

Women of the Senate Oral History Project

OLYMPIA J. SNOWE
United States Senator from Maine, 1995–2013

Oral History Interview
September 17, 2018

Senate Historical Office
Washington, D.C.

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

I, Senator Olympia Snowe, agree to participate in the Women of the Senate Oral History Project and understand that the 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:

Olympia J. Snowe
March 21, 2023

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

Betty K. Koed
Betty K. Koed, U.S. Senate Historian

Dated:

4/18/23

Introduction

Maine Republican Olympia J. Snowe won a seat in the U.S. Senate in 1994 after serving eight terms in the House of Representatives. During her three Senate terms (1995–2013), she was the first woman to chair the Committee on Small Business and Entrepreneurship and served on the Committees on Armed Services; Commerce, Science and Transportation; and Foreign Relations. She worked to build bipartisan support for a number of legislative initiatives, including expanding health care access, balancing budgets, and addressing sexual harassment in the military.

In this interview, Snowe describes her early role models and meeting Maine's first woman senator, trailblazer Margaret Chase Smith (1949–1973). Snowe considered herself a pragmatic lawmaker with a passion and penchant for public service. She discusses the differences between serving in the House and Senate, the role of women in lawmaking, the Senate's bipartisan women's monthly dinners, and the significance of placing the Portrait Monument (a statue dedicated to women's suffrage leaders) in the Capitol Rotunda. At times during her Senate career, Snowe took political positions that were at odds with her own party conference, and she explains how and why she defended those positions.

About the interviewer: Katherine (Kate) Scott is a historian in the Senate Historical Office. A graduate of the University of Washington, she holds a M.A. in history from the University of New Mexico and a Ph.D. in history from Temple University. Scott is the author of *Reining in the State: Civil Society and Congress in the Vietnam and Watergate Eras* (Lawrence: University Press of Kansas, 2013) and various book chapters, including "A Safety Valve: The Truman Committee's Oversight during World War II," in Colton Campbell and David Auerswald, eds., *Congress and Civil-Military Relations* (Washington, D.C.: Georgetown University Press, 2015).

Women of the Senate Oral History Project

Senator Olympia J. Snowe
Maine (1995–2013)

September 17, 2018

KATE SCOTT: Today is September 17, 2018. I'm here with Senator Olympia Snowe of Maine. Thank you for joining us here today. I'm delighted to be with you.

SENATOR OLYMPIA SNOWE: Thank you, Kate. I am delighted to be here.

SCOTT: Thank you. Let's get started with a little bit about your childhood. Tell me about some early female role models that you had.

SNOWE: It's interesting as I look back on my time when I was a little girl, as I think about it, I wasn't exposed much to television. It wasn't as present as obviously it is today. I used to read. One of the books that I was reading constantly was the Nancy Drew series. She truly had an influence on my life in several ways. I identified with her because she lost her mother at a young age, as did I. I was so enthralled by the fact that she was so independent. She had a passion for her detective work. She was skillful and resilient. She formed a role model for me in the sense that those were qualities and attributes that I wanted to embrace.

My aunt Mary, who raised me after my parents died (I was orphaned at 9), my aunt Mary, along with her husband, my uncle, who had five children of their own, took me in. I was going to a Greek school in New York that my father placed me in between my mother's death and his, which was a little more than a year. So, I would return home to Maine during the course of school vacations. But I had the opportunity to see firsthand how she had to balance responsibilities between raising a family and also working a third shift in a textile mill. My uncle was a barber. They obviously were not overburdened with money. But she set an example for tenacity and perseverance, the will to endure. She inculcated in us a drive to success: the importance of education, the value of hard work, and also the ability to surmount the insurmountable challenges. Certainly, not having an ordinary childhood I think it made it even more important for me to learn ways in which to grapple with the difficulties that I faced, being an orphan, and the relatively—more challenges that developed along the way.

SCOTT: What were people's expectations for you when you grew up? What did they think you might be?

SNOWE: It's a good question. I'm not so sure that I was aware of what people expected or assumed I would become. In my family, even starting with my father, he underscored the value of an education, even as early as kindergarten. I well recall that as I was attending

kindergarten, in my initial days, my father was a Greek immigrant and he didn't fully understand the fact, even though he had been in the country, that kindergartens were half-days. He would send me routinely to school, and I would come home after a half day of kindergarten, and he would say, "What are you doing home, Olympia?" I said, "Well, it's only half-days." Of course, he didn't believe me. He kept sending me back. He was getting frustrated. Finally, he said, "If you don't want to make anything of yourself, then don't go to school." I finally convinced the teacher to write a note to him explaining that kindergarten was only half-days. But education was really important, that I understood. Also, working hard. I think it's from that I developed, set expectations for myself. Especially because I didn't have an ordinary childhood, having been at a Greek school in New York. Living in a dormitory expanded my horizons by getting to know people from other parts of the country. I developed a resilience and an empathy because of the hardships that I had confronted early in my life that I understood others. I knew early on that I wanted to get more involved in the world around me. I ran my first campaign at this Greek school for president of the dorm and I won. I was interested in politics. There were some markers there that already indicated that I had an interest in politics. It was from that point forward that I began to shape my own desires and ambitions going forward from that moment.

SCOTT: I'm curious, what did you parents do before they passed? What was your father doing?

SNOWE: My father was a chef in a restaurant. My mother met him, she was waitressing. So that's how they met early on. I had a brother as well. But my mother used to write poetry and she really encouraged me to read, which was very important. I read a lot as a child. I was really interested in government. Starting probably in high school, I started to really focus on government and history. Ultimately in college, I majored in political science.

SCOTT: When did you think about entering into politics as a career? When did that thought occur to you? Was it as early as high school?

SNOWE: No, it actually wasn't. What I was planning to do—I focused on government and politics in high school. I gravitated to those subjects and certainly in college majoring in political science, I was planning to go to Washington and work in government. That was my aspiration, which was sort of unusual among other women. It was a time when the role of women was changing in society, and [they] played more of a dual role both at home and in the workplace. I had this interest in establishing a career. I thought it would be perfect to get married around 30. In any event, it happened earlier.

As I graduated from college, I had a choice between getting married or going to Washington, so I ultimately decided to get married. At the time, I remember reading Betty Friedan's book, *The Feminine Mystique*, and discussing the choices that women were making and sorting through those issues at the time. Ultimately, I decided to get married. I was married for three and a half years to my first husband. During that time, I served on the board of

registration in my community, as well as I ultimately worked for then newly elected Congressman Bill Cohen in his district office. It was shortly thereafter that my first husband was serving in the Maine state legislature. He was killed in a car accident returning home from a legislative session. People, including my friends and political leaders, urged me to run in a special election to fill his seat. Obviously, it wasn't an ideal time given the emotional upheaval and turmoil, but I realized that I had two choices. I either could withdraw from the world or make a positive out of a negative. Given my passion for government and politics, I decided to run and then make a decision from that point forward as to whether or not it's something that I would want to pursue again.

As it turned out, that one decision set in motion a journey for 40 consecutive years in public office.

SCOTT: That's incredible.

SNOWE: It really was. As I thought about it at the time, I loved politics and hadn't really thought about public office, although my first husband would often say to me, "Olympia you have an opinion on everything, so maybe you should run!" (laughs) And I love talking to people. I love people. I learned that from some of my jobs, especially being a waitress, getting to talk to people that I did not know, learning all about them and their interests and so forth. Ultimately, it was compatible for my service in public office because I realized then how important it is to stay in touch with people—and communicating with them and understanding their interests and preferences and where they want their communities, their state, or nation to go.

SCOTT: When you served in the Maine state legislature, I imagine that you were one of a few women. Were you often the only woman in a room of elected officials?

SNOWE: It's interesting because the Maine state legislature probably had—relatively speaking—a higher proportion of women serving in the Maine legislature compared with state legislatures across the country. There were a few of us. But you know, I never really gave it a lot of thought in terms of the fact that we were obviously outnumbered, in that sense. But Maine had already had the experience of legendary Senator Margaret Chase Smith, so people had a positive viewpoint of women serving in elective office. It was certainly comfortable for me, in that sense, once I learned the rhythm of the legislative process and the role and responsibilities. I gravitated towards it. I completed my first husband's term, which was almost three-quarters of his term, and then I ran for reelection for the state house of representatives. Then I moved on to the state senate where I served one term and chaired a major committee. It all seemed natural. It really built a foundation and framework for me in how to approach representing the people that you are elected to serve and you are privileged to represent. Also, my approach to legislating and the whole mission and purpose to public service, which was to solve problems. Those early days in the Maine state legislature really established a foundation and a basis for my approach to

legislating, which was to work across the political aisle and try to solve the problems facing our communities and our state.

SCOTT: You go on to serve in the U.S. House of Representatives. I want to put that on the side for the House historians to interview you about and move on to consider your first term in the U.S. Senate. What made you decide to run for the Senate seat?

SNOWE: Well, it seemed like a natural transition since—[with] my experience of 16 years in the U.S. House of Representatives in addition to the six years I served in the Maine state house and state senate—I had a cumulative experience of 22 years of legislative experience. I had considered early on during the time I was serving in the House of Representatives of running for the U.S. Senate, but I determined it wasn't the right time. This time was the right time. I knew I could make a bigger difference in the institution of the United States Senate, so it seemed like a natural pivot for me. I just made a quick decision to do it when Senator [George] Mitchell announced his decision to retire from the Senate.

SCOTT: I've heard people use that term before, "It was the right time." What did that mean to you? What does the right time look like?

SNOWE: Well, you have to look at a decision as I did even earlier in the '80s about running for the Senate. In that case, we were presented a primary with my colleague, a Republican colleague who was also serving in the U.S. House of Representatives, the only other member of Congress in that district. I had less tenure than he did. You think about the timing of that and obviously, the Republican Party would not have wanted to have a primary. So, you think about the timing from that politically, and whether or not it's something that you want to take on, additional responsibility. You also have to make the decision, realistically, that once you decide to run for another office, that you are prepared to lose the office that you currently hold. I was not prepared to potentially lose a seat in the U.S. House of Representatives at that time because I only had served four years when I was contemplating running for the Senate on the first occasion. But by the time 1994 came around, having garnered 16 years in the House of Representatives, I knew that I now was prepared to run and if it didn't work out, obviously I would move on. It was a different set of questions.

Also, you have to analyze the political landscape and legislative landscape. Sometimes the timing may not be right for whatever reason on a given set of issues. I think it all really is contingent upon an array of decisions that you have to make regarding whether or not you want to pursue another office or a higher position. In this instance, I had already come to that determination—if there was an opportunity realistically that opens up and made it possible, then certainly I intended to pursue it. The key was for me to make the best case in terms of who could best serve the interests of Maine in the United States Senate.

SCOTT: Tell me about the challenges of running for a U.S. Senate seat. It's different than the House. You are campaigning in a different way, I would imagine, or are you?

SNOWE: It's interesting. You are and you aren't. Certainly, in Maine we only have two congressional seats, and my congressional seat was two-thirds of the landscape of Maine, geographically a very large congressional district. In fact, it's the largest congressional district east of the Mississippi. I had already traversed a lot of territory in the state of Maine. From the logistical standpoint, it made it infinitely easier. But obviously you have to make your case to the southern part of the state and a different set of issues, perhaps. You have to evaluate that and make sure that you are in sync with those viewpoints, and you have to look statewide. I think that there is a certain expectation, when you are serving in the United States Senate, people assume that you are also going to be looking at the greater good of the country.

In Maine, somebody once told me, people want you to vote for your country, state, and party in that order. Because they see the importance and the value of the fact that you are one of 100 senators. You not only represent your state, you have an impact in representing the country. They understood that dual role. We had a great legacy of senators serving in the United States Senate and that really resonates in Maine. You have to be respectful of that legacy and tradition that we inherit. For example, Senator Margaret Chase Smith, she was legendary for her many firsts, but also for her raw courage. When I think about what Margaret Chase Smith did in her freshman term in the United States Senate, as the only woman to do in 15 minutes with her "Declaration of Conscience" speech what 94 of her male colleagues dared not to do, repudiated the tactics of Senator Joe McCarthy and slayed a giant of demagoguery, that really resonated and was embedded in the history and the conscience of Maine. You have to be mindful as a senator from Maine of that heritage, that political heritage, and following that line of independence and integrity. She was unfailing to her conscience and her passion for seeking the truth and justice.

SCOTT: That's an incredible legacy.

SNOWE: Yes, it was.

SCOTT: It sounds like you must be conscious of it as someone who is running for a U.S. Senate seat.

SNOWE: I certainly was when I started running initially, made my foray to run for the U.S. House of Representatives. Then-Congressman Bill Cohen made a decision to run for the Senate. People time and again would recount their experiences with Senator Margaret Chase Smith. I think, frankly, she paved the way for someone like myself to make it even possible to run for office. I think if that hadn't occurred, it might not have been doable. As a 31-year-old at the time, which was young, to be running for Congress as a young woman, might have thought of it very differently. But people had such a positive experience with her service, and she was

unflinching in her pursuit of the truth and righting the wrongs that people admired her, and that certainly is true to this day.

I can recall her opening speech at the first Maine Republican State convention I attended. She began her speech by saying, "I tell it like it is." The entire audience erupted with applause. It certainly had an impact on me because what it told me was that she was independent and she was straightforward. She connected with her constituents, the people of Maine, and even across the country. In fact, I met Senator Smith for the first time as a senior in college here in Washington. I sat across from her desk in her office here. Little could I have known that I would one day become a United States senator. But frankly, she paved the way. She was the trailblazer that made that possible and gave me that opportunity, ultimately.

SCOTT: I'd like to talk a little bit about that 1994 Senate campaign. You have touched upon it a bit. Did gender play much of a role in that campaign?

SNOWE: No, it actually didn't, and I think that was from the standpoint that I had already established a reputation. People were familiar with my legislative track record, my approach, my political philosophy, and my approach towards governance and getting things done. I was customarily building bipartisan coalitions in the House of Representatives, and I intended to apply that same approach in the United States Senate. People supported that and embraced that because they thought that it was the only way that you can get things done is to reach across the aisle to do what you think is right, what is in the best interest of your state or your country. Gender didn't play a role. In fact, I think if anything, it probably helped me, because as a woman, since they had already elected and reelected me eight times to the U.S. House of Representatives, I had a good benchmark on which to start and to launch my Senate campaign. And so, fortunately, I prevailed. I was leading at the beginning of the race, and the challenge for me was to maintain that lead throughout. It was about making the case who could best serve the interests of Maine. At the time, I said that I worried about America's place in the world, but I'll also always worry about Maine's place in America. I think it was taking that approach, and also being willing to build consensus in developing solutions to the problems facing our country were of critical importance to the people of Maine.

SCOTT: People often compare the House and Senate and say that they are almost like two different worlds. What was the Senate like when you came over from the House? After a long House service, how different did the Senate feel?

SNOWE: It is very different. In fact, I had to think about the brilliance of our founding fathers to design two fundamentally different institutions in how they function, operationally, their tempo, their rhythm. Somebody once described it, I think it was a very effective way of thinking about the U.S. House and the United States Senate, is that the rules of the House are designed to protect the institution and the rules of the Senate are intended to protect the individual senator. It's true. It's a very different orientation. You do have so much more power

as a United States senator. It obviously requires unanimous consent to move anything forward. You understand that you have very different, certainly a depth of prerogatives and authority that otherwise would not be the case in the House of Representatives.

You had to build coalitions in the House of Representatives. That's why I was always a part of, or led, coalitions on a bipartisan basis. Even among women, I co-chaired the Congressional Caucus on Women's Issues for a decade on a bipartisan basis with Congresswoman Pat Schroeder of Colorado to focus on the issues that matter to women and working families. We did a number of bipartisan coalitions as well to address issues, whether it was on the budget, on tax matters, and so forth for the simple reason, given the size of the House of Representatives, you had to build those factions in order to get anything done. You had to have a governing center. You drew people from both sides when there were a number of people who were willing to work across the aisle. That's why it was important. The rules of the House of Representatives, they were such that it limited the ability to offer amendments or to speak on the floor because of the size of the institution itself. Whereas, in the Senate, of course, it could be open-ended. I always thought the greatest challenge was to deliver a one-minute speech versus endlessly speaking in the United States Senate because you really had to make a point in one minute, and very quickly, on the major issues of our time. That was always a major challenge.

The Senate was very different. It's a smaller institution, so you feel the smallness. But you had a very large platform with which to advance your agenda. It's a much more solo endeavor in many ways, in the Senate, just by its very nature of its rules and the way it operates. You feel this elevated platform and the way in which you address issues is fundamentally different than it would be in the House of Representatives.

SCOTT: How so? Tell me about that.

SNOWE: Because you have the Senate being one of 100. You're more likely to gain attention on the issues that matter profoundly. Frankly, you can stop legislation, you can drive legislation. The rules are much more open-ended in many ways, so that you have your opportunity to make your point, assert your views, advance your positions through various means—even concerning holding up individual nominations to make your point. You have various ways in which to affect your views and, ultimately, to build support for your initiatives. And it's a bigger stage because there are only 100 senators. You certainly feel the difference from that standpoint.

I know many people used to complain about the fact that, when we got more members from the House of Representatives serving in the Senate, it changed the tempo. It's true. I think that over time you did see gradual changes in the way in which the senators responded to the different issues that might not have otherwise been the case. In the House of Representatives, it's much more combustible because anything could happen at any given moment. Whereas, in the Senate, it's a very orderly process in which things happen. It takes a great deal of time to work

through issues on the floor of the Senate. It's less likely that you'll have the kind of igniting of the fights and the fiery debates that otherwise might occur in the House of Representatives.

SCOTT: Did you find that atmosphere to be—were you pleased to be in an atmosphere that was a little less combustible? A little more deliberative?

SNOWE: Well, I like the deliberation, but I thought sometimes it was important to be able to get your point across, so you could have a lengthy speech. You have the opportunity to spend more time having a longer discussion or giving a speech on a key issue. That flexibility and latitude was a welcome change.

On the other hand, it took me a while to get accustomed to the tempo. In fact, I asked one of my Senate colleagues at the time, "How long does it take to get used to the tempo?" I say this because one time I was asked to attend a dinner and there were several other senators who would be attending as well. I think it was something in honor of an ambassador at the time. I waited until we got the definitive instruction that we would have no further votes for the evening. When I arrived at the dinner at about nine o'clock, all the other senators were there. I said, "How did you know?" They said, "Well, you *know*." (laughs) It was my early days in the Senate, and I said, "That's true, you do have to read the tea leaves once in a while to figure things out, when things have shut down for the evening." But the fact is, the tempo is very different.

Also, given the small size, you really have to care about the collegiality and collaboration you develop in the institution of the Senate. If there are only 100 of you, you have to make sure that you continue to maintain good and strong relations with your colleagues because you may be opposed to one another one day, but you are going to need an ally the next. You never know when the next issue arises where you are seeking someone's support. It really is important to maintain that collegiality with your colleagues. That was something that I recognized early on.

SCOTT: It's one of the things that people have been complaining about around here lately is what they see as a decline in collegiality. Did you find that to be true in your 18 years in the Senate? Did you find that collegiality fell by the wayside, or changed in some fundamental way?

SNOWE: In the final years it did. And one of the decisions I made in deciding not to run for reelection was the lack of the institution to work across the aisle and the lack of the ability of the Senate to produce results on the issues of enormous consequence to the country, working on a bipartisan basis and as had been the case when I first started in the Senate. I think when I entered the Senate, and by the time I left, there were tremendous and vast differences between how the Senate operated institutionally and among senators in building those bipartisan bridges in order to get things done for the good of the country. I think that that type of collegiality had lapsed in many ways, unfortunately. I view the institution of the Senate as perhaps the one house where people expected that there would be a refuge from the passion of politics in many ways.

Being able to bridge the divide and to reconcile the differences. Ultimately, that was becoming less likely, and more often than not we did not have the ability to work on a bipartisan basis to get things done and to address the issues facing this country.

When I first entered the Senate, Bob Dole was the majority leader and he worked with Senator [Tom] Daschle as minority leader in a constructive and collaborative fashion. That's not to say that they always agreed. They didn't. But the fact is that they had an open, straightforward relationship to get things done for the best interests of the country, setting an agenda, moving accordingly. That's how it worked. Bob Dole as majority leader, in fact, would often assemble a bipartisan coalition of senators to address a particular issue, and I was a part of a number of those initiatives. He would say, "I want you all to meet in my conference room tomorrow morning at 8:30, 9:00, to work it out." That's exactly what we did. It was expected to resolve our differences on some key matters and come up with solutions. Where we were unable to reach an agreement, Bob would shuttle between the two cloakrooms, literally, shuttle between the two cloakrooms to "work it out," in his words. He did. That was the approach because we had a responsibility to our constituents and to the country to get things done. We had a set agenda based on the promises that many of us had made during the course of a campaign on a key set of issues. And so, it worked, fundamentally it worked irrespective of the differences. We understood that it was important to surmount the differences and to ultimately reach solutions that were important.

SCOTT: Did you have mentors in the Senate that helped you orient yourself to the place when you arrived here?

SNOWE: No, I actually did not. Fortunately, having served in the U.S. House of Representatives helped in that respect. I knew a number of senators from my work in the House of Representatives, particularly being on the Foreign Affairs Committee and the House-Senate conferences that we had on foreign policy and foreign affairs initiatives. Also, I served on the Joint Economic Committee that also had both House and Senate members. I became familiar with senators.

Secondly, Bill Cohen was my colleague from Maine. He was the senior senator. He was always helpful with guidance and advice. Having worked with him formally, and of course having been in the congressional delegation for 16 years, we got to know each other. He was very helpful in providing any advice and counsel at that time.

It was interesting. We as women senators did decide to be mentors to incoming women senators for that reason because we thought it was much more helpful—and that more women were getting elected to the United States Senate, and so we thought it would be helpful to them to have that advantage of having somebody that they can talk to if necessary to get guidance and counsel, whatever that can make them adjust sooner to the institution, particularly if they are not familiar with the legislative branch, had not served in elective office.

SCOTT: Tell me a little bit about this bipartisan group of women senators. They have played a unique role in the institution, I think, in ensuring bipartisan cooperation, at least among this group of women.

SNOWE: The bipartisan dinners were something that I think all of us as women senators looked forward to. It was initiated by the senior Democratic woman, Senator Barbara Mikulski and the senior Republican woman, Kay Bailey-Hutchison. We initially did those dinners on a monthly basis, which became the tradition starting back in the 1990s. On occasion, we would invite women justices to our dinners and they, in turn, invited us to the Supreme Court. We had no set agenda or any formal structure. It was a free-flowing discussion, creating an environment of mutual respect and trust and ultimately reduces barriers and also becomes fertile ground for future cooperation on bipartisan initiatives. As Senator Barbara Mikulski once said, she said, there is no staff, no memos, and no leaks. There never were any disclosures from those meetings.

We just talked about everything, whether it was in our states or happening in institutions, male colleagues, what was going on in our families, whatever the case maybe. We got to know each other. I think it's so important to have those type of relationships on a social basis because you get to know people and are more familiar with their backgrounds, their perspectives, their frame of reference, what drives them, what motivated them to run for office in the first place. It's important. Ultimately, you have individuals who you can approach on various initiatives or ideas. Maybe they can support you, maybe they can't, but you always know that you have a willing listener and hopefully a partner in a legislative endeavor. We worked together on a number of initiatives that were important for women or for a group of us as women senators.

SCOTT: Can you give me an example of a case, a particular piece of legislation perhaps, that was really—where these relationships that you had with these other women senators made a difference?

SNOWE: We worked a number of times just on breast cancer research and funding. I can recall on one instance where the National Cancer Institute had sent out a mixed message about whether or not women in their 40s should have routine mammograms. I approached Barbara Mikulski, and we co-authored an initiative that swiftly and unanimously was adopted. That's how we would address issues, whether they affected women or other initiatives as well in working through various problems that were occurring on the floor of the Senate, where we thought we could weigh in and be effective in that regard. Another issue was the Lilly Ledbetter Act. I was the lead Republican co-sponsor with Senator Barbara Mikulski. That was to reverse the Supreme Court decision on the statute of limitations on pay discrimination. We revamped that ruling in the law to overturn that ruling. That turned out to be the first act signed into law by President [Barack] Obama in his first, in his early days of his presidency.

There are ways to have those discussions and conversations on a variety of issues. They can have an impact on legislation or just even in the conversations with our leadership in terms

of bringing up various issues. I can remember working with Kirsten Gillibrand on 9/11 on the issues affecting—the health issues affecting first responders, for example. It's those types of initiatives where they have a group of senators who can work together on issues and try to drive that agenda forward, drive that initiative forward.

SCOTT: It's interesting that the examples you've used have been examples where you've had bipartisan support for these particular bills. You seem to take a very pragmatic approach to legislating. Where do you think that comes from? Is that your own personal style, or do you find that it's the way to be most effective in the Senate?

SNOWE: Actually, my first introduction to the possibilities of working on a bipartisan basis was when I served my first years in the Maine state house of representatives. There was a particular instance where I was asked to serve on a special committee, appointed by the speaker of the house, and then the president of the Maine senate appointed several members as well, in the final days of a legislative session to repeal, basically [an executive council in] the Maine state Constitution [that confirmed] the approvals of gubernatorial appointments. It was sort of an anachronism. Literally, in the final days of the legislative session, I thought, how is that possible? There had been so many attempts over the years to repeal this constitutional amendment, and it never happened.

In any event, I just thought it was one more move and we'll have this face-saving device. We're going to get this committee, and it won't happen because we were in the final week. It was chaotic, we were in the final days of the session. But what made the difference was the commitment of each and every person sitting at that table. We would meet late into the night because we had long legislative sessions, because we had to end the session in so many days. Amazingly, because of the commitment of each and every person sitting at that table between the state senate and the house of representatives, and it was just a small group of us (it may have been about six), we came up with a confirmation process that exists to this day. We brought it forward and it passed both the house and senate, which required two-thirds [approval of the legislature] at the time [and passage in a statewide referendum] because it was a constitutional amendment. It prevailed. It really taught me a lesson. It didn't matter what the circumstances were, but if you had people who were willing and committed to solving a problem or addressing an issue in an effective and concerted way, you can get it done. I've used that as an example to students invariably because it really opened my eyes up at an early stage of my legislative experience, and that really did form the basis of my approach to legislating, and reinforced by the approach that Margaret Chase Smith took, the whole idea of being independent.

That's why I always used to tell the leadership, I can't help it, I'm from Maine. That's why I grew up personally and politically independent. And it's true. People expected you to be independent and to make your own decisions based on what you thought was right, taking in all the facts and making your decisions. That approach really did inform my views and my

philosophy towards governance. From that day forward, I tried to seek out bipartisan support for various initiatives, of trying to figure out how to get it done, how to accomplish my goal.

The same was true in the House of Representatives and in the Senate. I co-chaired a centrist coalition with John Breaux, a Democratic senator from Louisiana. We thought it was really an imperative to have that governing center, so to speak, a group of Democrats and Republicans who were willing to work together on some key issues. It was particularly important because, after the 2000 election, it was a pretty contentious atmosphere with the *Bush v. Gore* decision that was handed down by the Supreme Court. The Senate was in a rare divide of 50/50. John and I decided to hold a meeting that included about 30 senators, almost equally divided between Democrats and Republicans, and we invited the leaders of the Senate, Senator [Trent] Lott and Senator Daschle, to our meeting because we wanted to make sure that we conveyed the message that bipartisanship was alive and well and that we didn't want the legislative agenda to be derailed even under these contentious circumstances. The meeting concluded with both leaders shaking hands and smiling. It didn't. Within a few months, we passed the largest tax cut in history to avoid a recession, the potential of a recession, and of course that ended up being shortly before 9/11, as it turns out. We did, we moved forward on a legislative agenda. It's the practicality of that approach that produces results, that you can make a difference not only for people you serve, but in the interests of the country.

There is no other way to get things done without working with the other side. You are never going to get 100 percent of what you want. I always tell people, I say, I don't know any sphere of life where you get 100 percent of what you want. You have to listen and respect differing viewpoints, and then determine where you can reconcile those differences.

I think the big difference today and from the way it worked previously is that, at the end of the day, that people could overcome their differences. It wasn't that you had differences, it's whether or not you had the willingness to overcome those differences and develop a solution.

SCOTT: I think that some of the positions that you've taken have ruffled feathers among members of your own caucus at times. I'm thinking about the 2003 tax cut and your determination to get some concessions. Can you tell us a little bit about taking positions that can be politically challenging, either back home or dealing with members of your own caucus?

SNOWE: It is important to know what is the basis for your views and principles, what you feel strongly about, and how far are you willing to go. Make sure you have all the facts. In that instance, I was determined that we should offset part of the tax cut. I was concerned about the magnitude of our debt at the time. I wanted to offset part of the stimulus with offsets. I thought we should offset with some cuts in spending. In fact, I didn't even necessarily agree that we should even expand the stimulus beyond the \$350 billion, but unfortunately it went up to \$900 billion, approximately. I said, anything beyond the \$350 billion—which we all agreed was necessary because we were still trying to reignite the economy in the aftermath of 9/11 and the

devastating impact it had in so many ways—this tax cut was a way to fuel the economy. But the president decided to expand it to close to \$900 billion. That's when I insisted that we should have an offset. It was a difficult and challenging time because obviously, the president and my Republican colleagues felt very differently, but I thought that it was consistent with our principles in maintaining fiscal responsibility and reducing the size of our deficit and not adding to it.

Senator [George] Voinovich and I called down to the White House to have a meeting with the president on this matter. I was recounting the whole history of the Republicans with the issue of balanced budgets and reducing spending and reducing debt. I thought that historical perspective was important as we began to think about adding to the deficit. I ultimately prevailed in the bill that passed the Senate, but they decided in the conference to sunset it after 10 years as a way of circumventing the offsets in order to pay for it. That's the way they paid for it because it was outside of a 10-year window of the budget. I didn't support that. It was amazing because my aunt would ask me, when I would return home, she said, you know, are you sure the people are with you? Because I was opposing the president, who had a 90 percent plus popularity at the time, and my party. I said, I don't know. I'll find out. But, you know, Maine people were with me in recognizing that it was an important principle to uphold, having ways in which to provide for that tax cut, because we could not afford—and that was one of several stimuluses that we already had had in order to rejuvenate the economy.

SCOTT: I want to back up and talk about, again, when you enter the Senate in 1995, how do you go about getting the committee assignments that you would like? What's that process like? What were you thinking about?

SNOWE: On the Republican side, seniority is a determining factor. Which was great, actually, compared to my experience in the House of Representatives on the Republican side, which was a committee on committees. It was much more elusive, I should say, because it was behind closed doors, and you never knew who was with you or against you on your committee preferences. A lot factored in, including your votes, as you can imagine. It was a very challenging process. So, when I arrived in the Senate, I had the benefit as well as my seniority being elevated because they apply the 16 years of service in the House of Representatives, so that counted towards my seniority. That elevated me in my class—I think I ranked third, and we had a large class. The two who preceded me won special elections, they were replacing departing senators. So that was really useful.

I had the opportunity to serve on the Foreign Relations Committee, which I chose, which added to my experience from my 14 years—my 16 years on the Foreign Affairs Committee in the House, and it also gave me the opportunity to chair a subcommittee, which was comparable to the subcommittee that I was ranking on in the House of Representatives. In addition, I got Commerce and Transportation, and Small Business. In addition to that, I wanted to serve on the Budget Committee. That assignment is determined by the Senate majority leader. I called Bob

Dole, and I indicated to him that I was wanting to serve on the Budget Committee, and he said, “You have to also talk to the chair of the committee,” who was Pete Domenici, “because it is important to me that he concurs. You have to have a discussion with him.” I called Pete. We had an excellent discussion. I told him of my interest of serving on the Budget Committee because of the positive experience I had in the prior two years, my last two years in the House of Representatives, on the Budget Committee. I wanted to continue that service, and I was passionate about a balanced budget amendment, fiscal responsibility, and really enjoyed those issues and wanted to continue in that vein. So, in any event, he concurred with my request, so that’s how I got on the Budget Committee.

In my next term, I then went on the Senate Armed Services Committee because Bill Cohen retired from the United States Senate and Maine has always had a senator on the Armed Services Committee because of the importance of so many of our installations to Maine. I was the first woman to chair the Seapower Subcommittee. I was the only woman on Armed Services, at least for two years, and focused on issues where it matters to have women on different committees. That’s why the increasing number of women makes a difference—because then their voices are heard and views are represented on all of the committees. For example, on the Armed Services Committee, I also focused on gender integrated training. There was strong opposition to gender integrated training at a time in which our all-volunteer force is dependent upon women participating in our military. Ongoing integration of women in our military was key, certainly crucial, to our military readiness of all our units. But there was strong opposition to that. I really fought hard against bans and prohibitions on gender integrated training and visited installations where it really did emphasize indisputable value of men and women in our armed forces being able to train together in basic training. Obviously, they fight, as they say, as the way they train.

The same was true when it came to sexual harassment in the military. I also made that a focal point because it was a major issue at the time in some of our installations and across our military. And, similarly, I visited installations and worked with many people within the Defense Department and offices in the military regarding this issue and a number of different organizations and ultimately introduced a bill to inject accountability in the Department of Defense to address these issues in a timely fashion—to investigate them because women lived in fear of retribution. We had to make sure that accountability existed in the chain of command and responding to these issues in an effective, timely way and that they were investigated and ultimately prosecuted.

SCOTT: You eventually become the chairwoman of the Small Business and Entrepreneurship Committee. At the time that makes you one of only 13 women to have chaired a Senate committee. I am surprised at that low number, still (laughs), and I wanted to ask you specifically if you have any stories about the time that you were chairwoman of that committee—I think for four years—and if there are any things in particular that you’d like to—

something that perhaps you are very proud of, or things you wish you had gotten done but weren't able to accomplish and maybe why.

SNOWE: Yes, I served on the Small Business Committee from the time I entered the Senate and, actually, in all my service in the House of Representatives because small business is so important. Maine, it's a small business state, but small businesses are important to America. They generate two-thirds of all the net-new jobs, and it's still true today in America's economy. And women-owned business is the fastest growing segment. I really enjoyed my service and, in fact, Mary Landrieu and I [were] the first women to serve simultaneously as chair and ranking member of a standing committee in the entire Congress. It was another historic milestone in terms of women's service, in the United States Senate, and the overall Congress.

But I focused on—actually one of my first initiatives was really to focus on insurance, health insurance for small businesses. One of my very first initiatives, I drove that issue, worked constantly, consistently, because a large majority of the uninsured are concentrated in small businesses, either those who owned a small business or are employed by a small business. There are millions of Americans who just didn't have access to affordable health insurance. I had heard that from my small business owners in Maine, but also across America. I introduced my first initiative. It took multiple iterations. I worked through several years. Unfortunately, my initiative lost on the floor of the Senate. We had a week-long debate, which was unusual, as you know, because time is so limited with the schedule, that any bill gets assigned a week of debate. But we did, and it fell by a few votes, unfortunately, because ultimately, it could have shaped the debate on future legislative attempts on developing the Affordable Care Act and so forth. We could have, perhaps, had a different orientation to some of these issues and the way in which they ultimately unfolded. I knew that health insurance for small business owners was key because it would have helped to build a strong foundation for addressing this significant problem. In any event, after my initiative failed, I then worked another way, reached out to Blanche Lincoln, Dick Durbin, and we developed a bipartisan initiative that ultimately was embedded in the Affordable Care Act, as it turns out, several years later. But it took about five or six years to work through this issue.

I often thought if I had prevailed back in 2006, there might have been a different outcome in the way in which subsequent legislative initiatives addressed the remainder of the uninsured. We would have built a platform for a significant number of people who were uninsured, and then we could have built on that with other legislative endeavors. But I did work across the aisle in another way to try to pursue another option because I never give up. I said, okay, how can we work this time? So, I reached out to Blanche and to Dick Durbin and we developed a bipartisan approach. Unfortunately, we couldn't get there, but ultimately most of which turned out to be included in the Affordable Care Act to provide health insurance to small businesses.

One of the major events that occurred while I was serving as chair of the Small Business Committee was Hurricane Katrina. And also in my capacity as the chairman of Ocean and

Fisheries Subcommittee that included the Coast Guard, I visited both Louisiana and Mississippi to review the disaster that had occurred and to make sure that small businesses were at the forefront of relief because there were hundreds of thousands of businesses that were closed, were devastated as a result of what was reaped by the hurricane, and we wanted to make sure we had an efficient process and that it was working, that the programs were working. From that, we had many lessons learned, and I submitted a number of initiatives to revamp the programs, so that they were much more effective and efficient in the way they responded to the recovery. But the key was getting SBA [Small Business Administration] on the ground and handling more than 800,000 applications that had been submitted by FEMA [Federal Emergency Management Agency] from small businesses and more than a million jobs were affected in Louisiana, Mississippi, and Alabama as a result of the hurricane. It was widespread and consequential. That was an area that my committee focused on extensively with numerous hearings and to make sure the Small Business Administration was responding, doing everything we can to provide the relief and the necessary support in any way on the ground in these communities that had been damaged so significantly.

We also worked on extending credit to small businesses in the aftermath of the credit crisis of 2008, and that enabled the Small Business Administration to reach a high-water mark on small business lending of 30 billion dollars in that process, which we thought was critical as well.

One of the other areas that I really focused on as chair of the Small Business Committee was to make sure that small businesses had access to federal contracts, a greater percentage, because they were always competing with large companies and businesses. To their detriment, the agencies weren't always concerned about meeting their statutory goals and providing contracts to small businesses, so I really made that a significant part of my focus, as well as women business owners, and HUB zones, and making sure that they were getting the kind of support that was important for communities that depended on these organizations.

SCOTT: Do you think that women legislate in a substantively different way than their male colleagues?

SNOWE: I think they bring a different perspective. It's been my experience that they bring a different perspective, frame of reference, in many cases practical and result oriented. I have had wide ranging experience in working with women in Congress stemming from my days in the House of Representatives, where I was in the Congressional Women's Caucus for the entirety of my tenure and also co-chaired, as I mentioned, for 10 years. We devoted a considerable amount of time to a legislative agenda on an array of issues that included family and medical leave, child support enforcement, pension relief, the fact that National Institutes of Health was systematically excluding women from clinical study trials and minorities. We addressed that and remedied that and worked with Barbara Mikulski, who was in the Senate at

that time, we enjoined our efforts and we moved heaven and earth to make sure we changed all that.

My experience and interactions with women were always so positive in the sense that we were committed to certain goals and having their perspectives and their knowledge and their expertise contributes invaluable to the legislative process. I do think they do approach it from—it's not making a generalization—but I do think that women have a way many times of approaching an issue from a practical standpoint. Obviously, it depends on the issue and where you stand on the issue. Women are not a homogenous group, but they do have a practicality in the way in which they go about approaching issues.

SCOTT: The Senate, like every other place in the country, is always evolving. What are some of the evolutionary trends that you witnessed in your 18 years in the Senate? What things changed that were noticeable to you?

SNOWE: As a woman? Or as a senator?

SCOTT: As a member or as a woman.

SNOWE: I think that I didn't see that the role of a senator had changed markedly. But perhaps the role of the Senate has changed, in terms of how it functioned in addressing problems and the issues that came before the Senate, I think in a markedly different way from when I began to when I concluded my service in the Senate. I think they are vastly different. I think that as far as women—I think that women were a major part, a major force, in the Senate because the increasing numbers, I think that can certainly make a significant difference in that respect. You know, as we saw with Margaret Chase Smith, she was one woman. In fact, for much of her 24 years, she was the only woman serving in the United States Senate. On occasion she may have one other woman senator as a colleague. Again, increasing the number of women certainly made a difference, I think, in the Senate.

SCOTT: Are there things about the Senate that you miss? Things about the institution, or working with colleagues, that you think about fondly?

SNOWE: As I look back to my own experience in the Senate, I so much enjoyed working across the aisle to solve problems and coming up with initiatives and figuring out and solving the problem and how to make it work. It was like looking at a puzzle and how to assemble it. In this case, it is evaluating an issue and determining what the other side needs and how that works into the equation and trying to develop a solution and a legislative initiative.

I always loved a good memo because it really grounded me in how I approached an issue—because I thought that was really important to having a grasp of the entirety of the problem and the facts surrounding the issues and how best to approach it, the pros and cons and understanding. Also, understanding and appreciating the strengths and weaknesses of my

position, as well as a potential opponent, and trying to figure out how you can arrange it in a way where you can be successful. Time and time again, I just loved the opportunity to figure out how we could solve a particular problem working across the aisle, and the give and take of the process. It's enjoying the ability to argue your different positions and figuring out whether or not you have the best arguments and what you can do ultimately to prevail or to win over more support for your position. But it's sort of a number of building blocks in that process, and it takes many evolutions in the stages of the legislative process to ultimately reach a final solution to the problem.

SCOTT: I imagine that you have women approach you from time to time asking about advice that you might have for women who are interested in entering public life as you have in your career. What kind of advice do you give to women who want to enter the public arena?

SNOWE: I encourage them to run. If they are interested in government and politics, the world around them, or any particular issue, and they are entertaining the notion, I encourage women to consider it as a possibility. To many young women I say, it may not work for you now, but consider it in the future at some other point along your professional journey. It is satisfying. It is rewarding. It gives you the ability to contribute. We are a representative democracy. We get the government we demand, and if you want to change the direction or influence the future of your country, then we need your talents, your insights, your contributions because our promise as a nation really depends on it. America benefits by the broadest range of talent, knowledge, and expertise within the political realm and certainly at the highest levels of government.

I found it enormously satisfying to be able to help people, to do what I can to right the wrongs and to address injustices and to make life better for the people I serve and for the country. I think that is what it is all about. It's extremely rewarding to have had the privilege and the trust of people who elected you to use the power of your office as a force for good. You certainly can. You have the potential to drive agencies or, in the Senate or the House, to do something that can benefit a significant number of people in this country and to enhance the way of life in America. That is why what I found so gratifying is being able to figure out how I could help someone else. That is why I always encouraged my staff to make sure they were always on the front lines helping people with their particular problems and ways in which we could learn from them and how best to advance issues that would solve the problems that they were facing in their communities or in their state.

I think it's something that we need, where we need to have more women participating in this process and certainly in the United States Congress. The more voices you have, you have different perspectives, that adds value to the discussion, and it's a healthier reflection of our society as a whole. I know when I entered the U.S. House of Representatives, for example, there were only 16 of us out of 435, and there was only one woman in the United States Senate. The same was true in the Senate. When I arrived, I think there were seven [other] women in the

United States Senate. That's why we ended up writing a book when we were *Nine and Counting*, and then we republished it at thirteen and counting.¹ Now there are 23 women, so it makes a difference. People say, well, does it make a difference to have more women? Yes, it does. More than 20 percent of the membership in the Senate are women is better than less than 10 percent, right? It has an impact. It's a critical mass. It changes the dynamic.

I recall meeting a former senator in the Senate cloakroom one day, and he served I think during the '70s. I asked him if he had discerned any appreciable changes in the United States Senate. He said, almost instantly, yes, seeing women senators on the floor. He said, "It's startling just to be able to see women on the floor of the Senate." It does, it changes. That's the message that it sends to so many young women across this country about what is possible and adding their voices to be heard in this process. You have better outcomes when you have different perspectives and different views, different ideas. Experiences, life experiences are different. That is what I think that diversity adds to the legislative arena.

That's why I was such an advocate for the statue, the women's suffrage statue that was finally placed in the Rotunda back in the 1990s. It was actually my first year in the United States Senate that I was approached about the whole idea of moving that statue to the Rotunda. And it was down in the Crypt of the Capitol. I always wondered why it was down there. I did not know the history that it had been created to commemorate the 19th Amendment. It was created in 1920, and there it languished for all of those years in the Crypt of the Capitol. I said, that was sort of emblematic of women's journey throughout our history. It took that long, that many years, to find its rightful place in the Rotunda. But it matters, what adorns the Rotunda. That's what I said in my remarks of the rededication of the statue. Because it matters to the throngs of Americans who visit the Capitol and see that statue and all that it represents, and its significance of the three suffragettes and what they did to garner women's right to vote and fight for women's rights and equality. It matters to the millions of people who visit this country from around the world over the years, the importance that we place on the participation of women in the greatest democracy the world has ever known. When I was approached about that issue, I did not realize why it was down there [and] I didn't know why it had been initially created. I thought it was extremely important to have it find its rightful place.

SCOTT: Thank you so much, Senator. This has been terrific. I appreciate it.

SNOWE: Thank you, Kate.

[END OF INTERVIEW]

¹ Catherine Whitney et. al., *Nine and Counting: The Women of the Senate* (New York: Perennial, 2001).

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