

SENATE SERGEANTS AT ARMS

Interview #2

Thursday, November 16, 2006

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

RITCHIE: The Dirksen at least was designed for television.

JOHNSON: Yes.

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

JOHNSON: Conduits, yes.

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

JOHNSON: I did.

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

RITCHIE: Was he trying to recruit you?

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

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

JOHNSON: I did.

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

JOHNSON: Yes.

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

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

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

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

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

JOHNSON: And then [Gary] Sisco came in?

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

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



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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

JOHNSON: I would agree with that.

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

JOHNSON: No.

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

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

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

End of the Second Interview

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

"Michael A. Johnson: Deputy Assistant Sergeant at Arms," Oral History Interviews, Senate Historical Office, Washington, D.C.

