

**Women of the Senate Oral History Project**

**CAROL MOSELEY BRAUN**  
**United States Senator from Illinois, 1993–1999**

Oral History Interview  
September 22, 2017

Senate Historical Office  
Washington, D.C.

## Introduction

Born in Chicago in 1947, Carol Moseley Braun came of age in the midst of the civil rights movement and pursued a career in law. She joined the United States Attorney's Office in Chicago before being elected to the Illinois state legislature in 1978, where she served for 10 years. In 1988 she became the first African American to be elected to a Cook County executive position, as Recorder of Deeds. In 1992 she defeated both the Democratic incumbent and the Republican challenger for a seat in the U.S. Senate, becoming the first female senator from Illinois and the first African American woman to serve in the Senate. Senator Moseley Braun sponsored progressive education reform bills, campaigned for gun control, and fought against the enduring racism in American society.

*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, Senator, for joining us today. Happy to have you here.

**SENATOR CAROL MOSELEY BRAUN:** It's my pleasure.

**KOED:** It's wonderful for us to be doing the Women of the Senate oral history project and to have you as part of this story.

**MOSELEY BRAUN:** Well, I've been delighted to participate and thank you very much for inviting me back.

**KOED:** Thank you very much. I thought we would cover a couple of stories that we've covered before just because I'd like to have them on camera, and then I'm going to ask you some questions to take us into some new territory. You mentioned before that you had a few important female role models in your early life, and I wondered if you'd tell me a little bit about a couple of those.

**MOSELEY BRAUN:** Well, starting with my mother, who worked very hard and showed me that you can have "work/life balance," is what they're calling it these days. She gave us all the attention that we ever expected or needed. And she was always there, always. And yet she held down what had to have been very demanding jobs. She was a medical technician. I think I told you that. And she would do that and work what she called "on call," depending on what the hospital needs were. So she managed to work it out and she was a real role model. She made the point to me, "You do the best job you can where you're planted." And for her, that was her ethos, that you just did—that whatever you did was a reflection of who you are, and you do the best job you can.

So that was role model number one. The other was, I think I mentioned to you, professional role models, there were people like Jewel Lafontant, I think I mentioned her before, who was this very elegant, very dynamic woman, who actually was an ambassador to the United Nations and deputy solicitor general, I think, was her other title. She was a lawyer, and she was just phenomenal. Someone to look up to and to say, "I want to be like that when I grow up." So those were two right there. I'm sure I could think of others if given a minute. I forget who I told you in the first interview.

**KOED:** Those are two important ones. I remember you mentioned Judge Sampson, was another you mentioned.

**MOSELEY BRAUN:** Yes, Eda Sampson, yes. Again, another woman who was a lawyer and a judge, and she was kind of the antithesis of Jewel in that Eda Sampson was kind of a gruff, you know, whatever, but (laughs)—whereas, Jewel was very elegant and very movie starish. And then there was—I hope I mentioned Arnita Boswell. Arnita was—actually, she was the sister of Whitney Young. And she was, again, a club woman who was involved with the community on every level, and she would have teas and whatnot and invite us to her house. We’d sit around with her and she’d tell us—counsel us. And I wish I had listened more as a point, but the fact is she took us under wing. And I say “us” meaning not just me but other of my girlfriends. And so she was wonderful and reaching back, and for young women, to give us some direction. So those are three right off the top of my head.

**KOED:** And we didn’t mention before, but I would be interested in hearing why you decided to go into law.

**MOSELEY BRAUN:** My father. I mean, he was a frustrated lawyer. He was in law enforcement, I think I mentioned that, but he also played several instruments. And I think he had always wanted to be a lawyer, but never went to, and/or finished, law school. I don’t know which it was, but I think he never finished law school. I think he did enroll at one point. But he just kept pressing me. I wanted to be an art historian. I think I told you that. And he told me art historians don’t make—you can’t make a living as an art historian. In hindsight, he was wrong. (laughs) But based on where he was at the time, and the times, you know, he was probably right. And so he was looking out for me. And he counseled that I go into the law because I could make a living as a lawyer.

**KOED:** And you chose the University of Chicago Law School, correct?

**MOSELEY BRAUN:** Yes, and kind of it chose me.

**KOED:** It chose you, yeah.

**MOSELEY BRAUN:** It was the school in the neighborhood, if you will. So I was walking down the street, in fact, one day, and this friend of mine said he was going to take the LSAT. I didn’t know what that was. I said, “What’s the LSAT?” He explained what it was, which is the law school entrance exam. And so I said, “Hmm, I think I’ll do that, too.” Well the university was right there, and we were walking down the street. So we went and signed up for

the LSAT. I mean, that's literally how it happened. So I was like, okay, I'll go to—this school's fine. (both laugh)

**KOED:** It wasn't years of planning that got you there.

**MOSELEY BRAUN:** It wasn't years of planning that got me there, no, that's right.

**KOED:** What was your law school experience like?

**MOSELEY BRAUN:** It was interesting because I don't think I really appreciated how important those years were. I wasn't a very good student. At least not the kind of student my now ex-husband—I met him because he was on law review and I was struggling with tax. And another mutual friend said, "Oh, Michael Braun, he likes you and I think he'd be interested in working with you on tax." So we started studying tax together. That's how I met my husband was studying tax. (laughs)

**KOED:** So romantic.

**MOSELEY BRAUN:** It was very romantic. Over tax. So he aced the class, and we had a famous—our professor was Wally Blum—very famous man in the tax field. And Michael got an A. I barely squeaked by, but it's okay, I passed because of him! (both laugh)

**KOED:** Were there a lot of women in the law school by that time?

**MOSELEY BRAUN:** Not many, no. Again, when you consider there were only 10 black people in the entire school—black students.

**KOED:** Not just in law school? The whole school?

**MOSELEY BRAUN:** No, in the entire law school.

**KOED:** In the entire law school, wow.

**MOSELEY BRAUN:** Right. This is in the late '60s, early '70s. And they thought they had really—and they had—they had really pushed the envelope, because this—the University of Chicago had a tradition of admitting blacks and females, but there would never be more than one or two per class. When I got there, there were 10 in the school, between the three classes. And my class was the largest of them, and there were eight black people in my class. And so we were really something new for the law school. But it was interesting because there wasn't—I think there was as much curiosity about women being there as there was about black people being

there. So, and in fact, I founded the first black law students' association, in Chicago, at that school. And when I did so, one of our female professors—we actually had a female professor who was the wife—she was famous in her own right, but she was also married to a very famous legal theoretician. Her name was Soia Mentschikoff. She was married to a fellow by the name of Karl Llewellyn. And so she called me into her office when I created this organization. She says, “You have to understand. You are, first, a University of Chicago law student, and then you are a woman, and then are a black.” She didn't say black, “then you are a Negro.” I said, “No, Dr. Mentschikoff.” I said, “It's just the opposite.” I said, “The world sees me as a black first, and then a woman, and then they get to the University of Chicago Law School.” I said, “That's the last thing—last point of reference for my identity.” I said, “And that's not because I would have it that way. That's the way the world sees me, and that's what I have to react to.” And she didn't like my answer, but I think she appreciated it—that I was giving her my honest view of the world that I lived in.

**KOED:** And she was maybe stating something that she saw as an ideal, but it wasn't practical reality.

**MOSELEY BRAUN:** Exactly, exactly.

**KOED:** Interesting. Well, before we dig into your Senate career, you also made history as Recorder of Deeds in Chicago. So let's mention that, too, for the record.

**MOSELEY BRAUN:** Oh, thank you, yes, yes. The thing about Recorder of Deeds that I later found out is that one of the first black senators in Reconstruction had also been a recorder of deeds.

**KOED:** Hiram Revels?

**MOSELEY BRAUN:** Yep.

**KOED:** Oh, I'd forgotten about that, yeah.

**MOSELEY BRAUN:** I have a deed with his signature on it that he issued.

**KOED:** Yeah, that's right. I forgot about that, yeah. That's a wonderful connection through history.

**MOSELEY BRAUN:** Yes, indeed.

**KOED:** And you told a great story last time that I'd like you to tell about the puppet.

**MOSELEY BRAUN:** Oh yes. (laughs)

**KOED:** I'd love to have this for the record.

**MOSELEY BRAUN:** I'm still doing that. The puppet—well, I had this office. The office had about 300 employees. We had a lot of workers there. And I was trying to put my management team together and what I found was that not even the senior staff were listening to me. You know, I guess they thought I was just a politician and I was going to come and go or whatever. But for whatever reason, they weren't paying much attention. So I went to a local—there was a five and dime store up the street—and I bought this hand puppet. And it was a hand puppet of a balding white guy. So I went to the next staff meeting and I said, "Okay, since you won't listen to me, maybe you'll listen to him." (both laugh) So I had the hand puppet. I can't do ventriloquism, but I tried. And everybody thought I had lost my mind, but I think I made the point and they got it, which was, you know, if you'd listen to him, then listen to me, because I'm the boss here. So that was the point—was to break through and make a point that maybe they could appreciate.

**KOED:** Did they laugh, or did they just look shocked?

**MOSELEY BRAUN:** They looked shocked at first, and then they laughed.

**KOED:** (laughs) That's a great story.

**MOSELEY BRAUN:** First a shock, and then, oh, this woman's insane. And so then they laughed. They thought it was funny. But I have to tell you, it did make a difference, and they did then begin to start listening to what it was that I wanted to do and I was able to set the direction for the office.

**KOED:** That's interesting. It made them aware.

**MOSELEY BRAUN:** Yes.

**KOED:** In a way that they just had not been aware before.

**MOSELEY BRAUN:** It hadn't occurred to them.

**KOED:** Yeah.

**MOSELEY BRAUN:** That they were just kind of letting what I was saying go in one ear and out the other. It's like, wait, excuse me? I mean, my name is on the door here. (laughs)

**KOED:** That is such a great story. Well, once we get into your Senate career, another story I'd like to put on the record here is the breaking the pantsuit barrier.

**MOSELEY BRAUN:** Oh. (laughs)

**KOED:** Let's tell that story on camera.

**MOSELEY BRAUN:** Well, that story—I have to tell you, that was a surprise. I had no idea there was a stricture or an unwritten rule in the Senate about women not wearing pants. And I came to work one day. I thought I was all decked out in this nice pantsuit. You know? I thought I looked good. (laughs) And everybody started whispering and whispering. I was like, “What’s going on here?” Well it turned out this was a big deal and it actually made the newspapers that I had worn pants on the Senate floor. And the good that came of it was that—and that was shock. Shock! Oh, this is terrible. She broke protocol. But the good thing was that some of the Senate staffers then insisted on the right to wear pants to work, too. They said, “Well, the senator is wearing pants, so why can’t I?” And so it was like, yes, this makes sense. This is a good thing. Why shouldn’t there be the ability for somebody who’s working here to come to work dressed—as long as they’re neat and whatever, they should be able to wear what they want to. If they want to wear pants, then so what? Everybody else here’s got on pants. (laughs)

**KOED:** Why should it be an issue?

**MOSELEY BRAUN:** Right. Why is this a problem for anybody?

**KOED:** I heard there was a day when women coordinated to come together in pantsuits as sort of a show of force. Is that true?

**MOSELEY BRAUN:** I think so. But I think that was later.

**KOED:** It was later on, yeah.

**MOSELEY BRAUN:** After the shock wore off of here—she is wearing pants on the Senate floor! (laughs)

**KOED:** It was just a way to put a stamp on it, that the time has come.

**MOSELEY BRAUN:** Right. We were still agitating for a bathroom at that point, by the way.

**KOED:** Yeah, that took another couple of years as well.

**MOSELEY BRAUN:** Yep.

**KOED:** It's interesting that the Senate, as an institution, like so many institutions, has all these barriers that aren't written and they aren't formal. They're not in a rulebook somewhere. They're just traditional.

**MOSELEY BRAUN:** Tradition and historical.

**KOED:** And historical.

**MOSELEY BRAUN:** I mean, and I don't think I told you this story. I'm going to tell you this story I haven't told you yet. I messed up my knee working out, which I try not to do anymore. Every time I get the urge to exercise, I lie down until it passes these days. (laughs) But anyway, so I was working out and I busted my knee, and I went over to the hospital and they gave me a cane and they gave me a shot or whatever and wrapped my knee up. So I came onto the Senate floor for a vote. And when I did so, Senator Byrd, who, you know, I've spoken favorably about. He was very nice to me. But he stood up and objected to my being on the floor. I didn't know what was going on. I'm standing there like, "What?" So then Mark Hatfield asked that the rule be waived. So I'm standing there. This is going on—this conversation—they're having this conversation. I had no idea, no clue what was happening. Well, it turns out—so Mark Hatfield comes up and he's laughing, and he says, "Oh, Byrd is the repository of the Senate Rules, and you just violated a rule that comes from the Civil War era." And it turned out that some House member had come over to the Senate and beat Senator Sumner with a cane half to death, and since then, canes were banned on the Senate floor. I gather they've fixed that now to deal with the whole—

**KOED:** It happened in 1856 and they were banned afterwards. That's right.

**MOSELEY BRAUN:** Right, that's right. And so when I came on the Senate floor with this cane, even though my knee needed it—I mean, I needed it to be able to walk—I had violated an unwritten rule. And so the epilogue to that story is that Mark Hatfield gave me something for my knee—some medication from his state. And he says, "I'm the local bootlegger for this." (laughs) He said, "It's used in veterinary circles, but it may help you." And it actually did. I became the new—I became the extended bootlegger for that stuff. (laughs)

**KOED:** But that's a good indication of, first, all the unwritten rules we have to deal with, but also the fact that Senator Byrd was the repository of those rules.

**MOSELEY BRAUN:** And he was. And he did very well with the rules. And again, I said this at lunch even with you earlier, that I think, to give him his due, he started out as a member of the Klan when he started in the Senate, and then transformed over the years. And by the time I got to the Senate, he was wonderful to me, and he helped me with my state, with the appropriations I needed. I mean, to this day, I can talk about funding for the Bronzeville Military Academy, which is right there in the heart of the inner city in Chicago. That wouldn't have happened but for Robert Byrd. And I can go right down the list and give you a litany of the things that he was helpful with. He was really wonderful to me, again, having started from where he started. And then, I think I mentioned earlier, he also made a speech—which, I didn't know this part—he got up, on the occasion of his 10,000th vote, he said, “Of the 10,000 votes, there are only two that I regret; one was the vote against the Civil Rights Act of 1964, and the second was the vote for airline deregulation.” He spent five minutes talking about the Civil Rights Act, and then another hour and a half talking about airline deregulation. (laughs)

**KOED:** (laughs) That was the kind of detailed thing he really loved to get into. That's great. Also, tell me about when you came to the Senate, you were stopped by the Capitol Police officer, trying to come in.

**MOSELEY BRAUN:** When I tried to come in the door, yeah. And then one of the other guys told him, “Hold on, she just got elected from Illinois.” So I guess he hadn't been reading the newspapers or something. I don't know. He just didn't know.

**KOED:** He just didn't know you were a senator at that point.

**MOSELEY BRAUN:** Yeah.

**KOED:** Yeah, that probably still happens, I'm afraid.

**MOSELEY BRAUN:** Well, I have my magic—I call it my “get out of jail free card” now. I've got my little ID that says “Senate.” (laughs)

**KOED:** Yeah, we all have those. Alright then, I want to move into some new territory, and covering some familiar ground as well. But, so as the first African American woman to serve in the Senate, did you—or, I should say this—as a new woman senator in the Senate, did you quickly bond with other female senators, or did that take time?

**MOSELEY BRAUN:** I did. I did. And I'll tell you—but, like anything else, you can relate to and bond with some personalities and not others. And so there were some of the women with whom I struck up immediate friendship that deepened over the years, and whom I still consider to be friends, even if I haven't talked to them or seen them in many years now. There were others for which it was less immediate. So the good news was that there was a camaraderie. The women senators were all pretty much facing the same things, whether they were Republican or Democrat. That's one of the reasons why we were able to come together and form the first—it wasn't an official group, but we came together as women senators to discuss the issues, over at Barb Mikulski's house—or apartment.

**KOED:** Right.

**MOSELEY BRAUN:** And so that turned out to be a very, very good thing, because you got a chance, then, to collaborate across the aisle. And so people are talking about bipartisanship, but we were forced into bipartisanship because we were such a minority, and because we were—you know, we were the outliers on the whole thing. And so you almost had to be bipartisan because you couldn't afford to let "R" or "D" stand in the way of your having a conversation about something that was important to you or to your state.

**KOED:** Yes, you were almost immediately—out of necessity, you had to form a bond, because you were such a small group at the time—seven to eight people at that time.

**MOSELEY BRAUN:** Right.

**KOED:** Well, as the only African American in the Senate at the time, did you bond with the larger congressional black community, like what about the Congressional Black Caucus, for instance?

**MOSELEY BRAUN:** I worked with the Congressional Black Caucus, but remember they were House members, and so it's a different dynamic for them. And so even though I tried to work, and did, in fact, work with the CBC—and I give them great credit for the kind of clarity, in terms of policy, that the CBC brings to conversations. Having said that, I once pointed out, in one of the meetings, I said, "Well, you know, there are 20 congressional seats in my district—in my state." (laughs) At the time, it was 22. I said, "There are 22 congressional districts in my state. Do I get 22 votes?" They were like, "No, you get one vote." (laughs) But I joined the CBC precisely because I thought it was important for me to reach out across the Rotunda to talk about issues that we all face and appreciated.

**KOED:** One of the common themes that has come up in our interviews with women is that you have a broader constituency. As women, you have your state constituency, but you also have sort of a national female constituency.

**MOSELEY BRAUN:** Exactly.

**KOED:** And I think, as an African American woman, you had an even broader constituency than that. Perhaps you could speak about that a little bit.

**MOSELEY BRAUN:** Well, it's difficult to speak about, Betty, because I'll tell you, I don't know that I've totally analyzed what that meant. But it is true. That's very perceptive that you would ask the question, frankly. Because, one of the problems, one of the issues, was that there was such a demand for me to be everything to everybody. I made the point in one of our earlier interviews that I had so much mail when I got here to the Senate, that they gave me a room to put the mail bags in. And I didn't have the staff to help me go through it. So I want to take this opportunity to apologize to anybody that didn't get a thank-you note for their letters of congratulations. (laughs) But I couldn't answer—I physically could not answer. They brought bags of mail that are as tall as I am—that were as big as I am tall—and they put them in a room. And I went to the leadership and asked for some additional staff to help me get through it, and one of the leaders, who will remain nameless, said to me, “Ted Kennedy was a celebrity when he got here and he handled it.” You know, in other words, “Get over yourself and go figure out a way to work through this.” Well, it's like, what was I supposed to do? I mean, there was no equivalency between me and a Ted Kennedy. I mean, I'm a—you know—

**KOED:** He had a whole political machine behind him.

**MOSELEY BRAUN:** And I'm coming in a black girl from the South Side of Chicago. It's like, seriously? And you think these things are equal?

**KOED:** Did that improve at all over time, or it was just a problem you had to deal with throughout?

**MOSELEY BRAUN:** It was just a problem I had to deal with. And that's why I say I have difficulty answering the question, because I really—I probably should give it more thought, but without knowing what the numbers were—I haven't done that kind of research to know what the numbers were. But I was getting it from all sides, and particularly from black people. Even to this day, I get requests from black people who not only are not Illinoisans, but who haven't figured out that I haven't been in the Senate for 20 years. (laughs) It's like, okay, so—but yeah, so I had a lot of demands from all over the place, and expectations that went with those demands, and that I could not just ignore. And it's funny, because when you're both black and female there

are many things for which there is congruence and that you can work on, you know, with a singular focus. There are other things that are contradictory. And those things change depending on the issue that you're talking about. So, yeah.

**KOED:** Can you tell me the first time that you partnered with another female senator on a project? Do you have any memory of that?

**MOSELEY BRAUN:** I actually—Dianne Feinstein—Dianne and I used to drive to work together.

**KOED:** Oh, no kidding?

**MOSELEY BRAUN:** Yeah, well, she had a bill that was very important to her about assault weapons, and the car—I got stuck in the garage of the apartment building. Couldn't get out. You know, the gate thingy wouldn't open. I'll never forget, I came—I mean, I literally broke every speeding record to get here to the Capitol to make that vote. And when I walked in to make that vote, she was so upset with me. She got over it. In fact, she later gave me an engagement party. (laughs) So she forgave me. But it was like, oh, I almost—you know, and I didn't miss votes. I mean, you saw my record. I mean, I made all the votes. That was something that was very important to me. I didn't miss votes. And I particularly didn't want to miss a vote on something that was that important to my buddy. And, you know, it's like, I won't get a ride to work anymore if I miss this vote. (laughs) So yeah, we hit it off and we were buddies.

**KOED:** (laughs) Do you think, as a female senator, you are expected or forced to deal with certain legislative issues? In other words, is there stereotyping in the kind of legislation?

**MOSELEY BRAUN:** Of course. Yes, there is. I mean, you're expected to have warm fuzzies on any issues having to do with children, any issue having to do with domestic concerns. And the contrast is not true. Even though we will say, you know, "every issue is a women's issue," which, of course, it is, if you act like you want to talk about taxes or financial matters or foreign policy, they look at you like, you know, what are you doing here? You know, it's like you just stepped out of your place, again. And so that's a reality that I'm happy to say I believe is beginning to change. I think with this new crop, that the young women have kind of broken through a lot of that. And I think that may be why so many of them chose to go on the Armed Forces Committee, to begin to break those stereotypes, to say, you know, women can deal with military issues, too, and we are here to talk about these matters. But that had to be—it was a deliberate effort because the stereotypes are so prevalent and ingrained.

**KOED:** And did that shape the committee assignments you were able to get in any way?

**MOSELEY BRAUN:** Well, I think at first it did, yes. As a matter of fact, yesterday in a conversation, I told the “Joe Biden story.” After I got elected, Joe Biden came to Chicago to visit with me. He said, “Can I come and see you?” I was like, “Uh, I don’t think so,” because I had on blue jeans. I was unpacking boxes. I had just moved. And I said, “Well, you know, I’m in blue jeans and I just moved and I’m not in any shape to receive visitors.” He says, “Oh, no, don’t worry about me. I’ll just come on by and I won’t take more than 10 minutes of your time.” It’s like, “Oh, fine.” So I finally said okay. So he came and sat on a box. I’ll never forget this, because I had made a cherry pie, and so we sat there. He was sitting on boxes eating cherry pie, and he told me that he wanted me to be on the Judiciary Committee.

**KOED:** And tell us why.

**MOSELEY BRAUN:** And I’m about to do that. So then my response to him, which I thought was hilarious—he didn’t think it was funny at all—I said, “You just want Anita Hill on the other side of the table.” You know? And he goes—he didn’t think that was funny. I thought it was hilarious. But, anyway, so—but that year, it was me, I think Dianne was on the Judiciary Committee. There may have been another woman. There were three women on the Judiciary Committee.

**KOED:** There were—the two of you, and I can’t think of who the third was right now. But a third joined later on.

**MOSELEY BRAUN:** Yes, right. But there were three women.

**KOED:** As opposed to no women during the Anita Hill hearing.

**MOSELEY BRAUN:** As opposed to none during the Clarence Thomas confirmation. And so we went from a situation of having no women on judiciary, to having three, and then I think it even went to four, maybe.

**KOED:** Yeah, that’s kind of interesting because the Judiciary Committee, of course, is a sought after committee, but they sought you out not because you would be a great member of the committee, but because you would be a female, and a black female face on the committee.

**MOSELEY BRAUN:** Exactly, exactly, and you know, I’m a lawyer. So I thought that—because Dianne is not.

**KOED:** Right.

**MOSELEY BRAUN:** And so I think she was surprised that she was tapped for Judiciary at that point, but again, putting it in the context of the bigger picture, they had just gone through a bruising confirmation fight over Clarence Thomas's nomination to the United States Supreme Court, and I think they were determined it wasn't going to happen to them again. So it didn't have to do with us.

**KOED:** Was there a committee assignment that you really wanted that you weren't able to get?

**MOSELEY BRAUN:** I wanted Foreign Relations.

**KOED:** You did, oh.

**MOSELEY BRAUN:** But I couldn't get that because my senior senator, Paul Simon, was already on Foreign Relations. You can't have two [from the same state]. And obviously, Paul had the seniority. But I got it made up to me, because, I think, four years into my term, I went on the Senate Finance Committee, and the first woman in history to ever serve on the Senate Finance Committee.

**KOED:** Oh. I didn't know that.

**MOSELEY BRAUN:** Yes, yeah, there had never been a woman before me, and so I got to go on Finance, which to me, kind of made up for the—

**KOED:** Yeah, yeah. What was your relationship like with Paul Simon?

**MOSELEY BRAUN:** Oh, very good. I loved him. I mean, he was so wonderful, and he was good to me and his staff—his staff supported my staff. I mean, it could not have been better. And he was from southern Illinois and so he really helped me out with navigating Illinois, you know, and the politics of the state. So he was very wonderful in every way. So you know, I've missed him.

**KOED:** That's great. You mentioned in one of our earlier interviews, when I was asking you about if there were pieces of legislation that had strong gender components to it, one of the ones you mentioned was the legislation dealing with those suffering from Lupus. I wonder if you'd tell me a little more about that—the effort you put into that legislative story, but also the gender component.

**MOSELEY BRAUN:** I actually have an epilogue for the Lupus story. We were just coming into D.C. this trip, when I got off the airplane, there was a young woman who had on a t-

shirt that said, “We come together for Lupus.” Now, when I passed the legislation, not only did nobody know what Lupus was, there had never been clinical trials on it. It’s a particularly—it affects women, you know, more than anybody else, obviously, and it was like a deep, dark secret that nobody knew about. And now they’ve got kids running around in t-shirts talking about Lupus! I was so proud. I started to go over and say something to her. I didn’t, but she had on a purple t-shirt that said, “Coming together to fight Lupus.” It’s like, whoa, this is wonderful! You know? What a difference a day makes.

**KOED:** Yeah, that must have been a great sense of satisfaction for you.

**MOSELEY BRAUN:** It actually was.

**KOED:** What got you interested in the issue of Lupus?

**MOSELEY BRAUN:** You know, because of having been around—actually, it was a staffer. I’m going to give her the credit. She brought it to my attention, my health staffer brought it to my attention, and she went and gave me the—they knew how to pitch me. So she pitched me on it and gave me the numbers around Lupus and the fact that we were not conducting trials on it. And as you know, Barbara Mikulski had already done the whole thing with getting NIH to include women at all, and so the Lupus thing was kind of an outlier to that. And so I thought, well this will be a good thing to do, and so I took the ball and ran with it and passed the legislation. And it’s made a huge difference. Like I said, you’ve got teenagers walking around in t-shirts now.

**KOED:** Yeah, everybody knows what Lupus is now. It’s a common conversation among women.

**MOSELEY BRAUN:** At the time, nobody knew. So I feel really grateful. When I think about this place and being in the Senate, it’s things like that that make me have warm fuzzies and feel really good about my service.

**KOED:** And what was the main goal of the legislation? Was it to bring awareness, or was it to create funding, or all of the above?

**MOSELEY BRAUN:** It was to call for testing.

**KOED:** To call for testing—specifically for testing, oh, okay.

**MOSELEY BRAUN:** Yes, because there had been no tests done on it and that was a tragedy that had to be fixed. That’s what we’re here for, is to fix those kinds of omissions. But it

was a call for testing and figuring that that would then give rise to increased awareness, which apparently it has done.

**KOED:** Yeah, as evidenced by your visit today.

**MOSELEY BRAUN:** As evidenced by the t-shirt, right.

**KOED:** What would you consider to be your most important legislative accomplishment? Would it be Lupus?

**MOSELEY BRAUN:** Well, I still don't know. I still come back to crumbling schools [Education Infrastructure Act], because, you know, it never got funded properly, and it never really did what I had hoped it was going to do, but we started a conversation about our nation's educational infrastructure. We came up with the term "crumbling schools" in my office. The idea that the federal government, which does not—the federal government doesn't put much money into elementary and secondary education anywhere in the country, and that's traditional, but it occurs to me—and largely because of the issue that you don't want big brother telling Johnny what to read., I get that—but it seemed to me that you could decouple that conversation from the environment in which the learning takes place, from the schools themselves, the physical building. And federal support could come in for the physical building, and let the locals do the curriculum and teacher selection and all those other things that have to do with content. And so that was the approach. That was the philosophy behind it. And I was able to legislate—I actually passed the bill. It passed both houses. It never was funded. And what eventually happened was that they began to open up and allow schools additional—they expanded the bonding capacity, so let them go into debt to do it—to fix schools. Because schools, just like much of the other infrastructure around the country, were falling apart, and still are. And so school districts now can go into debt to get money to fix their schools, but it seemed to me to be appropriate that the federal government would step in and help local governments and help local school districts, not to mention the citizens who are using the schools, by repairing the buildings.

**KOED:** And the legislation passed, but it never got completed to the funding stage?

**MOSELEY BRAUN:** Right.

**KOED:** That must have been incredibly frustrating.

**MOSELEY BRAUN:** It was, on the one hand, and on the other, I was just happy to have the bill passed.

**KOED:** Yeah, at least it raised awareness, if nothing else.

**MOSELEY BRAUN:** Yes. And it started a bunch of things—I mean, there were other things, so I was able to legislate in the area of education, not just with crumbling schools, but I was—back to Robert Byrd—I was able to support the development of a school, a military academy, in the inner city of Chicago. And it's not only there, but it's cranking out graduates and the kids want to go there and it's a very high level, high quality of education. That started because Byrd helped me get military money to help support elementary and secondary education.

**KOED:** Back to Robert C. Byrd.

**MOSELEY BRAUN:** Back to Robert C. Byrd, right.

**KOED:** (laughs) Do you think women legislate differently than men?

**MOSELEY BRAUN:** Yes.

**KOED:** In what way?

**MOSELEY BRAUN:** You know, when you're not part of the "old boy's network," you have to come with the other stratagems, and among the stratagems, you go around and talk to people, you try to convince them of the soundness of your position and why it would be a good thing for them and no downside for them signing on. And while, at least in the time that I was there, there were a couple of instances in which, you know, I ran into brick walls of sexism, but to be fair, the victories that I had—the legislative victories—were more from just talking to people and convincing them of my point of view than anything else. And so I'm really glad and proud of that. I'm going to tell you another—I'm about to contradict myself and tell you a story of running into the brick wall of sexism. My state had a lot of the exchanges, right? Commodities exchanges, et cetera. And there was a member of the Commodities Futures Trading Commission that my guys back in Chicago didn't like, so they wanted to put a hold on this person. Now, why they didn't like him, I never got into those weeds, but anyway, they said, "We want you to stop this guy from being nominated." So I put a hold on this individual, whom I never met, by the way, and when I did so, the senator from Texas just went crazy! I mean, literally, he was bouncing off the walls. It was like Donald Duck had nothing on him. He was bouncing off the walls, he was so upset. And so he said, "Well, we need to talk about this. Can you come to my office later?" I said, "Sure." You know, again, you don't have to—that's one of the things, when you talk about women legislators—you don't have to win every argument, you know? You have a way of understanding, okay there's going to be some way we can resolve and we can get to consensus here. So I went down to his office and he made the point, which, frankly, had not occurred to me before then. He said, "The reason I went off the deep end like I did is because it was you." I said to him, "You know, this is normal. This is what everybody does. If you want to

stop a nomination, you put a hold on it.” Well, apparently my hold was doubly offensive because it was a girl—it’s like he even used the analogy of a filly beating—you know, in a horse race! No, seriously! That once a stallion is bested by a filly on the racetrack, he’s never the same.

**KOED:** Oh, my gosh.

**MOSELEY BRAUN:** I’m not making this up. I’m not. This was the analogy this guy used with me. And so I said, “Well, Senator, we don’t want you to be embarrassed.” (laughs) “I’m not looking to do any harm to you. I just have to stop this nomination.” I said, “I’m just doing my job.” And I said, “I’m sure you have gone through things like—when you have to do your job.” I said, “So is there some way we can come up with a compromise about this?” And so we wound up—he wound up withdrawing the guy’s name—so I won—but he did it in a way that didn’t look like it was responding to my hold.

**KOED:** Oh, okay. Saved face that way.

**MOSELEY BRAUN:** He saved face.

**KOED:** Was this Phil Gramm? Are you going to tell me? No?

**MOSELEY BRAUN:** I’m not going to tell you. You can look it up. (laughs)

**KOED:** Darn. (laughs) I think that’s a really brilliant statement, that if you’re not part of the “old boy’s network,” you have to come up with a different type of strategy.

**MOSELEY BRAUN:** Yeah.

**KOED:** And I think, in a way, that sort of sums up how women go about legislating in the Senate, at least for many, many years. It may be starting to change. I don’t know, but we’ll see. Do you think that women members face special challenges when it comes to the family—professional balance?

**MOSELEY BRAUN:** Well, yes, but I think that’s in any professional endeavor, because we are still—at the end of the day—we are still the caregivers. And so while I’m grateful to my ex-husband that he was a good dad, at the same time, I was faxing homework. My son was in high school when I was here, and he would fax me his homework. That’s what we did in those days, before the computers. But he would fax homework and I would look at it and fax it back to him. And I’m thinking to myself, how many guys in this room are reviewing their kids’ homework? Probably not.

**KOED:** Yeah.

**MOSELEY BRAUN:** So, yes, there are special kinds of demands. And expectations—and expectations that you have of yourself. I mean, that's the other thing. This is not something externally imposed on you. You have the sense of yourself that I want to be a good mother. I am going to be a good mother. I'm going to be a good homemaker, and I'm going to have to achieve a work/life balance. And that your work has to do with the public good is, frankly, just coincidental to it. You could be an engineer. You could be a—

**KOED:** Yeah, you could be a doctor, or a lawyer or a teacher.

**MOSELEY BRAUN:** —a doctor. Exactly.

**KOED:** Yeah.

**MOSELEY BRAUN:** So you have to find a way to strike the balance to make sure that you, again, live up to expectations. I have the most wonderful son. He just got married about a year ago. (laughs)

**KOED:** Oh, and he was about 17, 18, when you were elected, right?

**MOSELEY BRAUN:** Yes. So, yeah.

**KOED:** That's wonderful. Well, do you think the institution of the Senate and the community of the Senate was helpful and open to helping women deal with those challenges at the time?

**MOSELEY BRAUN:** No.

**KOED:** No. So you were just sort of in it and dealt with it?

**MOSELEY BRAUN:** You had to deal with it. You had to, you know, stiff upper lip and do the best job you could.

Because they weren't prepared to make a lot of concessions at that point. Now, maybe it's changed. My guess is that it has. It had to have, you know? But the demands of family, I think, really do impinge more on women, no matter what professional category they're working in, than on men. And that's just the reality. And at the end of the day, I mean, culture trumps politics, right? And culture is the first step, and that's—so the whole issue of role definition is something that we all grapple with. And, you know, you try to do the best job you can, but at the

end of the day, it really—it's your job, it's not who you are, you know? Maybe it is who you are, but it's not—it doesn't mean that you don't have a first allegiance and loyalty to your family.

**KOED:** Yeah. Well, in the time we have left, I want to sort of bring this out to some big picture questions.

**MOSELEY BRAUN:** Okay.

**KOED:** Through the years, I've heard people say—and I've made this statement myself, “When we have enough women in Congress for sort of a critical mass, we will see things change.” My first question is, what is a critical mass? How do we get to a critical mass? I mean, have we reached it with 21 women? Or do we still have to keep going? What are your thoughts about that? And secondly, what would be the impact of that, you know? Will things change?

**MOSELEY BRAUN:** Do you know something, change is a constant, isn't it? I mean, that's the real—if anything, change is the thing that happens more than anything else. Status is—status doesn't hold. It's always about change. And so things are changing and will continue to change. In terms of when the critical mass will be reached, I can't begin to tell you. I know there was the book that was written about the tipping point. I think the tipping point changes depending on the context and the environment. And so when we'll get to the tipping point in terms of the women in the United States Senate, a hundred members, right? So is that 52? Is that 48? You know, is there—you know, I'd only be guessing. You remember the old, is it the Indian expression, “The women hold up half the sky?” So half the population is female, but not all women identify and see the world through the same lens. You have women who are very comfortable being kept, if you will, barefoot and pregnant in the kitchen. I mean, there are women who are comfortable with that and who resent women who want to go out and, you know, change the world and be legislators. And so women are not of the same cookie cutter just because of gender. Women have the same ideological differences, I think, that men do. And so you'll find women ranging the ideological spectrum in the same way that the men do. I mean, that is not—that's gender neutral. And so will it change things? I think it will change the way that things happen. You know, you won't have an “old boy's network,” but what you will have is a network of people—of the insiders versus the outsiders. You will have that. You'll have a different way of—there'll be a different conversation in the room. The conversations will change a little bit. Not just a little bit, a lot, sometimes. Because depending on who's in the room, that has to do with how the priorities get set and how the conversations happen.

**KOED:** Yeah, and what issues are raised.

**MOSELEY BRAUN:** And what issues are raised. And sensitivity to them. I made, again, the point about when I was on the Finance Committee, one of the members of the committee had proposed a 20 percent copayment on mammograms. I have told you this story?

**KOED:** Yes.

**MOSELEY BRAUN:** And—on mammograms. I raised my hand and said, “Fellas, you may not need to have this test, but there’s a lot of women in your state who do,” and you could almost see the lightbulbs going off over their heads. It’s like they hadn’t thought about it like that. You know, this is a 20 percent tax on women’s health. Have you lost your mind? You know?

**KOED:** Yeah, so it took a woman in the room to raise the issue so that they would understand.

**MOSELEY BRAUN:** Exactly. And so I’ve been there. I’ve been in those situations, and again, I can even relate to my time in the Senate. There was an ideological spread among the women senators. We came together, frankly, in a collegial way to create our own networks to be able to talk to each other about issues and share information. And so information sharing is very, very important, but there were women in that room with whom I never had agreement on anything. There were other women that I was—you know, wanted to go shopping with. (both laugh)

**KOED:** Well, and when you came in, seven, eight, nine women—we now have 21 women in the Senate.

**MOSELEY BRAUN:** Yes.

**KOED:** I’m wondering if it will be more difficult to maintain the bonds amongst those women with more numbers. As the numbers grow, will the ideological differences grow?

**MOSELEY BRAUN:** I think the ideological differences may be highlighted, but the difference, I think, will be, again, information-sharing. And information is power. And so, if you’ve got more women, what you have are more sets of ears, more sets of people in different rooms who can share their information and their learning with the other women. And so it begins to open up the “old boy’s network” and begins to give women some kind of parity in terms of information and in terms of their ability to be legislators. So I really do see that as an opening of the door for opportunity.

**KOED:** That's the best statement I've gotten yet on that very issue. Thank you very much for that. Looking back to the political world of the 1990s and today, things have changed a lot. What sort of comparisons would you make between your time in the Senate of the 1990s and the politics that we have today, and the things that women members have to face today?

**MOSELEY BRAUN:** Well, better bathrooms. (both laugh)

**KOED:** Definitely.

**MOSELEY BRAUN:** Definitely better bathrooms.

**KOED:** Easier dress code.

**MOSELEY BRAUN:** Easier dress code. (laughs) I just think that, quite frankly, you know, progress is a difficult thing to define. It's always change, but the question is what kind of change? And so as we go in one direction, then there's a retrenchment from that. And I think, frankly, we are, right now, in a period of retrenchment on a lot of fronts. And some of it will be good and some of it will be bad, again, based on my own point of view. But the fact of the matter is that progress is not linear, but it is moving forward, and it will continue to move forward, God willing. And so, you know, I think—I'm personally optimistic about that—that we still have an opportunity to move forward and to do the best we can to honor our generation and to leave a legacy of a world that's better than the one we found. And I know that's what every generation strives for, and we haven't gotten there yet, but I think as long as we are committed to moving in that direction, we'll be on the right track.

**KOED:** The last interview we did was in September of 2016. So here's my last question for today. We're now past that election, of course, and in that election we had the first woman as a major party candidate for president, who lost the election. What sort of comments would you have about the gender issues involved in that election process?

**MOSELEY BRAUN:** I've got to tell you, I was shocked because the women did not rally around her like I would have expected. For me—I think that shocked the world—but I know I was really surprised. And the why of that—the whys of that—I think, you know, political scientists and historians will be looking at to analyze for a long time now. You know that old expression, "Success has a thousand parents and failure is an orphan." So I don't want to put it on her, because it wasn't all her fault. It couldn't be all her fault. But there were a variety of things around that that meant that she didn't even get the benefit of the gender split in her favor. So—

**KOED:** Yeah, interesting. Any final comments or thoughts that you have that you would like to add before we close?

**MOSELEY BRAUN:** I'm delighted you're doing this.

**KOED:** Thank you.

**MOSELEY BRAUN:** I don't think I said that on camera. I know I've said it to you, but I think this is a wonderful thing. You know, it's preserving for posterity the thoughts of this generation of women and the fact that we're all trailblazers—all of us.

**KOED:** Yeah.

**MOSELEY BRAUN:** And so, you know, hearing from the first ones to start cutting down the bush is very important. (both laugh) So maybe those who come after will say, oh, well, so that's what their journey was like.

**KOED:** Yeah, I hope so.

**MOSELEY BRAUN:** Me. too.

**KOED:** Thank you very much, Senator.

**MOSELEY BRAUN:** My pleasure. Thank you.

[End of Interview]

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