

INTERVIEW #2
A Day in the Life of Senator Moseley Braun
JANUARY 29, 1999

SENATOR CAROL MOSELEY BRAUN: Last time, you asked a question about whether or not my marriage had been a problem back in 1978.

BETTY K. KOED: Right. Was your interracial marriage an issue in that campaign?

MOSELEY BRAUN: I remembered something. To the extent that it was a problem, I just kind of ignored it. But as soon as I got elected, the first article of the *Hyde Park Herald*— which is a little neighborhood newspaper that I later wrote for—describing my candidacy, referred to my husband as "she lives in Hyde Park with her white husband, attorney Michael Braun."

[phone call; interview interrupted]

So, Michael thereafter referred to himself as a WHAMB, W-H-A-M-B, so we made a joke out of it. [laughter]

KOED: So, it certainly was an issue at times, for some people.

MOSELEY BRAUN: Yes, white husband attorney Michael Braun [laughter].

KOED: People like to put labels on all of us, in any way they can.

MOSELEY BRAUN: They do.

KOED: Somehow, that makes them more comfortable, I guess.

Today, I thought we'd talk a little more about working in the Senate, and what kind of experience that is. Let's start by your giving us an idea of what a day would be like for you in the Senate. We talked a little bit last time about how public perceptions are

very different from the reality of working in the Senate, but give us an idea of what a typical day would be like.

MOSELEY BRAUN: Well, a typical day was frenetic—that's the only word. I imagine that there are other professions in which the high level of activity is sustained over as long a period of time such as one finds as a member of the Senate, but, off hand, I can't think of what they might be. I'm sure there are. Maybe, someone running a multikazillion dollar business with world-wide branches works those kinds of hours. It was not only the long hours, but that there were a lot of plates in the air at the same time, a lot of balls being tossed simultaneously. So, the challenge was to stay focused, not to lose track, and to make sure that the details didn't get past you. So, in terms of just time, it would depend. I generally started at 8:30 in the morning, but what happened at 8:30 would vary from day to day. I tried to schedule things so that I could do meetings, office time, and the like in the mornings, if I could. Except, for example, every Thursday morning was our Town Hall meeting. I knew that I would have to be ready for showtime on Thursday mornings.

KOED: How long did the Town Hall meetings last?

MOSELEY BRAUN: An hour. And they were really wonderful. What we did was take questions from 8:30 until about 9:15 or 9:20, and then we'd take pictures for the next, however long it took. The smallest crowd I think we ever had was when five people showed up. The largest crowd was about five hundred. It was amazing. And we almost didn't know from time to time how large the crowd there was going to be.

KOED: Where would you hold these meetings?

MOSELEY BRAUN: Well, that was actually a point of some contention, because I thought that the secretary of the Senate, or the sergeant at arms rather, could have given us a set location in which to have these meetings, but, as it turned out, we wound up having to move from place to place, week to week. So, we could never tell people well in advance where the meeting would be. They'd have to call into the office beforehand. In fact, I didn't always know, so we wound up on more than a couple of occasions, I wound up going—like a homing pigeon—to where I thought it would be and it wound up being someplace else. Generally, it would be in the Senate office buildings,

either in Hart, or in Russell a couple of times. It was in Dirksen a lot. Most often in Dirksen, occasionally in Hart, and occasionally in Russell.

KOED: You had a "live" audience then, but were these also televised?

MOSELEY BRAUN: You know, it's funny you mentioned that, because that was something else that kind of annoyed me about the whole thing. [laughter] I wanted to have them televised from the beginning, but for some reason it just never got together to televise. We were able to televise some of the ones I did with Paul [Simon], we video recorded and televised some of those, but it was real spotty and there was no real consistency to it. We were able to televise some of the ones that I did with [Richard] Durbin, but not across the board consistent. There was no regularity to that.

KOED: For the most part, you met with constituents who were here in town, that came to town knowing ahead of time that these meetings would occur on Thursday mornings?

MOSELEY BRAUN: Right. In fact, I would put it on some of the letters, what we call the "robos," when I responded to people's concerns. We would put, "If you are here in Washington, come to this town hall meeting." I think Paul used a little card. It wasn't a big marketing effort, but a minimal marketing effort to get the word out that we were doing this. It also provided an opportunity for constituents who had specific issues and who had demanded or insisted upon meeting with "the senator" over something that, in the scheme of things, was not a huge big deal, to meet us. In most instances, you were able to get away with having staff meeting with people for those kinds of things. Often, if it was just your lay person from back home, who didn't want to hear that they can't meet with the senator—the person I voted for, or the person I elected. So the town hall meetings really served as a convenient way to have those constituents raise their issue, publicly with others or privately with you. You could shake hands with them and you could say, "You know that sounds like a very interesting issue. I'll have Sam over here deal with it, and if you don't mind speaking to Sam, I have to rush off. But I'm very concerned and you can talk to this person." So you could hand off constituents to staff on specific issues—

KOED: In a way that they felt comfortable—

MOSELEY BRAUN: In a way they felt comfortable with, in a way in which they felt like they had gotten the attention they needed and hadn't just been shunted off to an underling without getting your attention. So it really humanized the office in an important way.

KOED: And it gave them a chance to see both of their senators at the same time.

MOSELEY BRAUN: Right.

KOED: Did Senator Durbin do them weekly along with you, as Paul Simon had done.

MOSELEY BRAUN: Yes. In fact, there were two traditions that came out of the relationship with Paul that were very important—two aspects of collaboration that I don't believe Paul had enjoyed with [former Senator] Alan Dixon, but that I continued with Dick Durbin. One was the town hall meetings. Again, Paul had started the town hall meetings kind of on his own. I don't know if he did them regularly. I think he may have started them right before I came. When I started, I joined him, and it became a regular operation that we did together. Then, the second thing that we shared was judicial nominations. The tradition in the Senate had been that the senior senator from the president's party would have the power to select the district court judges. Paul did two things. He initiated a merit selection commission within the state, of citizens, and he shared that with me. I revised and I like to say improved the commission afterwards, but I kept the merit selection commission in place and continued to share the selection authority with my junior senator after I became senior senator.

KOED: To a good extent, then, the model that Paul Simon had established in these ways was followed and expanded by you.

MOSELEY BRAUN: Right.

KOED: Well, then, I was going to ask another question, but let's stay with the "day in the Senate" theme first before moving on.

MOSELEY BRAUN: I'd start out in the morning with 8:30 to 10:00 basically

given to constituent meetings, breakfasts with people, phone work, mail work, whatever. That was kind of flexible time, but it was work time. Then, at 10:00 the committees started. So, you always had a committee hearing going on from 10:00 forward. The Senate itself generally came in at about 10:00, sometimes later. In any event, you knew there was a committee or some set of activities at 10:00 that were connected to your official responsibilities. Once the committees got going, the Senate would generally be in session at some level of activity, sometimes in quorum call and sometimes it would be somebody droning on the floor, and at other times there would actually be votes being called while the committees were going on, but that middle part of the day was generally devoted to committee work. Then, you had down time, well not down time but in-office time, from 1:00 or 2:00 until the early evening, until about 5:00. That time was in-office. Often, that would be when you would take meetings. If you hadn't had a lunch meeting, which was usual, you would take meetings in the office or meetings outside the office—off the Hill—or you would be doing staff work and paperwork. By 5:00 or so, generally you'd be voting at that time of the evening. I don't know what it is about legislatures—and I say this having served in a state legislature—it's like "Dracula Session." For some reason or other, it's not until the sun goes down that you start voting on stuff. It's like—

KOED: Most of the votes seem to come around 5:00 or 6:00.

MOSELEY BRAUN: What's this cover of darkness business? I don't understand. [laughter] So you start with that, but that's when people start having their events, too. On some occasions, you'd be going to events at that time of evening, since they generally start about 7:00. To categorize broadly, voting and events would be the evening—

KOED: Those were the evening obligations.

MOSELEY BRAUN: Right. Generally, I would get home about 10:00, 9:30 to 10:00. I'd try to be in bed by 11:00. Almost always, I'd try to be in bed by 11:00. In fact, I have a kind of a habit. I try to get in the house by 10:00 because there was a television program on. I would turn that on while I got ready for bed. By the time it was over—

KOED: It gave you a chance to wind down.

MOSELEY BRAUN: Right. By the time it was over at 11:00, I'd like to be able to turn the light out. I wasn't always successful, but that was generally— And then you'd start the next day.

KOED: Did you often get calls at home, during the night, on any particular issue, or were you pretty much left alone to rest?

MOSELEY BRAUN: Pretty much, but I didn't get that much time at home. The only time I had at home was when I was finished with it all.

KOED: Sleeping time.

MOSELEY BRAUN: Right. Bedtime. For me, I tried not to—my staff tried not to call me at home with a lot of stuff, frankly. I tried to deal with the at-home time for private needs and family. Remember, particularly when I first got here, I was faxing homework. Matt was still in high school. So, I had a junior in high school to deal with. [laughter] When I look back, I don't know how I did it. I'll be honest with you. I don't know how I did it at all. I had a junior in high school!

KOED: Did you know of other senators in that position, any that you talked with?

MOSELEY BRAUN: Patty came the closest—Patty Murray. But her husband moved up here, so she had her husband and two children. She had her whole family here. It was difficult and stressful for her, but the difference was that I didn't have a husband, because Michael and I were divorced by then, but also, well, a couple of things had happened.

First, Matt had declined to move here. When I first came here, in fact, the apartments that I rented were large enough for us, because I had expected him to move here and go to school here. We had interviewed at the schools here. But he finally decided that he didn't want to leave his friends. Now, this is somebody who had complained about how much he hated his school. It had been one complaint after another about school until it came time to leave it, then he said "Oh, no, I don't want to go anywhere, my friends are here." So he decided not to move. That was the first thing.

The second thing was that, in truth, Michael has always been wonderful as a caregiver. We had originally agreed that Matt would stay with Michael during the week, then I'd come home on weekends and we'd kind of trade off, with Matt moving between our two respective homes. Michael had remarried and has a family. So that was going to be the deal. As it turned out, Matt decided that he did not want to live up with his daddy and his daddy's wife. His home was where we lived.

There's a funny story about this. For a while, I did not have a residence in Chicago, for about four months. I finally bought a place, but I hadn't moved into it, so Matt moved into it first. [laughter]

KOED: He established residency for you.

MOSELEY BRAUN: He established residency for us, yes. I discovered him and six of his pals and their pizza, while all of their mothers thought they were at a sleepover at each other's houses. [laughter] It was like, I don't think so! I called, thinking that Matt was at Michael's, but Mike said, "No, he's at your place." What my place, I haven't moved into my place. And he said, "Well, he said he was going to go back to Hyde Park and spend the night with Andy Zibbits, but he could be reached at your place." I said, oh no, and I called Andy Zibbits' mother. Pam said, "Oh, no, they're over at Sean's house." So I called over at Sean's house. "Oh, no, they're over at Andy Zibbits." So I got a plane and left here, flew back to Chicago, went to the new house, and—true enough—there were all these boys there with their sleeping bags and their pizzas.

That's when I moved into 5000. We just moved on in. I had people come and clean it and get my furniture moved out of storage. That's when I actually established a home, because it was clear that he was determined that this was how it would be—he would stay in Chicago and live with his Mom.

KOED: Even though his Mom couldn't be there all the time. These issues are going to become more and more important to the Senate—

MOSELEY BRAUN: We hope.

KOED: —as we have more and more women coming into Senate offices, as well

as professional women who are Senate spouses that have to deal with these kinds of family issues. We are no longer in a time when the family can just trail along wherever the husband decides to work.

MOSELEY BRAUN: Right. I think so. Frankly, the Senate does not do a very good job in handling those kinds of things. Take, for example, the issue of the codels [congressional delegations]. One of the reasons I never went on a codel was because, while you could take your spouse with you, you couldn't take a child. That was just the answer. Particularly given that I was gone so much and away so much, and he was so long-suffering. Maybe that's not the right word, since he was just terrific. Matthew could not have been better in his flexibility and coming to grips with the fact that his mother was gone and the western world was leaning on me for stuff. I did everything I could to try to stay involved, engaged, and attentive, but also to make sure that he knew that he came first. This meant stretching myself out. I mentioned faxing homework. We'd be on the phone for hours with homework. I would want to see it, so he'd fax it to me. So here I am in my apartment or in my office in Washington getting homework, going over it on the phone, and then sending it back. For that reason, it just didn't make any sense—I just couldn't go on any codels.

KOED: Many of the everyday experiences of family life, those that we take for granted, become very difficult in a situation like this—maintaining two households, for instance.

[phone call; interview interrupted]

You mentioned Richard Durbin a little earlier. When you became a senator, you were the junior senator, serving with Paul Simon, but during your term Paul Simon retired and you became the senior senator from Illinois. What's the difference between those two roles? Can you compare those for me?

MOSELEY BRAUN: It's interesting. It kind of made a difference. There was kind of a difference on judicial selections, in that it's rather like being the senior partner. Even though you try to reach consensus, everyone in the room knows that you're the person who's going to make the call. That was about the only place, frankly, where being a senior senator made a difference. I think that my political troubles had an impact on

that. Back home, when Dick became senior senator, it was a big deal. When I became senior senator, it was like "Oh, well, yeah."

KOED: That's interesting.

MOSELEY BRAUN: Oh, yeah, they downplayed it.

KOED: By "they" you mean the press coverage?

MOSELEY BRAUN: Press coverage, yeah.

KOED: Does the senior role increase your responsibilities in any way?

MOSELEY BRAUN: I think it does. I think that you really have a greater responsibility. It was funny, too, because in a way—I don't know if this is a function of our natural styles or of the roles, to be honest, but on issues having to do with the nuts and bolts of business for Illinois—taking care of the road funding, taking care of the appropriations, I took the lead. Well, Dick had experience in appropriations, so he was very much attuned to that. When it came down to the nuts and bolts of Illinois businesses or Illinois in the context of the Senate as a whole, I think I took the lead position on those things, even in terms of responsibility. In fact, I almost got a little annoyed—well, I'm being candid here—I got a little annoyed because when the six-year reauthorization of transportation funding came down, my staff was running around like crazy, doing the work, the negotiations. I was having meetings, sucking up to people who were making the decisions, you know, doing all the work to see to it that we got really on point and that I was able to achieve a transit funding package. I was able to do a lot of things legislatively, in connection with transportation. This afternoon, Rodney Slater was announcing the disadvantaged business enterprise [DBE] rules. You can imagine, when it came to DBE stuff, that stuff always worked my staff to death, because of all the women's businesses wanting to save the DBE, all the black businesses who were interested, and the Hispanic businesses and the Asian businesses. I had all these constituency groups coming to save the DBE stuff, not to mention the "road builders"—the good ol' boys back home—to deal with on transportation. There was a whole constituency for transit. We did a lot of work on that stuff. The new transit pass that people are able to use, well I was a sponsor of that at the Senate level. So, I did

transit pass. I was angling to get underground railroad funded there, even though that was technically not a transportation issue. There were a whole lot of things going on around transportation. I got kind of annoyed because I looked up and there was Dick [Durbin] taking credit for some roads being built in the state. I'm like, wait a minute! Actually, my staff was really furious about it, because he was claiming to have done all the work! But it was okay, because it was shared and I didn't have a problem with that. I've never had a problem with sharing credit on something like that. Everybody can look good, because there's enough to go around.

KOED: What sort of rapport did you have with Senator Durbin? How did it compare to your rapport with Senator Simon?

MOSELEY BRAUN: It was like the difference between having an uncle and having a cousin. We were all very close. I'm still close to Dick. To begin with, when Paul announced that he was going to retire, there was a battle back in Illinois, a behind-the-scenes battle, over who was going to be the candidate to succeed Paul. There's a fellow who was very close to Bill Clinton, actually a former chair of the Democratic National Committee, David Wilhelm, who was very interested in running for the vacant seat. I can't think of who all ran, Pat Quinn, and I forget who else there was, but Dave Wilhelm would have been the biggest problem. As it was, Dick had a primary contest to win. Whoever Paul gave his blessings to obviously would have a significant advantage. And, so, I weighed in in favor of Dick Durbin, because he had been a House member, he had the experience, and he was from southern Illinois, which I felt no small amount of concern about.

This is an interesting phenomenon. When Dixon was there, in truth both of our state's senators came from southern Illinois. Paul Simon came from further south than Dixon. Dixon was Belleville, and Paul was from outside of Carbondale. And, so, both were from the southern part of the state. For some reason, southern Illinois felt closer to Dixon. He was more the hometown kid than Paul was. It may be because Paul was more liberal on social issues, or whatever, so when they lost Dixon it was like, "Oh, my God, now we got this black woman from Chicago who's not going to pay us any attention."

KOED: You were a northern voice.

MOSELEY BRAUN: Exactly. Actually, this is one of the things that helped to defeat me in '98. What [Peter G.] Fitzgerald played on was that I've never been around, they haven't seen me, which wasn't true. But, again, the perception becomes the reality in that situation. You start off with the notion that I'm not going to be around, and then you take it one step further, particularly with the kinds of demands that I had—I couldn't be in anybody's place enough. I had people on the south side saying that I wasn't spending enough time in the black community. It was stunning. And yet I was working seven days a week. I thought what am I doing wrong with time management that everybody has the perception that I haven't been there, wherever it is?

This is a real digression, but I'll tell you what I call my "True Vine Church Story." I was down in Springfield, Illinois, which is in the center of the state. I was in a hotel, going to a meeting or coming from a meeting, and there was this black preacher in the lobby. He said, "Oh, Senator Braun, it's great to see you. How ya been?" I said, "I'm doing fine, Reverend, how are you doing? It's good to see you." He said, "Well, we don't see you around these parts much." Now, I was very sensitive to that, and I said, "Now, Reverend, I was just here two weeks ago for the state convention. I was here two weeks before that for—" and I named what the speech was I gave at the university. "I was here a month and a half before for that—" So, I gave him three examples in the last couple of months when I had been in Springfield. He looked at me and said, "Well, yeah, that may be so, and I'm sorry that I missed you those times, but, you know, you haven't been to True Vine Church." [laughter] So, I used to tell the True Vine Church story, because that was the sense of it. It didn't really matter.

So, one of the reasons for my backing Durbin over the other contenders was that he was from southern Illinois, or central Illinois really, Springfield, but still.

KOED: You thought it would give it a balance.

MOSELEY BRAUN: More balance for the state. I thought he would help to provide that balance. Again, it didn't help, because no one really felt that that was of any consequence.

KOED: You also experienced during your term, not only the shift from junior to senior senator, but also the shift from being a majority party member to a minority party

member. What was that like? Did it have an impact on the way the Senate operated—in committees, in the chamber, in relationships between people and among groups?

MOSELEY BRAUN: Oh, sure. Absolutely. When you are in the majority, you are in the cat-bird seat and you can pass legislation. You can *do* something. When you are in the minority, all you do is make noise and hope the leadership includes you when they cut their deals. [laughter] That really is what it is.

KOED: A succinct description.

MOSELEY BRAUN: Yeah. But it's thus in any legislative body. In Illinois, I had the exact same shift. Here's another parallel I hadn't thought about—in the Illinois general assembly. When I got there in 1978 the Democrats were in the majority. In 1980, the Democrats lost the majority. Frankly, the fellow who is now the governor of Illinois [George Ryan] became the speaker of the house.

That was a fortuitous thing for me because it turned out that I wound up in my second term seated next to, seat mates, with a guy who had been the Democratic speaker [William Redmond]. He was an older man who kind of mentored me at that point. It was wonderful. I think I learned a lot just sitting next to Bill Redmond, because I was absolutely green politically. You know, I had gone from protecting the bobolinks in Jackson Park, so I just didn't know— Having Bill Redmond on the one hand, and Ethel Alexander, who became a dear close personal friend. Ethel and I met when I got to Springfield. She had come out of the Chicago machine. She understood machine politics, which I did not. As a matter of fact, even to this day, people introduce me—she came to Washington having been a part of the Chicago machine. Nope, I was not a part of the Chicago machine.

KOED: You were never a part of the Chicago machine.

MOSELEY BRAUN: Never a part of the Chicago machine. So, between Bill Redmond on the one hand and Ethel on the other, I was able to get grounded in the politics of my state.

KOED: It proved to be a good training ground for you.

MOSELEY BRAUN: But, again, that second year I was in the minority and that taught some important lessons.

This really gets to a point that I want to make about the Senate. As a member of the minority in the state legislature—this gets real relevant now that I think about it—I was able to still pass bills and do what I needed to do, by working in a bipartisan fashion, particularly as an independent Democrat. I wasn't tied to the machine. That meant that for whatever it is you want to do, you try to develop coalitions that would get you enough votes. You put the votes together and you won, right? I was able to work across the aisle with a number of my colleagues in the [state] house. In fact, the woman who was my state director when I was senator, Jill Zwick, was a Republican state representative when I was in the legislature. We worked together in a bipartisan way in the state legislature.

Having said that, when we went into the minority here in the Senate, I took a page from the book that the way things worked was that you tried to make certain that the other side had a sense of what you were about and what your interests were, and that you worked through issues and tried to establish bipartisan support for a generic issue. I made the mistake—I've had occasion to tell Tom Daschle that this was a huge mistake—of going to Trent Lott to talk about what my legislative interests were. The result was that every single one of them he put right on his hit list of things *not* to pass. Absolutely. This "crumbling school" thing that I'm doing now, on education— I said to Tom Daschle later that I made the hugest mistake talking about crumbling schools with Trent Lott. For somebody who's come through the southern experience the way he did, for me with my black face to talk about public education with Trent Lott put the absolute wrong face on the crumbling schools initiative. The worst person to talk about fixing up public schools to a Trent Lott was someone like me, given that he comes out of the experience of people who took their kids out of the public schools in response to integration.

KOED: In other words, you needed someone who looked like—

MOSELEY BRAUN: Like him.

KOED: Like Trent Lott.

MOSELEY BRAUN: Exactly.

KOED: Did the power shift have an effect on personal relationships, too, among your colleagues in the Senate?

MOSELEY BRAUN: I don't think so. I don't think so. I don't think the people who were now newly in the majority saw themselves as being more— No, on a personal level, no.

KOED: It was on a policy level, a legislating level, that it had the greatest impact.

MOSELEY BRAUN: Again, what for me was the saddest aspect of it was discovering that, unlike Illinois, there was no bipartisanship—at least from my perspective. Maybe there was later. With regard to this leader, bipartisanship just was not on the program.

KOED: Interesting.

You played many roles in the Senate, and one of them, from time to time, was sitting in the president's chair. What was that like? Does that give you a different perspective?

MOSELEY BRAUN: That was phenomenal. That was phenomenal.

KOED: When was the first time you presided?

MOSELEY BRAUN: I don't know the day. I'd love to find the date. I'll tell you something. I actually sent a letter, which I don't think I have a copy of, to Lady Bird Johnson that I wrote sitting there, that first day, because—

First off, presiding was kind of a freshman duty. [Senator] Robert Byrd was not mean about it, but he was insistent that freshmen put in their hours at presiding. My staff—this shows just how green my staff was—instead of saying we're going to schedule the senator to preside based on her schedule, they would take whatever the cloakroom told them I had to do. And I said, now just wait one damn minute, you just canceled something that was important to me so I could preside. Have you lost your mind? Again, the guy who was making those decisions had been around for twenty years, so he was

responding to the institutional demands of the cloakroom instead of protecting—

KOED: Not to your demands.

MOSELEY BRAUN: Exactly. So presiding could be a pain, frankly. Be that as it may, the first time that I presided, I was so overwhelmed with the notion. Here I was, directing the activities of the Senate of the United States, coming off the south side of Chicago. This is why I wrote Mrs. Johnson the letter. It was the availability of quality public education at the elementary and secondary level, and all the scholarships and things that were available, and the opening up of what became the controversy of affirmative action—all of those things that went into the climate in the country when I came along made it possible to be there. When I was in grammar school, we were still able to point to the public schools as providing quality education, public education. You hadn't gotten into the whole dumbing down of America syndrome at that point. You hadn't gotten to the situation where children in public schools were likely to get less in terms of educational quality than children in the parochial or private schools. It was the same. So, I came out of public education literate, able to—as my grandmother used to say—read, write and cipher, in the first instance. When I got to college, unlike when my parents had tried to go to college—both my parents had gone to college but my mother had not graduated and I'm not sure if my father did, and they were very, very keen on getting your college degree—it was financial issues in their time. You had to be able to afford a college education. By the time I came along, you could go to college. I don't think my parents contributed a dime to my college education.

KOED: You had other forms of support available.

MOSELEY BRAUN: Right. Student loans, scholarships, part-time jobs. Johnson even had this program, one of the Great Society programs, that let college students work part-time in the post office and places like that. I worked at the post office. It actually turned out to be a good thing later—this is really funny.

I took a job at the post office, a hideous job, working in third class mail. You got dust in your nose and ears, and wore a cap on your head. It was horrible. The old timers, of course, would just throw out an occasional piece of mail while the students were working real hard. Finally, I quit the job at the post office. I hated it. At first, I was really

upset. I earned just enough money to go into another income tax bracket, so it cost me more in income taxes. But it finally worked out in the long run, because we were just calculating my pension and those few months at the post office put me over the ten year mark on the pension, so it helped with my pension. [laughter]

KOED: Makes up for the increased income tax.

MOSELEY BRAUN: Exactly. You could work in jobs that were made available under the Great Society and get scholarships. That was before the time of the Pell Grant.

KOED: Work study programs.

MOSELEY BRAUN: Work study programs began. Because of all of that, I was able to get a college education. Then, when it came time for law school, I got into the University of Chicago. I had no idea that it was one of the hardest schools to get into. I just walked down to the closest law school, close to where I lived, and said I'd like to go to school here. They looked at me and said okay. [laughter] I'm sure that was a function of the climate of the times, because the University of Chicago had always had somebody who was black and had always had women. Menchikov, who was a professor there, used to talk about how the University of Chicago had never discriminated, had always had blacks and always had women. Yeah, one black person and one woman. From the 1920s—So, it wasn't until my class, really, that they opened up. I think we had six or seven blacks and ten or twelve women in my class. Those numbers would have to be verified, I could be off, but it was the largest class of women and the largest class of blacks that the law school had ever had.

KOED: What year was this?

MOSELEY BRAUN: I started in 1969.

KOED: Right in the wake of the Great Society.

MOSELEY BRAUN: Exactly. And so I wrote a letter to Lady Byrd Johnson from the podium of the Senate saying that this was a belated thank you to her late husband for what he did, because he had opened up the doors of opportunity for people

like me.

KOED: That's a fabulous story. Sitting there, in that chair, really gave you a chance to put these things into perspective.

MOSELEY BRAUN: Yes.

KOED: Did it change your perspective on what you were looking at in the Senate Chamber?

MOSELEY BRAUN: No, not really. [laughter] I've got a funny story in that regard. When I was in the state legislature, I used to preside, and was part of the leadership there. In the state legislature, the prerequisite for presiding was leadership status. One day, when Matt was a little guy, all of seven or eight years old, I was presiding. He was running around the chair, you know how they run around. The parliamentarian said to him, "Matt, aren't you proud of your Mom? Look, she's presiding over the legislature. Wouldn't you like to be a legislator when you grow up?" And Matt's response was, "Nah, that's for girls. I want to be a lawyer like my Dad." [laughter]

KOED: The perceptions are changing.

MOSELEY BRAUN: Yeah, that's for girls!

KOED: Was it a busy day, that first day you presided?

MOSELEY BRAUN: I think it was. Remember, we couldn't read up there either. That was the other Robert Byrd rule. I would read the Bible up there, when we were in quorum calls.

KOED: And you were able to write letters.

MOSELEY BRAUN: Wrote letters, yes. It was really a singular experience.

KOED: That's a terrific story.

Let's switch from inside the chamber to outside the chamber. People are always interested in the relationship between senators, or any elected official, and interest groups, lobbies, and that type of thing. What sort of experiences did you have with pressure group politics while you were in office? Were there any individual groups that you dealt with a lot, or had more difficulty with, or more cooperation with?

MOSELEY BRAUN: Let me say this. If anything, that's one of the places where I don't think I did the best job. Getting back to the story I told earlier about the Lord was testing me and I failed, among the failures that I think I can ascribe to—again, I try to be clear about these things—I think I failed to appreciate, personally—My staff, for the large part, did because Bill Mattea who was leg[islative] director and later became chief of staff had been around for a real long time and understood interest group politics. But I never sufficiently cultivated interest groups as I could have or should have. I didn't cultivate them for fund raising, for money on the one hand, which you need to stay in office, nor did I cultivate them in terms of relationships. I don't know if that was a function of the time, or failure to appreciate the importance of cultivating, or, frankly, the fact that my politics—I think one of the more troubling parts of my politics, and my tenure in the Senate, I tended to be independent and nonconventional. The result was that I kind of became nobody's priority. The liberals and the civil rights groups, for example, were horrified that I supported the balanced budget constitutional amendment.

KOED: You took a great deal of criticism for that.

MOSELEY BRAUN: Almost more than anybody else. I thought it was the right thing to do. It made economic sense to me. My thinking on the balanced budget amendment was that I agree with my friends the economists who said that having a balanced budget amendment to the Constitution is an irrelevancy. I agree with that. However, it was my sense, having been a legislator, that the institutional pressures were such that every legislator is called on to do the best he or she can to "bring home the bacon." In the absence of checks and balances, there was no check on spending, particularly at the national level, that would keep people from going into the red, that would provide limitations on deficit spending. Even though our country's deficit as a percentage of GDP was less than some of the European countries, there was no question in my mind but that the deficit position we were in was really bogging down opportunities for economic recovery and for job creation. So, if I was going to be

consistent with my commitment in the campaign and say I'm going to help create jobs for people, just to go in lock-step against the balanced budget amendment because it was going to "cause cuts in social programs" (which, as you know, was the argument) didn't seem to me to be consistent with principle. That is where I drew a line. I said, no, this is what I think is the right thing to do.

That really does get to the whole, historic debate about a legislator. Are you a representative of the views—

KOED: A voice of the people or a voice of conscience?

MOSELEY BRAUN: Exactly. I've always believed that you are a voice of conscience, even if you have to take a hit for it. Your duty is to do what you think is the right thing. In fact, I just gave a speech this Monday when that core question came up in the context of the whole freedom of choice for abortion as well as the death penalty issue.

So, the liberals were not happy with me because of the balanced budget amendment. They weren't happy with me because of the Lani Guinier [confirmation hearings] thing. I subsequently learned later that senators do this all the time, but at that time I didn't know the process—this is a function of the naivety about the process—I didn't think it was appropriate for someone who was going to sit in judgment of a nomination to hold press conferences before a single thing had happened. It was like a judge making a pronouncement for the defendant or the plaintiff before the case had been called. That was the analogy I drew on, not recognizing at the time that those kinds of nominations are more a political process than a judicial process. The committee process is a political one, as opposed to a trier of fact. If anything, the Lani Guinier thing was a mistake on my part based upon—

But, getting back, the groups just came at me, instead of trying to discuss it with me, instead of trying to reason with me about it, instead of having a debate about it. What they did was try to hold me up for embarrassment and say nasty things about me in the press—you know, the gossip, the whispers, you know how they work.

It was a negative, contentious kind of relationship with the traditional liberal groups from the outset in regards to some very important issues. Labor was furious that I

supported the NAFTA [North American Free Trade Agreement]. Remember, all these things came right off the bat. Again, I didn't believe that we could be competitive with the European community and other trading blocs in the world unless we engaged in a trading arrangement in the region. Now, the terms of the trading arrangement obviously were something that had to be hammered out, which is why, by the way, I did not support fast-track. I thought that the Congress ought to have something to say about trade, and the constituent parts of our trading arrangements with our partners, but I thought it was appropriate for us to expand in the region.

KOED: You didn't support fast-track because you thought all the issues needed consideration along the way.

MOSELEY BRAUN: Right. And, you see, NAFTA was a fast-track procedure coming out of the previous Congress, so the question was are you for or against expansion of the trading arrangement? I just thought it made sense to do it, even though I had concerns about child labor and the like. In brief, what happened in that regard was that my politics tend to be unabashedly liberal on social issues, but more conservative on economic issues. If anything, this is almost the converse of the what the "new Democrats" are, because they are conservative on social issues—

KOED: And liberal on economic issues.

MOSELEY BRAUN: Exactly.

It's funny, too. I have to think about this, and I'm searching for words to describe how my politics can be categorized, and I'm at a loss except to say that it comes closest to what in Europe they call the "third way." If anything, my politics tend to be "third way" politics, but there hadn't been a name created for it yet. There's still no name for it here. There's no way to really pigeonhole it. The result was I ran into stereotypes from the right, where they expected me to be Jesse [Jackson] in a skirt, or they expected me to be a bomb-thrower on economic issues. I ran into brickbats from the left because I wound up being more conservative. It was like, "How dare you *not* be Jesse in a skirt."

I was not uncomfortable with that. Quite frankly, if that was the basis upon which I lost re-election, I would be very, very comfortable with it. That would not bother me at

all. I have always maintained that it is a legislator's responsibility to take a position based on principle. If you go down with it, so be it. It wasn't your seat to begin with. It belonged to the voters. I'm really kind of a Jeffersonian Democrat in that regard, because I really believe, as a core value, that legislators are public servants who serve at the pleasure of the voters. Had that been the point on which I lost reelection, it wouldn't have bothered me.

KOED: Upon a point of principle.

MOSELEY BRAUN: Right.

KOED: Rather than on the point of symbol.

MOSELEY BRAUN: Right. Or more to the point, money. That really pissed me off. [laughter] That's the real pisser, when you can't be competitive on the money front.

KOED: It sounds as though, regarding a relationship with interest groups, say labor for example, it's not as if they're trying to influence your opinion, or inform your opinion, on a particular issue, but rather being more of a hammer—identify the ones who agree and those who don't agree, support those who do—

MOSELEY BRAUN: That's right. That's exactly right. Remember, this is where gender and race come in again. Unlike a white male, I had a lot less perceived latitude to make an independent judgments about these things.

KOED: In other words, they are allowed to take any stance within the definition of their public role.

MOSELEY BRAUN: Exactly. Exactly. Whereas, for me, you stand out. Paul Simon was the sponsor of the balanced budget constitutional amendment. He didn't get half the grief that I did, even though I had campaigned saying that I would support it. Nobody paid attention! Literally, it was part of my campaign literature. The labor community back home—I had correspondence back and forth—they were so irate, saying "you tricked us." I said, I'm going to send you a piece of my campaign literature. It's right there.

KOED: They were paying attention to the symbol rather than the substance.

MOSELEY BRAUN: Yeah. Yeah.

KOED: You mentioned a little while ago the Lani Guinier hearings. That takes me into another range of issues that I'd like to talk about—committee work. You spent a good deal of time doing committee work. You were on four major committees—Judiciary, Banking, Small Business, and Finance, as well as some subcommittees. At the time of the Lani Guinier hearings, Joseph Biden was chair of the Judiciary Committee. Senator [Orrin] Hatch was the ranking minority member. What was it like in the Judiciary Committee? What kind of working relationship did you have?

MOSELEY BRAUN: I had a very good working relationship with both Joe Biden and Orrin Hatch, even though Orrin is much more conservative. He was really—how can I put it—he was supportive of me on a lot of levels, including a personal level, more than I think anybody would have expected. If it was *pro forma* or not, I'll never know, but I can tell you that in the entire time that I was in the Senate, both Joe Biden and Orrin Hatch became friends, good friends, who would take up for me even when the media was trying to get background and deep cover kinds of comments about me. I had not wanted to go on the Judiciary Committee.

KOED: Why not?

MOSELEY BRAUN: I had been on the Judiciary Committee in the state legislature. As a matter of fact, I was vice-chairman. I had gotten off of it before I could be chairman, because I just didn't want it. The reason I had gotten off of it is that I had come to the conclusion that judiciary committees, by definition, are everybody's hot button issues, or "How many angels can dance on the head of a pin," or controversial nominations. That's the work. On everybody's hot button issues, for somebody whose politics are all about creating coalitions and consensus and finding practical solutions to issues, hot button doesn't get you there. Hot button is exactly those things over which people will always disagree. You'll have a debate about it—death penalty, abortion, crack cocaine vs. powder—

KOED: Prisons, juvenile delinquency—

MOSELEY BRAUN: Affirmative action. All of those things. Then, you go to the other extreme. The whistle-blower, bankruptcy, patents—

[Knock at the door; interview interrupted]

And the controversial nominations get to be pretty apparent. And that's what's on that committee. So, anyway, I had expressed my disinterest in the committee. Joe Biden came to Chicago, just showed up. I was in the process of unpacking.

Well, this is a long story. I mentioned about Matt moving in. I had sold my house before I knew I was going to be a candidate, or about the time that I started running for the Senate, certainly before I thought I was going to get elected to the Senate. The closing took forever. I had the choice of closing on my residence on the 11th of November. No, I closed in September, but I was supposed to move out of my house on the 11th of November. The election was the 7th of November. I tried to get the people who had bought my house—and I was anxious to get out of that house, because the building was falling down and the neighbors were not cooperative—but the people who bought my house were not cooperative. They wanted me to pay their mortgage and their rent, both, and a penalty if I stayed, so I had to move out. I took all my stuff and sent it into storage. I called a friend who managed a building downtown and asked if there was anyplace I could rent for a couple of months. He said there was. I moved in there. It caused a huge political fury back home. "She's lost touch with her roots." Rush Limbaugh was playing "Movin' on up" in connection with my name. It was also one of those things, as it turned out later, that gave rise to the perception that we must have been stealing money from the campaign. It never dawned on me that people would interpret things like that, but the fact that I had sold my car, went from a Lincoln to a Jeep, moved from 67th and Oglesby into Lake Point Tower—

KOED: The press portrayed that as moving to the penthouse suite.

MOSELEY BRAUN: Exactly. In truth, 6740 was as luxurious as Lake Point Tower ever was, but it didn't have the same perception because 6740 was on the South Side.

KOED: Your old neighborhood.

MOSELEY BRAUN: Exactly, and this was downtown. When I say it was dumb, it didn't occur to me, again not appreciating the symbolism, and not having people around me telling me, whatever you have to pay to stay at 6740, do it and not create any waves right now. I didn't fully appreciate how people were perceiving me. That gets to another whole thing. It wasn't until much later that it dawned on me—this is going to sound really stupid, but it's true—that a lot of people thought I was some kind of welfare mother who had just made it to the Senate.

KOED: Part of that is probably due to the fact that in the press coverage of your campaign they gave very little attention to your governmental experience. You were an unknown nationally, except through the way that the press chose to portray you.

MOSELEY BRAUN: And I hadn't thought of that part. Yeah. Yeah. So, people thought here is a welfare mother who is now driving a new Jeep and living in Lake Point Tower. Small wonder they thought I was stealing money from the campaign.

KOED: And this was where you were living when Senator Biden came to visit?

MOSELEY BRAUN: Yes, that's why I mentioned it. Joe Biden called. I was unpacking things. I put all of my furniture in storage, but you have your personal effects and your kitchen stuff. It was almost Thanksgiving and I wanted to have dinner for Matt, you know. I was into stabilizing this nest.

KOED: Establish a home.

MOSELEY BRAUN: Right, even though it was just going to be temporary. Joe called and said he was at O'Hare Airport and could he come by and see me. I don't know what else he had going on that day, but he just showed up. I said, well I'm in jeans and I'm unpacking boxes and I'm not dressed. But he said "That's okay, I'll come by." So I put a pot of coffee on. He literally talked me into serving on the Judiciary Committee.

KOED: What reason did he give? Did the Anita Hill issue have a role in this?

MOSELEY BRAUN: I joked with him. He never thought it was funny. But my joke to Joe was, "You just want Anita Hill sitting on the other side of the table."

KOED: And Dianne Feinstein also joined the Judiciary Committee at that time. In the public perception this seemed to be a great coup for the two of you. Two junior members joining what is perceived to be a very powerful committee—the Judiciary Committee. But, in reality, it was quite different, then?

MOSELEY BRAUN: Absolutely. I didn't want it. Dianne liked it, but Dianne's not a lawyer. Like I said, it just wasn't—Other than Finance and Appropriations, there wasn't anything else that I would have rather done than Judiciary, but if I had had my druthers I would have taken Appropriations. Byrd didn't want me on Appropriations.

KOED: Why not?

MOSELEY BRAUN: He later admitted why not. Based on what he saw in the press, and based on—He didn't think I was going to make it as a senator, and he didn't think that I had the substance to serve on his committee.

KOED: In other words, it's pretty much up to the chairman as to who gets on the committee?

MOSELEY BRAUN: As to the big committees, yes.

KOED: In those early days of 1993, was there a good deal of lobbying on the part of the freshman senators to get onto certain committees?

MOSELEY BRAUN: Yes.

KOED: Which committees did you lobby for?

MOSELEY BRAUN: Appropriations.

KOED: What about Small Business? Was that something you just got put onto?

MOSELEY BRAUN: I got put on Small Business, and I got put on Banking.

KOED: You really did not seek any committee assignments, other than

Appropriations? The others just fell to you?

MOSELEY BRAUN: Right. The exchanges back in Chicago wanted me to be on the Banking Committee. In fact, they made the point that Alan Dixon, who had kind of been their go-to guy, had been on Banking, then got off of it and went to Ag[riculture]. Ag was okay by them, but not as important as Banking. But they had an interest in that committee.

That interest coincided with the fact that none of the fellows wanted Banking, because of the Keating Five. Because of the Keating Five scandal, nobody wanted to be on the Banking Committee. Don Riegle, who had been part of that, was still chairman when I got there. Basically, he was a chairman with no committee left. You had Don Riegle, Paul Sarbanes was still on it and had been unscathed, I think Kerry. In any event, Banking wound up being packed with three women—me, Patty Murray, and Barbara Boxer. We used to joke that the three of us got put on the committee because nobody else wanted it, so they just stuck the girls on there. [laughter]

KOED: Three freshman women senators.

MOSELEY BRAUN: Exactly.

KOED: Do you think that had any impact on the operations of the committee, having it be woman dominated.

MOSELEY BRAUN: I think it really did. Having the women there really gave—What was the issue that the three of us kind of held our—It wasn't affirmative action. Oh, it was CRA. The fact that it was the three of us, weighing in strongly saying you can't touch CRA, I think made a difference, even among the fellows on the committee. That whip-sawed some of the guys on the Democratic side back in line. We never had much support on the Republican side to begin with, on the CRA issue, always just enough to get the votes. There is a real possibility that, had it not been for the three of us, that CRA would be dead.

KOED: Interesting. There's a case where the women had a definite impact on committee process.

MOSELEY BRAUN: Yes.

KOED: What do you think were some of the most important issues you dealt with, in committee, during your term? On Judiciary as well as the others?

MOSELEY BRAUN: Well, the Confederate flag stands out for symbolic reasons. Other than that, on Judiciary there was the choice debate, which is never ending. The confirmations were important—Supreme Court confirmations—I did two of them.

KOED: Which two?

MOSELEY BRAUN: [Stephen] Breyer and [Ruth Bader] Ginsberg.

KOED: Did you support both of those nominations?

MOSELEY BRAUN: Yes. I'm trying to think what else there was.

KOED: Throughout your career here and in Illinois, you seemed to have a strong interest in educational issues, the Education Infrastructure Act for instance. Did you deal much with that issue in committee?

MOSELEY BRAUN: No. Interestingly, Infrastructure didn't go through either one of my committees—Judiciary or Finance. Well, it got to Finance eventually, but only after we changed it. The original Ed Infrastructure bill was a straight grant appropriation, which meant it went through the Kennedy [Labor and Human Resources] committee.

In addition to the education work, the most important work came in the area of the entitlement spending. I did a lot of stuff on pensions. I did a lot of stuff in regards to Medicare/Medicaid. Health care reform—I was very much a part of that debate although it went down the tubes. And the tax reform debate. Now, if anything—I give Bill Roth credit, although maybe he was just pumping me up or it was just a function of the circumstances in the bill—but I really had a sense of participating in the development of the IRS reform bill.

KOED: Did a lot of that come in committee work, in Finance?

MOSELEY BRAUN: Yes.

KOED: And in Small Business, you seemed to have a strong interest in women's businesses.

MOSELEY BRAUN: Right. But most of that didn't go through the Small Business Committee.

KOED: Really?

MOSELEY BRAUN: No, it's interesting. Well, it went through it, technically. Maybe it's just the way that committee operated, because Dale Bumpers was chairman and then ranking. That was a committee that didn't meet a whole lot. The actual work didn't happen in committee. It was more behind-the-scenes, working with staff. All the work on affirmative action, DBE stuff, women's business enterprises. I had very much wanted to do more in regards to micro-lending and that sort of thing. Also, on small business, I was very interested in SBA [Small Business Administration] reform, cutting the red tape.

Again, part of being in the "new way" or whatever you want to call it, is being the antipathy to bureaucracy. This is very different. It's a real divide among the more traditional Democrats and people like myself, because they see the response to be creating an agency, creating a program, creating a bureaucracy to respond to an issue as the way to deal with it. People like me say, if you can do it without having any of that, then you should. You should find the most efficient way to get to—

KOED: To get to the basic level, as quickly and as easily as possible.

MOSELEY BRAUN: Right. Without all this program stuff. I used to make it a point with my staff. They'd send me speeches, saying program this and that. I'd say, write me a speech in which you don't use the word "program." Even internally, it was a mind-set thing.

KOED: And that was difficult to do on the Hill?

MOSELEY BRAUN: Yes.

KOED: It sounds as though there is a lot of difference between committees, in terms of who's guiding them in the chairmanship role, but also in how often they meet, how much they rely upon staff?

MOSELEY BRAUN: That's right.

KOED: Does Judiciary meet on a regular basis?

MOSELEY BRAUN: Yes.

KOED: Does it have a larger staff than, probably, Small Business?

MOSELEY BRAUN: Oh, yeah.

KOED: How closely did you, as a senator, work with the staff assigned to those committees?

MOSELEY BRAUN: Actually, I think I worked with committee staff a fair amount. You work with your own staff first. In fact, there's almost a protocol that you don't work with the committee staff directly, and you don't work with other people's staffers directly, you go through your staffer.

KOED: And your staffer would work with the committee staff?

MOSELEY BRAUN: Exactly.

KOED: Are there any individual staff members from the committees that stand out in your memory as people your office worked with particularly closely?

MOSELEY BRAUN: Kennedy's staffer [Michael Myers] on Judiciary was a real, not just an expert, but he just knew everything. Kennedy had a real strong staff person there, who had a staff of his own. On Finance, you had Regan Burke, and her successor. You had some strong women staffers on the Finance Committee. On Banking,

Bill Mattea—my staffer—was as much an expert on banking as anybody, so I just dealt with him, and then Kellie [Larkin] worked under Bill. Those come to mind.

KOED: That's helpful, since we don't get as much information about staffers as we'd like. We try to get as much information about the interchange between senators and staff as we can.

[phone call; interview interrupted and then ended].

END OF INTERVIEW #2