertapes.

RITCHIE: I remember those big old leather couches and the Barkolounger type chairs—I'm sure many naps were taken back there.

JOHNSON: Yes, a few. As a matter of fact, I have one of those leather chairs in my office. [laughs] And hopefully they'll let me buy it when I retire.

RITCHIE: You mentioned running errands to the offices, so when you were on the floor you were often taking things back and forth between the Capitol and the office buildings?

JOHNSON: Yes, that was my main function, besides getting the floor prepared in the mornings before the session convened. I had often runs that I had to do with letters or documents, whatever, between the Capitol and the senators' personal offices or committees. So that was the bulk of what I did all day. Some of the more grunt work was I had to work in what we called the "bill hole." The bill hole was down in the basement of the Capitol and it was where we had to keep copies of the *Congressional Records* for a certain period of time. I don't think they do that anymore. I think GPO [the Government Printing Office] is responsible for doing that now. But back in those days we would file back copies, so if a senator wanted to read his remarks a week later, "Go to the bill hole and get this *Congressional Record*." I'd have to go find it. No pages wanted that job! Because it was dusty and dirty, and you had your blue suit on with your white shirt. So that was one of the more challenging assignments. But the main thing was taking runs out to the offices, and also out to the House office buildings. It wasn't just the Senate office buildings. I would make runs over to the House side as well. The Senate would never call the House pages, they'd just send their own pages over to the House side. That was most of what I did all day, make runs or assist senators when I was on the floor.

RITCHIE: Well, who maintained discipline? Who was the person that you reported to?

JOHNSON: Officially, we reported to Mr. Trice, as the Republican Secretary or the Secretary for the Minority or Majority, depending on which party was in the majority, but it was Mr. Brownrigg and the most senior guy in the cloakroom that really gave the pages the orders, in terms of what to do and who would be in the cloakroom. The Republican Secretary and his assistant was always dealing with the senators, with the vote tally sheets and stuff like that, sitting out in the well of the Senate. So it was really the cloakroom staff that kept pages in line, and disciplined us, and wrote us up. [laughs] When I say "write us up," they would call the office and tell your senator or your sponsor that you weren't doing what you were supposed to be doing, if you got out of line. It was pretty much Howard Greene and the folks in the cloakroom. And then on the Democratic

side, I got to know those guys, too, Patrick Hynes and a few other folks.

RITCHIE: I'm sure Howard could be a little gruff at times.

JOHNSON: Yes, gruff back in those days! Howard was young, and he smoked cigars back in those days. But he was a good person under that tough guy exterior—I won't call it an act, that's just who he is. He felt he had to be that way because of where he worked. But underneath, if you were in the cloakroom with him, you'd see him laugh and joke every now and then, and just let down his guard. As a matter of fact, him and I reminisce when we talk about the old days. When I got older and I had my own family, Howard appointed my son as a page for a couple of summers.

RITCHIE: Did you only deal with Republican pages, or did you deal with the Democratic side at all?

JOHNSON: I did. As a matter of fact, one of the notes that I had written down before coming over here was that there was some important legislation—well, first let me just answer you by saying this: we all knew each other because we went to school together. Because we all went to school together, I knew the House pages, I knew the Supreme Court pages, whether Dem. or Republican, were all pages. I didn't see ourselves as "You're the Dem. pages, we're Republican, so I can't talk to you." We all got along. Some of us roomed together and went out together. But from time to time we would have certain senators that would convene a group of Republican and Democratic pages. One such senator was Senator Mansfield. He had some important legislation come up in front of the Senate either in '71 or '72 where he asked—it was kind of interesting because he went to the cloakrooms and said, "I want you to send at least three or four pages from each of your benches"—they called the floor the benches—"to my office at three o'clock in the afternoon. I want to have a meeting with them." We didn't know what was going on. I got picked to go, and of course there were news cameras in there snapping pictures of this meeting. I have a picture of this. We're saying, "What's going on?" Senator Mansfield said "We have some important legislation before the Senate"—I can't recall what it was, but it was very important, and it was coming to a vote the next day on the floor. He said, "I wanted to get the opinion of the little people who run the Senate." So he went around the table and asked each of us were we aware of the legislation, did we know what it meant, what the impact of it was, and if so how would

we vote if we were senators? That was real interesting. So, from time to time. we got to do things like that.

There was another time when a foreign country wanted to possibly mimic the program. I'm not sure if it was Israel or England or whatever, but a foreign country came over and they made a movie about the pages. The movie is called "One Man, David Federaly," because David was the star of the movie, and David was Senator [Carl] Curtis of Nebraska's page. His mother worked for Senator Curtis at that time. They followed him around. A camera crew filmed him doing his work, delivering correspondence and documents to offices, and they made a movie that they showed overseas about the Senate page program. He is a doctor now, and I think he lives out west.

RITCHIE: Do you have some other notes about the page program?

JOHNSON: Yes, I wanted to tell you about some of my most memorable moments being a page, when history was being made. That was in 1971 when Senator [Jacob] Javits appointed the first girl page. Probably most people don't know about this, but in '71 Senator Javits looked around, looked at the history of the program, and said, "You know, we've never had any female pages, and I'm going to appoint one." I think he got up and he spoke about getting a female page, so we were all chatterboxes, saying, "Oh, we may be appointing some female pages." And sure enough, I think about a week or two later he appointed a young lady by the name of Paulette Desell. Paulette arrived in the Senate after--well, let me back up. There was another senator who said, "I'm not going to be outbeaten by Jacob Javits." This was Senator [Charles] Percy of Illinois. "So I'm going to appoint a female page." Here you've got these two senators and who's going to appoint the first female page?

Both female pages, Paulette and Ellen McConnell, arrived the same day. Ellen came to the cloakroom first, but the Senate was not in session. Paulette went to Senator Javits' office and got sworn in and went on the payroll first. So therefore Paulette was

[Pictures on the following page: top: Majority Leader Mike Mansfield meets with the Senate pages; below: Senator Strom Thurmond's daughter is made an honorary page.]

the one who made history as the first female Senate page. She went on "What's My Line?" and TV shows like that, and Ellen never lived that down. She talked about that disappointment during her whole tenure, about how: "I was the first to arrive in the cloakroom. I didn't know I needed to get sworn in and on the payroll. I showed up first, and they're saying she was the first, but I was here first!" It was a continued discussion amongst all of us, all the time, and Ellen never lived that down. But both of them were very nice young ladies. We all got to know each other very well. Paulette even had all of us over to her house for dinner and I remember because Joe Doss and I rode together and it was real foggy that night in Mount Vernon. Her father was either an attorney or a lobbyist, and they lived out in Mount Vernon, Virginia. She and her family were real nice people. So that was interesting that Senator Javits said he was going to—and did—make history by appointing the first female Senate page. I found out later that he appointed the first African American page as well.

RITCHIE: So the guys treated the girls okay? They didn't give them any resistance?

JOHNSON: No, we may have played jokes on them from time to time, telling them the wrong room number to an office: "Oh, yeah, that room is in the Rayburn Building," when it was actually in the Cannon Building. They'd say, "Mike, where's this room?" But all in all, we all got along and we all had a great time together. We all got to know each other and helped each other. That was one memorable moment that I wanted to point out to you.

Another one was when Senator John Glenn, who was an astronaut, and he came to the Senate floor after going up in space, to meet all the senators, and we all got to shake his hand. That was just remarkable, getting to meet an astronaut. That was like on the front page of the paper. That was a memorable moment.

Another memorable moment was when microphones were first put into the chamber. The senators resisted that vehemently. "We're not going to have those electronic gadgets!" One senator who didn't like them was Senator [Norris] Cotton. Senator Cotton was a pipe smoker, and he would cough a lot, I assume from smoking the pipe. When he would clear his throat he would take the microphone, and *cau-cau-cau* straight into the microphone while thinking it was off! Everybody would look at Senator

Cotton. He would forget that the microphone was on, and so we kind of snickered every time he did that. [laughs] "Why don't he turn his microphone off?" We would get a kick out of Senator Cotton doing that. By the way, he sat at—you already know this—they carve their names in the desks and we got a kick out of looking in the desks and seeing who sat where. Senator Cotton at the time was sitting at Daniel Webster's desk. He had that desk on the floor. I understand that they have rearranged it, so I guess senior members get certain desks, or the man from your state, or something like that.

RITCHIE: He arranged for the senior senator from New Hampshire always to have that desk.

JOHNSON: He did! Is that still the case today? [laughs] I'll never forget that, because he had a great desk. We'd have to fill up the snuff boxes, even though they didn't use it, and clean out the spittoons, for the senators who chewed tobacco. I remember that Senator Margaret Chase Smith was one of the only female senators at the time when I was a page. She sat on the front row because of her seniority, and she faced us, because the pages sat right there on the steps of the podium. She was always nice to us and would always speak to us. Of course, at that time Senator Brooke was the only African American senator. He sat next to Senator Hatfield and they were very close friends. You could tell, they were always chatting and laughing. They were two of the sharpest dressers in terms of the senators. Senator Hatfield would dress always so elegantly, always shined shoes, always looking good. So would Senator Brooke. In fact, Senator Hatfield received the "Best Dressed Senator" award several times while I was a page.

I talked about the Vietnam protesters getting up in the galleries and kind of scaring us from time to time with the shouting, and the Capitol Police officers jumping over the rails and removing them from the gallery. I also learned that the DC Police had detailees on the Senate door during those times. The other biggest event that happened when I was a page, Don, was when the Capitol was bombed. That was kind of scary. We were in school at the time. I think school had just started, it was maybe 6:15 or 6:30. I'm not sure if the bomb went off at the time in the morning or if it had gone off earlier that morning and the word was just getting to us. The bomb was placed behind a statue that was out in front of one of the windows on the Republican cloakroom side, where the Republican cloakroom extends to the hallway where the front of the chamber is, and they

have the windows painted so you can't see in the cloakrooms. The bomb was placed behind that statute, my understanding was, it blew out all the windows in the cloakroom. Word got to us in school, and the first thing we thought was, "Do we have to work today?" But on a more serious note, we were all concerned about making sure that Howard, or John Teague, or Rick Gracer, or none of the cloakroom guys were harmed. I remember them telling us that the Capitol was on lock down and there was a lot of chaos when the Capitol was bombed. I'm not sure if that was the first or the second time.

RITCHIE: There was one in '71.

JOHNSON: That's the one I'm talking about.

RITCHIE: And there was another one in '83.

JOHNSON: I wasn't working in the Capitol in '83; my office was at 400 North Capitol Street although I worked for the Senate Sergeant at Arms. I was a page when the first bombing happened, and it blew out all the windows on the Republican cloakroom side. We ended up going to work that day, and the windows were all boarded up. I remember a lot of controversy was going on with Chief Powell and the Capitol Police officers being professional. I could overhear comments and chatter that the laxness in security was blamed on the Capitol Police officers not being professional law enforcement, because at the time the officers were mostly patronage appointments. Most of them—and I knew a lot of them, a few from selling newspapers, many knew me from selling newspapers so when I became a page I would go to offices and people knew who I was. The newspapers blamed the officers for the bombing. Articles said that the guys were not paying attention. They were too lax. They were studying for school. Most of them were law students or in college or grad school. Although they were police officers, they were not considered professional law enforcers because they were appointed on patronage. I think the chief at the time was Chief Powell. I think that was the turning point where the appointment of Capitol Police officers by senators under the patronage system began to be eliminated. He lobbied and said, "I need professional officers to be able to protect this building, and protect you all." So that was really scary back in those days.

RITCHIE: Senator Harry Reid started out as a Capitol policeman when he was going through law school.

JOHNSON: I saw that in the newspaper recently. I'm not sure if I knew him then.

RITCHIE: He was there a little earlier in the '60s, but he was one of those law students who paid his way through school by working as a Capitol Police officer. In those days there wasn't much screening. The first screening in the '70s was outside the galleries. You could go into any of the doors without going through a metal detector.

JOHNSON: Exactly, you were never challenged. You're absolutely right, it was pretty much open. It was an open campus and an open building.

RITCHIE: And I guess since you were wearing a blue suit and a white shirt they knew who you were right away and you could come and go anywhere you wanted to go.

JOHNSON: They did. Now, one thing that they did change right after that bombing was they gave us name tags. So the little blue name tags that pages wear now, we had to start wearing name tags that said Senate Republican Page, Michael Johnson. But prior to that all we had was our blue suit and white shirt, and they knew pretty much who we were. And the officers didn't rotate that much. Being in school they pretty much stayed on one post. They had a post that they were assigned to according to their schedules. So they sort of knew your face and they knew who you were.

I'm quite sure there are some other memorable moments, but those are some of the highlights that I remember during my time as a Senate page.

RITCHIE: So altogether you were a page for three or four years?

JOHNSON: Yes.

RITCHIE: Wow, that's great, because today six months is maximum.

JOHNSON: Exactly, and again back in those days Senator Thurmond rotated his pages out every three months. He would get a new page every three months. Now, recently, I assisted with a reunion, a thirty, forty-year reunion. I think it was a year or two years ago. I had my boss, Mr. [William] Pickle, take the whole group on the floor. They accommodated us at the Supreme Court. We couldn't get on the House floor because they were in session. And we all took a picture out in front of the Capitol, with all the pages and their families who attended. I was part of that and helped arrange that. It was good to see some people I hadn't seen in years.

RITCHIE: Have you kept in touch with many of them?

JOHNSON: I have, especially my buddy Joe, who is president of the Water Bottlers Association, and Joe lives in Virginia. We often eat lunch or send each other email on the Internet, and with the recent controversy on the House side we've all been in touch. There's a page alumni listserv, and we're all on that list, so if someone sends a message it comes to all of us, and that's how we keep in touch with each other now, and we get together for dinner sometimes .

RITCHIE: I'm sure that the Senate you knew is very different from the Senate that the pages today know, it's changed so much over time.

JOHNSON: Absolutely, the Senate back in those days was very different. I think the difference, Don, was the fact that the senators, the people themselves, were different. They were just—I won't say regular folks, but they weren't so busy that they couldn't talk to you, that they couldn't sit down and have a cup of coffee with you, or a Coke or something like that. I don't see that today. I see them being very rushed. There are just so many issues to deal with and so many things coming at them from all angles on the foreign relation level to the local issues that they just don't have time that they had back in those days. I don't know if any of the pages have ever had the opportunity to sit down with either Senator Byrd or Senator [Bill] Frist in a roundtable discussion like Senator Mansfield took an hour out of his day to just say "I want to hear what these guys have got to say." That's just unheard of now. You don't see or hear them doing that because of the schedule and the pressure that they're under. I would say it was definitely different, the Senate that I worked in back in the day, versus the Senate of today.

RITCHIE: At that point it was still a five-day-a-week Senate, as opposed to a Tuesday, Wednesday, Thursday Senate. The senators were around a little bit more. Senator Aiken wouldn't go back to Vermont every weekend, so they had more time.

JOHNSON: You're absolutely right. I think that's a key factor, Don. Take Senator Aiken for example, Senator Aiken never purchased any property here in this area, to my knowledge. He said, "I'm a Vermonter, that's where I live, that's where my home is." So for his entire tenure here he stayed at the United Methodist Building, across the street from the Capitol. That's where he lived. I mentioned earlier that my mother was a housekeeper, a maid at the Shoreham Hotel, and that's where Senator Magnuson lived. He lived in a hotel. The senators came here to work and that's what they did. When they adjourned for the recesses, they would fly home and spend time with their families. So it was a five-day work week for us, almost every week. I don't remember getting Fridays off or saying "no votes." What do you mean, no votes scheduled? It was five days a week and sometimes Saturdays that we had to come in session, depending on what they were debating.

RITCHIE: At the same time, they would take long recesses or adjourn early in the fall so they'd be out for several months in the fall. What did you do when they were out of session?

JOHNSON: I don't know too many people who remember those days when they had the long recesses because they don't do that anymore. It's more broken up today, where they do a week on a week off, whatever. But when they would go out for the longer periods of time, some pages, the ones that the senators could keep on the payroll—meaning that you had the funds to pay them—worked in the senators' offices. I think we were paid by the Sergeant at Arms at the time, but the patronage position had to have funds associated with it, all of the complexities of keeping us on payroll. Sometimes they would take us off the payroll, and that's why some of my time in—when I go to the Senate Disbursing Office they say, "Mike, you had so many breaks in service early on!" I say, "Well, you know, that's how it was as life as a page." But when they were able to keep you on payroll during the recesses, you pretty much worked out of the [senator's] office. That's what they'd have some of us do. They would have pages come in and work in the mail room, back in the days—you probably remember this, Don—when we used to have the autopen signer. The senator had two hundred letters to go out, he

wouldn't sit there and sign them all—some senators did sit there and sign them, but some of them used the autopen. You'd go on and "Oh, you have 400 letters to get out today," I'd autopen sign them and fold them and put them in the envelopes and then send them out. So that's what some pages did when the Senate was out of session for long periods.

RITCHIE: Senators' offices were still pretty small in those days. A senator from Vermont wouldn't have had much of a staff.

JOHNSON: No, the staffs were not as big as they are in this day and age, and that's why a lot of times they would use the pages to augment the staff and help out with the—I won't call it grunt work but just some of the more mundane things, the mail room, delivering the mail, doing the autopen sign, taking orders to the old Service Department, which is called Printing, Graphics, and Direct Mail today, which was the old Service Department in those days, and doing things there. The other thing is, sometimes pages would have to do some driving for the senator, where you'd have to go pick him up at the airport or take him to the airport, or pick his chief of staff up, or take him to a meeting downtown. Especially the pages that were sixteen and had their drivers licence. In those days, if you were sixteen you could have a drivers licence.

RITCHIE: What would you do about school during the months when the Senate was adjourned. Did you go back to regular school or did the Page School stay operating?

JOHNSON: You're hitting all the big points there, Don! You're right on the money with these questions! That's a very interesting question and the reason why I'm saying that is because the Page School was under the DC Public School System, I keep reiterating that because it wasn't a private school, but very few people knew that. When we were not working, we would still have to attend Page School. We would not fall back to a regular high school or junior high school in the DC area, because most of the pages were not from DC. The interesting thing was we would take the full time for each class, which was 45 minutes, classes started at 6:15 A.M. and they ended at 9:45 A.M. because we only had four classes, with a half an hour break for breakfast, and we got out of school at a quarter to 10 in the morning. So there were often times that I would get stopped by truant officers in and around the Library of Congress, walking with my school bag. They would grab me and say, "What are you doing out of class?" I'd say, "Sir, I don't go to public school." "What do you mean? How old are you? Let me see some ID." Then I

would show them my Senate ID, and they would say, "Oh, okay." I would say, "I've already been to school, I'm out of school right now, I'm finished with classes for today." "It's only 10 o'clock, what are you talking about?" They didn't understand and a lot of them didn't know about the program, so it was kind of funny when I would get pulled over by the truant officers who were circling for the kids who were playing hooky from school. But we just would go the full length of the class and got out at a quarter to 10. If you didn't have to go over to work in your senator's office, then you were free for the whole day. You'd just go do what you wanted to do. Go study, a lot of time we would spend time in the reading room of the Library of Congress in group study. We would go down and have study sessions if we had exams going on. We may study until 12 and then we'd call it a day. But the truant officers didn't know that!

RITCHIE: I've given talks to the Page School now and I'm always impressed that they can get kids to go to class that early in the morning and that they're awake enough to understand what's going on, and then after they have to go to work as pages, so it's a lot of responsibility.

JOHNSON: It's a lot of responsibility for a kid. I think the kids back in those days were somewhat more mature. I'm not trying to take anything away from the kids today. As you know, they raised the age so you can't be a page at fourteen or fifteen anymore like I was, but the reason why I'm saying that the kids today are not as mature is because I find a lot of them are engulfed in these video games. Their focus is on the tube or the CRT or the computer or the video games, and so the interaction there with others is not like we had. We were always interacting with each other, we were always trying to get in the Hawk 'n Dove [laughs] back in the days, but we talked to each other, we went skiing together, we went on field trips. The human interactive factor was there, so you learned a lot more dealing with the staff, the senators, and each other. I don't know if they have that opportunity today. I just don't see that.

RITCHIE: It's also a much bigger organization today than it was. Before the Hart Building opened the staff was smaller than it is now and there was more of an opportunity to see people.

JOHNSON: Absolutely. I totally agree. On the Republican side we normally would have about twelve pages during the school year and then that number would grow

to about twenty during the summer season. Then the Democrats would have a little more. The Supreme Court always stayed at four. The House always had more than the Senate or the Supreme Court, because they had more members. The House would have anywhere between twenty and thirty, forty, fifty pages in the summertime, and during the school year they would have about thirty guys that were House pages. But you're right, the staff wasn't that large. There were only two Senate buildings at the time. The Rayburn had been built prior to me becoming a page, so the House was beginning to expand their real estate on the Hill.

RITCHIE: Yes, the more buildings, the bigger the staff.

JOHNSON: As a matter of fact, I brought one of my page pictures so you can get to see me with Senator Dole, and as I said I have many, many of these pictures. When I showed Mrs. Dole this picture, she and I were able to get a picture together. She invited me to her birthday party and said, "Bob, I've got a surprise for you." And I got to see Senator Dole again. I hadn't seen him for a long time, because of course I went on to college and when I came back I was grown up and I was not working on the floor.

RITCHIE: [pointing to the wall] By the way, there's my Bob Dole picture over there.

JOHNSON: Oh, that's a nice one, and that's in his office in the Capitol.

RITCHIE: That's when he was majority leader, right.

JOHNSON: And mine was when he first got there. He's a great person, he really is. Like I said, when I was a page I had a picture with Senator Baker and his page, but I lost that. There's a real interesting one that I have, and I didn't tell you this but I will say this, and that is one of the things we did just before female pages came to the Senate, we thought of this idea when Senator Thurmond had gotten married to Miss South Carolina, Nancy Thurmond, and we knew girl pages were coming, so myself and a gentleman I succeeded in Senator [John] Tower's office, working in the mail room, Rick Kunkle, him and I decided that what we would do was give Mrs. Thurmond's daughter, because she had just had her first daughter (the one that was later killed by the drunk driver), I think her name was Nancy too. She was a baby at the time. We decided to make Senator

Thurmond's daughter the first honorary girl page. We had a certificate made up. We had it framed. We signed all our names--there were five of us as pages. And we asked Senator Thurmond, could we present this to him and his wife. He set it up for us to come over to his office and he had his wife come in with the baby and we all took a picture of us giving him the certificate, with Mrs. Thrumond and their daughter Nancy. So to say the least I was real distressed when she was killed by the drunk driver, because I knew her when she was baby and I have a picture of all of us making her the first honorary girl page.

RITCHIE: And his son was a page later on.

JOHNSON: I didn't know that.

RITCHIE: My stepdaughter was an elevator operator here one summer and she met his son when he was a page.

JOHNSON: A lot of the pages who went to college here would graduate and work as elevator operators during graduate school. There was a guy that also used to be a page who is currently the chief counsel to the GPO, you may know him, Tony Zagami. He used to be an elevator operator when I was a page. He was a Democratic page. I don't know if Pat Hynes was in the cloakroom at the time, but Tony was on the elevators when he was in law school, and he's now chief counsel for the Government Printing Office.

RITCHIE: At that point, all the elevators had operators, the six of them outside the Senate chamber, even though they were all automatic elevators they still had operators.

JOHNSON: They still had operators, and there were two other ones that had operators in the Russell Building, down where the military liaison offices are. Those two elevators go up to the Russell Courtyard, they were operator driven.

[Pictures on the following page: top: Michael Johnson as a page with Senator Robert Dole; bottom: his son Michael Anthony Johnson II, also as page with Senator Dole.]

RITCHIE: Part of it was because the Capitol was a lot more open in those days and the elevator operators were there more for crowd control.

JOHNSON: Exactly.

RITCHIE: They were telling tourists what floor to get off on to get to the galleries.

JOHNSON: Yes, they were tour guides, elevator operators, information specialists. As a matter of fact, I always thought I'd be an elevator operator if I went to college in this area, but I decided to go away to school.

RITCHIE: You mentioned at one point that you repeated the eleventh grade. Was that because it was hard to do the schooling and be a page at the same time?

JOHNSON: Well, I will say this, and this is no aspersion on anyone, it was just the time we were living in, Don, and that was being the only Republican African American page, certainly not the only African American page going to the school—there were two in the Supreme Court, Richard Holland and Rodney Clark, who went on and went to Harvard, and then Senator Kennedy had appointed one, Jerry Harden, he was on the Democratic side, and there may have been one or two on the House side. But I always felt that I wasn't given kind of a fair shake in the class. I always felt that the teachers were harder on me than they were on the other kids. Either perceived or reality, I reacted to that. And in reacting to that I sort of withdrew.

Senator Aiken would actually have to counsel me and tell me, "I know you can do this work. I know you can, Mike. You've just got to buckle down. It's a little harder when you come from where you're not used to this, but I know you can do it. I've seen where you can do it, and you've just got to buckle down." I would tell him that I just didn't feel comfortable in class, the history class, the instructor, Mr. Hilton, he just seemed like he was always riding me, and I failed history. All you had to do was fail one course and that was it. That's what kept me back in the eleventh grade. But again, bless Senator Aiken's heart, God rest his soul, he and Mrs. Aiken tried everything to help me. Mrs. Aiken got a couple of the senator's staff persons to tutor me. I would go over to their house right over here on Third Street, just across from the Hart, Betty [Quinn] lived

over there—I know Betty still works with Mrs. Aiken. She and her daughter would tutor me and try and help me out. So he was committed to making sure that I was a success. And I was committed to not letting him down, because he went overboard for me, getting me tutors and stuff.

That was a period in my life as a page when I was struggling, Don. I was struggling to be accepted. I was struggling to fit in. I was struggling to get the work done. And most of all I was struggling not to let Senator Aiken and Mrs. Aiken down, because they were good to me. He was almost like a grandfather to me. I just struggled, and I repeated that year and then the following year I left for McKinley. He didn't let me go, because he could have. He could have said, "Why don't you go back to public school." But he gave me another try and I made it.

I was a little nervous about two things: my age, because I started school late in the kindergarten, when I was almost six, so I okay up to eighteen, which was the max you could be in terms of your age as a page. And my senior year, I did not want to run the risk of repeating that. I wanted to get to college. So I decided that maybe it's time for me to go to public school and get this last year over. But I always wanted to graduate from Page School, because back in those days graduations were just so nice. Senators would come and be the keynote speakers, and we'd have the graduation over in the House Ways and Means Committee room or someplace like that, and they were just something to behold, it really was. So that's one of the regrets I have, I never graduated from Capitol Page School.

RITCHIE: But you went on to Cornell, you said.

JOHNSON: I did. I came back I guess the spring of '74 and I asked a few senators for recommendations to college, of course Senator Aiken gave me a recommendation, Senator Javits gave me a letter of recommendation. I did very well at McKinley, I got straight As in my last year of high school, and I applied to Cornell, and I got accepted, and that's where I decided to go.

RITCHIE: That's an impressive school.

JOHNSON: A fantastic school. Beside being a page, it was the best four years of

my life. I was away from home, I got the opportunity to really prove myself and to grow. I was more mature than a lot of the freshmen students because I had been on my own as a page. Having been on my own at such a young age, all the trials and tribulations and mistakes I had already made. So when I got there, and I saw all these kids running around acting wild, I was wondering, "Why are they so excited about being in a dormitory on their own?" [laughs] I was just more calm and mature than most of my peers. I hung in there and I graduated in '78. I didn't get my degree until a couple of years later because there was one course that I had trouble with, and that was biology. I always had problems with biology, even at Page School, Mrs. Olmer was our biology teacher. I always had problems cutting up frogs and stuff like that. So I had to take this course in absentia at another school. I took a while before I did it because when I came home I was looking for a job. The Sergeant at Arms at that time, Nordy Hoffmann, hired me to come work for the Sergeant at Arms' organization. I got to working and kind of forgot. Then I finally went back and finished the course and got my degree. But I came out in four years, practically.

RITCHIE: What did you major in at Cornell?

JOHNSON: I majored in consumer economics and adult education. I started out in Arts and Sciences, just a general program. I decided that I wanted to do more along the lines of economics but I didn't want to be an eco major. I switched my majors, and then I started thinking about going into the ILR School—Industrial Labor Relations School—because I really wanted to be an attorney. That was what we were kind of raised to be, being a page. Everybody was saying, "Oh, I'm going to law school." I never made it, so I ended up graduating with a B.S. degree, but then I went on to graduate school in the Information Technology field and got a Master's in management information systems.

RITCHIE: Where did you go to graduate school?

JOHNSON: I did my graduate work at Bowie State University. And then I did some further graduate studies at George Washington in the area of program management, so I continued my education. I never had the opportunity to get a Ph.D., because of time and most of those programs are full-time. I had the interest, but just never had the time. But it was a real experience going to Ithaca. As a matter of fact, I went this year for my twenty-eighth year reunion, and that was just fantastic. I got to see a lot of my old

friends.

RITCHIE: A beautiful place.

JOHNSON: Gorgeous, to say the least! [laughs]

RITCHIE: Then you came back and Nordy Hoffmann hired you. Had you known Nordy before he became Sergeant at Arms?

JOHNSON: I did. Nordy was one of the people that I got to know selling newspapers. Nordy was one of my best customers. Outside of Senators like [William] Proxmire, McGovern, and Senator [Mark] Pryor's father, the senior [David] Pryor. Senator Bennett's father, Wallace Bennett. Outside of these senators, I had a few staff members that took an interest in me, helped me out. Nordy was one of them. Tom Korologos was another one. Lee Williams who worked for Fulbright was another one. I just got to know them, and when I found out Nordy was Sergeant at Arms I came to him and said, "I really would like to come work for the Senate." He said, "Let's see what we can do, Mike. I'll be in touch with you." He was able to find me a position at the time in the Senate Computer Center. That's where I began to learn technology. I went in as a budget analyst, working with the budget. He appointed me, and the rest as they say is history.

RITCHIE: What year was this?

JOHNSON: This was in '78.

RITCHIE: So computers were just coming in.

JOHNSON: They were just coming into the Senate. We were still in the mainframe era. Mainframes were starting to evolve into the mini computers. I ended up, after about a year and a half, switching staffs from being a budget analyst to working in the network, or the tech control center, where we monitor and install computers all over the states for the senators to talk to their home or state offices. Those were the first state office networks, for senators to be able to do correspondence with their home offices. It was a private wire network and we would actually fly out to the different states and install

the equipment. That's how I got to see Senator Aiken, because I installed the equipment in Burlington for Senator [Robert] Stafford.

I called Mrs. Aiken and I said, "Mrs. Aiken, I'm going to be in Burlington and I'd like to see you all." She said, "Oh, great, Mike, we'll have lunch." I'm thinking it's an hour drive, and I get into the car and I'm driving to Putney [laughs] and it's like in the other end of the state. I had to drive four or five hours. I didn't know it was that far, and I didn't gage the time and I was late for our lunch appointment. Senator Aiken's teeth were aching that day and she had to take him to the dentist, and by the time I got to the restaurant the whole restaurant knew I was coming. It was like, "Oh, you must be his old paperboy." I said yeah. They had a room named after George Aiken. They said, "Well, he waited as long as he could." I thought, oh, man, I didn't know where they lived, and people were trying to explain to me, "They live on the mountain."

So as I was leaving the restaurant, I ran into Mrs. Aiken driving the jeep, she was on the way to take him home. They had just left the dentist's office in downtown Putney. I went up and spent the rest of the day with them. We all took pictures. I took them gifts, and they gave me Vermont syrup, because they knew I always liked the Vermont maple syrup. I have all those pictures in my scrapbook, of him sitting on the couch, and him laying down. He autographed his book for me, the Aiken years in the Senate. He autographed it for me and told me he was proud of me. I said, "I told you I wouldn't let you down." He was just real elated that I went to college and became successful.

You feel good when you touch one person in life. It doesn't have to be a million people, but if you can help just one person, whether it's a kid or an adult or a relative or non-relative, I think there's a certain satisfaction that you get, Don, that you just can't get from anything else. That's why I mentor kids these days, and I teach part-time at Prince Georges Community College in Largo, Maryland, I'm an associate professor there,

RITCHIE: What are you teaching?

JOHNSON: Computer science and introduction to local area networks, or LANs, technical courses. My career began to evolve and I continued to go to school to get certifications and other degrees. Then I worked under Greg Casey as Sergeant at Arms, and Jim Ziglar in the area of program management. I was responsible for designing and

implementing a program management program for the Sergeant at Arms to manage all these large IT projects that we had, because we had no uniform way of doing so. We had some projects that should have been terminated because the technology was changing so fast or did not meet our requirements. Then just before Mr. Ziglar left, he came to me and said, "Mike, I want to leave my legacy on the Senate." I said, "You do?" He said, "Yes, and that is I want to write the first continuity of operations plan for the Senate. We don't have one, and I think it's a shame that we don't." And he said, "I think you can do that for me." I said, "Well, sir, I don't know anything about continuity planning." He said, "You don't have to. You're a good program manager, you're a hard worker, you can do it." So he gave me six months to get it done. I did it in five months. I delivered three large binders to him, just an enormous amount of plans, and processes, and procedures on how the Senate Sergeant at Arms organization would continue business if there was a catastrophe. It was the first Continuity of Operations Plan (COOP) ever written for the Senate, and I was responsible for putting together and managing the team that wrote it.

Then when he left and Mr. [Al] Lenhardt came in, Mr. Ziglar showed him what I had produced, and he said, "If you need this to continue, this is the guy for you." Then four or six days after Mr. Lenhardt was sworn in, 9/11 happened and he came to me and said, "I want to put together a task force to look at security in the Senate as a whole, with people from the Capitol Police and the Secretary of the Senate, and I want you as one of my reps on that task force." He also said, "I want to create a security department for the Senate," one that looks out for what we call the non-first-responders issues that deal with the continuity of the Senate, and again the rest as they say is history. I served on the task force for three months. We delivered the report to Mr. Lenhardt and the leadership at the time, and then Mr. Lenhardt in January of 2002 created the new Office of Security and Emergency Preparedness, which I quickly labeled "OSEP." I was the first manager and employee that was hired to help build this office. Now we're a staff of fifteen, and I was promoted under Mr. Pickle to Deputy Assistant Sergeant at Arms for Security in the Senate. That's what I do now. I work with making sure the Senate can continue doing business under any circumstances. I was the first to design and build out the alternate chambers that the Senate will use if needed. I started dealing with both non-classified and classified security issues and I had to get a top-secret

security clearance. I ensure that the Senate can operate under any circumstances.

RITCHIE: That's a long way from coming in as a page!

JOHNSON: [laughs] That is, Don, yes it is. Just sitting here talking to you—wow, thirty-three years is a long time. I've done a lot in the Senate. And my son went on to become a police officer in the Library of Congress. He went on from Howard [Greene] helping him to becoming a police officer. He said, "I want to do public service like you, Dad."

RITCHIE: And he was a page, too?

JOHNSON: He was a page under Howard, when Howard was Sergeant at Arms.

RITCHIE: Did he enjoy his experience as much as you did?

JOHNSON: He did. Now one thing that he didn't like, because he was a smaller kid than I was. I'm kind of bulky, as you can see from my pictures. A lot of the folks, the visitors and tourists would accuse him of being too young to be a page. He would come home crying all the time, and I would say, "What's wrong with you." He would say, "But Dad, they don't believe that I'm fifteen years old. They keep saying that I'm not fifteen." I said, "Well, you know how old you are, why does it bother you?" But he was a small kid and he was short. People just couldn't believe he was old enough to be a page. It was like, "You look like you're seven or eight years old. What are you doing as a page?" So that was his biggest challenge when he was a page, but he got to know senators like Senator [Orrin] Hatch, and the folks who were running the chamber when he was there.

Of course, in my job capacity, I don't get over to the floor and interact with the senators as much. The only time that I do is when I get service awards like this one here [shows photograph] from Mr. Ziglar and Senator [Trent] Lott, when I'm getting my either twenty or twenty-five year service award. I have a few of those pictures with Senator Lott, when he was the majority leader, and Senator [William] Frist, and Senator [Harry] Reid, but I don't get to talk to the senators unless I'm doing security briefings for the Sergeant at Arms. When I do briefings for my boss, then I get to see a lot of the senators. But that's what I do today, and I really enjoy it.

RITCHIE: I'd like to spend another session talking about the whole Sergeant at Arms operation and how it's changed over the years. Would you mind coming back another time, because this has been a very interesting talk.

JOHNSON: It has?

RITCHIE: Oh, yes, the page story was just great. We've interviewed pages at different times, but the story changes because the institution changes. I've also done interviews with people like Nordy Hoffmann, and Greg Casey, and Al Lenhardt, and I'd like to talk with you about how the Sergeant at Arms operation has worked over the years, and the computer side of it.

JOHNSON: I have the whole history.

RITCHIE: So why don't we plan another afternoon?

JOHNSON: And I'll bring a different set of pictures to show you. Like I say, I've got a lot of them, and a lot of them I lost. But I would love to come in and explain the operations. I've worked for thirteen different Sergeants at Arms, starting with Robert Dunphy.

RITCHIE: They come and go pretty fast these days.

JOHNSON: They do come and go. Now, Mr. Pickle has been here now for three and a half years, almost like Mr. Hoffmann was. Pickle is going on almost four years now. Of course, Mr. Lenhardt had a year and a half. But you're right.

RITCHIE: It seems to average about two or three years, but before that it was a longtime appointment.

JOHNSON: Yes, it was. Nordy was there for about five or six years. I actually went to Mr. Dunphy's internment in Arlington last year when he passed. I'll tell you about that, because there's some interesting stories there.

RITCHIE: Yes, I'd like your perspective on them as people, but also on the office and how it grew.

JOHNSON: And how it changed, absolutely. It has changed a lot.

RITCHIE: Nordy Hoffmann told me that when they delivered the first PCs to the senators' offices, he went back a year later to see what they were doing with them, and most of them were still in the boxes they came in.

JOHNSON: [Laughs] He's right! They didn't know what to do with them! Oh, I miss Nordy, I really do. I miss him a lot. And you know the Senate Computer Center was located in the building where he opened his private offices, at 400 North Capitol, where the Hall of States is, when he left the Senate. That's where his offices were, so I would go up and chat with him from time to time. He'd say, "How you doing there, Mike?" So I would love to visit and talk with him.

End of the First Interview

[Pictures on the following page: clockwise from the top: Michael Johnson with Senator George Murphy (R-CA); Johnson with Senator Clifford Hansen (R-WY); Johnson with Senator Edward Brooks (R-MA); and Johnson with Senator Jacob Javits (R-NY).]