CAPITOL TELECOMMUNICATIONS

Oral History Interviews with

Joan Sartori

Ellen Kramer

Martha Fletcher

Barbara Loughery

Kimball Winn

Rick Kauffman

Oral History Interviews
August 4, 2006 and November 1, 2006

Senate Historical Office
Washington, DC

Deed of Gift

I, Joan Sartrori, do hereby give to the Senate Historical Office the tape recording and transcript of my interview on August 4, 2006.

I authorize the Senate Historical Office to use the tape and transcript in such a manner as may best serve the educational and historical objectives of their oral history program. I also approve the deposit of the transcript at the Library of Congress, the National Archives, the Senate Library, and any other institution which the Senate Historical Office may deem appropriate.

In making this gift, I voluntarily convey ownership of the tape and transcript to the public domain.

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Joan Sartori

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I, Ellen Kramer, do hereby give to the Senate Historical Office the tape recording and transcript of my interview on August 4, 2006.

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Ellen Kramer

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I, Martha Fletcher, do hereby give to the Senate Historical Office the tape recording and transcript of my interview on August 4, 2006.

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Martha Fletcher

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I, Barbara Loughery, do hereby give to the Senate Historical Office the tape recording and transcript of my interview on August 4, 2006.

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Barbara Loughery

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I, Rick Kauffman, do hereby give to the Senate Historical Office the tape recording and transcript of my interview on November 1, 2006.

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Rick Kauffman

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Senate Historical Office by:

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Richard A. Baker

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I, Kimball Winn, do hereby give to the Senate Historical Office the tape recording and transcript of my interview on November 1, 2006.

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Kimball Winn

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Preface

The Senate installed its first telephone switchboard in its Reception Room on December 2, 1897, with a capacity of 100 lines. They served 90 senators and some 200 staff who worked either out of the Capitol or a nearby apartment house that had been converted into offices for some of the senators. Young male pages were assigned as the first switchboard operators. In July 1898 the House of Representatives received a similar exchange switchboard. By then the experiment of using adolescents as operators had proved a failure and its first operators were more mature women. By 1901 the Senate and House had merged their services into a single Capitol switchboard to serve both bodies. (An additional switchboard served the Supreme Court, which operated out of the Capitol until it moved into it own building 1935.)

Initially, operators handled all of the calls. When rotary dials were introduced in 1930, some of the senators objected that the new manual system was difficult to use. They won passage of a resolution giving Capitol phone users the option of either dialing for themselves or using operators. The operators also handled a growing number of calls from the public at a time when government functions and services were growing dramatically.

By the time the Senate entered the 21st Century, its staff had grown to 6,500, working out of the Capitol and three Senate office buildings, with an additional 454 offices in the senators' home states. Technology had evolved to meet the multiple communications needs of the expanding institution. Moving from switchboards to computers, Capitol operators continued to field incoming calls ranging from the White House to agitated constituents. The telephone exchange had by then moved first to the Dirksen Senate Office Building and then to the Postal Square Building near the Capitol. Operators helped to set up weekly teleconferences between senators' staff in Washington and their home states. They also handled members' telephone press conferences and town meetings. They coped with organized "call-ins" by protestors, and helped track down employees to take calls from their children. They also dealt with the extreme demands on the communications system on September 11, 2001.

In order to capture the development of congressional communications technology, the Senate Historical Office convened these two roundtable interviews with Capitol operators and information technology managers, each with long experience on Capitol Hill.

About the Interviewer: Donald A. Ritchie is Historian of the Senate. 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.

CAPITOL OPERATORS ORAL HISTORY
An Interview by Donald Ritchie with
Joan Sartori, Ellen Kramer, Martha Fletcher and Barbara Loughery
Friday, August 4, 2006

RITCHIE: I'd like you to introduce yourselves and tell me where you came from and how you got to be Capitol operators in the first place.

SARTORI: I'm Joan Sartori. Now, when you say where you came from, you mean what state you came from?

RITCHIE: Sure, what's your background? Where did you come from before?

SARTORI: I came from Pennsylvania. When I got married, my husband came to Washington and I worked for the phone company. At that time, the switchboard was closing their toll board. One of the girls that worked there worked at the Senate, and she notified me that there was an opening. And that's how I ended up here.

RITCHIE: And that was in 19–?

SARTORI: 1970.

RITCHIE: 1970. Very good, thank you.

KRAMER: My name is Ellen Kramer, and I came in '73, in July.

RITCHIE: Where were you from?

KRAMER: I'm from Iowa. I came here with my husband, military, and then we divorced, and I worked for Drug Fair for about three years. I had a good friend that worked in the telephone office and she encouraged me to come down. I applied for the job in '72 but didn't get it until '73. I was very happy to get it.

LOUGHERY: And you'll soon be going back to Iowa.

FLETCHER: Yes, she's retiring on the 15th.

RITCHIE: Congratulations.

KRAMER: Thank you.

FLETCHER: I'm Martha Fletcher and I was born in Washington, D.C. I started in the government when I was in high school, just a part-time job in the summertime after school. I stayed in the government for almost four years, left, and came back in 1976. I had a friend whose mother had been in the telephone exchange and that's how I found the job. And that's it.

LOUGHERY: I'm Barbara Loughery. I came in '76—1976. Let's see, I was born in Wilkes-Barre, Pennsylvania, left when I was 18, went to Philadelphia, worked for the telephone company for nine years. I was a pre-approved bride [laughs], meaning I was friends with my husband's sister. I didn't know he existed. We worked together, and I met his family and we got together. He was in the military, came home and we married about a year and a half later. We traveled somewhat and then came back to the area where we decided to retire from Andrews Air Force Base I was 37 when I got a driver's license—oh, yes—and got my job at the age of 42 here on Capitol Hill. I was supposed to stay for three years, but I'm a late bloomer. And I love my job.

RITCHIE: Well, these stories are typical of Washington. People come from all over. Actually, it's much less typical to be born in Washington and stay here, but especially the military connections of families moving around and settling in this city. All of you started in the 1970s. I wondered if you could tell me what the telephone operations were like when you came here between 1970 and 1976.

SARTORI: When I started we were up in the Dirksen [Senate Office Building] and we had a switchboard, the cord board, and that was for all in-house calls. The senators and the congressmen came in on the switchboard. When you answered that you knew who you were getting. And then we had the consoles for the incoming calls from the outside. The cord board was the more personalized service. We really liked it. Your hands were always moving with those cords. Then it wasn't long after that they took the cord boards out and we got our consoles, and went into conferencing on the consoles. It was good because when we were

up there you had this switch behind the switchboard. If anything went wrong, we could just go back and have them repair whatever was going wrong on it. We never thought we would ever leave there, but in '98—December of '98, wasn't it?—we ended up down here at Postal Square.

RITCHIE: So you were in the Dirksen Building until then?

SARTORI: Oh, yes.

RITCHIE: Whereabouts in Dirksen?

SARTORI: It was SD-180. It's where the Com Coordinators are now, that whole area.

RITCHIE: Would you like to add to that?

KRAMER: I can't think of anything.

RITCHIE: I guess I have a mental image of operators with all those cords, pulling them out and plugging them in. Were you by yourself or in a large group?

KRAMER: We had 50 girls when we came. How many were on the cord board? Ten or 12? And then you took turns.

RITCHIE: It must have been kind of noisy.

KRAMER: Not really.

FLETCHER: It changed, you see, six years later when we came. It was different for us.

LOUGHERY: But we still used the cord board. I remember using it. We were trained to use it. Was it just in case the equipment went down?

FLETCHER: In case something would happen, right. For emergencies, I guess.

LOUGHERY: In directory assistance they didn't have a cord board, we just had the buttons that we used.

RITCHIE: I'm not sure I understand what a console is. I have a mental image of someone putting a cord into a board, but what was the next step?

SARTORI: It was the console that was on our desk. Each one had a desk. And incoming calls came in on that type of console.

LOUGHERY: Like a large telephone, actually.

FLETCHER: Where the lights would light up. You would have a handset or you could plug a headset in.

RITCHIE: When it was a cord board, you could tell where the calls were coming from?

SARTORI: Oh, yes, all of them were identified. You knew who you were getting when you answered the calls.

RITCHIE: But on the console, could you identify the calls?

SARTORI: Just if it was House, Senate, in-house or coming into the Senate switch or the House switch. But the cord board was just members and leadership.

FLETCHER: Did you like the cord board?

LOUGHERY: I didn't work it that much. Did I like it? No, I was a little confused because you had to reach over everybody. You didn't just plug into this thing in the wall, you had to reach.

FLETCHER: Some did, some old-timers just loved working that. I never did. I never had to work it. Because there were what—I can't remember how many there were in a row.

LOUGHERY: At the cord board? Like the one we had in SD-180? It wasn't that large.

SARTORI: Each individual had how many cords, I'm trying to think. Was it 10 or 12, I don't remember. We were trying to get them all answered. Then you sat there until one came down and you answered another one.

RITCHIE: Do calls tend to come in as a rush or are things spaced out over the day? What's a typical day like?

LOUGHERY: You mean now? It depends on the issue.

RITCHIE: So if there's a hot issue on, the phones are ringing?

FLETCHER: Through the night, it will go through the night, but it depends on who's on the floor speaking. All of a sudden our board will light up.

LOUGHERY: A particular member.

RITCHIE: Through the night brings up a question. There was a memo in the file about 1983 when they were changing the shifts. I gather that all of you have had experiences with different shifts at different times. Has that changed over the years, the types of shifts that you have worked?

SARTORI: You mean as far as the amount of calls that came in?

RITCHIE: Well, in terms of when you worked, did you have any options when you first came, to working days or night?

LOUGHERY: There are different shifts. Like we work very early, a quarter to six, to quarter of two, and then we have an eight o'clock, we have an 8:30, we have a nine, we have a ten. That's what you're referring to?

RITCHIE: Right.

LOUGHERY: Ten, 11. Do we have a 12?

FLETCHER: Yes, we do.

LOUGHERY: We do have a 12.

FLETCHER: And then 10:30 to 2:30 And then a quarter of 11, and then 11 at night to 6 in the morning. We're always covered.

RITCHIE: And was it always that way? Was it that way in the '70s.

FLETCHER: Oh, yes.

LOUGHERY: No, we didn't have an all-night during the '70s.

KRAMER: We did, when I started, but then they stopped it.

FLETCHER: They stopped it for one year, because that's when they said they wouldn't have a night shift, and they transferred it to the Capitol Police.

LOUGHERY: Yes, they did, at 11.

FLETCHER: Then they gave it back to us.

RITCHIE: It didn't work?

FLETCHER: No.

SARTORI: When I started they had six women working the night shift. Then in '83 when they put the night shift back on, there were only three girls working it, and only two at a time, and then the third one was off. We'd work three weeks and we'd have Tuesday and Wednesday off, and then we'd have three weeks we'd have Thursday and Friday off, and then three weeks of Saturday, Sunday, and Monday, and then on the third weekend we would throw our own day in on the Monday and go into Tuesday and Wednesday again.

LOUGHERY: You have to like it.

KRAMER: I worked days for 10 years and then I've been on nights for 22, 23 years.

RITCHIE: Well, what's the difference between days and nights? Is it a different workload?

KRAMER: Oh, yes, it is. It's less traffic coming in and less traffic going out. And I don't hear as much fussing. [laughs]

LOUGHERY: Less traffic in the office.

RITCHIE: Do you wind up doing a lot of West Coast calls coming in later at night?

FLETCHER: Oh, yes.

RITCHIE: I know a lot of the West Coast offices stay open later at night.

FLETCHER: Three hours difference in time.

RITCHIE: People call without realizing what time it is in Washington, I suppose.

FLETCHER: And some people think the offices are open 24 hours. The switchboard is. And they'll say, "Oh, a live person!" They think they're going to get a recording.

SARTORI: But then they got a lot of complaints, too, because by the time she comes in the voice mail machines are filled up and then they complain to her, "Can you do something about it."

RITCHIE: So the individual offices have their voice mail, but they only take so many.

LOUGHERY: When you have a major call-in, they get filled up.

FLETCHER: A lot of the people take it in stride. You tell them, "You'll need to try back tomorrow, when the voice mail is cleared," or when they have people in the offices. Some of them want to argue with you: "Well, I'm a taxpayer and I want to talk to her right now!" [laughs]

LOUGHERY: They pay your salary.

RITCHIE: Yes, I've heard that one. [laughs] When voice mail came along, did that change the way things operated up here?

FLETCHER: It helped a little, but then when it gets full it's back to square one again. It comes back to you. And when they don't answer, it comes right back to the operator.

KRAMER: Business changed when special interest groups started buying 800 numbers that would feed into our switchboard. So maybe before if they were paying for it they thought twice before calling us. But when they had a free number put out on television or whatever, they would call and want to hold on an 800 number. "Would you put me on hold?" Can't do that.

LOUGHERY: They also try to use us for directory assistance, the outside, because directory assistance charges. Of course they use those 800 numbers, they want an agency number. We have them as a courtesy thing, but we don't handle their switchboards.

RITCHIE: I suspect that some of those people want to tell you what they think about the world.

LOUGHERY: Oh, they tell us all the time! [laughs] But you become immune.

RITCHIE: And I suppose part of your task is to get those people off the line as quickly as possible, to get to the next call.

LOUGHERY: Oh, yes, especially when there is a call-in. We try to handle as many as we can. They're entitled to call the board, that's how I feel. They're entitled to their opinions.

RITCHIE: Well, what would you say is the bulk of the calls coming in? Are they mostly public calls or are they internal Senate calls? How does your workload divide up?

SARTORI: It's more incoming from the outside, but then we have a lot of internal calls, too.

LOUGHERY: Before we got the 800 numbers, before these special interest groups bought up some of these 800 numbers, it was mostly on the Hill, the Hill people, and local. But now, Joanie's right, it's more from the outside now. And a lot of elderly, a lot of elderly.

FLETCHER: You tell someone you're taking away their pension, and the board lights up. But they only get just a little bit of what is said on the radio, and then they'll call.

LOUGHERY: Whatever that group wants to tell them.

FLETCHER: Mm-hmm. They're calling in to vote.

RITCHIE: And you're the election booth. Well, what about internal calls? Are you dealing with senators who are trying to get in touch with their offices? Do you handle them separately or do they come in with the mass of other calls?

SARTORI: During the day, I guess, they just go through their offices, but after hours they would come through the switchboard, and we do handle conferences for the members.

LOUGHERY: But we do have a board for the senators.

RITCHIE: Do they ask you to track somebody down?

LOUGHERY: Oh, absolutely.

KRAMER: On weekends.

RITCHIE: They're looking for one of their staff?

LOUGHERY: Another senator.

RITCHIE: And can you find them?

SARTORI: Normally, with luck we can.

FLETCHER: And then, of course, we handle the House calls also.

LOUGHERY: You don't deal with the House, do you?

RITCHIE: Well, I'd like to know about that, too. What's the difference?

FLETCHER: We handle everybody, 535 members.

RITCHIE: It's a lot harder to keep track of the House members, it seems to me. How do you deal with that?

LOUGHERY: We try, we really do try to find one House member for another House member, but we can only help them if we have the information. It's up to them to send us the information if we don't have it. And sometimes they do get angry. It's not our fault. But then when we release the call, we vent! [laughs]

SARTORI: All four of us have been House operators all these years, until March of 2005 when we all became just one under the Senate.

RITCHIE: So before they had separate House and Senate operations?

SARTORI: We were all in the same room and we worked together. Half of us were House and half of us were Senate. The only difference was the House got paid once a month and the Senate girls got paid twice a month. Other than that—you really didn't know who was House and who was Senate.

KRAMER: There was a difference on cost-of-living raises, and that caused a problem.

RITCHIE: That's right, for a period in the late '80s and early '90s there was a difference in the salary structures. That might have caused a little bit of friction!

LOUGHERY: Sometimes it did.

SARTORI: Yes, it did.

RITCHIE: In the files I came across a letter that Senator [Robert] Packwood had sent in because he was on the side of a highway, calling for some information, and he thought that the operator didn't speak loudly enough, that he couldn't hear because of all the trucks that were roaring by. I was thinking that you couldn't possibly be yelling into the phone because you worked in a room full of other operators. You must have to talk to people under all sorts of circumstances, where they're located, at least.

LOUGHERY: Speaking of Senator Packwood—shall I tell the story?

FLETCHER: I don't hear anything.

LOUGHERY: Okay, I won't. Martha, why don't you tell the story.

FLETCHER: I just brushed it off.

LOUGHERY: Martha was very cute. She's still cute. Packwood was a flirt. They're walking down the hall, you and Rita Freeman, and Sue, and he was really, really flirting with you, remember that?

RITCHIE: He had a reputation.

LOUGHERY: He really did.

KRAMER: He and Senator [J. Glenn] Beall from Maryland came over and took group pictures with us. What year was that? '75 do you think?

SARTORI: Or was that Mark Hatfield?

LOUGHERY: That was Hatfield.

SARTORI: Senator Hatfield always admired the operators. He was a telephone

operator when he was in the service. He was in communications and he worked at Bridgeport at that time when he was in the service, and he said he knows what it was to be an operator, and he always admired the operators. But that was when Senator Hatfield and Senator Beall came over and took the pictures.

LOUGHERY: He knows what it's like to be an operator, but I don't think our job is all that hard.

FLETCHER: I think the repetition—

LOUGHERY: Probably when you get older you kind of like the repetition.

FLETCHER: A lot of the senators, they call on us. In the other building it was easier. But they come during the holidays.

LOUGHERY: Senator [Joseph] Lieberman would come with his wife Hadassah. That was very nice. They brought us cookies. And who else?

FLETCHER: John Warner, Carl Levin.

LOUGHERY: Ham, and candy with the booze in it.

FLETCHER: [Strom] Thurmond brought a big watermelon, looked like the back of a truck.

LOUGHERY: They're really very, very nice.

KRAMER: Jessie Helms was always very nice to us. They all have been, basically, really, rather nice.

RITCHIE: Tell me, was there much difference when you moved from the Dirksen Building over here to Postal Square? Did you sort of move outside of the sphere?

LOUGHERY: That's right, we got out of the loop.

FLETCHER: In fact, we were demoted.

LOUGHERY: We were very upset. Yes, we were out of the loop. My whole family works up here. I used to have lunch with my daughter, sit outside, go seek out my husband for some money, but it changed.

RITCHIE: So your family works for the Senate or the House?

LOUGHERY: My husband is deceased, but my daughter works for Senator [Christopher] Bond. My son is Capitol Police, my daughter-in-law is Capitol Police. I don't see them up here. I think I've visited Barbara twice and she's been up here over 20 years. They just have their jobs and I have mine, thank God.

RITCHIE: Well, the size of the staff has grown considerably over time, and has spread out. When you started in the '70s there were only two Senate office buildings, and lots of apartment houses and temporary space, but now you've got the Hart Building and so many more people that are working on Capitol Hill, so it's harder to have a sense of community. And now that you're here, which is not that far, it's a five-minute walk, but still it's in a separate complex.

SARTORI: It is a separate complex. It just seems you're not part of the Hill.

LOUGHERY: No, you're not, and if you belong to the Credit Union, on your lunch hour it's hard to get down there and back within that hour, because you don't know what it's going to be like in the Credit Union, if the lines are long or whatever. But we've gotten used to it.

FLETCHER: We sat in the Dirksen office when they were building the Hart and running the switchboard with all the construction and a steel beam went through our manager's office—she was called the chief operator at the time. Just all kinds of commotion, and of course we had all kinds of little "pets" that came in because everything was being torn up out there. Four-legged creatures.

LOUGHERY: I was going to ask what pets are you talking about. Mice!

FLETCHER: We had mice running around.

KRAMER: You had to walk over the planks to get in.

FLETCHER: We still had to run the switchboard, but we did. We got through it. They'd be drilling and we'd have to say, "You have to speak a little louder, they're drilling."

LOUGHERY: But it wasn't that bad.

FLETCHER: No, it wasn't. We can laugh about it now.

LOUGHERY: We're very close. And we have the best operators in the world. I'd like to put that in.

RITCHIE: The operators work for the sergeant at arms. Does it make much difference who is sergeant at arms? Have you noticed that there have been changes when different sergeants at arms have come and gone?

FLETCHER: Well, for less than two years the four of us have been Senate employees, so we were always under the clerk of the House until they moved it to the Chief Administrative Officer. We were under that group until less than two years ago when we went on the Senate payroll.

RITCHIE: Well, did that make much difference, reporting to different clerks of the House?

FLETCHER: Well, it's like if they were establishing some sort of a leave policy they had to check to see what the House wanted to do and what the Senate wanted to do, and they had to get together—and you know what that's like.

LOUGHERY: It took a while. It took longer.

SARTORI: Yes, the telephone exchange had their own guidelines, because it was between the House and the Senate. They would have to agree and disagree and then come up with one for us. But we were under the House up until we became Senate staff.

RITCHIE: You had Donn Anderson as clerk of the House.

SEVERAL VOICES: Yes, we did. He was wonderful.

RITCHIE: He was a real institution man.

LOUGHRY: A really nice person, a really good person.

RITCHIE: Having worked his way up from a page to the clerk of the House, he understood how the place worked and had seen it change himself very much over time. He once told me that when he first came to work for the House he couldn't plug anything into the wall because there was still direct current in the Capitol in 1960, and it was only afterwards that they switched to alternating current. I thought if you're here longer than alternating current, that establishes you as a veteran. We talked about working conditions and you mentioned construction, what about natural conditions? What happens during blizzards and other times when it's difficult to get in?

SARTORI: We are here.

LOUGHERY: We brought our jammies and we stayed the night, to be sure we were here.

FLETCHER: The board was never shut down, ever. The blizzard of '96, when the federal government was closed for three days, if you did not get into work as a telephone operator you used three days vacation.

LOUGHERY: I was here for four days, was that '96?

SARTORI: Yes, we were all here. I think that was '96.

LOUGERY: My son came down and came in the room and said, "Dad wants you home." [laughs] I had no power at home, why would I go home? I was here for four days.

FLETCHER: And if there's an ice storm, you just leave the night before to make sure you're going be able to cover your shift. At least this is what the people here, who have

been here 30 years, this is how we feel.

SARTORI: We know in the fall to pack our suitcases to stay in case of bad weather.

RITCHIE: So you keep an emergency kit around?

SARTORI: Right.

LOUGHERY: Well, it was easier for us, too.

SARTORI: Because if you couldn't get out, you had to have a change of clothes.

LOUGHERY: And some of us live pretty far and we couldn't really drive in the snow or whatever.

FLETCHER: We know where the showers are in this building. And we know where they are in the Dirksen. We've been there, done that, all of us.

RITCHIE: And hope that they've kept the cafeteria open for you.

FLETCHER: No, it's vending machines here.

LOUGHERY: See, in the Dirksen we had a full kitchen. Were you ever in SD-180 when the operators were there?

RITCHIE: No.

FLETCHER: Oh, it was a full kitchen with two refrigerators, a stove, oven, and microwave.

LOUGHERY: And we had a smoking lounge.

SARTORI: That's a thing of the past now!

FLETCHER: There were two entrances. One was the hall down by the hearing room. The other was the hall where the nurses' office is. The back to our office touched the Credit Union, so if you know where the Credit Union is, that's where our offices were right behind that.

RITCHIE: But they didn't provide similar accommodations over here?

FLETCHER: We're renters down here. We rent this floor.

LOUGHERY: This is the penthouse. It's not an attic.

FLETCHER: That's what they told us.

RITCHIE: In the Dirksen Building you also had the Senate cafeteria which was operating presumably at odd hours. If the Senate was in late there was usually some kind of food service available, but I guess here if you work the late shift you bring your own provisions.

KRAMER: Just a snack and a drink. You usually have dinner at home. I eat the wrong things, but [laughs] don't have to cook it.

FLETCHER: But for the late hours you could never count on the Senate being in and the cafeteria being open. You just prepared to bring your own.

RITCHIE: When the Senate is in session late, until one o'clock or two in the morning—the same with the House—does that also affect the flow of calls coming in? Is it busier when they're in those late night sessions?

SARTORI: Sometimes. It depends I guess on what legislation they're working on.

FLETCHER: The State of the Union, that day they always make sure they get a few more operators to cover the evening through, when the President is speaking, and then an hour or so after, because a lot of senators or members want to make calls.

RITCHIE: And they'll use you to place the calls from where they are. Another question I have is that everyone carries a cell phone now. Has the cell phone changed anything in the way business is conducted over the phone these days?

LOUGHERY: No, it's just very annoying because sometimes they cut out and we can't hear what they're saying.

FLETCHER: The cell phones, I think, gave us more business, don't you?

LOUGHERY: My peeve is the cell phone and the speaker phone. Oh, good grief!

RITCHIE: It's hard to hear speaker phones?

LOUGHERY: Oh, absolutely.

FLETCHER: A person on a cell phone in a car, that's just about impossible, but they're calling in and we have to take the call, and we have to figure it out.

LOUGHERY: Most of them use their cell phones to call in.

RITCHIE: I once got a call from a senator from his car and it cut out six times. Finally, he said, "I'll call you when I get to my home." So I imagine you encounter that sort of situation, you get them on, they get cut off, have to call back, and they're probably angry at the phone and take it out on the operator.

LOUGHERY: Actually, the senators aren't too bad. I think they're very kind to us, really, don't you?

FLETCHER: Mm-hmm.

LOUGHERY: I haven't had any trouble except—he's still alive, I can't talk. [laughs]

RITCHIE: Well, you don't have to give me any names.

LOUGHERY: No, no, this is just too recent. This was actually on the news the other day. But I think they're very nice to us, they really are. They don't treat us too common! [laughs]

RITCHIE: Well, you mentioned that during the blizzards you've always been here. What happened on 9/11? I know that there was a situation where the operators had to leave. Can you tell me what the situation was then?

KRAMER: I had worked the night before and I was home asleep, and Fletch called me and she said, "You don't have to come to work tonight because they're trying to blow up the city!" I went to Waldorf to be with my granddaughter, and then I started getting curious about the middle of the afternoon. I thought, well, I'm going to call in and see what's going on. They said, "They've had subs working the phones. Get in here!" So I had to come to work that night anyway. [laughs]

FLETCHER: Our supervisor was off, so she missed out that day. But we were working on our early shift and we had the televisions on. All of a sudden they broke through and we saw—

LOUGHERY: I was putting through a conference call for Senator [Charles] Grassley and I looked up and I saw this building blow up. I thought it was a simulation. Then I hear it on the phone. The reporters obviously had their TVs on and they said they were blowing up buildings. Then they said everybody had to leave. Then I got a call from the VP's office and he was trying to get Denny Hastert. We didn't know where Denny Hastert was—he's the Speaker. Martha stayed, the conference stayed, who else stayed?

FLETCHER: But the police down the hall were just pulling us out.

LOUGHERY: The police said you have to leave, and the conference said, "Okay, you take the phone. You talk to the VP and tell him that we have to leave because the VP wants Denny Hastert." We found him. We honestly found him. We found him in a squad car with one of the inspectors on the Capitol Police. And then we didn't want to go out because we knew we were going to be in a mess out there. And we were. I would rather hide under the desk and wait a while!

SARTORI: Yes, I was in Pennsylvania at my aunt's funeral.

FLETCHER: And I had just gotten home—it was a long trip home—and I got a phone call: "We need operators because the hundred senators were going to make a hundred-person conference call and we need operators to come back in and place it."

LOUGHERY: Now, she's referring to a conference call with 100 people on it, on one call.

FLETCHER: On the 9/11 day. So I got back in the car and drove back downtown. Of course, my family thought I was crazy. But we came in and I think I stayed until 11 p.m. and through the night ladies were in.

LOUGHERY: It was frightening because my whole family was here. I couldn't find my daughter, I couldn't find my son. My daughter couldn't find her husband. And then finally there was a text message on my cell phone, which I didn't know how to do! I finally got Barbie and she said, "Oh, it's Larry." Larry is my son, and he told us where everybody was and that everybody was okay. But it was kind of scary. And Brett was at the Capitol at the time that the plane went over [in June 2004].

FLETCHER: When I arrived, they had pulled some people from either the secretary of the Senate or the sergeant at arms' office, so all these people that worked in the Capitol had come over and they were learning to work the switchboard until the operators got back in, and that's how it worked.

RITCHIE: So it was the Capitol Police who evacuated the building?

FLETCHER: Yes.

RITCHIE: Not realizing that you were the communications hub for all these members who were scattered all over the place.

LOUGHERY: Well, you see it's the desk. When you came up it's the desk there, it's one of the Capitol Police officers who has that post permanently. He came in and he said we had to leave.

FLETCHER: And the whole building was leaving, of course, so everybody was trying to get out of the Capitol Hill area at the same time.

RITCHIE: But your jobs were essential.

FLETCHER: Essential was leaving.

RITCHIE: Have they established any policies for the future?

LOUGHERY: Oh, all this did go over to the Capitol Police. The calls went to the Capitol Police, didn't they?

FLETCHER: Do you mean, do we have a new backup plan if something like this happens again?

RITCHIE: Yes.

LOUGHERY: No, it would be the same thing. We would have to leave and the calls would go over to the Capitol Police.

SARTORI: They are updating the evacuation plans.

LOUGHERY: But you know, seriously, you evacuate and you go out there and you see all these people. You're in more danger out there than you are in the building.

FLETCHER: I think they had a reason why. Did they say there was a threat on Union Station or something like that?

LOUGHERY: Well, Union Station is right next door.

FLETCHER: And they felt we needed to leave this building. We do have other places to go to, but I don't know if we should talk about that.

RITCHIE: Well, every office up here has a Continuity of Operations up here, and all of them have alternative places they can go to.

FLETCHER: Well, we have three. Two around here and one would be in Virginia.

KRAMER: A lot of offices moved up here at that time and they were putting them in any little cubbyhole they could find.

RITCHIE: That was during the anthrax incident that shut down the Hart Building in October 2001. So you had boarders.

LOUGHERY: We surely did.

RITCHIE: My office was displaced from the Hart Building and we worked out of the basement of the Russell Building, where we had one desk and one phone for nine people for three months. But I'm sure you had plenty of people over here in Postal Square. But 9/11 was the day when communications went crazy in Washington. Nobody's cell phone worked. Nobody knew where they were going. The members weren't quite sure what they should be doing. You mentioned this 100-person conference call, how did that work?

LOUGHERY: I didn't come back.

FLETCHER: Well, I'm not sure if they got all 100 people on, but they were placing a call and they were all just there.

LOUGHERY: I think it went well.

RITCHIE: Do you have to work through AT&T or the phone companies to set up a conference call?

SARTORI: No, we have our own conference system here.

LOUGHERY: We're more efficient than AT&T and Verizon. I'm serious! We're the best! We are the best, girls, trust me.

RITCHIE: Do you arrange conference calls for members in their offices very often?

SARTORI: They have a staff member that sets up the conferences and then they send the names to us. They go through the Republican Conference, the Recording Studio, and then they email us or they fax the names over to us.

LOUGHERY: Or their own offices, too.

FLETCHER: We have standing conferences every day of the week, and sometimes there will be one on a Saturday or a Sunday. Certain days we have many and other days it's slower.

LOUGHERY: Mondays it's usually staff, except for [Pete] Domenici.

FLETCHER: But every day, every day.

RITCHIE: Do Washington offices then conference with their home state offices? Is that the idea that they bring the various offices together?

SARTORI: They have the staff conferences, mm-hmm.

FLETCHER: It's like when she was on the conference with someone, there were reporters who would get on with the member, and he would tell them what's happening, and that's how she realized what's happening on 9/11.

LOUGHERY: That's how I realized that "Hey, this is real. This is not a simulation." Because the TV was right in front of me.

RITCHIE: So with a conference call, do you need to monitor the call? You said you were on the call.

LOUGHERY: We just call the people and say, "This is a conference call with Senator Grassley," and we put them in conference. If they don't want to go into the conference, we go back into the conference and tell the greeter that so-and-so is not participating, and it just goes on and on.

RITCHIE: So you are introducing people, essentially.

LOUGHERY: Exactly. Yes, we can't just put someone into a conference.

RITCHIE: That's true, they have to know that someone is coming on the line. But if you have an office meeting you must have a lot of people that you're tracking down to include in the call.

LOUGHERY: It depends. Like there's two senators who had really large conferences. That's Senator [Chuck] Hagel and who?

SARTORI: [Sam] Brownback sometimes, and so does [Charles] Schumer.

LOUGHERY: Schumer, yes, they have a lot of reporters. Some of them are just five and six.

RITCHIE: So it's like a press conference.

LOUGHERY: If there's three in the conference you have to have a senator on. If there are only three staff people they can do it on their own phones. But if the senator is on the line it's a different matter.

RITCHIE: That's true. I guess everyone has the facility to do smaller conference calls.

LOUGHERY: But we cater to the senators, of course.

FLETCHER: But you can't call the board and say, "I want to be in Schumer's conference." The greeter would have to call us and say, "I want to add this person and here's his phone number." Because you could be someone from the opposite party.

LOUGHERY: You could be a Republican listening into a Democratic conference.

FLETCHER: You have to turn them down. You have to say, "The greeter will have to call me."

RITCHIE: So people know that there are these conference calls going on, because they hold them on a regular basis.

SARTORI: In the House, we don't do any House conferences. They have to go through their MCI. They use outside conferencing.

RITCHIE: Why is that, I wonder, that they have a separate system?

SARTORI: They always have had to go through the outside. Each member is responsible for their own conferences. We never did.

LOUGHERY: They're not catered to as much as the senators are. I think they are allotted a certain amount of money, aren't they, for the conferences?

SARTORI: Yes.

LOUGHERY: And you're talking about 435 people on the House side, plus the 100 that we have here. That's a lot of people. Although I could sit there and do conferences all day long. I like to do conferences.

FLETCHER: She's our conference gal, she loves to do it.

LOUGHERY: It's not boring! [laughs]

FLETCHER: And we don't call them. They have to initiate it. So if the member is running late, she doesn't have to go tracking people down, that it's time to start our conference—

LOUGHERY: They call and say "We're ready to put our conference up," and we start it.

FLETCHER: —that's like babysitting. We can't start that.

RITCHIE: That's true, schedules are strained on Capitol Hill and I'm sure members are always running behind.

SARTORI: They'll always back their conferences up.

FLETCHER: Or you get them all on and they say, "Oh, the senator is not going to be able to make it."

LOUGHERY: It doesn't happen that often, but it does happen. That's not a big deal. I still get paid!

RITCHIE: We talked about the switchboard and the console. What is the equipment like that you're using now?

SARTORI: We're using computers now, but it's still the keyboard.

RITCHIE: What do the computers do that the previous systems didn't do?

LOUGHERY: Well, everything is right there. We don't have to pick up a book. We do have the books—you know, the House and Senate telephone directories. In case something happens we can pick them out. But we can look everything up on the computer.

RITCHIE: That must be a real Godsend.

LOUGHERY: Well, if you're computer savvy, which I am not, but I know what I am doing there. I don't go too far into it. It's easy, but I like the books too. When you're old you get used to the old way of doing things.

SARTORI: You'll have to come in and see the switchboard.

RITCHIE: So, before, you had a stack of telephone books?

LOUGHERY: We still do. We still have the print, which I think is important to have.

SARTORI: In case the computers go down we do have the books as backup.

KRAMER: Remember when the girls would go around and manually correct a number or a name, at each desk?

FLETCHER: And we have a card that has everything right there.

LOUGHERY: We used to do it not only on a card but in the book, remember?

FLETCHER: Of course, the committees were always changing.

LOUGHERY: When someone came in with a change of number, we wrote it in, literally, we wrote the new number in.

RITCHIE: There's such a flux of personnel up here. The staff is constantly changing, so as soon as you print something it's obsolete to some degree. At least with the computer they can update the numbers regularly. We get a telephone card just for the Secretary of the Senate's office, and we get several of them every year because of personnel changes.

FLETCHER: The Senate has always been easier to find employees. The House had a service like that until '95, when Newt Gingrich's group came in and they wanted to scale back on things. That's when the Republicans took over the House.

LOUGHERY: Don't say it that way!

FLETCHER: I don't mean to sound that way, but we really couldn't locate House employees anymore unless they were in the book. Now we can look in the computer, but if they're not there, that's it. For the Senate you can call the Disbursing Office and they have a locator service.

LOUGHERY: Why don't we have a locator service?

FLETCHER: I don't know.

LOUGHERY: We did at one time.

SARTORI: We did, it went to the Finance Office.

LOUGHERY: That's right. Now if you dial that Finance number, 56514—God, I wish I could get it out of my mind! Let's face it, it doesn't exist. You get a busy [signal.] It's a problem if someone is trying to find an employee on the House side. I don't know, they should have some type of service.

FLETCHER: They should; and then of course if it's a police officer they're looking for, we can give them the police personnel. And then Architect [of the Capitol] go that way. But if they are with the House—

LOUGHERY: Well, I think, actually, the House is cheap. You can leave that in. [laughs] Really, because they should have a locator service for House employees.

FLETCHER: They should.

LOUGHERY: Of course they should.

RITCHIE: The Senate has always treated itself a little better as an institution.

LOUGHERY: Yes, they have. We have no complaints about the House, except for little things like this. They should be more accommodating when it comes to something like this, of course.

RITCHIE: And it's interesting that these two institutions operate side by side and yet they are very different places.

FLETCHER: But if you get a child on the phone and they are looking for their mother, we don't care who we have to ring on the House side, we're going to go find their mother.

LOUGHERY: Exactly. Oh, we find their mom.

FLETCHER: It's just sort of shame, shame on you. This child might be sick at school, or has a problem. We don't care whose office we ring, but we try and help people

like that.

LOUGHERY: We do the right thing. We try anyway.

FLETCHER: We're operators.

RITCHIE: You get calls from people who have a request, they have a problem. How do you decide where to send them? Sometimes they have a specific name they are looking for, but what happens if they just have an issue?

LOUGHERY: The first question you ask is what type of work do they do, because many of them come in under the Architect, which we can call the Architect's personnel. What type of work? Secretary or anything at all, that kind of gives us a little bit of hint and then we take it from there. But we do try to find the people. Because we're in the same boat. If somebody was trying to find us they wouldn't be able to find us. Not that I really care–I don't know that I want to be found!

FLETCHER: Well, if they call about an issue, then we just sort of narrow it down. We let them know what we have to offer them. Your House and Senate members work here. If you have a problem with some military issue, you go to them first, and then they can direct your call. Or they'll call for another agency, and of course then you just send them to the agency. We don't dial it, we just give them the number.

LOUGHERY: If our job sounds boring, it's really not boring.

RITCHIE: No, there's a lot of detective work in there. In my office we get a number of calls from people—the polite way to describe them would be "crackpots." People who really have issues. What do you do with somebody who thinks that the Queen of England is taking over the U.S., for instance? We get that call pretty regularly.

KRAMER: You listen to them for a while and then give them to the Capitol Police.

LOUGHERY: Actually, they're not making a threat. Do you know that Threat Assessment is closed on the weekends! That really annoys me. Can you believe that!

RITCHIE: So if people call in with a threat, what do you do with them?

LOUGHERY: Well, you call the Capitol Police and it goes over to the Watch Commander's office. But I think it would be better even to give it to Communications, because they record everything that comes into Communications. I don't think the Watch Commander's office records any of that.

SARTORI: Well, where is Zimmerman? Isn't he with–

LOUGHERY: He's with Threat Assessment.

SARTORI: Because he takes those annoying calls.

FLETCHER: Monday through Friday, yes. And they don't open early in the morning either. We'll get collect calls from overseas, and then he has a real nasty message. You wait and then you tell the recording "No," you won't accept it. We have a nasty-mouth man—we call him dirty-mouth. We'll let the operators know that he's up, he's making the rounds. Then we had the White House operators over here checking things out, and they get his calls also. He's not just picking on us. Then what other? We have a lady who comes on halfway normal, Darleen.

LOUGHERY: She really does sound normal when she first comes on, and then she really harasses the offices. I just don't think we ought to connect her. I think if we recognize her voice we should just not even bother saying anything to her. It only adds to it. She's only going to add to what you're saying.

RITCHIE: We've found that a number of them sound reasonable for the first minute or so and then you begin to realize that they're in a different world completely.

KRAMER: They start repeating themselves.

LOUGHERY: Then they go off, exactly.

RITCHIE: So we try to make it a very short and polite conversation and get quickly to good-bye and hang up.

LOUGHERY: But I just feel that if you recognize the voice and you know, just [gestures] drop them in the box. [laughs]

RITCHIE: Going back to Threat Assessment. People must call to claim they're going to blow up the building.

LOUGHERY: Well, when 9/11 happened a lot of that came in. We became paranoid a little bit, but there were bomb threats, we got bomb threats.

RITCHIE: So those just automatically go to the Capitol Police?

LOUGHERY: Yes, we call Threat Assessment.

FLETCHER: You kept one on for quite a while so they could trace the call. When was that, in the other office?

LOUGHERY: Yes, that was years and years ago.

FLETCHER: And she kept them talking so they could tape it or trace the call.

LOUGHERY: They did, but they only got so far. I guess it takes a while to trace those calls. I don't have the knowledge of that, but I had him on for the longest time. But I don't know what they did, because they don't come back to you. I remember he wanted my name and I told him my name was "Barbara Henry." [laughs] But I remember that and what else I remember was to me it was a young kid. For some reason, I just had this compassion. I felt this is not a real thing. But Shirley was there, and Shirley thought it was a real thing

SARTORI: You were good though, you were calm with him.

LOUGHERY: I talked to him like I was his mother. Thank God I wasn't his mother! But I don't know what happened after that, I really don't. I have no idea. I didn't ask.

RITCHIE: You have to be part psychologist in the job as well.

LOUGHERY: I didn't think he was going to blow anything up, if you want to know the truth. I think he just wanted somebody to talk to.

RITCHIE: Well, there's another issue. People are lonely and they do want to have someone to talk to. Do you get the situation of people who just want to call to talk? How do you deal with it?

LOUGHERY: Well, it depends upon how busy we are in the room, okay? If we're not busy, we try to be kind. But if we're busy, we can't.

FLETCHER: You listen as far as you can let it go, and then say, "Gee, my board is backing up, I'm really sorry to hear about this, but let me try and transfer you to someone, because I know this is costing you." Trying to get them off the line.

LOUGHERY: Martha's right. This is usually what we do.

SARTORI: And usually when they do spout off like that they just say what they have to say and that's all they needed to do.

LOUGHERY: And they tell us they pay our salary, and they pay taxes, like we don't.

FLETCHER: Like the irate customers. "Well, I'm going to give you my supervisor," because we can't do anything with them. Ah! They turn so sweet when they get onto the supervisor.

LOUGHERY: And the operator is sitting back and saying "Joanie," [gestures] and has no idea. [Laughs]

SARTORI: Or you could turn right around and go to the supervisor's desk and answer it, and you're the same person but they change their tone.

LOUGHERY: And that has happened.

FLETCHER: Sometimes we have to do that when you're working with two operators on the weekend, and somebody's mad, and you have to run up there and say

"Supervisor's Desk."

LOUGHERY: If we wouldn't get them up there, we'd pacify them.

FLETCHER: And on weekends you really pacify them through the night. Because you pull their chain and they're going to call you back, as long as it takes them to redial.

KRAMER: They accuse you of hanging up on them, and carry on.

RITCHIE: Well, there are angry folks who want to be heard, and their senators and representatives aren't around to hear them, so whoever's on the phone is going to hear it.

LOUGHERY: What always amazes me is why they don't call during normal business hours and talk to a live person. They just want to talk to this machine. If I have a gripe I want to talk to somebody in person! But they won't call during normal business hours. They want to leave a message on their machines. I have asked, "Well, why don't you call during business hours and get a live person?" I'm trying to get them off my board, I'm not being kind, I'm just trying to get rid of them. But they just don't want to. I had a man the other day: "Operator, what number is coming up on your board?" I said, "You've blocked out your number. It came up as private." "Oh," he said, "I wanted to be sure it was blocked out." Because he just wanted to call and yell at somebody in an office.

RITCHIE: He didn't want to be traced back.

FLETCHER: Oh, and the man that calls and makes insulting remarks about a senator. We'll get him and he'll say he wants [Edward] Kennedy's office, and he says awful things–

LOUGHERY: Oh, yes, terrible, terrible things.

FLETCHER: But then he got mad when he didn't like what we were saying and we gave him to the supervisor and he changed his tune. He said he had a right to make these calls, but he doesn't have a right to put names on—

LOUGHERY: He doesn't have a right to say things like that. You know that guy who calls Senator Kennedy's office.

RITCHIE: Do you find that there are certain members of the Senate and House who attract more of these angry calls?

LOUGHERY: They are more focused on the Senate than they are on the House. But you know it depends upon who's speaking on the floor, it really does.

FLETCHER: It's a Democrat mad at the Republicans, or a Republican mad at the Democrats. Or Dick Cheney. Oh, did we get calls after he didn't shoot his gun straight, or rifle, or whatever he was shooting, and made little remarks about him!

RITCHIE: I wanted to ask you about memorable moments in the years that you have been here. What sticks out in your mind when you talk about your experiences with the House and the Senate?

FLETCHER: Well, it's amazing when you leave your office job, how many times the word "Capitol" comes out when you're not answering the Capitol telephones.

KRAMER: You say that on your phone at home.

FLETCHER: And you're embarrassed! I was down on North Capitol Street waiting for the light to turn green, and when it turned green, out of my mouth, in my car, I said, "Capitol." I thought, oh, my.

SARTORI: Had you been especially busy that day?

FLETCHER: Could have been, but I opened my front door one time and said "Capitol."

LOUGHERY: Hasn't it happened to you?

SARTORI: Oh, yes.

FLETCHER: I've done it about four times, and I thought there was something wrong up here. And the call-ins. I remember the Supreme Court nomination—

SARTORI: [Clarence] Thomas.

FLETCHER: Thomas, that was one of the worst call-ins we ever had. Was Watergate like that?

LOUGHERY: Prayer in school was bad, too.

SARTORI: Prayer in school, and the Budget Committee one year. Remember we had all those calls?

LOUGHERY: Who was here, Joanie?

SARTORI: Mr. McCormick. It was something with the budget. I can't remember what it was, but it was really bad call-ins. But I guess Thomas was the worst.

LOUGHERY: Thomas was bad. Prayer in school was bad.

RITCHIE: Bad in the sense that the phone just rang steadily?

SARTORI: Oh, yes. You couldn't even answer all the calls.

FLETCHER: If you wanted to take a sip of water, you'd have to let your board just ring.

LOUGHERY: That's how bad it was. She's right, you couldn't take a sip of water.

FLETCHER: I remember we had a committee room near the operators' room in the Dirksen Building, and when they would bring a witness in that they didn't want the reporters to know was coming in, they would bring him through our back door and walk them through our office. That was kind of different.

RITCHIE: During the Clinton impeachment trial, my office was inundated with calls. You'd come in in the morning and there would be a little stack of pink notes of calls that had built up during the night. We've never had anything like that before of since. I'd go home at night and my ear would be red because I'd spent the whole day on the phone answering questions.

LOUGHERY: Yes, I'd forgotten about that.

SARTORI: I did, too, but I don't think it was as bad as Thomas.

FLETCHER: Thomas was really bad.

LOUGHERY: It's the people who are angry, and a lot of people liked Clinton, let's face it. I'm sure there were angry people out there, but it wasn't as bad as Thomas. They didn't want Thomas on the Supreme Court. They were all adamant about that. But yes, I forgot about the impeachment.

FLETCHER: I remember the first time that Senator [Hillary Rodham] Clinton called our senators board, and that was kind of like a big deal because she was First Lady. We would say, "Oh, I just got Mrs. Clinton and she was nice on the phone," that type of thing. Little things like that.

LOUGHERY: I had her one time to put in a conference call and she is a lovely lady—and I'm not a Democrat. I mean, she really is, she's very nice. Who else? Oh, I had [Ronald] Reagan on the line one time, when he was running for the presidency. I had Arnold [Schwartzenegger] on the line not too long ago, and he said "Mahriah is in town. Mahriah is with me." But I wasn't quite sure if someone was pulling my leg, but I think it was him. Because he referred to her not as Maria just Maria Shriver. Why would you refer to your wife by her maiden name? But come to find out he was in the Capitol, so it probably was him. That was last year. He was looking for money I guess—for California.

RITCHIE: You mentioned Dick Cheney before, calling on 9/11. Do you deal with vice presidents very much, since they are semi part of the legislative branch?

SARTORI: Well, they have an office here. But not that much.

LOUGHERY: Yes, they have an office and staff in the Capitol and in Dirksen, but we don't deal with *them* of course, it's their staff. We get a lot of calls for the VP's office, though.

RITCHIE: I guess they usually go through the White House operators.

FLETCHER: But they don't call us, except for 9/11 when they were looking for the Speaker.

RITCHIE: Well, the interesting thing was that the White House operators were also evacuated on 9/11. They were all in Lafayette Park, across the street, because the entire White House was emptied. So their switchboard was vacant.

LOUGHERY: Yes, but they have the Signal board over there.

RITCHIE: They must have had somebody around, but if you tried to call the White House that day you just got a recording. There was nobody answering the phones.

LOUGHERY: Years ago, the White House operators weren't very pleasant at all. Now it's kind of different. They're nice now. See, they handled the senators' home listings, years ago. We didn't. Do you remember that, Joanie? We used to have to call the White House.

RITCHIE: And they would be abrupt?

LOUGHERY: Oh, very. Oh, yes. But then we finally got the numbers here. I never could figure out why they had all the senators' home phone listings, as opposed to us.

SARTORI: I guess it was because of the president trying to reach all the members, they had to have them.

LOUGHERY: Well, they still have the numbers. But why didn't we have them?

RITCHIE: I've been listening to Lyndon Johnson's taped telephone conversations, and he tended to call senators at home late at night. I guess when the phone rang at midnight

they knew who was calling in those days. Recent presidents don't seem to be so insistent on reaching senators in the middle of the night.

FLETCHER: Take their cell phone and go out to the Rose Garden and make it private, so that nothing's taped. Was Bobby Baker the secretary of the Senate?

RITCHIE: No, he was majority secretary. He never got to be secretary of the Senate.

FLETCHER: He had a past, didn't he?

LOUGHERY: Wasn't he during your Dad's era here?

FLETCHER: No, he was with Lyndon Johnson, wasn't he?

RITCHIE: Yes, but he stayed with the Senate when Johnson went to become Vice President. That's when he got into trouble. He was running a motel in Ocean City and a variety of other ventures, and got caught up in tax problems.

FLETCHER: Did you ever interview him?

RITCHIE: No, we've offered to, but he's retired in Florida and hasn't been available. But I interviewed the man who took over his job after he left, that was Frank Valeo, who did become secretary of the Senate.

LOUGHERY: How far back was that?

RITCHIE: That was in 1963 and 1964 when that was going on. Of course, it was a smaller community in those days and everybody on Capitol Hill knew everybody else, so when he got into trouble it really rocked the boat.

LOUGHERY: I think it's better now. There's much less patronage.

SARTORI: Yes, at that time there was more patronage than anything.

LOUGHERY: Well, that's all it was. If you didn't know anybody up here, you didn't get a job. Even in '76, let's face it.

FLETCHER: We were even in a secret location. We never, ever gave out where our office was.

SARTORI: No, when we started we were told never to give out our location, where communications was.

RITCHIE: Why was that?

SARTORI: I don't know.

LOUGHERY: I guess they protected the communications. What other reason would there be? We weren't allowed to say where we were, and if they asked how many operators there were, we couldn't say. Of course, we still don't. We weren't allowed to say any of that.

RITCHIE: Of course, now there's a lot more security, just to get into the building.

LOUGHERY: Then Bob McCormick came in, and he brought the press in the room! Big deal. You remember that?

RITCHIE: What was McCormick's position?

LOUGHERY: Director.

FLETCHER: Was he Director like Kim [Winn] or like Rick [Kauffman]?

SARTORI: I think Rick's position; Mr. Kauffman, that you just met.

LOUGHERY: There's Kim and then there's Rick, and we love them both. We really do. I'm being facetious, but it's true. We like them.

RITCHIE: You mentioned reporters, and that is something else I wanted to ask about. One of the biggest constituencies on Capitol Hill is the press. How do you deal with

reporters?

LOUGHERY: We don't tell them anything.

SARTORI: No, if they come in and ask your opinion or anything, we just refer them to Becky Daugherty of the sergeant at arms' office. She deals with the press.

LOUGHERY: And many times they call on the weekend. They want to talk to a senator. If we know it's a reporter, we may call one of the staff people and say so-and-so is on the line, but the senators don't want to be bothered with reporters on the weekend, I can assure you. We've been around a long time.

RITCHIE: That's what I was thinking of, the reporters who are trying to track down senators, do they try to use you to get their sources?

LOUGHERY: Yes, they do.

FLETCHER: But they never get through. Never.

LOUGHERY: Because when calling a senator it's one senator to another senator, especially on the weekend. If it's a reporter or somebody else, we call a contact person on the senator's staff and they can make the decision as to whether the senator wants to speak to that particular person. This is what we do. We're around a long time and we know what the reporters are up to.

FLETCHER: I'm not even as kind as she is. They've got to say, "This is Fox News and he's due here in 12 minutes and we can't reach him." Then I buy it, I'll go to the contact person. But they've got to prove to me that they're looking for him for a purpose, not just to make up an interview of some sort. No, because they have all the tricks.

LOUGHERY: They really do. They're not very honest people.

FLETCHER: We're treating them like used-car salesmen, aren't we? [laughs]

LOUGHERY: Worse. We're polite, but they won't get a senator on the line, not by way of us. They'll get a contact person, perhaps, and let the contact person decide whether he or she should get to talk to the senator.

RITCHIE: Do you have to deal at all with former members?

LOUGHERY: Yes, we do.

RITCHIE: Do you keep track of the former members' telephone numbers or addresses?

LOUGHERY: It depends on whether they want to leave anything with us. Fine. Most of them don't. I don't think we have any now.

SARTORI: And then there's a Former Members of Congress association.

LOUGHERY: But they have to belong to that.

SARTORI: If they belong to that, then we just refer people to that organization.

LOUGHERY: Or if it's a Democrat or Republican, I always give the Democratic National Committee number or the Republican National Committee number. I usually say, "Maybe they can help you in some way." We try to help.

FLETCHER: Once in a while we'll get a call from John Ashcroft, looking for someone. Charles Percy from Illinois used to call us after he retired. He'd come back on the board looking for someone.

LOUGHERY: Percy's wife is named Margaret. Margaret was supposed to pray for me. [laughs] Percy was making a lot of calls and he didn't say what for. He was placing calls and he would give us a list. But he was soliciting money for his reelection, and that's not legal. I think he picked up my attitude. I think I got an attitude at this point, because he would give us a list. He told me that Margaret was going to pray for me. That's what he told me. "Senator, I don't think I would go any further than this," because in my mind I'm thinking: what you're doing is not legal, not at all. But he had that list and everybody was doing it.

What could we say?

SARTORI: But then they stopped it.

LOUGHERY: Somebody got a hold of him. Oh, yes, I know what it was. He retired, or was he defeated?

RITCHIE: He was defeated.

LOUGHERY: Anyway, he kept calling and he wanted to use the senators' board, and Bob McCormick told myself and Barbara Broce to tell him he wasn't allowed to use the senators' board anymore! Brose looked at me and I looked at her, and I said, "He's making over a hundred thou. I am not going to tell him he can't use the board. Let Bob McCormick tell him he can't use the board!" And we refused to do it.

SARTORI: Yes, because after they leave office they can only use the senators' board for so many days.

LOUGHERY: Yes, 30 days.

SARTORI: No 60.

RITCHIE: I think senators get so used to the "perks" of office that they don't realize they don't carry them with them forever.

LOUGHERY: That was the only one. There was one other.

FLETCHER: From Minnesota, long last name.

RITCHIE: Rudy Boschwitz?

LOUGHERY: Oh, remember when Rudy came in the office that day? He was standing right next to me. This guy had this little sports coat on and I thought it was a maintenance man! [laughs]

FLETCHER: Didn't he come back wanting the freebie service?

LOUGHERY: Yes.

FLETCHER: I think they did tell him and he came right around and said he was entitled to one more day. He didn't take no easily, but didn't threaten you. He was just pushy.

LOUGHERY: No, they don't threaten.

FLETCHER: Now, people like Tom Daschle. We never hear from him.

LOUGHERY: After he was defeated, history.

FLETCHER: Sometimes you'll get a congressman throw out his name, and you'll think, "Sounds halfway familiar." You just say, "Oh, how are you doing? I hope you're enjoying retirement," and just play the role.

RITCHIE: You do encounter such unusual characters on Capitol Hill. Every personality from every part of the country.

LOUGHERY: Don't you think that's interesting?

RITCHIE: Oh, yes, that's what keeps the job interesting.

LOUGHERY: I think it's very interesting. Don't tell my boss that, okay?

RITCHIE: Every two years there's an election and there will be changes.

LOUGHERY: And that was always exciting, wasn't it, Joanie? Elections and inaugurations.

SARTORI: And the big thing is when parties change. The printing would all change.

LOUGHERY: That's the hassle for Joanie.

SARTORI: Yes, the printing of the Capitol Directory. Right now the Republicans are all in Roman and italic for the Democrats. When the majority changes, all the names have to change.

FLETCHER: Or one group doesn't want to give up that phone number, even though it was a Democratic majority that went to a Republican, that Democratic person is not giving up that phone number. Right?

LOUGHERY: There was a congressman a few years back who wanted a different telephone number because he didn't think his constituents would remember that number because it was too difficult! [Laughter] Do you remember that? We had to change it. That doesn't say too much for the constituents.

RITCHIE: My office's number was one digit off of Shannon and Luchs, the real estate agency, and for a while we got calls constantly. People would say, "I saw your listing for the house." Our secretary would say, "This is not the House, it's the Senate."

LOUGHERY: You've been there a long time, haven't you, since '72?

RITCHIE: Since '76.

FLETCHER: What month?

RITCHIE: I came in March.

LOUGHERY: Because you're the only person I knew in that office, the only name.

RITCHIE: I handle a lot of the reporters who call our office.

LOUGHERY: Why do they call, though?

RITCHIE: If something's happened, they want to know: How often has it happened? What's the background to it? Would it be correct to say this? What does it mean when they do that? And also because it's harder to get their calls returned from some other offices that are shy about answering calls from the press. The reporters are trying to write a story in a

short time, and we're a neutral, non-partisan office, so they tend to call us. And I'm foolish enough to let them quote me, so they call all the time, and that's probably the reason why you've heard my name.

LOUGHERY: They ask for you, whether you know it or not. [laughter] They ask for you by name.

SARTORI: When Ma Bell broke up they were tied, and one of the senators broke the tie vote when Judge Green introduced that legislation. It was Senator Beall we thought. Because we were trying to figure out which senator cast the deciding vote.

RITCHIE: We can probably find that information.

LOUGHERY: Yes, that was last week we were talking about that. It's time to retire, girls, when we go back that far.

SARTORI: We were trying to figure out because Senator Beall and Senator Hatfield came to the office, and I remember when the Senate was tied and one of the senators broke the tie.

FLETCHER: We do homework. We get children or the parents of the child calling in and asking questions. We know it's a homework assignment, and we say, "I hope I get an A."

RITCHIE: So you answer their questions?

FLETCHER: If we're not swamped.

LOUGHERY: Don't forget, we all had kids. I remember years ago my kids having to call the Capitol. It was like "What is the number?" "How do we find the number?" Now everybody in the world has the Capitol number. But they've always had to call the Capitol operator.

RITCHIE: Then you get people who are doing contests, or radio quizzes, and you get the same question over and over, and you know that something is driving that question.

LOUGHERY: Or "we have a bet going on, operator."

RITCHIE: We get calls like that. We assume they called the Capitol operator and someone forwarded them to our office.

LOUGHERY: How many people do you have on your staff?

RITCHIE: We have nine people, three historians, an archivist, and a photographer, but we handle a lot of calls every day and we assume that a lot of them probably do get forwarded from the Capitol operators.

LOUGHERY: You were on C-SPAN.

RITCHIE: Oh, that was their program on the Capitol.

LOUGHERY: Yes, I watched that. I don't know why I watched it–did you all watch it? About two weeks ago.

RITCHIE: Right, it was their 25th anniversary. I did the tour down to the bathtubs in the Capitol basement.

LOUGHERY: Are there tours up into the dome. We've never been up into the dome.

RITCHIE: In 30 years I've made it twice. You have to have a member of Congress go with you, although might arrange it through the Architect of the Capitol's office, or the Senate sergeant at arms. It might be nice to arrange for your retirement.

KRAMER: I wouldn't attempt it!

LOUGHERY: He's nice.

RITCHIE: It's a long walk up, but it's worth it, because you go inside the dome and look down into the Rotunda, and then go outside under the Statue of Freedom, and that's quite spectacular.

LOUGHERY: When you say a long walk up, you mean steps?

RITCHIE: Yes, a lot of steps—360 or something like that.

LOUGHERY: Ah, geez. [laughter]

RITCHIE: That's why you need a younger member of Congress to go with you.

FLETCHER: There's a redheaded kid who's from the House side, from Florida maybe, who looks like he's about 14. I know he would make the steps. Have you ever seen him? He's probably 26 or whatever.

LOUGHERY: In other words, they have to go with us?

RITCHIE: Right, you need a member or the Sergeant at Arms or the Architect of the Capitol. But once you get up there, there's a beautiful view of the city in all directions. You spend a lot of time up there because you're catching your breath from climbing all the stairs, and then you have to climb all the way back down again.

SARTORI: Would you try it if you got the chance?

FLETCHER: Yes.

KRAMER: I wouldn't! I wouldn't even.

LOUGHERY: Would you like to do it?

KRAMER: No! My goodness.

LOUGHERY: Oh, I would go three steps at a time. I would definitely try it.

SARTORI: Well, I don't like to be on—

RITCHIE: Well, you're actually between the two domes. There is an internal dome and an external dome. You climb up with the outside of the dome around you. It's not a

convenient climb, but it's not an impossible one either. I would say, pick a cooler day than right now. Once it was open to the general public and anyone could make the climb. There was even a couple who got married on top of the dome in 1905, we found a newspaper article about that. But everything is more secure now. That's another issue. How has security changed during the years you were here?

LOUGHERY: It's just a pain in the neck, that's all. No, it's for our good.

RITCHIE: Well, you have family who are on the Capitol Police.

LOUGHERY: That doesn't make any difference. It doesn't mean a thing, trust me.

FLETCHER: I remember someone picking me up right there at that northwest door of the Dirksen Building and parking their car right there and I could come right out.

LOUGHERY: But not now. Now to go down First Street you have to show your ID and then you have to go through the barricade and let them open the gate for you to go through. You have to have a Senate ID to get through. Sometimes on Fridays I go down First Street because Second Street is too crowded. Yes, the security is more.

SARTORI: Before it was more relaxed.

LOUGHERY: Before they worked on the need to know. I mean, if you knew the person coming into that building, that Capitol cop let you in, but now even if they know you they have to see your ID. And rightfully so. They're doing the right thing.

RITCHIE: Especially because you're often here off-hours, late into the evening.

FLETCHER: We handle questions about the Statue of Freedom, so we don't send them over to you. We have it printed up, and if somebody wants to know what she is wearing, we read all this out to them.

RITCHIE: So you have a number of those "evergreen" questions that you have answers printed for?

FLETCHER: That we keep them from you. Aren't you happy?

LOUGHERY: Evergreen, is that what you call them?

RITCHIE: Those are the questions that always get asked and you can answer them in your sleep.

LOUGHERY: I just read it right off. I have it sitting right there.

RITCHIE: Besides the Statue of Freedom, are there any other regular questions like that?

SARTORI: Wagonmaster. And that's a term you haven't heard for years.

LOUGHERY: You know, I had a call for it about two weeks ago.

SARTORI: Did you, really?

LOUGHERY: For crying out loud, it's been years and years, but it's still in the computer. The girls were saying, "What in the world is a wagonmaster?"

FLETCHER: And then they'll call wanting to know what Congress is this? Is this the first session or second session? Things like that. It's amazing that people don't know that they get two senators and one representative, and the length of their terms.

RITCHIE: You hear a lot of visitors to the Capitol who don't know the names of their senators.

FLETCHER: Every other one.

RITCHIE: Well, I promised that I wouldn't keep you past 10 o'clock.

LOUGHERY: Ellen worked all night.

RITCHIE: Yes, I understood that you were leaving at this stage while everyone else was just coming in. But I want to thank you all very much for participating.

LOUGHERY: Don't let the boss listen to it!

RITCHIE: I enjoyed this enormously.

LOUGHERY: We did too.

FLETCHER: Will you step into our office and see our equipment?

RITCHIE: Yes, I'd like to see that, thank you.

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CAPITOL OPERATORS ORAL HISTORY
An Interview by Donald Ritchie with
Kimball Winn and Rick Kauffman
Wednesday, November 1, 2006

RITCHIE: Could we begin by your introducing yourselves and telling me what your current duties and responsibilities are here?

KAUFFMAN: Okay, start with the boss.

WINN: I'm Kimball Winn. I'm the director of IT [Information Technology] Support Services in the Office of the Sergeant at Arms. Among my duties are responsibility for the Capitol Telephone Exchange, telecom services in general, as well as desktop support, and general office equipment, but I guess what's relevant here is the Capitol Exchange. I've only had responsibility for the Capitol Exchange for about eight years now. Before that, we reorganized. After a few missteps it fell under me about eight years ago, so that's my history with the Capitol Exchange.

RITCHIE: Okay. Rick?

KAUFFMAN: I'm Rick Kauffman. I'm the branch manager for telecom services. The branch is responsible for providing all telecommunication requirements for the Senate side of the Capitol, as well as all the state offices for the members. We also provide directory services, billing services, a help desk, and in addition to that is the Capitol Exchange, which reports directly to me and provides the entering point for the Capitol.

RITCHIE: Okay, good. Could you tell me a little bit about your backgrounds before you came here, what your experiences were that led you to this position?

WINN: Sure. I graduated from grad school in 1980 and took a job at the Bureau of Economic Analysis, in downtown Washington. One of the people that I worked with was a gentleman named Mike Bartell. A couple of years after I started there, he left and went through a series of jobs. I stayed there, and then one day he called me and said, "How would you like to work at the Senate?" I said, "Well, that sounds interesting," so I applied for a job

that he had open and I got the job. My title then was research projects specialist, and that was in 1987. That was when microcomputers, personal computers, were first starting to come into use in the Senate, so we were doing work figuring out how this technology could be used by the Senate. We eventually formed a microcomputer support group and I became the head of that. Out of that we added some other groups and formed an office systems division of the old Senate Computer Center. Eventually, I became the head of that.

That's where I was when Greg Casey, who was sergeant at arms at the time, decided to reorganize the sergeant at arms, and eliminated what had been the Computer Center, the old Telecom Department, the old Service Department, and created three fairly big departments called Central Operations, Technical Operations, and Office Operations. I was not head of any of those. I was in a program management job, and then shortly after this reorganization had taken place the person who had been head of Technical Operations resigned. What happened was they asked Tracy Williams, who was then head of Office Operations, to take over Technical Operations, and then asked me to take over Office Operations. So I did, on an acting basis, which I think I was acting for a year and a half, and then was given the job permanently. Then somewhere in a different, slight reorganization, that became Information Technology Support Services, which is what it is today.

Let's see, before that I was born and grew up in the Tidewater area of Virginia, the South Hampton Roads area, and graduated from high school down there, and went to the University of Virginia for my undergraduate and my graduate degrees. So that's my history prior to coming here.

RITCHIE: You mentioned setting up the support network for PCs, and I remember that when we first got started with computers in the Senate Historical Office, in the late '70s and early '80s, it was private contractors from outside companies.

WINN: Right.

RITCHIE: They changed constantly, and it was a terrible situation. Then finally the Senate developed its own inside operations, and things became much more routinized and regularized. We knew who we could call on.

WINN: Right. When I started we had three minicomputer vendors. I guess the Senate had done—I still have the report—a study on how to best automate the offices. The conclusion was to choose one of the then—there were several—minicomputer vendors and provide that company's products to all the offices. The Rules Committee decided not to select that vendor but to select three different vendors and give each member a choice of which minicomputer they wanted to use. That was chaos, because there was no commonality, no interchange between vendors, so there was no such thing as electronic mail. That just didn't work. So it was a big deal when we first put in PCs, we first did the member office microcomputer project, or MOM, where we gave one PC to every member. We actually had to twist some arms to get some of the members to take their one PC, because they didn't see the value in it. It's laughable now, but that was the case back in 1988. We moved slowly forward from there, first using microcomputers as terminals into the minicomputer systems, and then replacing the minicomputer systems with a local area network, and then networking all the networks together to get to where we are today. It's been an interesting trip.

RITCHIE: Rick, can you tell me about your background?

KAUFFMAN: Sure, I was born and raised in Cincinnati, Ohio, and lived there most of my adult life. I went to the University of Cincinnati and graduated from there. Thirty years ago I started in the telephone industry. I began as a sales rep, then became a cable installer, and then a service technician. I went through lots of different small companies and ended up working for a voice-messaging company for about 10 years, ran their distributor operations throughout the United States. Then in 1997 I came to Washington, D.C., to be the director of operations for federal services for a company, all private industry. I worked my way up to director of global operations, and ran their worldwide operations. In June of 2001, I was presented with the opportunity to come to the United States Senate and take on the telecommunications branch, that's how I got here.

RITCHIE: What's the difference between working in the private sector and coming to the government?

KAUFFMAN: A lot of people will say it's more stressful; to me it's less stressful, or a different kind of stress. You don't have shareholder values to worry about. You don't have to worry about the price of stock. The other difference is that although I had thousands

of customers around the world, here you have one hundred CEOs in very close proximity. It's a different challenge. It's a different stress. But it's actually been enjoyable. A lot of folks thought I would not be successful just because of my nature in coming to a government job, but I think I've been fairly successful.

RITCHIE: What's your nature that they were concerned about?

KAUFFMAN: Impatience. [laughs] I think I even said that in an interview when asked, "Everybody has a weakness, what is yours?" I don't like sitting idly by. I like to keep moving and shaking. But it's been very enjoyable and we've been given lots of opportunities to do things, especially with 9/11 and then with the anthrax and the ricin incidents and all those things that happened down here. It's stretched most of us to new horizons, and that's good. I've had the opportunity to learn a lot, and I'm not saying it because he's sitting here but Kim has been a great mentor, not only from a management skills set but the knowledge of this institution that he has is just phenomenal. So it's been enjoyable from that standpoint.

RITCHIE: Well, could you give me an overview of the telephone operations—what it all entails, and what the big issues are?

WINN: Sure. In short, we operate basically a small telephone company. Actually, it's not such a small telephone company, it's probably bigger than—well, there aren't that many rural telephone co-ops anymore, but my guess is that if you put us up against some of those we would be bigger than quite a few of those rural telephone companies. We have our own telephone switch, which actually belongs to Verizon, but is located here in the Senate, and that serves the 12,000 or so folks that we serve on the Senate side of Capitol Hill. We do our own telephone installations. We publish our own telephone directory. We do our own telephone billing—every office that has phones gets a bill once a month, just like you would from a telephone company. We do the help desk. So we really are a small telephone company. Anything else?

KAUFFMAN: And then the exchange.

WINN: Yes, and no small part of that is we also provide a switchboard for Congress, not just the Senate but for the entire Congress, which is where when people call either one

of the main numbers for Congress, they get routed to the same switchboard, and the folks there answer the person's call. With any luck, the person knows who it is they want to talk to and they can transfer them. Other times, it takes a little bit more prying to get the information out of them as to who it is that they want to talk to. They answer calls from the public. They also answer calls from internal Senate and House staff who dial zero on their telephones to get to the switchboard. On the Senate side we provide our members with a direct connection to the switchboard, so if they need the operator for whatever purpose, to track down somebody, to get a call wherever they need to, all they have to do is pick up a phone and the person on the other end answers and knows who it is, actually, when they answer the phone.[1]

RITCHIE: So much of what goes on here on Capitol Hill is either Senate or House. How can you serve both?

WINN: Good question. Well, until a year and a half ago, the way the switchboard worked was as a joint operation: half of the employees on the switchboard were employees of the House chief administrative officer—for years before the House reorganized in '95, they had been employees of the clerk of the House, but with the reorganization of the House officers in '95, '96, that function got transferred to the chief administrative officer. So half the employees were employees of the chief administrative officer; half were employees of the Senate sergeant at arms. Because the chief administrative officer and the House in general has different employment practices and policies than we do, we actually came up with a separate Capitol Exchange employee handbook, which had employment practices and policies that were not quite the House and not quite the Senate but which applied solely to

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[1] Known as the blue button phone, this practice dates back to 1930 when senators opposed to the new rotary dial phones won passage of this resolution: *Whereas dial telephones are more difficult to operate than are manual telephones; and Whereas Senators are required, since the installation of dial phones in the Capitol, to perform the duties of telephone operators in order to enjoy the benefits of telephone service; and Whereas dial telephones have failed to expedite telephone service; Therefore be it resolved that the Sergeant at Arms of the Senate is authorized and directed to order the Chesapeake and Potomac Telephone Co. to replace with manual phones within 30 days after the adoption of this resolution, all dial telephones in the Senate wing of the United States Capitol and in the Senate office building.*" A compromise was eventually reached that gave senators the option of either dial tone or operator service.

the Capitol Exchange. We got the officers that were involved to sign off on that.

They have always—well, not always—since the Dirksen Building opened in the 1950s, the Exchange has been located in Senate space. The Senate has provided basically the mechanism that makes the Exchange work, and the House just provided half of the employees. It got to be very sticky. The House wanted to do some things, and then the Congressional Accountability Act came up; well, who are these people's employers, for the purposes of that act? We first tackled it through a memorandum of understanding, which laid out the roles and responsibilities for everybody, and actually which still is in effect. Then with last fiscal year's legislative branch appropriation, we got legislation put in there to transfer the House operators to the Senate payroll. So at this moment, and for the last 18 months, they are employees of the Senate. But there is still a memorandum of understanding in place because it's almost a poison pill provision in the legislation. They are our employees so long as that memorandum of understanding is in place. If the House decides that they don't like what we're doing, or whatever, they can revoke that memorandum of understanding, and those employees would go back to them. We're not quite sure about what would happen with the ones who have retired or have left for other reasons, but half the operators would go back to the House and we'd be left in the situation we were in before.

But they have almost always been a combined operation. To our recollection, or as far as we've done the history, was a separate House switchboard and a Senate switchboard only for a couple of years. When the first combined switchboard was put in, it was put in the Capitol to serve both the House and the Senate. It's moved around, but it's always served the entire Congress. I guess somebody thought it would be stupid for people to call the Capitol and ask for someone on the other side and be told, "I'm sorry, you have a wrong number, you have to call this other number." But it's always been in one location, and currently with a single workforce that does work for both the House and the Senate.

RITCHIE: When you consider that the average tourists do not know the names of their senators or representative, you can imagine that calling two different switchboards probably would not work.

WINN: Right, exactly.

RITCHIE: When I came to work for the Senate in the 1970s, we had a phone with a series of buttons at the bottom, and the entire secretary of the Senate's office had one WATS line [wide-area telephone service, for long-distance calls]. You would wait after work and sit there waiting for that little light to go out.

WINN: And pounce. [laughs]

RITCHIE: And immediately pounce on it because there were four or five other people in other offices waiting to do that as well, so that you could make a long-distance telephone call. Obviously, the technology has changed enormously. In the years that you've been here, I suspect that you've seen some technological changes. What have been the biggest changes in your careers here?

KAUFFMAN: Recently, or at least since I've been on board, is taking some of the ancillary services that we've offered, fax services and conferencing services, that required people to initiate on our staff, and making those more automated. So we have Web conferencing capabilities. We have the ability to get fax to the desktop, and other types of things. So the technological revolution and evolution of going from machines to software devices. And the Exchange, the operators, when they were in Dirksen had these huge mechanical switchboards, and even prior to that you had cord boards. Now it's a soft phone on a PC that they use to answer and transfer calls.

RITCHIE: They've done away with the telephone books.

KAUFFMAN: We could.

RITCHIE: Or at least the operators have the numbers on the screen.

KAUFFMAN: Yes, right.

WINN: I would say probably 95 percent of the calls they get they can transfer either by memory—which amazes me that most of them know as many numbers as they do—but they have a card that provides the numbers for the House and the Senate that are the most frequently called. It's very rare actually that somebody has to go beyond that to transfer a call. But, yes, most of the directory information is online now. I don't know if we will ever

be rid of our telephone books. For one thing, it's a resource for people outside the Senate, who want it. It's a Senate document printed by GPO [the Government Printing Office], and sold by GPO. They never tell us how many they sell, though.

RITCHIE: Well, frankly, for our oral history project they have been very useful. We have the telephone directories going back to 1976, and for spelling of names it's the best single source, and for being able to track people's careers. It's quite interesting to pick up the 1970s volumes and see how many of the staff are now senators, for instance.

WINN: I think back in the Exchange we have them going back to the early '50s.

RITCHIE: What would you say about the technological changes in the time that you've been here?

WINN: Well, Rick mentioned the main ones in the telephone area, which is basically the same thing you've seen in the banking industry, where you don't go to the bank anymore to find out what your balance is. You sign on online. We've been doing that same sort of thing, automating it, making it easier for people to do themselves. We still provide the services for people that don't want to do it themselves, but it's much easier for people to do it themselves. The other technological advances that we've seen I've already touched on—moving from minicomputers to microcomputers and local area networks, and now we're sort of going back to the future where a lot of offices are deciding: "Well, it's really too much work to maintain all these servers in my office. Why can't the sergeant at arms just have a big Senate server and sell me or give me the services that I need?" Which, you know, is where we started, back whenever with an IBM mainframe. So that's it.

The other big thing that has hit us really hard, and it's not so much a technological advance as a mindset, is the new emphasis on continuity of operations and redundancy. Before, if you needed something, you bought one of it. Now you can't buy one of it anymore, you have to buy two of it, at least, because you have to make sure that one of them is going to survive somewhere should something happen to the first one. We've re-engineered a lot of our current systems to make sure that they are redundant and that there is a pail-over capability, which in turn has improved our ability to offer services. It enabled some of the things that we have done over the last few years. You know, the telephone itself was not invented as a way to call your Mom in Iowa. It was invented as a way to help deaf

people communicate—that was where Alexander Graham Bell was going with it. Little did he know what he had wrought—to steal a phrase from the telegraph. Similarly, a lot of the things that we're doing for our continuity of operations, the unintended consequence of that is the ability to offer different services.

RITCHIE: In the sense that redundancy just gives you more capacity?

WINN: Sometimes it does, and sometimes it doesn't. Sometimes one device is working all the time and the other is just sitting there waiting for the first one to fail. Other times, you have two devices that are always working. If either one of them fails, the other will pick up the load, sometimes at a reduced capacity, sometimes at the same capacity. It really depends on the system and what you are actually talking about and how it's been set up. It's been a challenge, especially with the telephone side. One of my colleagues who is now retired spent most of his time in the Senate Computer Center and then got dragged into the telecom department. He used to say, "It's not that complicated. It's two wires." Well, he learned, and I learned, that telephone systems are a lot more complicated than just two wires might indicate.

One of our challenges, I'm sure Rick can talk about this more, was trying to figure out how to engineer our telephone system because we have a Verizon switch that is located here. Obviously, it's a different challenge, because chances are if something happens to that Verizon switch, something has also happened to the Dirksen Building, and probably Hart and Russell as well. The main purpose of that switch is to provide the connectivity for the telephone that's on everybody's desks in those areas. If those buildings aren't there, there's no need for that switch to provide that connectivity, but people still need to be able to call the number and have something happen to it. So it's an entirely different mindset and challenge than dealing with data. We have a data infrastructure that serves the same people as the telephone switch does, but everybody sort of intuitively understands that that infrastructure is there to serve the PCs that are in those buildings, and if the buildings go away you don't need that infrastructure either. They don't quite get that with the telephone service. So we've done some unusual things.

RITCHIE: Just a really basic question: When you say you have "a Verizon switch," what do you mean when you say that?

KAUFFMAN: Well, Verizon is the telco, the local telephone company, and an enterprise of this size requires a huge PBX, private branch exchange. Back in the'80s there were very few, if any, companies that could offer an entity of this size the ability to buy something. So when you look at the services that are being provided to the members, the quantity of telephones that are here, the ability to provide dial tone every time you pick up that handset, it required a fairly large telephone switch. Really, your options at that time were to go through the local telephone company, and in this particular case, Verizon (and back then it was C&P Telephone) chose to install a central office switch. That's the same type of switch that provides you dial tone at home, and provides dial tone to other businesses and other government agencies. They could have fed us from a central office off campus, but they chose to put it on campus and make it easier to cable out the campus and then allow us to provide exchange and administrative type functions. So that's why it's called a Verizon switch, because they're the people that own it.

RITCHIE: And that gives you more flexibility inside the system?

KAUFFMAN: It gives you more flexibility, but in some respects it also hampers your capabilities, as we found out with anthrax, when we were prevented from going into the buildings. The telephone switch was operating just fine, but we had no access into the Hart or Dirksen Buildings, so we couldn't get into the telephone switch to make changes to allow folks to move their offices to other locations on the campus. Probably the largest thing that came out of 9/11 for us was to really do an analysis of our entire communications infrastructure and determine where our strengths and our weaknesses were, and are, and then try to build out from there. We've done some things like put a new switch at an off-site location, utilize some features that Verizon offers where you can redirect telephone numbers in the cloud, and take all the equipment that was located in Dirksen and as much as possible geographically disperse it to other buildings on campus or out to the ACF, which then gave us greater flexibility, allowed us to upgrade to more of the latest and greatest technologies, and kind of positioned us where we are right now, which is going into what we call our telecom modernization program, where we are actually looking at replacing that switch and taking the Senate into the next level of technology that is available, which is in the IP or Internet Protocol arena. So you can now put voice over your Internet.

WINN: Or your network.

KAUFFMAN: Or your network, yes, and provide you with lots of other opportunities and capabilities for off-site, from your home, potentially, to state offices, and a converged effort, I guess, as far as communications goes. That's a major effort. We've put a lot of time in it off and on for about three years, doing studies and requests for information, requests for quotes and things like that. We're getting close to the end of that. We're looking forward to that.

The other thing we did was look at means of communication and besides just having the telephone on the desktop, it became quite clear that cellular telephones as well as the introduction of BlackBerrys into the Senate were going to become a wave of the future. Those things are great as long as you have a window, or you're outside, but when you start getting into the buildings, and especially with six-foot walls, or into the Capitol, your capability in using those devices is pretty limited. Three years ago we began building out an infrastructure within the office buildings, and currently we are doing the Capitol, that allows your cell phone to work in 95 percent of the locations indoors, as well as your BlackBerry. That's enhanced members' capabilities to communicate, and from an emergency situation it's really given our folks the opportunity to be notified, regardless of where they are. As Mr. Pickle [Senate Sergeant at Arms William H. Pickle] said, he was in the cafeteria and made a cell phone call, and he was ecstatic, because that was a dead zone.

RITCHIE: That was the problem on September 11th, that there was no bell signal to evacuate the Capitol. Someone said that she grew up in an area where there were frequent tornadoes, and they had a tornado warning, why couldn't they have a warning system in the Capitol? The police literally had to knock on every door to tell people to evacuate.

WINN: Well, when you talk about the bell system, we have the legislative clock and bell system, if you go back and look at some of your older telephone books you'll see that there was a Civil Defense warning on the legislative bell system, which was just continuous ringing basically, or pulse ringing. It was a Civil Defense warning, but since then we've put in PA systems and annunciators, and where we didn't, the Capitol Police did, to handle that. Yes, the in-building wireless has been quite a feat for us. That's one of the things that I think Rick will have as his legacy when he leaves here, the in-building wireless.

RITCHIE: Do the BlackBerrys come under your control as well?

WINN: Yes.

RITCHIE: Because that's certainly been a big change here, for everybody in a leadership position.

WINN: That was another thing that we started off by giving every member a BlackBerry, just so they could touch them and feel them and see how they work. Now I think we have about 5,000 of them out there, so that was a success. It will be interesting to see how these work, because on September 11 the big knock was: Well nobody's cell phone worked, but the people who had BlackBerrys at the time, those did work. At the time, the BlackBerrys were on a separate network from the cellular telephones, so there was no competition on the BlackBerry network with people trying to make cellular telephone calls. Well, now that network has all but gone away and everybody has a BlackBerry that relies on the telephone network to get through, it remains to be seen—although they assure us that it's going to work—whether it really will work the next time we have a big, major event like that.

RITCHIE: Well, the biggest danger that I see with BlackBerrys is that when I'm driving out of the Senate parking garage, people walk out into the middle of the street bent over their BlackBerrys. When they're text-messaging they're oblivious to where they are.

WINN: It's just like a cell phone, it conveys with it a cloak of invincibility that you don't have to stop at stop lights or look before crossing, you just assume that somebody else is going to take care of you. There is a special Providence that looks after fools and little children.

RITCHIE: The technology is changing so rapidly, how do you keep up with it?

WINN: In the sergeant at arms we have a technology assessment group, an IT research and deployment group that does technology in general. Some of it is wireless, some of it is telephone. We do our own as far as the telephone side of things, which tends not to change quite as rapidly as other areas, but we do have our technology assessment group which is always out there looking at what's the new latest, greatest. Is it mature? Does it have a use here in the Senate? Is it supportable here in the Senate? Because a lot of things are out there that are built on an organizational paradigm that the Senate doesn't adhere to.

Something that requires a lot of administration per person which isn't going to happen here in the Senate, because we don't have the resources to do it and the offices aren't going to do it themselves. Similarly, something that involves a large investment up front may or may not happen. We need to get a lot of buy-in before we can do that, because we don't drive what people will adopt. We can't force people to use things. We're just like everybody else here. We're trying to provide services without being able to say that you must use this. We do occasionally, but in general we don't.

KAUFFMAN: The other thing we do is we attend a lot of conferences, a lot of seminars, and we encourage our staff to do the same. We get technology refreshers from the different vendors we deal with. They'll come in and tell us what's the latest and greatest. And the nice thing—you asked me what the difference between private industry and government is—everybody wants to do work with the government. So it's easy to find out what's out there, because they're knocking on your door wanting to tell you about it.

RITCHIE: This is also a political institution, where you have members who are desperate to communicate constantly. Do you get pressures from inside, from people who want systems to do things, perhaps beyond what you have in mind?

WINN: Oh, yes. It's not necessarily in my area right at the moment—it sort of is—but one of the things that we're facing right now is all the people who are communicating with their constituents via e-mail. Their constituents send them e-mail, or go to their Web site and fill out a form, or they buy e-mail lists of people in their states that they want to communicate with. Well, they're getting blocked as spammers. The Internet service providers on the other end get these 10,000 messages for people at Yahoo.com and say, "Wait a minute, just based on sheer volume this is spam, and so I'm not accepting any mail from you anymore." That's an issue, and a case where people have pushed things beyond where it needs to be. With every technology that we put out, there are always going to be people who are going to push it to the limits. And there are a number of people here in the Senate, and I'm sure on the House side as well, who see every restriction, every guideline, as something to be gotten around—the sport in trying to beat the system. We've always got those people as well. It keeps us on our toes.

RITCHIE: When I toured the Exchange the other day, the service that impressed me the most was the conference call set up. I hadn't realized how much time went into that and

how regular that was as a service. Is that something relatively new?

WINN: No, we've been doing that for years and years. A lot of members like it. They like the personal touch of having somebody from the Capitol Exchange making sure that only the people that are supposed to be there are there, and when something goes wrong they can jump in and try to fix it. As Rick mentioned, one of the things we've set up is a self-service conference system, more like what some people are accustomed to using, where you set up a conference call for X number of people at such and such a time and you send them a message: "Here, call this 800 number and enter this code and you'll be put into our conference." Some members have adopted that for their calls that used to go through the Exchange, but others have not. They want to hang onto the way they've always done things. So we're going to accommodate them as long as they want to do it that way.

KAUFFMAN: Yes, we go against the typical shift that you would see. Normally, if you have a technology and you bring in a new technology, what you see is the technology here [signals with a hand held high] and as this new technology is introduced, the old technology starts doing this [drops hand]. In this particular case, the first one has stayed the course, and the second has grown exponentially, just phenomenally.

RITCHIE: Perhaps it's a generational change. Older members are used to doing things a certain way and the newer members quickly adopt the new methods.

WINN: Some people, they see it as a more personalized service when they have somebody there who is looking out for the conference. Speaking of such things, one of the other things that the Exchange does is during recesses the members will send in their itineraries and their contact information for where they will be each day during the recess so that if somebody is looking for them they can just call the Exchange and find them. That's something that you don't find much of anymore. It's an interesting service.

RITCHIE: Also over the years an increasingly large number of staff have been shifted to the home states of senators. So if a senator has a staff of 60, 20 of them might be back in the home state. That requires different kinds of communications just to have an office meeting.

WINN: Right and to do that, one of the things we did was provide each member—we need to stop doing this but we can't figure out how to stop it once we've done it—with a video teleconferencing set up. We bought each member a video conferencing system, one for D.C. and one for a state office, because most members have a main state office. We upgraded their circuits to make it work better. So there is a lot of meeting going on between state offices, or even a constituent will come into a state office for a meeting with the member, where the member is in Washington and doing this by video teleconference. A lot of people like that. A lot of people have bought additional units to put them in other state offices or other locations here in D.C. That's a technology that's catching on.

It's funny, I have this little memo about the history of the Capitol Exchange and I'd forgotten that once again we beat the House. We had the first telephone system in the Capitol. We put in a PBX, a private branch exchange, in the Capitol in 1897, with 25 to 30 lines of service, and one operator. It wasn't until the next year that the House put in its PBX, with one operator and a few lines. Then it was a couple of years later when they combined the two. It was in 1901 that they combined the Exchange and made a single Exchange, so it's been a 106 years now that this combined Exchange has been in operation.

RITCHIE: One of the stories I read was that the first operator in the Capitol was actually a page.

WINN: Right.

RITCHIE: But they were adolescent boys who did what adolescent boys tend to do, they cut up, and that's when they decided to hire a mature woman to be the operator. From that point on it was all women operators, but I understand that you have recently hired some men operators.

WINN: Well, obviously now the position is not restricted to women, and we have had men in the not-too-distant past, but for whatever reason it's an occupation or a position that tends to appeal to women, I guess. We do have at the moment two male operators out of the 35—

KAUFFMAN: Thirty-one.

WINN: Thirty-one, that's right, 35 total. Thirty-one operators, and two of them are men. One of them just started not too long ago, and the other one hasn't been here that long, for that matter. And they make great operators.

KAUFFMAN: I think initially, and I'm guessing at this, but it probably had something to do with pay, it was a lower paying job. With parity and everything it's come up. It's an attractive starting position, especially if you are trying to get your foot into the Hill. In a non-member situation it's a great opportunity to come on.

RITCHIE: It will be a surprise to people who call the Capitol Operator, however, and have a man answer.

KAUFFMAN: It is.

WINN: I sat down one day during one of our call-in campaigns and took over one of the positions for a few hours, and there were people who were surprised that it was me answering the phone.

KAUFFMAN: The thing that amazes me is the amount of members who dial in for the personal services and recognize the operator's voice, and in some cases their name, and carry on a conversation, and vice versa, how many of the members when they call in the operators by voice recognize who they are. That's really a neat thing to have happen back there.

RITCHIE: Sort of a relationship develops.

KAUFFMAN: Yes, absolutely.

RITCHIE: Well, we used to have "squawk" boxes on our desks, before there was C-SPAN.

WINN: The little green boxes.

RITCHIE: That sat on your desk, and you listened to the debate on the Senate floor. It was surprising how easily you could identify who was speaking, even though there was no

picture and no announcer. In those days there were much stronger regional accents, it seems to me.

KAUFFMAN: Absolutely. I even know those were 401B boxes—that's how old I go back in this crazy business.

RITCHIE: We've touched on this when we talked about continuity of operations, but security has become an enormous issue on Capitol Hill and I wondered how much since 9/11 security has affected the work that you do?

WINN: I think it's more on the continuity of operations side of things than on the security side, actually. Day-to-day—

KAUFFMAN: Other than alert notifications or things like that.

WINN: Yes, you've got your new systems for sending out notifications that require care and feeding. Day-to-day it hasn't affected us too terribly much other than having to go through magnetometers and whatnot.

RITCHIE: To go back to the continuity of operations, on September 11th, everybody on Capitol Hill was evacuated, including the telephone operators.

WINN: Yes, despite their protestations, I guess.

KAUFFMAN: Yes.

RITCHIE: What happened? And how has that been dealt with since then?

WINN: Rick can tell you that because I was out of the country on September 11th.

KAUFFMAN: Yes, it was, "Welcome to the Senate, Rick." [laughs]

WINN: He had just started in June or July, so he had only been here a couple of months.

KAUFFMAN: I actually went back to the Exchange when the second airplane hit the tower to make sure that they were okay. At that point we started getting the notification to evacuate. Even worse than that, we were told to evacuate and go home. So the operators said, "No, we're not leaving. We're open 365 days a years. We never shut down the Exchange." And the Capitol Police made it quite clear that yes, you were going to evacuate. At the time, we had a very important conference call taking place and we informed the Capitol Police that we would be more than happy to leave but we needed to complete this call. They allowed us to do that, and then we left the building, and went home as directed. Within an hour I received a call to get back to the Hill and stand the Exchange back up. So we did, a few operators were close by and they were able to get back in, and we actually used part of the secretary [of the Senate]'s staff to come over and staff the telephones. We were down about an hour, we were able to re-staff quickly, but there were very few calls coming in. Everybody was glued to CNN or their news stations to find out what was going on. We were able to handle the call volume. Where that led us, though, was what do we do in the event something occurs again? So we have looked at and have actually established alternate sites for the operators to go to. One within the Capitol complex, one outside the Capitol complex, and one even further away from the Capitol complex. That gives us the ability to pretty much keep running, and answer the calls, and provide the services as needed.

RITCHIE: It was interesting that the White House shut down their phone system at the same time.

KAUFFMAN: They did.

RITCHIE: It's sort of startling in retrospect to think that you'd cut off your communications system at a moment like that, but I guess the instinct was just to protect everybody.

KAUFFMAN: Well, you do. You've got shelter in place and different things that you have to do with leadership and all those types of things. And all those were occurring. Our call was actually coordinating some of that, so that's why it was important that we complete the call that we were on before we did anything else.

RITCHIE: The other problem was that the leadership was trying to communicate with the members and the members were trying to find out what was happening.

KAUFFMAN: Correct.

RITCHIE: And the instinct is to call the Capitol Operator.

KAUFFMAN: Call the Capitol Operator, yes. And we were here, so we were able to complete those calls for them.

RITCHIE: Not to mention that going home that day was a real task.

KAUFFMAN: I got lucky, I guess, because I walked out of here, walked across the street, and walked right onto the Metro, which immediately took off. I guess that was the last Metro out of town. My wife met me at Shady Grove. I got in the car and got home, and the phone rang, and got back in the car and drove back down here. [laughs] So it was a wake-up call.

RITCHIE: And you were fortunately out of the country, right?

WINN: I was in London. I was on vacation. A friend was getting married the Saturday after September 11th, and so another friend and I had gone and we were touring London. As it turned out—I didn't know this until later—we were on top of St. Paul's Cathedral when all this happened. I didn't find out about it until much later. Then tried to call back in to see what was going on. It took quite a while to get through from overseas back here. I don't recall who I got ahold of first, but just to check in to see, make sure that everything was okay and running. That's when I first heard that they evacuated the Exchange, and then the seats weren't even cold yet when they said, "Oh, never mind, come back." Like Rick said, we got some of the legislative staff from the secretary's office over here to man the phones. At the time I think we were still using phones.

KAUFFMAN: Yes, we were.

WINN: It was basically the same phone that you have on your desk, that's what the operators were using, so it wasn't difficult to do it.

KAUFFMAN: If it rings, answer it.

WINN: Exactly.

RITCHIE: I've interviewed several of the people who came over here that day because we did a continuity of operations oral history, and they were all very proud of their service, because in a crisis like that there was a great sense of helplessness. They at least had something to do. They were some of the few people in Washington who were given a job, and they had someplace to go, and it was a sort of proud moment for them.

WINN: Right. I guess we're continuing in the tradition of moving the Exchange further and further away from the Capitol Building. We keep trying to argue that we're not a target here.

KAUFFMAN: We're the best kept secret in D.C.

RITCHIE: The other thing that happened that day, which you mentioned earlier, was that everybody's cell phone wouldn't work. The system overloaded and crashed. The question is what do you have in mind for a future situation like that? You said we don't know about the BlackBerry, what would be the means of communication at that point?

WINN: Two things have changed since then. We have the in-building wireless system. If you are out in the street and in the middle of nowhere you are relying on whatever Verizon or Sprint or Nextel or Cingular or AT&T—well, they don't exist anymore—has put in place to handle those calls. That's what happened on September 11th—almost everybody was outside of their building trying to talk on the cell phone, and there was one poor cell tower up there that's getting hit by 5,000 people, going "I can't handle this." Around here, the carriers have beefed up the service, not only in response to September 11th, but they realized that there are a lot of big events that take place near Capitol Hill. There are concerts on the 4th of July and Memorial Day and other holidays, there are marches and protests, and the Inauguration every four years. So they've spent some money to beef up the infrastructure around here. Then we have our in-building wireless, which if you are in the building it's got plenty of capacity to handle just about everybody. Also if you're in the building, you've got your desk phone, although it's amazing how people tend to forget how that thing sitting on their desk that you pick up and talk on is a viable option for communications.

KAUFFMAN: We've done a little bit of testing on capacity, because we take the opportunity during events like 4th of July and things like that to do different broadcast testing and see if we have breakage or if the capacity can handle it, because you do have 100,000 folks out on the Mall and it's a great opportunity to test. With the carriers' help in building out their infrastructure, we feel pretty good at this point. It's significantly improved over 9/11.

WINN: The messaging portion of BlackBerrys probably will continue to work. I'm [knocks on the tabletop] 99 percent sure of that. It's simply because of the difference in the way messages are transmitted as opposed to voice conversations. If I call you on the cell phone, there's a radio tower somewhere that has dedicated a radio, basically, to my conversation. It doesn't matter whether I'm talking or not, there's this radio that is handling the conversation. Well, with the messaging, you compose a whole long message and you send it, and sending that message takes that radio a tenth of a second, and then it's free to do somebody else's. The same radio with a given capacity can handle a lot more e-mail messages and text messages and things like that than can that same radio if it's trying to carry voice conversations. So just inherently the way the systems are structured gives it more capacity for text-type messages. If everybody is sitting there trying to download CNN on their little screens so that they can see pictures of whatever it is that's going on, it might be a different story, but if you're just sending email chances are it will get through.

KAUFFMAN: The perfect example of that is a lot of reality shows today or the game shows, where they have you text-message in or do different things like that. Besides the fact they're generating revenue for all the carriers that are doing that, and it's a cool thing, the other thing it does is it enables them to get 20, 30, 40 million people voting versus the telephone, because the telephone is now designed to choke out traffic. But it doesn't blackout and cave in, like it did in New York back in the '80s. I think that is a great test of that technology and how quickly it can do things.

RITCHIE: It does work both ways here in that you have lots of constituents who are trying to get into the system. I remember during the presidential impeachment trial—

WINN: We all do! [laughs]

RITCHIE: —the phone system just got overwhelmed. From your perspective, what was it like at that stage?

WINN: That was an interesting time. The Exchange was getting bombarded. We were handling some very minuscule percentage of the calls that were actually coming in. We were handling them faster than the offices were handling them. A lot of the reason that we were having such a difficult time handling them was everybody that people wanted to talk to, their lines were busy. Whether it was because they were all talking to somebody or because they had just given up and busied out all their phones so they weren't getting any calls, we don't know. During those situations, people keep saying, "You need to beef up the capacity of the Exchange." Well, the Exchange really isn't the choke point. The choke point is the individual offices who are getting the calls. We're passing them to them as fast as those people can take them. Taking the Exchange out of the picture wouldn't help. Or increasing the capacity of the Exchange isn't going to help constituent A get to his or her representative any faster.

The interesting thing to see is that when we do have these high call-in volumes, how the productivity of the Exchange goes up. The time that it takes them to answer the calls goes down. The amount of time they spend talking to people goes down. So the amount of calls that go through the Exchange goes up, sometimes 20, 30, 40 percent over what it would be during a normal time. But again, it would be even higher if the people they were trying to transfer the calls to were actually accepting the calls. Because for every call, two things happen. Every call that you try to transfer to somebody who is busy, on the Senate side chances are they want you to try their other senator. So there's a second chunk of time that's devoted to that. Then if that second senator is busy as well, you have to explain to them that you can't take a message and they should call back later or, "Here are the numbers, you can try calling them directly." Some number of those people call us back. They just keep calling the number that we have.

KAUFFMAN: Hang up and call right back.

WINN: Because one of the things we've noticed is a lot of public advocacy groups, or lobbying groups, or special interest groups, they buy 1-800 numbers and they just point them to the Capitol Exchange. They tell their folks, "If you are interested in prescription drug reform, call 1-800-PRESCRIPTIONS—or whatever—and ask to speak to your senator."

Well, these people don't know who their senator is, or why they're even calling other than they got a flier that said, or saw a commercial that said, "call this number." We don't have a toll-free number that Congress pays for—so if people are calling our number directly they're having to pay the freight. But these toll-free numbers that somebody else is paying for, fine, they'll call 10, 12, 15 times and get through.

I don't remember what the percentage of the calls that were actually presented, the network was blocking some number of calls, and some number of calls were coming in. We were answering some small percentage of those during the impeachment. It had some effects on the switch, but not that great of effect. The biggest effect was nobody could get through to anybody else's office because their lines were all tied up with them talking to their constituents.

RITCHIE: *Roll Call* ran a story about the Senate Historical Office because we were on the phone for practically the entire impeachment trial. In the morning there would be a stack of telephone messages from the voice mail that we'd have to respond to, and then people would call all day long. It was mostly journalists, but sometimes it was constituents who were watching on televison and wanted to know what something meant. I guess the operators thought it sounded more like a historical question than a political one and forwarded it to us.

WINN: Yes, exactly.

RITCHIE: Another unusual thing about the way the Congress works is that we're not 9 to 5. We have members whose states and districts are in multiple time zones. If you count the Alaskan and Hawaiian senators, it's even beyond three. So the staff here work well into the night, and you have a series of shifts for the operators. How does that work? How do you maintain essentially 24 hour service here?

WINN: Like you said, we have a number of shifts. They are not your typical three-by-eight-hour shifts, where you have an 8 to 4, and a 4 to midnight, and a midnight to 8 shift. We've got staggered shifts. The first one in the morning starts at 6. Then more people come in later in the morning. In the meat of the day, between about 10 o'clock and 3 o'clock, we have the most number of people on. Then the people that came in at 6 start going home, and then more people are coming in. So we stagger it and we ramp it up and then it ramps down

in the late afternoon, until 11 o'clock, when the folks come in for the overnight shift. We have two people on over each night.

One of the interesting things about this is it's sort of like the military. You're here until you're relieved. If your shift ends at 11 and the 11 o'clock operator is not there, you can't leave. You can't just get up and leave the Exchange unattended. That same thing during snowstorms and whatnot, the operators know to bring their overnight bag and some food if it looks like it's going to snow, because chances are they're not going to be able to get home and their replacement is not going to be able to get in.

KAUFFMAN: They do it quite readily and with happy faces.

WINN: And you touched on something with the secretary's folks: the operators take pride in the fact that they are, basically besides the Capitol Police, the only 24 by 7, 365-day-a-year operation on Capitol Hill. And that they're relied on, and people expect them to be there. They know that when they sign up. We've very clear with people when they apply for jobs that no whining when they say "The government is closed on Tuesday"—

KAUFFMAN: And you're not! [laughs]

WINN: And you're not, exactly.

RITCHIE: Well, since 1995 Congress has been operating under the Accountability Act. Has that complicated your lives? Because it involves a lot of labor regulations, while the Congress operates on such a different schedule than practically anybody else.

WINN: Well, we've done what everybody else has done, classified our employees as exempt or non-exempt. The Exchange is non-exempt, and they work shift work, and actually because of their shift work their nominal hours are seven-hours a day. So if something happens and they have to stay late we don't have to adjust the schedule somewhere else, because there's not a lot of room. We really are robbing Peter to pay Paul if we ran eight-hour shifts and somebody had to work an extra hour because somebody didn't show up, well then we'd either have to pay them overtime, which we don't budget for, or we'd have to cut their hours an hour somewhere else, which means that somebody would have to come in an hour early, and it's just a never-ending thing. So the seven-hour shifts

work well for that sort of thing. If they work over they get paid, but it's straight-time as opposed to overtime, until they've reached the 40-hours-a-week. It allows us to provide the coverage that we do.

In other areas, we stagger start-times. We have a contracted-out help desk for microcomputer and whatnot related problems. Those tend to be the more serious ones, because it is a personal device. They're here from 7 in the morning until 8 in the evening, or half an hour after the Senate goes out of session, whichever is later. Everybody else works—we're basically covered from 7 to 6 or 8 to 6. But if a copier breaks, for instance, usually there's another copier somewhere around. You just take your stuff and go to the other copier. If a telephone breaks, there's almost always another telephone somewhere around it. Everybody is subject to recall. If something happens and we need to get somebody back here, we bring them back. We've worked around it, and we've made sure that we pay everybody overtime if they work overtime. On the employees, and the supervisors, is where most of that burden falls, accounting for hours and making sure that people don't work overtime if it can be avoided, and if they do that it's properly accounted for and documented so that we can pay them the overtime that they're due. That's been the biggest thing.

RITCHIE: I've always had to explain to people outside the institution that the Congress is an organization that works essentially from Tuesday through Thursday and can work 16 hours or more on Wednesday, because that's the one day that everybody is in town. I gather that the calls coming in here are more intense whenever the Senate is in session and people can watch what's going on, as opposed to when they're away.

WINN: It varies with in-session and out-of-session, but what really drives call volume are hot button issues and not what's being said on the floor but what the news media are reporting. We get a spike at the Exchange when the evening news comes on on the West Coast. Or the talk radio folks gin up support or opposition to whatever it just might be and tell the people that are listening to call. There isn't that much during the recess hours. The call volume goes down. But it's not the Senate being in session per se, it's other people's reactions to the Senate being in session.

KAUFFMAN: Yes, we hit a peak yesterday because of a comment that was made [by Senator John Kerry about the war in Iraq] that drove it.

WINN: And the funny thing is, we don't ask people why they want to speak to their member. That's not why we're here. We don't care. Two things that we don't tell people is how many calls that we got about a particular issue, because we don't know what the people were calling in about, and we don't like to tell how many calls came in on a certain day because there are people out there that would see that as a record to be broken. I don't know if you recall, there was the Virtual March on Washington last year or the year before last, where some interest group was getting people to call their members.[2] They had them timed. It was like, if you signed up to go on their Virtual March on Washington, they sent you a message: "You will call Senator X at 10:28 in the morning and Senator Y at 10:47 in the morning." There were people who were sending faxes in. They were going to try to set some sort of a record of most calls to Capitol Hill. Well, we wouldn't satisfy them by telling them how many calls came into Capitol Hill, because we don't want to encourage that sort of thing. It's like the National Park Service no longer counts the people that show up for demonstrations on the Mall. It's just a number for somebody to aim at.

RITCHIE: And they're never happy with whatever number that you give out.

WINN: Right, the organizers are never happy with whatever the number is. Exactly. And the same thing with this Virtual March. I don't remember what their stated goal was, but from what we saw they didn't quite make it.

KAUFFMANN: No. They wanted to jam the Exchange and that didn't happen.

WINN: Right.

RITCHIE: That raises a question about the media. Do you have to deal with reporters at all?

WINN: We try not to. If they call, for anybody in the sergeant at arms the response is they need to call the executive office and explain what it is they want to know and why.

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[2] On February 26, 2003, anti-Iraq War protesters conducted a Virtual March on Washington by calling, faxing, and e-mailing the Senate and the White House with hundreds of thousands of messages opposing military action against Iraq.

They will let us know whether we're to talk to them or whether to provide the executive office with the information and let the executive office deal with the media. But we do get calls. I remember one woman who called me during that Virtual March. "Is it true that the Capitol Exchange is down?" "Um, no." "Well, I'm told that people calling in are getting a busy signal." "Well, that's fine, but we're still answering calls. From what we are seeing, people were not getting busy signals, so I don't know who's telling you. But I'll be happy to transfer you to the Exchange right now and you can see," which I did, and she got right through. I think the operator was kind of annoyed when I said, "Never mind."

KAUFFMAN: "I'm busy, leave me alone!"

WINN: Exactly. I think the record for calls still goes to the Clarence Thomas hearings.

RITCHIE: That's interesting, just everyone one way or the other wanted to state their opinion.

WINN: Yes. It was televised, and probably more dramatic than the impeachment trial was.

RITCHIE: Yes, its outcome was certainly more up in the air.

WINN: One of the things that people seem to be confused about, not so much now that we are a single operation but when we were a joint operation, they thought that there were House operators answering the calls that came into the House and Senate operators answering the calls that came into the Senate, and that's never been the case. For one thing, if you go and do a Google search on the House Web site, you'll find that they list the Senate main number more often than they list their own main number, which I find odd. There has always been two main numbers, but I'm not sure why that is. The House is 225-3121, and we're 224-3121. We're the Capitol.

RITCHIE: But they'll both get you into the same Exchange?

WINN: They both go to the exact same place.

KAUFFMAN: Which is why we answer it, "Capitol Exchange, may we help you?"

WINN: Yes, exactly. We don't know which number they called, or care.

RITCHIE: You've alluded to some of this, but where do you think things are going? What's your projection for the next 10 years?

KAUFFMAN: Oh, I thought you were going to ask me about the election. [laughs]

RITCHIE: That could have an impact on the future, too.

KAUFFMAN: Well, technology has definitely evolved a long way from where we were in 1986 when we put this phone system in. Wireless capabilities, the ability to take your cell phone at some point in the near future, probably two years out, and have that actually be a Wi-Fi device as well as a cellular device as well as your telephone. It just roams seamlessly between them. The ability to take a telephone or a soft phone on a PC and dial in via broadband and your VPN client, and actually assume all the features and the functions you have from your desktop, and conduct business. The caller doesn't know if you're in Washington or if you're in Iowa or if you're on vacation in the Caribbean. So there's lots of opportunities from that standpoint. I think the challenge is: Is the institution ready to go to the next technology? Based on our discussions with some of the committees that we have helping us through some of these things, I think they are. There's always going to be the few that hold out. Interesting enough, it's not necessarily the old-timers that are the holdbacks. Some of them will embrace technology very well. But the one thing they want to make sure is that when they pick up that telephone, they get a dial tone. That's our challenge as technology evolves, to ensure that that dial tone is always there.

WINN: I think we will continue to see the convergence of video and voice communications on data networks and all that that provides. Eventually, if this goes as planned, you can pick up a phone and dial 202-224-whatever and it will ring in Des Moines, Iowa, or Boise, Idaho, and sound like the person is in Washington. Then it will be easier for members to move more people out to the state offices if they want to. I find it interesting, since I've been here for 19 years now, they've been talking about trying to move more people out to the state offices because the space is cheaper, and I still think it's somewhere around 25 or 30 percent of the staff are in the state offices. It's been pretty much that. There's

4,000-some-odd member office staff, and a little more than 1,000 of them are in state offices. It will be interesting to see if the improvements in communications help accelerate that trend toward moving people to state offices, because the person that answers your letter, expressing your opinion on something, there's no reason for that person to be in Washington. There's no logistical reason for that person to be in Washington. They could be anywhere. I think the trend will take us where it's easier for people to justify putting more staff in the state offices.

RITCHIE: Some mail rooms have moved—senators have moved their whole mail operations out to the home state, in part because of the mail screening problems and because it takes up a lot of space.

WINN: Right. It's interesting that they move people out to the state offices but we don't ever get any space back from them.

RITCHIE: Yes, something quickly fills the vacuum.

WINN: Exactly, the Senate abhors a vacuum in space.

RITCHIE: Well, I know your operators still miss the space they had over in the Dirksen Building.

WINN: I don't blame them. It was not nice space but it was centrally located and convenient to everything, the Credit Union, the cafeteria, everything that you lucky people who work in one of those Senate office buildings or the Capitol take for granted, and those of us who work out here in the [Postal Square] hinterlands long for.

KAUFFMAN: They miss their kitchen.

RITCHIE: They all mentioned that, yes. Well, are there any other issues that you'd like to bring up that I haven't raised questions about?

WINN: Not that I can think of. I'm just looking through my little historical notes here, about the Exchange. Actually, one of the things—you may not remember this when you did it, but one of the things you've done is compiled the minutes of the Democratic and

Republican conference meetings for the Senate, from the '20s up, and I was looking through those, where they outlined how many operators we have, and which ones are patronage and which ones are not patronage. When I first read "exempt," I thought well, this was before the Fair Labor Standards Act, so that's not what they're talking about. Oh, exempt from being replaced by a patronage employee.

I think the Exchange has been one of the more successful joint ventures on Capitol Hill over the years, probably because it flies under the radar. Unlike the Capitol Police, or the Architect of the Capitol, or the Guide Service, which is visible out there every day and gets a lot of attention mainly from the House side, a lot of interference from the House side, this operation has mainly flown under the radar, probably because it works well and is not very visible. We hope to keep it that way. We hope to keep it working well and—

KAUFFMAN: Invisible.

WINN: Yes. Quietly and efficiently do the work that everyone expects us to do.

RITCHIE: Well, I think you're right. Because it works, people take it for granted, and that's the perfect situation.

WINN: We're doing this telecom modernization, you know. Greg's analogy is: "I turn on the tap and the water comes on. I don't think of sitting down and writing the water company a letter thanking them for making sure the water comes on everyday." It's the same way with telephone service. People just take it for granted that it's going to be there, and the Capitol Exchange is going to be there. It's our challenge to make sure that we live up to that, that it continues to be something that can be taken for granted.

RITCHIE: Well, that you very much for participating, I appreciate it.

KAUFFMAN: Thank you.

WINN: Thank you.

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