

Women of the Senate Oral History Project

SHEILA P. BURKE

Legislative Assistant, Senator Robert Dole, 1977–1982
Deputy Staff Director, Finance Committee, 1982–1985
Deputy Chief of Staff, Republican Leader Robert Dole, 1985
Chief of Staff, Republican Leader Robert Dole, 1986–1996
Secretary of the Senate, 1995

Oral History Interview
March 16, 2018

Senate Historical Office
Washington, D.C.

**AGREEMENT AND RELEASE
ORAL HISTORY PROJECT
U.S. SENATE HISTORICAL OFFICE**

I, **Sheila P. Burke**, agree to participate in the Women of the Senate Oral History Project and understand that the physical audio recordings and transcripts of my interviews are and will remain the property of the United States Senate.

In entering into this agreement, I understand that all or portions of my oral history may be made available to the public in an online feature on the Senate website, may be made available to researchers and may be quoted from, published, or broadcast in any other medium (consisting of all forms of print or electronic media, including the Internet or other emerging, future technologies that may be developed) that the Senate Historical Office may deem appropriate. I also approve the deposit of the recordings and transcripts at the Library of Congress, the National Archives, and any other institution that the Senate Historical Office may deem appropriate.

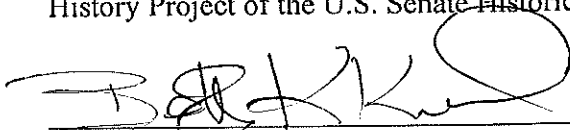
In consideration for my inclusion in this project, I understand I am entitled to receive a copy of the transcripts of my interviews. While I hereby relinquish any intellectual property rights or interests I may hold in the content of my interviews, I acknowledge that the Senate has the discretion to decide whether or not to make all or any part of my oral history available to the public.



Sheila P. Burke

Dated: 4/23/2020

I, Betty K. Koed, accept the interview of Sheila P. Burke for inclusion into the Oral History Project of the U.S. Senate Historical Office.



Betty K. Koed, U.S. Senate Historian

Dated: 5/3/2020

Introduction

Sheila Burke came to the Senate in 1977 to serve as legislative assistant to Kansas senator Robert J. Dole. A native of San Francisco, California, with a bachelor of science degree in nursing from the University of San Francisco and a master of public administration degree from Harvard University, Burke assisted Dole on matters of public health in his position as ranking member and then chairman of the Committee on Finance. She became deputy staff director of that committee in 1982. In 1985 Dole brought her into the Office of the Majority Leader, first as deputy chief of staff and then as chief of staff in 1986. She remained in that position for 10 years. From January to June of 1995, she also served simultaneously as secretary of the Senate. In many ways, Burke's Senate career from 1977 to 1996 mirrored the development of the Senate itself—the rise of women to positions of influence, and the backlash that caused; the development of policy expertise within members' and leadership offices; and the frequent transfer of majority power between the two parties. Discussing the growing role of women on Capitol Hill, Burke noted, "The fact that you have women at the table for many of these very complicated questions and issues I think has made a huge difference both in the substance of what we do and the nature of the debate."

About the Interviewer: Betty K. Koed is the U.S. Senate Historian and Director of the Senate Historical Office. Koed earned her Ph.D. in political and public history at the University of California, Santa Barbara, before joining the Historical Office in 1998. In 2016 Koed was awarded UCSB's Distinguished Alumni Award. Appointed Senate Historian in 2015, Koed supervises all historical and archival projects, provides talks and presentations to senators, staff, and the public on wide-ranging topics of Senate history, and conducts oral history interviews with former senators and staff. She oversees more than 10,000 pages of historical material on the Senate website, is senior editor of the Biographical Directory of the U.S. Congress, and provides research and reference assistance to the Senate community, the public, and the media. She is a former officer of the Society for History in the Federal Government and has served on the Editorial Board of the *Public Historian*.

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BETTY K. KOED: Thank you, Sheila Burke, for coming in and doing this today, we really appreciate it.

SHEILA P. BURKE: I'm looking forward to it.

KOED: I would like to start by asking you, before you came to the Senate and as a child and as a young woman, did you have female role models or mentors that were important to you?

BURKE: I did! I am the product of 19 years, thereabouts, of Catholic education. Probably my first role models, in addition to my mother, were the nuns who taught me, and two in particular, Sister Dorothy Bushnell and Catherine Grace Vetter, both of whom were with Immaculate Hearts in California—a very active social order, very involved in social justice programs and in human rights issues. They were wonderful in helping all of us young students to appreciate some of those issues.

KOED: Interesting. And you started out as a nurse, you were in nursing to begin with.

BURKE: I was.

KOED: So how did you move from nursing to public service?

BURKE: Well, you know, it's interesting. Nursing is a career—and this is true in medicine, true in nursing, and a number of other health professions—where there's very little that we can do that isn't influenced by public policy. How we're licensed, what we're permitted to do, who we're permitted to care for, whose care is paid for, are all influenced by public policy, either at the state or federal level. I became active as a student when I was in college in the [National] Student Association, and remained active when I graduated and went into practice in Berkeley, California, and came to know folks involved in the Student Association. Ultimately, I went to New York City to work for the Student Association and came to know people in Washington. I was headed home to California for graduate school when someone approached me

and said, “Have you thought about Washington? Bob Dole is looking for someone to handle health issues.” So it was a transition that I hadn’t anticipated. I fully expected to remain in the practice of nursing for my entire career, so it was an interesting transition.

KOED: And did you then interview with Bob Dole? How did you get into his office? Tell me a little bit about that.

BURKE: I did. One of the staff on the Finance Committee at the time was the person who I’d come to know and he knew Senator Dole was looking for a health person and suggested Dole talk with me. I didn’t know Bob Dole at the time, and I, of course, was born and raised in California—a Democrat from an active Irish-Catholic family. And I said, “Sure, happy to meet him, be interesting.” I met with Senator Dole. I explained that to him, that I was in fact not from Kansas, in fact from the west coast, and in fact from an Irish-Catholic Democratic family. He indicated he didn’t care what my politics were at the time. He was interested in the fact that I had taken care of patients and that he really wanted someone to handle health issues who’d had some patient experience. There was a physician on the committee staff at the time and Jim Mongan, a very close friend at the time, who sadly we lost a number of years ago, but Jim was working for Russell Long at the time and Senator Dole wanted the Republican staff to have someone who had cared for patients as well and was less interested in my political leanings than in the fact that I knew something about healthcare.

KOED: Was it standard for members to have healthcare experts on their staff by this time?

BURKE: You know, it had begun to be. Certainly, Senator [Edward] Kennedy had a number of physicians on his staff at the time, and you began to see in the case of some of the committees with jurisdiction in health areas that they had begun to identify folks on the policy side who were in fact practitioners, either physicians, nurses, or others. It began. It wasn’t complete, not as many as there are today, but there were some.

KOED: Do you think that Senator Dole’s own personal history played a role in that?

BURKE: Oh, no question. The fact that he had spent years in a hospital, had been cared for and benefitted from the healthcare system, and he often talks about that experience and what it was like. And I think that gave him a keen appreciation for what kind of help people needed and what the government could do and what people needed to do in their own right.

KOED: And when you entered his office, this would have been about 1977?

BURKE: Seventy-seven.

KOED: What was your title when you entered the office?

BURKE: I was a legislative assistant on the personal staff and went to work for him. He at the time was a junior member of the Finance Committee. He was ranking on the Health Subcommittee. Herman Talmadge was the chairman and he was new to that issue. It was not certainly one that he'd delved into deeply in the past in terms of the healthcare financing programs. So, I basically handled his committee work and health issues in the office.

KOED: And were there other women in the office at the time?

BURKE: There were a couple. Jo-Anne Coe was sort of the office manager, a longstanding staff person for the senator who'd been involved in his campaigns. She was not a policy person, but was an administrative person. On the policy side, the other woman of note was Mary Wheat. As in "wheat," Kansas wheat, who was from Kansas. Mary handled all of the agriculture and nutrition programs. Mary and I have remained friends to this day and she was the other sort of woman on the staff at the time.

KOED: Did she stay a Hill staffer for a long time?

BURKE: No, she didn't. She went back, went to law school, and moved home to Kansas and remained in Kansas, but she did all the food stamp work for the senator and all the child nutrition programs.

KOED: In the Senate community at-large, not just in Senator Dole's office, as a young female staffer, what kind of experience did you have there? Did you meet with other women and form bonds?

BURKE: You know, there weren't that many women on the professional staff at the time. There were no real organized efforts at the time for women to gather. I mean, one obviously knew people who were involved in similar situations. Perhaps my closest relationships were with the women who were staffing the members of the Finance Committee, and that became increasingly true over time, particularly when Dole became ranking and then chair. There were a number of women who handled issues on the social welfare side. Senator [Abraham] Ribicoff had a staff person who handled healthcare issues. There were others, and we tended to bond together because there were so few of us at the time and it was over issues and common interests.

KOED: And did you face, at this point in your career as a female staffer, did you face any barriers? Were you allowed to go on the floor if you needed to? Were there institutional barriers?

BURKE: The barriers were less gender-related, although we had dress code issues. You know, we couldn't go on the floor with pants, with no jackets, and things of that nature. There were no institutional barriers specifically as related to gender. I mean, we got on the floor if we needed to be. The rules for the floor were tight. You had to have a reason to be on there and so we were pretty cautious about that. It was more a sense of expectations that we weren't likely to be as senior, or as significant in the course of the discussions. Whether we were tough enough going into negotiations were always issues. Women at the time tended to be, with some exceptions, tended to be on the social welfare issues—healthcare issues, things of that nature. You tended not to see them in tax early on, for example, or trade. I think it was less institutional than it was just bias.

KOED: Cultural bias more than anything.

BURKE: Exactly.

KOED: Did you ever find yourself, or see other women, purposely taking a tough stance or something to try to gain the ground you needed, the respect you needed?

BURKE: You know, I don't think taking a stand that was unrelated to the importance of the issue or to the position their bosses were taking. I didn't in my experience find that women found themselves having to be more combative, more hostile, or more aggressive. You know, the women that I came to know were unbelievably talented and substantive, but knew that there was a bias against, or at least limitations in terms of people's expectations of us and whether we were strong enough. And, in my case, I was lucky that no one ever doubted Dole's point of view about the staff and how important he felt his staff were. And he backed us up. And that made all the difference in the world. No one questioned, if we spoke for the senator, that we weren't speaking for him, and he never undercut us, never went back on agreements we had made, and so there was never a reason for someone to think we were other than Senator Dole's staff.

KOED: Well, when you came into the Senate in 1977, how many female senators were there?

BURKE: None. Nancy Kassebaum arrived soon after.

KOED: And did that have any impact on the role of female staff, do you think?

BURKE: Well, we certainly didn't have a lot of role models. I mean there were not a lot of women that we experienced. Now, that changed. It began to change and you began to see a fair number of women. You saw more women in the House, obviously, than you did in the Senate, but it was clearly a male-dominated environment. The absence of women senators

certainly was obvious in terms of our dealings, but you know, Nancy was so remarkable and such a wonderful partner and she was from Kansas and we had a tremendous amount of exposure to her, but there's no question it was a male-dominated environment.

KOED: Tell me a little bit about the Finance Committee and working on the Finance Committee. What sort of issues were you involved in there and who were the people that you worked with?

BURKE: Boy, you know, I was lucky in so many ways. When I first went onto the committee staff, Russell Long was the chairman and Herman Talmadge was the subcommittee chairman, but it had just giants of the Senate. You know, Abe Ribicoff was on the committee, Jack Heinz was on the committee, John Chafee, Jack Danforth. I mean, really remarkable members who had just a keen appreciation for the institution, but also for the responsibility of the Finance Committee. The issues that Finance handles, everything from tax policy to Medicare, to Medicaid, Social Security, trade policy—I mean just the critical issues of the day. And they were a deliberative committee. They were largely bipartisan in many of the issues they handled. For many years, they had a single staff. They didn't have a Republican staff or a Democratic staff. That came sort of into the 70s. And so, they tended to historically work together.

It was, by nature of the members, relatively conservative. You might imagine that, given the senators, people like Russell Long, but the staffs worked closely together. Mike Stern was Russell Long's staff director at the time, a legend at the time just in the knowledge he had of the programs. Joe Humphries was one of his staff, similarly a legend in Social Security law and things of that nature and tax policy. It was a committee that was deeply immersed in very technical issues, in both the tax laws, Social Security law. So, Finance was a committee that was used to dealing with very complicated matters and the staff were highly skilled and expert in the subject matter. Carl Curtis was the ranking Republican when I first came onto Senator Dole's staff, but amazingly within probably 18 months or less of my time on the senator's staff, the two senators who preceded him in seniority—Carl Curtis and Senator [Clifford] Hansen—both retired and Dole became ranking. Stunning. Relatively junior member.

KOED: Pretty early in his career.

BURKE: Very early in his career and he suddenly had to build a staff for the Finance Committee. He took very seriously hiring and identifying folks who were subject matter experts. Bob Lighthizer, who is now our trade ambassador, was the chief of staff at first. Rod DeArment was his deputy. Rod went on to be [deputy secretary] of labor. Both of them had come out of Covington—Bob substantively expert in trade policy, Rod substantively expert in tax policy. I went over to the staff and we looked to hire and build a staff that were made up of subject matter experts. It was a remarkable experience. The issues were everything from the big tax reform

bills, the tax bill of '86 was one that we were obviously involved in, but there were all the Social Security Act changes, the bailout of Social Security, and Senator Dole and Senator [Patrick] Moynihan really led the effort when the Greenspan Commission had failed.¹ Tremendous changes in Medicare and Medicaid. All of the reconciliations—OBRA, COBRA, DEFRA, TEFRA—all those matters came before the Finance Committee in many respects and were handled by us. Some of the early trade work was handled by us. When Dole was ranking, then chairmen, and then when he moved to the leadership, our view was always Finance was the most important committee with the broadest jurisdiction and the most critical things to handle in terms of policy, particularly on the domestic side.

KOED: And Finance always has its fingers in every pie.

BURKE: Yes.

KOED: Every legislative pie. And also, contextually, this is a time period, the late '70s, when we're in an economic recession, so the fiscal issues and finance issues were even more important at that time.

BURKE: Were huge, were huge. Well, and you had the [Ronald] Reagan election. So you went through a period of time in the '80s, the early '80s, with Reagan essentially as a new president and Dole as chairman of the Finance Committee for a period of time, where the Reagan agenda was really to push a lot of those issues on the tax side and Social Security reform and things of that nature. And so, Finance was at the heart of much of that. And much of the work that was done—Dole was leader by the time we did the big tax bill—but it was a remarkable achievement. Dole became leader in '86, '85-'86, and the '86 [Tax Reform] Act, of course, was led by Senator [Robert] Packwood on the floor, but we had been in on the workings. I think some of the unique things were that there were periods of time when the leaders on both sides of the aisle, Senator [George] Mitchell and Senator Dole, were both on the Finance Committee, so you had the opportunity as well for the leadership to be critically involved in the substance as well as leading the effort on the floor. At the time the committees were critically important. It was rare that the leadership took it over. The details, the drafting of the bill, the management of the bill on the floor, were done at the committee level, and the leadership in this case also had roles as members of the committee, so I think that made a tremendous difference in terms of their substantive knowledge of the issues at hand.

KOED: And do you know, this is something that we hear a lot now, "Let's go back to regular order."

¹ The National Commission on Social Security Reform (known as the Greenspan Commission) was created in 1981 by Congress and the president to study and make recommendations regarding the short-term financial crisis facing Social Security at time.

BURKE: Right.

KOED: That was regular order at the time.

BURKE: It was. And what you found was the relationships, both between the Democrats and Republicans on the committee staff and the committee itself, but also with their House counterparts—whether it was Danny Rostenkowski or Charlie Rangel or Bill Archer on the Republican side, that relationship was also critical because we used to go to conference. We did markups in the traditional way, with a bazillion amendments, and then we'd take a bill to the floor, and we might be there for weeks and managing huge numbers of amendments, and then we'd go to conference.

KOED: And hold hearings.

BURKE: And we'd hold hearings. You know, anyone who would spend time in the Ways and Means Committee conference room on the House side—I mean all the things that came out of that, you know, *Gucci Gulch*, the book that was written at the time—you would see the lineup of people when we were doing things like tax bills, and it was in fact the process of marking it up in committee, considering the issues, moving it to the floor, taking amendments on the floor, and then going to conference.²

KOED: And it seems to me that under that system, by the time a bill got to the floor, the committee chairs, both ranking and chair, and the committee had a real vested interest in seeing the bill passed, because they had actually worked their way through the compromises.

BURKE: No question, no question. They worked their way through it. Now there were times, there's no question, that there were deeply partisan differences on a number of issues, and so you would often go to the floor with a divided caucus and a divided Senate, but the process of having to manage through the amendments at the committee level and then at the level of the Senate really did move that process along. And you were invested at that point in trying to get something done.

KOED: As the healthcare expert for Senator Dole's staff, did you also work with other members of the committee a lot?

BURKE: Oh, absolutely. We had 20 members of the Finance Committee at the time and the effort, with rare exception, was to come to closure on issues where there were deep differences. Healthcare was one of those issues where at the time we had members on both sides

² Jeffrey H. Birnbaum, Alan S. Murray, *Showdown at Gucci Gulch: Lawmakers, Lobbyists, and the Unlikely Triumph of Tax Reform* (New York: Vintage Books, 1988).

who were deeply knowledgeable about that issue. You think of people like John Chafee, who was remarkable. You think of people like Jack Heinz, who when he was with us was remarkable. Dave Durenberger, and at the same time Abe Ribicoff. You had Lloyd Bentsen. You had members over time who were also substantively, deeply knowledgeable about these issues and so you found that the members were deeply invested and interested and they had staff that could handle those issues. It certainly allowed us to delve into very complicated questions.

The Medicare/Medicaid laws at the time were not that old. I mean, they were only passed in '65, so in the '70s and '80s they were still relatively new. A lot of issues had arisen, but they were programs deeply ingrained in the American public, particularly Medicare and Social Security. And so, both sides had a vested interest in trying to find middle ground. You had a huge constituency of people who cared deeply about these questions. You had members on both sides who really were knowledgeable and were deeply invested. And you were up against people like Henry Waxman who was bettered by few in terms of his knowledge of particularly the Medicaid program. But you had others. As I say, Chafee and Heinz and Durenberger and Danforth and others, and on the Democratic side, equally as invested, Senator Mitchell, Senator [Thomas] Daschle, and others over time. Those were issues they dug into.

KOED: Well, 1981 is an important turning point, of course, because it's when the Republicans regain the majority, and it brings Bob Dole into new positions, but also helped to bring you into new positions. So, tell me first a little bit about what it's like to transition from minority to majority status.

BURKE: Oh boy. It was very interesting. I was with Senator Dole the night of the election and I'll never forget when he got a call from Senator [Howard] Baker saying essentially, "Bob, you know, you're the new chairman of the Senate Finance Committee. What do you think?" And Dole's reaction at the time was, "Who's going to tell Russell [Long]?" And, in fact, at the committee meeting, where they go around and they vote on the new chairman, they begin with one side and then go to the other side, and they went down the row and they said, "Mr. Chairman." Russell Long voted and he said, "I'm voting, you know, for my Chair." I mean, it was a very funny set of— He had been chairman for so long.

KOED: He'd been "Mr. Finance" for years.

BURKE: He had been "Mr. Finance" for so many years. You know, the thing about Senator Dole, and this was true with Russell Long but it was also true with Senator [Robert] Byrd over the years, the senators developed a remarkable relationship. He did so with Mitchell, he did so with Daschle. It was a mutual respect. It was a strategy of no surprises. "We're going to battle over issues but we're not going to surprise each other." I have a photograph in my office of Senator Dole and Senator Long, and it's a classic Long position where he's got his arm around a

member. This was so typical of Long, because he never—his view was you never speak out loud if you can whisper, and he was literally whispering into Dole’s ear about something. They had a very good relationship. Long was a conservative—a Democrat—but conservative.

KOED: Southern conservative Democrat.

BURKE: So they weren’t coming from radically different places in things like tax law, and even in some of the social welfare policies, but the transition from minority to majority is really remarkable in the sense that you were suddenly put in the position of having to drive the agenda. And suddenly put in the position of not being the minority, but rather to try to drive through an agreement. And he also was representing a president. Dole, just as was the case with Mitchell or anyone else, never lost sight of the fact that they were in fact the spokesperson for their president if they held the White House. Dole took that very seriously. While he may have agreed or disagreed with Reagan on any particular issue, or with [George H. W.] Bush on any particular issue, he was in fact the spokesperson for his president.

And so all of the ’80s work—again, tax issues, reform issues on the entitlement side—many of them came to the Finance Committee. And Dole felt strongly his responsibility. He may have disagreed with Dave Stockman or with Don Regan or Jim Baker, any of them over time, but he took that responsibility seriously. And he had a caucus to manage that had extremes. There was a middle and there was a left and a right. He had everybody from John Chafee to Jesse Helms. And so, he had that line to walk. It was something he took seriously.

KOED: I’ve sometimes wondered if having that diversity within the caucus, and that was there on the Democratic as well as the Republican side at the time—

BURKE: Yes, no question.

KOED: I wonder if that made coalition building easier or more difficult when you were trying to get legislation through?

BURKE: You know, I think it depends on the issue. I think it is never easy. You know, you have issues like budget act issues or the movement to the reform, and navigating between Mark Hatfield, who had very strong views on constitutional amendments to balance the budget, and you had activists on budget reform like Warren Rudman, God bless him. You had Jesse Helms and Bob Packwood. It’s interesting that the caucus found a way to come to closure. I’ll never forget when [Richard] Lugar challenged Helms over the [chairmanship] on the Foreign Relations Committee and Bob Packwood—the question, would Packwood go naturally with Lugar versus Helms? The caucus is remarkable in finding a way to manage that diversity and to allow members their opportunity as needed to essentially vote on issues they cared deeply about.

It doesn't make it easier—it's always easier if everybody thinks the same way—but I think it's a healthy process. In that caucus, over those years, that caucus would disagree violently on issues, but ultimately I felt Dole managed those relationships remarkably well.

KOED: Tell me about Dole as a leader, as a personality, both as leader at the committee and then when he became floor leader and how his style might compare to other leaders we had at the time.

BURKE: You know, it's hard to compare, because I didn't know any other leaders as well as I knew him, but classic Dole would be to walk in—and his greatest happiness was when he had meetings going on in every room—and he would basically say to people, “Work it out.” And he would bring them all together and put them in a room and basically say, “Work it out.” It wasn't that he didn't care about the details, because he did. It wasn't because he didn't understand them, because he did, but his goal was to essentially force them to come to closure rather than impose a point of view. And so, there was a never-ending sort of series of conversations with people around the table, where he would try to get them to basically drive to conclusion.

He also had the patience of Job. We would be in session at midnight, one o'clock, and he would have presented a consent agreement to Senator Byrd. You know, “Here's what we'd like to proceed.” Senator Byrd would go into his office and play the fiddle and the staff would all be pacing. And Dole—wasn't bothered. He would wait out however long it took for someone to come to agreement. He just was remarkably patient in dealing with people. It wasn't that he wasn't partisan, because he was, but he had a healthy respect for the people with whom he was working and knew they had to come to their own conclusion. He could be very persuasive when he needed to be. He could be very clear about his expectations and goals, but he basically counted on their willingness to sit down and come to an agreement. He and Mitchell had a wonderful relationship. He and Byrd had a great relationship. And again, it was a no-surprise. I mean, we're going to fight over issues. Dole knew how to use parliamentary procedure when he needed to and wasn't afraid to use it. He wasn't afraid to essentially set up a conflict, but he also was respectful of his colleagues and what they needed as well. But he also wasn't without—you know, pushing things to the edge. The night we brought Pete Wilson in on a gurney—³

KOED: Uh huh, a famous moment.

BURKE: Yeah, exactly. He was certainly prepared for the dramatic when he needed to be and for the surprise when he needed it and he was a master of that process, but he never

³ On May 10, 1985, Pete Wilson (R-CA), who had undergone an emergency appendectomy, rode by ambulance to the Capitol and was wheeled into the building on a stretcher. At 1:30 a.m., he entered the Senate Chamber in a wheelchair, wearing pajamas and a bathrobe and with an intravenous tube hanging by his side, to cast his vote in support of President Ronald Reagan's budget.

underestimated Senator Byrd and his knowledge of parliamentary procedure. Never underestimated the sort of needs of other members to essentially get a vote. Al D'Amato came to the floor one night and decided to talk about typewriters, and went for hours on a completely unrelated matter. It was because the last typewriter company in New York was about to close. You know, Dole just let those things go.

KOED: I also think about this—a little bit out of sequence—but the issue of Mark Hatfield and the balanced budget amendment where he backed Mark Hatfield's vote, even though it went against his agenda.

BURKE: Yes, absolutely, absolutely, because he knew that was something that Hatfield needed. I mean, there were bright lines, there weren't many, but there were bright lines against which people could not go or cross and he was respectful of that, with rare exception. Bill Armstrong had a view about the debt limit—hated the debt limit, hated having to pass a debt limit, violently opposed to the debt limit. Dole knew that and he knew that there were lines—Hatfield, balanced budget, Armstrong, debt limit, Packwood and reproductive rights—where you're never going to get them to cross that line.

KOED: Yeah, interesting. So, as the '80s move on and Bob Dole moves towards leadership position, how is your role changing in the early '80s?

BURKE: Bob Lighthizer went to USTR [United States Trade Representative] not long after we'd gone to the Finance Committee and Rod DeArment became staff director and asked me to become deputy staff director to essentially manage the social welfare side of the committee staff. So, I guess it would best be described as taking on additional responsibilities over time. I left the committee to go to graduate school with the expectation, in 1980, of taking a leave from the committee. Of course, I started in September and in November the Senate flipped. I was at Harvard at the time and Dole asked me to come back. And so I negotiated—Mike Dukakis was my advisor at Harvard—I went to Mike and said, "What do you think?" And Mike's reaction was, "You know, you need to go back, but we'll find a way for you to do that." And so I commuted to Harvard. I organized my classes, so on certain days I went back and forth and finished my degree. It took longer to do it, but I finished my degree.

KOED: That must have been incredibly challenging.

BURKE: I went back to the committee. Again, it was the opportunities that in part arose because of the transition Dole was making and that I would never have expected. I expected to spend a year with Dole and then go home and go back to graduate school. There was nothing planned. It's not as if I said I want to spend the rest of my life doing X. It was just his transitions and the opportunity that gave me as well. So I was very lucky. Again, it was the transitions from

Lighthizer to DeArment and then for Dole, from committee to essentially the leadership office, that gave me that opportunity.

KOED: So you became chief of staff in Dole's office first, correct? Or is it just the leadership office?

BURKE: No, no. That's just leadership. Rod and I went from the committee to the leader's office. Rod went over as chief, I went over as deputy into the leader's office, and then Rod left before the end of the first year to go back to Covington and I became chief of staff. So it was nine months into Dole being leader.

KOED: Did you have the title chief of staff?

BURKE: I did.

KOED: You did at that point, so they had switched to that title by that time. I noticed from the news coverage that there was a fair amount of criticism of you as chief of staff. The Senate and the press wasn't completely ready for a female chief of staff, I think, for the leader's office.

BURKE: Well, I think the issue was less about—I think that became part of it—but I think it was more substantive in terms of policy than it was just positionally. It was a period of time when there were a number of issues that arose that were of particular concern to the conservatives, and Dole was also beginning to position himself for one of his runs for president. It became particularly acute as he really stood up to run and they felt that there was the opportunity to go at him by going to me. It was known that I was not a conservative. It was known that on a particular set of issues—social welfare issues—that I was left of center. A lot of the press at the time and a lot of the newspaper articles really highlight those differences on welfare reform and on some of the reproductive rights issues. A lot of—I'll never forget, there were a whole series of articles where someone quoted somebody else quoting somebody else. It was John Fund at the [Wall Street] *Journal* and somebody else in the [Washington] *Post*, somebody else in the [New York] *Times*, and it was sort of the same kind of story which is, she's going to mislead Dole and take him off on a track.

KOED: There was a lot of that.

BURKE: Uh huh, tremendous amount.

KOED: I saw it from two angles. One is he's now an older man and he's being controlled by a younger woman.

BURKE: Right. Subject to the wiles of a young woman. Right.

KOED: Could he handle that? There was a lot of sexism in the coverage.

BURKE: There was. A tremendous amount of sexism. And it was laughable on the face of it, in part because Dole had always surrounded himself with strong women, his wife being an obvious one, but Nancy Kassebaum, his colleague, and Jo-Anne Coe, who had been with him for years. The suggestion that you could mislead Dole into taking a position that was antithetical to where he was philosophically was complete ignorance of Dole as an individual. I mean, Dole had very strong views, and if anything, all we could do was inform him and let him come to closure. The suggestion that he would be taken away from his basic philosophy because it was a female staff person was absurd on the face of it. I mean, he found it absurd.

KOED: Did you ever talk about it with him?

BURKE: You know, not directly. Not really his way of dealing with it. He would laugh about it or make comments about it. I did offer to resign. He declined. When interviewed, he said, “She’s my chief of staff and she does a good job.” A lot of his colleagues were similarly kind of unhappy about the attention to a staff person. Senator Byrd made some comments on the Senate floor about, if you want to fight with a member, fight with a member. You don’t go after their staff. Some of the other members [acted] similarly. I got a lovely note from Warren Rudman and from John McCain and others. I think they were offended that they’d go after staff when the fight was not with the staff. You know, even Phil Gramm was very kind at the time. So I think the members found that was over the line.

KOED: Yeah, at one point, there was even the *New York Times Magazine* cover story on you. So what was your reaction to that when you saw that?

BURKE: Yes. Jason DeParle, right. I think there was a concern on the part of the campaign at the time that I was going to become an impediment for Dole, and I think there was a lot of back conversation from some of the campaign folks. My view is staff should never be in the paper. Your name shouldn’t be in the paper, your picture shouldn’t be in the paper, and that’s not what our role is. That was always how I’d approach my position when I was at the committee staff and on the leadership staff. And so to suddenly be in the middle of this kerfuffle and pick up the newspaper every day—*Wall Street Journal* or whatever it was, *USA Today*—was at complete odds with how I wanted to be known and certainly how I thought the staff should behave. And so, when Jason DeParle approached me about doing the article, my instinct was no. I don’t need one more story. And then, I sort of came to the decision that at some point I had to be heard, because they were writing all these stories. No one ever spoke with me. John Fund never called to talk to me or any of the others. I decided this was an opportunity. We expected it to be a

relatively small piece and it was really his following me around for a day to figure out what I did. And it became, I think because of all the other press, a cover story. Never intended to be. And so when I picked up the Sunday *New York Times* and saw my photograph on the front of the magazine, I was stunned. I think Jason was stunned. And it was not a good experience. Jason did a lovely job, but my children saw it. They were very small. “Why did mommy have horns?” You know, in the picture.

KOED: They put horns on you [in the photo].

BURKE: Yeah, they put horns on me. It was very hard for my children. I mean they were young, but my son was old enough to kind of wonder what was this about? You come into work the next day and everybody’s sort of looking at you like, what’s this about and do we need this distraction, which is what I thought it was. So, it was a very uncomfortable period of time.

KOED: I can imagine that. How much of that do you think is related to the fact that you were a woman?

BURKE: Oh, a lot. And I’m normally not of the view that everything is gender-driven. But in this case, there’s no question in my mind. I don’t think they would’ve done it with a male staff director. I don’t think we would have seen it.

KOED: Today, Leader [Mitch] McConnell has a female chief of staff [Sharon Soderstrom], who is by his side all the time.

BURKE: Uh huh.

KOED: And yet, I almost never see her mentioned in the press.

BURKE: Good for her.

KOED: Right. I’m wondering what’s changed from that time to this.

BURKE: Well, you know, it’s an interesting question. Query whether it is where Dole was at the time—the issues around his running for president, the concern on the part of conservatives at the time. I think I was also higher profile in the sense that I handled a lot of policy and so I ended up being in the middle of a lot of the policy discussions where, you know, differences of opinion were more evident. I don’t know whether it’s that, because the nature of the job changes. Each leader has a different role for their chief of staff. In some cases, it’s administrative and policy in the sense of managing the staff. In other cases, it’s a substance policy position. In the case of Dole, it was substance as much as it was the management of the

team. Senator Dole also believed firmly in essentially allowing his staff and encouraging them and preparing them to speak in his behalf. And so we were often in situations where we were the conduit of information or of direction. I think every member does that differently. Some members really choose not to do that, but other members do. And I think depending on how the member feels [dictates] how exposed the staff become in terms of negotiations. The upside is, I was trusted by Senator Dole, which was a wonderful thing. I felt able to negotiate on his behalf and so I felt empowered to do that, and that was a wonderful part of my job. Every member approaches that differently, I think.

KOED: Yes, and I've always thought that the real hallmark of the quality of a chief of staff is how much respect they get from both sides of the aisle. And you had a lot of respect from both sides of the aisle.

BURKE: I was very lucky. Again, I give all that credit to Senator Dole, because members will take clues from other members. If a member essentially empowers you and supports you and backs you in what you do, and if another member sees that, they're more likely to see that as a value to them. And so I think a great deal of my success, to the extent it was my success, was because of the way Senator Dole positioned his staff. It was true of Rod DeArment when Rod was chief of staff. I think that's just generally been the case for Senator Dole.

KOED: When I read Senator Byrd's speech on the floor, when he said don't attack staffers, go to the members, I thought that was a very poignant moment, actually, because it was one of the most heartfelt.

BURKE: It was. And completely unexpected.

KOED: Was it?

BURKE: Completely unexpected. Senator Byrd was a remarkable person, but he's not somebody who normally would spend a lot of time with staff. I mean, he wasn't somebody that you'd hang out in the cloakroom with or even on the floor. He was a very formal person, and so it was completely unexpected.

KOED: Interesting. Well, talking about policy, one of the policy issues you played an important role in, and a somewhat high profile role in, was the healthcare debates of the early [President Bill] Clinton years. Tell me a little bit about that. At one point, you had two very strong women, yourself and Hillary Rodham Clinton, who were sort of spokespersons in a way, or at least leading figures in the debate. Tell me a little bit about that.

BURKE: Yes. You know, it was really quite interesting and quite remarkable, one, because she was so skilled and so knowledgeable. And I think she was in a remarkably difficult position being the spouse of the president and being the point person on a policy area. I think that's fraught with challenge and I don't know that I would recommend that to anyone. I mean, from the members' standpoint, it's a very awkward sort of situation. But she was remarkable in terms of her knowledge of detail and her desire to essentially come to closure. It was a very complicated set of issues. It was far more complex than—our current president would talk about how healthcare is a complicated matter—it was very complicated. And the way they organized it. It was a high profile issue in the campaign. It was a high profile issue in terms of their win, but then they took a year in this crazy tollgate process. As a result, they lost a lot of the momentum that they might have had.

Also, I think she depended upon folks like Ira Magaziner, who did not know the institution. She also had people who did, like Chris Jennings—very skilled. And I think she was not served well by the direction they perhaps gave her. Didn't get buy-in from the committees of jurisdiction. [Daniel] Rostenkowski, you know, was not going to be happy in that process. Even in the drafting, if you want to get something done, you have to be careful about what committees you choose to negotiate with. Well, she wasn't going to get a lot of satisfaction out of Pat Moynihan, and she was going to get that from Ted Kennedy, but the jurisdictional issues were huge. The differences between the Finance Committee and the HELP Committee—remarkable. So I thought she was very gifted, very knowledgeable. It was an interesting set of issues for all of us, given her position, but I thought badly managed by the Oval Office.

KOED: Describe your role in that process for me.

BURKE: Well, I was Senator Dole's principal spokesperson. I certainly had relationships with the White House staff and with Mrs. Clinton to the extent she was coming to the Hill, but also with my colleagues on the Finance Committee at the time—Lawrence O'Donnell, who was Moynihan's staff guy. Lawrence and I would have often offline, backdoor conversations about can't we come to closure? But you had a breach in the caucus on our side, so you had Senator Chafee and others who went off to try and develop an alternative, where Senator Dole was trying to hold the line for the rest of the caucus. So, it was difficult within our caucus as well as trying to figure out who was going to negotiate with the folks in the White House. There were a lot of hurt feelings, a lot of anxiety, and a lot of anger during the course of it. You know, we'd move forward and then everything would stop, and there would be efforts to sort of try and move it forward. Senator Chafee organized a series of member meetings that I would attend. But at the end of the day, it was clear that they weren't going to give Clinton the win. You had all the other issues with Clinton taking place. When we came into the fall, it was clear that nothing was going to go forward. I think it was a disappointment for Chafee and others who really wanted to get to closure, but I think Dole felt very strongly about the caucus and where the

caucus was. So, it was a very challenging time around an issue that a lot of people cared deeply about.

KOED: An issue also that sometimes would have been categorized as a female issue or women's issue. Did you see any tension there about the fact that we had two women who were sort of helping to manage this women's issue, or were we beyond that at that point?

BURKE: No. No, I think we were beyond that. I think you found that some of the more interesting issues—and Senator [Barbara] Mikulski was a remarkable participant in this issue—but how women had been diminished for years in terms of research policies and investments, some of the early NIH work. You know, she and some of her colleagues really highlighted how women had really become secondary in terms of a lot of our policies, but in the context of the healthcare reform debate, it really didn't break down to gender. I mean, the impacts were clearly going to be different. Remember, at the time, the "Harry and Louise" ads, and it was really the family issues and it was the middle-class questions. It was people that had coverage that didn't want to give up coverage, but it wasn't as much an issue of gender or gender equity. It certainly would've played out that way, but that's not how the issues were really put forward.

KOED: Well, this time period in the early '90s, early to mid-'90s, is an important point for gender issues in the Senate. One is, in 1992 we get the so-called Year of the Woman, and we go from two female senators to seven. And it's the first time we have more than two women serve simultaneously in the Senate.

BURKE: Right.

KOED: So as we're moving into '93, we have seven women senators. Do you think that made a difference in terms of how policy is designed?

BURKE: Oh, I don't have any doubt. I mean, there was Senator Kassebaum who led a lot of the efforts in the HELP [Health, Education, Labor, and Pensions] Committee to essentially look at some of these issues in healthcare. I don't think there's any question that the presence of women, when we talked about issues of social security, healthcare, armed services, made an enormous difference. Senator Mikulski, who had led a lot of the efforts at NIH in terms of research, those issues would not have been positioned had there not been women in the Senate. No doubt in my mind.

KOED: And did you see a correlating growth of female staff at this time?

BURKE: You know, the staff had begun to change over time. Some of the folks with whom I'm still very close friends—Lindy Paul, who became the staff director at the Joint

Committee on Taxation, who came off the Finance Committee staff, had worked for Packwood and led the tax policy staff. You began to see a number of women in a number of those slots. In the leadership, colleagues in the leadership offices, and for us as well, you began to see more women. So I think that had begun to change over time as more women were coming onto the staff, but you certainly saw it in that period of time. Absolutely.

KOED: Well another gender-related issue is the more difficult issue of the Packwood scandal at this time period.⁴ You had worked with Bob Packwood on Finance for many years. Tell me a little bit about him and what your experience had been with him.

BURKE: You know, at the time, it was a very sad situation in many respects. Actually, Senator Dole sent me to Senator Packwood's office to get his resignation letter. It was a very bittersweet moment. The behavior was appalling, can't be excused. I think that was a view held by both men and women, certainly among the staff that I knew. I knew a lot of people who worked for him, none of whom had been exposed to that kind of behavior, but we knew it to be true. I think, on the legislative side, he was brilliant. He was a remarkable negotiator, was remarkable in managing legislation and took the '86 bill to the floor. He was just masterful—knowledge of details, ability to stand up and speak in whole sentences on complicated matters—but personal behavior that was abhorrent. At the time, I think there was a lot of frustration that there was a sense that he was a target, in part, not because the behavior was acceptable in any way, but that other members had behaved poorly and had not been essentially targeted. And I think there was a bit of a sense of unfairness. You know, "Okay, he's wrong, he ought to be gone, but what about these other guys?"

KOED: We had John Tower, we'd had other issues of this prior to Packwood.

BURKE: Yes. Yes, and so I think, on the Republican side, there was some sense of that—they're going to go after him but you had similar behavior in your president and a whole host of other things. Again, I think women particularly found it abhorrent. You found it abhorrent that he would aggressively go after staff or after women, that it wasn't just an issue of alcohol or anything else, but that he was aggressively, essentially putting people in those positions. But I think the sadness was in the loss of a skilled legislator, frankly. So, he was wrong, did the wrong thing, should have been gone, but you look at what a loss it was on a substantive side.

⁴ In late 1992, claims of sexual harassment, abuse, and assault began to come forward against Oregon senator Robert W. Packwood, mostly from former female staffers and lobbyists. The Senate Ethics Committee investigated the charges, and based on the evidence, including the senator's own diary, which provided incriminating evidence and corroborated the allegations, recommended that Senator Packwood be expelled from the Senate. Packwood resigned his seat on October 1, 1995.

KOED: Yeah, as a staffer, as a member of the community, you see both sides of the story.

BURKE: But I had no issues with him. He was always very respectful.

KOED: Had there been rumors about his behavior or was it a total surprise?

BURKE: Some, but I think it was a surprise. The degree, the extent of it, at least for me, was a big surprise. I had never experienced it, personally, and so I always find those things, when they occur, to be surprising. So there had been some rumors, but not really obvious. I'd never seen behavior that I thought was odd. So he was always very proper and certainly in the committee, he was always very proper. But my exposure to him was in a committee setting, not in a personal office setting, so I wouldn't have seen it. But I think it was surprising. Again, appalling behavior, but the sad side is the loss of a gifted legislator.

KOED: Do you think it was in any way part of a broader culture that allowed that to happen—look the other way? Did you get any sense of that?

BURKE: Well, I think there is no question there was a culture. I think it was a period of time when that kind of behavior was more accepted. You know, the sly jokes, the off-color remarks, the language issues. It was a very male-dominated environment and you did see it. You saw it in how people were treated and the language that was used and jokes that were told. Again, I was lucky. I worked for somebody who didn't drink and didn't swear, and so he wouldn't have tolerated it if he'd seen it in our staff. If he'd seen any of our staff behaving that way, that would have been it. He had no tolerance for it. But other offices? No question. You would hear of how people were treated, differentials in pay, people getting promoted more quickly than others, title differences. You know, it's clear that there were huge differences and huge challenges. No question.

KOED: Now one of the questions I'd like to ask is about the title differences, because by the time we get into the 1980s, the administrative assistant position has morphed into the chief of staff position. But, it looks as though—I have anecdotal evidence—it looks as though the men were getting chief of staff titles before women, is that right?

BURKE: Oh, no question. No question. Yeah, no question. The speed with which certain people were promoted. It was office space. It was salary. All of those things reflected a real difference. No question.

KOED: Office space. I hadn't thought about that.

BURKE: Absolutely. Absolutely. No question. And it really isn't just a seniority issue, like who's been here longer. I mean, there was no question there was a gender issue.

KOED: Okay. Was there any sort of organized effort of women at the time to sort of fight back?

BURKE: No. No, you would find—as I would encourage women today—to find someone with whom they can talk, find a mentor, find someone who can help guide you in some of these issues. But there was no, at the time, organized effort. There were—it's interesting because it's still true today—there were a group of women, for example, who were tax policy folks, lobbyists and others, who gathered together as women because they were so unique in terms of the people doing tax policy. So there was a group of women who really focused on tax policy. There is even today yet a group of women on healthcare—Healthcare on Wednesday—which is made up of all the sort of women senior lobbyists and advocates in town who gather together to talk and support one another. So there have been groups like that that have been created as a result of a subject matter interest and the value of finding colleagues with similar interests. You know, allowing women to talk with one another, because the old boy network was so evident. Particularly, as I say, in tax and in some of those areas. I'm sure it's probably true in defense, I just don't know the area as well.

KOED: That's interesting. Well, for the time we have left today, let's talk a little bit about your role as you move into secretary of the Senate, which is interesting in several ways. One is that you remained as chief of staff and served as secretary at the same time. How did that happen? And why?

BURKE: I did. I chose to have it happen. Senator Dole needed—it was during a period of transition again—and he needed to bring somebody on to be secretary of the Senate. We were trying to figure out how to manage doing that and still keep things going. And so, he asked and I offered to hold the position, but I was not willing to give up being chief of staff. I said I'll do it temporarily until we can get somebody in place—it was Kelly Johnston who followed me—that we would find someone, identify someone who would be suitable for Senator Dole and with whom he could work. Jo-Anne [Coe] had moved to the campaign and so we needed to fill that slot. There was going to be a transition. At some point, Dole was going to ultimately decide what his plans were. So, I offered to do it, but I had no interest in leaving the chief position. So, I did both for a period of time.

KOED: Wow. That must've been quite a balancing act.

BURKE: It was interesting.

KOED: For one thing, they're two very different roles.

BURKE: They're two very different roles. It was a remarkable opportunity and a remarkable experience. It gave me—even after 19 years—a much better understanding of the infrastructure of the institution and a wonderful appreciation for the work of people that you don't normally kind of see that really run the place. I was very lucky. I had great folks in all the positions, whether it was the clerk's office or the parliamentarian or the historian, and so for me it was a wonderful opportunity. And it was a clear break. I could go down the hall—at the time, literally, the two offices were half a hall apart—I could go down the hall and worry about the legislative agenda on the floor, but then I could go back to my other office and worry about signing legislation and doing the budget preparation for arguing for the support of the secretary's office. It was a great experience. I really enjoyed it.

KOED: And in addition to the very different roles you played, in one role it's kind of a partisan role and the other one it's a strictly nonpartisan role. Was that a difficult balance to achieve?

BURKE: Right. Right. You know, I was lucky in that I had good relations on the other side of the aisle. And, in fact, one of the people who encouraged me to do it was Martha Pope, who had been Senator Mitchell's staff person and secretary of the Senate. Martha was the one who convinced me to do it. Martha said, "You'll get an unbelievable understanding of the institution. You can manage both for a relatively limited period of time, but it's an experience you ought not to miss." Again, I had great relations on the other side of the aisle with Senator Mitchell and others, and I think I went into it thinking it was going to be relatively short—six, eight months—but I think the members knew that they could come to me with issues and deal with them on the side of the secretary and not have a problem.

KOED: You mentioned Jo-Anne Coe and Martha Pope. Jo-Anne Coe had been the first female secretary, 1985. You were the third female secretary. Most of the secretaries since that time have been women.

BURKE: They have, yes.

KOED: Kelly Johnston, Gary Sisco are sort of the exceptions to the rule. From 1789 to 1985, it was all male and it's kind of switched, which is interesting in itself. Did you have any conversations with Jo-Anne Coe and Martha Pope about being a woman in that position and the responsibilities?

BURKE: More so with Martha than with Jo-Anne. I'd known Jo-Anne for years and she transitioned to the campaign. You know, I had a sense of what the job was. I'd been exposed to

Jo-Anne, obviously, in that role when Dole became leader and so it wasn't a big surprise. It wasn't as obvious as being about a woman in the office, interestingly enough. It was really about the opportunity to go from the legislative side to the administrative side. Jo-Anne had never been a policy person. She had always been the administrative person for Dole. Martha had some policy experience. So, it was really a question of the management of the two and how they worked. But, as I say, it was a great experience. I was very lucky.

KOED: You know, as I interview people who were here in the 1980s and knew Jo-Anne Coe, I have found that the men often say she was kind of difficult to work with, but the women tell me she was a breath of fresh air.

BURKE: Oh, interesting.

KOED: I have seen a real gender split in the reaction to her. It's been kind of interesting to see as I talk to people. Yeah.

BURKE: Huh, I would imagine. Yeah.

KOED: Well, one of the things we haven't talked about at all is the fact that through all of this, of course, you also have a family and young children. Tell me a little bit about how you struck that balance between family and professional life.

BURKE: I'll actually start with a funny story. I was relatively late getting married and relatively late having children. I have three children, all three of whom were born while I was chief of staff. I was at work until about 10:00 one night. Went home and at midnight essentially went into labor. Went into the hospital and my parents were at the house. I had gone to the hospital. It was their first and only grandchild. I'm an only child. The whole experience of being pregnant and being chief of staff was an odd one, because no one in recent history had been in that position. You know, I was obviously pregnant and TV had come to the Senate, so my mother would call and say, "You look exhausted. Go home and lay down." People would call into the cloakroom, "Is that woman still pregnant?" You know, members would look at me as if I was going to speak in tongue. It was quite amusing and interesting at times. But this night, I went home and went into labor, went into the hospital, and at about 7:30 or 8:00 in the morning, the phone rang. The senator was in Iowa doing an event in Iowa. My dad answered the phone. Senator Dole doesn't introduce himself, it's just "Hello" and you know who it is. My dad said, "Yes, Senator." "Is Sheila there?" "No, Senator, she's in labor. She's gone to the hospital." And there's this dead pause, and Senator Dole says, "Well, when will she be back?" I mean, it was one of those out-of-body experiences. But I literally went into labor and I had my staff guy sitting outside in the waiting room. I was doing memos, sending memos back and forth. You

know, it was a similar situation with all three of my kids, although all three of them were born during Senate recesses.

KOED: That's a master effort!

BURKE: Well, Dole could never understand—When I had two other women on my staff who became pregnant while we were there, neither of whom had children during the recess, he just said, “Well, what do you mean they're gone? We're in session.” Well, it's not something you can easily organize.

You know, the non-funny part of this is that there is no way not to be guilty about what you're doing. You're either guilty because you're at work, or you're guilty because you're home. I would routinely go home, put the kids to bed, and go back to work. And it's a very difficult juggling act. We were blessed that we could afford to have support—we had a young nanny who lived with us—but it was a horribly difficult balancing act, generally, and particularly when the kids were quite young. But even as they got older. I remember during the '96 campaign, I went on the road. I went on the plane with the senator and went back for a parent-teacher conference for one of my children. The teacher, it's a grammar school teacher in a good school and my daughter was doing very well, but basically she said, “Your daughter really misses you. When are you going to come home and take care of your children?” in the course of this parent-teacher conference. My husband sort of held me as I was about to go across the table at this woman.

So you're isolated in many respects, because there weren't many people going through the same experience. This is not a Senate issue, but I would go to parent-teacher things. I would always try to do ridiculous things to prove that I could do it. You know, show up with all the snacks or whatever it was. But there was kind of this division between the women who worked out of the home and women that worked in the home. So, you felt some kind of pressure there. And all the other moms would do whatever they do, and you knew you couldn't because you were basically at work. It made it very difficult. Again, it's a balancing act.

I remember the year we did the budget negotiations out at Andrews Air Force Base. We were out there just hours and hours and hours. We came home from Andrews and it was like 3:00 in the morning or something when we'd left Andrews and I realized I needed to get, I don't know, diapers or formula or something. And so I'm at the Georgetown Safeway, the “Social Safeway,” with my basket, thinking why does this not seem odd? It's 3:00 in the morning and I'm shopping for whatever I'm shopping for. So, it's a balancing act for any parent, male or female, to balance essentially the demands of a family and the demands of your work. We all deal with it differently. We all make different choices. And, you know, I went back very quickly. I didn't take two months off or three months off. I went back almost immediately. You look back and you wonder, did I do the right thing? You wonder if you did the right balance, which is kind

of a never-ending battle. But, again, these are very challenging jobs, as are many, and it's a balance all the time. Anyone who says, "No big deal"—it is a constant battle with yourself. Am I doing the right thing?

KOED: Everybody has the responsibility, but it's hard to imagine a man being asked, "When are you going to come home and take care of your children?" So there's a special guilt trip given to women.

BURKE: No question. No question. Part of the burden we put on ourselves, part of it society puts on us, but it's hard to imagine any male being asked that question. But then again, it's also the balance of how you work at home. I mean, who does what? It becomes a huge challenge.

KOED: And it's also interesting that it's often women who ask those questions.

BURKE: No question. Yeah.

KOED: Always puzzles me. I just want to get one little anecdote in here because you mentioned going on the floor while you were pregnant.

BURKE: Yes.

KOED: I've heard stories, anecdotal stories, of women being harshly criticized in the late '70s, early '80s, because they went onto the chamber floor while they were pregnant. Is there truth to that?

BURKE: Yes.

KOED: Okay. So, they just thought the condition made them unqualified?

BURKE: Or, you know, that something was going to happen, there was going to be some crisis, or that they were going to essentially not be able to respond. I think part of it is just ignorance. I mean if you think about it, you had a group of members, with rare exception, who had not been around a pregnant woman since their own wives had had children. So, if you assume you've got a room full of men, the closest thing is probably a daughter who's had a child. You know, that's not their experience. I mean it's not what they were exposed to in most cases—not all, but in most cases. And so I think they were uncomfortable with the obvious condition of people that are pregnant. I think it's a little fear of the unknown. You know, what's going to happen? What if something happens to her? What if she trips or falls or whatever?

KOED: Or goes into labor?

BURKE: Goes into labor or does something else. My guess is that will change if the average age drops. You know, people will be more familiar because they have spouses who are similarly employed and carrying a child. But I think part of that '60s, '70s, '80s was just the generation of people you were dealing with, many of whom could have been my father. In fact, most could have been my father. And so, I think they are naturally cautious. With the presence of more and more women in the Senate—You know, it's all the issues that come up. What do you do about women that want to breastfeed? What do you do with the circumstances of women wanting to have a child? I mean, I can remember bringing Daniel in—my son—when we were in a conference over a weekend, and bringing him in and having him crawling around in the front office in the leader's office, because that's what I needed to do. So, times are changing, but at the time it was very challenging.

KOED: Yes, and we're going to have to face some of these issues head-on, because Senator [Tammy] Duckworth is now pregnant and is raising issues. How does she vote when she's taking care of her child? What happens with breastfeeding issues? It might come to a bit of a head, this debate.

BURKE: Well, you know, that's actually an interesting question. The accommodations that one makes and how one deals with issues like breastfeeding. You know, whether you do it or don't do it, whether you pump at work or don't pump? Do you have private places or do you not? All of which have to be managed. No question. And I think it will become increasingly—Is she, I suspect, the first and only senator to be pregnant?

KOED: She's the first one to give birth while she's in office. We've had others who adopted children while in office, but not—

BURKE: Yes, who adopted children, but not actually delivered.

KOED: She is the first one to deliver while in office.

BURKE: Yeah. So, it's the accommodations that we make in any circumstances. In this case, a natural course of things. You know, poor Pete Wilson being hauled in and other members who've had particular challenges. You know, how do you accommodate for that? And how do you deal with it?

KOED: Yes. When Senator [Max] Cleland came, they had to put a ramp in and things like that. That's right.

BURKE: Exactly, exactly. You make those adjustments, but the institution turns slowly. I mean, the building of the birdcage in front of the staff seats [in the Senate Chamber]. You know, lots of things change in that respect. The availability of women's bathrooms in the Capitol was a big issue, particularly I know for the women senators going back into the lobby and back into those areas, those were male bastions. They had no place—

KOED: Yeah, it was senators only, which meant male only at that time.

BURKE: Senators only was male only, and they had to go upstairs to go to the bathroom. So, the institution has adjusted, albeit slowly.

KOED: Albeit slowly. We were working on a piece in the office yesterday about women's access to the Senate gym and the swimming pool and they're still battling issues for access to that. So, it's an ongoing story.

BURKE: Exactly. Exactly. And I have no concept of what it's like in the House, being an upper body person, but it's an interesting set of issues. Just the uniform and the outfits and what women could wear and couldn't wear. Again, very slow to respond. Very slow.

KOED: Well, let me finish today by just asking you a broad question about your years in the Senate. From the 1970s on has really been a time of great evolution for women in the workplace. During your Senate career, what sort of changes did you see that have been really major changes or milestones on that timeline of women in the workplace?

BURKE: One, that there are more. I think, certainly in the institution, there's a grudging acknowledgement of the value of women in senior positions, that it wasn't just the support staff, but it was actually the principals. I think the presence of more women in the Senate as members has had a big impact on that. The fact that you have women at the table for many of these very complicated questions and issues I think has made a huge difference both in the substance of what we do and the nature of the debate and how the debate is essentially brought forward. I think all those things are radically different than they were. I think it presents an opportunity for young women to see people as mentors and to see examples of people who essentially have broken through those barriers. I mean, literally, when I first came to the Senate in '77, there were just no senior women, just none. So, you really didn't have a place to go. You really didn't have someone to talk with. The rare exception was so rarified that it wouldn't have occurred to you. Women had gone on to be cabinet officers, although they were always the soft agencies. You know, Labor—

KOED: Education.

BURKE: Education, HHS, Office of Personnel Management. That's slowly changing. And so young women now have the opportunity to have seen people essentially progress on the basis of their knowledge and substance, not on the basis of who they knew. And I think that changes people's impressions. The fact that there are women who are spokespeople, who are essentially put forward as representing organizations or members, I think changes people's perceptions. So, I think it's just a world of difference from where it was in '77. And it's women who have achieved those results because of merit, not because of anything else, and the sense that there is a way to do that.

KOED: Great. I think that's the perfect place to end today.

BURKE: Good.

KOED: Thank you, Sheila! Thank you.

BURKE: You're welcome! Absolutely happy to do it. It's a great project, thank you!

KOED: It's a wonderful project.

BURKE: Fun questions!

KOED: It's been so much fun to do. We're well into it, but we have a long way to go. We're going to be continuing to interview through 2018 and 2019. Our goal is to have a really good collection that we can pull together into a web feature to commemorate the centennial of the women's suffrage amendment.

BURKE: Oh, good!

KOED: So, we're aiming to 2020 for that, but it's also giving us a great opportunity and excuse to connect with people like yourself so that we can then do oral history interviews about not just gender issues, but the rest of your career which we want to hear about as well.

BURKE: Right. Exactly.

KOED: It's given us a good way to get in the door with some people who have been a little reluctant—not that you've been reluctant, but we've had a few that we've tried to get in the past.

BURKE: But you know it's the issue that you touched on, which is that you don't want to, first, think that you did as well as you did because you're a woman. It's a much more

complicated set of circumstances. Two, the natural instinct of staff is not to be on the front of the story. I think that makes people sensitive. How you portray relationships? I mean, people are very careful about those relationships, which I think is important, but I can understand why some people would be anxious.

KOED: It's not a natural situation for people to be in the spotlight. So that's part of it.

BURKE: No, particularly if they're staff.

KOED: Particularly if they're staff. That's very true.

BURKE: Yeah. It's fraught with challenge. You don't ever want to be on the wrong side, but, again, I think I was so lucky to work for somebody like Dole.

KOED: Yes, I can understand that.

BURKE: The circumstances could have been so different, but even Dole was cautious about whether I was going to be tough enough to be staff director and asked that of people. Asked that of my predecessor, Rod DeArment. He asked Rod, "Do you think she is tough enough to be the chief?" You know, "Can she handle some of these issues?" And I think he was quite concerned at the outset that I wasn't going to be able to manage it and tolerate the sort of give and take. It took a while to build that relationship. Even though I'd been on his staff for a number of years, he had to be convinced that I could handle it. I think that's true of a lot of members. Again, it depends on who you work for. You know, I was really lucky. Guys that worked for Mitchell or Daschle or others—really lucky. Senator McConnell and others who are remarkably respectful of—Again, McConnell's a good example of having a wife that's very strong. He has surrounded himself with women. So, part of it is their own experience and how that experience essentially plays out. So, in the case of McConnell and Dole, we're both lucky that they are both people with strong surroundings and nobody questions whether they're able to make their own decisions. So, that's certainly a part of it.

KOED: What course did your children follow?

BURKE: I have two in graduate school, one of whom is getting her master's in public health at Columbia, and one of whom is getting a joint MBA/MFA at NYU. So, Sarah wants to do public health related kinds of issues. So, I guess she's a little bit in my footsteps. My daughter Katie, who's the one doing the joint degree, wants to do something in theater and movies on the production side, not on the acting side, so she'll get her MBA and the fine arts degree. And my son has followed in my husband's footsteps and is interested in supply chain management. My

husband owns a family-owned company that does manufacturing and Daniel's very interested in supply chain.

KOED: Yeah, interesting! Wonderful.

BURKE: Yeah, so all different things.

KOED: Are they married? Do you have any grandkids yet?

BURKE: Nope. No, no, no. They're all still in their twenties.

KOED: They're young.

BURKE: They're quite young, so no grandchildren, no spousal units. My husband lives in California, so he commutes. The kids are two in New York, Daniel is here, but goes back and forth, so we're kind of spread out.

KOED: Do you come to Washington pretty often?

BURKE: I live here.

KOED: Oh, you do!

BURKE: I live here. I commute to Harvard.

KOED: You commute to Harvard. Oh, I thought you were commuting down here.

BURKE: No, in fact, when I first left here, the Senate, and went to Harvard, I commuted. I went up every day. Flew back and forth. I came back fulltime when I was at the Smithsonian, but still commuted to teach, and now I'm at Senator Baker's law firm.

KOED: Right, I saw that.

BURKE: And I commute to Harvard to teach. In fact, I start back again Monday.

KOED: Wow, it's a busy schedule!

BURKE: Well, that and the damned weather. I mean, last weekend in Boston was just a nightmare. We had that horrible blizzard.

KOED: They must have 25 inches of snow.

BURKE: I was there Tuesday and we got 18 inches and blizzard winds and by Wednesday afternoon, basically the streets were clear but still snow on the sidewalks. It will be gone by Monday, but they're expecting another nor'easter next week.

KOED: Oh, are they. I didn't hear that. Oh dear.

BURKE: Right.

KOED: It's been rough. Yeah.

BURKE: It's been terrible.

[End of Interview]

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