

MICHAEL A. JOHNSON
Deputy Assistant Sergeant at Arms

Oral History Interviews
November 8, 16 and December 1, 2006

Senate Historical Office
Washington, DC

Deed of Gift

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Michael A. Johnson

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Accepted on behalf of the
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Preface

In the days of the afternoon newspapers, Michael A. Johnson used to leave school on Capitol Hill and head for the nearby Senate Office Building with a stack of the *Washington Evening Star*. Born in Washington on December 6, 1954, he became a regular visitor to the senators' offices throughout the 1960s. Vermont Senator George Aiken and his wife, Lola, took a special interest in him, and they arranged for him to become a Senate page in 1970. He was the second African American to serve as a Republican page (Senator Jacob Javits had appointed the first in 1965). Serving as a page for four years, he spent most of his high school years in the Senate Page School. He took his classes early in the morning and then reported with the other pages to the Senate Chamber, where they ran errands and assisted the senators and staff throughout the day and sometimes well into the evenings. After serving as a floor page, he was promoted to cloakroom page, which provided him a unique perspective on the legislative process that started him on a lifetime of service to the United States Senate.

Furnished with letters of recommendations from senators, and good grades in school, Michael Johnson went on to Cornell University. After he graduated in 1978 he returned to Washington and soon after was hired by the sergeant at arms, Nordy Hoffmann, to work in the Senate's fledgling computer center. Over the years, under a series of sergeants at arms, he worked in various phases of Senate computerization and telecommunications, helping the institution to adjust to new technology and facilitate senators' communications with their constituents and state offices.

In 2000, at the request of Sergeant at Arms James Ziglar, Johnson led a team that prepared the Senate's first Continuity of Operations Plan, which was completed in May 2001. On September 11, 2001, Johnson rushed to the Capitol Police headquarters with the copy of the COOP plan. While Sergeant at Arms Al Lenhardt chose not to implement the plan that day, it provided assistance to many Senate offices weeks later when an anthrax attack closed the Hart Senate Office Building for three months. Johnson's role expanded with the increased concern over security on Capitol Hill and the need for alternative meeting places for the Senate. In 2002, he became the first employee in the Office of Security and Emergency Preparedness, and in 2005 Sergeant at Arms William H. Pickle promoted him to deputy assistant sergeant at arms.

About the Interviewer: Donald A. Ritchie is associate historian of the Senate Historical Office. A graduate of the City College of New York, he received his Ph.D. in history from the University of Maryland. His books include *James M. Landis: Dean of the Regulators* (Harvard University Press, 1980), *Press Gallery: Congress and the Washington Correspondents* (Harvard University Press, 1991), *The Oxford Guide to the United States Government* (Oxford University Press, 2001), and *Reporting from Washington: The History of the Washington Press Corps* (Oxford University Press, 2005). He served as president of the Oral History Association and of Oral History in the Mid-Atlantic Region (OHMAR), and received OHMAR's Forrest C. Pogue Award for distinguished contributions to the field of oral history.

[Picture on the following page: Michael Johnson with Vice President Hubert Humphrey (left) and Minnesota senator Walter Mondale (right).]



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, D.C., 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 Hine. 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.

Every day 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, nine 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 six 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 Federle," 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 out-beaten 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 D.C. 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 [James M.] 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 e-mail 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 [William] 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 ten 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 was 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 George's 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. This is not classified what I'm telling you, but I designed an alternate chamber for a non-threat environment, which is here in the Hart Building, Hart-216, and then another chamber off Capitol Hill, but in D.C. 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 Frist, and Senator 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).]

SENATE SERGEANTS AT ARMS

Interview #2

Thursday, November 16, 2006

RITCHIE: You said you remembered something about Senator Eugene McCarthy?

JOHNSON: Yes, from our first interview, Don, I went home and I was reminiscing—and I'm just elated and honored to be able to share my part of the Senate's history for the last thirty-three years as of December of being on the Hill. They don't count my paperboy days—if they did I'd probably be retired by now! But I remembered when we talked about some of the staffers who were instrumental in my career in mentoring me and helping me, there was a young lady on the front desk of Senator McCarthy's office. He was on the fourth floor of the Russell Building at the time. She would buy newspapers from me. A very nice young lady, and she would take me out to the Senate softball games in Rock Creek Park. She was dating a gentleman who was a Senate elevator operator. Back in those days elevator operators were patronage positions, like pages. Today, she's very famous, her name is Kitty Kelley. She was just one of the nicest people I've ever met. It was only recently that I put two-and-two together when I read an article that she worked in Senator McCarthy's office. I said, "That's Kitty Kelley! That's the same Kitty Kelley that used to take me out to the park." I tried to get a hold of her to say hi, but there are a few people I had to go through to get to her, and I wasn't successful, but I left her messages saying, "Hey, this is Mike Johnson, I used to sell you the Washington Star in the Senate. I just wanted to say hi and thank you for your mentoring me when I was a kid, because it helped." I just wanted to follow-up with that, but I'm glad to be back for my second interview.

RITCHIE: It is interesting that a lot of the people that you meet around here on a regular basis, a couple of years later you open the newspaper and there's their picture, they've been appointed to some important position, or they're at the White House doing something, but they're someone you saw in the cafeteria not long ago.

JOHNSON: Absolutely, like Tom Korologos. Tom is ambassador to Belgium now. He worked for Senator [Wallace] Bennett when I first met him. As a matter of fact, when he got appointed I saw him in the Capitol and he told me to go and see Senator

[Robert] Bennett and tell him that I used to be his father's paperboy. I haven't had that chance yet, but if I ever get that chance I'll let him know.

RITCHIE: At the end of the last interview we were talking about your career with the sergeant at arms office. You've known pretty much all the sergeants at arms going back to Robert Dunphy, and you said you just went to his funeral recently.

JOHNSON: I did. Mr. Dunphy was the Senate sergeant at arms when I was appointed a Senate page.

RITCHIE: What's the relationship between the sergeant at arms and the pages?

JOHNSON: Oh, that's a good point, Don. That's a good lead into the sergeant at arms operation. When I was appointed a Senate page, the sergeant at arms was the employing office for the pages. Although the party secretaries and the cloakrooms were responsible for managing the pages, and making sure we did our work, and what we had to do when we reported to work, it was the sergeant at arms payroll that we were on. Whenever there was an issue of pay, or being appointed, the senators had to fill out forms or contact the Senate sergeant at arms, "I'm sending this kid over. Put him under my patronage position." So that's how I met Mr. Dunphy, who was a very nice man.

As you said, I recently went to his funeral. I'll tell you a quick story, which is really unique. When I got out of college I came back to the Senate and Mr. Nordy Hoffmann was the sergeant at arms at the time, and I had known Nordy for years, going back to the '60s. He assigned me to work in the Senate Computer Center, and I worked with this young lady for years, who retired less than three years ago. Her name was Donna Stout. About a week before Donna was getting ready to retire, I ran into her. She said, "Mike, you know I'm leaving, I'm retiring." I said, "Wow, Donna, has it been that long since you came here?" She said yes, and I said, "One day I'll be able to get there." We just started chitchatting in the hallway, and I said, "With all my page years I'll be able to retire hopefully soon." She said, "I didn't know you were a page. When were you a page?" I said, "Oh, back in '69 I was appointed but I didn't start until January of '70." She said, "My father was sergeant at arms then." I said, "Who was your father?" She said Robert Dunphy. I was like, "Are you kidding me?" She said, "Oh, it's all coming back to me now. He would come home and talk about this little kid from the

neighborhood around Washington, that he had just come to the Senate and he needed bit of polishing around the edges.” [laughs] I was a little rough around the edges, coming from the rough neighborhood at the time. She said, “He would talk about you at the table. He would say, ‘Yeah, I’ve got this little kid. I’m working with him. He’s a page. He’s a little rough.’ But that was *you!*” Then one thing led to another and when her father recently died, she called me and said “My family would like you to come to the funeral and the interment at Arlington Cemetery,” and I even said a few words during the services. His family was just in awe that someone thirty something years ago still remembered Mr. Dunphy. She gave me his phone number and maybe six months or a year before he passed I called him in Florida and we talked for about a half an hour about the Senate. He was just so proud of me and he was really glad I called him.

But back in those days, the sergeant at arms was the employing office. That’s the payroll we were on, and the sergeant at arms was basically our employer, and our managers were the cloakroom and the party secretaries. At that time, they didn’t call them party secretaries. You called them the majority and the minority secretary. Mr. Trice used to say majority or the minority secretary.

RITCHIE: You were away at college, I guess, when Bill Wannell was the sergeant at arms, but you came back when Nordy Hoffmann was sergeant at arms. Could you describe Nordy Hoffmann as an individual

JOHNSON: When I came back, actually I had continued my ties with the Senate while I was away at Cornell University in Ithaca, New York. I would keep in touch with Senator Aiken and Mr. Hoffmann and others. So in the summertime I came back to work, each summer. I don’t remember the chronological order, but one summer I was a doorkeeper on the Senate Chamber, appointed by the sergeant at arms. The next summer I came back I was a Capitol tour guide. There was a gentleman you may know who was here a long time, Tommy Nottingham. Tommy ran the tour guides for about twenty-five to thirty years. I worked under Tommy, and Tommy remembered me when I was a page. That was a good relationship. I worked as a tour guide giving tours in the Capitol, and that’s where I really learned about things outside of the chamber that I didn’t learn when I was a page, because everything was sort of confined either to the chamber or making runs to the offices and committees. Then my junior year was when President Nixon resigned, and Gerald Ford became president. The VP, his office being the president of the Senate,

used the remaining salary of the VP and paid executive interns with it for that summer. There was a gentleman who worked in the Republican cloakroom at the time I was a page that knew me. He was on the staff of Vice President [Nelson] Rockefeller, who had been appointed to finish the vice president's term. He asked, "Would you like to work for the VP when you come home this summer?" I was getting older and more mature, so I thought I was ready and I said sure. His name was Spof Canfield [H. Spoffard Canfield, administrative assistant to the vice president]. He was an attorney. He hired me to work for Rockefeller. I do have a picture—I've got so many pictures—I was trying to look for the best ones to share with you. But I worked as an executive intern for the vice president.

Having said that, my history continued. When I graduated in 1978, I came to Mr. Hoffmann and said, "You know, I really would like to come back and work for the Senate." If anybody knew Nordy, he was a straight shooter. When I showed up in his office, I remember sitting in the reception room. There was a young lady who had worked for Senator Baker for a long time, Marie Agnuson. She said, "Mr. Hoffmann, Mike Johnson is here." "OH, WHERE IS HE AT?" He came out and I heard his loud voice. When Mr. Hoffmann talked the whole room shook. "OH, MIKE, COME IN HERE. WHAT ARE YOU DOING? WHAT DO YOU NEED?" I went in the office and he made me feel so comfortable. He said, "I'm really proud of you. You've come a long way, young man, and I want you to keep up the work. Now what can we do for you?" I said, "Well, right now I'm selling life insurance as an occupation, and I really would like to dedicate my life to service to the Senate. I was wondering if you could help me get started. Anything will do." He said, "Oh, okay, let's see what we can do. Why don't you let me talk to my staff and we'll look around and see what's open." About a week or two later I got a call and he offered me a budget position in the Senate Computer Center, which I accepted.

Mr. Hoffmann was an innovator. He was a straight-shooter and he also loved the Senate. When I sold him newspapers, his office was in the Old Senate Office Building, and I think he worked for the Democratic Policy Committee. He was staff director or counsel, something like that. I was too young to really know what his title was. But he loved the Senate. Mr. Hoffmann was interested in making sure that the job he did for the Senate, that he did it to the best of his ability, and that people knew always where he stood. He was not the type of person that would say one thing and do another. Now, of

course, I was too young to call him Nordy. Most people knew him as Nordy. I would go into his office sometimes to have private conversations with him and I found out he was a Notre Dame football star, the Fighting Irish. He was just one of the nicest, honest people that you could ever meet, and he was very dedicated to this institution. He was an innovator. Later on, I followed in his footsteps by doing volunteer work for the Senate Credit Union. He volunteered and served on the Credit Union board of directors, and I served on the Credit Committee and Credit Union Growth Solutions boards. I spent about seven or eight years doing volunteer work to help build the Senate Credit Union. But he was involved in a lot of things. I remember him assisting Mrs. Aiken on the Red Cross blood drive down in the Russell Building on the first floor, when Mrs. Aiken was involved with the senators' wives and Red Cross blood drive. He worked with Diane Casey, who started the Senate Staff Club. That was when the club issued Senate staff license plate additions that you attached to your car license tag. Most club members thought these plates kept police officers from giving you tickets [laughs]. Some of them found out that it didn't.

But Mr. Hoffmann knew everybody, he worked with a lot of people in and outside the Senate. The biggest thing I can say about Mr. Hoffmann was you never really knew what his political affiliation was when he became sergeant at arms because he did not wear that on his shoulder. He was the sergeant at arms for the Senate and "By God, I'm going to support the one hundred senators in this chamber. Regardless if they're Democrat, Republican, or Independent, I'm the sergeant at arms." That's the way he executed his duty and I had a high regard and respect for him for doing that. He was not, as they say in this day and age—I wasn't as smart to understand it back then—but he was not a partisan person. He didn't say, "I'm going to do more for this party because they're the ones who put me in office." He loved the Senate. He worked well with Mr. Trice, with Mr. [Frank] Valeo, with Mr. Wannell, and [Oliver] Dompierre [assistant to the minority]. I never knew what Dompierre did, but he was always there on the floor with Mr. Wannell, and Mr. Valeo. He was always willing to help somebody that was down and out. I think Nordy had a rough life growing up, but he was one of the fairest and nicest persons I've known.

RITCHIE: He assigned you to the Senate Computer Center pretty much at the beginning of the center. It had just gotten underway. Now it seems like a world away. Can you tell me what it was like when you first went to work there?

JOHNSON: When I started working there, I didn't know the history of how the Computer Center started, but I later found out that Mr. Hoffmann had been an innovator. Mr. Hoffman saw that computers were coming about, and it's my understanding that the Computer Center started in the Senate Service Department around 1975. There were a limited number of computers being used in the Service Department and the sergeant at arms decided it was time to separate this operation from the Service Department core operation, with the Service Department staff focusing on printing and graphics. So, when I started working at the Computer Center, the operation had been established for several years before I got there.

The Senate Computer Center, or SCC as we called it, was relocated into rented space at 400 North Capitol Street after it moved from the Dirksen Building. Subsequently, this is the same building where Mr. Hoffmann's personal office was located when he retired from the Senate. It was located on the fourth floor and the Center was located on the ground floor. Since I worked in the same building, I would visit his office to talk with him sometimes. When I started working at the SCC, the staff was comprised of about a hundred people. There was an Office Consultants group that worked with Senate offices on their requirements for computers and office automation. This group had about eight people assigned to it that were responsible for training offices on the systems at that time. The training staff at SCC was responsible for training the computer experts and programmers. This group also trained some office staff in word processing and how to use our mainframe applications as well, because personal computers didn't exist yet. There was a group responsible for the Computer Center budget, and I was hired as a budget analyst to work in this group.

I processed vendor bills and purchase orders, and researched contracts we had with our vendors and service providers, such as AT&T. We had about a hundred folk that worked down there between the vendors and the sergeant at arms staff. There was a director and a deputy director who were responsible for the overall management of the entire operation. There was a computer network team that was responsible for programming the network equipment that interfaced with the IBM mainframe. The network was growing fast at that time and the equipment we used were modems for dial-up services for state offices, multiplexers, and we installed our own communications lines in the buildings. These lines made up the Senate Private Wire Network, or PWN. The network was also responsible for the Front End Process, or FEP, which did all the

networking input and output while the IBM mainframe processed programs and job control language, or JCL. The mainframe ran large programs, such as the payroll. We also installed tie lines with a company called Online Systems that was located on the first floor of 400 North Capitol, so Senate offices could run their Correspondence Management Systems, or CMS applications, used to respond to constituent letters and issues. We also had an administration support staff, but that was basically the operation.

RITCHIE: You started as a budget analyst but you wound up moving into the technical side of the operations. How did that happen?

JOHNSON: I did. There was a position that came open in the computer network that was located inside the computer room, where the mainframe resided. My supervisor came to me one day and said, “You know, this budget work is good, Mike. You’re doing very well at it. But what are your long-term career goals?” At the time, Don, I really didn’t have any, except to attend graduate school. I knew I wanted to be an integral part of the Senate, but my goal was, based on my history of working as a page and all I wanted to do was go to law school. I wanted to be an attorney. That was my goal.

My supervisor said, “If you haven’t really thought about it, you’ve been doing this a couple of years, why don’t you consider moving over to the network and see if you can learn a little more technical skills; you may like it.” So that’s how I moved up from being a budget analyst into the data network as a network technician. That’s where I learned computer wiring, coax and twisted pair wiring, how to put in the network computer systems. I got a lot of training, traveling all over the United States putting computer networks in the state offices. We would ship the equipment ahead of us, going to the office, and when we arrived we’d have to unbox the equipment and install it, certify it, and then fly back to Washington. And monitor it for maintenance purposes. It was remarkable to learn and see the technology changing, working on the private wire network and building that network as well. I did like it, so I decided to take some computer courses and ended up going back to school to get a master’s certificate in data and telecommunications and a master’s degree in management of information systems.

RITCHIE: The main objective in the beginning was to link together all of these offices. The senators were here but they had offices in their home states, and they needed to communicate with Senate staff wherever they happened to be.

JOHNSON: Exactly. The goal was to enhance the ability to communicate between the Hill and the senators' state offices. At the time, staff communicated via telephones, teletypes, or fax machines. They would fax a lot of things between the offices. But they weren't able to exchange data very easily. And at that time, offices used the old acoustic-couplers, where you had to dial the phone and put the receiver in the acoustic-coupler and then transmit your letter or your data over the phone lines. But we were challenged with coming up with technology to enhance that capability. That's why the network began to grow and we began to look for—I won't say "bleeding edge" technology but "leading edge" technology. The difference between the two is that bleeding edge is not tried and true technology. Leading edge has been at least Beta tested. If you put it in your office you know it's going to work. And nothing that was sensitive would get into the wrong hands. That was our challenge, and that's what we did. At the time, it was only about three or four years before the computer industry migrated from mainframes to minicomputers. We were charged with looking at the new network computer technology and bringing it into the Senate.

RITCHIE: I was going to ask you what was the biggest challenge for bringing computers into the Senate, but you've just mentioned security. That's one that is a little bit different than might be if you were going to a corporation. They might not be as worried about things leaking out. Were there other problems that were sort of Senate specific problems?

JOHNSON: Yes, there were, and this one is still somewhat of a problem today, even though we've conquered the issue of faster, better, more accurate computer communications, this problem, I think, still exists. Just so you know—and I'm probably preaching to the choir here—there's four elements that you need to communicate, whether you're doing it person-to-person, person-to-application, or application-to-application, and that is you need a sender, a receiver, a message, and a medium to send it over. You've got to have those four elements. If you don't have those four elements, you don't have communications. And there are two qualifiers: when you communicate, the message must be understood and you must be able to detect errors. So if you have errors present, you may have to abort or retransmit your data.

The biggest challenge at the time was not only staying on top of the technology in communication, but who owns the data? I'll give you an example. I guess about seven

years ago we migrated from Lotus cc mail, electronic mail system, to Microsoft exchange. The Senate used Lotus 1,2,3, or cc mail, for a long time. When we began to migrate from cc mail to the current Microsoft Exchange platform that we use today, that issue came up again: who owns the data? So the biggest thing was security, meaning can I transmit my messages—in any form that it needs to be, it can be a voice message, it can be a data message, or it can be a video message. If you have the data on your PC, and your computer is subpoenaed, who owns the data? Because it's my understanding that a senator doesn't have to answer to a subpoena, unless he is directed by the Senate. I may be wrong, I'm not an attorney, so I want to qualify what I'm about to say, but if his computer is subpoenaed that it's answered through the Senate somehow. His PC is subpoenaed, but does it belong to the Senate or does it belong to the individual senator? And that is still an issue that the Senate is grappling with. The sergeant at arms office, his office being the chief law enforcement office of the Senate, worked with the Ethics Committee, the Judiciary Committee, and the Rules Committee to address this issue. Security is important to keep hackers from accessing sensitive and official-use-only data. So security and data ownership are really key issues.

RITCHIE: I remember in the beginning when we were dealing with computers, there were a lot of outside companies that were coming in. I guess as a budget analyst you were dealing with those companies, but we had contracts with private corporations and they would send in their computer reps. And every week we'd have a different person coming in, and they would never understand the Senate and the peculiarities of the institution. So it came as a great relief to us when the Senate finally had their own people they could send around, who at least understood the lingo and what the needs were, and I'm sure that was the same in the senators' offices.

JOHNSON: It was. It's funny that you bring that up because early on, I think there were several reasons why that happened. One was because the Senate was just embarking on computer technology and automating offices. When I was a page, senators were reluctant about just putting microphones in the Senate Chamber. I was there when the microphones finally got put in. Then they said, "We'll never have TV cameras." I came back after school and then a little later TV cameras were added to the chamber. So change moves slowly in the Senate. Although the sergeant at arms was responsible for automation of Senate offices, in terms of office automation as we know it today, we did not have a large budget to hire the expert staff, and at that time people with those skill

sets were in high demand, and cost a lot. When there's low supply and high demand, you know what that means: high salaries.

The most logical thing to do, and I think it was a smart step, was to go out and hire the expertise you need, bring that expertise back and then begin to train your own in-house staff to do the job. That's how we survived. We survived by having strong vendors' staff helping us. And as you said, as time went on we had problems because the vendors never understood our environment, probably never will understand the Senate environment. The Senate staff and the vendors' staff tended to have different philosophies, different ways of doing things, so it slowly migrated into: "We've got to take ownership of this technology migration, but let's make sure we have their where-with-all, the know-it-all, the skill-set to be able to do that, because we don't want to mess it up and we don't want to go backwards here. So there was a transition period, where the skill-set had to be learned by the folks in the Senate who were interested in working in the Senate Computer Center. Also, with the availability of people who wanted to come here and work for the low government salaries versus what they could get at IBM and companies that were really on the forefront of the technology, we were able to achieve our goal. You had to really be a dedicated civil servant to work in the Senate.

That's pretty much how it was. To this day, it's gone back and forth. As the technology curve goes up, and the demand for those resources gets higher, we've gone back to: "Do we do it or do we let a vendor do it?" Currently, as you know, the technical support for both the state offices as well as here on Capitol Hill is done with vendors and the sergeant at arms' staff. It's a partnership these days.

RITCHIE: This is essentially an eighteenth-century or nineteenth-century institution. The Capitol Building was started in the 1790s, the Russell Building opened in 1909. You've got to bring in modern technology and figure some way to put it into these buildings. I remember that back in the 1970s in the Russell Building there was often only one electrical outlet in a room, and all the desks would be pushed together around that one plug. Back then you only had a few electric typewriters to deal with, but to bring in computers must have been a difficult chore to figure out how to install them in buildings that were never designed for anything like that.

JOHNSON: Yes. We've learned—when we built new buildings like the Hart

and the CVC [Capitol Visitor Center], which is another expansion of the Capitol—that you have to have the infrastructure there to support technology. You bring up a very good point. The buildings were only designed to carry voice traffic, which was telephone traffic. The first computer was the telephone switch. It was designed for voice communications. So you're right. It's a challenge. And the way we have looked at it, and still look at it to this day—although I have been out of the IT field for about eight years, other than teaching technical courses at Prince George's Community College—well, let's take the Capitol Building as an example. We're building the CVC and we're wiring it out for what we call multimedia: voice, data, and video communications.

The Capitol Building, to me, having worked there in the cloakroom, on the floor in the chamber, as a tour guide, doorkeeper, is three things to me: it's an office building, it's a historical landmark, and it's a museum. That's what I think of when I think of the U.S. Capitol, it's three things in one. When we're trying to install the infrastructure that's needed to operate computers in the Capitol back then and still today, you have to balance out all three of those factors when you're ripping walls, when you're cutting through mortar, when you're drilling holes, when you're going through mosaic tile. The same way with the Russell Building. It was not designed for computers, so when you're installing the computer medium, whether your medium is twisted pair cable or the first medium which was coaxial cable—the medium of choice today is fiber optics—well, for any of those mediums you've got have the conduit for it, and that's where we run into big problems with these buildings. Where do you put it? How can you hide it? How can you make it assimilate into the existing building without being noticed? Visitors will walk down the hall and say, "What is that they've put up there?"

The Dirksen Building was a little better but nevertheless the Dirksen Building, which is where the Capitol Exchange switch moved to when it moved out of the Capitol—I was co-located with them in SD-180 for years when I was a manager in the Senate telecommunications department. That building was a little bit more adaptable to retrofitting the technology for data and video communications in the committee rooms and the offices.

RITCHIE: The Dirksen at least was designed for television.

JOHNSON: Yes.

RITCHIE: When they built that building they knew television was going to be a factor, and they put in TV closets essentially off the committee rooms. This building—the Hart Building—when they started it they knew they were going to have computers, so they put floor conduits all through the buildings.

JOHNSON: Conduits, yes.

RITCHIE: So the buildings have each grown with a different type of media, but they still have to be retrofitted when new media comes along.

JOHNSON: Yes, and the new media, in my mind, has to do a lot with bringing the communication down to the desktop. So when I say that you have to retrofit even the Dirksen Building, yes, you are absolutely correct, the Dirksen was built for television communication or the mass media, but when you look at technologies like: do you have the ISDN [Integrated Services Digital Network] lines for desktop video, ah, now, that's a different thing. You had the technology to broadcast the hearings. You had the technology to do an interview with a senator in a hallway, and could connect a camera to an outlet. But even connection points like the "swamp" [the location on the Capitol lawn reserved for television cameras], where senators hold press conferences, they had to be forward thinking. But the Dirksen adopts to technology easier than the Russell Building. Of course, the Hart is more state of the art, as I see it.

RITCHIE: When you walk through the basement of the Capitol and you look up you see wires everywhere. They're exposed on that level, but as you say in the public areas you can't have that.

JOHNSON: When I worked as a manager in the Senate Telecommunications department, I was responsible for managing the United States Capitol Police (USCP) radio communications systems and capabilities. This included their mobile communications equipment, portable radios, and special events communications equipment. During the Martha Pope administration, this responsibility was transferred from the USCP to the sergeant at arms organization because USCP didn't have the resources to continue managing this operation. Prior to the transfer, this operation was located on the first floor of the Ford House Office Building, but we relocated it to the Dirksen Building.

One of the earlier complaints that I received from USCP regarding this system was the intermittent communications in the Senate and House office building garages for their portable radios. Since the two most important things to a police officer are his gun and radio, I knew we had to fix it. Therefore, my team conducted a series of tests throughout the buildings which confirmed complaints about coverage. We determined that we needed to install Radiax or “leaky cable” in the garages to increase coverage and ensure that the radios worked properly for those areas. The installation of this cable was a challenge because we had to make it fit into the existing infrastructure and did not have a lot of conduit for it. The sergeant at arms was able to get the project approved by oversight committees and the changes increased the communications for USCP as planned. This was part of my transition from working in the data communications area at the Senate Computer Center to working in the Telecom and learning voice communications.

RITCHIE: You mentioned the different sergeants at arms. You were hired by Nordy Hoffmann and in 1980 the Senate switched. The Republicans won back the majority for the first time in twenty-six years and Nordy left as sergeant at arms. Did you have an “uh-oh” moment: will the incoming sergeant at arms want me as much as the outgoing one did?

JOHNSON: Yes, I did. As quiet as I keep it, I still have the uh-oh factor. [laughs] Even with Mr. [Terrence] Gainer coming in January. We were meeting with Mr. Pickle this morning and he was complimenting the work that we’ve done in the Office of Security and Emergency Preparedness (OSEP) to secure the Capitol and protect all of us. You always have that uh-oh factor when a new sergeant at arms starts. If you’re smart, you never feel comfortable, because—I don’t know whether it was Mr. Hoffmann but someone told me that every employee in the sergeant at arms’ office is an employee “at will.” I didn’t know what that meant then, but what that means is by law there are only three statutory positions in our organization, and that’s the sergeant at arms, the deputy sergeant at arms, and the administrative assistant. Everybody else are employees at will. That means you can be asked to leave at any time that it switches over. Now, in this day and age, that office has become more nonpartisan. We are a support organization for the Senate. We’re not politicians. We are folks that go through the interview process to get our jobs. It’s not like the old patronage days where Senator Aiken calls up and says, “Put Mike on the payroll,” and the new sergeant at arms comes up and says, “Oh, you’re a

political appointee, you're out of here." It's not like that. It's morphed into more of a professional organization. Nevertheless, the rules of the Senate still are that we are employees at will. So, yes, to answer your question, I did have the uh-oh factor, like what am I going to do? Is this going to affect me? That's still to this day.

I would also like to take this opportunity to say how much I have enjoyed working with Mr. William H. Pickle as sergeant at arms. He is very intelligent, a quick learner, and experienced when it comes to security because of his background. I've worked with him since he arrived and I was promoted to deputy assistant sergeant at arms for the Office of Security and Emergency Preparedness in his administration. He's done a great deal to help secure the Capitol and continue the wonderful work that Mr. Lenhardt started after September 11, 2001.

RITCHIE: I remember they told us we worked "at the pleasure of the majority," and we had to hope that the new majority was just as pleased.

JOHNSON: That's a phrase I haven't heard in a long time! [laughs] Thanks for reminding me, Don. Yes, I've heard that one as well. You work at the pleasure of the majority. Back in the old days, there were large turnovers in the staff being replaced and there were people coming in who didn't have a lot of experience. Someone higher up realized that the organization needed some continuity. We needed to keep some of these people with the institutional knowledge of how this place works, and how to keep us functioning. Senators pass laws but it's the support staff who keep the Senate running. So, as time went on, less of a political turnover started to happen. It still happens, but I don't see it at the grand scale that I used to see it, in the wholesale swap out of folks.

RITCHIE: When Nordy Hoffmann retired and Howard Liebengood came in as sergeant at arms in 1981, did you see any changes in the operations? Was he as committed to the computers as Nordy had been?

JOHNSON: Yes, Mr. Liebengood, God rest his soul, I didn't get to know him as much as some of the later sergeant at arms, like Mr. Giugni, Mr. Ziglar, Mr. Lenhardt, and Mr. Ernie Garcia. But Mr. Liebengood was committed to keeping the legacy that Mr. Hoffmann started with automating the Senate. He knew that was very important to the senators, communicating with their constituents and their state offices, being able to mark

up bills with the committees and get them ready for votes, and being able to have graphics produced in a timely manner to display on the floor. He knew that was very important to the senators, so he kept that momentum going. I think he was less hands-on the day-to-day operations than Mr. Hoffmann was. Mr. Hoffmann was involved more in the day-to-day operations of the sergeant at arms' office, and I think Mr. Liebengood deferred that to his deputy, while he dealt with senators and the leadership. He dealt more with the aspects of the job where you deal with the dignitaries, the State of the Unions, the joint sessions, and that type of stuff. That's my opinion of Mr. Liebengood, he was not as involved in the day-to-day operations of the different departments.

RITCHIE: You also had an advantage. You were hired by a Democratic sergeant at arms but you had experience with the Republican side when you were a page.

JOHNSON: I did.

RITCHIE: So you came in the door as a bipartisan person.

JOHNSON: I did, and it's funny you should say that because even today I'm a registered independent. I learned early on that the way to eliminate your job in the Senate was to start wearing your political affiliation on your shoulders. I guess I learned that from Mr. Hoffmann. You don't go around advertising your politics when you are supposed to be nonpartisan. I knew senators and officials and chiefs of staff on both sides of the aisle, and that's how I basically conducted myself. I'm here to support the Senate as an institution, I'm not a politician. I learned early on that I had to be independent by affiliation. I don't even recall what I was registered as before that change happened. When I got to vote and am asked, "What are you, a Democrat or a Republican," I check the independent box. I'm an independent. I know people from both sides of the aisle and work for the entire Senate.

RITCHIE: We're here to help those people who get elected to do the best job possible. We don't elect them, we just help whoever gets elected.

JOHNSON: I like that, absolutely. Now, who was after Liebengood?

RITCHIE: The job turned over a lot. Larry Smith came in for a brief time, and

then Ernie Garcia after him. Smith was 1984 to '85. Garcia from '85 to '87, and then Henry Giugni from '87 to '90.

JOHNSON: Okay. What I remember about Mr. Smith and Mr. Garcia, and I think at that time—you may want to correct me if I'm wrong, Don—we had the first African American deputy sergeant at arms, Trudi Morrison. She was the first African American deputy, and the first female deputy. Martha Pope was the first female sergeant at arms. I'm trying to recall correctly. Mr. Smith and Ernie Garcia's tenure were very challenging for those two individuals because of two things, in my opinion. From an operational standpoint, many of the folks who had been around working in the sergeant at arms office for years needed direction. Nordy came up through the Senate. He had worked in the Democratic Policy Committee, he had worked around the Senate. So many knew him. Staff were trying to understand the goals of our new boss.

Their biggest challenge was the transition from mainframes out of the end of the '70s to the minicomputer era beginning in the early '80s: '83, '84, '85. The challenge there was a lot of offices had their personal preferences as to which minicomputers that they should be able to use. It came down to an issue where the Senate sergeant at arms had to decide, but had to satisfy all offices. What happened was we ended up choosing three minicomputer platforms. There were several vendors that won out on the bids to put minicomputers in the Senate, so we chose Data General, Honeywell, and Prime. The people that worked in the Computer Center wanted one choice to make our jobs easier—easier to interface, easier to upgrade, easier to support. Couldn't do it. Politically, our boss, the sergeant at arms, in this transition between Mr. Smith and Mr. Garcia's tenures (because both of them had short tenures), that was what they had to do to keep everybody happy. The decision was made to give the offices a choice of three mini platforms, and that was a technological challenge for us.

This was one of the times where, during that technological transition, we had to go back to being vendor-supported. That's what I meant about the vacillating back and forth as technology changes. The technology you bring in will depend on the level of the people you need to support that technology. We didn't have it. It was three different platforms. They all operated differently, buy they all were minicomputers. But they had their own different processes; their own different ways of connecting their workstations; their own ways of processing. It was very challenging.

RITCHIE: Just to get people to be able to send e-mail from one office to another—

JOHNSON: They weren't compatible, because they were proprietary systems. We were doing a lot of workarounds [a temporary method for achieving a task when the planned method does not work], we were doing a lot of innovative things to make the system work, but it was always clugy [a workaround, not a fix]. It was never smooth and robust, as we consider it today. That was a challenge for us. That's what I really remember about those two administrations, the fact that they had to implement it and get us to that next platform of computers, and it was very challenging for the sergeant at arms organization. During that time, that was one of the areas where we started experiencing growth, because we had to begin to hire technical talent to come work for us. It was better to do that than to continue to pay these minicomputer vendors millions of dollars to put the systems in and maintain them. Again, the thing that was always in the back of our mind was security. Will the data be leaked? Who owns the data? Will the e-mail find its way into the press? Can people hack into the system? The more we thought about that, and I'm quite sure the administration had thought about it, the more we believed, "We've got to support these ourselves and not have people that do not work for the Senate have their hands on the data in operating these systems. We have to do it ourselves." That's what I remember about those two administrations.

RITCHIE: Yes, the Senate works on its own schedule. You've got people all over the country that you've got to connect into the system. You have the demands on the floor. Trying to keep all of those people happy must be a very difficult situation.

JOHNSON: Sometimes it's almost impossible. We survive, but it's a real big challenge for us, it really is.

RITCHIE: Then Henry Giugni became sergeant at arms. He was more of an institution man. He'd been around for a while. What were your relations with him?

JOHNSON: That's one of the times when my career really started to improve and I really started to grow. Henry Giugni came out of Senator [Daniel] Inouye's office, and he was one of my paper customers back in the '60s, so I knew him before he was sergeant at arms. And I also knew Hiram Fong very well. Senator Fong was a very nice

senator—he was very nice to me. Henry worked for Inouye but he would visit Fong’s office, talking with Senator Fong.

During that time, he hired a gentleman to be his AA, named Brian Nakamura. Brian was an attorney. Brian came in and realized that the sergeant at arms office for the past fifteen years—this was around ’87—had focused on taking care of the Senate offices, the committees, the support organizations, with automating them, but the sergeant at arms had neglected to automate itself. That administration was the administration that brought that to the forefront. Brian was very innovative in saying, “We’re doing all these great things for everybody else, which is what we should be doing, this is what we’re here for, but we’ve got to keep up ourselves, because we’ve got to be able to communicate and be effective, and have a system to resolve troubles, and communicate with the office.” He looked around and he said, “We need someone in the sergeant at arms organization that can focus on automating all of our different departments.” By that time, you had Hair Care with Mario [D’Angelo], you had the Budget Office, with Dennis Doherty, who worked over in the basement of the Capitol—and then Dennis left us and went over to work for a committee. You had the Service Department. You had the Computer Center. You had the Senate Recording Studio. You had the tour guides—they weren’t controlled by the board at that time, the tour guides were still under the Senate sergeant at arms.

So Brian created a position called information systems coordinator for the sergeant at arms executive office. A lot of my peers thought that I was pretty sharp, and I was going to school, and I was really on the bleeding edge of technology. I wrote a paper one time on fiber optics for a contest in the industry. I would go to a lot trade shows. I would always go up to what is today the National Institute of Science and Technology, or NIST, and go to the forums and look at what the vendors were doing. I wrote a paper on fiber optics and I won the contest. They gave me a scholarship to go back to school to get a master’s certificate, or certified in data/telecommunications. Having said all that, I applied for the position. I was encouraged to apply, and I got it. I was one of the three finalists for the position. There were five directors on the panel at the time: the director for customer relations, director for the network, director for the finance portion of the Computer Center. Brian let the five directors interview the candidates, and I was hired.

I’ll never forget that when he offered me the job, he brought me over to his office in the Capitol. The sergeant at arms’ executive office was still in S-321 at that time,

where it had been for over a hundred years, the main office. He sat me down and he said, “Now, you know Mike, you’ve been here a long time, you’ve got a history with the Senate, but if you come work in the executive office you know you run the risk if a new sergeant at arms comes in, you could be asked to leave.” He said, “You really need to think about whether you want to do this or not.” He said, “I know you’ve got the skill set. Everybody was really impressed with your interview. You gave a good chalk talk on how you would do this job, and automate our departments. But I want you to really think about the political side of this, because you haven’t really been affected by that in your current position.” So being the person I am, I was real nonchalant, “I’ve been there, done that, worked in the cloakroom, but I want this job and I know I can do this.” He said, “Okay, I just wanted to caveat before I offer you this position.” He offered me the job and said, “You think about it and come back to me tomorrow and let me know whether you want it or not.” I went home and I thought about it, and I realized: no risk, no reward. This was an opportunity to move up to that next level.

I worked with Mr. Giugni and Brian Nakamura to automate certain areas of the Senate sergeant at arms’ departments. I was responsible for procuring and implementing a work-order tracking system for the Senate Service Department. They had appropriated funds for two years that were about to expire in six months to replace an antiquated Work Order Tracking System or WOTUS, but had not completed the project. Now that I was in the role of Information Systems Coordinator, this was the first large, complex project I was assigned to manage and complete. As project manager, I put together my project team and wrote a statement of work (SOW) that we advertised in the *Commerce Business Daily* for bids on the system. I completed the project before the funds expired, so it was on time and within budget. The director of the Service Department, Russell Jackson, was very happy with the new system and the outcome of my efforts. Russell, who was a good friend of Henry’s, came from the Senate superintendent’s office when Henry promoted him to director.

Another challenging project that I worked on simultaneously was automating the Senate Hair Care facilities with a point-of-sale (POS) system. Mario [D’Angelo], the manager, was tasked by the sergeant at arms to keep better records of the operation finances, so he needed to install a point-of-sale system to track cash flow for products and services. However, he did not have the resident staff or expertise to do it himself, so I was tasked as the project manager to complete the assignment. Mario’s operation was

one of several revolving fund operations within the sergeant at arms office, which also included the Senate Recording Studio and the Photo Studio.

These operations received payment from offices and customers for their services. Although they got some appropriated funds as well, they had to operate on the cash they took in, so they were referred to as revolving fund accounts. The Senate beauty and barber shops had been consolidated into the Senate Hair Care facilities, so you now had one manager of both facilities. It was often mentioned in newspapers like *Roll Call* that they were not profitable. Mario was under pressure to migrate from a manual receipt-keeping process to an automated process that would also lend itself to easy auditing. Again, I developed a systems requirements document based on their input, developed a SOW, advertised it in the *Commerce Business Daily*, or CBD, and evaluated the response proposals for each system. I had the system installed for the Hair Care facilities located in the basement of the Russell Building, selected Robert [Stoney] as the systems manager, and worked with the provider to train the staff. Mario was pleased with the outcome and told me on several occasions how the system had made his job of managing the facilities much easier.

Another significant accomplishment during that time was working with the Senate Recording Studio and its director, Jim Grahne, to install a local area network in their facility and assist them with developing plans to upgrade the facility to a High Definition or HD digital broadcasting facility. As you know, the Senate Recording Studio is responsible for broadcasting and recording the Senate sessions and providing the network feed to the major TV networks. This includes audio and video and they are also responsible for assisting senators with radio broadcast sessions that are used normally in radio stations in their home states. I also assisted Bob McCormick, director of the Senate Telecommunications Department, with installing a local area network for his entire operation, which consisted of about 90 to 130 individuals and managers; installing a centralized facsimile broadcast system to eliminate the need for Senate offices to send and receive bulk fax jobs from a single fax machine. In addition, I served on Bob's project team and assisted with the procurement of a new telephone switch. This is the current Northern Telecom DMS-100 phone switch. During the same time, I served the Common Services Procurement Team that was charged with procuring and implementing a new telephone switch for the House of Representatives and the General Accounting Office [GAO].

During this time, my technical, managerial and project management skills were growing and the success that I experienced with the majority of these projects was evident to Brian Nakamura and Mr. Giugni that they picked the right person for this position. When Mr. Giugni left the Senate, he went to work for Cassidy and Associates, a lobbying firm in downtown D.C. He called up one day and invited me to visit his new offices and meet Mr. Gerald Cassidy. I remember him telling Mr. Cassidy, "This is a sharp young man here, who grew up disadvantaged but made good from selling newspapers in the Senate." I could tell he was proud of me. He also took me to lunch once or twice at the Club 116, when he visited the Hill.

RITCHIE: Was he trying to recruit you?

JOHNSON: Yes, I think he was, because Mr. Cassidy's organization was growing and he needed someone who could help with their computer and office automation efforts. Although he never came out and said that, Mr. Giugni had a way of getting you to think about something without telling you exactly what he wanted you to think about. That was Mr. Giugni. But again, he was a straight shooter. He was really proud of what I did while he was Senate sergeant at arms, with automating the departments that was long overdue. I also neglected to say that a friend of mine actually worked for Mr. Cassidy as his systems administrator during that time, and his name was Jerome Brown. He and I were good friends because we often roller skated at the same indoor rinks around the Washington and Baltimore areas.

RITCHIE: So you moved back into the Capitol for this job of automating the sergeant at arms' offices?

JOHNSON: I did.

RITCHIE: That must have been kind of pleasant after you had been off at 400 North Capitol Street for a couple of years.

JOHNSON: It was. I felt removed after being at 400 North Cap. for so long. But the Capitol is a building that you never get used to being in. I can walk through that building for a thousand years and there's always something I haven't seen, or something I haven't noticed. Then space became very tight, so I ended up moving to an office on the

fourth floor of the Hart Building. They gave me a suite by myself, and that's where I worked out of until I went to work for Senate Telecommunications under Martha Pope's administration.

RITCHIE: I wondered—she was the first woman sergeant at arms, that's a big change, and also you had been working with Henry Giugni and they had warned you that if you had a new sergeant at arms things could change. What was the transition like between them?

JOHNSON: I knew there was something in there I was forgetting! This was the first time that I had faced the reality that I could lose my job. Mrs. Pope was appointed by Senator [George] Mitchell, I think. She didn't know me. I didn't know her. Her deputy was a gentleman out of the Democratic cloakroom, Bob Bean—Robert Bean. Robert, bless his soul because he's passed, he called me into his office maybe a couple of months after he got to know who was where and who was doing what. He invited me to meet in his office and I'll never forget this conversation.

He sat me down and he said, "As you know, we're the new administration here and we're Democrats." He said, "I've looked at your resume from your files and I noticed that you worked in the Republican cloakroom, and you worked for a lot of Republicans." He stared me in the face and said, "Are you Republican?" Like that. I said to him, "I'm a professional." I said, "I'm a professional computer science and network person. I'm not a politician. I've worked for Dems and I've worked for Republican sergeants at arms. I worked for Mr. Hoffmann" and I went on. He looked at me, shook his head, and he said, "Well, you know it's our option that we can let you go. You know that." I acknowledged with all respect, "Yes, sir, I realize that you can ask me to pack my bags and leave, that's your prerogative." He said, "But we're not going to do that because I've done my research and a lot of people like you. They respect you, and more so than that, they say you've done a real good job for this organization, and we want to keep good people like you." That's when I went phew! [laughs] That's when I started feeling a little more relaxed. My heart was pounding.

He said, "So I'm going to give you the option of where you want to work. We have several management positions open in the technology area, whether it was going back to the Computer Center or telecom, because you have experience in both areas. We

don't need you to do your current job anymore. You've automated the sergeant at arms departments." He said, "We're going to give you some options. Choose one and let us know which one you want." I said, "I'm fine with whatever you need me to do, so long as I remain in management. Tell me where you need me to be in my skill set." I said, "I would like to continue to manage systems and implement systems." He said, "You can go here in the telecom department as the subsystems manager or you can go back to the Computer Center and work in the network." I figured that what I needed was to broaden my skills and horizon, Don, and so I chose to go in the field that I didn't know anything about, and that was telecommunications. Because I had the data, computer, and the LAN background. I was thinking: "If I can learn the voice technology, I will be very marketable."

That's when he moved me from the fourth floor of the Hart Building down into SD-180 where the telecom department's main staff and Capitol operators were located. I became the manager of the subsystems and shortly thereafter the Capitol police radio systems that I was telling you about earlier. I was given that responsibility, also managing the operator responsible for producing the Senate telephone directory each year. That was one of the most trying times for me, with being really afraid that I was going to have to actually go back out and beat the bushes again, beat the pavement for a new job. I wasn't really concerned that I couldn't land anything on the Hill, or I wouldn't land on my feet, but I really was up for the challenge, and I really love working for the Senate sergeant at arms and I didn't want to leave the Senate. When he said, "We're going to keep you," that was just a relief. I think I even went out and had a drink that night! [laughs]

That's once incident I remember about the Martha Pope and Bob Bean administration. Afterwards, I didn't interface with or see Martha or Bob that much, because I left the executive office and dropped down several levels in the organization, but from what I knew of her, and the meetings that I was in with her, she was a quick learner. She knew that she was making history, being the first female sergeant at arms. I was really happy for her, having worked so long for the sergeant at arms organization, and she had a very successful administration. She was responsible for moving us forward to what's the next phase or wave of technology for the offices. So that's some of what I remember about Mrs. Pope's administration.

RITCHIE: It's interesting that you moved to telecommunications, because from doing some other interviews recently I'm aware of what a communications-driven institution the Senate is. Everybody in the country wants to call in, and then you have the senators who are desperate to call out and to connect with each other. Then you've got the police who are on their own frequencies. So people are constantly on the phone and you've got to have a system that accommodates them so they don't have a busy signal every time they call.

JOHNSON: Constituents and senators don't like busy signals! You're right, I couldn't agree with you more. We call that inbound-outbound communications, and as I said earlier, if you've got those four elements present, the two qualifiers are the message must be understood and you have the ability to recover from errors. If you don't, communications hasn't taken place, or you've got garbled communication or data. When I got into telecom, that's when I began to learn voice systems. I was responsible for operating, managing, and upgrading the centralized fax network that the offices used to do mass faxing to organizations, because facsimile technology was changing. That was one of the many challenges that came across my desk, and I was very successful at meeting those challenges.

I also had a big challenge with managing the Capitol Police radio system. I was the Senate radio frequency manager, which is a FCC [Federal Communications Commission] requirement. As such, I was responsible for insuring we retained our frequencies for the police communications system. Getting the frequencies assigned to the Senate, making sure that our license didn't expire—that was a challenge because a couple of times our frequencies were reallocated because the FCC paperwork got lost or was never sent to me, and I didn't complete it on time. I ran the risk of losing frequencies that we had used for years to communicate. Those were challenging responsibilities along with putting in additional leaky cable—Radiax cable—to allow the police officers on duty in the kiosks and booths in the basements and garages in the Russell, the Rayburn, the Dirksen, and the Cannon buildings to be able to communicate. That was a big challenge.

Another problem that I had to resolve but was not well publicized was that I worked with the Architect of the Capitol (AOC) to increase the footprint on the top of the Senate and Library of Congress buildings for putting up additional antennas to

communicate. I ran into problems with the Architect of the Capitol not wanting me to put up more antennas on the buildings. I was told, “We’ve got too many of them up there now. We don’t know who’s owns what.” That was another challenge, working with Mr. [Alan] Hantman’s organization to get more roof space, whether it was on top of the LOC [Library of Congress] Building, the Hart Building, wherever, to put up more antennas. At that time, I started to notice the technology and the industry moving away from wired communications, where you’re putting in hard wires, like co-ax, fiber, or twisted pair cable, to wireless communications.

So telecom was working with the nuances of companies coming to us and saying, “You know, we can do this using wireless technology—you just need to let us put a couple of transmitters in your building.” The technology was new, and if you know anything about wireless communications, there are two drawbacks that exist today, and that is security and speed. We couldn’t get the transmission speed needed, and it wasn’t secure. Anybody with a radio transceiver could stand outside the building, turn it on, and pick your signal or data right out of the air. So we were constantly looking at new technologies. Going back to your earlier comment about, do you rip the walls up in a historical building like the Capitol? Do you try to put something in that’s more modern, looks good, and people don’t say, “What is that?” This was an issue. Working for this department was when I earned my experience in the telephony and telecommunications areas, those were some good times for me.

RITCHIE: When you mentioned the Cannon Building, that reminded me that the telephone operators were one of the few offices that deal with both sides of the Capitol. When you work for them you’re not just dealing with the Senate, you’ve got the House as part of your terrain as well.

JOHNSON: Yes, they do, but one thing that people probably don’t know, but that may have come out when the telephone operators did their oral history, two things that I remember about the operators and that is although they work for the Congress, and when they answered the phone—as a matter of fact, my stepdaughter, Tequila Taylor, is a Capitol operator right now—you answer the phone, “Capitol operator.” What people don’t know was that the House hired their operators and the Senate hired their operators, but they all were in Senate space. Oh, man, we had problems going back and forth with the House when the Senate wanted to do something for the Senate operators, but the

House operators would say, “Oh, wait a minute, they can’t have those benefits when we’re not getting them.” That would get the House managers spun up. They’d call Mr. McCormick saying “What are you doing? Our operators tell us you’re doing this.” One thing led to another until eventually they realized the best way to solve this dilemma was to let one of the two bodies hire all of the operators. The Senate obtained this responsibility in the ’90s, so they all now work for the Senate. But yes, back in those days, the operators worked for both the House and the Senate. Just like the Capitol Police, you have some on the House payroll and some on the Senate payroll. Of course, House officers get paid once a month, while in the Senate we get paid on the 5th and the 20th of each month. Yes, I remember those days.

RITCHIE: When you were talking about the footprint on the roof, you were also competing for space and technology with the parties. Weren’t the political parties putting antennas up on the roof about that time? They were beginning to establish their own broadcasting facilities in the Republican and Democrats Conferences.

JOHNSON: Exactly. What we would do is be technical advisors to them. We did not see ourselves as competitors. The sergeant at arms organization had to support the entire Senate, but these organizations supported their party. So yes, we had to consult with and work with them. It was always a good working relationship, because working for the sergeant at arms we had to make it a win-win situation for everybody. We could not get into political battles between the Democratic Policy Committee and the Republican Policy Committee when it came to resources. We would always come to a healthy agreement and a compromise as to who needed what and when.

RITCHIE: Especially because they were very competitive with each other as to what they got.

JOHNSON: Yes.

RITCHIE: It always struck me that the minority party—whichever party happened to be the minority at the time—was always more technologically advanced than the majority, because they were willing to try anything possible to get into the majority!

JOHNSON: That's right, I totally agree, Don. Most people wouldn't think that it would be that way. You'd think, oh, the majority's got more money, they're more innovative. Not really. [laughs] The minority was always looking for ways to get ahead.

RITCHIE: There was a lot of turnover in the office of sergeant at arms. Martha Pope left in 1994, and then came Robert Laurent Benoit, and then your friend Howard Greene, and then Greg Casey, and that's all within about two or three years.

JOHNSON: Yes, okay, now it's coming back. Yes, Larry Benoit and Greg Casey. Now, Mr. Benoit, I didn't know him. He wasn't there that long, and by that time I was back down into the organization and had left the executive office. I don't really remember a lot about his administration other than he came in and he was, I think, encouraged by the leadership at that time, both the minority and the majority, just to keep things running. We had to stabilize the phone switch—we were having problems with it at the time. I was down at the technical level, working through technical projects. So I didn't really get to attend a lot of meetings with him or get to know him. For him, nothing jumps out.

RITCHIE: He was only in office for a couple of months, because Martha Pope had switched over to become secretary of the Senate, and was only in that job for a few months before the election of 1994, when the Democrats lost the majority.

JOHNSON: And then [Gary] Sisco came in?

RITCHIE: First Kelly Johnston and then Gary Sisco were secretary of the Senate, and Howard Green came in as sergeant at arms.

[Pictures on the following page, from top to bottom: Michael Johnson with Sergeant at Arms (SAA) Greg Casey; Johnson with Senator Trent Lott (R-MS) (right) and SAA Jim Ziglar (left); Johnson with SAA Al Lenhardt; and Johnson with Senator William Frist (R-TN) (left), SAA William Pickle; and Senator Harry Reid (D-NV) (left).]

JOHNSON: Right, now that was very interesting because Howard and I had a long history together. This was one of those instances where I knew the sergeant at arms that's coming in, like Mr. Hoffmann, I was close to, and Mr. Giugni, that I had a history with. I don't think Howard wanted to be sergeant at arms. I think he *loved* being the Republican secretary. That's what he wanted to retire as. The job was a lot of responsibility, and I think Howard really enjoyed just taking care of the senators and being on the floor. That's what he was used to doing, coming up through the cloakroom, trained by Mark Trice and Mr. Brownrigg, and that's what he wanted to do. When he became sergeant at arms, needless to say, I was elated: "Oh, my buddy is sergeant at arms!"

I had a couple of discussions with him early on. The discussions really were not for myself, they were for my son. He had begun to get older. He was at the age where he could become a page, and I wanted him to get that exposure. Maybe the next session I'll bring you a couple of his pictures. He looks just like me. You'd probably think, "Are you sure that's not you, Mike?" I went to see Howard and I said, "Howard, I'm really happy for you. I know you'll do a good job. You know I've been working in this organization for a long time. Anything you need, let me know. Anything you need to know, let me know. I've worked all over here." He said, "I know, Mike, okay when things settle down I will." I said, "Well, one thing I would like to ask of you if possible is that this summer, could my son come to work for you as a page?" "Oh, sure, no problem." And that summer, his first summer there, my son went to work for Howard as a Senate page.

There were a couple of discussions we had where Howard was trying to grasp the magnitude of the job—now, one thing I will say is that although Howard was used to being the party secretary for so long, had done that job, knew that job inside-out, probably could do it in his sleep, he learned the duties of the sergeant at arms quickly. He knew the Senate and a lot of sergeant at arms duties, but in running that organization he had a learning curve to overcome. He would call me from time to time and I would go over to his office and he would ask me about certain things. He was just in awe of what I had learned, and what I knew, and what I had done and accomplished.

I'll never forget, on one of my visits he got up after our discussion and he said, "Dammit, we're going to make Mike the director of the Senate Computer Center!" He

walked out of the office and told Marie Agnes and Marie goes, "Praise the Lord!" [laughs] I'm walking out the door thinking, "Well, I don't know if I'm ready for that, but whatever Howard needs I'm there for him." I think he really sincerely wanted to do that, but it was so political that actually I'm probably better off that he never did that. I think that would have been my ticket out the door. But he jumped up and said that. I guess it was about a week later he called and said, "You know, Mike, I probably spoke too fast. We need to think about this a little bit, because you know as well as I do that's going to put you in the forefront."

At that time, the Computer Center was embarking on migrating from minicomputers to microcomputers. Now, that process began around the Martha Pope-Bob Bean administration, and that was still ongoing, and he knew that. We were putting in local area networks (LANs) and there was a lot of controversy over whether we should use Novell or 3Com networks. Novell was the de facto standard for LANs in the industry, 3Com was more affordable, they had better equipment, they were more reliable. We were struggling with these two and the staff was pushing 3Com. What they may not have known was Novell built great software but 3Com built great hardware. You could run Novell software over the 3Com hardware. We ended up settling on the 3Com network. But Howard said, "Now is not the time to thrust you in the middle of that fight. Just stay where you're at for right now. I don't want to put you in that." He said, "but I've learned a lot from our sessions and we need to continue to have these one-on-one sessions."

He was only there a year and half or so in that position, but my son, Michael Anthony Johnson II, did get to work for him for two summers as a Senate page. I helped Howard out behind the scenes, gave him a lot of good advice on the technology. I was sort of like his silent consultant. Even to this day, we talk all the time on the phone. I always call to see how he's doing. He still lives in Virginia and he still has a place down in Clearwater, Florida, that he travels back and forth to.

RITCHIE: The sergeant at arms operation had gotten so complex over the years. It just grew. Every time something new happened like computers, they would add it in. I suspect that someone who was used to dealing with the politics of the institution and the politician had no concept of how much management was involved in that job. About that time the majority leaders changed, when Senator [Robert] Dole ran for president, and

Senator Lott came in as majority leader, with Greg Casey as sergeant at arms. Mr. Casey was Mr. Management. He was going to change the operation from top to bottom. How did you deal with Greg Casey as the sergeant at arms?

JOHNSON: Again, Don, the more I talk to you it seems like you were working in that organization along with us! You've got a very good grasp and a very good perspective on the organization and how it's grown and changed over the years, and you've hit the nail on the head with your question. When Mr. Casey came in, this was the lightning rod where we were going to—not going to, where we did change the structure and management of the departments. This was a time where we had one of the first major reorganizations in the sergeant at arms organization, in the history that I'm familiar with, since I worked there. And it was all under Mr. Casey's directive. Just fire and charging forward but with a lot of thought. "We're going to do better. We can do better." A great motivator he was. These are the things I think about when I think about Mr. Casey. Spoke very confidently about what he wanted to do and where he wanted to take the organization. Great communicator. Good sense of humor. Always smiling. Always laughing. Made you feel comfortable, I don't care who you were, senator, cable puller, printer in the Service Department. He talked to everybody, made you feel good, made you feel part of the organization. I knew that when I had a conversation with him that he was a dynamic leader. There's a difference I've learned in my career between being a manager and a leader. If I had my choice, I would want to be a leader, because a leader can manage but managers can't necessarily lead. That's what I learned from Mr. Casey.

He instituted the first major reorg that I'd seen at that scale in the organization, where he consolidated a lot of the same operations, especially where we had these silos. You had Mr. McCormick, who was the director of the Telecommunications Department. You had Mr. [James] Preissner, who was director of the Senate Computer Center, who later went to work for the Social Security Administration and subsequently retired, leaving the Computer Center, and all of the stove pipes reporting up directly to the deputy or the sergeant at arms. Mr. Casey came in and said, "You know what, we can do this better." He consolidated a lot of similar operations. Those were two of the key operations at the time, but of course you had Jim Grahne, who was director of the Recording Studio. So you had these leaders in these technology fields, and Mr. Casey consolidated all of that under a Chief Operating Officer, a COO, a gentleman by the name of [Charles] Chick Ciccolella. I think he's currently at the Veterans Administration. He

was the COO, and he was the guy that Mr. Casey brought in to get everybody consolidated and moving in one direction. Not only moving in one direction, but talking to one another more frequently. “You guys got to talk.” A very exciting time, things were moving fast. Mr. Casey, when he made his mind up, it was made. You were going there.

I had the privilege to experience that entire reorganization, as things were being shuffled around, and like operations were being consolidated. Where they should have been working together, they were put in the same unit or division or department. He went out and marketed his reorganization. He talked to the folks. He didn’t just stay up there in the Capitol, in the executive office, and mandate. He got out and he came and met with us. He would talk and he made sure you felt comfortable and you knew what your new role was. Through that whole process, my role changed. Mr. Casey, in consolidating everyone under the COO, created a couple of new organizations. Not a lot. But one of them was called the sergeant at arms program management department, and this department was created because Mr. Casey saw the need to improve program management. He saw the need for his departments to be able to better manage their programs, their projects, and the biggest challenge was: we didn’t know how to terminate bad projects. We didn’t know how to walk away from them. Because if you had one office that said, “I need that,” and they had a requirement, you had an obligation to satisfy them, or at least address that requirement.

What he did was he created this department to help Chick Ciccolella to manage all of these major projects, whether they were the replacement of the correspondence management system, whether it was upgrading the work order tracking system that I had brought in years ago that, as you know, when the shelf life expires you’ve got to decide: do I build, do I buy, do I buy-build? What do I do here? Do I upgrade? Do I go with the latest and greatest? He hired a gentleman that he brought in from the military to work with Chick, John McWilliam, who later became the chief financial officer for the Capitol Police, before he then went on to work for Booz Allen. He worked with Chick to help him manage these large projects. John had two positions open for senior program managers, and I applied for one of them, and I got it. That’s when I left the telecom field.

Then my office transferred to Postal Square. I didn’t go over when the Computer Center moved over, because I was in the Capitol then, working in the executive office. I

got one of the positions and I worked with John to help manage and control the large projects under the sergeant at arms. Mr. Casey was happy that I was one of the persons that was hired in that position. I went through the interview process. It wasn't handed to me on a plate. Then when John left to go work for the Capitol Police, the other senior program manager moved in as acting. Then a current director's slot opened up for IT services and he got it. Afterwards, I was put in as acting director of program management. That's when I began to help Mr. Casey and Chick with implementing the new techniques for managing projects. Those were some exciting times.

RITCHIE: Earlier, you said this is a very conservative institution and change comes slow, and here's a man who wants to change everything. Was there a lot of resistance to Casey's changes? How successful would you rate him?

JOHNSON: Again, you're hitting the nail on the head right there, Don. It was a big challenge for him and there was a lot of resistance. There was a lot of resistance, and it came from all angles. Mr. Casey, again being the dynamic leader and spokesman that he was, was not afraid of challenges. He proved that. He was a great speaker and he made you feel good. I'm quite sure that he articulated very well to the Senate leadership where he was trying to take this organization. He knew it needed changes. He knew it needed to be more efficient. I won't say morale was low, but people were sort of just moving along like they always had. But a lot of resistance. From the bottom, people resisted groups being lumped together. They didn't see the logic. People resisted being moved around and offices being changed. If you had talked to folks at that time, those were some very scary times for people who were not used to change. For me, it was a fun time because I was always used to moving around. I was used to trying to do innovative things and new things to help the sergeant at arms grow in its support efforts to the Senate. I saw it as an opportunity, and that's what I did. I thought I made out very well. But there were a lot of people that sat back with their arms folded saying, "What is he trying to do? I don't understand it. Someone needs to explain it to me. Someone needs to grab my hand and walk me along with this." Mr. Casey put out documents, he released new org charts with reporting lines drawn up and down vertically in the organization. But there was a lot of resistance. A lot of resistance.

RITCHIE: In retrospect, the 1990s were a period of enormous technological change. It sort of happened incrementally, but we went from primitive computers in

1990—there was still a telegraph office in the press galleries—to far more advanced by 2000. If he hadn't tried to adjust a lot of those processes, some of those systems would have broken down.

JOHNSON: Absolutely. Again, this is where I think he had the foresight to realize this change was happening. I never knew what Mr. Casey's background was in terms of what he did before he came to the Senate, whether he worked in private industry or the technology field, whether he was close to it or on the peripherals, but he had the foresight to see that if we did not change, that the sergeant at arms organization would become stale and stagnant and that it would not keep up with the changes and the dynamic of the '90s. So he did have the foresight. I think he was also one of the very few sergeants at arms that carried a weapon around. He really fulfilled the role of a true sergeant at arms when it came to executing his duties. He was not afraid of the challenges. He was not afraid of making decisions. I think the institution, being as conservative as it was, was not really ready for the changes that Mr. Casey was ready to implement. That made his job extra hard, to try to envision something, move it down that road, but at the same time deal with the resistance you're going to get. We all know Ohm's law says you take the path with least resistance. He didn't do that. [laughs] He hit it head on.

RITCHIE: That's why there were so many sparks.

JOHNSON: I would agree with that.

RITCHIE: If we talk much longer we're going to get into security issues. Why don't we come to a close at this point, unless you want to add something about what we've just been talking about.

JOHNSON: No.

RITCHIE: And then we can pick up the story in another week or so.

JOHNSON: What we've done is we've sliced and diced it. We've gone from my years as a page, looking at the legislative process and the political process in the Senate to the technology, and now the era of security is a whole different era and different sergeant

at arms, a whole other ball game. So this is a good time to take a stop and take a break.

End of the Second Interview

*[Pictures on the following page: top: Michael Johnson with President Bill Clinton;
bottom: Johnson with Illinois senators Richard Durbin (left) and Barack Obama (right).]*

CONTINUITY OF OPERATIONS

Interview #3

Friday, December 1, 2006

RITCHIE: The last time we talked about the various sergeants at arms you worked for over the years. We got up to Greg Casey, before Jim Ziglar came in. I wondered if we could start by your telling me about Jim Ziglar. I know he was important in your career, but what made him stand out among the sergeants at Arms with whom you worked?

JOHNSON: So many wonderful things come to my head when I think of Mr. Ziglar. As a matter of fact, I was just talking about him at home last night. One of my hobbies is I'm a neon glass bender, so I make neon lights. I made a neon sign for Mr. Ziglar with his initials in neon, but I never got a chance to give it to him. When I run across him in the halls he asks, "Have you still got that light for me, Mike?" I say, "Yes, sir." His birthday is coming up soon. Mine is December 6th and I know his is the 9th or the 12th, somewhere around there in December, and I plan to go see him and give him this memento.

But so many good things come to mind when I think of Mr. Ziglar. I would say of the top three sergeants at arms that I've worked for, he is definitely in that number. He was one of the most intelligent people I've ever met. He was an astute, quick learner. He could grasp things when you briefed him, he could get it in a heartbeat. The other thing I liked about him was he always made you feel welcome when you talked to him. He always made you feel relaxed. He was, I would say, real passionate about that job, and what he was responsible for as the Senate sergeant at arms. He took it very seriously. He made sure that he had the right people in the right places. He also didn't necessarily rely on one person's opinion when he was looking for an answer. He would kind of poll people. If you gave him an answer he'd trust but verify. That's what I liked about him. He did his homework. He was just a really great leader. Again, he wasn't a manager in that position, he was a leader, he led that organization. So when I think about Mr. Ziglar I think about words like integrity, very intelligent, very astute, very passionate about his work, and a very good person. He had a good heart, and a good soul, and I could tell that.

When I think of his administration, a lot of things come to mind. He wanted to

make sure that we had the right tools to do the right job at the right time. He wasn't afraid to make sure you had that. He was, in fact, the sergeant at arms that promoted me from acting to director of program management. I had worked as a senior program manager under Mr. Casey, when that office was created under his reorg. Going into the next administration with Mr. Ziglar, he was the one that picked me for that job. He said, "I know you can do this job. You're the guy I want." Although I had submitted my name and then I withdrew it. I withdrew it, Don, because I felt that the cards were stacked against me. I just kind of felt that with the way the interview panel was set up, it was stacked against me. So when I went for the initial interview with the panel, I respectfully at the very beginning said, "I'm withdrawing my name, but I appreciate the opportunity to come and interview with you all."

Mr. Ziglar got word of that, right after I declined to go through the interview, and called me to his office. He said, "What are you doing?" I said, "Well, sir, I don't have a really good feeling about this whole interview process." He said, "Mike, you have done great things. You have struggled. You've come a long way. Why would you want to give up now? This is an opportunity for you to get a director's position," which was something he knew I had been wanting for a long time. He talked to me. He talked me into going back. He said, "I would like you to reconsider going back for an interview. You're a strong candidate. You're a strong contender." And I did, based on that conversation with him.

So that was the kind of guy he was. When he recognized talent, he knew it right off. He had that intuition. It didn't matter who you were, he could read people very well. Subsequently, years down the road I ran into some folks who knew him who said that he did the same thing at Price Waterhouse, when he was a managing attorney there. That led me to believe—and I always knew it anyway—that Mr. Ziglar was just a genuine person, and you really don't run across that type of person that much these days.

RITCHIE: In your first interview you said that he came to you and said he wanted to leave a legacy of doing a continuity plan. That was pretty remarkable that he thought of that before September 11. Why was he thinking about that as an issue then?

JOHNSON: Well, it was actually a bipartisan directive given to the Police Board, and at the time, he was chairman of the board. This bipartisan directive was

issued in September of 2000 by the Speaker of the House, majority leader of the House, and the majority and minority leaders of the Senate. The four signatures on that letter directed the Capitol Police Board to develop a—they didn't call it a continuity plan, they called and said that we needed to ensure that the Senate could operate under any circumstances, and therefore we needed to have plans in place and they were tasking the Police Board to do that. That was mainly what initiated that. Now, I'm quite sure that there were talks, as you and I know there are always talks behind the scenes and in the private quarters, of what needs to be done, and I'm quite sure Mr. Ziglar was privy to that. This was more of a formality, to formalize it so that in going forward it wouldn't look like this was something that he just threw together. That letter, I think, prompted him to act. The letter is dated September 2000.

Mr. Ziglar had one of his executive assistants working on that project for about three months, up until about January 2001, and then he approached me and said, "Mike, I'm leaving the Senate this summer. One of the legacies I want to leave in the Senate is to get this plan written." He showed me the bipartisan directive that mandated these plans be developed, both in the House and the Senate. He said, "I think you can do this. As my director of program management, I would like you to do this for me." Then he explained that he had one of his executive assistants working on it, but that he wanted to make sure it got completed before he left, and this person was working on a lot of other initiatives. He wanted one person to focus on it, and he tasked me to do that.

Of course, at that time, Don, I was a good program manager, I had a great IT background, but didn't know anything about continuity planning, didn't know anything about emergency preparedness planning, and definitely did not know how to write one for an institution like the Senate. I was in awe that he asked me to do it, but on the same token I had reservations because I didn't have the experience. That's when he just said, "I know you can do this, Mike, I've got all the confidence in the world. But you've only got six months. I need it by June."

RITCHIE: How did you go about researching an issue that complex?

JOHNSON: It really wasn't too difficult. The first thing I did, being a seasoned and trained program manager, was to put together a high-performance project team. I had the requirement letter to get everyone excited about developing this plan. I needed a

team, and I needed funding assistance. I didn't think I needed a budget, because we weren't buying a product. We were writing a plan. But I needed a team to help me amass the information. There was a gentleman who is currently head of Senate Security for the secretary of the Senate [Michael diSilvestro] who was tasked to work with me to develop the secretary's continuity plan at the same time. He joined my team, and then I had others join my team from within the sergeant of arms organization. I put together a team of about ten folks, and I was the project team leader.

In addition, I added David Vignolo to the project team. He was a staffer in my program management department who I knew was detail-oriented and a good writer. I think he was an English major in college. This proved to be a very good decision because David helped me a lot with writing, editing, and collating the plan chapters and sections. In fact, he liked it so much that he changed his career goals to pursue a career in continuity planning. When I moved over to help create the sergeant at arms Office of Security and Emergency Preparedness, and headed up the continuity planning section of that department, he applied for a position in this department. He became certified in business continuity planning through the Disaster Recovery Institute of DRI. He's currently the continuity program manager for the Senate sergeant at arms and is responsible for assisting Senate offices and committees with writing and maintaining continuity of operations (COOP) plans.

The first thing we did was take Mr. Ziglar's suggestion and contact the executive branch to see how they wrote continuity plans. We also looked at best practices to see who else were developing these plans. We've got two other branches, the executive and the judiciary branches, so the first thing that I did was to contact the General Services Administration, as Mr. Ziglar suggested. "There's an acronym called COOP planning, which stands for Continuity of Operations," we asked GSA what were they doing in that arena. "What have they done? What plans have they developed? We'd like to come and talk to you." That's what got the ball started. They had been doing this for a long time, because they have succession planning in the executive branch. So it wasn't new to them. They said, "Sure, we'd be happy to talk to you." That was the point where I did need a budget because to get the people assigned to work with me, I had to reimburse them, so I established an interagency agreement with the GSA administration. So now I had one or two GSA staffers assigned to my team as well.

Linda Grinnage from GSA was another key player on my team because she brought to the table her resources from GSA, including providing my team with the original template that we used to develop the plan, knowledge of how to write the plan, examples of plans GSA had written, and resources to help me write and edit the plan. She was a wonderful addition to my team, and to this day I appreciate her efforts and contributions in publishing the first COOP plan for the Senate.

RITCHIE: What kind of issues were you dealing with?

JOHNSON: I was dealing with a multitude of issues involving the project team and writing the plan itself. Let's take the project management issues first. I was dealing with issues such as getting the interagency agreement between the legislative branch (the Senate) and the executive branch (the General Services Administration) established without delay because time was limited. I was dealing with the fact that nobody on the team had ever written a COOP plan except Linda, so the majority of my team members had a huge learning curve to overcome. I dealt with issues such as how much training we will need to acquire before we can start writing the plan; how do I get the sergeant at arms departments to provide me with their input since it wasn't one of their primary duties; how do I keep the project moving so I can meet the deadline; and how do I ensure that Michael DiSilverstro had what he needed to write the secretary of the Senate plan as well? There were a multitude of issues and long work hours that I had to contend with in completing the important but complex project. In addition, I had to be creative in keeping Mr. Ziglar apprised of my progress, since he was busy running the entire organization.

With regard to the issues pertaining to the plan itself, the first important issue that we as a team decided to address was: Where would the Senate go to deliberate if the Senate Chamber was unusable for some reason or another, such as a fire? It didn't have to be a terrorist attack that rendered it inoperable. The chamber could simply be under renovation to be deemed unusable. So this issue we labeled as "Developing an Alternate Senate Chamber." Other issues regarding the plan had to do with what happens when we have a "localized incident" that affects a small area of the Capitol or an area within one of our office buildings. The next issue had to do with what to plan for during a "wide-scale incident" that affects the entire Capitol or Senate office buildings, separately or at the same time.

Other issues I had to deal with were how do we notify or communicate with senators and staff when an incident occurs; how do we respond in the first twelve hours of an incident; how do we identify the “vital records” that the Senate would need during an incident; and many other issues as well.

So my first focus was to find an alternate chamber for the Senate. We needed an alternate chamber established, identified, and approved. Then everything else that supports that chamber needed to be developed next—everything that I learned from my years as a page, working in the cloakroom, working on the floor, working in the senators’ offices, I knew supported the Senate Chamber. Everything else would need to be planned next, so this was my starting point.

RITCHIE: What was the hardest part of that job?

JOHNSON: The hardest part of that job was not knowing whether I was doing it right, because I had never done it before. But with the help of GSA, I used their templates, I modified them—and when I say “I,” it was a team effort, I was the project manager but I had people helping me. We modified the template to fit the Senate and the legislative branch because the template we were using was geared toward the executive branch, and of course we operate differently. So the hardest part was not knowing whether I was doing it right, and the other hard part was meeting the project deadline. I knew I couldn’t miss it. I had never missed an important project deadline in my career, and I wasn’t about to start now with something as important as this assignment.

The project team gelled together. There were differences but I would like to think that my personality and participatory-management style aided me in identifying and resolving disputes or differences of opinion. Furthermore, these skills allowed me to make sure that we were one team moving in one direction. In my opinion, the optimum membership for a project team is five to seven members. If you have more than that—I had ten members—it’s more difficult to manage. Although I had a large project team, I was able to keep everyone moving in the same direction.

RITCHIE: I wondered, because on Capitol Hill there are many fiefdoms. You have the Office of Senate Security, the Capitol Police, all of these groups. Did you ever encounter any resistance from people who thought that they were already taking care of

things?

JOHNSON: Interestingly enough, not much. The reason I think was because I asked Mr. Ziglar to issue an announcement to all department directors that I would be leading his project and how important it was to him and the Senate that I receive their full cooperation. I also did not run into a lot of resistance because people could see that I was a confident project leader, but I would not hesitate to escalate issues above my level when needed. Remember, this task was coming from the Senate leadership and the Capitol Police Board, so if someone said, “I don’t have time to do this, Mike, I have other priorities,” I would remind them of our mission, share the bipartisan agreement with them, and help them resolve the priority conflict.

The focus was on the survivability of the U.S. Senate under any circumstances. We had the directive, so everyone involved came together for the common goal. I had a representative from the Capitol Police and the Senate Security Office on the team. I had a person from GSA on my team. GSA also used a private contractor to assist us. When difficulties arise, I would just—not in an intimidating way—talk to the person to help resolve the issue quickly. I would also encourage my team members by reminding them about this great opportunity for completing this assignment because it had never been done before now. “The leadership is asking us to do this. This is not about Mike Johnson or any one of us on this team.” I would elevate the goal above a single individual and encourage everyone to cooperate for the good of the institution. And people just fell in line. It was a great achievement!

RITCHIE: So you finished this plan around May or June?

JOHNSON: Mr. Ziglar wanted it completed by June 2001, and around the second week of May, I delivered to him the plan in three large binders and in CD format—I don’t know the total number of pages it consisted of. The plan was divided into a COOP plan for each sergeant at arms department. In addition, a similar plan was completed and presented to the secretary of the Senate about the same time. These were big thick binders. These were even bigger than those black binders on your bookshelves.

I had them place the plan on a compact disk for him so he didn’t have to carry the binders around. He said, “You’re finished?” I said, “Yes, sir, this is what you asked for.”

He said, “Wow!” He was just elated. The first thing he said was, “I knew you could do it, Mike.” I said, “Thank you, sir, I can’t take all the credit. I was the leader of a great project team, who helped me.” I also wanted to recognize Mike diSilvestro, head of Senate Security, he was a key partner in this. Dave Vignola did a great job with helping me write and edit the plan.

RITCHIE: Well, you submitted the report in May 2001, and then September came along. When you began to realize what was happening on September 11, what did you think in terms of having studied the continuity of operations?

JOHNSON: Oh, let me just make another point in terms of the plan itself. Although the bipartisan directive was mandated by the leadership of both the House and the Senate, the House was working on their plan at the same time. They used a contractor to help write their plan. We contemplated doing the same thing, but decided against it. Mr. Ziglar was very foresighted, in making sure the secretary of the Senate was included in this effort. He told me, “Now, when you write this plan, we have to make sure that the secretary participates.” By having Mike D. on my team, and working with us when we produced the plan for the sergeant at arms, we equally produced a plan for the secretary of the Senate, which a lot of people don’t know. There were two plans that were delivered.

RITCHIE: That makes sense, since they both have a lot to do with what goes on on the floor of the Senate.

JOHNSON: Exactly, the sergeant at arms with security and protocol and the Secretary of the Senate with the legislation and the chamber operations, notwithstanding the party secretaries’ rolls. So I had to digress to clarify that, that it wasn’t just one plan for the sergeant at arms, but we produced two plans and we’ve been walking in lock-step ever since then, when it comes to COOP planning in the Senate.

RITCHIE: You mentioned that the House contracted theirs out. When they got their report, was it similar to yours?

JOHNSON: It was not, and as a matter of fact—I don’t know this to be true today—but I don’t think it ever became a living and breathing document like ours did. We update ours as needed, but at least every two years. I satisfied the near-term

requirements to complete a plan for the sergeant at arms within six months, and I promised a long-term strategy to take our plan to the next level for the sergeant at arms, which was to have each Senate office write a plan. I had a very aggressive project plan for this initiative. I was not just thinking about what I was tasked to do, I thought ahead and mapped out a plan for years to come. I don't think the House followed this strategy, because they had a contractor write their plan. I believe our plan was very functional—not to say the House's wasn't, but when I got a copy of their plan to compare, it didn't have the depth of what we wrote. I think part of the reason was the people who wrote it didn't work in the House. They were contractors, whereas Senate staff wrote our plan. Who best to write it than the people who work here and have to keep the institution running? I think that was the difference.

RITCHIE: Knowing the peculiarities of the institution helps a lot.

JOHNSON: Knowing the peculiarities of the institution, absolutely. You had asked me another question.

RITCHIE: About September 11th. When that was happening, what was your reaction? What were your thoughts about that whole continuity process?

JOHNSON: I was sitting in a meeting when the first plane hit the Towers. Someone ran down the hall and said, "A plane just flew into the World Trade Center." I thought, what? We all thought it was an accident, so we continued our meeting, but others were turning on the TV. I left the meeting and went back to my office to turn on my television to watch the news, and another plane hit, and I watched that. At that point, we all knew that this was no accident. Not two planes in the same Towers. People just started self-evacuating.

Interestingly enough, Mr. Lenhardt had just been sworn in a few days before. He had only been on the job for six or seven days when this happened. The first thing I thought about was to contact the sergeant at arms to see if he was activating the COOP plan. When the sergeant at arms activates the plan, there is a position called the "COOP Action Officer" for the Senate, who is responsible for implementing the plan. And that was me.

The first thing I did was grab a CD with a copy of the plan and went to the Capitol Police headquarters, where I knew Mr. Lenhardt was with the leadership. Other senators were going there as well. The irony of it was I couldn't get in the building! Here I was with the continuity plan for the U.S. Senate, and I couldn't even get in the police headquarters where the decisions were being made! There was an officer on the outer perimeter that they had set up around police headquarters who recognized me. I think he was a lieutenant. He said, "Mike Johnson, he works for Mr. Lenhardt, let him through." That was how I got in.

When I got through the barricade, I went up to the seventh floor where the sergeant at arms and the others were meeting with leadership, and when I got a moment to speak with Mr. Lenhardt, I said, "Sir, are we activating the COOP plan?" He said, "Hold up for that right now, Mike, we're still trying to gather information." Now, there was chaos going on outside on the street due to the mass evacuation. People were self-evacuating. Traffic was all tied up. As a matter of fact, my significant other, Ms. Thirise Brown, the Web and network administrator for Senator [Blanche] Lincoln, was passing me in her car as I was going to police headquarters. She said, "Where are you going? I'm going home." I told Thirise that "I've got to work. I can't go home. I'm the COOP action officer." She said, "Okay, I'll see you at home." I stayed up there the entire day, waiting for word regarding the plan—when and if he was activating the COOP plan. Should he activate a portion of it? Should he activate all of it? I sat there and waited.

I know you probably heard this when you did the interviews with the telephone operators, I'm not sure if Barbara [Loughery] or Martha [Fletcher] talked about this—I know both of them very well, but that was the only time in the history of the exchange that it ever shut down. To make a long story short, we never activated the sergeant at arms COOP plan that day because it was determined that the Senate was okay and it was only a mass evacuation. There were no damages to our buildings or to the chamber. So Mr. Lenhardt tasked me with going back to Postal Square and assist with getting the Capitol telephone exchange opened back up. That was a challenge in itself. He had another one of his executive assistants who went over with me and we just started calling operators at home to get them to come back to work, because the Postal Square building had evacuated everybody out. A lot of the Capitol operators that I called said they couldn't get back into the city because of the barricades. The D.C. police department was allowing people to leave the city, but they weren't letting anyone but law enforcement

and medical personnel come back in the city, because they didn't know what was going on. So my colleague and I coordinated getting police escorts for some of the operators to get back into the city. While we waited for operators to arrive, along with volunteers from the secretary of the Senate's office answered the Capitol Exchange phones. I think Dave Tinsley and Dan Kulnis were some of the volunteers from the secretary's office who helped us. It was truly a team effort and I was happy to be part of it. We had to answer the phones just like the Capitol operators do, "U.S. Capitol, may I help you?" I quickly went from being a COOP Action Officer to an adhoc Capitol telephone operator.

I'm laughing now, but it was a very intense time. And it was a very long day for me. I normally get to work at 6:30 in the morning, and I didn't leave until about 12:30 the next morning, September 12th. That still wasn't as long as some of my page days.

RITCHIE: And the remarkable thing was the very next day the Senate was in session. They had police barricades all around the building, but they came back into session. What was the discussion at that point about continuity of operations? Although they didn't have to move out of the chamber, did they begin discussing at that stage the emergency circumstances?

JOHNSON: Yes, as I recall, the very next day, when they came back into session, there was a lot of discussion going on in the Capitol that I wasn't privy to, I wasn't part of that, but I was still on standby in terms of whether or not I needed to activate the alternate chamber. In the plan, we had identified an alternate chamber, but it was not completed. We had it approved by the Senate Rules Committee. The sergeant at arms signed off on the plan, but I didn't have the alternate chamber built. I had the location. I had it identified and approved. But I didn't have it ready for prime time. So the discussion that day was more or less trying to find out what had happened in New York, what had happened with the plane going down in Pennsylvania, what had happened at the Pentagon. It was more—I won't say damage control, it was still more information gathering. I was still on the sidelines, but the talk of activating COOP had subsided.

Now, I forgot to tell you that the COOP plan I delivered to Mr. Ziglar had some major recommendations in it. It didn't just cover our executive operations. It covered the Page School and dorm, and the secretary of the Senate likewise. It covered the Disbursing Office operations, and the Stationery Room. It covered the Senate clerks,

such as Dave Tinsley [Legislative Clerk].

RITCHIE: And the pages, they were put on buses and sent over to Colonial Beach on the Chesapeake, or someplace like that.

JOHNSON: Yes, they evacuated the pages, I don't recall where. Elizabeth Roach, the proctor, took them. I can't recall where, but that was what their evacuation plan called for. They had the police officer on the bus with them.

RITCHIE: It was good for the pages and it was good for their parents. It got them out of town and took their minds off of what was going on, and got everybody relieved.

JOHNSON: Right, the kids were safe. Most people who work in the Senate probably don't know, and even at that time didn't know that we had a continuity plan, because it had not been advertised. It had not been disseminated. It was only between May and September, four months, it was brand new and so a lot of people didn't know we had that plan. But we were ready.

RITCHIE: Well, that was September. The next month [October 2001], this whole building [Hart Senate Office Building] shut down because of an anthrax attack. That was in many ways much more disruptive of the Senate's business than September 11th, which was a distant threat that never arrived. But the anthrax was in the building, shut down all of the buildings for a couple of days, and shut this building down for three months, which was definitely a situation for continuity of operations.

JOHNSON: Exactly, and when that happened in October, we all thought, "What else is going to happen?" But that was real. It wasn't perceived. It wasn't external. It was right here on our campus, and that's when the Senate Disbursing Office and the Page School did activate their COOP plans. My role as the COOP action officer then was to put together an emergency operations center for the sergeant at arms office. Also my role was to work with the Senate Rules Committee, particularly Kennie Gill, who was staff director at the time, to find alternate office space for the Senate staff who were displaced from Hart. What I didn't know at the time but I soon found out was that 50 percent of the senators' offices were located in the Hart office building. Fifty percent? Mr. Lenhardt

said, “Yeah, Mike, and we’ve got to find them alternate office space. Now, here we are in ’06 and that’s a big part of our plan now. Back in those days, when we wrote the plan, it was—I won’t say a distant concept, but it was something we had not finished planning for. We hadn’t drilled down to that level yet. The biggest challenge for myself and the continuity folks, and the Rules Committee staff working with Mr. Lenhardt, was finding alternate office space and making sure that these offices could continue work.

One thing I’ll also say, Don, and a lot of people have either forgotten or don’t know, or don’t want to give my team credit for, but a major recommendation in the COOP executive plan summary was that in our assessment of how to continue business, we needed an alternate chamber. We worked through so many issues. That was just the starting point. Another major recommendation was that we needed an alternate computer facility (ACF). Today we have that facility, but a lot of people don’t know that the concept and recommendations for that facility came out of the first continuity plan that was written for the Senate. People think the IT guys thought of this. It was my team that said we need to have one in the event that our main computer room and main frame were taken out, for whatever reason, fire and things like that, that we have a facility to back up our computers. This recommendation was adopted and that’s why the Senate has an ACF today. Another thing I’ll point out is that when we made that recommendation, Mr. Ziglar worked with the Senate leadership to get funding put into the next year’s appropriations bill, so the facility could be acquired. Afterwards, other legislative branch entities saw our request and said, “The Senate has asked for money for an alternate computer facility. We would like to be included in that effort We need the same thing.” Then the House joined in, although I don’t believe this idea was in their COOP plan, and the rest as they say is history because everybody said, “We want a piece of that.” To this day, we have the Library of Congress, GAO, GPO, AOC, House, and Senate operations included in the ACF, but it was the Senate’s initial concept.

RITCHIE: Well, the computers saved everybody, because we walked out the door in October 2001 without a single book or any of our files or other paperwork, but within days we had a computer hooked up at a desk in the Russell Building. We could get our e-mail. We could get anything that was online. If it hadn’t been for that it would have been hard to do any work for three months. We had limited space—one desk for the entire office—but the computer enabled us to function.

JOHNSON: Right. What we did during the anthrax attack was work with the Rules Committee to identify and acquire alternative office space in the Postal Square building for the Senate offices to use. Simultaneously, the Rules Committee identified vacant space in committee and conference rooms in the Dirksen and Russell buildings for other displaced staff from the Hart Building to use. The extended campus set up at Postal Square that offices used could accommodate two people per office, and worked well. Keep in mind that many offices transferred the workload and other responsibilities to their state offices or staff just worked from home and some telecommuted. We also worked with the Rules Committee to get authorization to enter into a short-term lease agreement with the General Services Administration to obtain additional office space on the fourth floor of Postal Square. So, the lessons learned and experience that we obtained from developing our first ever COOP plan were benefitting us while we recovered from the incident.

RITCHIE: You were building on it.

JOHNSON: Yes, we were building on our COOP plan, that's exactly what we were doing.

RITCHIE: As all this was happening, how did the continuity plan evolve? Obviously, now everybody realized how important the issue was, and it had these new layers added onto it. What was the next step after that?

JOHNSON: The next step in my mind was for me, since I was leading this effort for the sergeant at arms office, to develop a strategy to assist each Senate office to write a COOP plan for their operation. As you know, each senator's office is like a small corporation in the Senate. Therefore, each office needed to have a COOP plan to ensure the office could function under any circumstance. The anthrax incident that displaced 50 percent of the senators' offices for three months was evidence that this was the logical next step, which I had previously identified. The additional goals that I had for COOP planning in the Senate were as follows:

1. Complete a COOP plan for each senator's office.
2. Complete a COOP plan for each Senate committee.
3. Complete a "gap analysis" of the sergeant at arms and secretary of the Senate

COOP plans to identify what was missing.

4. Complete the build-out of the Senate Alternative Chamber on Capitol Hill.
5. Identify and acquire an Alternative Senate Chamber off Capitol Hill.
6. Expand and plan to include provisions for an Alternate Senate office building for use during a long-term incident that closes one of our buildings.
7. Complete a COOP Emergency Communications Plan so we'll have primary and backup communications equipment and protocols established for an incident.
8. Complete a COOP Emergency Transportation Plan for the Senate.

Furthermore, I wanted to acquire funds so that I could establish an ongoing Test, Training, and Exercise (TT&E) program to allow us to periodically test our plans, conduct drills for setting up our alternate facilities, and train our COOP personnel.

I briefed these goals and objectives to Mr. Lenhardt. He recommended that we proceed, but remember to “crawl, walk, and run” as we moved forward with these goals. So that’s been a motto for me when executing my duties as deputy sergeant at arms for security and emergency preparedness.

Mr. Lenhardt also introduced me to the concentric circles concept: Let’s build our plans out, starting from the hub of Capitol Hill and out. And that’s what I have done. I started taking the plans to the next level. I started to acquire and build-out the facilities, and get the facilities ready, and request the budget to do that. I had no budget to act on any of these plans, and at the time we didn’t have a Chief Information Officer (CIO), one central person responsible for all the IT stuff. I think there was a director or two, but there wasn’t a centralized person responsible for the ACF, so later on a CIO was hired by Mr. Pickle. His name is Greg Hanson. We became good friends, since he started working with us. So the next logical step was, “Okay, let’s start implementing some of these recommendations in this plan. Let’s review it and test it.” Mr. Lenhardt and Jeri Thomson, the secretary of the Senate at that time, were saying, “We’re going to move on some of these recommendations, but what we’re also going to do is do an assessment of our vulnerabilities in the Senate,” both physical and technical vulnerabilities, or whatever else we need to look at.

Mr. Lenhardt then commissioned the Legislative Branch Emergency Preparedness Task Force, LBEPTF. He created this task force and hired a gentleman who currently

today works for the Capitol Police, Richard Majauskas, and asked him—he had prior military experience—to lead this team as the director. Lenhardt put me on this team along with Mike DiSilvestro, from the Office of Senate Security. Remember, Mike and I had worked together in creating the original COOP plans for the secretary of the Senate and the sergeant at arms. He tasked us with doing a study of our vulnerabilities and looking at what we could fix immediately. The director used to call it—and it was the first time I heard the term—“low-hanging fruit.” He said, “We’re going to pick the low-hanging fruit. We’re going to fix what we can fix right away as we conduct the study. We’re going to recommend solutions for the different vulnerabilities and present it to the leadership and to our bosses.” That’s what we did.

For the next three months, I worked on the task force and also assisted with the anthrax response. I learned a lot while working on this task force, conducting the vulnerability analysis of the Senate campus. We completed that in December of 2001. After the report was provided to Mr. Lenhardt, he created an office that was responsible for the continuity and emergency preparedness business of the Senate from a security perspective, but not as first-responders, because that’s the Capitol Police’s job. He needed staff who could permanently address these and other security issues for the Senate. He wanted to make sure that the planning was going on, that evaluation and preparation continued. So in January 2002, the report was disseminated to the leadership and other Senate officials. Mr. Lenhardt recommended to the leadership that the Office of Senate Security and Emergency Preparedness be created. He called me into his office and said, “I know you are director of program management, and you produced the first continuity plan for the Senate. How would you like to come over and work in a new office I’m creating called the Office of Security and Emergency Preparedness?”

Me being an old IT guy, I immediately started thinking acronyms, because in the IT world everything is an acronym. Most people know that the word LAN is an acronym, and it stands for Local Area Network. The first thing I thought of was Office of Security and Emergency Preparedness? I said, “OSEP.” Like that, and he said, “Yeah, OSEP.” I said, “Wherever you need me, sir, I’m ready.” He said, “Okay, I’d like you to vacate the director of program management duties and come over and work in this office I’m creating and help build this office.” So that’s what I did. Those were the next steps: Look at low-hanging fruit, what we could fix right now, look at our long-term objectives, and create this office.

My experience in the Senate was then more valuable than ever, because I had worked on the floor. I had worked in the cloakroom. I knew how the floor operated. I had to work with the party secretaries in looking at the chamber operations. I had been a telecom manager, responsible for the Capitol Police radio system and equipment. I was the one, I think I mentioned earlier, to put in the radiax cable over in the Rayburn building, and the leaky cable, to increase coverage for their portable radios, so I knew where some of the vulnerability was. I had worked in the IT field, so I knew where some of our vulnerabilities were. But Rick and Lenhardt also brought in teams from outside, from other organizations, to help us with the study. And that's what we did. It just came together beautifully and I was glad to be a part of it. One of the certificates I brought to show you was after we did the first exercise of the Alternate Chamber. Mr. Lenhardt shared the task force report with the leadership and other senators, and Senator [Mary] Landrieu spoke about our team on the floor and gave us kudos in the *Congressional Record* on December 19, 2001. She talked about our task force and what we had accomplished. It mentioned all of our names. That was really nice that she did that for us.

RITCHIE: Were you hearing from any of the senators while all of this was going on? Did they have opinions about what should be done? Senators usually aren't shy about expressing their opinions.

JOHNSON: No, they're not shy. [laughs] I did not personally hear from them but I do know that Mr. Lenhardt was in constant conversations with the leadership, Senator [Tom] Daschle and Senator Lott, and other senators. I know that he had inquiries from senators who had experience and backgrounds in this area. Although I did not interface directly with the senators, unless we were briefing them. So the SAA would tell us which senator was concerned about a particular issue. We were trying to make changes rapidly to secure the campus and to make sure that everyone was safe.

RITCHIE: I know some of the senators were pretty indignant about this building being closed for so long. They wanted to get back in here and couldn't understand why it was taking so long, and I'm sure that they had strong opinions about what needed to be done.

JOHNSON: Yes, they did, and I heard some of that. I heard of senators—and this was just hearsay and not something I can substantiate—but I heard that there were senators who said, “Get that building open.” We were under the radar scope. The Hart Building was closed for about three months. We were under pressure to get the building open. It’s my understanding that at the same time the Hart was attacked, the same thing happened in Florida, that building was deemed unusable and torn down. The Hart Building being a new building, that was not an option, so these speciality teams that were brought in, and the excellent work that the office of the attending physician, Dr. [John F.] Eisold and his team did, it was just remarkable. It was just remarkable to see these teams of experts working together, hand in hand. I think there were a lot of opinions from senators. There were also senators I heard that were concerned—and rightfully so—with some of the expensive art was on loan to their offices, and that they wanted to save. They didn’t want it to be destroyed by the cleaning chemicals. They were concerned about that. They were concerned about a lot of things, but mainly would their staff be safe when the building was reopened. I also think most of all that the senators were grateful that no one died from that attack on the Senate Hart Building.

RITCHIE: Yes, when you consider the alternatives, the consequences could have been pretty severe.

JOHNSON: Far worse, yes.

RITCHIE: At the same time this was going on, the Visitor Center [CVC] was being constructed on the east front [of the Capitol]. Did any of your plans affect the way the Visitor Center was being constructed? Did that become factored into the issue of continuity and alternative meeting sites?

JOHNSON: There was some discussion and some consideration about using a section of portion of the CVC as an alternate chamber. They debated using the auditorium that they were building as a alternate chamber that could be used for joint sessions. But again, that was hearsay and I was not privy to that. That was being kept at a very high level. By the time it got down to me, I was just told to implement something. So the CVC didn’t have a huge impact, Don, on the continuity planning. At that time, after we got the Office of Security and Emergency Preparedness established, our focus was to continue to implement the recommendations that were approved that came out of

the COOP plan and that came out of the vulnerability analysis report that the task force wrote. In addition, our focus was to get some of these alternate facilities acquired and configured so that if we really had to use them, we could.

I was spending long hours working on the alternate chamber in the Hart Building, and taking the plan to the next level. I also was working on a way to test the plan. There is a key component of continuity of operations planning called test, training, and exercise. Now, of course, in the Senate, that's easier said than done. I'm not going to walk into Senator Daschle, or Senator Reid, and say, "We're going to be doing some testing in the Senate Chamber, sir. You won't be able to use the chamber today." That ain't going to happen! We had to work around a lot of obstacles to begin to develop a test, training, and exercise program. The first test I managed and conducted was the alternate chamber on August 7, 2002. By that time I had the alternate chambers built out. The secretary of the Senate staff held a mock session in the alternate chamber. We went into a mock session with the clerks and the secretary of the Senate, and we passed this resolution. Jeri Thomson and Mr. Lenhardt kindly gave all of us a copy of it. It designates when we did the first continuity of operations exercise.

RITCHIE: So you held a mock session of the Senate in an alternative place and passed this resolution?

JOHNSON: In an alternate chamber, yes.

RITCHIE: Tested all the communications equipment—

JOHNSON: Exactly. Set up all the cloakrooms. Set up all the clerks' work stations, the official reporters, place for the press if the press would be allowed in during a real world incident. We had our doorkeepers. We had USCP chamber protective division. Yes, we made it look just like it was the Senate Chamber in the Capitol. At that time, the House had not begun to exercise at this level. We talked about the House in contrast earlier. The House was taking smaller steps. They were testing the alternate vote tally machines and the electronic equipment. They were buying and programing alternate laptops. We went for the bigger challenge. We said, we're going to do this exercise, and it just came together very well. I got a lot of kudos for a job well done since I led the effort, and I was really happy that it was successful. I also have a letter from Mr.

Lenhardt thanking me.

RITCHIE: Have you had any exercises since then?

JOHNSON: Yes, I have several every year now. As a matter of fact, this year I put together a guidance document for the sergeant at arms and the secretary of the Senate on the recurring exercise and training that needs to go on at all levels of our COOP facilities, and it's based on a senator's term, a six-year cycle. At the end of six years, we've cycled through all of the testing that we need to do such as communications to our facilities, to setting up alternate office space, to setting up briefing centers, and more. It's now beginning to become institutionalized, which is what I wanted.

RITCHIE: Well, especially now that we have whole leadership change coming up in the next Congress. Everyone from the majority and minority leaders to the sergeant at arms and secretary of the Senate is going to be different. You can't count on the continuity of the people who know what's going on, you're going to have to constantly keep briefing new people in those posts.

JOHNSON: Exactly, and we're prepared to do that. We're gearing up for those. As a matter of fact, I have an exercise coming up on the 18th of January to prepare COOP staff for the State of the Union address, a sort of dress rehearsal. It's a functional exercise where we will be walking some of the new leadership staff and probably Mr. [Terrence] Gainer, the new sergeant at arms, and Nancy Erickson, the new secretary through the exercise.

RITCHIE: So you'll do that just for the regular event, not to simulate an emergency off-site?

JOHNSON: Yes, exactly. Now, we can't use the Senate Chamber. We have done exercises in the Senate Chamber, but you probably know that you can't use the Senate Chamber for anything other than to pass laws. Permission must be granted to allow us to use it for exercises. It's really complicated. The sergeant at arms has to do a lot of coordination to make it happen. I manage the exercise program for the Senate, and I'm the exercise director for the January exercise. It's designated to testing our capabilities to stand up an emergency operation center and a leadership coordination

center in the event that something happens. But we dress rehearsal for situations like this. Again, we're not first responders, but we're the folks that have to sustain the operation, once the incident is contained and identified, to insure that operations continue, that laws can be passed, and that senators can deliberate and communicate with their constituents. So, yes, I'm planning several exercises right now.

RITCHIE: What have been the big lessons that you've taken away from this process? You were in it before everybody knew there was a problem through the point where everybody had been through the problem and knew that they had to address it. Now that we're five years beyond September 11th, what would you say are the most important things that you've learned from this process?

JOHNSON: I will put it in three words, if I may just quote Mr. Lenhardt: "Crawl, walk, run." I learned that I was crawling when I embarked on writing the first continuity plan. I didn't have a clue what I was doing but I got it done. I learned to walk while working on the task force and acquired the expertise to work with other security professionals. And one day, I'll be running to the point that I have everything in place that the Senate needs for business continuity. Then it's a matter of maintaining it. I'm not there yet. What I've also learned is that it takes people working together to make this all happen. It's really good to see senators like Senator Landrieu recognize the task force, and Senator Frist, and Senator Reid come to the sergeant at arms awards ceremony every year. I brought a couple of my service awards to show you. The senators recognized me and said, "We're the senators, but this place wouldn't run without you all, and we appreciate that." That goes a long way. I've learned that people working together can do almost anything that they want to do.

Furthermore, I learned—something I've always known—that the Senate is still a very conservative organization, that the wheels of the Senate turn slowly, that we don't move as fast, and that's good. I've watched some of the executive agencies that I've been dealing with on continuity issues move too fast. You can't just jump up there and start running. You've got to take your time. You've got to assess. You just can't move too fast. Some people may see that as not so good, but the more you work here, the more you appreciate that. It's good to have that energy and enthusiasm—"I've got to get it done!" But even with the changeover in the leadership, and the administrations, and the majority versus the minority, it's still the Senate. For us, it's the Senate. We're support staff.

We're not political. We support the one hundred senators, regardless of who is in the majority and who is in the minority. That has been entrenched in my mind. As long as I know that, and work that way, what I can contribute, the Senate will always be a great place.

RITCHIE: One thing that's always going to be a constant is that the Capitol is always going to be a target. The British burned it down, its been bombed several times, there are protest groups that congregate here. When people want to make a symbolic gesture, the Capitol comes to mind. That means they are always going to have to factor in that there will always be some sort of a threat.

JOHNSON: You're absolutely right, and my boss, Mr. Pickle, mentioned it in a *Roll Call* interview where he basically said, "The Capitol will always be a target because this is the people's house and it's a great symbol of democracy." We know that, those of us who work here. A lot of people know this and a lot of people don't, Don. Right after 9/11, and even in the following summer of '02, a lot of interns turned down jobs here because they didn't want to come here to work. People who were slated to come as interns and people who were working here said, "I'm going home. I don't want to work in a place that's a target. I don't want to live under this constant threat and fear." Because, of course, you mentioned 9/11 and anthrax, but we had the ricin incident as well. That put our teams into play. So there's always going to be something targeting us. The people that are working here are people that choose to work here, not because they have to but because they want to, if the institution wants them. That's remarkable. I find that fascinating.

This is also a good time to mention the current sergeant at arms, Mr. William H. Pickle, who is my boss. He is a great leader and has done a lot for the U.S. Senate. He retired as a Secret Service agent responsible for the vice presidential detail, so he knows security and continuity of operations all too well. He's been a great mentor to me and has allowed me to grow under his administration. When Mr. Pickle started, the OSEP operation was maturing, so he asked me to step up from doing just Continuity of Operations management to assisting with all the projects in this department. This includes physical security, life safety security or emergency preparedness as well as continuity of operations and continuity of government (COG) initiatives. As such, Mr. Pickle promoted me to deputy assistant sergeant at arms for the Office of Security and

Emergency Preparedness, and I'm grateful for the faith and confidence he has in me.

RITCHIE: Well, you've certainly built quite a life here, from the day you walked through the door selling newspapers.

JOHNSON: Speaking of that, I brought in my twenty-five year service award, and in July 2005 there's my thirty-year service award. I have pictures with the Senate sergeant at arms and the leadership giving me those awards. And as of December of this year it will be thirty-three years of service for the entire Senate. I joke with my significant other, Thirise Brown, I say, "Well, you know, they're still not counting my paperboy years!" [laughs]

RITCHIE: But that was part of the learning curve, too.

JOHNSON: That was part of the learning curve, but if they would count those years, my pension would be a lot bigger! No, but it's been an honorable experience and I've just been really lucky to be here. You know, Don, there's something that I think about a lot, and I thought about this when Richard [Baker] gave his presentation at the off-site [retreat for the sergeant at arms staff], which started all of this because he showed that picture of my previous boss, Mark Trice. When I think about my history in the Senate, I think a lot about the slaves who helped build the Capitol. There has been controversy over that issue the last five, seven, eight, nine years about the slaves that helped build the Capitol. Being of African American descent I sort of wonder sometimes, am I one of the souls that came back to this place after being reincarnated, where probably once I was here before, and maybe helped build this great landmark. But it has been a fantastic experience and I wouldn't trade it for anything in the world.

RITCHIE: Well, you've kept it running, that's for sure.

JOHNSON: [Laughs] Yes, I have, and hopefully I will continue to do that. I plan to be here at least until my retirement age, when I'm fifty-five and then maybe a year or two after that. I love the Senate and I love this institution. I love people like you, the people who work here, the people I've met and shared my life with and helped support this institution. Like I said, I wouldn't trade it for the world. I wouldn't trade it for any Microsoft or Ma Bell, or AT&T employment, it's just been a great experience for me.

RITCHIE: I thank you for sharing these memories with us as well. This has been a very positive contribution to our oral history collection.

JOHNSON: I want to thank you, too, Don, and Mr. Baker, for allowing me to participate in the oral history of the Senate. I'm glad that I was able to share some of my memories and mementos with you.

End of the Third Interview

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Room E-202
Las Cruces, New Mexico 88001
March 7, 1983

Mr. Joe Guidice, Supervisor
U.S. Senate Computer Center
400 North Capitol Street
G Level
Washington, D. C. 20510

RE: Mike Johnson

Dear Mr. Guidice:

Although mistakes are always brought to our attention, it is very seldom that we hear about what a good job someone is doing. Therefore, we thought we would let you know that one of your employees, Mike Johnson, has been of such great assistance to this office that we could not let it pass unnoticed.

Mike has spent literally hours on the telephone with our computer specialist, Cathy Morrison, tracking down a multitude of small problems that has plagued our system. Mike has always been extremely helpful, polite, knowledgeable, and patient. He has always "come through in a pinch."

Mike is an asset to your office and a blessing to ours- we hope he is around for many years to come.

Sincerely,

PETE V. DOMENICI
United States Senator

By: *Darlene Garcia*
(Mrs.) Darlene Garcia, Director
Southwest Regional Office

cc: Senator Pete V. Domenici
Washington, D.C. 20510

BARBARA A. MIKULSKI
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July 15, 1987

Dr. Henry Kuualoha Giugni
Sargeant at Arms
U.S. Senate
Room S321
The Capitol Building
Washington, DC 20510

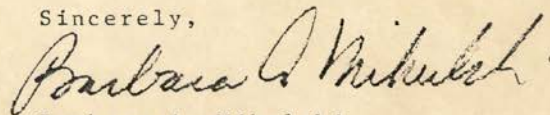
Dear Dr. Giugni:

I, along with my staff, would like to take this opportunity to thank your Senior Communications Specialist, Michael Johnson, for the service that he rendered during the malfunctioning of our computer system.

Mr. Johnson at all times conducted himself in a professional manner, made himself available to staff throughout the process by keeping them informed and aware of all progress made to correct the malfunction, and followed through after the system was repaired to see that all was functioning properly.

The efforts and intentions of Mr. Johnson were greatly appreciated. He is to be commended for his diligence and expertise.

Sincerely,



Barbara A. Mikulski
U.S. Senator

BAM:vv

United States Senate
Sergeant at Arms

Service Award

Presented to

Michael A. Johnson

In recognition of

30 Years

of dedicated service to the United States Senate Sergeant at Arms

July 2005

William H. Feltz
Sergeant at Arms