

— IRVING SWANSON INTERVIEW ONE —

*Editor's Note: This interview was conducted at Mr. Swanson's home in Rockville, MD, on July 27, 2004.*

**WASNIEWSKI:** Alright, Mr. Swanson, let's start out with some biographical information. Where were you born?

**SWANSON:** Born in Hudson, Wisconsin, on the 25th of February 1912. And I attended high school there. I did have a couple of benchmarks there. I won a state contest . . . baritone contest, musical contest. I debated, and was a member of Phi Eta Sigma which is the state, or the national scholastic society. I spent the next year in the accounting office of the Chicago-Northwestern Railroad in St. Paul. I had gone down to enroll at the University of Wisconsin, but I got homesick. I was still a young whipper-snapper at that time. I came back home and I had to get a job. The vice president and controller of the Chicago-Northwestern, Charles Jensch, and his family were dear friends of mine. The Jensch boys were the closest friends I've ever had. Mr. Jensch gave me a job. So I spent the next year with the railroad. The next summer I spent on Sand Island on Lake Superior. I was getting a little more mature and I was earning my way along. I went to school the next fall at Wisconsin. And, I spent that year and the following year at Wisconsin. Then I went to the University of Minnesota after that for a year of pre-legal work. I couldn't make my mind up what I wanted to do. At first I wanted to be a college professor.

**WASNIEWSKI:** In what discipline?

**SWANSON:** Yes.

**WASNIEWSKI:** In what field?

**SWANSON:** History. History was what I loved. I came down to Washington to go to law school rather than going to law school at Wisconsin or Minnesota. The reason for that was that one of the Jensch boys advised me—he had graduated from Harvard Law School. He had been number two in his class at Harvard and had come back to practice law in the Twin Cities. Hudson, incidentally, is 14 miles from St. Paul now, it was a few miles more in that day because it's all been built up. The St. Croix River divides the two states. Those were the days before roads were good and the train was the transportation. I caught the 6:30 train in the morning and it, believe it or not, took almost an hour to get over to the Twin Cities. I spent the work time there and would catch the train at about 5 o'clock at night to get back to Hudson.

[4:00]

I appreciated the job that I had there because the Depression was coming on. Unless you've been through the Depression you don't really know what it is because it was tough. Hudson had a large Chicago-Northwestern Railroad car shop—Mr. Jensch was a figure in this. As an aside, Mr. Jensch was only a high school graduate but he was a brilliant, brilliant man. He had become the vice president and comptroller of the Chicago-Northwestern.

**WASNIEWSKI:** How do you spell Jensch?

**SWANSON:** J-E-N-S-C-H. They were a wonderful family. Sam and Herman were very close friends. Sam graduated from Harvard Law School.

He was at the top of his class. Herman graduated from Carleton where he was a star athlete. I had that good relationship. So Mr. Jensen hired me despite the fact the [millions of] people were being laid off. I came down to work in Washington because Sam had a classmate of his who at that time was working for Burt Wheeler, the Senator from Montana. The man was going to George Washington University Law School. Sam said, "It's a good school you should go down." Of course, I needed a job because the Depression was on. And so, I came down . . .

**WASNIEWSKI:** And this would have been about what year?

**SWANSON:** 1935. So I proceeded to go ahead and checked into Washington. Bailey Storts was his friend's name. Storts said, "You go over and see the personnel man"—in the Library of Congress. At that time the Legislative Reference was part of the Library. He said, "Tell them who you are," and he said, "I would suggest you bring your transcript." I was coming here to go to law school—that was in January 1935 or something. I can't give you the exact date.

**WASNIEWSKI:** That's fine. That's fine.

**SWANSON:** So I put my transcript in my pocket. An elderly man by the name of Boyd was the top personnel man at the Library. Bailey had called over to make the appointment. I proceeded to go ahead and go down to see him. Mr. Boyd said, "You look very good." He looked at my transcript—it was almost all A's. He said, "Mr. Swanson, I think we can use you. You want to go to school," he said. "There are a lot of people here that are attending school. We

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try to help those who would like to go to school.” Well, I said, “That’s just fine.” He said, “When do you want to start. Can you start tomorrow?” I said, “Mr. Boyd, “I’d like to start today.” So I went to work right away. That was a very good job for me. I was digesting legislation and that sort of thing. That’s how I got into it.

Well, anyway, during my time with the Legislative Reference I met my wife [Margaret Swanson]. My wife was working at that time. We were married in '37. One of her good friends was a lady by the name of Louise Calloway. My wife was a graduate of GW [George Washington], too. Louise’s husband [Roger M. Calloway] was the Democratic reading clerk of the House.<sup>1</sup> Mr. [Alney E.] Chaffee at that time, was assigned to the Republican side because they needed a clerk in their closed conference.<sup>2</sup> Mr. Chaffee was in his nineties and he just couldn’t function anymore and was ill. Roger was having a very tough time carrying the legislation at the desk. You probably have seen the desk operation. You work very closely with the Speaker back and forth, the amendments, the legislation. Then you have to take the roll call and take the votes. The tally clerk totaled the number. He [Calloway] said, “I need some help.” He said, “Irv, have you got a good voice?” And I said, “Well, I thought I had a pretty good voice.” And he said . . . And I had graduated from law school, too. And so he said, “I’ll talk to the Speaker.” Speaker [Samuel Taliaferro “Sam”] Rayburn had just become Speaker. He had been the Majority Leader, the Democrat Leader.

**WASNIEWSKI:** And so this was in 1940?

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<sup>1</sup> Democratic reading clerk in the U.S. House of Representatives; *Congressional Directory 1940*.

<sup>2</sup> Republican reading clerk in the U.S. House of Representatives; *Congressional Directory 1940*.

**SWANSON:**

This was in 1940. So I, and Mr. Calloway—see, you get to know these people intimately because there aren't very many people on the floor and you're working with them all the time—went to the Speaker's Office. Lew [Lewis] Deschler was the Parliamentarian and Lew was sitting in there.<sup>3</sup> Sam was kind of a gruff man but a good and great man. He said, "Your résumé looks good, you're a lawyer." He said, "You've got to have a good voice to take us through these roll calls?" I said, well, I had done well in singing and I was on a debate team and that sort of thing. He said, "I'll tell you what we'll do . . . Mr. Swanson, we'll try you out for a month." He said, "If it doesn't work out you can go back to your old job—I'll see to that." The Speaker at the time was the second most powerful man in the country. I said (here I am a punk, a punk in his early twenties), "Well, Mr. Speaker, you won't hold it against me if I don't like it and I want to go back." {laughter} Rayburn laughed and he said, "Oh, that's fine."

[12:00]

So I went in as the assistant reading clerk. I got \$3,600. Now these are 1940 figures . . . I think I was making \$2,000 or something like that at the Legislative Reference Service. I think the top man at the Legislative Reference Service was paid \$3,200. So you can see . . . {laughter}

**WASNIEWSKI:**

You were doing pretty well.

**SWANSON:**

Considering the value of the dollar at that time. So, anyway, I went to work and after about a year, Roger Calloway developed cancer. He lingered for about a year and a half—I think it was. And I had

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<sup>3</sup> Parliamentarian of the U.S. House of Representatives from the 70th Congress (1927–1929) until his retirement during the 93rd Congress (1973–1975) on June 27, 1974.

to handle the entire legislation at the desk. If I had to go the bathroom, we had an agreement, that someone would get up and make a point of order and hold off until I could come back {laughter}.

**WASNIEWSKI:** Now for people who might not understand exactly what that entailed—people who may be reading this transcript or listening—tell me what that meant. Handling all . . .

**SWANSON:** Well it meant this: A Member gets up and makes a “point of order” and asks some questions of the chair. The Speaker would answer that. In the meantime, I could go to the washroom and come back. Anyway that didn’t happen very much. Very little.

**WASNIEWSKI:** What was your workload at the desk? What were you doing at the desk and on the floor?

**SWANSON:** All proposed legislation went through my desk. (They call it the legislative clerk in the Senate). We had a tally clerk. When you called the roll, you said, “Mr. So-and-so.” [And he would say,] “Aye.” And I would repeat, “Mr. So-and-so votes, ‘Aye.’” Keeping track was the tally clerk next to you. So, you go through 435 names. Then you call the names of all those that had not voted. So, it’s a pretty tough job, and you had to handle it all. And, I don’t know, you’ve been in the House? When they have a roll call it’s bedlam, taking the call. You have to have good eyesight and you’ve got to have good hearing—which I don’t have now.

You get to know the Members intimately. After calling the roll the Members who have not voted can come into the well of the

chamber and you recognize them and they vote. You repeat their answers and the tally clerk tallies their vote. I don't know if you want me to tell you . . . some of the little things. It's been so long ago you can't remember everything.

**WASNIEWSKI:** Please.

**SWANSON:** At the time of the extension of the draft, which was an important issue . . .

**WASNIEWSKI:** Selective Service in 1940 . . .

**SWANSON:** Selective Service. It passed by one vote. Now you can imagine what that responsibility was on me. I remember that occasion vividly. I didn't want to make a mistake. It would be awful, if you did. I will say this: when it's so close like that it's quiet in the chamber. At ordinary times when you vote on amendments or passage or the motion to recommit, it's bedlam in the House. The Speaker has to call for order in order to get the roll call taken. Now those are the old days. Now, you have electronic voting. You don't have any of this. So, I would say, I should have stayed on that job because today it is a lot lighter!

[16:00]

But anyway, that's what I was. And after some time, Roger Calloway died and George [J.] Maurer who was the Speaker's assistant (and he'd gone to school as so many people on the Hill) became the Democratic reading clerk.<sup>4</sup> We were very good friends. Mr. Chaffee was still alive and I still had the title of assistant

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<sup>4</sup> Listed in the *Congressional Directory 1945* as the Democratic reading clerk in the U.S. House of Representatives.

reading clerk that was because each side had to have a clerk . . . for their closed caucuses or meetings.

**WASNIEWSKI:** And, so, you would be in both . . . you could go into both the Republican or the Democratic caucuses?

**SWANSON:** No, I wouldn't go into the Democratic Caucus. One clerk went on one side and one on the other. And so, even though you may be a non-partisan or just non-political . . . when you came in, eventually you had to service one side or had to service the other. I serviced the minority which was Republican . . . Well, so I served in that capacity for a number of years . . . with an exception, when the war came on.

**WASNIEWSKI:** Let me backup . . .

**SWANSON:** Alright back up.

**WASNIEWSKI:** And get you to talk a little bit about the Clerk's organization when you first came in before the war. I'm interested in knowing at some point.

**SWANSON:** Alright, before the war, well . . .

**WASNIEWSKI:** . . . how the war would have changed things. But, in 1940, when you came in, how large was the Clerk's office at that point?

**SWANSON:** Well, the Clerk's office wasn't one of tremendous size. It's just like anything else—like in the Members' offices they had two or three, sometimes only one person, now they've got many assistants.



I remember the Appropriations Committee which was a very important committee located right off the floor of the House. Mark Shields was the clerk and Johnny Pugh was the assistant clerk. They had two or three assistants that were handling subcommittees. Their career was for a lifetime. They didn't leave it. And, so, the staffs of these people were minimal compared to what they are today. And, of course, that reflected itself on the floor because no one is permitted on the floor with the exception of those that are the officers of the House and those that are vital to the functioning of the House.

When a piece of legislation comes in from a certain committee, by unanimous consent . . . the staff, two or three of them could come in at that time. But outside of that it's a closed job. Of course, you have people in the cloakroom, which is a gathering place for the Members themselves. {laughter}

[20:00]

So, I came over there at that time. Mr. Chaffee passed away and I became the reading clerk. Do you remember Mr. [William Tyler] Page?<sup>5</sup> Have you ever heard of him?

**WASNIEWSKI:** I have heard of Page before, yes.

**SWANSON:** Well, yes. For many years, he was the Clerk of the House. Prior to that he'd been the reading clerk of the House and he moved on up. You get to know the Members so well.

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<sup>5</sup> Clerk of the House from the 66th through the 71st Congress, 1919-1931. Page was from Maryland.

He was there when I first came. He was a venerable elderly man and was very, very nice and very helpful. I remember he said to me, he said, "Remember now, there will be some Members who will try to take advantage of you." What he was trying to say was, in effect, that when absent they'll want you to vote 'em one way or so. I always wanted to accommodate the Members but that was not for me. I dedicated myself to honest voting.

So, anyway, William Tyler Page died and I remember going to his funeral. He must have had, at least 400 out of the 435 Members that attended the funeral. They came out to his home. I remember that you couldn't get practically into his house.

**WASNIEWSKI:** He was very popular with the Members?

**SWANSON:** Very, very popular. I think Mr. Page had to be in his late-80s, anyway, or close to it. And, unless you've been through that you don't realize how close you've become to the membership of the House. You're dealing with them individually all the time. They're coming up and asking you—and I always tried my best to service the Members of Congress, in other words—they have a multitude of, let us say, questions all the time.

**WASNIEWSKI:** What were some of the typical questions they might ask?

**SWANSON:** Alright. I handled the amendments that were submitted. Members that were not present when the amendments were offered would come up to the desk and ask questions. They had been in committee or other meetings. Many times the attendance was minimal. When you are legislating in the Committee of the Whole,

a quorum is 100. The House resolves itself into the Committee of the Whole House on the State of the Union for legislative purposes. The Speaker asks a certain Member to preside. That is another time when you get to know people very, very well because you are working directly with them. They are not in the chamber all of the time and they would ask you many questions.

I go back and I see many of these fine people who were presiding in the chair. Wilbur [Daigh] Mills, for instance, was a favorite of Speaker Rayburn's to come and preside. Wilbur was an able person, wonderful friend of mine. He became a good friend. He's dead now. It's tragic on Mills because he got to drinking a little too much, you know. In the end, he quit the Congress. Mills was a very able man and was a very fair man. Let's see, what was I talking about?

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**WASNIEWSKI:** Relationship with the Members. Your relationship with the Members.

**SWANSON:** Yes. You've got to have their confidence all the way through. I'll never forget [Vito Anthony] Marcantonio. He was known as the Communist Member by some . . .

**WASNIEWSKI:** From New York.

**SWANSON:** From New York. I always treated "Marc" just as any other Member, whether a Republican or Democrat or the Speaker or a leader or not. He was a Member of Congress and he got the same service. Members would come up to you and say, "What kind of amendments do you have?" They'd come in from their offices or from committee hearings that they'd been in. You told them: "This

amendment does this and does that.” And if there’s a pending matter, they would say, “Who’s for it? Who’s spoken for it?” You know. And, “What is it?” You had to be on your toes.

So, “Marc” many times would come up to me and would say, “What does this amendment do?” And I would tell him exactly as I would any other Members. Marc and others used to like to have long weekends to go home from Thursday to Monday. In the summer there was no air conditioning yet in the Capitol and it was hotter than the hinges of Hades in July. They got out of here in the summer. My job was a great job, just a great job.

**WASNIEWSKI:** Let me follow up on that. When do you remember air conditioning being used?

**SWANSON:** Well, I can’t tell you exactly. I started to work in the chamber before the war . . . probably ’40. They air-conditioned the chamber at that time. You never saw such wonderful attendance in all your life. Their offices weren’t air conditioned. The chamber was done first. It didn’t take long and they air conditioned the Capitol and then the House Office Buildings.

**WASNIEWSKI:** So, your whole time there the chamber was air conditioned at least?

**SWANSON:** Oh, no. My first years in the chamber were not air conditioned. That’s why they got out of there. Oh, yes. I’m recalling all these things. Now . . .

**WASNIEWSKI:** That’s fine.

**SWANSON:** In those days the sessions were much shorter. I was paid for the entire year. Many times I had assignments that I desired. I went to different places around the country or world. You want to go into these deals?

**WASNIEWSKI:** Sure, tell me a little bit about them.

**SWANSON:** Well, a good example of it was the Inter-Parliamentary Union meetings. A delegation of Members of Congress would go. They were joined by delegates from other countries in the Inter-Parliamentary Union. Well, they had to have a clerk. And, they decided I should be one of the clerks. Bill Reed from the Senate was the top clerk. I was the legislative clerk for our group. One meeting, we went to Bangkok. It was a fine group. There were 16 of us . . . 16 Members and their wives. They asked me and I said, “Well, I’ll go, but I’ve got a wife.” The answer was, “Take your wife with you.” So, we flew to Thailand.

*Brief Interruption of Tape*

**WASNIEWSKI:** You were talking about the Inter-Parliamentary Union and you were in Bangkok.

**SWANSON:** Yes, that’s right. We had a number of excellent Members. [Thomas Hale Boggs] was one of them. Hale became a very close friend of mine. And his wife Lindy [Corrinne Claiborne “Lindy” Boggs] was along.<sup>6</sup> All their wives. Do you want to know about that trip?

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<sup>6</sup> For more information on Representative Boggs, see Office of History and Preservation, Office of the Clerk, *Women in Congress, 1917–2006* (Washington, D.C.: U.S. Government Printing Office, 2006): 500–505 and <http://womenincongress.house.gov>.

**WASNIEWSKI:** Sure. I'd like to hear about one of them if it's representative.

**SWANSON:** Oh it was great. We all left as soon as the November election was over. We had a government airplane. Bill Reed and I had to make all the arrangements for it because it was our duty to do that. Tom [Thomas Carey] Hennings [Jr.] was the senior Member, he was a Senator. He was from Missouri. I had known him in the House, so we renewed a lot of old friendships. Hale and Lindy were along. Mr. [Henry Oscar] Talley from Iowa was also a Member. I think Tom was the ranking Member and I think Talley of Iowa was the ranking Member on the House side. The plane picked them up on the way out. We stopped and got Tom and his wife. Let's see who else. Oh, Katharine [Price Collier] St. George was a delegate.<sup>7</sup> She was an able person and she took her daughter with her. We started here in Washington with the exception of Hennings, and then we picked up somebody else in the West, which one I can't tell you. Thinking of the Members that were along, oh, Gordon [Llewellyn] Allott. So we stopped in Hawaii, and then went on to Bangkok. We were there about 16 days. And it was a very, very interesting trip and meeting. John Robeson of [Virginia] was along. Albert Gore and his wife Pauline were along. We were gone about a month. We had 16 days, I think, in Bangkok. Then, on the way back, we stopped in Taiwan. Chiang Kai-shek and Madame Chiang entertained us. I'll never forget this. My wife and I were low on the totem pole. In other words, Senators and their wives. And we came in and Chiang Kai-shek and his wife greeted us. I remember he was very affable. He said, "Has anybody been in the Far East before?" Nobody mentioned it. At that point my wife raised her hand. And

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<sup>7</sup> Office of History and Preservation, *Women in Congress, 1917–2006*: 258–261 and <http://womenincongress.house.gov>.

he said, "Oh, you have?" She said, "Yes when I was a little girl." Her father had been an Army officer and was stationed in the Philippines and the family had made some trips into China. From that moment on, the Generalissimo was talking to my wife more than anybody else. {laughter}

But anyway it was a great trip, a wonderful trip. Coming back, we stopped in Hawaii. We stayed at the Royal Hawaiian. Have you ever been out there?

**WASNIEWSKI:** Never been to Hawaii.

**SWANSON:** Oh, it's lovely. I think we were there about three or four days and then came back. So it was a grandiose trip, just a grandiose trip.

Another occasion was when I made an inspection of many national parks. The committee was short of help and the chairman said to me, "Irv, what are you doing?" He said, "I want to look into a few things at some installations . . . Will you do it?" I replied, "Yes, but I want to take my wife with me." So I drove to many national parks and it [the subcommittee] was the interior appropriations. The park services were in private hands and there were some complaints about it. So I had to make a report. We went through the parks and, of course, they entertained us and were very helpful. It was wonderful to see these national parks in the West.

**WASNIEWSKI:** And to travel . . .

**SWANSON:** There weren't as many parks at that time, I can assure you of that. There were so many . . . emoluments to the office that made it so

attractive. Now, I don't think this happens today because the Congress is staying in session almost 12 months of the year. So . . .

**WASNIEWSKI:** On these trips, for instance, to Bangkok. So you would arrange the trip, but once there you would . . . you would learn about parliamentary processes?

**SWANSON:** Oh, I was at the meetings all the time and handling our working with our delegation on the floor. The wives were enjoying life in Bangkok. It wasn't like working in the Congress itself but it was still a very interesting job. And so that was part of the outside emoluments.

**WASNIEWSKI:** Okay.

**SWANSON:** You know, I can't recall all these things. After all this is 60 years ago.

**WASNIEWSKI:** You're recalling it quite well. If you think of anything, please feel free to, to volunteer it as we go along.

**SWANSON:** Every now and then memories come up.

**WASNIEWSKI:** You, you mentioned Wilbur Mills. What other Members, who else do you remember working closely with or . . .

**SWANSON:** A hundred others, anyway. Many others. Well, for instance, Margaret [Chase] Smith became a close friend of mine.<sup>8</sup> And she,

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<sup>8</sup> Ibid, 196–201 and <http://womenincongress.house.gov>.



later on went on into the Senate, so that was one of the reasons why. . . Bill Reed wanted me to come over to the Senate . . . so, why I went to the Senate. I want to say at least half the Senators were former House Members. They moved on up.

**WASNIEWSKI:** When do you remember first meeting Margaret Chase Smith?

**SWANSON:** Her husband was Clyde [Harold] Smith. He was a Member of Congress when I first came to the House. He died and she took his place. She asked me a lot of questions about the operation. I always liked to be helpful to people. Maybe I was too helpful to people. I always told them what I thought all the way through. First of all I loved the Congress. Why . . . well, I don't know why. But anyway, it was one of those things. The political bug had bitten me. Do you want me to tell you?

**WASNIEWSKI:** Sure. Any stories that would . . .

**SWANSON:** My Congressman originally was Merlin Hull, an old, elderly man and a wonderful person. We became very close friends; I was almost like a son to him.

**WASNIEWSKI:** This was your Congressman from Wisconsin?

**SWANSON:** Wisconsin.

**WASNIEWSKI:** Okay.

**SWANSON:** His district was adjacent to Minnesota and the Twin Cities. Merlin was dedicated to the district. He was a wealthy man and had

owned newspapers. He serviced his nation; he loved being a Congressman; loved being in the district. And, I'll never forget, an incident: I'd been elected minority clerk and I was on the floor most of the time. Hull's secretary was Bess Sanderson. A Page boy came to get me. He said, "You're wanted on the phone." So I went back to the cloakroom and it was Bess on the phone and she said, "The boss would like to talk to you." Merlin must have been in his late eighties at that time. She said, "The boss would like it if you would come over to the office."

And I said, "Well, Bess, we're getting ready to adjourn here now in about 15 or 20 minutes." I said, "I'll be right over afterward." She said, "No, can you come right away?" That was enough to just make me say, "I'll come right now." Someone would have to take my place. I wasn't reading clerk at that time. So I went over there and Bess said, "Go, right on in." She was the only person in the office.

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And Mr. Hull was sitting back in his big leather chair. Did you ever see those black leather chairs? Sitting back there, he said, "Sit down Irving." So, I sat down and he looked at me and he said, "How would you like to take my place?" He was the undisputed king of the district. He would win by 90 percent. And, you know, I was just a punk at that time. I, maybe I moved too fast. I don't know. But anyway, I told him, "Mr. Hull, I certainly appreciate that sentiment." He loved the district. I said, "I appreciate your confidence in me. But," I said, "I think I've got a better job than you." Can you imagine that? {laughter}

“Well,” he said, “Look, I’m getting so damned old.” “I love this district,” he said. “I want someone to be able to take good care of it that will follow through.” He died about six months later. He felt as though he was at the end of his life.

Some years after Mr. Hull’s death a man by the name of [Vernon W.] Thomson took his place and he became a very good friend, too. Later on he was governor of Wisconsin. Oh, incidentally, the adjacent district was represented by a man by the name of [Bernard John] Gehrman. He used to be our milkman. He had lived in Hudson and he was our milkman. He would always say to me, “I’ll tell you, you’re such a husky man right now because I gave you wonderful milk when you were growing up.” {laughter} Yeah. He was a fine person.

**WASNIEWSKI:** And you passed up Mr. Hull’s offer because you felt that the job you had was . . . made you happy?

**SWANSON:** Well, not only that but there was not too much difference in pay. I had found out what the Members had to go through. Every . . . 12 months out of the year practically. Do this, do that. And you had to be, if you were a good Congressman you had to see everybody that you could no matter what his name, religion, politics, or anything was. You were a service. They are harassed to death. Some of them would have to go back home two, a couple times a week . . . at least once a month. And, it was a nerve-racking, nerve-racking job. Now, maybe if you had a district that was lock-stock-and-barrel it would be different. But I wasn’t in a position to say, “Lock-stock-and-barrel.” And I didn’t have any money to run for Congress anyway. Mr. Hull would have said, “Look, I want him

to take over.” That’s about all he had to say. But . . . it’s a tough job, tough job. Especially where you get into a district where they change the boundaries, etcetera. Now, if you’re in the Senate, that’s a little bit different. You’ve got six years. A Congressman’s elected every two years, and he’s campaigning again almost the next day after his election.

**WASNIEWSKI:** And that’s your recollection even back in the 1940s, was that it was . . . .

**SWANSON:** That’s right. That’s right. And, now I think it’s worse because of  
[44:00] radio, TV, all that sort of thing. And, so many pressure groups involved. You had them in those days. So, that’s the reason why I didn’t want to go Congress, even if I was lucky enough to be elected. It’s a tough, tough, job.

Incidentally, Tom Davis is a Congressman from Virginia and he was a Page boy.

**WASNIEWSKI:** This would have been . . . .

**SWANSON:** There you are.

**WASNIEWSKI:** . . . back in the late-forties. Or would this have been on the Senate side?

**SWANSON:** This was on the Senate side.

**WASNIEWSKI:** Okay.

**SWANSON:** Yes. Tom is a very able person. You ever . . . yeah, you know.

**WASNIEWSKI:** When you look at. . .

**SWANSON:** Constituents have hundreds of problems. They come and say, “Oh, we got to go see our Congressman.” You have to do this or you have to do that. The Members were overwhelmed.

**WASNIEWSKI:** When you look at the way that the House, that the Members knew each other back in the early 1940s compared to the modern House.

**SWANSON:** Yes. Well, of course, I was on the Hill the last 20 years but I was in private industry. That’s the only time when I made money {laughter}. After I retired from the Hill, I became the legislative counsel to the Pharmaceutical Manufacturers Association (PMA). When you reached a certain age you had to retire. After PMA I went with the Harris Corporation. These jobs paid a lot more and carried an expense account. There aren’t many up there who worked with all the Members. I knew so many of them—some on a first-name basis.

*End of Part One – Beginning of Part Two*

**WASNIEWSKI:** Okay. You were saying that you were in a unique position because you knew so many Members from working on both sides of the Hill.

**SWANSON:** Oh, yes. I always tried to be of help to them. The bill under consideration was many times foreign to some of them. Most were Members of other committees. Many Members who were not

present when the bill was submitted would come up to the desk and ask what the amendment of bill was all about. I listened to the full debate. They would come up and say, “Irv, what does this amendment do?” Or, “How many amendments do you have?” Etcetera!

Let me go back to Marcantonio.

**WASNIEWSKI:** Sure.

**SWANSON:** “Marc” would come on the floor and would ask me questions. He did not talk to Members very much. He was very independent. Many Members liked to have the House adjourn from Thursday to Monday. Marc would object on occasion. I liked to get out, too. It took only one person to object. He would not tell Members whether he would. But he would tell me.

It was a great time to get out and play golf. I was a golfer and I was a member of Army-Navy. I joined, as soon as I got into the war. The Members of Congress had a special deal. They didn’t have to pay the initiation fee. Many times I would play with the Members. There was a big gang of them—there were probably 15 or 20 of them. We were all in this fraternity together, of playing golf together. Both at Columbia—I’m a Member of Columbia, too—and at Army-Navy. So I became intimate friends with both Democrats and Republicans.

You know, the longer you are up there, you realize that the dividing aisle doesn’t separate great guys from the bad guys. They’re on both sides.

And, another thing. All those years that I spent up there, I want to say this: the great ones were always humble. They were humble people, really. They would listen to other people. They didn't know it all. But some were hard to reach because they were a Congressman or they were a Senator. You know what I mean. But most of them that I've known were great . . . treated you like a brother.

I was talking about the golf, yes. That was their only recreation, of getting out into the open. In the end, some of the dearest dear friends of mine were golfers. So, you get to know them out of the confines of the House.

**WASNIEWSKI:** Any differences between the way Members interacted with each other in the 1940s, pre-war or after the war, compared to now?

**SWANSON:** Well, of course, it's been a long time ago. I retired in 1989. I can't tell you about today. I haven't been on the Hill or back in there, for [4:00] two or three years. But, some of them were very, very friendly to the other side of the aisle. They may have been Democrats or they may have been Republicans, but they were pals, in other words. A good example of that was a man by the name of Mike [Michael Alyosius] Feighan from Ohio. He liked to play golf and I used to play golf with Mike. He was one of the finest people I've ever known. Just a great, wonderful person. He had Republican friends just as close to him as Democrats. And that goes for the Republicans the same way. In other words, they were Americans, let us put it that way. Naturally, you had to if you were going to Congress you had to run as a Republican or Democrat. But after they came they were just friendly human beings.

I mean, if you stop to realize how many people that came to Congress that some become president, House first and then the Senate. And so many of them became on a first name basis with me. I'll never forget Lyndon Johnson. Lyndon was a congressional secretary before he came to Congress. Dick [Richard Mifflin] Kleberg was his boss. Mr. Kleberg was a friend of mine. He owned the King Ranch in Texas. Lyndon was his secretary. I think, at that time, Lyndon had holes in his shoes {laughter}. Many secretaries run for Congress when their boss dies. Lyndon ran and won.

There was a place that many staff people would eat at noon. I would go over at noon and play when I could. Mrs. Wrinkle was an old German lady who had a yellow house. Marvelous, marvelous food. We would get over there and sit at a big round table. Members of Congress didn't come there very much. It was secretaries, most of them. And Lyndon was one of them. That's where I first got to know Lyndon. And, so he was elected and he came up as a Member. I don't, I don't . . . must have been after, well, was it after the war? No it was still before the war.

**WASNIEWSKI:** Still before the war.

**SWANSON:** Yes. These are just things that are popping into my mind. I hope you make heads or tails to it. At times the House would postpone taking roll call votes until the end of the day. They would take the roll calls over. And again, I was all alone. Some Members would feel sorry for me {laughter}. I'll tell you some stories on that, too.

[8:00] One time I was wilted. I think I had four or five votes. When you call the roll, it takes time, hard listening, in other words to get the



votes right. Anyway, Lyndon came up to me. He was a young Congressman. He came up to the desk and I was sitting there, kinda half-wilted, I think after about four or five roll calls. He grabbed my hand and he said, "I want you to have this, Irv." And he gave me a silver cigarette lighter, with "LBJ" on it. Of course, I thanked him. During the war I gave it to a close naval colleague. He died about a year later with lung cancer. You know, those are things you go back and say, "Why did I give that cigarette lighter to Jay?"

Oh, that was Lyndon. Lyndon went over to the Senate. Later on, I went to work in the Senate. Lyndon was a pretty regular guy in the House. In the Senate, he knew he was a Senator. He would still come up to me and ask questions. He came up and said—he always grabbed you by the coat—and says, "What the hell is that guy gonna do on that? How long is he gonna talk?" {laughter}

Gerry [Gerald Rudolph] Ford . . . that's another one. Gerry Ford, became a very dear friend of mine. The man before him was Barney [Bartel John] Jonkman, who was a Congressman from Grand Rapids. And Jonkman used to like to play golf and I played golf with him sometimes. Jerry was a great football player at the University of Michigan. Oh, yes, Dick [Richard Milhous] Nixon. When he first came to the Congress from California, he defeated a man by the name of [Horace Jeremiah "Jerry"] Voorhis. At the end of the day, Voorhis would come in at night—when all wanted to go home—he'd come in and make an hour's speech or something {laughter}, for the *Record*, you know what I mean. It was a relief when Nixon beat him. I was very friendly with Nixon at that time. He had a good staff. The House staffs were getting larger. The girls

that worked for him were very capable and loyal. Loie Gaunt and Rosemary Woods worked for him. Rosemary was the only one that he took with him when he went to the Senate.

**WASNIEWSKI:** Was he on the floor a lot in the House? Did he spend a lot of time on the floor?

**SWANSON:** Oh, quite a bit.

*Brief Interruption of Tape*<sup>9</sup>

**SWANSON:** When Roosevelt came on down to the House for the declaration of war, Jimmy was along with him at that time. He used my desk. Of course, we had to go to war and I took the vote.  
[12:00]

**WASNIEWSKI:** You took the roll call.

**SWANSON:** The roll call, oh, yes. And, down in the front row, Jeannette Rankin was crying like a baby.<sup>10</sup> Right. She was in a front seat. To begin with the background on that—she had been in Congress during the First World War and voted against it. She then left the House and was gone until she came back and voted against World War Two. But, Ev [Everett McKinley] Dirksen, she had a . . . a, I don't want to say a crush on Dirksen, but she admired Ev Dirksen. Ev came down and sat next to her and put his arm around her and tried to get her to vote "Present." (Ev Dirksen became one of the

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<sup>9</sup> Having just been asked a question about his memories of the House Floor on December 8, 1941, the tape starts with Swanson beginning his answer.

<sup>10</sup> Office of History and Preservation, *Women in Congress, 1917–2006*: 36–41 and <http://womenincongress.house.gov>.

dearest friends I ever had.) But she wouldn't. She was dedicated against war.

**WASNIEWSKI:** I heard an interesting—and I'll have to make a recording of it for you if you haven't heard it—on NPR, Walter Cronkite has done a series on voices of the past and he talks about major historical events. Well, he had a piece on, the vote, right after Roosevelt's address and it's dedicated to Rankin being the lone dissenting vote. And a radio reporter had left the mic on in the room, and so there's about 8 to 12 minutes of the roll call. And it gets to the, it gets to the 'Ds,' or the . . . it doesn't get anywhere near towards the end. But what you're hearing is this banter back and forth between Rayburn and Rankin, trying to get recognized by the chair. Do, do you remember any of those details?

**SWANSON:** No, I don't remember that.

**WASNIEWSKI:** Okay.

**SWANSON:** I don't remember that exactly. No.

**WASNIEWSKI:** Okay.

**SWANSON:** Dirksen did his best to get her to vote to "Present."

I later went to the Senate. One reason was Dirksen. I'll just say this. When I was in the Senate and I had reached my goal which was to get the maximum retirement, and get out and make some money if I could. So, being at my maximum, I was going to retire. Senator Dirksen's secretary called me. The Senate was not yet in session.

[16:00]

Lee Gomian was his personal secretary. She had been with him many years. She called me on the phone. I was assistant to the minority at that time in the Senate. She said, "Irving the boss would like to see you." And again it was almost like years before when Congressman Hull called me. I said, "That's fine I'll be over. I'll come on over right before we go into session." "No," she said, "he would like to see you now if you can." And I said that's fine. I was in my office so I got up and went over to his office in the Capitol. I was ushered in right away. He said, "Irving, I found an extra \$3,000 in my budget and I want you to have it." I was at the top of the scale. "I want you to have it." I looked at him and I said, "Pete . . ." —Pete Chumbris, who was his legislative man and a dear friend of mine.<sup>11</sup> I had told Pete a day before that I was going to retire and he had gone back to Dirksen and told him, "Irv's going to retire." Dirksen said, "I want you to have it." I looked at him and I said, "You old rascal," those very words. I said, "Pete told you I was going to retire." And he said, "Irving, I hate to lose my friends." Later in the year he was dead in . . . I want to say in a matter of two, three months. He knew it, just like Hull had known he was going to go. Dirksen was a wonderful person, wonderful person.

**WASNIEWSKI:** I hope we can go in to that but I want to move back to December 8th . . .

**SWANSON:** Oh, good.

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<sup>11</sup> Peter Nicholas Chumbris had also served as counsel for the minority (Republican), Anti-Trust and Monopoly Subcommittee of the Senate Committee on the Judiciary.

**WASNIEWSKI:** . . . because that was such a fascinating day. Now, did you see him sit down next to Rankin? Were you, were people listening in to his efforts or was he relating this story to you after the fact?

**SWANSON:** Who?

**WASNIEWSKI:** Dirksen. When he was sitting down next to Rankin.

**SWANSON:** Oh, I saw them at that time. You know my desk right was right in front of the chamber. She was crying and he was trying to talk to her. He told me that she shouldn't have voted against it. Ev was a Congressman at that time. Dirksen was a very humble man. Very good man. He didn't think evil of anybody. He knew when someone was bad, of course. But . . .

**WASNIEWSKI:** Thinking back to December 8th, now of course Roosevelt, that was a rather rushed appearance before Congress because the attack happens on the 7th and he comes in at noon on the 8th. Do you remember any of the prep work or set-up that you had to do that morning?

**SWANSON:** No. I don't remember recall anything. I think Joe [Joseph J.] Sinnott was the Doorkeeper at the time.<sup>12</sup> I'll tell you what though, this is what's interesting. The first time I saw Roosevelt—he used my desk to speak from and I sat close by—I never realized the paraphernalia that he had to keep himself going. He was totally, totally immobile from his hips down. Walking around he looked a

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<sup>12</sup> Doorkeeper of the House from the 62nd through the 65th Congress (1911–1919) and from the 72nd Congress (1931–1933) until his death on January 27, 1943, during the 78th Congress (1943–1945). For information on his career, see “Doorkeeper of the House of Representatives Joe Sinnott,” Weekly Historical Highlights, Office of History and Preservation, Office of the Clerk, [http://clerk.house.gov/art\\_history/index.html?action=view&intID=322](http://clerk.house.gov/art_history/index.html?action=view&intID=322).

little as though he had some use of them, but he didn't any use whatsoever. That was never played up at all and I want to say that as far as the pictures that I've seen, none ever showed that part of Roosevelt. What I'm trying to say is that they didn't show his infirmities.

**WASNIEWSKI:** Were there any special efforts made for him? Did anyone come to the Clerk's Office and say this needs to be done, this needs to be done so we can get him into the chamber easily and not show these infirmities?

**SWANSON:** Well, he came in with Jimmy [James Roosevelt] of course, his son. He was on his arm. You didn't realize how bad off he was. He had to be propped when he was at my desk making his speech. He was propped up with a seat in other words. I'll tell you again with respect to Roosevelt. I didn't agree with lots of his things, in my own mind. But he was necessary for this country. I think this country was on the verge of collapse, the Depression had been so terrible. So many of his programs were, of course, unconstitutional. But I think he goes down as one of the great presidents and I think Ronald Reagan is going down as a great president also. And I want to tell you another man who I think was a great President: he was Harry Truman. I got to know him pretty well too. He had a young man with him. His name was Harry Salisbury. I got to know Harry before the war when I was with the Legislative Service. We were classmates at GW Law School. We used to ride down to school on the street car together. His father was Truman's commanding officer during World War I. They were intimate friends. I was, at that time, a member of the Legislative Reference Service. The House had cut the Legislative Reference Service. Now, the

Legislative Reference Service does nothing but for the Congress itself. The House had cut us, not too much, not too much, but enough. I remember like yesterday, joining Harry to go down to law school. I said, "I don't know what in the name of God these people are doing cutting their own, their own people." And he said, "What do you mean Irv?" I said, "They cut our appropriations, we're working for the Congress entirely." He said, "Have you seen Harry the True?" I said, "Harry, who is Harry the True?" "My boss, Harry Truman." "No." "Do you want to see him?" I said, "Sure." The Trumans had taken their close friend's sons to Washington to go to law school. He said, "I'll call you tomorrow." He called me and said, "Look, can you be in Truman's office at six in the morning." I said, "Harry, yes, I'll meet you there at six." That night I prepared a speech for the Senator of about five minutes. The Senator was the chairman of the Legislative Subcommittee. Well, I met Harry [Salisbury] in front of the Senator's office. Senators had three rooms then, now they have close to 23! We walked through the first two rooms. No staff was yet there. The third room was the Senator's. Harry [Salisbury] stuck his nose in and the Senator said, "Come on in, Harry." So we went in and Truman said, "You're a good friend of Harry's. Tell me what you want." I said, "I'm a staff member of the Legislative Reference Service and the House has cut our appropriation." After

[24:00]

about a minute, he held up his hand. He said, "Anyone who's a friend of Harry's is a friend of mine. I'll see what I can do." And, of course, I knew that he was chairman. Do you think that the figure was restored in the Senate committee? You bet your life. Do you think that in conference it was restored? It was, certainly was. Truman said, "Anybody who's a friend of Harry's is a friend of mine." We then talked baseball for several minutes. I went back to

his office after the bill had passed to thank him but he was out, so I told Mr. Messel, his top man, how much we appreciated his wonderful help.

Another interesting occasion was when I was in the Navy. I had been commissioned during the war. I had been at our naval school in Boston and was called back and assigned to the Chief of Supply. I knew so many people on the Hill and the Navy wanted me back. I was up in the Capitol on Navy business quite early in the morning and was walking down the Rotunda Hall when I met the Speaker all by himself. He said, "Swanson, what are you doing back here?" And I said, "Well, they called me back." He looked at me and he said, "Do you want to come back?" I said, "Mr. Speaker, you hired me. I'll do anything you want." Well, that was probably about 10 o'clock in the morning.

**WASNIEWSKI:** And this is Sam Rayburn?

**SWANSON:** Yes that's Sam Rayburn. I went down and of course I had privilege from the days back to eat in the Senate, the House Restaurant. I went down and after eating lunch and went back to the office probably around 2 o'clock. They said, "You're not here anymore. You've been discharged." I said, "What do you mean?" "Report to the Hill."

**WASNIEWSKI:** You went back to the Navy Yard?

**SWANSON:** No, no. Downtown to the headquarters on the Reflecting Pool. That's exactly the way things worked at the time. Roosevelt died I think in April, wasn't it?



**WASNIEWSKI:** April of '45.

**SWANSON:** Well anyway, I was back on the Hill. Shortly afterwards Speaker  
[28:00] Rayburn invited Truman, because he was a good friend of Truman's, to come to the Hill and meet the Members of the House. They closed the doors, it was just the Members and it included me and the people at the desk to meet the new President. Well, I had already met him, as you know. They all lined up to go through. As I came in the line I said, "Mr. President, you don't remember me . . ." And he said, "Oh, yes, I do! You're Harry Salisbury's friend." And do you know what he did? He stopped the line and proceeded to tell me about Harry. He said, "I just sent Harry abroad because I don't believe some of the reports I get from that State Department." We talked probably close to a minute. The Members were saying, "Geez, Swanson, he's a friend of the President's." {laughter}

**WASNIEWSKI:** It was a smaller community at that point. Let me walk you back to December 8, 1941. You've talked about Rankin. What was the temper, the mood in the room when Roosevelt came in to speak?

**SWANSON:** You could hear the drop of a pin. You know. Just a quiet . . . easy to take the roll call I can tell you. Everybody was quiet. Very

serious. I walked out with the Speaker, Speaker Rayburn. Two days later, you know, it was Germany and Italy.<sup>13</sup>

I walked out of the chamber with the Speaker. I have the gavel used by the Speaker at the time we declared war against Germany and Italy. The President sent his message down this time and I read the message to the Congress asking for the war and then took the roll call. The Speaker gave me the gavel. We kept the gavels in my desk. He signed and dated the gavel.

**WASNIEWSKI:** He gave you the gavel from December 8th for the declaration?

**SWANSON:** No. He gave me the gavel for the war against Germany and Italy. He took the other gavel. I have my other here someplace if you want to see it.

**WASNIEWSKI:** Certainly. Sure, sure.

**SWANSON:** I've had 2 or 3 people who have wanted it. I'm going to donate it to the archives or somewhere when I die. The ink is fading on it. So, as the Speaker and I walked out into the Lobby, a reporter met us.

**WASNIEWSKI:** Speaker's Lobby?

**SWANSON:** Speaker's Lobby, Speaker's Lobby. Yes, you know some of these things I have forgotten until now. Because I had taken the roll and read the message. The Speaker and I were walking out together and were stopped by a reporter, whoever it was I don't know. He

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<sup>13</sup> Swanson's role in the historic House proceedings are featured in "The Declaration of War Against Japan," Weekly Historical Highlights, Office of History and Preservation, Office of the Clerk, [http://clerk.house.gov/art\\_history/index.html?action=view&intID=143](http://clerk.house.gov/art_history/index.html?action=view&intID=143).

[32:00]

said, "You got a good boy here now." And the Speaker said [putting his hand to his head to rub it], "Very fine good-looking guy, too." He didn't have a hair on his bald head and I was losing mine, too. Those are the little things {laughter}. Rayburn was rough in lots of ways, but he was a great man.

**WASNIEWSKI:** Well, why do you think he gave you the gavel? Anything in particular?

**SWANSON:** I am the one who read the Roosevelt speech, took the votes. He signed it and I said to him, "Wow that's nice." In effect, I was thanking him for giving me the gavel. He had the other gavel, the one on the 7th or 8th, this was about the 10th. So he autographed it right there at the desk and gave it to me.

**WASNIEWSKI:** Was this something he typically did? Was he that way with the people on the floor?

**SWANSON:** No, I don't think so. No, I don't think so. We got the gavels from the Architect of the Capitol. You want to see it? I can go upstairs. I think I know where it is. Or did you want to do it another time?

**WASNIEWSKI:** Sure. Well, if we could just finish out the end of this tape and then maybe we can do that. You mentioned that Dirksen was trying to convince Rankin to vote present.

**SWANSON:** He told me that. I wasn't present to listen to their conversation.

**WASNIEWSKI:** What were the Members' reactions to Rankin? Do you remember that when she cast the lone vote?

**SWANSON:** I think they all respected her. There was no saying that old woman ought to go out . . . I don't remember anything like that, no. But it was a serious time and I think they basically respected her heartfelt position. She was a pacifist of the Number 1 order. And, I suppose she felt as though if she didn't vote against it why she would be betraying herself. That's an odd thing, voted against World War I and World War II. These were the only times was in the Congress.

**WASNIEWSKI:** And the vote on December 8th pretty much ended her career after that.

**SWANSON:** I don't think she stood for re-election.

**WASNIEWSKI:** Let me ask you this. In the post-September 11th world we're always interested in security and things of that nature. Do you remember any changes on the Hill after the attack on Pearl Harbor? In terms of security . . .

**SWANSON:** I don't think the partisanship of politics was strong. That almost faded away. We were going to win the war. I think there was great patriotism on the part of all.

**WASNIEWSKI:** I guess I'm . . . just in terms of physical security on the Hill. Do you remember extra precautions that were taken in letting people into the building?

**SWANSON:** Well, yes. Not enough I would say. Not enough. But, if I recall correctly I used to park right up there at the door of the Capitol.

**WASNIEWSKI:** On the East Front?

**SWANSON:** Yes. After the declaration, I don't think they allowed parking. You had to park more or less on the grounds out there. I think that was  
[36:00] it, but don't hold me to that. They didn't want somebody driving in there with a bomb or something. Now I think you can't get on the Hill, can you?

**WASNIEWSKI:** Security is tight.

**SWANSON:** I'm glad to see that because you have a lot of nutcrackers out there.

**WASNIEWSKI:** That's interesting, that that was pretty much the only change you recall after the attack on Pearl Harbor.

**SWANSON:** Well, I think on entering the Capitol you had to go through a detector, open your purse or whatever you had there. Before that you could just walk in and walk out.

**WASNIEWSKI:** But you remember bag searches after Pearl Harbor?

**SWANSON:** Yes, yes that's right. And I think . . . now you're bringing me back. I think you walked through a whatever you call it when you walk through to decide whether you had a weapon.

**WASNIEWSKI:** Metal detector. That would have been, that would have been a little later.

**SWANSON:** You think that's a little later?

**WASNIEWSKI:** I think it is. Yeah, but certainly they may have done bag searches. That's interesting.

**SWANSON:** Yes. I remember that. I wasn't security conscious like I am now.

**WASNIEWSKI:** Right. Well, that's interesting.

**SWANSON:** And I don't think the terrorists had the sophistication. I look at it and it breaks my heart because I think of the condition this country is in from a security standpoint.

**WASNIEWSKI:** How long were you, were you still employed as a reading clerk after the declaration of war—before you went into the Navy?

**SWANSON:** I was commissioned in the navy in early '43 or something like that. Many of my friends were going into the service. Some were losing their lives. You know, I wanted to go into the service. Oh, that's what interested me. I went to somebody who knew the ins and outs of it. Bill [John William] Ditter was a Congressman from Pennsylvania. He sent me down to see Admiral [Brent] Young. Bill was on the Appropriations Committee. And, I went down to the Navy. This was very interesting. Are we being recorded?

**WASNIEWSKI:** Yes.

**SWANSON:** Well, I was going to use a little street language. Should I or not?

**WASNIEWSKI:** You can . . . we can delete, too.

**SWANSON:** Alright. So, I went down to the Navy and filled my application for

[40:00]

a commission. Bill Ditter was also one of my good supporters. I think he was ranking Member on the Defense Appropriations Committee. I had such a wonderful relationship with so many friends. In a few days, Bill said to me, "Irv, how are you coming with this commission?" I said, "Well, I filed it last week. I went down and saw Young." He said, "He hasn't come through on that?" Then he said, "Let's go in the cloakroom." We went in the cloakroom. And right in front of me—I'll never forget—he phoned Young. He said, "Get Admiral Young." "Brent," he said, "we sent our man down, Irv Swanson. What have you being doing now? Well," he says, "you can [deleted expletive] or get off the pot. I'll go to someone else!" {laughter} You know, that afternoon I got a call. The commission came through. And that was in the first of the days of the summer. So then I went down and became one of Young's aides. Then they sent me to naval school in Boston.

**WASNIEWSKI:** Admiral Young was . . . where was he at this point?

**SWANSON:** He was chief of supply.

**WASNIEWSKI:** At the Navy Department?

**SWANSON:** Oh, yes. His office was located in a temporary building . . .

**WASNIEWSKI:** This was down by the . . . what would have been the Navy Yard?

**SWANSON:** On the Mall by the Reflecting Pool.

**WASNIEWSKI:** Oh, okay, okay.

**SWANSON:** Reflection pool there. Admiral Young took me around the country when he made inspection trips. I'll never forget one time when we came back from Florida once and we stopped in Charleston, South Carolina. There was a big navy yard there. My father-in-law was the commandant of the Citadel at that time. We went on out to the Citadel, and reviewed the cadets in formation. My father-in-law was very military all the way. Young was not that way. He was just a regular, ordinary, humble guy. And I'll never forget, when we came back in from reviewing the cadets and he said, "Jesus Christ, Irv, that guy is military." {laughter} I'm just quoting him—I'm usually not swearing like that.

**WASNIEWSKI:** Sure. Sure.

**SWANSON:** Later on Admiral Carter, who was the deputy, took over. Admiral Carter. Very, very nice. Very, very nice person. Oh, I had some wonderful friends that I made in the Navy. Just wonderful friends.

**WASNIEWSKI:** And you were, were you stationed overseas at this point? Or were you . . .

**SWANSON:** No. No.

**WASNIEWSKI:** You were stateside?

**SWANSON:** I remember I went to Young and said, "Look, I haven't been out to sea yet." And he said, "Well, were going to have a recess. Tell you what, would you like to go?" I said, "Yes, I would." So he sent me and another officer for temporary duty aboard the *Missouri*. She was just commissioned. We had to go down to Norfolk to board her.



[44:00]

She was out about 10 miles or so. We had to go out by lighter to get out there. And, I'll never forget going up to that huge thing in the water. I don't know how many stories—seven, eight stories, anyway, you know what I mean? The captain knew we were coming. I think he later lost his life at sea.

**WASNIEWSKI:** This is the captain of the *Missouri*?

**SWANSON:** Captain of the *Missouri*. His brother became a well-known admiral. Callahan was their [family] name.

**WASNIEWSKI:** Okay.

**SWANSON:** And so, I served aboard that baby. She was shaking down and was going to the Far East.

**WASNIEWSKI:** Okay.

**SWANSON:** I remember I got off at Baltimore when they went up into the Bay. I got off of the *Missouri* because Admiral Young wanted me back. They wanted me to handle congressional affairs. If they had a sour Congressman or Senator, why, I was to go in and explain our position. They always opened the door for me.

**WASNIEWSKI:** Okay. So you were, you were essentially at this point a liaison between the Navy and between . . .

**SWANSON:** Oh, that's exactly why they wanted me.

**WASNIEWSKI:** Okay.

**SWANSON:** They wanted somebody that knew everybody up there {laughter}.  
Admiral Carter became the chief of supply and I was his aide.

**WASNIEWSKI:** Well, this is something that when I get you the transcript you can think about it . . .

**SWANSON:** Embellish?

**WASNIEWSKI:** Well, you can fill it in. You can fill in names. That would be perfectly fine.

**SWANSON:** Yes, alright. That's over 60 years ago.

**WASNIEWSKI:** One of the interesting stories you had—and my tape is probably going to run out here in a few minutes—is you came back from the war and you were re-hired by Speaker Rayburn as reading clerk.

**SWANSON:** Absolutely. Meeting me in the hall.

**WASNIEWSKI:** Right.

**SWANSON:** One morning when I was up on the Hill on naval business, I met Speaker Rayburn in the hall. This was after the surrender in Europe. The Speaker said, "You want to come back?" I said, "It's up to you. It's up to you, Mr. Speaker, you hired me!" And that was enough {laughter}.

**WASNIEWSKI:** And then in August, though you read the message of the Japanese surrender.

**SWANSON:** Yes. Absolutely. In other words, they had to pass a resolution ending cessation of hostilities. I read that, too. Speaker Rayburn said, "We need you back."

*End of Part Two – Beginning of Part Three*

**WASNIEWSKI:** You came back in 1945, the summer of 1945, and you read the message of the Japanese surrender.

**SWANSON:** Yes.

**WASNIEWSKI:** And I was asking you, at that point do you recall if it was really a rather skeleton staff in terms of the people on the floor in the Clerk's office because so many people were in uniform at that point. Do you remember?

**SWANSON:** Well, I shouldn't say that you had people that were substituting. I might say, older people. These people were not involved in the draft.

**WASNIEWSKI:** Not drafted as yet.

**SWANSON:** That's right.

**WASNIEWSKI:** I am going to ask just a few more questions and then we'll stop for the day. You had mentioned a few women Members. I find that of particular interest because we're working on a project now on "Women in Congress" and profiles on all the women.

**SWANSON:** I think you people are great. That's just wonderful to have a history of this.

**WASNIEWSKI:** Margaret Chase Smith. What was your impression of Margaret Chase Smith in the House?

**SWANSON:** Representative Clyde Smith was her husband. He died and succeeded him. We became friends on the floor. She asked me many questions. I was somewhat of a veteran at that time even though I was still a punk. Then she went over to the Senate. I was always welcome at her office.

**WASNIEWSKI:** Do you remember was she was well-respected in the House?

**SWANSON:** Oh, yes.

**WASNIEWSKI:** She got an important committee assignment, I think it was '43 during the war, on the Naval Affairs Committee.

**SWANSON:** Yes. I can remember that.

**WASNIEWSKI:** Was she respected by the Members?

**SWANSON:** Let me put it this way. I am going to tell you an aside. Claire Boothe Luce, Congresswoman from Connecticut.<sup>14</sup> And, you know, Rayburn, Speaker . . . Oh, lord isn't that awful. Well you see this is my age showing.

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<sup>14</sup> Office of History and Preservation, *Women in Congress, 1917–2006*: 214–219 and <http://womenincongress.house.gov>.

**WASNIEWSKI:** Wouldn't have been Rayburn?

**SWANSON:** No, no, no. Rayburn was not involved. Martin, Joe [Joseph William] Martin. He was more or less maneuvering on the Republican side. And, Martin was the Republican Leader. He put Clare Boothe Luce on Military Affairs and Margaret was not on any important committee. She complained to me and others. We helped rectify that. She went on Navy then. And, of course, as far as that's concerned it probably was better anyway for her because there were naval yards in Maine.

**WASNIEWSKI:** Bath.

**SWANSON:** That's right. She went over to the Senate and later I went over there. We were good friends. She had a Congress, had an administrative assistant named Bill Lewis. He was a very loyal and able man.

**WASNIEWSKI:** Sure.

**SWANSON:** Bill Lewis.

**WASNIEWSKI:** Longtime administrative assistant.

**SWANSON:** Oh, yes. Very, very close, intimate administrative assistant to her.  
[4:00] She became hard for some people to talk to . . . Members of Congress. She was a little more open when she was in the House. She knew she was a Senator. But, she was always nice to me. At that time Representative Clare Boothe Luce was in Congress. I

didn't know her that well. She was quite a favorite of Joe Martin's. One of my big favorites was the lady from New York.

**WASNIEWSKI:** Kathy St. George.

**SWANSON:** Kathy St. George. Great favorite of mine. She was one of the delegates to Bangkok when I was along. Pru Ryan [Priscilla Ryan] was her daughter. Mrs. St. George was just wonderful. Nice to my wife Margaret, too. We had somebody like Mrs. [Frances Payne] Bolton from Ohio.<sup>15</sup> And she was very much dignified. She also took her husband's place.

**WASNIEWSKI:** She was one of the wealthiest women in America at that point.

**SWANSON:** Right. I don't think she was poor. We had some others, too. We had a Congresswoman from Georgia and I can't think of her name.

**WASNIEWSKI:** Helen [Douglas] Mankin.<sup>16</sup>

**SWANSON:** What's that?

**WASNIEWSKI:** Helen Mankin. She was in briefly.

**SWANSON:** Yes. And she took pity on me. I'll never forget a night session. She sent some coffee up to me {laughter}. Yes, yes indeed. She was a nice person. And, think of some of the others that we had.

**WASNIEWSKI:** What about Helen Douglas?<sup>17</sup>

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<sup>15</sup> Ibid., 190–195 and <http://womenincongress.house.gov>.

<sup>16</sup> Ibid., 244–249 and <http://womenincongress.house.gov>.

SWANSON: Oh, Helen Gahagan Douglas. I knew her, but not well. Melvin Douglas was her husband.

WASNIEWSKI: Right.

SWANSON: He was a movie star.

WASNIEWSKI: What about Mary [Teresa] Norton?<sup>18</sup>

SWANSON: She was a senior Member. I think she was the chairman of the Labor Committee.

WASNIEWSKI: She chaired the D.C. Committee in the '30s and then she moved to Labor. And then she at the very tail-end of her career, was chairman of the House Administration Committee.

SWANSON: There you are. I knew she had become a chair. She was a dignified person. I didn't know her intimately but she was always nice to me. She was well-liked.

WASNIEWSKI: Of all that group . . . oh, Edith Nourse Rogers?<sup>19</sup>

SWANSON: Oh my goodness, yes, I forgot about that. She was something! {laughter}. She spoke quite often. Yes, yes, she was one of the senior women . . . And . . . Yes.

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<sup>17</sup> Ibid., 232–237 and <http://womenincongress.house.gov>.

<sup>18</sup> Ibid., 60–65 and <http://womenincongress.house.gov>.

<sup>19</sup> Ibid., 70–75 and <http://womenincongress.house.gov>.

WASNIEWSKI: There weren't very many at that point.

SWANSON: Oh, I tell you there was another one . . . Congresswoman from  
[8:00] Illinois.

WASNIEWSKI: Marguerite Stitt Church?<sup>20</sup>

SWANSON: Oh, Marguerite Church, yes. She took her husband's place too.  
She was quite dignified.

WASNIEWSKI: Might have been . . . Charlotte Reid was later from Illinois.<sup>21</sup>

SWANSON: No, No. This lady was a rough and tumble one. She was a good  
friend of Jere Cooper's who was a Democrat, ranking member on  
Ways and Means.

WASNIEWSKI: I am trying to remember who else would have been from Illinois.  
Ruth Hanna McCormick, but that would have been much, much  
earlier.<sup>22</sup>

SWANSON: Let me go try to get my *Congressional Directory*. You got me.

### *Brief Interruption of Tape*

WASNIEWSKI: Mr. Swanson is looking through his *Biographical Directory* and he  
just recalled Jessie Sumner, from Illinois who came in the '38  
elections.<sup>23</sup> She could be very combative. She was an isolationist.

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<sup>20</sup> Ibid., 284–287 and <http://womenincongress.house.gov>.

<sup>21</sup> Ibid., 416–419 and <http://womenincongress.house.gov>.

<sup>22</sup> Ibid., 84–87 and <http://womenincongress.house.gov>.

<sup>23</sup> Ibid., 180–185 and <http://womenincongress.house.gov>.



**SWANSON:** She was combative. Illinois at that time was, well let me say was pretty conservative, in other words. You had Leo Allen, chairman of the Rules Committee at one time. And Ev, of course, Dirksen. And Les Arends who was from Illinois and a dear friend of mine and a golfing friend.

**WASNIEWSKI:** And became the long-time whip.

**SWANSON:** The whip. Yes, exactly. A number of people from Illinois were conservative. We are talking now about the time before the war. Right of center. It was very much that way. Michigan was that same way and Indiana was, too. You didn't find that quite in Wisconsin. Senator [Alexander] Wiley was chairman of the Foreign Relations Committee. He was not a right-winger generally speaking. Fine person. And the other Senator of course was right-wing—Joe McCarthy.

**WASNIEWSKI:** While we're still on the subject of women in Congress at this point. This may be one of the last questions I ask. I am very interested in reading actually a couple of oral histories from women who were in the House during the '40s and '50s. Their recollections of Sam Rayburn were interesting because Rayburn did a lot it seemed to promote them, get them on committees, and help them out. I'm just wondering...

**SWANSON:** I think you're right. I think you're absolutely right. I think he wanted to be very, very fair to both sexes. I am trying to think of

any women from Texas though. Do we have any women from Texas?

**WASNIEWSKI:** Not at that point.

**SWANSON:** I can't remember. In other words it was still a man's, man's world.

**WASNIEWSKI:** Oh, the first one was a woman in the late '60s. Lera Thomas.<sup>24</sup> Who succeeded her longtime husband. He died and there was a special election and she served for about a year. She was the first woman from Texas in the House.

**SWANSON:** I think I was over in the Senate at that time.

**WASNIEWSKI:** I think this was '67-'68. Somewhere in that neighborhood.

**SWANSON:** No. However it was not a matter of north, or south, or east, or west. It was just the idea that, you didn't have that situation. Florida, of course, had a woman Senator [Paula Hawkins] and she was a friend of mine.<sup>25</sup> Someone I'm trying to think of here not long ago that I mentioned.

**WASNIEWSKI:** Oh, the woman from Illinois?

**SWANSON:** No, that was Sumner. Jessie Sumner. I can't recall anybody from Wisconsin at that time.

**WASNIEWSKI:** No.

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<sup>24</sup> Ibid., 430-433 and <http://womenincongress.house.gov>.

<sup>25</sup> Ibid., 258-261 and <http://womenincongress.house.gov>.

SWANSON: Michigan. Oh, Michigan. We had a lady from Michigan.

WASNIEWSKI: There were two. Ruth Thompson, first.<sup>26</sup>

SWANSON: Ruth Thompson, that's the one I'm thinking of. She was a very, very good friend of mine. You understand, a lot of the new ones would come up and talk to you about affairs at the desk and on the floor. Matt, I want to say, I always tried to give my honest opinion about everything. I had great respect for the Congress itself and the young ones that would come in and would want to hear the inside dope if someone would give it to them. It's Ruth Thompson, you're absolutely right.

WASNIEWSKI: Did you have any recollections of her in particular? She was a judge at one point, wasn't she?

SWANSON: Yes. I think so. Oh yes, I would go back over to her office lots of times and stop by . . . she was from the lower part of Michigan. I think probably up around, above Gerry Ford's District . . . up there, farther up on that side.

WASNIEWSKI: Okay. And then the next woman from Michigan would have been Martha [Wright] Griffiths.<sup>27</sup>

SWANSON: She was not there when I was there.

WASNIEWSKI: I think she came in, in '54 or '56. I can't remember which.

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<sup>26</sup> Ibid., 288–291 and <http://womenincongress.house.gov>.

<sup>27</sup> Ibid., 358–363 and <http://womenincongress.house.gov>.

**SWANSON:** You bring these things up. I am recalling things in the back of my mind. California, of course, you had Helen Gahagan Douglas.

**WASNIEWSKI:** You mentioned members coming up to you and asking your opinions.

**SWANSON:** Well, "What are the amendments?" "What does the amendment do?" "And, who is for it and who is against it?" Of course, you're attentive because you're listening there every moment. You're sitting right in front of it. The speakers are right in front of you. I don't want to say that I knew it all or that anyone at the desk knew it all because that's not true. But I was glued to the desk. Well you might say maybe I didn't give them the right answer, I don't know. But it was honest from my heart. So many of them would say well, "Congressman So-and-So supported," . . . they followed the leader. That was a very common thing to do.

**WASNIEWSKI:** That's interesting.

**SWANSON:** I said, "Well, Dirksen's for it," or let's say, "Congressman So-and-So is for it." And you knew who the Member was affiliated with or knew or respected. Clare [Eugene] Hoffman was a Congressman from Michigan. He was an irascible sort of person. He would take the opposite side and he'd say that "So-and-So was for it, I'm not for it." {laughter} Oh, yeah, that's common. And then, of course, the other thing about it is, now we have so many colored in the

[16:00]

Congress. The only one I can remember was Representative [William Levi] Dawson.<sup>28</sup>

**WASNIEWSKI:** From Illinois, the First District.

**SWANSON:** I think the only one we had there.

**WASNIEWSKI:** At that point, I think he was the only black Member.

**SWANSON:** From South Carolina, of course, I knew [James] Strom [Thurmond] very well. He became a Republican. Some of the other people . . . Johnny [John Lanneau] McMillan. He lived out where we did. Just a couple of houses from us out in Arlington Village. We lived out in Arlington Village and Johnny McMillan lived there. He was a very nice person. Very quiet sort of Member but very decent. Are we off the record?

**WASNIEWSKI:** It's on. Would you like me to shut if off?

**SWANSON:** Just take it off because I am going to say something.

### *Brief Interruption of Tape*

**WASNIEWSKI:** I am going to ask one more question here and close out. Early on you had mentioned Lew Deschler was Parliamentarian when you came. What are your recollections of Deschler?

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<sup>28</sup> For more information on Representative Dawson, see Office of History and Preservation, Office of the Clerk, *Black Americans in Congress, 1870–2007* (Washington, D.C.: U.S. Government Printing Office, 2008): 292–299 and <http://baic.house.gov>.

**SWANSON:** Well, he had come here in the '20s. He had come as a young man and stayed right on with the Republicans and Democrats in the House many years. Many longtime people became very non-partisan. Just invaluable individuals. Very non-partisan. Lew was very, very close to Rayburn. And also Martin, of course. He was tough to approach for a lot of people. He liked to play cards. They had a room off the floor, right off the edge between the Speaker's office and the floor. That was a great card room. Oh, what did they call it? The Board of Trade Office, I think it was called.

**WASNIEWSKI:** Board of Education

**SWANSON:** Yes. Board of Education

**WASNIEWSKI:** And Deschler was always in there?

**SWANSON:** Oh, he was in there a lot. Not when the Congress was in session. He had a wonderful assistant. More approachable and affable; a regular kind of guy. His name was Bill [William T.] Roy.<sup>29</sup> He was, later on, a colonel in the National Guard. Bill Roy was very regular. Lew kept to himself. Just above the average person. And, of course, I had to work him. I was on a first name with him and he was Lew to me. But most of them would say Mr. Deschler.

**WASNIEWSKI:** Did you ever make it into the Board of Education?

**SWANSON:** Not really because I didn't play cards. I didn't play poker. I think I had my nose in there or something but I mean for some reason or something come up and I went in there to find somebody. Board of

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<sup>29</sup> Longtime assistant Parliamentarian in the House.

[20:00]

Education. I am glad you brought that up because it bothered me for all these, a long time I was thinking of it not long ago: Dugouts where they went in to relax or so.

**WASNIEWSKI:**

Were there any other rooms that you remember them using?

**SWANSON:**

Not really. Not really. That's the only one that I can remember up there. The Senate side you didn't have that. I mean, there's more camaraderie in the House than you would find in the Senate. Although the gang used to go out to the Columbia Country Club. That's where [Barry Morris] Goldwater became a good friend of mine. Can I say that?

**WASNIEWSKI:**

Sure.

**SWANSON:**

Anyway, I went over to the Senate. Senator [Henry] "Styles" Bridges was the Republican boss on the Republican side. Delores was his wife. She used to play golf with my wife, Margaret, and they became very good friends. The Senator and I were close also. Styles asked me who I thought would make a good chairman of the [GOP] senatorial [campaign] committee. My answer was I thought a first-term Senator, Barry Goldwater, would do a good job. The chairmanship of the committee is a very important one because it affects all Republican senatorial candidates. The next day as I was sitting at my desk on the floor of the Senate, Goldwater walked into the chamber and came directly over to my desk and said, "I told Styles I would take the job if you would come with me." He then turned around on his heels and walked out of the chamber. I went to Senator Bridges and said, My God, I can't go on a different payroll." It would mean I would have to give up my retirement. My

retirement meant so much to me as I am not a wealthy man. I no longer had political ambitions. He said, "I'll take care of that." He put me on the Senate payroll at a low rate. It took care of my longevity.

**WASNIEWSKI:** I would love to talk about that in greater detail. Anything else you would like to add. Any other recollections?

**SWANSON:** Oh, probably about a thousand things.

**WASNIEWSKI:** Okay. Well I hope we can visit again soon.

**SWANSON:** Oh, we can visit someday.



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