

PAULETTE DESELL-LUND
Senator Jacob Javits' First Female Page, 1971-72
April 15, 2014

KATE SCOTT: Today is April 15, 2014, and I am here interviewing Paulette Desell, who was the first girl page appointed to the U.S. Senate, appointed by Senator Jacob Javits of New York. So Paulette, thank you for joining us. I know you've come a long way from Vermont and I would like to start—when did you first hear about the page program and what prompted you to decide to apply?

PAULETTE DESELL-LUND: I heard about it on the nightly news in early November of 1970. I had spoken about it at dinner with my parents and they encouraged me to write a letter to the senator, which I did do through a few drafts. About a month later, not quite, but close to that, we were asked to come to interview with Frank Cummings, Senator Javits' administrative assistant. Then he took us [my parents and me] to the Senate reception room where I met Senator Javits for the first time. We spoke with him for a very short amount of time. He did let me know that there would probably be a lot of media attention involved and asked if I thought I could handle that. I responded that I thought I could, not really knowing. It was very much by chance rather than by design. I had seen pages on the Senate floor in visiting the gallery earlier, previously. That was how I became interested in the page program, because up until that point it wasn't really an option [for a girl].

SCOTT: Right. There are a couple of interesting things about your case as well, which is that, one, you are local to the area rather than being someone from [back in New York]. Help us make that connection. Why would Senator Javits have considered someone living nearby as opposed to someone up in New York?

DESELL-LUND: It was by design for Senator Javits to have someone whose family either lived in the area or who had extended family living in the Washington, D.C., area who would be able to be responsible for a 16-17 year old girl working in Washington, D.C.

SCOTT: You were here because your parents worked here—that's why you were living nearby?

DESELL-LUND: Yes, that's correct. We lived in Alexandria.

SCOTT: Tell me about that letter that you wrote because you have a great exchange with your father over it. [laughs]

DESELL-LUND: When I said I was interested, my father said, “Well write a letter.” I went down the hall to my room and wrote a letter on a little steno pad. I brought it out and showed it to my father who was continuing to watch the nightly news. He looked at it and responded, “Hmm, it's not good enough, try again.” I went back and I tried again. I brought it out again, he looked again, and acknowledged that it was somewhat better, but it still wasn't good enough. I needed to try again. My third try was satisfactory to him, so that was the letter I typed up. My parents helped me to get the final copy typed to send to the senator's office because my typing was not excellent. Those were the days long before people had electric typewriters at home, unbelievably.

SCOTT: Tell me about your first meeting with Senator Javits. What do you recall about him as a person?

DESELL-LUND: I remember he was very alert. It was clear that he was very busy, he had been called off the Senate floor and I remember that he had time for us and wanted to spend that time with us, but that this [page appointment] was a part of—this was a small part of—very large work that the senator did. He was generous with his time with us, but he certainly had his mind on other things also. This was, thank goodness, not the only thing he was thinking about.

SCOTT: Senator Javits is a pioneer on this issue. He is determined that this will happen, that female pages will become the norm in the U.S. Senate. It's 1970 and what sense do you have after meeting with his staff and meeting with him about how soon you may become a Senate page?

DESELL-LUND: We were informed that there were some problems with the office of the sergeant at arms and the Senate Rules Committee; the office of the sergeant of arms was not comfortable moving forward [to accept appointment of a girl page]. We were informed of that, but we were also assured that this would happen, and the expectation was that by the time the 92nd Congress convened after the New Year, that the difficulties, the hurdles, would have been cleared.

SCOTT: And this is in December. Just a month will pass probably and everything will be fine. When you hear about the offer of your appointment, what were you feeling?

DESELL-LUND: Oh, I was delighted! I was just thrilled; it was so exciting to think that I had the opportunity to work in the United States Senate. I wasn't a real seeker

of attention, but I could make it through the media. I was excited about doing the job. I was excited about being in the United States Senate to do the job.

SCOTT: When you learn of your appointment—and then we can talk a little bit about the next few months—things are delayed. But do you ever receive any advice from Senator Javits' staff about how to handle the inevitable media attention? Was there ever any chance to sort of help you figure it out? I mean you're 16, who knows what the attention will be like.

DESELL-LUND: I believe that those discussions probably occurred with my father and he passed information onto me. They were very supportive; Frank Cummings, Paul Leventhal, Paula Schmit were all staff members that I remember interacting with around press conferences and they were encouraging. I think they just really tried to help me stay calm. My father was the one who would just suggest to me maybe the evening before or before we left home in the morning if there was a press conference, he would raise some questions that I probably ought to think about because they might be asked. Sometimes they were and sometimes they weren't, but simply the questions were the catalyst that enabled me to reflect and feel a little more comfortable.

SCOTT: Senator Javits anticipated that this would be quickly resolved and in fact it wasn't. The process dragged on for five or six months into mid-1971. Tell me a little bit about what you were doing during that five-month waiting period and the communication you had with Senator Javits' office and what you were thinking, what you and your family were thinking might happen?

DESELL-LUND: We were in fairly regular communication with the senator's office, again, usually through my father, but occasionally a letter was sent to me. I'm sure there were times that I was discouraged because it really did drag on. The interaction was usually encouraging and just, "Hang in there, this is going to happen. We didn't think it would take this amount of time, but this is going to happen." There was just this confident resolve that it really wasn't a question. It would be.

SCOTT: And Senator Javits is joined eventually by some other colleagues who also make the point that they will make an effort to appoint female Senate pages.

DESELL-LUND: Yes. Senator [Fred] Harris [D-OK] appointed Julie Price and Senator [Charles] Percy [R-IL] appointed Ellen McConnell [Blakeman] and you know their stories and where they were. I continued to go to high school in suburban Virginia, in Fairfax County. We would keep in touch, the three of us. I would often talk to Julie on the phone and I am sure we would commiserate as teenage girls do, "When this is going

to be finished,” and “How awful are those people that are holding us up?” I would also communicate with Ellen, who was right here in Washington, by phone. Beyond the attendance at a committee meeting in February, no I guess—in March, those things happening, life went on pretty much as usual except that there's this sort of dangling hope that really-everybody is right and this will happen. Because you really don't for sure know. So that's kind of where we lived.

SCOTT: What did you know about the issues on the Senate side that were slowing down the process? How did you understand, here's some of the hurdles and things? Were those identified to you by the senator's office?

DESELL-LUND: They were. They were identified as time went on, I believe, because they kept throwing up more hurdles. The notion of—well the work is too heavy or too hard. What bathrooms would girl pages use? Well they can't go in the Marble Room—how appropriate is it that they go into the cloakroom? The concerns about language that the senator's might use and what would we wear. Many things that seemed from my perspective as a youngster, foolish, non-issues.

I certainly do believe that they [the issues raised] were important enough to these men to take their time and even bother to try and block it. It was important enough to them! I believe that some of it was motivated by [the idea], “Well these are young girls, we want them safe.” That's wonderful, but they also should have wanted young boys safe. There was a level of protection there that didn't only apply to girl pages. I remember debate on the Senate floor about women and the draft. The same concern was raised there, clearly at a more intense level for, again, the safety of women in that case, in war.

SCOTT: Did you hear from other pages, young boy pages, who were already serving in the Senate?

DESELL-LUND: I did. Well, not anyone that was serving right in the Senate. Boys that had served in the Senate and they were encouraging and they were positive. That kind of buoyed up my spirits. A total unknown to us was, “How will these boys accept us?” To hear from someone that, “You can do the work” and, “You will enjoy it. It's a great place to be.” It seemed to signal that there would be acceptance and that was certainly positive because when you're 16 years old, that is much more important to you than the weighty issues that old men care about.

SCOTT: [Laughs] That's great, that is so true. Tell me a little bit about what you recall of that Senate hearing where you were asked to testify before this ad-hoc committee that was determining whether or not females could be appointed as pages.

DESELL-LUND: I remember very little. I only know what I was able to go back and read and I did that a week ago—I don't remember that either. [laughs]

SCOTT: Do you remember being nervous?

DESELL-LUND: Oh yes, yes. At that point in time, I had been through enough media experiences that I knew I could survive those, but this was different. These were the people who were going to make the decision. These were the people who were in the way of the job. That was different, that [concern], I think, was there for the three of us, a sense of, if it doesn't go our way, we don't get to do this. We don't get to be pages. That probably made it a much more tense interaction.

SCOTT: Do you recall having any coaching from the senator's office about preparing for your statement?

DESELL-LUND: I believe there probably was, but I don't recall.

SCOTT: Something happened at that Senate hearing because it wasn't long after that the Senate—that Jacob Javits submits his resolution allowing for the appointment of girl pages, but also girls in other areas, elevator operators and other things, which is interesting. And it passes. The Senate finally approves it, I think this was in May, we just looked at this, I have forgotten already. Tell me about the moment when you finally found out that it was going to happen.

DESELL-LUND: I was in school; it was the end of the school day when I found out. I simply received a slip to come to the office; my mother was there to pick me up. Having received that, I had no idea why she was there to pick me up. We didn't have an exact date [telling us], “Well this is when it's going to be voted on.” I went to the office and my mother and I left. She told me, “Okay, tomorrow you're going to be sworn in and you need something to wear. We need to get some fabric, and your sister is coming home and you two need to do some work.”

SCOTT: Where was your sister? She was in college?

DESELL-LUND: My sister, Linda, was in college at Mary Washington College in Fredericksburg. She came home and together we sewed the pants suit [I wore], which in retrospect, it occurred to me recently, “Why did we wait until now?” I don't know, but apparently we did [both laugh]. Definitely not good preparation, but it was ready to go the next morning. It was probably a good way to soothe nerves the day before.

SCOTT: Tell me about that next day being sworn in. What was that like?

DESELL-LUND: Well, we went to Senator Javits' office. That was where we were sworn in—that's where Ellen and I were sworn in, sometime mid-morning I believe. It was the senator's private office and it was just packed with press. Then they packed in my family and Ellen's family. There was a little jostling near the microphones as they were trying to get us close enough together so that everyone was satisfied that they got the coverage they wanted for their mic and that they got all of us in the pictures. Senator Javits spoke a little, for a moment. Senator Percy spoke, and we were sworn in. Then I believe the press asked Ellen and me a couple of questions and we needed to sign some paperwork and we were pages!

SCOTT: And that was it. You were off. Tell me about working as a page and what types of things you were doing daily.

DESELL-LUND: On a daily basis, we would generally come over from school very early. People [other pages] have probably shared with you that at that point in time, Senator Robert Byrd [D-WV] was in charge of when the Senate went in session and he was not one for dawdling. The Senate was starting its work day at nine o'clock in the morning, which meant we needed to be at work at eight o'clock in the morning.

We would, of course, need to put any amendments, resolutions, and hearing reports that were going to be coming up on senators' desks for the day. The previous day's *Congressional Record* needed to be put into a wonderful thick folio, which I certainly hope they don't do anymore. Depending on how big a *Congressional Record* was for a day—it could range from being probably 3/8 of an inch thick to three quarters of an inch thick on a big day—those *Records* might need to be what we called stripped every seven to ten working days, which meant we would have to take all the *Records* out of these large binders, leave only the previous day's [*Congressional Record*] and get rid of the backlog of *Records*. Some would be put in the Senate records room downstairs. I think it was three to five copies, I don't recall exactly, which we saved and took to the records room. That's a fun story, when we would take records down to the records room, each page would sign—there was a post there and pages through the ages had signed that, Bobby Baker's signature was there and I signed it, and Ellen signed it, all of us Republicans [signed it] because the Republicans and the Democrats had separate records rooms. So we each signed that, it was a tradition.

SCOTT: So you're saying there is a wall—a pole in the wall?

DESELL-LUND: It was like a—the room, the records room—it was in the basement of the Capitol and there was a support—

SCOTT: A pillar.

DESELL-LUND: A pillar, thank you! A support pillar that people would sign there or on the wall nearby as they were pages. The key to the records room was always getting lost as I recall—you can just picture this. You've got ten teenagers. How did the key ever exist? When it was found—when it existed and was somewhere that was known, it was a normal key with a ring attached to it through a block of wood that was probably two and a half inches by six inches long. So you would think that it couldn't be lost, but it was frequently lost. I don't know if this is the kind of thing you want to hear, but where I learned how to break into some place was learning to break into the Republican Senate records room. We never had the key, hardly. It would frequently be missing. You take a little ID and you put it there in between the door and the jam. You never learned this?

SCOTT: No. [both laugh]

DESELL-LUND: You put it between the door and the jam. You could kind of wiggle it and you could get the door to pop right open.

SCOTT: Wow. I assume that the other pages were teaching you how to do this?

DESELL-LUND: You know Michael Johnson? Michael Johnson taught me to do that! [laughs]

SCOTT: That's great [laughs]. Michael Johnson went on to have a long career here in the Senate.

DESELL-LUND: I know!

SCOTT: Let's go back to these first days and your reception among the boys, the boy pages, but also among the senators. I mean it must have been clear to you who voiced some of the strongest objections to having—or was it clear to you? Which senators were most opposed to having girl pages? And then how did that make you feel when you had deliver things to them or had to run errands or things like that. Were you thinking about it much?

DESELL-LUND: I don't think I overly focused on it really. The other pages were very accepting and we formed wonderful friendships. Michael Johnson knew the

hallways and tunnels of Capitol Hill better than anyone else at 14. He was probably the one that taught me most of what I know as far as getting around the Capitol and the buildings. We would be paired with them [other pages] to go on runs with the tickets and learn how to get the initials of office staff, their signatures, when we had delivered something or we had taken something to move it over to the Senate and to go on to the other side of the Hill. Relationships with boy pages were fine. Some of them were about my age, some of them were a couple years younger than me. That's a big deal at 16, 17. Joe Doss, you know Joe. Joe was incorrigible, but he was just being a 14-year-old kid. David Federle, these were all people that I worked with and they were very kind, they were fun, they would include us. That was fun, that was no problem.

Senators, I believe yes, there were senators who were more and less happy with our presence, [with] Julie's and my presence, and Ellen's just very shortly afterward. To their credit, they were no more dismissive of us than they would be to boys, I didn't feel. Some of them could be pretty darn dismissive. They were not all great personalities, but many of them were very, very nice, very kind. Some senators actually came up to me as I sat on the steps and shook my hand and welcomed me, which was very, very thoughtful. I have wracked my brain. I don't know if you have one of those little books of congressional members from the 92nd Congress. If I had one to look at, I might be able to tell you who was—there was a Democratic senator who came up to me about a month after I had been there and he introduced himself and he said, "I want to welcome you. I was not really sure that girls should be pages, but you have always conducted yourself as a young lady and I'm very happy that you are here." That was very thoughtful of him and he was a southern Democratic senator. He was probably not one of the ones that was at all comfortable—he might have voted yes, but he probably wasn't at all comfortable with having girl pages. That was nice. Does that answer your question?

SCOTT: Yes that was great. Who were your favorites? Who were your favorite senators over time?

DESELL-LUND: Well certainly I had favorite senators—I had and continue to have a very deep respect for Senator Javits. It was clear that he was so dedicated to his work. I have always felt he was a great politician in the very best sense of the word, politician. In that I mean that he had great integrity and he worked very hard for important issues like civil rights. I remember a speech he gave about the Lockheed loan guarantee and I remember him saying that the reality is that we are wondering if we should have this loan guarantee, but if something is good for General Motors it's probably good for the United States. He was saying that supporting business supported the people of our nation. He was a very pragmatic man and I think in that combination of pragmatism and working for the rights of others and making life better for people in our

nation—those are the reasons I respected him so much. That's where my appointment and the appointments of the first black page and first Puerto Rican page, that was the roots of that. He cared about what was right and just. He was smart enough to do things that brought positive attention to him and his work in a way that people would react well to it. He was a very serious hard working, brilliant man.

My connection, favorite really on the Senate floor was George Aiken [R-VT]. I loved George Aiken. He had these two ties that he wore. One was red and one was blue and they had elephants on them and that's it. He had a red tie and a blue tie with elephants on them and it would be a red day or a blue day. He would come through those doors from the Senate lobby and he'd just be kind of humming to himself and he'd stop and say hello. He was just the most humble man. You probably know this, his greatest honor in his entire working career was to be governor of the state of Vermont. If people knew him they would address him as governor and not as senator. That was what he valued to a greater degree, but there was no show about Senator Aiken. People might look at him and think, "Oh, well, he's not really aware of what's going on." But he was, he took it all in. He just didn't feel the need to get up and flap his mouth about it. I do recall, he spoke three times during the 13 months that I was a page and I wrote this down last night because I can't guarantee that my memory is good enough to remember all three of them without [it] being difficult right now. He spoke regarding Vietnam and getting out of Vietnam and I think people were very aware of—he was the one who said, "We just need to declare victory and get out. That's it." That was about the length of his speech, it was about two sentences long.

SCOTT: Short and to the point.

DESELL-LUND: That was it. He didn't waste people's time.

There was a discussion on the Senate floor one day and it was a Democrat who was saying, regarding elections, and I believe he was talking about the election of [President Nguyễn Văn] Thiệu in South Vietnam, that Thiệu had run unopposed and that could not be a democratic election, if he ran unopposed. George Aiken took exception to that. [He] stood up and said that the last one or two times that he had run for the United States Senate, he had run unopposed and he was quite certain that it was a democratic election. This was a long speech because then he went on to say that the cost of his last reelection campaign was somewhere around \$30 and that was what he had spent on his reelection campaign. This was just a genuine man that was there; he was doing what he needed to for the leadership of our country. He really wasn't about himself. He was just wonderful.

And then the third time, and I loved this one because this was a connection to the other senator who I just admired so much and that was Mike Mansfield [D-MT]. To me, Mike Mansfield is the epitome of a statesman. Oh, he was just so good at what he did and for all these men that I've mentioned, there was just such genuine integrity to them. The last time he [George Aiken] spoke to the Senate that I recall, he told the Senate that they had a job to do; it was time to listen to Senator Mansfield and get the job done. I think this might have been when they needed to leave for Christmas and people were not getting things done. He just stood up and he told the Senate, "You're here for a reason and you've got a job to do, and you need to listen to the Majority Leader and you need to do your job gentlemen." And that was it. It was like, "Yes! We would like to go home too." [laughs]

I loved Senator Aiken. How has that influenced my life? Well I live in Vermont.

SCOTT: That's very interesting. But you didn't have any prior connections to Vermont did you?

DESELL-LUND: I had visited Vermont once as a child. Truly I wound up where I was supposed to be. I'd only been there once and had fallen in love with it. I went there after college. Senator Aiken was a favorite of mine, and I want to say a little more about Senator Mansfield.

I don't know if it was this question but one of the questions you asked about was what were some of my most vivid memories as a page? Listening to Mike Mansfield talk about the trip he and Hugh Scott [R-PA] had made to China just mesmerized me. There were often times when I did not mind leaving the Senate floor. I liked to [go on] runs, I enjoyed that, but when he was giving that speech I was planted at the front of those steps and I wasn't giving up my spot. It was just fascinating, just so fascinating. That was a point in my life where I—I just so much wanted to travel. That was so important to me that the world was becoming so much smaller a place than it had been. There were barriers that were breaking down that been in place my entire life. That was pretty fascinating. I certainly remembered that speech as being something that I would not leave the floor for. Senator Mansfield was a favorite of mine.

The other senator who I really recall with affection was Clifford Case [R-NJ]. His desk was right in front of the steps. He was in the front row. He would come in and he would greet us and sometimes chat. I recall one time he came in and said, "My hands are cold, I lost my mittens. I don't know where they are, have you seen my mittens?" And he's looking around and we answered, "No Senator." Atlee Valentine and I were sitting there and were a part of this interaction with him and we kind of joked, we should get

him some mittens. Over the weekend I went and got him little kids mittens at the store and when he came in the next Monday they were on his desk. These little children's mittens and he came in and he looked at them and looked at us and said, "Did you do this?" Yes, we did. He laughed. He routinely acknowledged us.

One of the things that was sometimes frustrating as a page was that there were probably at least half of the senators who did not really acknowledge us as people. We were people to respond to the snap and take care of what they needed. That's fine, that was the job. We were the people to open the door for them, get them for a telephone call. Some senators had the graciousness to say thank you and others did not. You sort of knew who those people were. I believe it was Senator [John] Stennis [D-MS]—in the morning before the Senate would open we [pages] talked while putting that day's paperwork on each desk. Then starting 15 minutes before the Senate would be in session, we would "man the doors" and we would open the doors, because apparently these men were not strong enough to open their own doors. We would open the doors for them. Like I say, some of them would acknowledge you and others would not. Again, getting on toward Christmas that first year, I believe Senator Stennis was—I don't know if it was [chairman of] Appropriation or Armed Services, but we were talking about money for Armed Services and that was one of the things that was not getting done. So we decided, when we opened the door for Senator Stennis we were going to say "Merry Christmas Senator Stennis" to him and we did and he did not acknowledge us then, either [both laugh].

SCOTT: So he was one of those who typically didn't acknowledge?

DESELL-LUND: He was one who typically did not acknowledge us. And so was Ted Kennedy [D-MA]. In a typical day we would do that [open the doors], the Senate sessions would start. There would be runs to the Dirksen and Russell Senate Buildings, which were just called the old and new buildings at that point in time. Every afternoon there would be runs, a run at least, to the House side of the hill. That was something that I pretty routinely did. I liked doing that. One thing that I'm good at is visual spatial ability, I would get a half dozen runs and I would be like, "Oh what's the most efficient way that I can do this?" And I could plan that in my head, which I was generally very successful with, except for the Rayburn Building, which is just a labyrinth. That building makes no sense at all.

SCOTT: The hallways, it is so hard to figure out.

DESELL-LUND: You could be on the fifth floor in room 539 and say, "I need to go to 429, I'll go down this staircase." You go down the staircase and you were nowhere

near the same room numbers. [Scott laughs] It never made sense to me, but I'd still go there. I would do runs pretty routinely. I'd stop off and visit people sometimes, Michael J. [Johnson] introduced me to a whole lot of people in the United States Capitol and sometimes you'd stop and chat for a couple of minutes. I'd go out on the House steps and see if any House pages were outside. Frequently, I'd always seem to go out there when Chris Shay was having a smoke. He was a house page. He was a friend of ours.

I enjoyed the runs and I enjoyed going into the offices. I enjoyed figuring out how to go from here to there. One of the NOT best runs I ever had was when I needed to go to Lowell Weicker's [R-CT] office to pick up something and bring it back to the Senate floor. They had not told the cloakroom what it was so I was sent. I had to pick up a spittoon for Senator Weicker and bring it back to the Senate floor. It was a nice brass spittoon if someone was really into—

SCOTT: And it was clean?

DESELL-LUND: Yes, I think it was at that point, thank God. When I walked into the cloakroom with it, Howard Green, he was the head cloakroom page at the time, he shrieked, “Oh God! I can't believe they had you carry that.”

SCOTT: Were there tasks that were sort of divided by gender?

DESELL-LUND: I think it was more preference. There were people like, for example, I liked to do House runs and I didn't cause a whole lot of trouble [for cloakroom staff] so I got my way. I liked to do “all senators” where you needed to go to each office, I enjoyed those. You got all of them for the old building or the new building. Usually we'd race and we'd see who could get back first.

[Interruption]

SCOTT: Okay, you were just saying some of the things you liked.

DESELL-LUND: Yes, the boys usually got to handle the flatbed, you know the flatbed cart that would take the records downstairs. That was typically a job that was assigned to them. Of course we couldn't go into the Marble Room so if someone was in the Marble Room, then the boys had to go. If someone needed a speaking podium, one of those podiums for the desk, one of the boys had to go. [Those were also in the Marble Room.] We would also, in the days of the ticker, we would tear off the ticker [which printed out the Associate Press news], that was a routine sort of job. There were, as I mentioned, there was a peer who oversaw the pages on the floor and that job was called a

floor boy. Ellen was a floor boy and so I think that barrier was very quickly cleared. I guess those are the typical things that I remember being a part of our days.

I have this wonderful story. It was summertime. Dan Schwick, who was a Democratic page, and I were on an elevator. We got on having gotten off the subway in the Capitol. Of course, we were allowed on first and we were in the very back of the elevator. They [the elevator operators] piled in far more people than you think could ever fit, so it's very, very shoulder to shoulder. When we got to the second floor, of course we needed to get out, but all these tourists [packed in front of us] were going to the galleries. Dan had this moment of not recalling the words he needed and instead he blurted, "Look out!" [both laugh] So people in front of us just parted and we walked off. I looked at him and said, "Look out?" We just doubled over laughing. Dan said, "I forgot the words 'excuse me!'" It was great; I still remember and can still chuckle when I think about it.

That's pretty much it for a day, as far as what I recall we did on a typical day.

SCOTT: There were a lot of political and policy issues that were very much alive at the time. You already mentioned Vietnam. Were you following any of those things?

DESELL-LUND: I did follow some of them, but really—others, I really couldn't wrap my head around. They were just too big for me as a kid, and they might be too big for me now. Really, what I did learn and developed a respect for through the debate that I heard and the issues I was aware of is that no problems are simple, all problems are multifaceted. You can learn something from almost every perspective, and that there's value in debate and in listening to one another. Compromise is paramount because the obligation is to move to a better place, not a singular place of one person's point of view or another, but to move in a direction that is better for all. So that certainly was an overarching lesson that I learned in listening to debate, while at the same time knowing, "Wow, I really don't get all the details of this." So I guess that was my take away.

SCOTT: That's a great lesson.

DESELL-LUND: It was a great lesson, it really was. And it's certainly very useful in any walk of life.

SCOTT: Were your parents political?

DESELL-LUND: No, no. Not at all. If they had any political leanings, however, they were Democratic.

SCOTT: Oh, okay. I was going to ask if you knew if they had supported Javits when they lived in New York?

DESELL-LUND: Wow, I have no idea, but probably most likely given their view points and his liberalism, most probably. But I don't know. We never had a discussion about that.

SCOTT: What were some of your least favorite tasks as a Senate page? Assignments?

DESELL-LUND: Wow, I can't think of anything that I really disliked doing. I never thought of that before. That's real positive, isn't it?

SCOTT: [Laughs] It is positive. What about school? What was your school experience like? I know that those were very short hours and you had very short periods of study for English and math and other things. What did you think of that experience? How would you evaluate it?

DESELL-LUND: I recall that the 12th grade literature book I had was printed the year I was born, so I didn't have a lot of respect for the D.C. school system at the outset. I believe that the Capitol Page School had some very good teachers. I don't think I had more than one of those teachers possibly, but to be fair, I only had two teachers. I needed two credits; I needed a government credit and I needed an English credit to graduate from high school.

I also took physics as a senior and Mr. Steely, he was a good teacher and he was funny. I was the only girl in the class. I recall him saying, "I haven't had any girls in this class in the twenty odd years I've been teaching this." He always called me Miss Paulette, and he was always nice to me and wasn't all that nice to the boys. [laughs] Even when I screwed up he was still nice to me. I think he was afraid I would cry or something. Our English teacher, I think, was very overwhelmed by the boys.

From the point of view of a student that had come out of a good suburban high school in Fairfax County, the expectations and the instruction at the Capitol Page School were far below par, except for physics, but Mr. Steely taught at the University of Maryland so that helps you to understand that. From my point of view many years later as an educator, here these men and women were seeing students for sometimes a semester, possibly two semesters, possibly four years. Where did they invest their time and effort? Well, I think that if I could have gone back and seen it with different eyes, they were probably investing most of their effort in the kids that were there for the four,

and the three, and the two years, and they should have been. Really I received very little in the way of education at the Capitol Page School. However, to be fair to my teachers, we had fifteen minute periods so it was all self-study and I believe that those individuals probably recognized that kids that were there for a semester or two semesters were probably, hopefully, getting a good education where they were attending the rest of their high school experience. But for this handful of kids that were there for four years, Capitol Page School was all the education they were going to get, so hopefully they did a better job with them. I just sort of hope.

Some of the teachers were not particularly engaging, I don't think, to the girls. I don't know that it was necessarily girls so much as the fact that we were really there for a short amount of time and they were probably pretty confident that we didn't need them a whole lot, but they did have students who really needed an education and they were the only ones to give it to them. I'm kind of giving them the benefit of the doubt. Maybe that's where they really tried to invest their effort. When I think of, again, working in a situation where students sometimes come and go, to have as many as 30 percent of your student population change every semester, is not a good thing for a teacher because you have no opportunity to get to know these students, to get to know their strengths or their weaknesses.

SCOTT: And to help them develop over time.

DESELL-LUND: Exactly. Yeah, it's tricky.

SCOTT: One thing I always love about the page stories that I hear is the incredible access that you all have to some spaces that a lot of us don't even know about. I'm thinking of hideaway offices and things like that, but also that as a page you get to attend some events, like a joint session of Congress. What were some of your favorite moments?

DESELL-LUND: Some of these I did write down. I got to go up on the dome of the Capitol, to the top of the Capitol dome, outside. That was an incredible experience to walk up those inside steps and then to be outside there and look at the city. It was early on a Saturday morning and it was a foggy day, I remember. That was awesome, just incredible to have that opportunity. That took, at that point in time, a whole lot of finagling for a small group of us to be able to do that. That was not a commonplace thing.

SCOTT: It was a group of pages then?

DESELL-LUND: It was a group of pages, yeah. I think we were taken up by someone in the House, on the House side. I think that was it. That was one of them.

I have a memory of Edward Brooke's [R-MA] speech about planning for the bicentennial. Again I think it was Atlee and I, the Senate was almost deserted. There was the presiding officer there and there were maybe two or three other senators on the floor. Brooke had come down to the front desk right in front of the podium. Senator Mundt's desk. So he spoke from that desk and we were just a few feet away, and there was really no one else in the room. He gave the whole speech to Atlee and I, and it was kind of fun because we were there and we were listening and we were reacting. As people will do, you react and then they continue to pay attention to you. So there was something I recall in his reference to—on the 5th of [July] 1976, he wanted the American people to wake up to more than a hangover. He wanted it to be a celebration, but he wanted it to be a celebration on a grand scale and that really celebrated history as well. I recall that. Let's see.

SCOTT: He was a remarkable man. First African American elected since Reconstruction.

DESELL-LUND: He was one of those senators who acknowledged pages on a routine basis. He was a good man. Let's see.

SCOTT: Did you know the senators who opposed the girl pages coming in?

DESELL-LUND: Did I know who they were?

SCOTT: Yes, did you know who they were?

DESELL-LUND: Well, I mean, other than the things that I had read in news articles, no. To tell you the truth, we knew there were some. You could tell that some people didn't react to us. I really felt that to a great degree, they were also just grumpy old guys who didn't react to the boys very nicely either. There were some that were fairly curt and dismissive. [Hugh] Scott was one of those, [John] Tower [R-TX] was one of those. I'd have to look at something, but there were a number of them. People who acknowledged us as a group [were] Senator Brooke, Senator Weicker, Senator [Bob] Packwood [R-OR], Senator [Mark] Hatfield [R-OR]. Those people all acknowledged us, but they acknowledged the boys too. I know that unfortunately over time, things have come out that there were inappropriate things with some individuals, but I never experienced anything like that. They were just genuine and acknowledged that we were human beings that were there to help.

SCOTT: You had 13 months here, which is a different experience than many other pages. What were some of the other memories that you have of those really special moments?

DESELL-LUND: Well I remember that—this was the time that Ellen was there and they were voting on the Equal Rights Amendment. And Ellen was emphatic, “I am not leaving this Senate floor!” [laughs] I was like, “Okay Ellen, you got it.” This I also remember very clearly, they were going to have another vote right after the vote on the Equal Rights Amendment and so they needed someone to stand in the hall and tell the senators not to go away. That was one of my assignments. So there were two of us, and I don't remember who the other person was, but as the senators were [leaving]—most often when they left the chamber, if they were going back to their offices they came out on the Republican side of the Senate and they'd head for the elevators. We were stationed there to catch them after they had gotten past the plain clothes policeman or guards but before they got out to the hallway to tell them, “Please do not go too far senator, there's another vote coming.”

SCOTT: Did you have an opinion about the ERA?

DESELL-LUND: Well, I guess my opinion, it was tempered by—well we didn't have an equal rights amendment and we [girl pages] got here. I don't know if we need it. I think that there have been times in my life when I listen to both sides and end up thinking, hmm, so I don't know if I have strong opinion now. I believe that was sort of my approach to it, which is probably different than it would be now. At 16, 17, that was what I was thinking.

SCOTT: Were you also applying to colleges then?

DESELL-LUND: I did. Yes, as a senior. The influence that the page experience had on me being in a small school as opposed to a very large high school was significant. I was in a class of over 500 at Fort Hunt High School. I was in a class of 19 at the Capitol Page School. I liked a smaller school better, so when I applied to colleges I applied to the University of Massachusetts and Nazareth College, and a couple of colleges in the state of Virginia. Nazareth College is in New York State in Rochester and I was accepted by Nazareth. It was a women's college and I had decided that I would study to become a speech pathologist. That was what I wanted to major in. I went to Nazareth College and I mean, I could have studied that at the University of Massachusetts, but having been at both a large school and small school, I chose Nazareth. Never regretted that. I received a good education.

SCOTT: I noticed on your letter to Senator Javits that you mentioned you wanted to be a teacher? And did something about the Senate experience change your desire to teach?

DESELL-LUND: No, it was my mother. [laughs]

SCOTT: Who was a teacher.

DESELL-LUND: Who was a teacher. And her advice to me was, don't teach in the classroom. If you want to go into education, specialize in something. She made arrangements for me to visit Gallaudet [University] and to do some observation there one day, and speak to some people there. I did decide to major in speech pathology and I am still a speech pathologist. It was kind of nice to go back to New York State. At the time we moved to D.C. when I was 10 or 11, I had never felt like this was home. New York State was home to me. This was not home, really. I was fine with returning to New York State.

SCOTT: Well, tell me about how the lessons you learned or the experience here as a Senate page, how it may have shaped your life after.

DESELL-LUND: This is what I thought about last night and I might need to look at my notes. I think that the major influence on my life was just the self-knowledge that I can do this. And it really doesn't matter, if I wind up in a situation, [I know] I can do this, regardless of what it is. If I have to do it, if I need to do it, because I'm told that it has to be done, I will do it. I believe very strongly in self-knowledge. That's a very empowering thing for all of us. I believe that was the greatest takeaway influence in my life.

As we just talked about, my mother was a teacher and it was through her guidance that I pursued becoming a speech language pathologist. Certainly, what was important to me in my life came from my family. The Senate, compared to my life before and after, was a flash in the pan. It opened my eyes to a wider world, but in some ways it was like the ultimate 3-D experience, but it wasn't the experience that I was seeking in the world, either. It didn't awaken in me any plans for grand solutions or certainly being a person who pursued any place that's powerful in any way. If anything, my takeaway regarding power was how dangerous it is and how alluring it is and that it can be abused by people. It didn't influence me in that manner; it was really the, "Okay I can do this." Simply that.

SCOTT: What do you think the page program offers generally to young people in high school years? If the Senate ever considered doing away with its page program as the

House has done, what would you want to say to Senate leaders who were considering that?

DESELL-LUND: I believe there is great value in young people being able to see firsthand democracy in action, and the Senate needs to be careful that that's what they're doing. Those young people have an understanding of our government system, that's a part of them. It's not something that they've learned in a book. You really understand it very intrinsically [as a page], it's woven into you. I believe that there's value in that. I believe that for some people, it was a real spring board to pursuing great dreams that have really changed lives or created opportunities for many people. And it would be a terrible thing [for young people] to lose that opportunity. I certainly don't think it would work to have college aged students. That would just be ridiculous, because they wouldn't be focused. They'd be focused on themselves, [their careers], they wouldn't be focused on what was there before them.

SCOTT: You've been involved with some of the page reunions. You've come back for a few page reunions.

DESELL-LUND: One.

SCOTT: What prompted you to do that?

DESELL-LUND: It was probably Atlee Valentine saying, "Paulette, I'll go if you go."

SCOTT: You're still in contact with a few?

DESELL-LUND: Atlee Valentine I am in contact with, [and] Ellen and Julie more so probably within the last five years, although I never really lost contact with Atlee. I have had e-mail contact with friends that I worked with, peers. When that reunion occurred two years ago, I really worked to find as many people as I could using the Internet and did manage to find a number of people and let them know that there was a strong core of people from the time we were there that were going to be present. It was wonderful to see them.

SCOTT: Is there anything that you'd like to add that we haven't covered?

DESELL-LUND: No, I guess not.

SCOTT: I thank you very much for your time, coming down all the way from Vermont and spending the afternoon with us. Thank you so much.

DESELL-LUND: You're welcome, you're welcome.

[End of Interview]

[Pictures on the following page, clockwise from the top: Paulette Desell (center right) sworn in as one of the Senate's first female pages, with (left to right) Senator Charles Percy (R-IL), fellow page Ellen McConnell, and Senator Jacob Javits (R-NY); Desell with her sponsoring senator, Jacob Javits; Desell with fellow page Julie Price.]

