

Women of the Senate Oral History Project

MARY L. LANDRIEU

United States Senator from Louisiana, 1997–2015

Oral History Interview
September 18, 2017

Senate Historical Office
Washington, D.C.

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


I, **Mary L. Landrieu**, agree to participate in the Women of the Senate Oral History Project and understand that the physical audio/video 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.

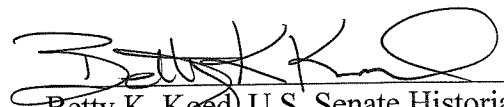
In consideration for my inclusion in this project, I understand I am entitled to receive a copy of the transcripts of my interviews. While I hereby relinquish any intellectual property rights or interests I may hold in the content of my interviews, I acknowledge that the Senate has the discretion to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

The Honorable

Dated:


July 24 2000

I, Betty K. Koed, accept the interview of the Honorable Mary L. Landrieu for inclusion into the Oral History Project of the U.S. Senate Historical Office.


Betty K. Koed U.S. Senate Historian
Dated: 8/13/2000

Introduction

Mary Landrieu grew up in Louisiana in a politically active family. Inspired by the women in her life and political pioneers like Representative Lindy Boggs in Louisiana, Landrieu began her career in public service by winning a race for the Louisiana House of Representatives in 1980. As a state representative, Landrieu was initially one of only three women in both houses of the state legislature. She was elected state treasurer in 1988 and after two terms ran for governor in 1995 against a crowded field. Though she fell short in the race for governor, the following year she prevailed in a campaign for the U.S. Senate, becoming the first woman in Louisiana to be elected to a full term in the Senate.

When Landrieu entered the Senate in 1997 she was one of only nine women serving at that time. She was the first Democratic woman to serve on the Armed Services Committee and went on to chair the Small Business Committee, the Energy Committee, and Appropriations Committee Subcommittee on Homeland Security. In her 18-year Senate career, Landrieu was a leader on a diverse range of issues, including energy policy, education reform, and child adoption.

About the Interviewer: Daniel S. Holt is the Assistant Historian at the U.S. Senate Historical Office. He earned a Ph.D. in U.S. history in 2008 from the University of Virginia. Prior to joining the Senate Historical Office, Dan was a historian at the Federal Judicial Center (FJC) from 2009 to 2016, where he edited volumes II and III of *Debates on the Federal Judiciary: A Documentary History*.

Women of the Senate Oral History Project
Senator Mary Landrieu
Louisiana (1997–2015)

September 18, 2017

DANIEL S. HOLT: Senator Mary Landrieu, it is wonderful for you to be here today for an interview for our oral history project on Women in the Senate. I'd like to start by asking, as a child and a young adult, did you have any women role models either in politics or outside of politics that influenced you?

MARY LANDRIEU: Well, I most certainly did. I had several wonderful women role models, but the thought of running for office didn't occur to me when I was young. It didn't happen until later. But when I was a child, of course, one of my role models was my wonderful mother, who still is a great role model for me. She is just an extraordinary woman. The only problem, or challenge in that regard, was that she was a "stay at home" mom with nine children. And I thought, "I cannot do that. I'm not that good." (laughs) So while I admire so many things about her, I just chose a different path. I love being a mom, have two children, but not nine, and not going to stay at home and do all of that. It is an amazing contribution she's made, not just to our family but to our community. Also my grandmother—both grandmothers—but particularly my grandmother on my father's side, my paternal grandmother. She was a little go getter. She was, first of all, sort-of self-educated—went through eighth grade, never made it through high school or college. But she started a little real estate business, when women were just getting into the field. She wouldn't have described herself as a feminist, but she most certainly was and kind of ruled the roost and was just a tremendous spirit and wonderful advocate for all good things and a wonderful support for me.

Then as I got older, of course, looking at women in public office, Lindy Boggs was just literally right next door. Lindy and Hale Boggs were very good friends of our family. Of course, Hale died when I was a child. And so I watched Lindy pick up that mantle from stay at home mom to becoming a force to be reckoned with here in the United States Congress. I just loved and admired her, and love and admire her to this day even in her passing. She was a role model for me and thousands and thousands of women—and men, might I say—because of her graciousness, her effectiveness.

Then later on in life Ann Richards became a tremendous friend and role model in the political sphere as well as Lindy. I met Ann when I was young. Of course, you can't meet Ann and ever forget the moment or the surroundings meeting her. She was just a force of life. We stayed very close friends until her last days. She was just an

extraordinary role model for me. Once I had decided to get into office and start moving up, Ann was always there for me.

HOLT: You had quite a career prior to joining the Senate. When did you begin to consider running for the Senate and why?

LANDRIEU: It wasn't until after college, which is a little unusual when you interview people around here. They say, "Oh, when I was born I knew this was what I want to do," (laughs), or "When I went into first grade, my teacher told me I would be president." It is kind of funny, some of us chuckle a lot about it. But women, as a general rule, didn't grow up with any of those thoughts, because in the time we grew up there were just so few women in public office. It would have been laughable to say, "When I grow up I want to be president of the United States," literally. So I don't think the idea dawned on me to get into public office, although my father was elected [to the Louisiana legislature] when I was five, so I grew up with him being in public office, and enjoying it, for the most part liking it. There are some parts you don't like, but there are some fabulous benefits—front row seats at Mardi Gras, riding in the limousine to your baseball games, and all those sorts of fun things as a kid. But seriously, once I got out of college and started just volunteering in a campaign for a neighborhood friend, that's when I was tapped by friends who were also working in that campaign and they said, "We are looking for a candidate. Would you consider running?" I was unemployed, didn't have anything to do (laughs). I was in between college and my first real job, so I thought, "Well, why not?" and so stepped out and went door to door by myself, rain, shine, sleet—no snow, in New Orleans—and got elected to the legislature. That's how it happened.

Then I didn't still think about higher office. It never dawned on me about the United States Senate. But I knew once I got elected and got there, even though I was only one of three women out of 150 in the [state] senate and house, single, very young, I felt like a fish out of water, but I felt like this water needed more fish like me. So I decided to stay with it then ended up in the Senate.

HOLT: To jump to running for the Senate, how did that campaign differ from your previous experience running for office? Being the first woman in Louisiana to run for a full term, how aware were you of that distinction? How much did gender play into your campaign?

LANDRIEU: I think gender played a part in the campaign, but I'll come back to that to kind of frame it a little bit. I was in the legislature for eight years in Louisiana, and one of three [women], then one of six, and always in the minority, always the odd person out. I was young, I was female, and I was from New Orleans. Sort of three strikes against you in the Louisiana, more conservative legislature. So I had a lesson by fire, you could say, toughened up. It was a successful two terms, I think, but I was always advocating for

women and children. I didn't just go to the legislature and pick up the agenda from the Chamber of Commerce and start reading it on the floor. That might have helped me to fit in a little bit better. But I wasn't there to fit in, I was there to change the world to fit us. So I was deemed a "radical" in my younger day. I don't think anyone in Washington would say that about me, but nonetheless that's what my nickname was in Louisiana. I had really gone through the fire for those first eight years.

Then I ran for state treasurer. Interestingly, there was a woman who had been state treasurer for 20 years, so it was not unusual for our state to elect a woman treasurer. In fact we had done so, she was quite popular and well liked—Marie Evelyn Parker. So when I chose to run for higher office, leaving the legislature, I chose that spot particularly—there were two or three openings I could have put my name in for, but I chose that exactly for that reason. People had already elected a woman, they might not be too uncomfortable voting for another one. Also I was, of course, extremely interested in the job, the duties and responsibilities. I remember thinking that. Because at the time you just couldn't waltz in and say, "I'm going to run." It was kind of a big deal if you were a woman. We'd never had a woman governor. We had not elected a woman ever, still to this day, attorney general. We had not had a woman lieutenant governor. I kind of picked that spot carefully, knowing at the time that I probably wanted to run for governor.

And so I got elected and happily was elected without opposition. I'd like to say I think that I did a fine job there and had a lot of accomplishments. So when I put my name in the hat for governor, that was a big deal, because we had never had a woman governor. It was a really, really tough and bruising race. But I have to say, I was the frontrunner up until the very end. I really don't think—I'm sure that being a woman, and a young woman—I was only 38 years old when I was running for governor—I'm sure it had an impact, but I don't know if it was the overriding reason for losing. It was both a burden and a blessing. In a big field you do stand out. There were 19 folks running. There was another woman in the race. It was an interesting dynamic at the time.

But anyway, when I ran for the Senate, I kind of had already been through all of that commotion. I actually found it in some ways a benefit, because again, you are kind of standing out in the crowd and your name recognition is good, people can obviously identify you, and in politics that's half the battle (laughs)—people knowing who you are and remembering what you're saying. So I can't say it was negative, but it was always a struggle, I guess, in the background.

HOLT: You arrive at the Senate in 1997. When you are setting up your office and hiring new staff, was the question of gender on your mind when you were filling out your staff?

LANDRIEU: Absolutely. The question of gender *and* race, because I was always such a strong advocate for women succeeding and helping other women. There were women—in my looking out of the windshield—that got to places ahead of me far faster, but they never quite reached back. I said, when I’m in that position I’m going to reach back and do everything I can.

So throughout my time in the Senate—starting, I hired a woman chief of staff, who in some ways, I think, her potential had been overlooked by some of the people who she had served with in the past. But it wasn’t overlooked by me. I think she was fabulous, terrific, the perfect person, the perfect balance of communication skills, and policy skills, and people skills, understanding the way Washington works. So I had a woman chief of staff. I had, when I was in the Senate, the only African American chief of staff. Because our state is 30 percent African American. I think in the same way, and sometimes in even more deliberate and harmful ways, the talent in the African American community is consistently overlooked. And I think the Senate still struggles with that.

And it wasn’t hard. I mean there was lots of talent. All you had to do was know where to look and you could find it. So we had a tremendous diverse mix. I think I had one of the first African American LDs [legislative director]. Definitely the only chief of staff African American in the Senate. I had, I think, one of the highest ranking and highest paid African American women working on my staff the whole time I was here as my office manager. I was very conscious of that. Not perfect, of course. I’m sure there might be others that had a better record. But it was a high priority in the Landrieu office.

HOLT: What were the first weeks and months like in general when you got to the Senate?

LANDRIEU: (laughs) I don’t think I want to tell anyone about it, because I’m not sure it would be that encouraging to anyone. (laughs) I was stuck up in an attic. I didn’t know where anything was. I mean, you have to understand I had spent my whole career really wanting to be the governor, and preparing myself in every way that you know how to do that. Studying and learning and spending time in the state capital—and knew all the 64 parishes well, and all the 66 school boards well, and knew all the levy boards well. I had really done my homework as many women do, not just thinking I could waltz in, and understood our education system and our healthcare system, and was completely, in my mind, completely ready to be the governor. Then I didn’t win. So when I became the senator, it took me a while to adjust to this new job and new role and really understanding what a senator does. And I still think I was very focused on my state, which is a good thing I believe—other people may have a different view—and I know that we are national and our office is national, and I could talk about a lot of things that I did for the whole country, but I always just had this special carve out in my heart

for Louisiana. I think it's because my plan might have been to be the governor, I think God had other plans and I ended up here.

I had never spent any time in Washington. In fact, I laugh—the only time I came, twice, was for Close Up. I was in the first class of Close Up, which is that wonderful organization that brings kids, rich and poor, and I was more to the poor side, here to Washington to spend a week, and that was it. So I got to see the Supreme Court once, the Senate once, House once. Then I was a princess in the Mardis Gras ball, which is another wonderful thing when you are a kid in Louisiana and you have the chance. A small group gets to come up for that. Then my father was secretary of HUD under President Carter and I came up for his inauguration, his swearing in. Other than that, I hadn't spent any time in D.C. and hadn't paid any attention, really, to the workings of the United States Senate.

But I had two amazing mentors. Well, Lindy Boggs was still here, so she was always one. Then John Breaux himself, who basically recruited me to run. And Senator Bennet Johnston. I was just with Bennet this week—we're still very good friends. I could not have asked for two more amazing men. Then Russell Long was still alive and he and his staff reached out to me. It was just, I got so much help from them and then worked hard and had a great staff and it just kind of worked.

HOLT: One of my questions was going to be which senators you found to be most helpful when you were a freshman senator, and I guess also on the flip side, if you were willing to say, the least helpful when you arrived?

LANDRIEU: Let me start with the most helpful, because I really do want to point out a few of the guys. Amazingly and strangely enough, Ted Stevens was a great helper to me. Very direct, straightforward, and could be very grumpy and dismissive. But he taught me a lot. He taught me how to toughen up, how to position yourself to make great deals. He was hugely instrumental in the creation of the World War II museum, he and Senator Inouye. Both were mentors of mine and both on the Appropriations Committee, which I was fortunate enough to get appointed to by Senator Daschle. I actually went out and campaigned for Ted when he was running for reelection. My party wasn't real happy, but I think that friendship sometimes exceeds loyalty to party, particularly when you are supporting someone who you think is an excellent senator. Alaska could never ever find a champion like Ted Stevens as long as they're a state. I know all the senators [from Alaska] and they're wonderful but Ted was quite amazing in that way.

Then Senator Domenici, who just passed away this week, was extremely endearing to many of us. Again, you wouldn't know that about Pete. He could be very gruff and have this sort of very tough exterior. But he had such a heart, such a heart for kids, an amazing father, all of his children, with his eight children and Nancy, just a

wonderful, wonderful human being. He took me under his wing. He was chairman of the Budget Committee, so that's good to have friends with the chairman of the Budget Committee. Also Senator [Frank] Murkowski from Alaska. He was my chairman as well on the Energy Committee. So I had very good friends that were Republicans. Johnny Isakson was always phenomenal.

Then on my side, of course, John Breaux and Bennett Johnston, and Tom Daschle, Harry Reid. I had so many friends.

But there were a few that were difficult. I don't mind saying, since he's passed, but Strom Thurmond was here and I just could not get over his still "eye for the girls," or "eye for women." It was something. Not that it ever was bothersome, because at the time he was so old, he was quite up in there in age. But it was a little—I just would say, it's just a different time. But honestly, I don't think I experienced any malicious or overt pushback for being a woman. Now, that doesn't mean that sometimes you weren't inadvertently ignored at a meeting, or your opinions were maybe taken as seriously as some others. You can read a lot about the psychology of that. But I never felt personally harmed in any way or not accepted.

That was not true of the Louisiana legislature. I lived every day with people saying, "Why are you here?" "This place isn't really built for you or your kind." But here, the people were much more sophisticated, much more educated. I think it was also a later time. I was elected in 1996.

HOLT: When you arrived there were seven other women senators, and then you and Susan Collins came in in the same year. Did you find a cohesive female caucus in the Senate? How was the relationship between women across party lines?

LANDRIEU: Absolutely, and a lot of that was because of Barbara Mikulski. I have to give Barbara a tremendous amount of credit for understanding what it felt like to be the first and the only one. Barbara will go down in history as one of the most extraordinary mentors of other women. She never forgot where she came from. Never forgot her immigrant Polish roots. Never forgot the neighborhood where she was from. And never forgot us. When I say "us," I mean all the women of the Senate. I was so lucky to get here when she was here. Susan Collins and I got here not only the same year, but the same way. Susan had run for governor and lost and so had I. Part of it is that it is hard still for the country—we saw this with Hillary Clinton's race for the presidency—they will elect you to the Senate, but electing you to the chief executive office of the state or the country is still a ceiling that hasn't been completely shattered, either at the national level or frankly at the state level.

So Susan and I bonded pretty quickly over that and remained good friends. Of course, Olympia Snowe was phenomenal, the other senator from Maine. But Barbara Mikulski kind of kept us all together for as long as she was here. In her honor we should all stay together. Because it was a great sisterhood. Kay Bailey Hutchison was a great partner—she was a senior Republican member along with Olympia Snowe—and they just made sure we had regular meals together, regular opportunities. We worked where we could together. Then when the Freedom Caucus showed itself, and the Tea Party—not the good part of the Tea Party, I’m sure there is a good part, but I’m talking about the part that says no compromise, don’t talk to the enemy, never discuss, no deals under any circumstance, that party that’s really not democratic at all and really very anti-American—before they raised their ugly head we were all pretty close and able to work across party lines. Then the pressure on the Republican women to stay toward the right wing of their party became almost unbearable for some of them. Partly, I think that’s one of the reasons Olympia Snowe stepped out of the Senate. I mean, she’ll have to write it in her book—maybe she already has and I just haven’t read it—but I know from observing it was always just so tough.

Women by nature, I think, are more collaborative. Just by our nature we talk more, which is a good thing when you are in public office. We can express ourselves naturally. That helps. So we could work things through and talk things through that I think men might find—generally, I know this is stereotyping, it’s not always true for everyone—but as a general rule, and there have been lots of books and studies written about it, women are just more collaborative. If left to our own devices, I don’t think there is an issue right now in the United States, literally, if left to our own devices—like if you took all the men—and you couldn’t do this because it’s against the law and our Constitution (laughs)—if you could wave a magic wand and just have all the women in the Senate and the House, oh my gosh! We could do a healthcare bill, a balanced budget, appropriate defense authorization probably in 10 minutes time. I’m exaggerating a little bit, but honestly I believe that. Not that men don’t have amazing gifts to offer, but when it comes to compromising, collaboration, listening, feeling empathetic, it’s our strong suit and I’m really proud of it.

HOLT: That’s great because it anticipates exactly what I wanted to ask you about. Thinking more generally about the Senate and your time here, especially in the late 1990s, how welcoming do you think the Senate as an institution was to the influx of women senators? Thinking not just about people, but also the environment of the Senate?

LANDRIEU: That’s a very good question. And it wasn’t that welcoming. Let me give you two examples. When new members come into the Senate, the spouses of the senators get Senate pins. Well, I’ll never forget the day that my husband was handed an official Senate pin for a spouse and it was a pin with pearls on it. That is a very good

indication of how the Senate as an institution was not at all ready for women to come. And it was almost like—I mean, we weren't offended by it, we chuckled about it, and we had the pin changed. I called and said, "Listen, I don't know if you all thought about this but this is just not appropriate." So the pin was changed.

We didn't have a bathroom, a facility. Barbara Mikulski, I think, when she first came, there wasn't a bathroom on the same floor of where we work most of the time. That had to be accommodated. I was in the Senate almost 18 years before we had a dressing room that was appropriate for women. It was finally built, where you could put your makeup on, have a place for your brush, just things that men and women do differently. This place was not built for us. It just wasn't, period, when the Capitol was built. And you always get that feeling no matter how many, until maybe there are a hundred of us in the Senate, you still get that feeling. The chairs are bigger; the chairs are built for men. The desks are built for men. The offices are built and sort of decorated for men. It's just something you get used to when you are a leader and you are pioneering, that all of the States capitols were built for men, this building was built for them and not for us. You just have to know that and handle it and when it comes up—The gym wasn't open to women. I guess they thought maybe we didn't need it, but we do. (laughs) So that was a whole big fight when I was here that several of my sisters led, which was great.

It is something to think about for the history. I hope the young women never have to even think this way because we want them to know that the Supreme Court was built for them to serve, that spacecraft are built for them to be astronauts, that skyscrapers are built so that they can go to the top floor and be the best architects in the world. But that was not the case for the past century. So maybe this next century, this 21st century, buildings and places of power will feel more comfortable, but they still don't feel like they were built for us.

HOLT: You served on [the Committees on] Armed Services, Appropriations, Agriculture, Energy and Natural Resources, Small Business—the two of which you served as chair. When you arrived, did you feel that being a female senator you were expected to take on particular issues? Do you think there was stereotyping in the kinds of legislative interests that you would have?

LANDRIEU: That's very interesting. I'd say it really started changing when I got here in 1997, in large measure thanks to Barbara Mikulski, who proved she could stand toe to toe, even though she was only 4'11", with any of them. But I didn't feel like that. I think my leaders, Tom Daschle and Harry Reid, would accept our committee [requests]. We wanted to be on Commerce, or Finance, or nontraditional women's committees—perfectly fine.

Now that wasn't true when I was a legislator back in the day of the 1970s and 1980s. Women were pigeonholed into the health and human services, education, etc., childcare policy. But when I got to the Senate I served on the Armed Services Committee. In fact I was the first Democratic woman ever appointed to the Armed Services Committee. But that leads you to understand that there was probably a prejudice prior to my being there, because no Democratic woman had ever been appointed in the history of our whole country. I mean, you think about all the wars we've fought, the billions of dollars that were spent, the gazillion decisions that were made, and Margaret Chase Smith was the only woman on that committee until I got there, and I got there in 1996. That's kind of incredulous. It really is hard to believe.

Then I got on the Appropriations Committee, and Senator [Dianne] Feinstein was on there, Senator [Patty] Murray was on there. That was a little bit more traditional for women. But the Energy Committee, which I ultimately chaired, was not a traditional place for women either, but because I'm from Louisiana and I requested it and Bennett Johnston, I think, called the leader and said, "You need to put her on the committee," I ended up getting a chance to get on and ended up chairing it.

Another interesting little piece of history is Olympia Snowe and I were the first two women ever in the history of the Senate to be a chair and ranking member of a committee at the same time. So if you go back through all the history and think about from the beginning of committees, all the men that served as chair and ranking member, it was not until after 1996 that Olympia and I became the first two women to sit next to each other at a dais.¹ I looked at her and said, "Can you believe it has taken this long?" She said, "No I cannot." That was a small committee—Small Business is not just about small business, it's about business, because small business is the business of America, but it was one of the lesser committees in the parlance of the Senate. But we were still very proud to be the chair and ranking member of that important committee. I think we both left quite—and particularly Olympia, because she served a long time on that committee—left quite a mark of wonderful things that I think the country is still benefitting from.

HOLT: In general, what were some of the legislative issues that were most important to you in your career?

LANDRIEU: Education and reforming our public schools was always something that was central to my being in public office. One of the reasons I ran for public office was to help improve, fix, transform—you can pick your word—public education. I just knew being from the city of New Orleans and observing the public school system around me that there were lots of challenges and problems, and for a relatively poor city like ours

¹ Senator Landrieu chaired the Committee on Small Business and Entrepreneurship and Senator Snowe served as ranking member from 2009 to 2013 (the 111th and 112th Congresses).

that it was the only way up and out and on, not just for poor African American kids and middle class white children as well, but particularly for the African American community that, without it, there was just no hope. We were a southern state, the oppression was tangible, and the only way that you could push through that was a good solid education. And we just did not have good strong, public schools.

Remember, in the south they were segregated by law, then they were grossly underfunded—on both the white system and the black system—and I could go on and on. So I came here ready to make change. I'm very proud that I did. I was one of the few Democrats that crossed over, there were 15 of us, that crossed over to support President [George W.] Bush in his call for accountability. I championed everything that President [William J.] Clinton and his team of centrist Democrats—from charter schools to innovation schools to not process but results—I think the transformation in public schools happening in America today, I'm very proud to have been the point of the spear, in the vanguard of those changes, both in Louisiana and here. There's a book coming out, David Osborne's book, which is very timely, just know he's released it, talking about reinventing America's public schools.² And the New Orleans transformation from being one of the worst public school systems to literally being one of the best—apples to apples. We're not better than a very wealthy all-white or majority county or city, but we'll put our kids, black and white, rich and poor, up against anybody just like us and we'll beat them on English and math today. That says a lot and I spent a lot of time on that.

I also spent a great deal of time on coastal restoration for my state. Of course, we are sinking into the Gulf of Mexico, I don't have to tell you what happened after Katrina and Rita—deadliest storms still, by far the deadliest, most impactful. Even Harvey and Irma, as terrible as both of them were, won't meet half of what Katrina and Rita was, it was just a horribly unfortunate event. But I led the restoration of the city, the restoration of Louisiana, restoration of some parts of Texas as well. I've loved working with counties in Texas on that and building great relations with Dick Shelby and Thad Cochran and working on the RESTORE Act, which came after the BP oil spill.³ So a lot of my time was spent on that and education.

Then my third piece was I was the leader of the adoption caucus. Our two children are adopted—the most amazing children—and it's been such a blessing to our family. My husband was adopted from an orphanage in Ireland when he was five. So I come at this issue quite naturally. Even before I married Frank, even before we had two

² David Osborne, *Reinventing America's Schools: Creating a 21st Century Education System*. (New York: Bloomsbury USA, 2017)

³ Resources and Ecosystems Sustainability, Tourist Opportunities and Revived Economies of the Gulf Coast States Act of 2012

children we adopted, I knew that this was what I wanted to do. I think it was because my aunt adopted two children when I was young and it had such an impression on me. I thought, what a wonderful thing to do. I could see what a blessing it was to her and what a great opportunity it was for these two children that I just loved it, loved the thought of it. So I've led it ever since and am still a leader in that area. I helped create the coalition here in D.C., over 200 members, it's very bipartisan. It's been fun to work with conservatives and Freedom Caucus members like Trent Franks and Tom DeLay and also Hillary Clinton, who was an amazing champion for these issues when she was here in the Senate. I think those will be part of the legacy that I'm most proud of: the coastal restoration efforts, the education reform efforts, the rebuilding after Katrina and Rita, and the work for the most vulnerable children in the world.

Actually the most vulnerable group of human beings in the world are small children without parents. And there are lots of horrible things that happen in this world to lots of people, but really bad things, really horrible things, happen to little children without parents, or teenagers without parents. I could go on and on with the horrors, both here in the United States and around the world. But it's something that I've loved working on with many, many members from both sides—Senator [Charles] Grassley, Senator [John] Rockefeller, Senator [Lincoln] Chafee was phenomenal, Senator [Mike] DeWine, Senator [Sam] Brownback. Those are members that I wouldn't vote with on almost anything else, but when it came to kids, when it came to fighting for orphans in the United States and around the world, I couldn't have asked for better friends.

HOLT: Do you recall specifically from experiences—you mentioned earlier about the ability of women legislators to communicate better, to collaborate and compromise better—do you have memories of one of the first times or other times working with another female senator on some legislation that stands out to you?

LANDRIEU: Yes, probably my work with Maria Cantwell and Lisa Murkowski on energy issues. I chaired that committee for only a year, but if I could have chaired it for longer—Senator Murkowski has done a great job—with Senator Murkowski with the lead Republican to my left and Senator Cantwell, the lead Democrat to my right, Senator [Ron] Wyden was there as well and he was phenomenal to work with, just phenomenal, but Lisa and Maria and I had such a deep respect and understanding for each other. I knew and understood that Maria represented Seattle, a much more liberal place than where Lisa and I would come from. But I knew the Democratic caucus well, like she did. Lisa and I both knew the Republican caucus pretty well. We just collaborated on a number of things. My time was short because I wasn't reelected, but I think would have been—so it never really came to fruition, but we had laid the groundwork over years of just trusting each other, knowing each other, laughing together, talking about our kids, our nieces, nephews. I had Maria and her nephew at Mardi Gras one year. I traveled out

to visit with Lisa and her family in Alaska. Those kinds of relationships are so important these days, to build that kind of possibility to trust each other to build the energy policy for the nation, or to decide the future of nuclear energy, or to lay the groundwork for wind or solar energy in this country. To think about how to transition from oil and gas, using gas as a bridge fuel, for what our nation needs to continue to be strong and have diverse sources of energy. It's just kind of a shame that it didn't work out. But Lisa has gone on to be a great chair—they are working right now, the both of them together, on an energy bill. So that would be something that I would point to.

(laughs) Maria and I passed the Small Business Jobs Act of 2010 and, oh my god, if you ever want to be in a foxhole, you want to be with her. We passed it against the will of both of our leaders and got it done. So that's a good example of when two women—like Harry Reid would just look at us together and shake his head and say, “Okay, I give up. What do you all want”? (laughs) Because he just knew that we weren't going to give up.

HOLT: That actually points to another question I was going to ask, which is about your relationship with Senate leadership over the years. How would you characterize it?

LANDRIEU: Well, I was very fortunate to have two very amazing leaders, Tom Daschle and Harry Reid, and I mean that. They could not have been more thoughtful, particularly Tom Daschle. First of all, getting to the United States Senate, I was in a runoff, as you know, and it was in December and all the other races were over. Had Tom Daschle not rallied the caucus and said, “We can win this seat”—think about it, it was in Louisiana in 1996. It wasn't a great year for us. The South had changed and was changing pretty radically. The thought that Tom Daschle really thought that I could win—Thank goodness I did, because I literally beat the first Tea Party person before there was a Tea Party. That was Woody Jenkins. I would lay in bed at night sometimes and just thank God, thank you that I won that race. Because after Katrina happened, I'm not sure [Jenkins] would have championed our recovery at all. I know that might sound harsh, but it's just the way he was, his philosophy of not having government involved in *anything*. He graduated from LSU law school and refused to take the bar because he didn't believe in licensing lawyers. He didn't really believe doctors should be licensed. It was a very right wing libertarian viewpoint that would have been disastrous for our state. Tom Daschle knew that and he put everything on the line. I think they raised me like a \$1 million in 24 hours, as I recall, literally, and helped me get to the Senate. So my introduction to leadership was nothing but positive, positive, positive.

And then I got on some great committees and felt like—and Tom was a feminist and so was Harry Reid. They were both very, Tom particularly, was very sensitive. And

Harry was very supportive and I was very fortunate to have good relations with Patty Murray, Chuck Schumer, Dick Durbin, who served in the leadership. Then as a centrist, now as a centrist, not as a woman, but as a centrist, I had to push my way in, because our caucus tends to lean left. And so Mark Pryor, myself, Mark Warner, we had to push hard to kind of get in the middle of our discussions because our party leans left at times. Which can be good, there are lots of good arguments on both sides, but when you are trying to move a country forward, I think the center is always a good place. I know there is a yellow line there. It does not mean that we're cowards. It means that we are willing to work with the other side and try to find common ground and I'll go to my grave thinking that is the best way to legislate, is finding common ground. In a country as diverse as ours, from little states to big states to very conservative to very liberal, two coasts, a center, the "fly-over" parts, the religious parts, the atheist parts. It's hard to find that common way forward and I think one of the great legacies, at least of my time in the Senate, was when the roll was called, I showed up for the centrist caucus coalitions and hopefully held some things together and moved the country forward.

HOLT: You served during such a transformative period, with this constant up and down of political winds during your time, as you said, coming from Louisiana, a state that was becoming redder. That must have been really difficult to navigate.

LANDRIEU: It was very hard, very tough. I would sit home, because I lived here in D.C. and also lived in the state, so I had two residences—an apartment in New Orleans and a house here—we raised our kids here.

That is another thing I want to say: I took a lot of flak for [that]. I never left Louisiana. My heart is still there, my family is still there. My spirit is there. But my children needed me and I wanted them with me when I became a senator. My son was 4, we adopted my daughter the first year I was in the Senate. So not only was I learning to be a senator but I was learning to be a mother, which is more important than being a senator. I wanted my kids close to me. And I wanted my husband close to me. There have been too many families that have broken up, or too many issues that have come up, even in our own delegation. I wanted our family to be close. I took tremendous heat in every election. "She's left us. She moved to Washington." I didn't leave anybody. I came to work. That's what people elected me to do, was to come to work. And work is here, voting almost every day. All the meetings are here, unless you have a field meeting, which is once in a blue moon. Your committee meetings are here. I came to work, which is what I was elected to do. But I was held to a much different standard and was pilloried in every election about it.

I never would do it differently. Very close to my children. Fixed them breakfast almost every morning, got them off to school, made them lunch, did the carpool, and then

came to work. Blanche [Lincoln] and I, who both raised little children while we were here—Patty Murray had that same experience. Not all the women—some of them weren't married, but the ones that did, some of their kids were older. There were a small group of us women who had small kids when we were in the Senate. We had our own little caucus. We had our own little (laughs) mental health group that we would have to talk to each other about how to balance all of that. But I wouldn't trade it for anything in the world. When I see women having small kids at home and traveling back, these members of Congress, it just breaks my heart. Because it's just not right to split families like that and split time just because people think your work is in the district. No, you're elected to Congress. Particularly in the Senate your work is in Washington. You're representing the state, but your work is here. Your committee meetings are here, your meetings are here. Your votes are here. Then you go home to the district to listen, to be involved, of course, with local things going on and keep up. But I think that's been one of the tough things. So for our family, it was an amazing experience and I would strongly recommend that if you have small children while serving in Congress, you keep them here. Everybody has to make their own [decisions]. My spouse came here, which I was also grateful for. Frank gave up his law practice of 20 years. He came here, started a whole new career. So it gets complicated in each family depending on what the spouses are doing. Sometimes the spouses can't pick up and leave, if they have a law practice or they are architects or real estate agents at home. But for us it worked out that Frank could come here. Blanche and her husband were here. We talked a lot about how important that was for us to be able to do both jobs that we felt called to do, being a mom and a wife and a senator, that we could do them well.

HOLT: Your kids made it all through school here?

LANDRIEU: Yes, all through school here, and now they are both getting through college, slowly but surely. They are 25 and 20, so they are still on the launch pad, but they went to school here. Mary Shannon actually graduated from high school in New Orleans. She ended up going back for a fluke. It was good thing, it was my high school, it was great that it worked out that way. But their elementary schools and for the most part high schools were here.

HOLT: Did you find that there were other men senators at the time that also had small children and that this issue came up with? Do you recall them talking about it?

LANDRIEU: They did, but not the same way. Ron Wyden was interesting, because Ron had small children and was divorced through that process and I know that he struggled a great deal. You can look at his history. And Joe Biden, when his wife died tragically. So there were a handful of male senators that felt the full force of being either single parents or the custodial parent. But for the most part the families here were more

traditional, where the husband did the Senate work and the wife was at home or the wife was working but also able. There were a few families—Senator [Evan] Bayh had small children, so he and Susan had to struggle with that as well. So there were a few of us that talked about it, but Blanche and I would just look at each other and roll our eyes, like “Oh, my gosh.” Because we were still doing the cooking. My husband was fabulous and did the carpool and all of that, but it still falls basically to the woman in so many places to be the emotional support for the family. And it takes a lot of effort because you are also the emotional support at work, and the emotional support for your state, and the emotional support for your staff, and the emotional support for yourself. There is a lot ground to cover with that. It’s important, and sometimes I most certainly would run out of gas. But you get recharged and you go on. We’re not the first generation of women that have done this, but we are the first generation of women that have been in the Senate doing it. There have been other tough jobs that people have had all through history, but we were the first generation that did it here.

HOLT: You hinted a little bit about press coverage during campaigns, but how about during your time in the Senate in general. What did you think about the press coverage you received during your Senate career?

LANDRIEU: I think it was generally pretty fair, but I still think that all the talk and chatter about the way you look, what you wear, it was always so focused on the women and not at all on the men. It was always something in your mind that you just had to just push through. Sometimes it could be harsh, sometimes helpful, and sometimes just downright silly. But it’s just the nature of things. It will change. It’s not the way it should be, it’s the nature of the way it is now, not the right way, just the way it is. Over time as more women are in executive [positions] running big companies, when the first woman becomes president—Angela Merkel has had a tremendous impact in the world in that way. She’s just been phenomenal. Margaret Thatcher from the more conservative side was also helpful to give people in the world a view of a powerful woman who wasn’t also a runway model. It’s just important for people to understand that leadership comes in all sorts of different sizes, shapes, and colors, and what’s really important is a person’s heart and their brain and their intellectual capacity, their ability to analyze and cooperate and move things forward. So Hillary Clinton shattered so many glass ceilings and I hope that she will continue to do so. In my view, Sarah Palin was a little bit of a detour, but we’ll leave that there.

So many women, both Republicans and Democrats, conservatives and liberals, with the intellectual capacity to lead, which eliminates a few, but with most the intellectual capacity to lead have really done a great service to the world. And I might say, so have women athletes and women astronauts. It really just takes your breath away still, from my breath, when I see a woman four star general. I think this is amazing. Even

when I think in my mind of a general, I'm always picturing a tall good looking white guy. I'm not picturing a tall good looking African American guy or a short good looking or not so good looking woman. It's just the way the stereotypes are in your mind and you've got to fight that. So when I had women coming in that were four star generals to my office, it would take my own breath away. It's just a matter of the world becoming more accustomed to seeing those visuals and thank goodness our kids now, the one many good things about the Internet, but one of them is that kids really do see a lot more variety of different images than what we saw—well, you're a lot younger than I am—but what I saw growing up. So millennials are much more open to this concept than my generation was.

HOLT: The durability of those images is really spot on in terms of the challenge, I think that's very true. You've actually already talked a lot about what I was going to ask you about, which is the balancing of family in the Senate. In general, what surprised you most about being a senator? You talked a little bit about how you weren't sure what to expect when you got here. What surprised you the most?

LANDRIEU: Let me say one more thing about the family issue. This is something Blanche and I would laugh about all the time. We'd always look around and say if 100 of these seats were filled by women, we would definitely have a dinner break every night. Because that is for any woman, any woman in America working anywhere, the hardest time is between four o'clock in the afternoon, or three o'clock when your kids get out of school, and seven o'clock at night until you have dinner and sort of settle them down. And so those hours between four and seven are priceless to women everywhere. The world doesn't recognize that. The world just goes about their business like those hours between four and seven are just like the hours between eight o'clock in the morning and noon. Not true. You'll see, it's like a bewitching hour. Women are all over scrambling to get their kids, get them home, find someone to get them, get them home, get them safe, get them from school. And those are women that are working now daylight hours. There's a whole other schedule that goes on for women that have to work the night shift, but I'm just talking about the bulk of Americans that work days. And you would think that the Senate was less lollygagging around. Blanche and I would look at each other every day and say, "What are we doing?" To Trent Lott's credit, because remember, and Trent Lott should go down in history for this, he loved to have dinner with his wife every night. I think that is kind of wonderful. And very romantic. And I think very stable for a family. So Trent would say he wanted to have dinner, we'd have a dinner break. We loved that. We could go home, fix dinner, serve dinner, clean up dinner, and come back and work.

When you say, does this place function for women, no. But I don't think any big companies do that either. They just don't think of it that way. Women think about their

life not in component pieces. It's one life. That's the way we think. It's one life. It's your life at work, your life at home, your life with your spouse, your kids, your work, it's one. For men, it's been conveniently separated for them and organized so that they can do it. It's never been organized for us. You just have to kind of make it work. Which is why we fought so hard for daycare for poor women and middle class women, to be able to support, have that backup at home, why we fight hard for neighborhood schools and transportation for kids, and meals at school—anything that would help the women of our country manage that one life and all the moving parts of it. Not to mention the care that you have to give for your neighbors, the care that you have to give for your elderly relatives, the work that you want to do through your church. You could go on and on and on. Work built by an industrial age kind of forgot about the women. I think in agricultural times it was clear that women were a part of that for any number of reasons. The industrial age kind of forgot about it. Maybe in this new tech age we can remember that you can't hold up the sky with half the hands, you need them all. Maybe the world can organize itself a little more efficiently to accomplish that and not put so much strain on the women who are struggling to do it every day.

HOLT: Earlier you mentioned being the emotional support in so many different places. The thing that stands out to me, especially in my household, is the mental organization aspect, too. As a senator you are running an office of many people and then you're also the one at home who is running the home.

LANDRIEU: Exactly. That is exactly it. It's the mental gymnastics that you have to go through when you wake up every day. There are so many moving parts. Husbands are good. When you say, "Could you do this?" and they usually do it, not always. My husband learned to be exceptional. He *learned*. It was very difficult at first, but he learned, and then we both sort of learned this new kind of dance where he would take a little bit more responsibility, like to get them to the doctor. I hate to say it, but I would forget they had to go to the doctor. So Frank started doing more of that. But in most families, particularly my husband had lots of flexibility, etc., but in most families you are exactly correct. The woman just has a hundred different moving parts every day. And the mental and emotional strain is what is the problem, as well as the physical stress. But it's really just the emotional and mental strain of having to keep so many different moving things. Like I had to prepare a speech the next morning but I'd also have to help Mary Shannon with her homework, and I'm sitting there trying to focus on her homework and I'm thinking I have to speak before 500 people in the morning and I don't have the first note written. It was tough. But you know what? After a while we just kind of counseled each other like this and said, "It's just not going to be perfect. That's all there is to it." We are not going to be the most prepared senator. We're not going to give the greatest quotes on the floor because we don't have time to do that. But you know what, we're going to do it as well as we can. And that's what we did. I just kind of let the guilt go

away. I would recommend, I know this sounds more like a psychology session than a history, but for women it's important to talk about these things. I just let it go. You cannot be the perfect CEO, the perfect wife. You can be good at all those things. If you are going to try to be perfect, don't try to do too many things at one time. You can be good, you can be solid, you can do your great job for your state and I would really recommend to any woman to step up and lean in.

HOLT: Aside from getting better at it, do you think it changed over the course of your career, in terms of dealing with those challenges?

LANDRIEU: Yes, it got easier. It got easier and easier, and I got better and better at doing it. But also there were more women that were here and there were more women saying, "Hello, we'd like a dinner break." Or "We need this, we need that." The gym opened, it was just—More women make it better. At one point we finally, finally at one point, had at least one woman on every committee in the United States Senate. That was a breakthrough. Because if you think about it, for 200 years that committee met and didn't have one woman that could speak, not one. Unless she was called on and then she was given a time limit. So when you're building big policy and big bills, it's hard to give your opinion in 30 seconds as a witness. Or you can submit one minute of testimony. When you are a senator, nobody can turn your mic off, and that makes a big difference. Once we got one woman on every committee, then you could really start feeling and seeing that change. It was subtle in some instances, very direct in others.

I'll give you a very direct one: sexual abuse in the military. With Claire McCaskill and Kirsten Gillibrand, when they were on the Armed Services Committee and I think still are, that issue came front and center. Everyone was asking them, not what the men thought, it was just, "What do you think, Senator Gillibrand?" "What do you think, Senator McCaskill?" And their views held sway. Think about it. If they weren't on the committee and no woman was on the committee, how would that issue have been handled? Would it have gotten the attention that it got? I don't think so. Honestly, I just don't think so. You could go back and see the way all sorts of—how rape was not even considered a crime until just recently, spousal rape is still a tough topic to talk about. Daycare was not—it was a women's issue, but it's an economic issue for the United States of America, like the whole country. The GDP depends on women being able to work. It is not a soft, little side issue. It is a central economic question for the nation. No one would look at it that way even when they started talking about it and saying, "We might consider it." Nobody still really talks about it that way. But we know that. The women know that. And we bring that kind of passion to it.

So it's gotten better, it's gotten a lot better but until we get clearly a third to 40 percent—a tipping point. There's books been written about it, a great one, you can read

it, but there is a tipping point—we are not at the tipping point yet. But we are getting close. Once it hits, you'll be able to see it and feel it and hopefully the world will be better because of it. We're not quite there yet. Maybe it's 40 percent. But we started with one woman on every committee. That's a start.

HOLT: Thank you very much for sitting down with us today. This was wonderful interview and an honor to talk to you.

LANDRIEU: Thank you very much.

Index

- Adoption caucus, 10–11
African American staff members, 4
Agriculture, Nutrition, and Forestry Committee, Senate, 8
Appropriations Committee, Senate, 8, 9
Armed Services Committee, Senate, 8, 9, 18
Bayh, Evan (D-IN), 15
Biden, Joseph R., Jr. "Joe" (D-DE), 14
Boggs, Corinne Claiborne "Lindy," 1, 5
Boggs, Thomas Hale, Sr., 1
Breaux, John B. (D-LA), 5, 6
Brownback, Sam D. (R-KS), 11
Bush, George W., 10
Campaign for Senate, 2, 12
Cantwell, Maria E. (D-WA), 11, 12
Capitol Building, Washington, D.C., 8
Chafee, Lincoln D. (R-RI), 11
Childcare, 17, 18
Clinton, Hillary Rodham (D-NY), 6, 11, 15
Clinton, William Jefferson "Bill," 10
Close Up Foundation, 5
Cochran, W. Thad (R-MS), 10
Collins, Susan M. (R-ME), 6–7
Daschle, Thomas A. (D-SD), 6, 8, 12
DeLay, Thomas D., 11
DeWine, Michael (R-OH), 11
Domenici, Pete V. (R-NM), 5
Durbin, Richard J. (D-IL), 13
Energy and Natural Resources Committee, Senate, 8, 9, 11–12
Feinstein, Dianne (D-CA), 9
Franks, Trent, 11
Gender/gender bias, 2–4, 8–9, 15–19
Gillibrand, Kirsten (D-NY), 18
Grassley, Charles E. (R-IA), 11
Hurricane Katrina, 10, 12
Hurricane Rita, 10
Hutchison, Kay Bailey (R-TX), 7
Inouye, Daniel K. (D-HI), 5
Isakson, Johnny (R-GA), 6
Jenkins, Woody, 12
Johnston, J. Bennett, Jr. (D-LA), 5, 6, 9
Landrieu, Edwin "Moon," 5
Lincoln, Blanche L. (D-AR), 14, 15, 16
Long, Russell B. (D-LA), 5
Lott, C. Trent (R-MS), 16
McCaskill, Claire (D-MO), 18
Mikulski, Barbara A. (D-MD), 6–7, 8
Murkowski, Frank H. (R-AK), 6
Murkowski, Lisa (R-AK), 12
Murray, Patty (D-WA), 9, 13, 14
Parker, Marie Evelyn, 3
Press, 15–16
Pryor, Mark (D-AR), 13
Race/racism, 4
Reid, Harry (D-NV), 6, 8, 12
RESTORE Act (Resources and Ecosystems Sustainability, Tourist Opportunities and Revived Economies of the Gulf Coast States Act of 2012), 10
Richards, Dorothy Ann, 1
Rockefeller, John D., IV "Jay" (D-WV), 11
Schumer, Charles E. (D-NY), 13
Sexual harassment, 6
 in the military, 18
Shelby, Richard C. (D/R-AL), 10
Small Business and Entrepreneurship Committee, Senate, 9
Small Business Jobs Act of 2010, 12
Smith, Margaret Chase (R-ME), 9
Snellings, Frank, 14, 17
Snowe, Olympia J. (R-ME), 7, 9
Spouses, Senate, 7–8
Stevens, Theodore F. "Ted" (R-AK), 5
Tea Party, 7, 12
Thurmond, J. Strom (D/R-SC), 6
Warner, Mark R. (D-VA), 13
Women in the Senate, experiences of, 6–9, 13–15, 16, 18–19
Work-life balance, 13–15, 16–18
Wyden, Ronald L. (D-OR), 11, 14