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Mrs. Everett C. Johnson

Interviewer: This interview is part of the University of Delaware oral history project. Mrs. Everett C. Johnson of Newark is going to discuss her experience in Washington when she worked with Senator John G. Townsend of Delaware.

Mrs. Johnson, what were your first impressions when you went to Washington and what year was this?

Mrs. Johnson: It was January 1929. Senator Townsend had been elected senator in November 1928. I was a little bit frightened because I hadn’t been prepared for the position at all, had never worked in an office. But Senator Townsend had assured me that he wanted me to be more of a contact person and hostess in the office and that he didn’t know much about it either but that we would learn together.

The first thing Senator Townsend did was to tell us whom he had named as his staff. He had put his son Paul as his secretary, and I came in second place and Olive D. Hurley [phonetic] [0:01:24] of Georgetown came next. She had been in the office of Senator Thomas F. Bayard whom Senator Townsend defeated in the election and he had asked Senator Townsend to take care of her good. Senator Townsend had already asked him if there’s anything he could do for him. He was that kind of a man. Olive was a democrat, of course, and there was some thought about that down at the National Committee but she was loyal to the office.

Interviewer: Were most senatorial staff at that size in those days?

Mrs. Johnson: I will tell you that just in a minute. I wanted to say that Olive was loyal to the office and proved good help. We got a long time together and she finally became a staunch supporter of Republican Party. Each office is given a staff that in proportion is suitable for that size -- to the population of the state, so ours was a small staff.

Senator Townsend also had a young man on his patronage as other senators did. This was Walcott Gum [phonetic] [0:2:44] of Frankford, Delaware who had a policeman’s job. I think it was on the Capitol Grounds. It may have been around the Supreme Court. But anyway, he took a night course at night, in three years he had his law degree.
Paul received a salary of 4,250. I received 2,400 and Olive 2,250. These salaries were set and we received our pay every two weeks by walking over to the Capitol to the disbursing office. Senator Townsend salary was $10,000, a few years later it was increased to $12,500. These salaries have increased over the years. The senators now get $42,500 as do the members of House of Representatives.

I don’t know about the other salaries except for the one which I received. I asked Senator Boggs the other day what I would be receiving if I were down there now doing the same work and he said $20,000. And he added and he would need it in Washington these days Mrs. Johnson.

In those days, they had no administrative assistants, no legislative assistants. We even wondered why the President Roosevelt, when he came in, needed so many administrative assistants. He had a group of lawyers in an office in the Capitol who would help the people in the office or the sentry himself to frame a bill he might want to introduce so it would be legal.

And there was two newspaper reporters covered our office. One was a Mr. Lynn who wrote for Wilmington Papers and a young man Larry Allen who was an AP man.

[0:05:03]

Interviewer: Did they -- when you say they covered the office, was the man who worked for the AP assigned to eastern states or one senator? Did he come to see your office almost every day?

Mrs. Johnson: He came here regularly several times a week when there were big stories. I’m sure he covered a number of other senators. If I may stop to describe the young man for a minute, he was a nice looking young fellow, very sociable, nice. We liked to see him come in the office and because I was older than some of the clerks, he took a fancy to me. And one day when he ripped his sleeve in his coat, he came right to me to ask if I had a needle and threat that I could sew it up for him. I felt as if I were partly his mother but I happened to have it on hand because I hated to change the typewriter ribbon I had sewed in a hem for Olive in return for her putting a typewriter ribbon on my typewriter. So, I happen to have it on hand.

It’s interesting to know the special services that are given to the senator and his staff. First, there’s a Library of Congress and it certainly is well named because they bow to every wish or need of a senatorial staff. If I
needed to do any bit of research for Senator Townsend, all I had to do was to call and ask when I might come over; they’d make it as soon as they could. I’d had a desk and chair waiting for me, someone to get the books I needed. And if I didn’t have time to go over, I’d express my need to somebody over there and the results would be quick and good.

We also had a stationary store where the stationary for the senator was furnished. And also they wrapped packages, small packages for mailing and sent them over to the post office. There was another room called the maintenance and carpenter shop, I think, something like that, where anything that had to be sent by mail and had to be boxed with wood was done there. And they also would make during the senators’ term, a beautiful cedar chest for each senator. And it’s beautiful. And they would make the red boxes which the senator used to send home his collection of things when he’s in Washington.

And during, the Bicentennial, the George Washington Bicentennial, each senator was given one -- maybe two busts of George Washington. And of course, he wanted one in his office and one at his home, so one of them would be shipped to him or to someone else, bound carefully so they wouldn’t be broken in wooden boxes. That would be done in the carpenter shop. Then our typewriters were watched over for repair.

And of course, there was a post office and four mails delivered to the office. It came tied with good strong twine and Olive told me that when Senator Bayard was there, as was well to do as he was, he was thrifty. He would always take that twine from the package and carefully add it to a ball he had started, and he had several huge balls in his closet shelf when we left Washington.

Now, I’d like to tell you about with committees to which Senator Townsend had been assigned. One was agriculture and that was very natural because he’s senator with such work. The next was banking and currency and he had a bank of his own, and knew all the banks in the state and served for 50 years, I think, when he died on the Bank of the State of Delaware.

And the next was appropriations which would fit anyone. I should have said the Farmer’s Bank of the State of Delaware. He was also on the claims committee, which is a very interesting committee and on the audit and control of the Senate. Now, the claims committee had to with claims...
...against the government of course and they were varied indeed. And the claims were small and large depending on whether the government operations in some way destroyed a whole island or whether smaller because a man had an injury while he was using some implements in the Veterans Hospitals, such things as that. But they all required the great deal of reading. The claims committee didn’t meet every week, but when they'd have a collection, most of the people on the committee were lawyers. So Senator Townsend was at a disadvantage but he had pretty good judgment after all. And I used to prepare the research material for him.

We had some very interesting people call at the office during that time. And one of them I’d like to tell you about, he was a man working in the Veterans Hospital and every time he used a certain bit of machinery, I don’t know whether it was -- I forget now but it was x-ray or what. But his -- fire would break out, running sore. And he didn't know what it was, he blamed it on other things but it narrowed down till he knew, it was that machine. He asked to be transferred to some other kind of work, anything at all and they would not transfer him. Well, through the Library of Congress, I found a medical book which had an article in it that hit this very accident or ailment. And I briefed that and gave it to the senator and he won the man $5,000 which he seemed very grateful to have.

I will say that during the twelve years that Senator was on that committee, only of their judgments have been returned -- was vetoed at the White House

I found out almost immediately how fortunate the Delaware senators and their staffs were to live so near Washington. It meant that Senator Townsend could go home every weekend for overnight and it meant that we might. It meant that our friends would come to see us with less cost and less time. I would hear the girls in the other offices talk about wanting to go home, how much it took to go home. Of course, the senators were allowed a certain amount of money to spend on round trips to their homes but the staff -- the members of the staff were not.

I have two illustrations which will show for what I mean. Next door to us in the Office of Senator Vandenberg of Michigan, and every adjournment, when he went home, he would take certain members of his staff with him but it usually ended up with a young lawyer and his wife who was also a lawyer and a typist were left alone in the office because they were the two who could manage it. And they were getting homesick to go to Michigan. And the young man whose name is Oliver Dompierre, D-O-M-
P-I-E-R-R-E, came to me one day. He had been very helpful to me in getting started in the office.

So he came to me one day and asked me if I would consider helping him get a trip and his wife -- get a trip to Michigan this summer during adjournment. I stayed in Washington most of the summers because I had to have some kind of a home and I had my furniture brought down. I always had sizeable apartment and some girls with me. So he thought he was free to ask me and I agreed to do it. It wasn’t a bit hard. It didn’t take but a short time each day to throw away what had to go in the scrap basket to get the different printed matter that the senators' constituents had asked for at the printing office and then forward the mail to him. And there was a sign on the door that any visitor should call next door to Senator Townsend's office. And one summer, that summer, I had more visitors from Michigan than I had from Delaware because Delaware thought we were all at home.

Now, the second illustration is the summer and I took care of Senator Dale’s office in the same way. His secretary who was from the State of Washington.

[0:15:00]

His secretary was left behind. It was a girl who had lived [inaudible] [0:15:03] most of the time had been in Washington. She very much wanted to go one year. And she persuaded Senator Dale to leave a sign on the office to call the Delaware office. Well, they didn’t have many callers from Washington but one veteran kept coming in. He seemed to be worried about his insurance and he said that Senator Dale’s office had promised to do something about it. And I wrote to them and I hadn’t had an answer back when the man came again and he was very insistent. So I said, "Well," I didn’t think what I was doing, but I said, "Will you walk down to Senator Dale’s office and I’ll see what your file says."

Well, we opened this darkened office and then in the inner room where the files were, I found his file. I opened it fortunately quickly and all I saw it was a little pink slip such as they use down there for memos. And it said on it, “That this man is crazy and dangerous.” I folded the file and went toward the door. And I said, "Well, come on back to my office we’ll see what we can do." Not thinking, not dreaming what in one minute what we would do. But as I near the office, I saw two men from the elevators standing there, and they took charge of the man. And I didn’t see him after that. They had seen him come in the office and they had seen me go out with him guessed what I was doing.
At first, we had two rooms for offices; one for Senator and Paul. Paul came in for conferences frequently with his father and the rest of the time he was a public relations man in Delaware as well as in Washington. Olive and I had the other room. The senator’s first job, which I think I heard at the time, was customary, was to go to call on all the senators who would been there before he came. And he made a good job of it. I am sure he never missed one of them.

Another thing that was quite natural with him was to get acquainted with all the service people; the elevator boys, and the young man that steer the trolley over to the Capitol. He knows whether they were married or not, how many children they had; nothing political about it because he would never get a vote from the District of Colombia if he does that. But he was just interested in people and he would remember them and ask about them later. And the reaction toward the staff was just wonderful. I’m sure it was the same way with Olive but I know when I went to get on that little trolley; that trolley started immediately unless it's the senator buzzing.

When I got on the elevator, it was the same way. And some of the senators were good enough to ask us to get on if we were in sight you know, they tell the boy to wait. But we had no end of courtesy from those services just because Senator had paved the way.

In the banking and currency committee, Senator met a number of people whom he already knew in New York and some new ones. And one of those new ones whose name I shall not mention became very fond of senator. And he knew he was going to have a trip to Washington, he would phone me and ask me to engage a breakfast room in a bedroom in a certain hotel for him and ask Senator Townsend if he would meet him there for breakfast the next morning.

And one morning, Senator, after he returned, called me in the office. He said, "Well, truth is stranger than fiction." He said, "Do you know what the guy wanted with me this morning? He said while we are sitting here eating breakfast, my wife is being married to my best friend. He said my wife’s father is doing the same thing I am with someone else because he couldn’t bear to marry her and couldn’t because he was an Episcopal minister." He said I blamed -- the guy had told Senator Townsend, "I blame myself a great deal. She was very delicate and I spent $1000 trying to get her good health and she is apparently now, but I have spent too much..."
Mrs. Johnson: ...time away from home on my business. And each time I go home, I’d see this friend’s feet under my table. And finally she told me just what it was and that she wanted a divorce and I’ve given it to her. But it’s a pretty sad day for me.”

Senator Townsend wanted some pictures in the room and we didn’t wait to get any from Delaware just then. But we found some that we liked. The mountainous part of United States, there’s a beautiful scene, and taking them down to the carpenter shop, we soon have them framed and up on our walls. He was very proud of them.

Every time Senator went to his home in Selbyville, he would return with a basket fruit to be placed where -- for the staff and for visitors. Senator McNary of Oregon, where they grow such wonderful pear fruit saw it. So he began to bring us fruit too. I never saw prunes like they grow in rural Oregon, they’re as large as apples and one will almost make a meal.

We’re not familiar with the amount of work a committee or a subcommittee can take from a senator. We'll sometimes blame the senator for not being on the floor but he had in-committee doing some very important work. When Senator Townsend was there, I think he had too many committees. I believe I’ve heard that they don’t give a senator so many now. But he would go sometimes when committees were overlapping each other. He would go for a while in one, and see a quiet spot and go for a while in the other one, which isn't fair to a senator.

The Depression was upon us and it was a very sad time for everyone in Washington as well as other places. There were so many people from other states came to Washington if they couldn’t get work. And the parks and benches were filled with people with bowed heads. And we had urgent appeals in the newspapers to do something. One I saw one morning appealed to me. It was that we would choose a family; they gave a list of families and addresses and each one was supposed to choose a family. We might duplicate things but there were trying to make it so we wouldn’t. And I chose a family not very far from the Capitol.

And one evening, as Senator Townsend was living about the same time I was. He said he would take me down and I said, all right, if you leave me off at this certain place. And after we got in the car, he says why are you stopping there? And I told him I had a family there and explained to him. He immediately took out his purse, his wallet and gave me the largest bill in it, so I could do more for my family that day than I had expected to do.
I usually went to the grocery store and had a boy accompany me up to the house. The first time I went, I found them, a man and his wife and four children, little children in a large room. The water supply was in the hall as well as a little stove and the beds almost filled the room. It was a pitiful sight. I knew that man wanted a job. I knew there wasn’t anything in Washington for him. Just now, unless they would make a big upheaval and then it would be criticize by the taxpayers.

A good looking young man from Delaware came in the office one day. He had been one of those that come in. He wasn’t desperate yet but I knew he deserved work. Some of them that came in office, I think, had never seen Delaware, although, Senator was so tenderhearted that he’d pay their rent or do something for them. But this young man I felt really wanted to be doing something. He was tall and muscular, and later, when I had a little time during the day, I thought I’d do something very daring. I went down in the architect’s office. I’d never been there before. I didn’t tell Senator I was going. And I talked to the architect; he wasn’t from Delaware at that time. I don’t even remember his name now. I told him this little story. And I said there are paintings around our windows. Are they painting the whole building, could they use another man...

[0:25:00]

Mrs. Johnson: ...because I had asked the boy to come back. He said yes, if he knew how to hold a paint brush, he would put him with the crowd. And later that day, Dan Morton from Wilmington, he was the most generous person in the world, came in to pass a call. And the young man in question was painting in sight. And I said, "Don, it’s a cold day and he has no coat on and I know because he doesn’t have one." And I didn’t have to say anymore. When Don went back to Wilmington, he enclosed a check in a letter with a provision that the young man would never know who gave it to him. And I wish you might have seen that young boy when he put his coat on.

Another thought about the depression, Senator Wagner from New York had his officer right across the way from us. I never knew how he got in his office in the morning without being seen because there was a row of chairs in front of his door, about 10:00 every morning, awaiting the people who couldn’t get in his office demanding help. His secretary’s room was right across mine. And she came across one day wringing her hands. She says I wish everybody in the world was dead. She was that desperate.
Interviewer: Did Senator Townsend have any kinds of legislative remedies that you happen to remember at the time of the depression? Did he have any general ideas about possibly making his situation better?

Mrs. Johnson: I think the ideas that he had would take too long to get in operation to help the situation as it existed in Washington at that time. I think charity was the only thing that could be done at that time in Washington. They were all busy trying to get their heads together and think what could be done. But they wanted something that would be really useful. You can’t hire man to do work that’s silly and expect them to admire their government.

For instance, when I built my house there was a group that came each morning out in front of my house. They were making a new street. Evidently, they had to put there utensils away the night before and they had to wait out there for an hour or so until the boss came to bring their utensils. And then they worked, and laughed, and told ugly jokes. My brother who was there sick at the time was disgusted with their language but that isn’t the way to resolve things. There has to be something more definite than that. And I’m sure they were busy in thinking but I can’t remember now any concrete thing that was done.

And one that got interested me very much while I was Washington was ghostwriters. I’d never heard of them before really. The people would say I believe so and so wrote so and so speech but they wouldn’t call them ghostwriters. And here I began to get acquainted with ghostwriters. People would come in the office who were ghostwriters and it was not thought anything about. When President Roosevelt came in Office, he had his ghostwriters. It was no secret. It’s been so with every president since but it was all new to me then.

When I mentioned the wrapping of packages in the stationary room, the man there was so disgusted one day with senators that he told, he says, "I wrapped everything in this office but puppy dogs." And I think he had a point there because I knew that there was too much sent out from the offices at the expense of the government.

There are a number of human interest stories that come to mind. The young man who was on Senator Townsend’s patronage, Walcott Gum, lived with two other boys in an apartment somewhere in Washington. He kept up acquaintance with me because I had known his mother and father, and I like the young man very much. But he was taken ill and sent to a hospital in a large ward. He must have had double pneumonia. And one night, about 11 o’clock, the doorbell rang and it was one of the boys
that he lived with wondered if I wouldn’t come to the hospital. But they knew his father and mother’s address but Walcott was determined that they shouldn’t be notified.

[0:30:00]

And they thought they should, and would I go with them to see what I could do. Well, I did that and found that it was just as they said. But I persuaded Walcott to let me call his father and mother and they came before morning.

In 1931, I guess it was, the senator returned home from his home in Delaware one Monday morning and told me that he had had a talk with Jude and his son about a new member of our staff. He had been told by the disbursing office that he was being permitted to have another members -- our work was growing. It would pay $1,800. And senator wanted it to go to a young man in Newark. And I objected to it. I thought he should have somebody from his own county, you know. He said no, he wanted somebody from Newark. I said, "Well, must it be Newark or somebody at the university?" He said it didn’t make any difference.

So, I called my daughter and told her, and asked her to think it over and tell me the right young man to offer it to. And she suggested a graduate of that year, who had been very popular, as popular as any young man she’d even known. He had an accidental playing football, broken his neck, I guess or something. Anyway, he’s going to get well from that but she thought he would be fine.

So I told Senator, and he said, "Will you write a letter to Mrs. Charles Warner in Wilmington." She was a chairman of the Women’s Committee in Wilmington. And see if she knows him. And she wrote right back that she thought he was fine young man. So senator told me to write for him to come down, talk it over. And this good looking brown-eyed young man entered the office one morning and it was Caleb Boggs. And I took him over to the cloak room to meet Senator left him there. And when Senator came back, Caleb was walking with swinging along.

He had given him the job. Senator, at that moment was chairman of the Audit and Control Committee of the Senate, which has to do with little and big expenses that have been contracted by the members of the Senate; trips and different things. And they had to be verified. Sometimes, the senators are brought on the carpet, and sometimes they didn’t get what they asked for, or not that much. But it was a very strict committee and they needed somebody. The former secretary was leaving
and that we needed somebody to take that place. So that’s the place Cal received.

And also Senator had stipulated that the young man must be going to school at night for a profession and Cal did want to study law. So he came on our staff. And when Olive came back from lunch, I said, "Olive, wait till you see our brown-eyed boy."

There are two statues of Delawareans in the Capitol. Caesar Rodney is seen at Statuary hall. I’m not sure that Clayton is in Statuary Hall. Still I think first they felt they might have to put him around the corner but I believe they’re both there. A named Bryant, a sculpture, made the statues after they were ordered but he couldn’t find any place to put them. He was told every time that Statuary Hall was filled. So Dr. Ryan, who was a professor of history, chairman of the History Department at the University of Delaware came down. I knew him really well. He came and asked if there’s anything our office could do to get those statues put in Statuary Hall. It was adjournment of Congress and I was there alone, so there's nobody to see anything -- do anything about it except myself. And I did another daring thing. I went down to...

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Mrs. Johnson: …the basement of the Capitol again to see if there’s anybody down that could help us get those statues placed. And I found a kind dear, and things began moving. And it wasn’t too long after that until I was invited to see the unveiling of them statues in the Statuary Hall. And by the sculpture, I was given a picture of each one, framed, for the part I had in it.

There are many ways that a Senator or his office can help get things done that are stalled because of the many requests. Dr. Henry Clay Reed of the History Department of Delaware wanted very much to have a William Penn stamp. And he wrote to me to see what we could do. And I did everything I knew what to do with all the answer I could get. I even went down to the post office. It was that they had too many requests and it cost too much money to design these stamps. Nowadays, I understand they're making a business of it in a building near the Capitol; that they make stamps up, all shapes and sizes and figures, just to make money on them. But I just couldn’t seem to get this.

But one day, Senator who had already written in his own name, called me in the office. He says, "You know I’m invited to dinner tonight and Jim Farley who is Postmaster General wants to sit next to me. We’re good
friends." Senator had plenty of good friends in the Democratic Party. And he says, "I might be able to get your stamp over." And he did. And Henry Clay Reed sent me a card with a first William Penn stamp on it.

I recall that the first year we were there we had a three months adjournment of Congress. It doesn't seem possible now. Olive went her friends on a motor trip to California. Senator was down home. He would come up a couple of times a week. I'll call on the phone, and we had a numbers of callers from Delaware and some of them wanted me to go with him on certain sightseeing trips. And that's what I was supposed to do. And I remember one day that Mrs. Warner came down with the group and she wanted me to Mount Vernon with them. Well, I thought they knew the way to Mount Vernon. I certainly didn't know it. I had never driven a car.

So after a while, the driver, I forget who it was, thought he might be on the wrong road and asked me. And I had to admit that I didn't know. And we had to stop a car or a truck from North Carolina. He told us how to go to Mount Vernon. And I adored Mount Vernon. I had been there before and I just thought that's a place of all the places in Washington where I'd like to have lived. And I enjoyed going around hearing the comments. And that day, there was a little boy in a group near us. He saw the sign, smokehouse over an outside building. And he came yelling to his mother, "Oh, mother, they used to make them come out here to smoke."

The Bicentennial -- George Washington Bicentennial was quite an affair. I have told you that the members of Congress received statues of the head of -- I mean the bust head of Washington. Well, at the end of the Bicentennial. They held his funeral. And of course, it was February 22nd and the governors of all the original states were invited to come and bring a guest and flowers to put on the altar. Governor Buck was our governor then. He called Senator Townsend to ask if he would take his place. It did not serve Senator Townsend to go. It was either on Saturday or Sunday, I forget which. So he called me and asked me if I would go and take Marjorie, which I consented to do. We went to a hotel in Alexandria and the governor was there to greet us, just as they did in old-town funerals. The old-town funerals were held in homes though and the friends gather together and have a meal.

So after he had made his speech, we had a meal. I remember in his speech, he had suggested that maybe he had been a mugwump and he told us what a mugwump was. It was when you had your mug on side and
you sat on a fence -- and when you had your mug on one side and your wump on the other. And he asked if we knew that in the dictionary, there was such a word as yes/no. He was right. I looked it up afterwards, there is a word of the dictionary yes/no and it means when a person is a mugwump.

Well, later we went out in the dining room and Marjorie and I were seated with a congressman. And we had some fine conversation, not that we took part in it but hearing them discussed this matter. After dinner, we walked to the little church carrying our red roses. And at the service, we from the 13 states, the delegates who had been sent would walk up to the altar and place our roses there. It was a very stormy, rainy, snowy day. We had a bus to take us back. If we hadn't, I don't know we ever got back and that was quite a day.

This is a little change but in the summer during that adjournment, Margaret Barnard from Dover who was secretary in Senator Hastings office in Delaware, and I attended all the band concerts of the Marine, the Navy and the Army. Some of them were held on the steps of the Capitol and we'd sit on the grass or sit on the steps. One was held in some building over -- I think that must have been the Marines but they were always very lovely. And I remember one evening, we had so much pleasure listening to two Italians still with their work clothes on, who had come from some job and stopped there. The evenings were long. And they discussed these pieces that were played as if they had played them all themselves. It was very interesting.

I found out that summer what the people meant who said that Washington was hot -- the streets were hot enough to cook an egg on. I really think that they were. And I've heard since that that has been proven. We had no air-conditioning. We had no air-conditioning in the Senate Office Building then; it was put in a few years later. There were very few of the apartment houses, only the new ones which had electric refrigerators. I remember that I moved. I never broke a lease but I moved almost every year trying to find one that was a little better than the other because I had girls with me who needed to be comfortable.

Not long after arriving at the office, I told Senator Townsend that I had already met some very worthwhile people who had come from Delaware to work on the Civil Service in the District of Columbia. And I thought they were worth being written up for the Wilmington Paper. He jumped at it, he said whether the Delmarva Star would be glad to have it, and I know one that you can go interview, already had me interviewing them. Well, the one he had mentioned was a Senator Kerry from Wyoming whose
father was born in Milton, Delaware and he owned the farm near Milton which had been left to him by his grandfather. So we called him the third senator from Delaware. I did have a very nice interview with him. He was a handsome man he owned more land in Wyoming than he knew he had. He couldn’t tell me how many acres but he had 2,000 acres under cultivation.

The Star seemed glad to have the articles, so I arranged some of them -- I think it was six, I had arranged. It meant a trip to the office of each person, then the writing of the article and then a trip back to see if the article I had written suited for me each time. So after the sixth, I decided that I'd better take care of my own office and not do so much of that but there was a field there for anybody. The most interesting...

[0:45:00]

Mrs. Johnson: ...person by far whom I interviewed was a Dr. Tindal formerly in Wilmington. Mr. Tindal died a few years later. The papers called him the old employee of the District of Columbia. He was 88 when he died and District of Columbia’s most honored official. He had served in the Civil War. He was 85 when I saw him first and still he was writing, and alert and going to his office everyday. They had insisted on him keeping an office there.

While I was interviewing and met him in his office, he opened the drawer and showed me a typed copy of a cosmic theory similar to Einstein's which he hoped to have printed someday. He had a degree of medicine and law from the George Washington University. He had served as secretary to the first mayor of the District of Columbia. And he served also a secretary to the commissioner of the District in Columbia after that title became used. The Congress, later, in appreciation, made special provision for his retention in the building. And the residents of the city decided that when he should remain there as Director of the Bureau of Intelligence for the District.

Anytime I could spare the time, I like to go over the galleries. There's so much of interest there. And we knew the boys and the men who had charge of admission to the galleries well enough so that they would tell us that we shouldn’t go in the president’s gallery for instance or some other good one and wait for another time. But usually we would get in. And I saw many people there I had wanted to see.

Interviewer: Who is the most colorful, flamboyant, senatorial personality when you were watching from the gallery? Who did you especially want to watch?
Mrs. Johnson: You mean man or a woman? Well, I would say Huey Long because Huey was quite a character. And I liked him in spite of his odd doings. I remember one day someone came in our office and wanted a bible. And we didn’t have any, we were ashamed to say. And I just had a hunch that somehow that Huey would have a bible. And I called his office and he did have it. And I went down there and got it. And while I was there, his secretary showed me his office -- in her office. He had law books and other books from floor to ceiling and I wondered how many senators had that. And one day, there was a group from Newark who came down to see me. And of course, I was supposed to take them over to the gallery and I took them and introduced him to Senator first in the cloak room. And he took us up to the gallery himself. And I said to him in a whisper, "They’d love to hear Huey Long speak." We were no more seated when I saw Senator Townsend walk over to Huey and speak a few words. And after a little while, when Huey saw his chance, he made us a speech. I don’t remember what it was about but it was a speech. And he looked up at our gallery the whole time.

It was the practice for Democrats in the Senate to speak on their own side of the Senate floor and for the Republicans likewise to speak on their own side. But it didn’t make any difference to Huey Long. He paraded that Senate floor as if it belonged to him. And he was just about to stand right at the seat of one important senator, which I saw happened one day, when Harem Johnson entered the room and saw Huey Long standing at his speech. You never saw such an expression on anyone’s face. And so on Senator Johnson’s he looked awhile and then he turned on his foot and left the room.

One day when I was the gallery, a couple of young men were seated near me. And one of them turned to the other and he said, "Does Roosevelt ever come to this joint?" Another day and in another gallery, a group of page girls from the DAR Convention were seated there. It happened at that day, it was not a regular session but a funeral memorial service for a member of the Senate. I forgot who it was -- I forgot whose funeral it was. The girls listened for a while and then one of them said, "Do they always start this thing with flowers?"

And they one day, because Senator’s daughter wasn’t in town, she gave me her ticket for a seat for some function that went on the Senate, some memorial function. And because I was from Delaware, I had a seat right back of the VIPs and Alice Longworth was seated in front of me. And I
noticed that her handbag looked about as shabby as mine and her gloves were out at the fingers just as mine were. But the thing that amused me most was when it was all over and she couldn't get out fast enough. Instead of waiting for the people in her line to move, she straddled the seats and went over one back of seat out to the other till she got to the door. I would like to know her better.

One thing I saw in the Senate one day that both saddened me amused me. It was at a time when Senator Hiram Bingham was being chastised, I'll say for having -- it was during the tariff debate. And he had brought in a member of the manufacturers association to advise him. And that was thought unethical. So he was allowed to lose his seat in the Senate. And he had looked haggard. He's really a handsome man but he had gone through all this so much that he was haggard.

Across the aisle from him was Senator James Hamilton Lewis. They called him James Ham Lewis, his buddies did. And he was taking part in the debate. He was so suave that he could make a man feel that he was his friend although he was taking picking him to pieces. And it was proving about little too much for Senator Bingham. And when Senator Lewis concluded his remarks, Senator Bingham rose and said, "When I am chastised by the [inaudible] senator from Connecticut or from Illinois, I feel that I've been chastised and massaged by a pearl." And sat down.

The same Senator Lewis had a wig, which he's very fond and he would change it as the hair grew probably so that he must have had about three wigs for different occasions, different periods of the month. He was quite a character. His office force was devoted to him yet they never knew what he was going to do. At one time, he disappeared. They kept waiting each morning thinking he would come in then there call his home. And finally, being from Chicago, a barrel of ham appeared in the office. And girls didn't know what to do with them. So they called Mrs. Hamilton and she didn't know where he was. And they said, "Well, what are we going to do with this ham?" She says, "Divide them up and eat them." He found out later, when he returned that he'd been to Africa during the Senate session.

I've always felt that it was important that people should know how much time the senators have to spend in committee and sub-committees. It may have been for that reason that Senator Townsend introduced a few bills as he could. There are three that I'd like to mention that I think stand out.
One was on the banking and currency committee because of that that he introduced his Silver Bill, which had to do with the United States Government buying silver all over the world for more than the market price and storing it at West Point. He thought it should be stopped. But he had troubled getting out of committee. I think it would have been a popular bill. But Senator Barkley who was one of his best friends was chairman of the committee and he saw to it though that bill didn’t get out, that a Republican got credit for it. Senator had a man name Mr. Brattier who did research work for him. Mr. Brattier was a writer for the New York Times. He wrote editorials on financial subjects. I know he did it because I typed some of them for him and we would see them in the paper the next day.

One night, after I have gone to bed, the phone rang. It was Mr. Brattier. They were having a night session at the Senate and he was sure that he had some material that Senator Townsend could well put before the senate that evening. But he had to have it typed, would I go with him up to my office and typed it for him and time was precious. I put on my clothes and rode up there with him, and wrote it and he dashed over to the Senate. That was the last I saw of him that evening. After it was over, I went down to the corner. It was about 11:30 by that time, waited on the corner to take either a taxi or a street car, whichever came first. I think it was a street car. The next morning when Senator came into the office, he was very serious. He says, "I don’t want anything like that to happen again.

You won’t believe this but there was a bill introduced from the Agriculture Committee sent by Senator Townsend pertaining to oleo. Oleo was being made then so near like butter that it has being sold as butter. As well as I can remember, the bill that he introduced demanded that -- required that the oleo be untended so they would know it was oleo and that nothing but butter should be furnished by the men in our own services. And the bill passed. I think it must have been amended later because they went back using the -- but they do advertise it more nearly as oleo. The Dr. T.F. Manse [phonetic] [0:57:55] of the University of Delaware at that time, told me that oleo that was being produced at that time cost about 7 cents for the ingredients in it apparently.

The third bill, which I’m very proud, was the Plant Patent Bill. Luther Burbanks had made his famous collection of plants that he had discovered. He had no assurance that somebody else wouldn’t pull them to pieces and get a patent on them. He had never had a patent. When he died, his widow was faced with that. She had all the money he wanted her to have in his gardens but no assurance. So with the help of the men
on the House side, this bill applied bushes and trees, not to seed. The first application was made for a rose by a Frenchman. You see, the bill applies for anyone who brings it to the United States Patent Office. And I forget the numbers of bills -- number of patents that were issued in a few months.

One requirement when presenting, when applying for a patent was to produce, I think it was three drawings and color of the plant. And I thought the prettiest one that I was shown when I visited the patent office was one of a mushroom. Such delicate, beautiful faint coloring and lines were in that picture, those pictures.

Last year, I was given a gift of a rose bush.

[1:00:00]

Mrs. Johnson: And I happened to notice there was a little metal something hanging to it. And I looked at it and it was plant patent so and so, and it made me thrill.

Another bill which Senator Townsend introduced was the perennial Equal Rights Bill. Through that I met Hazel Moore, legislative assistant to Mrs. Margaret Sanger. Mrs. Sanger, I think, founded the parenthood association, the birth control. Hazel had worked for a number of years with the Red Cross, and was a very valuable assistant to Mrs. Sanger and made a several trips to China with her. Hazel and I became good friends during the times she spent in Washington. She had a key to my apartment and I had an extra cot always in my room for her. Hazel had been divorced and she had a son half grown in a private school for boys in Washington.

Later, he went to China. And finally, flew commercial plane and it came out in the papers that he had been lost in one of his trips. And Hazel was in Washington at the time, became greatly agitated. She had a number of friends in China and she knew if she could get over there, they would be influential enough to have a real search made for the boy. The Washington Post, I believe it was, at least a Washington paper became interested in it for the story value. And they paid Hazel’s expenses to go to China to fly there. And while she was over there she died for she had made her search of a disease I didn’t know she had which was diabetes.

Interviewer: You've described some of the bills that Senator Townsend was particularly instrumental in engineering through the Senate. Are there any other particular kinds of bills or were there anymore that you think are important to talk about?
Mrs. Johnson: I believe the rest were minor and rather local, concerning Delaware because Senator had a feeling that there were entirely too many laws introduced. Took up too much time and were not worthy of they work the committees were giving to them. Rather than ignore the subject of lawmaking altogether, I would like to applaud the statement made recently by our Judge Neals in addressing a group of newly naturalized citizens of the United States in the District Court of Wilmington when he said, "Multiplying laws in Washington encroaches on your liberty. It behooves us as citizens to watch jealous eyes our home and our lawmakers when they pile up the body of laws." Judge Neals must have had in mind the fact that when this first session of the 74th Congress was convened in January 1935. The code of laws of the United States then in affect -- with the opening of each law -- with the meaning of each law, briefly stated and printed in a small type, filled a large volume of 2,275 pages, just federal laws. And mind you the first session of that Congress, which was adjourned in late August, enacted 80 more laws and if the members of the Congress had had their will, the number would have been 13,000. Small wonder that Senator Joseph T. Robinson of Arkansas...

[1:05:00]

Mrs. Johnson: ...majority leader of the Senate, became a bit concerned the last evening and in rebuking Senator Lon for interrupting the normal disposition of legislation was instead -- used instead the phrase, dissipation of legislation.

One day I was fortunate enough to have a seat in the gallery so that I could get a clear look of Mrs. Roosevelt which I’d never had before. I found her better looking than her pictures. She had fine eyes and brow, pretty hair, and when she smiled it lighted up her whole face. Her manner was serious as if she were always thinking about serious things and she always carried her knitting to the gallery and knitted the whole time she was sitting there. She looked older and much more serious when she’d been in Washington for a few years.

Mrs. Hiram Johnson attends sessions of the Senate more than any other of the Senate wives. Her husband seems to appreciate her presence and often addresses his self to her when he speaks. He considers her his best critic. If you don’t mind I’m going to change the subject for just a few minutes and tell you about one Saturday morning when I was in the office alone, Senator had gone to Delaware, as was his custom when he was not in committee.
And in walked Mr. Pierre DuPont and asked for the Senator. I told him he wasn’t there and asked for what I might do for him. And he said, "Well, I just came down on the train to attend the meeting that I had been called to and a trust and I made some notes, which I would like to copy." And I said, "Well, come on in Senator’s room and use his desk." He said, "Oh, no, I’ll just stand here," and he stood by my roller top desk and began writing. And I said, "Mr. DuPont, might I type them for you?" He looked so pleased and grateful and he said, "Would you?" And he thanked me profusely. And I thought all these sarcastic remarks I’ve heard about the DuPont Company in Delaware since we came here, they think they run -- some people who come in think the DuPonts run our state. And I have lived there a good many years and I was never was conscious of anything like that. They've have just given people good jobs and good pensions and taking care of them when they were ill and things like that.

Mr. William B. Foster of Wilmington, the Vice President of the DuPont Company asked me one day if I would send him a copy of every bill and report on that bill which I might get, that would help him on certain subjects in which he was interested. I agreed to do it. And I sent him more bills than I would like to count. Then once, he wrote about an amendment that was being called on a bill that was before the committee of agriculture and asked me if that were passed, would I send him a telegram or telephones him immediately upon its passage.

Well, one day, I had the feeling that they were going to have a midnight session until midnight that night and that amendment was apt to come up. So that was the second time I had been in the gallery at midnight when it closed. But that amendment did pass that night and I telegraphed Mr. Foster because I hated to wake him out of his sleep. I hope they didn’t call him from the telephone office.

Another little meeting one day of social interest, it seems they were going a little slow over at the Capitol and he phoned for me to come over for lunch. And I went over and he had Senator Walcott from Connecticut who is probably his best friend in the Senate. And while we were there, Senator Walcott told a story about Lady Esther. And before I tell it I want to tell another one about Lady Esther, which occurred during World War II.

[1:10:00]

A cousin of my husband’s lived in Philadelphia and her husband was in World War II. He became a colonel. Both were graduates of the University of Delaware. And his assignment was to the harbor at
Plymouth where the vessels that had been damaged in battle were brought into see if they could be retrieved. He was an engineer and there was a British engineer whose name I don’t remember associated with him. And Lady Esther always was always very good to people that came to help in the war from America -- from the United States because she herself was in Virginia. And this Fred Murray -- Colonel Fred Murray, who came from Selbyville where Senator Townsend lived, had been invited several times to her home for dinner. And he was very artistic himself. After he had been graduated, he had been named superintendent of maintenance at the Federal Reserve building. And they had a class in painting and woodworking and he always walked off with the prizes and had done some beautiful work. He immediately noticed an aphern (phonetic) on the side table and remarked on its beauty. He had mentioned his wife Polly, and Lady Esther immediately turned around and says, "Take it home to Polly." And when the Fred told me the story, I exclaimed and said, "My, she was impulsive." He said, "Yes but if she had admired my watch, she would expect me to give the watch to her."

I’ll go back to the luncheon story that Senator Walcott gave us. He remarked that Lady Esther was in the city. And he said I wondered if she’ll bring her son, her youngest son with her. He said, "You know, when I was assisting President Hoover in Europe during the war, in his food relief program, we were entertained frequently at Lady Esther’s. And one evening, she sent us home a bit early. She said that because I expect to have a baby about midnight. And we all laughed over it and I told her to be sure to phone me. And sure enough, she phoned me shortly after midnight that her new son had arrived. The next day he entertained Lady Esther at the Senate dining room and a few senators were invited among them Senator Townsend. And she did have her youngest son with her and they laughed over it.

At another time, Senator Townsend, who was living at the show room asked me to come for dinner with him that night because the Balls, George Ball, I think his name is, were coming for dinner also. And he wanted me to meet them. Now George Ball is the brother of the second Mrs. Aphrodite DuPont and was Aphrodite DuPont’s lawyer. I went to the dinner. We had a very pleasant time. I had to smile when I thought of connections my husband have had with the family. And after the evening was over, the Balls took me home to my apartment. I might add that after Mrs. DuPont’s death, this was the Ball and a man -- another lawyer named Mills who married a Dover Delaware girl, Helen Barnett, now lives in Jacksonville, Florida were named trustees -- no, were named executors.
of Mr. DuPont's will and trustees of the foundation, which I suppose will go on forever.

I have remarked before that Senator Vandenberg had an office next door to ours. He made frequent speeches and very businesslike. He would be at the office as early as 7 o'clock in the morning, typing his speech with two fingers. I think he never had a ghostwriter. He had quite a good staff and once in a while he'd...

[1:15:00]

Mrs. Johnson: ...take his whole staff over to a corner restaurant, the Methodist House for luncheon and it was quite to show them going. In Senator Vandenberg's office, as I may have may said before, was a young man whose name was Oliver Dompierre. And he was a great help to me when I came to the office brand new. I had a letter from him the other day in which he told me he had been continuously on Capitol Hill since I knew him in Senator Vandenberg's Office. He had been there 43 years. He had worked for several senators and leaders and for Senator Dirksen until he died and he is now working for the minority leader as his assistant.

I may have stated that Senator Townsend was living at the shore room since the third year of his terms. And his habit, unless he was breakfasting with the birds and glasses from Virginia, would walk to the Senate, a distant of four miles. And he would always be there as early as 8 o'clock. And on his way one morning, he passed what we would call a supermarket now. They just come to Washington. And he noticed they were unpacking crates of chickens and he went into see what was going on. They were very nice to him and he found that they were also having chickens cut up for sale afterward. And the idea came to him that didn't have to be done in a store; it could be done as a business down in Sussex County. They have the incubators and hatch their own chickens, raise them, they could have the farms with all the feed that the chickens needed was grown, and have the chicken's cut up in little houses at the place of business and ship them directly, all ready for the stores. He put that in the back of his mind and you will see how it worked out later.

That day he was so busy looking that he left there a cane which Huey Long that had given him and knew it would never do to lose it or Huey would be getting him another one. So, the next morning, he stopped for the cane. Senator Townsend was quite disturbed when he received the news of the death of a colored man with whom he had used a crosscut saw in his early, early days to make tracks for the railroads. This man's funeral came on a day when Senator had a very important committee
meeting. And it seemed that he couldn’t possibly go. In trying to comfort him, I told him that the man would understand perfectly if he were alive. He said, "No, he wouldn’t. He would expect me to be there." And he couldn’t wait the next weekend to get down there and talk to that man’s widow.

Interviewer: Could you tell us something about the personalities of the senators who you might have seen when Senator Townsend was in office?

Mrs. Johnson: Oh, there were almost as many differences as there were senators but when one stayed there for twelve years, it did become evident that there were some very interesting personalities. Senator Borough is one. He might be seen in the senators' own dining room eating breakfast every morning quite alone. He didn’t seem to have any need for anyone else. I noticed his wife was in the gallery most of the time and I think her presence was enough for him. He was a man who refused to take the increase in salary when it was given to the senators. He said that he would not do that until he had been reelected by his constituents without understanding. He gave the money back to the treasury.

Senator Asher was so polite that one would not have been surprised when a vote was called to hear him say no, thank you. A newspaper man was talking to me about the attitude of the different senators. He said, "Now, Senator Bird is as capable...

[1:20:00]

Mrs. Johnson: ...as Senator Tidings [phonetic] [1:12:19] but not so aggressive. Senator Tidings will step on your foot in debate but Senator Bird is more apt to apologize or walk around your foot. Senator Townsend was invited to the White House several times during the Hoover Administration. And one weekend, he and his daughter were the only guests they invited to go home with them, to their country retreat. I forget where it was. And Senator's daughter Leila reported a very nice time and that they were fine homey people and they felt quite at home in their house.

Senator Townsend was well-liked in the Senate. His best friends, I think, were Senators Glass and Bird from Virginia. Senator Walcott from Connecticut, Golsborough [phonetic] [1:20:57] from Maryland. He frequently breakfasted with the Glass couple -- Senator and Mrs. Glass at the hotel because she was semi-invalid and did not get out a great deal. And also he requested with the Birds and visited their plantation in Virginia. When Mrs. Glass died, Senator came to my desk and in a sad
voice said, "Mrs. Glass is dead. I wish you would write the sweetest letter you know how to write and I will sign it."

I was always interested in the friendships that seemed to grow between the senators, not at all dictated by politics. And I think perhaps it isn’t today because I read recently that when John Williams was in the Senate, he and the majority leader Mansfield breakfasted together many mornings.

**Interviewer:** What was the Senator Townsend’s campaign technique and how would it be different do you think from what's done today except for television?

**Mrs. Johnson:** Oh, just as different as it could be. He wasn’t an orator but he made a good sound speech and he made a few of them and made good speech at the convention preceding the nomination. He went up and down the state and people collected money for him. But the difference is in fervor and rushing and the collecting of a lot of money was unheard of in those days. He would have been ashamed that it took that much money to get him elected. And of course, he was sad when he was defeated for the third term but probably not surprised because the state had not yet got in the habit of sending a man term after term from little Delaware when there were others who wanted the job.

His lawyer, James Tunnel [phonetic] [1:23:19] of Georgetown had defeated him and it was practically all done at the last minute by printing material and page ads material out of context about some actions on a bill. I forget what it was. He was sad too about leaving his friends. I think people don’t have any idea of what a sound friendship goes up when one is seated for a few terms in the Senate and you're with a group of men such as you will never be with again. Each one probably of high metal caliber.

He didn’t return to the office for about a week and a few days after the election, Senator Bird came into the office to talk to me. He said, "You have no idea how much I love Senator Townsend. I feel that he’s just like brother to me. And you may be surprised to know that I contributed to his campaign and he contributed to mine, although we have different parties. He knew that a Democrat would be elected in Virginia and he want it to be me. And I felt the same way about him in Delaware."

**Interviewer:** What did Senator Townsend do after his defeat?
Mrs. Johnson:  Oh, Senator Townsend was very alert and very active, an early riser. And he had so many projects on hand that he was never lost for anything to do. And besides he had started this new business...

[1:25:00]

Mrs. Johnson:  ...the chickens in Sussex County. President Truman had appointed as alternate to Mrs. Eleanor Roosevelt to the organization meeting of the United Nations in London. And he was a very faithful attended. I heard that Mrs. Roosevelt called him her buddy because he would be at the meetings when she couldn’t be. And he kept a diary which think is quite wonderful for him because he never wrote a letter very long but he kept a very faithful diary, which -- and I have had a copy of it.

On his 86th birthday in Selbyville the Lion’s Club gave him a custom O'Neil [phonetic] [1:25:52] luncheon and it was a card affair because the room wouldn’t hold too many. And at the head table, there was senator - - and several senators and Vice-President Nixon who gave a speech.

You may think of Washington in terms of laws, public buildings, department, commissions and parades. I prefer to think of that as everybody’s town in terms of human interests. I like to think of Washington as a city where even during a few days one may see and hear persons from all over the country and many other countries all over the world. Where, if fortunate, one may see the President of the United States and his family or where one may in a tour of the Capitol, see the King and Queen of Siam, Amelia Earhart and the Crown Prince of Japan and French Folevel [phonetic] [1:27:12] and some famous American and even our Will Rogers.

I saw Will Rogers one day in the crowd outside the Senate surrounded by senators, all having a good time. That same week, when Senator Townsend started on this, he gave me a ticket he had for Will Rogers' evening at the Shore Room. It was a good time had by all. While I appreciated Washington while I was there, it never seemed like home to me.

[1:27:54]  End of Audio