

INTERVIEW #1
The Road to the United States Senate
JANUARY 27, 1999

BETTY K. KOED: How did you get interested in politics, in Illinois State politics as well as national politics?

SENATOR CAROL MOSELEY BRAUN: I come out of a civil rights background, in terms of my family. My father was always an activist in the pre-civil rights movement. That is to say before Dr. King, when—I guess coming out of World War II—there was a burgeoning group of African Americans who had served in the military, and were a part of what was then the newer generation that was just not content to go along with the old ways. They really provided the foundation for the Civil Rights Movement that we came to know under the leadership of Dr. King and others. In the 1950s my dad was really quite an activist. He introduced me to political figures in life—

[phone call; interview interrupted]

And yet, interestingly, there had never been a convergence, or coming together of civil rights activism and electoral politics. They were two separate and distinct tracks—parallel even. And so, I never had an interest in electoral politics. I just never thought of myself in elective office. I never thought of running for office. I really didn't pay much attention to it. In my early days, I worked with Republicans just as soon as Democrats. In fact, I worked in three Republican campaigns before I got started.

KOED: In Chicago?

MOSELEY BRAUN: In Chicago. Actually, they were successful. I worked for Chuck Percy. He had a campaign office not far from my house, and I was one of the people who worked on his campaign. You know, I was a kid. Apart from Percy's election, I worked for Jim Thompson when he ran for governor. Of course, by then I was a lawyer already, and I was an assistant U.S. attorney working for him in the office. Frankly, I didn't even think about the political implications of me out on the stump for Jim Thompson. [laughter] It was like, okay, he was my guy in the election, so there you are.

But I never thought of a career in politics for myself.

So then I left the U.S. attorney's office. Actually, I was just thinking about this a minute ago. I could just kick myself. I didn't really have a choice of leaving at the time, because I was pregnant. In those days, you stopped working when you were pregnant. They had something about breaks in service for federal employees, and if I had stayed at the U.S. attorney's office for six more months, I would have been in the CRS or CSR [Civil Service Retirement System], whatever, retirement system instead of the FERS [Federal Employees Retirement System]. [laughter] So I got ten years, but it's four and six, not five and five. So I've been thinking about those days. In any event, I left to have Matt, my son, and then I was home, being a homemaker.

I worked with some neighbors on a kind of environmental issue. The Chicago Park District was going to put a golf driving range in a part of Jackson Park and destroy the habitat of the bobolinks¹ in Chicago. This was a very major deal in my neighborhood. We were very concerned about the bobolinks. So I went out picketing with the other women, to save the bobolinks. When our state representative retired several months later, one of the women involved in that called, or saw me pushing Matt down the street in the baby carriage, and said, "Oh, our state representative just retired, and we were thinking of you being a good candidate. Would you be interested in running?" I pooh-poohed the idea. Oh no, not me. As a matter of fact, at the time I think I was more miffed than anything else that she hadn't invited me to the party. They had a party for him, and I wasn't invited. [laughter] So I said no.

Then, some interesting things happened. One group came to me and tried, basically, to threaten me, saying that if I ran for the office it would mess things up for the independent Democrats who had been fighting the machine for so long. That a black couldn't get elected to this seat, because I lived in an integrated neighborhood. Then another group came and said—The bottom line was that a black could not get elected to that spot. When one of the groups left the house, my then-husband turned to me and said, "Well, they said the wrong thing, didn't they?" I said, they sure did. That was when I made up my mind to do it.

¹A bobolink is a kind of bird.

I borrowed my first \$10,000 from him, and got a campaign started. It started in this lady's kitchen, Kay Clement's kitchen. Kay and I have subsequently had a parting of the ways, but at the time she was very instrumental in helping me. We called it the Kitchen Campaign. It was really calculated to bring in a new kind of politics, an interracial politics that wasn't so focused on race issues, one that brought people together. It's funny, because, even now, during this last campaign, somebody sent me a copy of my campaign literature from 1978. It talked about the same kinds of things—it was amazing—bringing people together and nonracial politics and coalitions. We called ourselves the Coalition Crusade for Good Government.

In fact, when I first started to run—This is a digression. I left this little part out, but now I'm mentioning the racial aspect of it. When I first began, and some other of her friends asked me about running, my first response was, oh I can't possibly do that. I've got a six-month old baby, a white husband, and I don't know anything about politics. [laughter] And they said, oh, that's all right, you can learn. So that was kind of how I got started.

I ran for state legislature. In those days, and this is an interesting historical point, as a matter of fact—well not historical but a current point—Illinois, since the 1909 constitution I believe it was, had a system of cumulative voting and multi-member districts. This was, in fact, the same thing that Lani Guinier got derailed over. Remember, she was talking about proportional representation. Our state had always had proportional representation, since the turn of the century. So, in that election, you ran and you could ask a voter—who had three votes—to divide those votes up anyway they wanted to in the primary and in the general. They could put them all together and give you all three, or they could divide them among several candidates. In any event, the district was always guaranteed to have two representatives of the most dominant party, and one representative of the least dominant party. So every district had two Democrats and one Republican, or two Republicans and one Democrat.

I ran at a time, this is another interesting historical footnote maybe, I ran at a time that because the state representative had retired, one of the two Democrats had retired, there were ten people in the field—a lot of people running. There were two women running. At the beginning, we had kind of a bitter rivalry between us—we have subsequently overcome that—but, in any event, we both ran and, in a curious twist, we

both won. This gets to be important in the old days in the district, because before there had been Bob Mann, the person I ran to succeed, and an older black guy by the name of Louis Caldwell, a state representative also. The Republican in the district was Bernard Epton. These names get relevant in a minute. Anyway, Bob Mann retired. Caldwell was running for re-election. Barbara Curry and I both got elected, which meant that Caldwell lost his seat. From his perspective, the black girl took his seat, and Barbara Curry, who was white, took Bob Mann's seat. Of course, it wasn't like that at all. [laughter]

KOED: That was his perception of it.

MOSELEY BRAUN: That was his perception, and he went to his grave thinking that I had beaten him and taken his seat in the state legislature.

So, we went to Springfield that year, in what was called the "year of the woman."

KOED: Another year of the woman? A previous year of the woman, I should say.

MOSELEY BRAUN: It was my first "year of the woman." So, both times I ran for office, it became the "year of the woman."

KOED: That's interesting.

MOSELEY BRAUN: Absolutely. So, my class in 1978, in the state legislature, represented more women elected in Illinois, in the state legislature, than ever before. In much the same way as in 1992, particularly after I won the primary because our primary was early, Patty Murray told me that her poll numbers jumped by 20 percent.

KOED: That seemed to be a trend that I picked up in my research. You were the forerunner in that race, and most of the women seemed to benefit from that primary win.

MOSELEY BRAUN: Right, because our primary was so early. So, that was the first year of the woman, 1978. And Barbara Curry and I both went to the state legislature. That was really my first electoral spot. I had marched with Dr. King as a teenager. I had been involved in the politics of the '60s. I had always been involved in civic and community kinds of political activities, but not really in elective office, not really in

elective campaigns. Although, as I look back, it was really more than I thought, because, again, I had worked for Thompson as a volunteer, had volunteered in the Percy campaign. The person who probably really did inspire me to say yes, and who parenthetically did not support me in 1978—well, he did later. I mentioned that there were ten people running. When I was in law school I wrote speeches for state senator Dick Newhouse, who is probably one of the unsung heroes, frankly, of the Civil Rights Movement going into politics. He was one of a new breed of politicians. He was against the machine.

KOED: There was an important transition happening at this time.

MOSELEY BRAUN: Very important transition. In fact, Dick Newhouse, but for the fact of his interracial marriage, might well have been the first black mayor of Chicago. He got bumped out by Harold Washington because of some race politics, frankly, within the black community. I was [Dick Newhouse's] speech writer for a while, while I was in law school. I did it as a volunteer. And then, when I got ready to run, his law partner and best friend was one of those other ten people running. Since he hadn't expected me to get in there, he kind of sat out the primary and really was supporting Eric—I've forgotten his last name. Dick supported him and didn't support me when I ran in 1978. Of course, he later came around, and really became a real mentor to me. It was a start in politics that really was unexpected.

KOED: It seems, too, that this reflects a national trend among African Americans, that of becoming more involved in politics at that time. Because politics had not served them well for so many years, I think there was a hesitancy to get into electoral politics.

MOSELEY BRAUN: I think that's right.

KOED: But, little by little, in the early 1970s and especially into the late 1970s, you begin to see a lot more elective offices going to black Americans. I think your experience is very representative of that larger trend.

MOSELEY BRAUN: That's right.

KOED: Do you think that your interracial marriage helped you in that election, or hindered you, particularly since you came from a very diverse constituency.

MOSELEY BRAUN: You know, it's funny, but I have never quite been able to analyze that appropriately. It's a tough one because feelings about interracial marriage have always been so mixed, in both regards, both whites and blacks have real antipathies in some instances and uncertainty in others. Particularly, when it's a black woman and a white man.

The area I lived in had a large Jewish population, for example, and Michael's last name was Braun. There were some people who thought he was Jewish, and he's not. But there were some people who may have been more disposed to support me because they thought I was married to someone who was Jewish, but then again, being Braun didn't help me at all in areas of the black community where they had trouble even pronouncing it. [laughter] I used to catch heat about it in some circles.

I can remember being really humiliated in public meetings. Yeah, it could get really ugly. In fact, mentioning Dick Newhouse, one of the ugliest humiliations I have ever seen occurred at a public, political occasion in which he had his wife with him. The people were so nasty to him. Yeah, I've gone through being humiliated because of it. But I suspect on another level altogether, some whites might have been more comfortable because of it, but I've never been able to decide if it helped or hurt.

KOED: That would be difficult to determine.

Well, let's move up to 1992. You had been in the Illinois state house of representatives, you had served as Recorder of Deeds, you had been, as you mentioned, active in state politics as well as in political activism outside of the electoral process. Why did you decide to run for state-wide office?

MOSELEY BRAUN: That's a very good question. I think, in part, because of the challenge. The Senate had, and frankly once again has, no minority representation, no black representation certainly. At the time, there were two women. Between those two things, I just concluded that even if it just makes the statement that we can do better than this, that our democracy is not that closed, that the only people who can serve in our

highest legislative body are not just rich, white males, starting with the rich part.

KOED: I noticed that a lot of the press coverage of this time mentioned the Anita Hill-Clarence Thomas hearings. Did that play a role in your decision?

MOSELEY BRAUN: It did, but you know, this is where I am truly mystified, and I'm going to, one of these days, figure out exactly why this is so, but I've never had good press relations. Why that's so, I don't really understand. It's as though they made up their mind how they were going to characterize the race, and it really didn't matter what I had to say about anything.

In fact, my campaign really started before we knew anything about Anita Hill. You'll remember that there was a break in the hearings. I started off being annoyed that George Bush would suggest that Clarence Thomas was the most qualified person at the time for the Supreme Court. Now, I just really had a problem with that, because of Thomas' record over at the EEOC [Equal Employment Opportunity Commission]. My motivation in the beginning, in terms of opposing the Thomas nomination, was around his politics.

The challenge of these conservative right and right-wing, even right-wing blacks, to those of us who had been part of the Civil Rights Movement was a very, very serious one. It was something that, frankly, was very, very troubling. We have it now. To be honest, our side of the aisle, our side of the political spectrum, has done little if anything to develop voices and to develop talent in the African American community commensurate with the kind of effort being put in by the right wing. Why this is so, I don't understand.

KOED: You think it's more organized and much better funded on the right?

MOSELEY BRAUN: There's no question about it. Absolutely. I had a card yesterday—this is a digression—I had a card from a little girl that I met over at the Chamber of Commerce here in Washington. A bright, bright, bright young black woman. A college graduate. I guess she's working on her MBA or whatever. She's now styled herself as a Republican activist. We talked about it, about how she was recruited, actually recruited, when she was in college, to come and get involved in Republican politics.

KOED: Recruited by whom? A specific organization?

MOSELEY BRAUN: Oh, the Young Republicans, you know. They brought her out here to Washington, and gave her a job at the Chamber of Commerce. That sort of thing. As an aside, on our side of the aisle, I couldn't get the DSCC [Democratic Senatorial Campaign Committee] to give me money towards the end of this last campaign. In fact, Russ Feingold was turning down money they were sending to him. Yeah, they tried to send money to Russ, soft money to Russ, which, of course, he wouldn't accept. The same week I was begging for \$300,000, Russ Feingold sent a million dollars back to the DSCC—the same week!

KOED: Do you think that's because they were looking at the polls, and thinking that they didn't want to put money into this campaign?

MOSELEY BRAUN: I'm sure that's right. But, again, if you've got one black person in the entire United States Senate, it seems to me you go the extra mile to try to help that person to not run short of money. They didn't. It was sink or swim on your own, and, of course, as it was, I sunk.

KOED: Going back to 1992 again. I found the press coverage of the 1992 campaign, the coverage of your campaign, to be, honestly, very sexist.

MOSELEY BRAUN: It was. It was ridiculous. You see, seeing it in hindsight, I ran into the double-whammy of racism and sexism. When I was growing up, people would say, "Have you ever experienced racism?" And I'd say yes. "Have you ever experienced sexism?" Yes. Well, "How are they different?" Well, they kind of aren't, because someone's got their foot in your face, it almost doesn't matter why it's there. It's still a foot.

KOED: The reason behind it isn't as important as the block.

MOSELEY BRAUN: As the reality of it, exactly. And so, what I found was that, both with regard to negative racial as well as negative gender stereotypes, I was especially vulnerable. Without getting into the specifics of all the ugly controversies that associated themselves with my time in the public life of the Senate, if you go through

them and just made yourself a matrix of all the stereotypes you've ever heard about women on the one hand and about blacks on the other, every single one of those controversies fit one of them.

KOED: An interesting perspective.

MOSELEY BRAUN: Every single one of them. It's just stunning. One person said to me, well, you had to expect that you'd be held up to a special kind of scrutiny in all of this. I never objected to scrutiny. What I did object to was, on the one hand, having to accede to the notion that it was okay to be held up to a different set of standards because of my race or my gender, just accede to that, which a lot of people suggested that I should have done—just kow-tow, tuck-tail, and say that's just the way it is, and not get personally upset about it. That was one option. Alternatively, to try to resist it, in which case you find that you're just pissing them off and giving yourself more problems. So, there you are.

KOED: That plays into the idea, noted by some in the press coverage, that they thought you more a symbol than a viable Senate candidate. I also noticed, for instance, that the press frequently made comments along the lines of, "She is coming from an obscure county office," completely ignoring your experience in the Illinois house of representatives, your role as assistant majority leader.

MOSELEY BRAUN: Or that I was a lawyer. That is exactly right.

KOED: Or your legal training. I was very struck by that. I have in my notes here that there was a *Columbia Journalism Review* report that commented on a *New York Times* article, produced during the 1992 campaign, which took until the twenty-second paragraph of that article to mention your previous experience. The first twenty-one paragraphs dealt with your "cheerleader smile" and things like that. If it were a male candidate, they would never mention a "cheerleader smile."

MOSELEY BRAUN: That was the gender part.

KOED: So, the gender bias was very strong. Now, regarding racial bias, in some ways it was very obvious, but I think there were probably other ways, much more subtle,

that might have affected you as well. Those were harder for me to pick up from press coverage. Do you have any thoughts on that?

MOSELEY BRAUN: Again, talking about our matrix. You just mentioned cheerleader smile. [Drawing a matrix diagram] So we've got cheerleader smile [drawing] vs. qualifications—that's a gender one. Under race, you've got that I was late for everything, remember that? Not paying attention to the fact that I had all those appointments and engagements, and was being pulled in nineteen ways from Sunday. That I had a disorganized staff. Now, I'm not sure whether that's race or gender. It's both. There was this woman in Chicago, Carol Sexton, who was Jane Byrne's sister—Jane Byrne was the first woman mayor of Chicago—they coined the term "revolving door" referring to her staff turnover. You will find "revolving door" used in reference to my staff, when, in fact, I had no more or less turnover than many if not most of my colleagues.

KOED: Yes, they often noted high turnover of staff.

MOSELEY BRAUN: Right. But there wasn't. In fact, if there was a problem, it was because I had people criticizing me because I kept so many of the Dixon staffers on. As much to the point, there were people who had worked in the campaign with me who stayed the whole six years. When you analyze that, you look at the percentage of staff turnover, and say where did the "revolving door" and "disorganized staff" come from. That was gender and race.

The whole thing with my mother—the Medicaid thing. That's called welfare cheat. [Drawing] That's a black stereotype. The fact is that this got more press when it broke than the Gulf War did, on television in Chicago. The thing about it that was so insane, even to this day, and I'm happy to share the actual documents with you, it was not a matter of hiding assets. This woman got a windfall while she was in a nursing home. It was like winning the lotto. Now, if somebody made a story out of your mother winning the lottery while she was in the nursing home, and you did not report it, how does that get to be a criminal violation. Yet, it cost me almost a million dollars, in legal fees, not to mention the bad press, negativism, and the poisoning of the well.

KOED: It seemed to have a real effect on the campaign.

MOSELEY BRAUN: In the campaign, it was what gave rise to the debt, because, from the time that thing broke, it cost us \$500,000 that we had to pour into different advertisements. I didn't track the money as closely as I probably should have, but my former campaign manager commented that we were dropping 2 points a day in the polls.

KOED: In the wake of that story?

MOSELEY BRAUN: In the wake of that story. To combat it, we had to beef up our efforts in terms of publicity as well as the workers. We hadn't budgeted for that, and it cost us a lot more money. But, welfare cheat is clearly a race thing. The state of Illinois did not even have a form with which my mother could have reported the money. And so here I was trying to protect my mother—I didn't want her to get hurt in all this, and as it turned out she really did. This was probably the singular event that hurt me both politically and personally the most, because it involved my family. My whole family got dragged through the mud. A law enforcement family—the last thing these people want is to have it said they are violating the law and stealing money. There we were, with welfare cheat. Everybody was horrified. What do you do? There was just no way that we could get our story out. And it continued into this election campaign. This guy ran commercials talking about stealing from Medicaid.

KOED: It was resurrected in the second campaign?

MOSELEY BRAUN: Right.

KOED: Were you able to pin-point the source of it? Did it come from your opposition, or was it another organization?

MOSELEY BRAUN: We have not been able to do that. What really mystifies me, again, is how it got such legs. How did that get such legs? Or was it "welfare cheat" that was getting the legs?

KOED: It did get a lot of attention in the press.

MOSELEY BRAUN: And particularly when you consider that I had no

responsibility for reporting my mother's money in any event. It wasn't my money. I kept saying, wait a minute, it's not my money! It's not like my mother was a mental case, or anything like that. She was in a nursing home because of her leg and everything but, anyway, that was about welfare cheat.

Then you get into the whole thing with [campaign manager] Kgosie [Matthews] and all those stories. That was a gender thing. I'm convinced of it. That was the same thing that Gerry Ferrarro had to go through. You know, mysterious African running around in Armani suits. The guy was wearing Armani suits when I met him.

The FEC [Federal Election Commission] complaint—that cost a whole bunch more money, which gave rise to a whole bunch of other stories.

KOED: Also along the gender lines, there was a lot of press coverage along the lines of women having a tendency to choose "bad relationships," and some using it to support you and others to hurt you.

MOSELEY BRAUN: That's exactly right.

KOED: A lot of "we've all had bad relationships."

MOSELEY BRAUN: What did this guy do to anybody? Certainly nothing bad to me.

KOED: Did you ever start to have, say about the time of the Medicaid issue, second thoughts about running for state-wide office? Or were you committed to go all the way?

MOSELEY BRAUN: I was committed. I was committed to go forward. In fact, it was only much later, after much of this kept coming at me, that I began to say, "Why in the world did I do this?" On a couple of occasions, I even got close to just throwing in the towel. A couple of times I thought, "I'm out of here." I was just telling someone that the Lord used to play a funny joke on me. This is the way I talk about the issue, but it's true. Whenever something hideous would happen, I'd go home and turn on the television, or sometimes I'd just pick up my Bible and start to read, but I'd turn on the television and

there would be something on television like *Rosewood*, or *Roots*, or the bombing of the kids in Birmingham—

KOED: Something to stoke the fires.

MOSELEY BRAUN: Stoke the fires. So, okay, I haven't really suffered, okay? That's suffering, and this is not suffering. I'm okay with this! [laughter] But, seriously, it was almost eery. Every time. I'd be dragging, I'd be so ready to throw in the towel, and I'd turn it on and there would be something there.

But Kgosie, I'm convinced, a lot of the stuff about him was a gender issue. The whole notion that stayed around of the personal use of campaign money, I think that was more race and lifestyle. Blacks often get hung up on lifestyle issues. I'm sure that's what it was. Particularly, they had no points of reference for him, in terms of his background, and not enough for me. So, when you find, not to brag or anything like that, someone from a middle class background—it wasn't a poor background, we didn't go through the "I was born in a dump, my mama died and my daddy got drunk" type of thing [laughter]—we had a quintessential (except my father was very violent, a whole other story) middle-class upbringing. From there, I haven't changed at all. Well, I've matured, I hope, and learned some things, but really haven't changed my lifestyle all that much. And yet, when I traded in my Lincoln and got a Jeep, the story was, "She bought a jeep, she must have used campaign money to do it with." I thought, I'm not on welfare fellas. Because it went against the welfare mother.

KOED: I think there's a definite racial component to that. Among both whites and blacks in America, I think that there seems to be an image that we have of what a black activist should be and look like. If people don't fit that image—usually a very poor background, rising from poverty, staying close to that community—a good deal of criticism has come to many blacks who have reached beyond that, or were never a part of it.

MOSELEY BRAUN: Or who were never a part of it, that's right. Kweisi Mfume has a book out, I saw it sitting at a friend's house the other day, and I forget the name of the book, but the second line on the cover says, "From the Mean Streets to the

Mainstream."²

KOED: That's the expected image of black activism in America.

MOSELEY BRAUN: That is absolutely the image. While, frankly, I have experienced the mean streets, during a little side journey in my life, and I was always grateful, frankly, for that. As funny as it sounds, I was grateful for it.

KOED: You learned a lot about people through that experience.

MOSELEY BRAUN: Absolutely. With Kgosie, his background was even more illustrious than mine. His grandfather—I know you don't need all of this—his grandfather was Zed K. Matthews, a professor in South Africa, one of the authors of the Freedom Charter. He was like their Thomas Jefferson, okay? His father and grandfather were arrested when [Nelson] Mandela was arrested, sent to Robben Island [Prison], and both got released. The South Africans tried to assassinate them, whereupon his father and grandfather both went into exile. His grandfather went to Botswana, became the ambassador to the United States from Botswana, when it became a nation. In fact, his grandfather died while he was still ambassador here in Washington. [President] Lyndon Johnson had his grandfather's body flown back to Botswana. His father, meanwhile, went off to the World Council of Churches to raise money for the anti-Apartheid struggle. Kgosie was raised in London. He didn't go to Africa until he was 14. When his father went back to South Africa, the ANC [African National Congress], which his grandfather helped to found, didn't want the father to come back. So, the father basically left the ANC and became Chief [Mangosuthu Gatsha] Buthelezi's counselor, because Buthelezi was his mother's brother. On his mother's side, Kgosie is Zulu, and his father is now the deputy minister in the government. His sister is the assistant whip in Parliament.

KOED: A very illustrious family.

MOSELEY BRAUN: Right. But whenever you read something about him in the press, it's about his Armani clothes. I was always grateful to him because he kind of broadened my horizon in terms of national and international politics.

²Kweisi Mfume and Ron Stodghill, *No Free Ride* (New York: Ballentine Books, 1996).

But, anyway, getting back to the matrix, we've gone through personal use of funds, that's a race/lifestyle issue. We got past that. And the FEC, after an audit that went for four years, cost us all that money, not a single penny in a fine.³ In spite of all the bureaucratic language in the report—There was messy record keeping, no question about that. Earl Hopewell was a nutcase, but that was my fault. I take full responsibility for Hopewell. He was a nutcase who didn't do his job. But, the fact of the matter is that the money was accounted for. Sloppy record keeping notwithstanding, the money was accounted for. I think that's why they did not give us a fine after they went through all this stuff. They said, okay, it was really messy and it's taken us four years, but no money was personally used, which is the case that kept being made. So, anyway, the personal use issue is theft, that's kind of like welfare cheat if you really think about it. Because blacks are what—[again drawing on the matrix]—

Under women, women are air heads. [laughter]

KOED: Bad business managers.

MOSELEY BRAUN: Yes, bad business managers, not managers. Influenced by the man—ran, controlled by the man.

Under blacks, they are lazy and shiftless [continuing to draw]. They are kind of criminal, they steal. And, of course, that went for him, too, so that becomes race and gender, because he was my partner in crime. We should make a point of these as we talk. I've done better matrices, this is just a scribble. If you go right down the list, there you go.

That's why I said to [Senate Historian] Dick [Baker], if anything, the good part of

³Moseley Braun drew criticism for alleged campaign finance violations, but such charges were later dismissed when a five-year investigation by the Federal Election Commission turned up only a minor discrepancy of \$311. The results of this investigation were discussed in Moseley Braun's 1999 confirmation hearings to be ambassador to New Zealand. See Jodie Wilgoren, "Leaping Past Triumphs and Debacles," *New York Times*, March 14, 2003; Helen Dewar, "Moseley-Braun Gets a Hearing," *Washington Post*, November 6, 1999; Hearings before the Senate Committee on Foreign Relations regarding Nomination of Carol Moseley Braun to be Ambassador to New Zealand, November 5, 1999.

being in the Senate *was* the Senate.

KOED: Explain what you mean by that.

MOSELEY BRAUN: Because the institution is so traditional, and because the institution works in its own way. You get to be a legislator, and a legislator representing a state. And so things like race and gender become less relevant, because it is the position to which individuals respond. I think it's very much the same thing—I'm guessing now—but I think it's very much the same thing with the military. One of the reasons blacks do well in the military, and women are beginning to, is because the hierarchical structures mean that individuals respond to a captain, a lieutenant, a general, not the girl with the stars on her shoulders.

KOED: The rank stands in front of gender, or class, or race.

MOSELEY BRAUN: Exactly. Exactly. Exactly. I'm glad you mentioned class, because class has a lot to do with it, too. Class fits into that very much. In the institution, that gets in the way of those things that would otherwise detract. There was a movie with Denzel Washington and a woman who was a military, a sergeant, and she was fragged basically by her own troops.

KOED: Oh, yes, I know what movie you mean [*Courage Under Fire*]. The story was told from all the different perspectives of what happened and what this woman did in this particular situation.

MOSELEY BRAUN: Exactly. But the reason I mention it is because she was fragged because of her gender. The reason they were covering it up was because they all knew they had violated the rule by failing to respond to her leadership because of gender, as opposed to responding to her leadership because of her rank.

KOED: In that case, gender got in the way, was put ahead of rank.

MOSELEY BRAUN: That's right. It was a murder case. It's the same thing with the Senate, when gender or race gets in the way of you doing your job, it really is a big deal. It is something that violates the fundamental order of the Senate. So, I could be a

legislator, and I found that my colleagues treated me like a legislator. Some of them may have hated my guts. Some of them may have had hoods in their back closet somewhere. But it didn't matter, because—

KOED: You had an equal vote.

MOSELEY BRAUN: Exactly. I had an equal vote. I represented the people of Illinois. I think every member of that body respected that.

KOED: When you joined the Senate, in January of 1993, what was the reaction you got from the other senators? Was it a welcoming?

MOSELEY BRAUN: It really was. Strom Thurmond showed up at my ceremony. [laughter] He was too funny. One wonders whether he actually knew where he was, but, be that as it may, he showed up. Of course, the gasp from the room was audible when he walked in. [laughter]

KOED: I guess if any member of the Senate ended up being an antagonizing force, it was not Strom Thurmond but was Jesse Helms. For example, the Daughters of the Confederacy issue and the singing Dixie in the elevator incident. Do you have any thoughts on that?

MOSELEY BRAUN: Just that, the day that it happened, frankly I was unprepared for it. I didn't think we'd have an issue. You see, it had come up in committee—the flag business—and it was Strom Thurmond in the committee.⁴ I had gone around and lobbied my colleagues, as you do, and most of them had sided with me. Not all, which really kind of surprised me, because it was such a no-brainer to me. I didn't realize at the time that this was considered to be a big deal by Strom. Strom really wanted this to happen, and he was the ranking member on the Judiciary [Committee] at the time, because Joe Biden was still chairman. Again, you'll have to pull the vote on it, but I think in committee most if not all supported me. So we won it in committee. I thought that meant it was a dead deal.

⁴In 1993, Moseley Braun convinced the Senate Judiciary Committee not to renew a design patent for the United Daughters of the Confederacy, because it contained the Confederate flag. The patent had been routinely renewed for nearly a century.

Then, we were in the middle of the confirmation hearings of, I believe, Justice [Stephen] Breyer, when Orrin Hatch had gone into a thing—Orrin and I have always gotten along, even though our views are very different—he had gone into this whole thing about comparing abortion to slavery, something the Pope just did yesterday, which just sends me off the deep end. Anyway, I was getting ready to go into that issue. Some paper wrote something criticizing me over the words I used to describe the procedure, but I took personal objection to what he said, to that analogy, and was later criticized for making it a personal issue to me. Well, okay, I'm the only black person here, so who else is going to be offended by it. [laughter] So, I was in the process of doing that when a staffer came in with a note that said Jesse Helms has just taken to the floor with a motion to restore the Confederate flag patent. I thought, okay, Lord, what did I do this morning? What did I do to get this one? I get to argue substantive due process with Orrin Hatch over abortion over here, and then I have to run out here, because Strom was still sitting in the room. Strom had passed it on to Jesse Helms. It was Jesse Helms holding the fort.

So I literally ran from the committee over to the floor to take up the issue. Thinking that everybody would understand, I just kind of held forth and quietly thought I could defeat the motion. When it didn't go down, I was like Whoa! Wait a Minute. This cannot be. That's when we took up the issue further. I think Jesse Helms was being deliberately antagonistic, in a southern kind of way, when he got on the elevator.⁵ The action on the floor I think he was pretty much sticking to the idea that these are nice little old ladies who have a different point of view.

KOED: After the elevator incident, was there discussion among your colleagues in the Senate? Or was it just something that was quickly forgotten?

MOSELEY BRAUN: No, more than one of them came up to me and talked to me or mentioned it. One of the things about having said how the Senate was much easier to deal with because race and gender get to be irrelevant, having said that, the contradiction to that statement is that it is still the "old boys club." I was never confused,

⁵In the summer of 1993 Senator Moseley Braun encountered Senator Jesse Helms in a Senate elevator and he promptly began singing a verse of "Dixie." Moseley Braun recalled the story: "When Helms stepped into the elevator, he saw me standing there, and he started to sing, 'I wish I was in the land of cotton ...' And he looked at Senator Hatch and said, 'I'm going to make her cry. I'm going to sing 'Dixie' until she cries.' And I looked at him and said, 'Senator Helms, your singing would make me cry if you sang 'Rock of Ages.'" The story was carried in many news accounts, including the *Las Vegas Review-Journal*, August 6, 1993.

and I hope my now former female colleagues are not confused, that the boys still have their conversations, their relationships, their discussions, that you don't know about, but you'll get little outcroppings that will suggest—

KOED: Locker-room conversations, so to speak.

MOSELEY BRAUN: Exactly. So you'll get little outcroppings that will suggest that those conversations have taken place. What I got was that they thought the comeback on the whistling dixie was rapier-wit or whatever, very good, and they all took note of it. But in terms of being in a conversation with someone who had something to say about it, that did not happen.

KOED: Do you think that coming into office in 1993—Once again, you're in the year of the woman, I guess we should talk about that. What did it mean to be part of the "Year of the Woman"? The second time for you, probably the first for the others. Also, in many ways you were the vanguard in that year of the woman. You received a good deal of national press coverage. Did you feel special responsibilities, or burdens, because of that?

MOSELEY BRAUN: You want to know something? I sometimes jokingly describe the period from the primary in March until the election in November as hyperspace, which is kind of like when you play video games and when you reach a certain point you go into hyperspace. I've kept some notes from that time, but unfortunately it is largely a blur, because I was so busy. I've always been mystified, for example, when people in the press would say to me that you were the darling of the press in the beginning. When? I never saw when I was the darling of the press. I missed that part. Maybe I didn't start paying attention to the publicity until it got ugly. I don't know.

KOED: That could be. There was one comment, I have it in my notes, that I found really interesting. Here it is. During the campaign, you became something of a celebrity in national politics. In 1992 the *Washington Post* noted that "the hottest senatorial prospect now is someone who resembles Carol Moseley-Braun." This was in the summer of 1992, after your upset victory in the primary, but before the negative campaigning had begun. Clearly, in this article, they were setting you apart as a model—this is the hot item for the Senate right now. What do you think about that?

MOSELEY BRAUN: It's just like anything else. They were taken by surprise. Their punditry had not worked. The punditry said the incumbent, Alan Dixon, was going to win.

KOED: A shoo-in.

MOSELEY BRAUN: For those who didn't think he was a shoo-in, it was going to be Al[fred] Hofeld, the millionaire. So, here I was—I wasn't a millionaire, I was a woman, and I was black on top of that. It's like, Whoa! What kind of duck-billed platypus is this? I think a lot of it really was the novelty value, and the curiosity of it. Really, I was kind of a talking dog at that point. Again, I missed out on a lot of the so-called good press, because I was very busy working sixteen to eighteen hour days, seven days a week.

KOED: This was a grueling time for you.

MOSELEY BRAUN: Particularly since I didn't have money, I had to raise money. One of the good things was that Kgosie had been involved in Jesse Jackson's 1984 and 1988 campaigns, so he knew people around the country that I didn't know. I didn't have any national contacts at all. We went on what we called the long march, going from state to state to state doing fund raisers. We were raising, on average, about a million dollars a month. Bus rides, little tiny planes that looked like they'd fall out of the sky if someone sneezed on them. It was physically very, very demanding and very, very grueling.

KOED: Did that primary win come as a surprise to you, too?

MOSELEY BRAUN: No, I thought I was going to win. I've always had a prescient, sixth sense about that. I thought I'd win the primary, and I thought I'd win the general. That was an election when there was never any doubt in my mind about whether I was going to win.

KOED: Despite the bad press you got at times, you won quite handily. Did you feel a sense of mandate going into office from that win? Did you feel that people had really spoken in your favor?

MOSELEY BRAUN: I'll tell you something, it wasn't so much that. If anything, and this is one of the untold stories about all this, I was there to do a job. This is kind of a contradiction. They always want to make me out to be this celebrity, high-style. I had a job description. I had a job to do. I had to represent the people of Illinois. That means attending to their business. That means being a legislator. That means constituent service work. That means almost like a state legislator writ large. That's how I saw what I was supposed to do. In terms of a "mandate" to be a voice, if anything, I did not—I was really upset the other night. I was listening to a television program with this woman, a black female reporter, who really pissed me off because she had been a detractor from the beginning. She was saying, "You know, Carol Moseley Braun never really understood the symbolism of what it was that she represented. She never fully understood what we expected of her." It gets back to that symbol argument. I can go around and make speeches and kiss babies until the cows come home, and never get a single Illinois business taken care of, not pass a single bill, not help one person, you know, in getting their social security checks unloosed. Sure, I can do that.

KOED: In other words, it is a double-edged sword. Being a symbol helps you gain national publicity which can help a campaign in many ways, but it can also hurt it. It also places certain burdens on that person. You have to be a person who can please everyone all the time, and that's impossible.

MOSELEY BRAUN: Right. That's not possible. There's another side to it, too. Again, I was never comfortable with it. When you talk about being a symbol. So what does that mean? A symbol for what? What set of issues are you talking about? If I'm going to be a black symbol, that says I do one set of things. If I'm going to be a women's symbol, that's another set of things. If I'm going to be a symbol for the poor, oppressed, down-trodden, and overworked, that's another set. So, if I'm going to be a "first," another set.

KOED: You were a "first" in many ways.

MOSELEY BRAUN: This sounds old fashioned, but my attitude was, look, let's dispense with symbolism. I'm going to do my job and have a substantive something to point to. And I will rise and fall based on the substance. As it turned out, I fell based on the symbols. But that's another thing. Maybe that woman was right, maybe I never did

fully understand it. Again, I don't think—and this gets to the whole thing about whether or not it was my responsibility to go around and just be a national role model—I did not believe that was my responsibility. I did not believe that was my job. Not that I didn't comport myself as best I could to live up to people's expectations, but at the same time I had a job to do. My first commitment was to that job.

KOED: There are so many levels to deal with there. One level might be that most people who do not serve within the Senate, or within the House or other political office, have no idea of what a day is like in the Senate. And, therefore, they think you can spend a lot of time being a symbol to the American people, for whatever category we may choose for the day, and still have time left over to do all the legislative work, the committee work, and that sort of thing. Do you think there's a real misunderstanding?

MOSELEY BRAUN: Well, there is. But that applies to everybody. There's a special dynamic for me, and I'll get to that. As to everybody, there is the phenomenon—I call it the lobster dinner phenomenon—the average citizen out there thinks that senators are people who get driven around in chauffeured limousines, golf in the morning, and go to lobster dinners at night, and all they do is hang out and be important. They don't work hard. They have no idea that even the Strom Thurmonds of the world—for his age, Strom Thurmond probably works harder than any 90-whatever year old in the country. It's a very hard job.

So, you take that—that one set of misconceptions. Then you get to the special circumstances having to do with me. In the first instance, let's talk about the substantive level, we had more work to do. I don't know how you check this, but I remember one time comparing with Dianne [Feinstein] and some of my other colleagues. I was getting California-volume mail with an Illinois staff to handle it. I was getting more phone calls, with an Illinois staff to handle it. We were getting on average 1,400 invitations. The volume of everyone wanting me to come and speak, everyone wanting me to come to their thing, and particularly for those constituencies who felt they had a special investment in me, they were especially disappointed when I told them that I couldn't do it because I had to go to work. Remember, this is particularly true for the black community, but women also. You have never heard such screaming as when I told a NOW chapter that I couldn't come and speak to them. You would have thought that I had just assassinated somebody. But more to the point, the black community had never known

anybody in this position.

KOED: They had no frame of reference at all.

MOSELEY BRAUN: None. Zero. Zip. So they expected that I was going to respond just like the congressmen did, with local concerns only, and that I would be another Maxine [Waters]. That's on the one hand. On the other hand, because I was the one senator, that made it doubly important that I personally be there. I couldn't send representatives. Thirdly, because Jesse Jackson—the other point of reference in terms of national politics—all he does is go to meetings and give speeches. He doesn't have a day job. [laughter] Jesse does not have a job.

KOED: I was thinking, as you were saying that, that playing that symbol role would be a great job if you didn't have another job to do.

MOSELEY BRAUN: Exactly. You know, it's funny, because I got into trouble with Oprah [Winfrey]—I think to this day Oprah holds it against me—I got into trouble with her once because I made the statement that I'm not "Oprah Goes to Washington" or "Jesse Jackson in a Skirt." I'm a senator. I represent a state. Oprah took it wrong. I wrote her a note which said, look, I meant no disrespect to you. I just want to make sure that I get taken seriously as a senator, and not just someone who's entertaining people. That was a real point of conflict, because people were looking for me to entertain them, by giving speeches, whatever. It was really about entertaining. Particularly, as politics moves more into that.

KOED: The lines are getting blurred?

MOSELEY BRAUN: The lines are getting blurrier every day. Here I was, with this expectation that I was going to entertain, that I, in fact, was going to be Jesse in a skirt, I got into all kinds of trouble on substantive levels. Particularly, in my economic policies—they were so much more conservative than Jesse Jackson's. They were really pissed off. They were heartless mad at me for supporting the balanced budget amendment. Now, they didn't get that kind of mad at Paul Simon. They sure didn't get that kind of mad at Dianne Feinstein. But they got that kind of mad at me.

KOED: Your stand got a good deal more attention than theirs?

MOSELEY BRAUN: On balanced budget, on tort reform. The trial lawyers essentially hired Jesse, or whatever they did with Jesse, to do these blast faxes. I was furious with him. He did a blast fax talking about me on tort reform. It's like, wait a minute, there are no other Democrats that are supporting this? Why are you targeting me, Señor Jackson? I was really furious with him. So he was not real helpful. He was out there throwing banana peels, and essentially saying to the faithful, well we knew she had gone off the reservation. We knew there was something weird about her. So, I ran into that on the policy side, because, once again, I wasn't Jesse in a skirt. And because I was doing my job, and not just going around giving speeches, I couldn't do Oprah. I couldn't do "let me entertain you" and "be earth mother to the country." Even if I had the inclination to do it, I didn't have the resources to do it.

KOED: And you wouldn't have had the time.

MOSELEY BRAUN: I wouldn't have had the time.

KOED: In many ways, your colleagues in the Senate, and I would imagine especially the freshman class of 1993, men and women, understood what your life was like much better than your constituency.

MOSELEY BRAUN: No question about that.

KOED: Did you feel a real camaraderie among that freshman class elected in 1992?

MOSELEY BRAUN: Yes, I think there was.

KOED: Did it cross lines of gender?

MOSELEY BRAUN: It crossed lines of gender and it crossed lines of party. I struck up a friendship with Bob Bennett, which I'm sure will be a lifetime friendship. He's just a pal. Now Bob Bennett is as conservative as you get, but he's a friend. He's been a friend. We came in with Russ, Patty, me, Barbara [Boxer].

KOED: Yes, I have the list here: Bob Bennett, Barbara Boxer, Ben Nighthorse Campbell, Byron Dorgan, Lauch Faircloth, Russ Feingold, Dianne Feinstein, Judd Gregg, Dirk Kempthorne, Patty Murray and yourself.

MOSELEY BRAUN: Yes, there was a real camaraderie in that class.

KOED: Do you think there was a special bond among the women? Or was there a lot of attention given to something that didn't really exist?

MOSELEY BRAUN: No, I think there really was. I think the women had a tendency—we tried to form our own "old boys' network," really, now that's my shorthand for it. Barbara Mikulski, particularly, tried to set up meetings in which the women would get together. We eventually expanded it to a bipartisan thing, which was another set of meetings that brought the women together over dinner, all women—Republicans and Democrats. In some ways, we really tried to set up our own kinds of relationships that would help counter-balance our continued exclusion from the real track.

KOED: Did you talk about that, as a group?

MOSELEY BRAUN: Sure. We did. And we talked about the issues. That was the nice thing about it. We talked about issues in a bipartisan way. You knew who was going to be there on choice issues. You knew who was going to be there on research issues. You knew who was going to be there on pension issues. There was some rivalry inside. But that all got smoothed over, and we were kind of protective of each other. There was a bond among the women that was very important.

KOED: Can you point to any specific piece of legislation or a particular event where the camaraderie you shared with the eight other women had a real effect on the outcome?

MOSELEY BRAUN: Patty Murray and I worked together—Patty was kind of the lead dog—right after the Tailhook scandal, getting the rules of the military changed on sexual harassment. We legislated together on that. On pension issues, I took the lead on women's pension issues. Barbara Boxer was close behind, breathing down my neck, because she really wanted the issue. I got there first. [laughter] So, pensions, we worked

together on that. Olympia [Snowe] worked with Barbara Mikulski on women's health issues, more often than not. Kay Bailey [Hutchison] probably kind of isolated herself a little bit, only in that her politics were so much more conservative, even on women's issues. She was trying to be Phil Gramm in a skirt, literally. That meant that whether it was women's health, or sexual harassment, or freedom of choice in abortion, or women's pensions, Kay was kind of over here [gesturing to her right]. Although I worked with Kay on the spousal IRAs. That was one place where we worked together.

So, yes, I think there was legislative output that reflected the women working together on issues, particularly those that had a gender aspect.

KOED: When you came into that Senate in 1993, were there any members that emerged as mentors or role-model figures for you? You mentioned Paul Simon and the balanced budget amendment. What role did he play in the development of your office? Was he a mentor in any way?

MOSELEY BRAUN: Paul was very helpful. He couldn't really help me with my office, although, quite frankly, he probably could have helped me more if I had gone to him more. He was open to me on all kinds of levels. I was grateful. In fact, I could not have done better in a senior senator. There was not the kind of antipathy, rivalry, or contentiousness that sometimes happens between senior and junior members in the same party. He was very, very helpful. We worked together on bills, like balanced budget and others. We did our town hall meetings every Thursday together.

KOED: A lot of cooperation.

MOSELEY BRAUN: Yeah. On every level. Like I said, I just could not have done better in terms of senior senators. I would put him first among the people who mentored and were good to me.

After him, I think Joe Biden would probably come next. Joe was very helpful to me, both on the Judiciary Committee and even after I got off the Judiciary Committee. Joe has been a good friend.

After Joe—I'm going to the old bulls now—after Joe, I think Ted Kennedy would

be next. He reached out to help me.

Again, I try to be realistic in taking both the blame and the credit. Really, I was so busy playing defense, and so busy licking my own wounds and going owie, owie, why are they picking on me, that I failed to spend the kind of time, or give the kind of attention to creating the infrastructure around me that needed to be created. I didn't have the infrastructure coming in. I mean, literally, I used to use the analogy that it was like trying to build a boat while you're already in the water. So I didn't have it coming in, but I think that if I had said, okay, let's shut down the speeches, shut down the travel, shut down everything for this month, this week, whatever period, until I get this operation going smoothly, I would have saved myself a lot of trouble.

KOED: To a good extent, when you set up a Senate office, you become sort of small business owner.

MOSELEY BRAUN: Yes.

KOED: You have employees to deal with, staff to inform and educate. It seems like a huge task. How did you go about doing that?

MOSELEY BRAUN: It is a huge task. By the way, let's put down here one other set of canards [returns to the matrix drawing]—lazy, shiftless and disorganized, let's put down, too, she didn't show up for Senate orientation.

KOED: I missed that in my research. You were traveling for a while, and you missed orientation?

MOSELEY BRAUN: I didn't miss orientation.

KOED: Oh, you didn't miss orientation.

MOSELEY BRAUN: In fact, there's a picture—one of my staff has it—on the front page of both the *Washington Post* and the *New York Times* of me and Dianne Feinstein at Senate orientation.

KOED: That's right. And I saw another picture from orientation, now that I think of it, that had the five women together.

MOSELEY BRAUN: Exactly. Yet, time and time again, you will see, "She was out traveling and therefore didn't show up for orientation," out having a lark and not doing her job. So that's another one.

Actually, in hindsight, it was a mistake to go out of town at that time. I needed a break. I was really, really tired coming out of the election, and my mother had gotten sicker, and I felt all kinds of responsibilities. I'll probably go to my grave feeling responsible for what happened to her and that whole Medicaid thing. And I had fallen in love with Kgosie. We didn't really become an item until after—over that summer—and he had asked me to marry him. So we were going to take advantage of the opportunity to go to South Africa so I could meet his family, because African families are very traditional. They had to inspect my teeth, basically. [laughter] That was the primary focus of our activities in that break. I was going to come back in January and set up the office and get started. That's what I did. The problem was that, with all this stuff that had been left hanging over from the campaign, and all the expectations about symbolism and the like, it just meant that I was stretched too thin. I really failed to adequately organize and re-organize. I kept some people as hangers-on—I mentioned Hopewell, who I had to eventually pay off and it just killed me. I wanted, personally, to just sue him and go the whole nine yards, because he was just blackmailing me really for money. I should have fired him back then. That's all hindsight.

KOED: We've been at this for well over an hour now. We can pull it to a close at this point, or continue if you like.

MOSELEY BRAUN: Let's give it ten more minutes.

KOED: Okay. Let's talk a little bit more about when you were setting up your office, and hiring your staff. As you mentioned before, you kept some of [former Senator Alan] Dixon's staff, but you also brought in new staffers. What were you looking for? What kind of agenda did you have for your staff?

MOSELEY BRAUN: You know, I think that's one of the problems. I did not, at

the time, fully appreciate the fact that some people just don't have transferable skills. I almost laughed saying that, because this is a conversation I used to have with [Chicago mayor] Harold Washington. He would talk about people having transferable skills. I kind of intellectually understood, but didn't really appreciate what he meant by that. What I found was that somebody who does a good job at politics at home, you may find one of those people who can make the transition to do national politics on the same level, but more often than not you find somebody who just can't get there. Then you run into all kinds of problems. It is just a bad situation, to the extent that we really did get the revolving door comments. I think it reflected no small amount of that. There was one guy who I had really almost inherited, had been with me at the Recorder of Deeds office, very bright, very smart, but he just couldn't make the transition to Washington.

KOED: So, national and local politics are very different.

MOSELEY BRAUN: Very different. So the turnover I did have was really a function of personality, and wasn't more than anybody else, and the inability to make the transition. Or, alternatively, here's another aspect, they could not understand why Illinois was important. [Mike Frazier] knew the Hill very well. He knew all the rumor mills and the gossip centers—all that stuff! He had worked for Ted Kennedy. Kennedy was one who reached out to help me. It was getting real ugly at the beginning. One day, I was feeling so blue, and I was thinking that I was just going to throw in the towel, this is ridiculous. I can't do this. I know that it was Mike Frazier who contacted Ted Kennedy. I got a phone call from [Kennedy]. He said, "Carol, this is Ted Kennedy, let's go to lunch." How do you say, "No, I don't want to go to lunch" to Ted Kennedy? You don't, right? So, I drug myself out of bed. I was in such a blue mood. I wore all black. Black everything. Not even a scarf with color in it, just black, black, black. I got dressed and drug myself over to La Colline. I'll never forget it. He really did counsel me—you know, what to do in the glare of the press and all the rest of it. But anyway, Mike's problem was that he didn't understand why Illinois was important. I'd have some preacher that had been very involved in the campaign calling and not getting his calls returned, or the business community feeling like they didn't have a way to get in. It was that sort of thing.

KOED: Somehow, Senate staff have to bridge both worlds?

MOSELEY BRAUN: And that's transferable skills. You got to be able to do

both, and understand the role and relevance of it all. Not everybody can do that.

KOED: How long did it take you to settle in with a staff, and to get the office running the way you wanted it to run?

MOSELEY BRAUN: It never happened. Of course, part of that is just self-improvement. No, the office ran well, I think, but it never ran as well as I would have liked. Talk about being a small business person—mail, for instance. I mentioned the volume of mail. I actually had gone to the Rules Committee to get additional staff, because I thought it was kind of unfair that I was expected to perform with all these extra burdens on me. And Wendell Ford—Wendell actually didn't get it—the problem. Wendell said to me, "Well, you know, when John Glenn got here, he was a celebrity and we didn't give him extra staff. And Ted Kennedy is a celebrity, and he doesn't have extra staff." So, I was standing there going but, but, but, and didn't have a comeback to that. I never was happy about how long it took us to answer letters. I used to track how long it took us to answer letters. On the one hand, in the main, when I go home people say, "Oh, I was so pleased, I got an answer from you, I never expected an answer." From my way of thinking, as a small business person, if someone sends you a letter, you get it back to them in a week. You answer them, right away! I can remember, with my office report, just having fits about the fact that it would take thirty days, sixty days, sometimes even longer, to get an answer back to a constituent.

Now, I found out that a lot of my colleagues don't answer that kind of mail at all, which I didn't know. That was incomprehensible to me—people not answering their mail—just absolutely incomprehensible. That it would get answered but would take a long period of time was, for me, the problem. I was determined to answer every bit of mail.

In fact—and this goes beyond the volume issue and I haven't really thought this through—because of who I was and all the things that meant to so many different kinds of people, I think it really did empower and give people a sense of connection that they wouldn't otherwise have had. Let me tell you a little story. This is apocryphal, but I think it really does get to talking about the volume of work as well as the way people saw me. During this last campaign, I was in Champaign-Urbana, at a hotel called Jumers. Jumers is kind of an Illinois institution, the kind of thing they put on television to make us look

like hicks [laughter]. I'm in Jumers. I have my own little habits. Among my habits is that I have to drink water when I go to bed. I have to have a bottle of water by my bed. Jumers, of course, does not have anything like FEI [mineral water][laughter], so I said is it possible to get bottled water of any kind. The woman said, "Well, you know, the kitchen is shut down but I'll see what I can do." So, I started taking a shower and I heard a knock on the door. I ran to the door, wet with towels wrapped around me. I just cracked the door open a little bit and said just push it in through the door. The water bottle came in. The lady said, "Are you really Senator Moseley Braun?" I said yes. She said, "I just wanted to have an opportunity to meet you so I could thank you in person." Okay. Well, I'm really Carol Moseley Braun, I told her. She said, "Senator Moseley Braun, I just want to thank you from the bottom of my heart, because when my husband killed our daughter you were the only person who listened to me."

Needless to say, at this point, I opened the door a little bit and stuck my head out, thinking what is this story? She was a young woman who was a cleaning lady. Apparently, to the best I can reconstruct the story, her husband killed their daughter back in Illinois, and then he ran off to Arkansas or somewhere. Apparently, it was a matter of her trying to get information to the law enforcement people, or getting the police departments to coordinate—I don't even know. Clearly, I did not have anything, myself, to do with this case. But, whatever it was, my office responded to her, gave her whatever assistance she needed. So, she's standing there, this cleaning lady, in Jumers in Champaign-Urbana, with tears streaming down her face. I was the only person who listened to her, and the only person who helped her when her husband killed her baby.

KOED: That's an amazing story. In many ways, it reflects what we're talking about today. Being a woman, and therefore approachable, in a position of power. Was she black?

MOSELEY BRAUN: No.

KOED: And being in power and able to help, but also having an office able to deal with this important case that meant so much to this woman, despite the volume of work that every senator must deal with.

MOSELEY BRAUN: I get choked up talking about this story, because what do

you say to somebody like that? Something I learned from being a state legislator—and I would say this to the staff all the time—it's that kind of constituent service where the rubber meets the road. That's where government takes on meaning to the average person. That's where the connection is. I say you have four different types of constituents. First off, you have the fat cats who, as far as they are concerned, you are a cog in the wheel of whatever it is that they're doing. It's business for them. It's not ideology, it's just business. Either you're going to produce for their industry, or not. You got that crowd. They'll always be around. They hire lobbyists and the lobbyists are running around here—that's Gucci Gulch and all that. Then you've got the nut cases. [laughter] These are people who talk about martians invading their homes. They'll hang around. You've got those. Then you have the interested citizens who are just interested in government. That's not a large group of people, but they're out there. People who just care about government working and the issues. And then you have people who need stuff. Those are people, who in many instances, are the least powerful, or the least able—

KOED: And need the most help.

MOSELEY BRAUN: And need the most help. We do everything we can to make sure the fat cats and lobbyists are happy. We do everything we can to make sure the League of Women Voters like us. We try even to be polite to the nut cases. So I would say that you have an absolute responsibility to those people who come in here looking for help, you know the farmer whose property has been declared a wetland and he couldn't plant, those that really need help.

KOED: I can think of no better place to end this interview.

END OF INTERVIEW #1