



THE RUTH ANN OVERBECK
CAPITOL HILL HISTORY PROJECT

Interview with Donald Anderson

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TAPE 1/SIDE 1

KULYK: This is Nathaniel Kulyk. I am interviewing Donnald Anderson for the Ruth Ann Overbeck Capitol Hill History Project. We are at the Center for Legislative Affairs in the Cannon House Office Building and it is November 15, 2005. To start off, if you'd please tell me a little bit about your background and your education.

ANDERSON: Well, I was born in Sacramento, California in 1942. Attended the public schools of Sacramento until age 17, when I received an appointment as a page in the House of Representatives by the late John Moss who represented the city of Sacramento in the House for 26 years. I left the CK McClatchy Senior High School in Sacramento to come to Washington at the beginning of my senior year and enrolled in the United States Capitol Page School from which I graduated in June of 1960.

After graduation from page school, I decided to stay on in Washington and enroll at the George Washington University where I earned a bachelor's degree in political science. I continued to work for the House part time during my undergraduate studies. At the time, staying in Washington and attending GW was simply in pursuit of education. I hadn't quite focused on what I would do with it once I got it. Working for the House of Representatives was simply a means to that end.

Shortly before I completed my undergraduate studies, I was offered a minor appointment in the office of the Clerk of the House, which was a nice bump-up in pay, certainly putting me significantly ahead of where I expected to be at that early stage in my life. So I decided to stay another year or two while I focused more clearly on the next step would be and the rest is history. I enjoyed the work I was doing in the Clerk's office, the compensation certainly was good. It was an exciting place to be. I always had a fascination with the mechanics of government, probably more so than politics, but the mechanics of how government works, in a practical everyday way. And so I decided within a few years that I ought to stay with the House and see how far destiny will take me, having no idea that I eventually would end up being elected the Clerk of the House. Of course that came 27 years later. And having, at that point, run out of rungs in my ladder, since the Clerkship is the highest office within the gift of the House to one of its servants.

So that's how I came to be here and came to stay here. My career with the House spanned 35 years, curiously from January 4, 1960 until January 4, 1995, when my last ministerial duty was to preside over the organization of the 104th House of Representatives and the election of the chair of Mr. Speaker [Newt] Gingrich.

KULYK: How did you first get interested in the mechanics of the federal government?

ANDERSON: Well, it started at the state level. My mother [Sally Anderson], who is happily still living and in very good health at age 95, was a 40 year employee of the State Controller of California. And she worked at the state capitol in Sacramento, which I suppose gave me my first interest in white buildings with big domes. And as a little boy, I used to frequently go down to the capitol to visit Mom in her office and hang around the chambers of the State Assembly and State Senate and got interested in the process of lawmaking at the state level. And then, as I was beginning my senior year of high school, I saw an article in *Time* magazine, a very lengthy article, about pages in the House and Senate in the Congress of the United States—fascinating article that painted a very vivid picture of the lifestyle of the pages who in those days were all white boys. Integration by race or by gender had not come to the page corps yet. The article didn't hold out much hope for, um, boys of ordinary means from ordinary families which described my situation. It kind of suggested, incorrectly, that pages came from mainly families that had a lot of political horsepower, some wealth, influence. Then and now, nothing could have been further from the truth. But in the spirit of "you've gotta play to win," I picked up a pen and wrote a letter in longhand to Congressman [John] Moss and explained why I wanted to be a page in Congress and put a four cent first class stamp on it and sent it off to Washington. And a couple of weeks later, to my everlasting amazement, I got a response back from the congressman offering me the appointment, sight unseen. In fact, I didn't meet the man until I got here to Washington, in this very building as a matter of fact.

KULYK: What were some of your responsibilities as page?

ANDERSON: The duties of the pages really hasn't changed much historically. Running errands, answering telephones, setting up the chamber each day for the daily sessions of the House. I was assigned to the Democratic Cloak Room, so my duties primarily were to answer the phones, give out information about the House schedule, current floor activity, the parliamentary situation, find members for their phone calls and messages, which meant learning almost three-hundred members at sight. The hours weren't nearly as long then as they are now. It was almost more like a standard business day than the late end of the night sessions which are so commonplace now.

KULYK: And what were your responsibilities as the Clerk of the House of Representatives?

ANDERSON: As the Clerk of the House, my duties fell into three major areas: legislative, general administrative, and financial. The legislative responsibilities of the Clerk were primarily those things that most people would first think of when thinking about what the House does, the processes by which the House crafts its one and only product, which is a body of law and public policy for the nation. The tallying of the member's votes, the keeping of the journal, the preparation of the bills and resolutions at their various stages of consideration, a wide variety of record keeping and archival functions. By the time

I became Clerk, added to those very historic chores were televised House proceedings. I was responsible for producing the daily telecasts of the House, which of course were carried by C-SPAN, but are actually produced by the House itself using its own employees and equipment in the process.

General administrative covered sort of like, running the hotel, the habitability of our various buildings. Furniture, furnishings, carpets, draperies, venetian blinds, equipment of every description, computers, telecommunications, the child care center, the House recording studio, the list goes on and on.

The financial duties of the Clerk included budget, finance and dispersing. Late each year I would sit down with my budget staff and begin discussing our projected needs for funds for operating the institution for the coming fiscal year, gathering information from the other officers of the House, and various other sources to determine what Capitol programs needed to be pursued, trying to [coughs], excuse me, anticipate any cost of living adjustments for federal employees who would have to be budgeted into our Congressional budget. And then early in January I would be called before the Legislative Branch Subcommittee of the House Committee on Appropriations for several days of public hearing to present the proposed budget to justify the figures that I had compiled and to call to the table with me the other officers and officials of the House to justify their portions of the budget. Once the hearings were concluded and the legislative branch appropriation enacted, then it would be my responsibility to disperse the funds which then, and now, hold at about an even billion dollars a year for operating the House of Representatives according to rule and law and specifically the guidance given to me as the dispersing officer by the language contained in the rather thick report which the committee issued to accompany that bill detailing the strictures under which those funds could be used and could be dispersed.

KULYK: Okay. Did you shape the role of the Clerk in any innovative way while you were holding the position?

ANDERSON: Sometimes it's hard to measure progress, but it was my goal to keep the office scrupulously nonpolitical. The House offices hadn't necessarily been that way over the years. I've always been an admirer of the Westminster, the British system, where rather than having a staff that is affected by the vagaries of political change, the British Parliament, and that is a guideline that is followed by most of the other parliaments of the world, employs a career competitive nonpolitical staff that remains unchanged, no matter which party may be, in the meanwhile, in control of the chamber. Obviously, it was neither my intent, nor my mission, to try to institute a parliamentary system in the House of Representatives. But I felt as an officer of the House, that I had to be scrupulously fair and impartial in dealing with all of the members of the House.

Insofar as retaining my own staff, I never asked a prospective employee for his or her political affiliation, nor did I take an interest in what their affiliations were once employed. My only stricture was that whatever political activity they engaged in, which they certainly had a right to do, that it'd be strictly at arms length and never involving the workplace. And also, that it never rise to a prominence that could cause embarrassment to the institution or to me as the Clerk of the House. I am a Democrat. My liberal credentials are in fairly impeccable order, but I never let that affect my judgment in dealing with all of the members of the House or in making decisions to govern the Clerk's office.

I was particularly interested in the human side of my organization, which numbered over 600 employees in two dozen different departments in at least ten different buildings. A rather vast organization with a very diverse workforce. As one who took many years to rise to the office that I did, the old fashioned way, one step at a time, I was keenly aware of the problems and anxieties and the hopes and aspirations that people who work here have. I think because it took me quite a long time to rise to the position of responsibility that I did, I was acute to those things when I became the Clerk of the House.

One of the areas that I spent a great deal of time on was personnel management and relations, trying to ensure that my large and diverse workforce was confident in the fact that I was on their side, that I could be relied upon to be their advocate and was determined to keep equity and fairness a standard in the workplaces for which I was responsible. So motivating that workforce, keeping them happy, keeping them confident, I think, probably was one of the major goals of my administration. If I may compliment myself, I think I succeeded rather well at it.

KULYK: Very good. When did you first move to Capitol Hill?

ANDERSON: Oh, the first day I arrived in Washington, I became a resident of Capitol Hill as a page. We were required to live in approved rooming houses. There was no dormitory for pages. In fact, that wouldn't happen for almost another quarter of a century. And the doorkeeper's office that was then responsible for the page program kept a list of rooming and boarding houses on Capitol Hill where they preferred that we live. It was a matter of sheer practicality since I had to be at school in the Library of Congress at ten minutes past six in the morning, had no car, and frankly didn't need one, living close to school and to work was the only reasonable thing to do. And I, early on, developed a great fondness for the Capitol Hill community and as the years passed, it became clearer in my mind that it was the most appealing place in the Washington area to live. I never gave any thought whatsoever either to moving to another part of the city or to one of the suburbs. I've always liked the Hill. Though retired now for eleven years I continue to live right behind the Library of Congress.

KULYK: Well, what in particular do you find appealing about it?

ANDERSON: First off, I've always found it remarkable that, within a block or two of the seat of the national government of the United States, that there's a real neighborhood with real single family houses where people actually live in a sense of community. Not unlike that would be found anywhere else in any city of similar size. We have interesting neighbors. We have the Congress and we have the Supreme Court and we have the greatest library in the world. But other than that, it's a real neighborhood with real people doing a wide variety of things, not necessarily associated with the principal business of the city which is the business of government.

KULYK: What kinds of residents live in Capitol Hill?

ANDERSON: When I first came to the Hill, it was mainly elderly people. There was a remarkable absence of children in the neighborhood. That was at a time of great change in our society when white flight was commonplace in American urban centers, the demographics of cities were changing as white citizens were moving to the suburbs, black people were becoming a clearer majority in urban centers, and that certainly affected the city of Washington. Racially, Capitol Hill was a much more diverse area than it is today. It's overwhelmingly white now, at least close in, in the area where I live. When I started living on Capitol Hill, it was much more racially diverse than it is now. The renaissance of Capitol Hill had yet to begin. That would begin in earnest perhaps a decade later in the late 60s, early 70s when people saw the clear desirability, if not prudence, of living close to where they worked and families that had moved to the suburbs started returning to many neighborhoods of the city and particularly Capitol Hill. The elderly longtime residents either passed away or moved to retirement communities and the neighborhood became much more gentrified.

Contrary to a certain mythology that seems to persist about Capitol Hill, it was never a slum. It was never an undesirable place to live. It perhaps was a little bit on the tattered and tarnished side, but it was always a wonderful respectable neighborhood in which to live. It was never crime-ridden. It was never the least bit slummy. But of course, with the return of families from the suburbs, more attention was given to the schools. It was a delight to see parents pushing baby carriages again on the sidewalk, actually for the first time, because we hadn't had any. There was a certain vibrance and vitality that came to the neighborhood with the families. People with children have a tendency to look for places to put down roots. And not everybody is convinced that you have to have a large front yard and a backyard in which to successfully raise children, that you can do it quite nicely in a townhouse.

KULYK: Have any buildings been restored over time?

ANDERSON: Virtually all of the buildings on Capitol Hill have been restored at least close in. There aren't but a few houses in my neighborhood that have not yet had some level of restoration if not

thorough top to bottom restorations. Fortunately, the Capitol Hill Restoration Society has managed to keep a very short leash on renovations so that the character of a neighborhood is unchanged. It retains very nicely its 19th century charm because modifications to the exterior of the buildings is sharply, ah, limited and regulated. So we still have that wonderful 19th century atmosphere. What people do inside, of course, that can't be seen from the street, is pretty much their own affair. Some of the houses are starkly modern inside in contrast to Victorian or Edwardian exteriors. It's just a delightful place to live. There's a lot going on in Capitol Hill. Entertainment, restaurants, those services which make people find a neighborhood comfortable. Drug stores, dry cleaners, photo shops, just about anything that you can think of that you would need on a daily or weekly basis without having to drive to get there. I'm a walker. I keep a car but I do many of my errands on foot simply because it's convenient. I don't have to go very far.

KULYK: What were some of the local issues related to Washington D.C. that concerned you the most?

ANDERSON: Well, something that concerned me initially when I came to town—of course I came from the far west. And in California, we never had a culture of segregation or discrimination. It was a very pluralistic society, culturally diverse. And when I came to Washington, it was still very much a southern city with a southern attitude about a lot of things. It was a majority black city. But it was governed primarily by Congress where the senior southern members had a great deal to say about what went on in the community in which Congress was situated. Also, old customs sometimes die hard. Though Washington was desegregated in the early 60s, trolley cars for instance still had the white lines on the floor which was the dividing line in the days of segregation between black and white people. And even though it wasn't enforced, passengers had a tendency, several years after desegregation, to still arrange themselves as they had on the streetcars before segregation was abolished.

As times changed, the southern segregationist hold on the city gradually diminished and the old Board of Commissioners, which was presidentially appointed, gave way to the first limited home rule government. Even though it was always denied, there was never any doubt in anyone's mind, including my own, that the southern members were not anxious to give home rule to a city that was predominantly black. It was very clear, even though it was also denied, that that was one of the reasons for not giving more home rule to the city. I have always felt that the citizens of Washington, of which I happen to be one, should have a far greater say in their own future and their own affairs than they have even today. I can understand the mandate in the Constitution that gives Congress control over the seat of government. But I think the rationale for that should be more focused, that as long as the federal government is not interfered with in any way by the local government, they should keep their hand off of the decisions and policies decided by the people of the community.

KULYK: What were your initial thoughts with the home rule legislation passed in the early 1970s?

ANDERSON: Oh, I was absolutely delighted. The District of Columbia, which a lot of people don't understand, had fairly broad home rule in the 19th century, which then disappeared. They had an elected mayor that was popularly elected and a council. But then that was taken away in the era of Reconstruction and the long Jim Crow period that followed. So, home rule was not without precedence. It had been here, it had existed. And its return was long overdue.

KULYK: What about today...do you think home rule is sufficient or should they go further?

ANDERSON: Well, I believe that the roughly 600,000 citizens of the city are entitled to a voting representative in the House. I would not go so far as to grant two senators because that implies statehood, which, I don't think the District will ever achieve. There has always been a vocal, though not particularly large, Statehood Party in the city of Washington. I've always thought that they should focus their energies more practically on the obtainable, which I believe would be a voting representative in the House so that we would have a more influential voice in our own affairs.

And I don't like the idea of Congress being able to arbitrarily overrule the decisions of the people of Washington made either through their council or in issues put to the people, one of which has reared its ugly head again in the issue of gun control in the city of Washington. In the mid 70s, the people made it quite clear that they did not wish the sale or exchange of handguns in the city of Washington, which seems to have worked rather well for us, and now the move is actively afoot to change that to give gun dealers the right to sell weapons in Washington. I'm not going to address the issue of gun ownership, that's a broader issue for another discussion. But, the people have decided they don't want it here, they have never given any indication since 1976 when that law went into effect, that they have changed their mind about wanting to be able to buy and own weapons in the city. And I see no compelling reason why Congress should fly in the face of the people of Washington and impose on them something that they clearly don't want.

END OF TAPE 1/SIDE 1

TAPE 1/SIDE 2

KULYK: This is side two of tape one. Still interviewing Donn Anderson here. It's still 11/15, November 15, 2005. To continue, what are some of your thoughts on the transportation situations in Washington, D.C., and the role that the federal government played in that?

ANDERSON: The city of Washington, in the 45 years that I've lived here, has always had good to excellent transportation. Like many urban areas, we have had explosive growth, particularly in the suburban areas. As someone who has always lived in the core of the city, transportation has not really been an issue with me because my horizons are rather near. When I came to Washington, we had an excellent trolley system, which was on its way out, which finally ended service in 1962. And it wasn't for some years after that that the first subway line started operating. We should have, as many cities also in hindsight would have agreed, begun subway construction much earlier than we actually did. We had a crushing need for public mass transportation, the heavy rail system, long before we actually built it. But, we got it. It's a splendid system. I can only shudder to think what chaos that the streets of the city would be and if we did not have the Washington Metro, which moves huge numbers of people in and out of and through the city every day. Congress did take an active role in funding the system. There was no way that the resources of the District government, without huge federal support, could have created the Metro subway. There is probably no type of public work which is more costly than building a subway. It's sometimes said that ours was one of the last major systems that would ever be built, simply as a factor of the cost of doing it.

It was done so splendidly that not only is it a system that you can use to get around town, since many cities have axial subways, where you have to come up and take another form of transit to get to your ultimate destination. But Metro takes you to most of the places in the city where you'd really like to go, particularly out-of-towners who are here for sightseeing, can access most of the important sights of the city on Metro and then not contribute their cars to surface congestion. But it was designed so well that it is attractive. It's well lighted, it's clean, and above all, it is safe. It is something that we who live here can use with peace of mind and those from out of the area, who tend to think of big cities as places seething with crime, to use with the peace of mind that while they're riding it they will be safe. As a longtime resident of the city, it is a matter of conspicuous pride to me that we have something that is so nice. I go out of my way to use it. Sometimes I just ride it when I could easily walk on a pleasant day because it's a pleasant transportation experience.

KULYK: How did Metro impact Capitol Hill?

ANDERSON: Well, like some of the quiet residential areas of the city, we had our anxiety that, with the Hill being suddenly being accessible to large numbers of people from other areas that our serenity, our peace, our quiet would be disrupted. And that certainly hasn't been the case. I know that the people of Georgetown now regret the fact that they stubbornly opposed Metro serving Georgetown. They seem to have the feeling that it would bring in "the wrong element," you can read that any way you like. That it would add to congestion and noise which they have without it. And they, of course, don't have the

convenience of having a Metro stop in the heart of Georgetown. In the last ten or 15 years, they have given some voice to constructing a Metro stop. But now that the system is built, it would be so costly to put in a stop on the blue and orange lines, those lines going so deep beneath that region of the city that they'll never get it. It cannot be justified for the convenience of the relatively small number of people that it will serve.

But it is a wonderful way of bringing tourists to our area without their cars. Capitol Hill, of course, is a tourist destination. And tourists can park their cars elsewhere, come on the Metro. It's a pleasant experience for them. They aren't competing for precious street parking in our neighborhoods. Most of us park on the street because our houses were built before cars were part of the mix. And such few garages as there are in the alleys were built for much smaller cars than exist today. So we don't have people competing, the tourists, for our precious street parking. I think it's been a tremendous asset to Capitol Hill and a real convenience for those of us that live here, that say want to go to one of the malls to go shopping and don't feel like driving on the interstate or the Beltway or [Interstate] 270 and unless we have major shopping to do we can zip over to where we need to be, pick up a few things, and come back.

KULYK: Did Metro bring about a spike in retail or development?

ANDERSON: No, we had a couple of very healthy commercial enclaves on Capitol Hill, mainly the close-in Pennsylvania Avenue corridor in Southeast and a couple of blocks of Massachusetts Avenue in near Northeast. There has been some growth in commercial activity. But I think that's more ascribable to the economic prosperity of the neighborhood than Metro. I don't think our business community, our merchants, particularly depend on their customers coming to them from Metro, that the neighborhood probably provides the lion's share of their support. I have a tendency to prefer to use services that I can obtain in my neighborhood rather than going elsewhere for them, simply as a matter of convenience and to try to support the people that keep our neighborhood viable and active by giving them my custom rather than taking it elsewhere. I suppose I could shop around and save a little money here and there by not using local services, but then do I really want to do that?

KULYK: Is that a common sentiment with your neighbors?

ANDERSON: Yes, we have a tendency to like doing business with the people around us. The only thing that we lack on Capitol Hill is a good supermarket. There is a large Safeway at 14th [Street] and Kentucky Avenue. But it doesn't seem to be of the same quality of Safeway stores that are in more affluent areas in other parts of the region. For that reason and that reason alone, I tend to do my grocery shopping in Virginia. Of course, I'm retired. I can head out to Northern Virginia in the middle of the morning after traffic is gone, have a pleasant drive up the GW Parkway for 15 or 20 minutes, not look for a parking

space, shop at a well-stocked store offering a greater variety and perhaps have a bite to eat in the suburbs, and then come back before rush hour and have made a pleasant activity of grocery shopping. But if we had some higher end food retailers in the Capitol Hill area, I would gladly use them. I'm in no means enamored of my steering wheel.

KULYK: What role did the federal government play in urban planning, and how did that impact Capitol Hill?

ANDERSON: Well, the government—the federal government, has always had the upper hand in urban planning in the city of Washington and I must say, and I think my neighbors would agree with me, that considering that the city over the years was planned again and again by committees of politicians from other places, they did a pretty good job of doing it. The city is intelligently laid out. It's a beautiful city. They're a lot of things about it that make it a desirable place to live. For one thing, the city is human scale. While it is magnificent and while it's grand, while we have our great public buildings and public spaces, it is human scale. People fit in very comfortably amidst the architecture of the city. It's a low-rise city. It is a city of neighborhoods. It's really a bedroom community. Because nothing is made here outside of law and public policy, we don't have smokestacks, we don't have heavy industrial areas. The only thing we ever did have, the Washington Navy Yard, which as an industrial operation has long since ceased to function. So it's a very inviting place.

The city is laid out mainly on a grid, making it fairly easy to find one's way around, though it can be confusing to have pairs of the same street numbered or lettered or in different quadrants of the city. Someone who lives here learns that very quickly and they're enough of us walking around to guide out-of-towners who are headed in the wrong direction. Or to the right address or on the wrong side of the city. I think Congress has done a splendid job of building not only a federal enclave which bespeaks the greatness of the nation, but having created around it a residential setting that is inviting and comfortable and convenient for those of us who live here.

KULYK: Did you ever talk to your neighbors on Capitol Hill about local issues and what the Congress was doing to try and address them?

ANDERSON: Yes, particularly since 9/11, when we had been affected by street closures on Capitol Hill, which has had a profound effect on our daily lives in terms of the convenience of getting around the diversion of traffic into one's quiet streets, as streets around the House and Senate office buildings have been closed for security reasons, which in our minds can be more or less demonstrated to exist. We're kind of reconciled to the fact that because we choose to live where we do, at the seat of government, that there're going to be things that are always beyond our control. And have to ask ourselves from time to

time, “Is the increase of traffic congestion in our neighborhood still worth living here?” And I don’t see anyone in a hurry to move. I’ve grumbled about it but you couldn’t get me out of my home at the point of a sword. I love living on Capitol Hill. To me, it’s the only place I would think of living. I can’t imagine what measures would have to be taken, it would make me so uncomfortable that I would pack up and move someplace else.

KULYK: Were there any federal issues, aside from transportation and whatnot, that you saw playing an impact in your neighborhood?

ANDERSON: I can’t say in my neighborhood specifically. There are things that those of us who live in the city and who pay taxes here are concerned about more broadly. For instance, I’m one that would favor a commuter tax on people who work in the city, which isn’t very big, but live outside it. Other locales have such revenue enhancers and I think that people who earn their living here, who benefit by the services provided by the city, should at least in part pay for those services. You know, and not depend on the 600,000 of us who live here to keep the streets paved and patrolled by the police and properly lit, and—there are a lot of things that are put on the city of Washington because of what it is ... that have to be paid for elsewhere. Of course the federal government does reimburse us for the things that come to us simply because we are the federal city. The inauguration, the visitors of foreign heads of state, the kind of things that require the level of police protection and public safety that no other city is required to provide. But I think the people who work here gladly enough ought to contribute something to the maintenance of the city.

KULYK: Do you think the federal government should provide, or should give the city of Washington more authority to govern itself?

ANDERSON: Absolutely.

KULYK: In what specific ways, do you think?

ANDERSON: Um, I think that they should ... not be so bold in overruling the decisions of the city council which are subject to Congressional review. I think we ought to be able to govern ourselves according to our collective mind without having external judgments imposed on our collective mind by people who may be of a different bent simply because they come from other regions of the country. People who live here have a stake in the future of the city unlike members of Congress who mainly work here for an indeterminate period of time but obviously have their roots elsewhere and may be guided by a philosophy of government or a philosophy of place which is not applicable to the city of Washington.

I would not take Congress out of the picture in terms of governing the city because I would have some concern that at some time it could happen that the decision of the local government could impact on the federal government. And the federal government does need to enjoy an immunity from undue influence by the locale in which it is situated. But it should be much more forebarent in not interfering with the decisions of the people of the city make. I mean there are things that the city council does that drive me crazy. But it's my city council. And no matter where I might otherwise choose to live, such as Sacramento where I still own a house, my family home, the city council of Sacramento doesn't necessarily follow what I think is the soundest policy all the time. But they reflect the collective judgment of the people of Sacramento. And it would be just as inappropriate for Congress to meddle in the affairs of the citizens of Sacramento as it would be in meddling in their affairs here in those things that affect only the community that have no spill-over effect on the ability of the federal government to function without intimidation or interference. That there should be a better test before Congress can be involved as to things that are clearly affecting the national interest as opposed to what things are in the local interest that Congress may be inclined to meddle in.

KULYK: What kind of test do you think there should be in order to determine that?

ANDERSON: I'm not sure that I've ever thought about it that carefully. Off the top of my head, I'm not sure. I'm not a lawyer nor a constitutional scholar ... but I just feel that there should be more limitation on how far Congress can go in meddling in the affairs—and I use the term meddling very precisely—in the affairs of the citizens of the city. Coming from someone who has throughout his life been part of the federal establishment. But nonetheless, I live here.

KULYK: Are there specific ways that Congress should not get involved, are there any specific examples?

ANDERSON: Well Congress, I've got to say, used to, before we had limited home rule, get involved in a lot more things. I mean, there're the old jokes about the laws about, the Congress used to make, regarding the length of dog leashes in the city and the whether or not it was appropriate to eat an ice cream cone. Happily those days of micromanaging are gone. But I'm not sure if I can speak to that question competently.

KULYK: Were there any Presidents of the United States in your mind that did a great deal for the city in terms of their policies, more so than others?

ANDERSON: I can't really think of a president who viewed Washington as his home, even for the meanwhile. The president certainly is our neighbor, but he definitely is not a member of the community. I recall with great fondness the efforts of [Claudia Taylor] "Lady Bird" Johnson during her husband's

[Lyndon B. Johnson] presidency to beautify the city. And she did a marvelous job and we're still the beneficiaries decades after her husband's presidency of the efforts that she made to beautify our city, the little neglected parks and unkempt triangles and spaces in the midst of our streets that were neglected now still bloom with flowers and beautiful plantings that Mrs. Johnson led the way in seeing planted and cared for. But no, I don't think any president that I can recall, which goes back to [Dwight D.] Eisenhower who was still president when I came to the city, has ever viewed the city with any personal concern. In fact, we've had those that'd have been just plain hostile to it. The ones that run against Washington and don't want to be viewed as in any way getting comfortable here or being kindly disposed towards the city.

We make an easy punching bag. There're very few places I think in the world which have been as grossly misrepresented as this city. For instance, the red herring that constantly comes up about Washington being the murder capital of the country if not indeed the world. And there are no figures that can begin to support that contention. If you looked at crime in the city of Washington and compared it to any other community of about 600,000 people, you'd probably find that Washington ranks way down the list substantially safer than many other similar cities. We get the bad press that we do because of what we are, the seat of the national government. And I'm constantly telling people that come from other areas that, by all means, you can come here and feel safe in your person and feel secure. We have bad parts of town. Unless you make a wrong turn you're not likely to ever be in those parts of town. But any place you go will have bad parts of the community where, you know, crime has a tendency to be more rampant than other areas. But it's extremely rare that you hear about a tourist having a problem with crime in the city. Perhaps a purse-snatching on The Mall but, you know, certainly not becoming a victim of a murder or rape or some other hideous offense, it just doesn't happen.

KULYK: Well, you mentioned previously that there have been presidents who have been very hostile to Washington. Which ones do you think have been the most hostile?

ANDERSON: Well, you know, Ronald Reagan who, of course everyone likes to admire, and I admire him too, the guy was good even though I never voted for him. Philosophically we were quite different. But he made it very clear that, you know, Washington was a place that seemed to embody all the things that were bad about government and just the effect that the manifestations of power have on people. He certainly was no friend of the city of Washington. That immediately comes to mind. Others have been less vocal in holding up Washington as a place of scorn and contempt if not occasional ridicule.

KULYK: How about presidents who have been members of Congress or senators, do you think they might have a different perspective?

ANDERSON: Yes, probably more so those that served longer ago when the pace of Congress was such that they stayed here more, that they spent social time in the city. Today, members of Congress spend virtually no time here. They virtually all leave the city on weekends. You know, you just don't see them around on weekends.

When I first came, members of the House got two funded trips each year. If they wanted to go back to their constituency more often, they had to do it out of their own pockets. They had a tendency to stay here since many of the members were not men of great wealth, they couldn't afford to be flying home all the time on their own dime. So they had a tendency to bring their families here to settle, to establish themselves as part of the social and community side of the city. That just doesn't happen anymore. Fewer and fewer members are inclined to move their families here for several reasons. They go home almost constantly because Congress now pays enough in expense money for them to virtually budget a round trip to their constituency every single weekend if that'd be their desire. And most of them do go home every weekend. Many of them are reluctant to locate their families here for fear of the perception that they're getting too comfortable, that they're settling in, that they have the notion that they're going to be here for the rest of their lives as elected officials, which opponents would use against them in future campaigns at home. Decades ago, members had less reluctance to move their families here, it was the only way they could keep a family together. They just couldn't afford to go home as often as they do now. So I think members had a greater acuteness to the joys of living in the city, to the concerns of the neighborhoods because they had real neighbors that were also part of their social mix.

KULYK: Are there any members of Congress who live on Capitol Hill?

ANDERSON: Oh, lots of them do. Ah, most of them live in apartments. Some of them have sort of frat houses where a group of them will get together and rent a large house that has a bunch of bedrooms because they're only there during the week. They don't entertain at home. Nor are they there on the weekends. They're only a few that actually seem to own homes or condos on Capitol Hill for reasons just given, they're afraid that people will think if they settle in too comfortably or create a real establishment for themselves that they're settling in. And this is a city, as it has been said again and again, where perception is reality.

KULYK: Generally speaking, how much do homes go for currently on Capitol Hill?

ANDERSON: Ah, I think about the cheapest you could get, a fixer-upper, for now would be in the vicinity of \$350-\$400,000. Where just 25 years ago that would've given you one of the finest houses in the neighborhood that wasn't a fixer-upper, it had already been fixed up.

KULYK: Were there, and I think we touched on this, but were there any additional issues that the federal government related to that affected the Capitol Hill neighborhood that you can think of?

ANDERSON: Nothing immediately comes to mind.

KULYK: Did working for the Congress, and knowing that the work you were doing directly affected you and your neighbors, profoundly affect you in any way?

ANDERSON: I can't say it profoundly affected me. It certainly was in the back of my mind. It wasn't until I retired from office that I actually got involved in any active way in the affairs of the community. I felt, number one, that because of the strictures on my own time, I couldn't make any real civic commitments because I just couldn't depend on keeping those commitments, since my schedule was not entirely my own. Nor did I feel that it would be entirely appropriate to hold office and to become involved as any kind of a community activist that there could be a conflict in those roles.

END OF TAPE 1/SIDE 2

TAPE 2/SIDE 1

KULYK: This is tape two, side one, of an interview with Donn Anderson for the Ruth Ann Overbeck Capitol Hill History Project. Still November 15, 2005. If you'll please continue.

ANDERSON: Ah, refresh my memory. Where were we?

KULYK: We were talking about whether working for Congress and knowing that the work you did affected your neighbors, if that affected you in any way.

ANDERSON: Well, the work that I did really didn't have any effect on anybody since I was never involved in policy. I was certainly involved in policy affecting the institution. But Congress is a place of specialization. My specialty, my interest, my background has been the mechanics of how the House works, the history of the institution. I'm something of a technocrat when it comes to the House of Representatives. I was interested in terms of policy that the House was engaged in that would impact on my neighborhood whenever it touched on the affairs of the city of Washington. But the work that I did did not have any affect on either the neighborhood or the city.

KULYK: What did you do after retirement?

ANDERSON: Well since retiring, I've joined the boards of directors and trustees of a fairly long list of charitable, historical, and other do-good organizations. Gives me an opportunity to pay back on the enormous debt that I feel I owe for the extraordinary life that I have led and yet. Involved in activities of

the Catholic Church here in Washington and I travel back and forth to California frequently to visit my mother. I go every other month for a couple of weeks. Gives me a kind of bi-coastal element to my life. Since retiring, I have, I shouldn't say I've become an activist, but I've become more engaged in the affairs of the community, attending meetings of the Advisory Neighborhood Commissions, occasionally the City Council, getting involved in moves in the neighborhood to promote various interests in which we have a common purpose to make life more delightful or safer on Capitol Hill.

KULYK: What sort of issues do they get involved in?

ANDERSON: Well, we have a problem on Capitol Hill with people converting houses, frankly illegally, to offices. Lobbyists, law firms, whatever, buying a house and then suddenly operating a business out of them, in violation of zoning. It's very hard to deal with the Zoning Commission in the District. They have a tendency not to be proactive in protecting the interests of neighborhoods which is a matter of real concern to those of us that live in this neighborhood. Because of its proximity to the two houses of Congress, obviously, lobbyists would love to have offices nearby, where they don't have to worry about driving and parking or taking a cab. And so, every once in a while, we notice that another house has been turned into an office. And we want neighbors. We want people who actually sleep there at night, not businesses in the houses around us. You know, plus the additional congestion that anything that's commercial brings in as clients come and go.

Also, people that turn houses into offices don't have any stake in the future of the neighborhood. It's a very narrow interest. This is a place where they come to work and the things that impact on us as neighbors, whether our recycling is collected when it should be, how people are caring for their property, the prosperity of our public schools, the condition of our parks, this is no concern to people that have strictly a commercial interest in Hill property. And it's the kind of commercial interest that provides no service to the community, as opposed to grocery stores and dry cleaners and drug stores and the kinds of things that we use.

KULYK: What kinds of steps can be done about that?

ANDERSON: Well, we find that there are strength in numbers. If enough of us get together and make enough noise, we can sometimes affect the Zoning Commission in either stopping something that's been done without proper authority or preventing something from happening that shouldn't happen. If they know there's the neighbors are in lockstep in opposing. I mean, we vote. Granted, we don't have a lot to vote for in the District of Columbia but perhaps because we don't, we have a tendency to turn out in larger numbers when we do, simply to take advantage of the limited franchise that's available.

KULYK: What kinds of activities do you do with the Catholic Church?

ANDERSON: Well, I'm a lay reader, both at the [Basilica of the] National Shrine [of the Immaculate Conception] and at St. Joseph's [on Capitol Hill]. I'm involved at St. Joseph's with various community outreach projects. I'm a chair of the capital campaign for the restoration of the church. It's a historic church, a very beautiful church that was built in 1890 and it was only recently that we finally took the bull by the horns and said, "Look, you know, our roof is leaking, the plaster is falling, we're in jeopardy of losing our insurance on the building if we don't do something about it." And so we started a full court press to raise a substantial amount of money for the restoration of that beautiful building which is probably about half way along. We got the building made water-tight, we put a new slate roof on it exactly like the original 1890 slate roof, since we had 23 places where you stand in the attic and see the sky through the roof, repointed the exterior stones and reset the windows so it's now water-tight, which means we can proceed to do the inside of the church knowing that we won't be fighting continual water problems. We had to do the things that were mechanical before we could do the things that were aesthetic. And so, we're now at the aesthetic stage of restoring that beautiful church to its 1890 splendor. And probably within the next two or three years we will have completed the project. We have found that while we're not a particularly wealthy parish, our parishioners have been very generous and giving. We inherited something quite wonderful from the old German community that built it late in the last century and we have an obligation to them and to those who follow us to leave something beautiful for those who will worship in that space a hundred years from now.

KULYK: Does the parish do any activities for the neighborhood?

ANDERSON: Um ... well, we run our inter-parish school, which is of course, open to non-Catholics as well as to Catholics. St. Peter's School receives a lot of funding from St. Joseph's Parish. We no longer have a school. We haven't had one since the late 1950s when our school was torn down because it was a fire hazard. And our children attend St. Peter's School which, of course, accepts non-Catholic children as well and has been very popular with non-Catholic families on Capitol Hill. So we're keenly interested in the growth and prosperity of St. Peter's school. Um ... we make, we try to be a good neighbor, to be involved in the interfaith community on Capitol Hill, to see that proper services are being provided for the needy, the homeless, those that have chemical dependencies.

The Archdiocese of Washington provides a lot of services that go beyond the Catholic people of the city of Washington. I am a director of the Anchor Mental Health Association, which is one of the entities of the Archdiocese, that rehabilitates homeless people to the point where they can be self-sufficient, self-supporting, self-respecting. We get most of our clients from St. Elizabeth's Hospital, people who have

been suffering from mental illness that can be dealt with, or from chemical dependency, or people who've just been unfortunate who have fallen through the cracks of society. And we provide rehabilitation, relearning life skills, learning how to perform tasks that are marketable, and helping them find job situations so that they can begin supporting themselves and living decently and with self-respect and become contributing members of the community.

KULYK: What are some of the other institutions that you are involved in now?

ANDERSON: Well one that is Capitol Hill focused that just came to mind, is I'm still a member emeritus of the House Page Board, which is the policy-making governing body for the page program in the House of Representatives. Our kids live in a residence at First [Street] and D Street, Southeast, across from the power plant. So they are members of the Capitol Hill community during their semester or two in service to the House of Representatives. And we are pleased that they have fit in so well with the neighborhood. I know that when we converted that building in 2001 for a page residence, some of the neighbors had some trepidation about having 72 teenagers living across the street from them, even though we gave them our best assurance that they won't be sitting out at night with their boom boxes, smoking dope, or generally raising hell, that our pages are ladies and gentlemen and kept under very tight control.

And the first year that they were there, and this was their own initiative, none of us planted the seed, they were so successful in fundraising for their spring formal dance, that they had several thousand dollars left over after they met the needs their plan called for, that they gave several thousand dollars to the Garfield Park Association, which is the little park adjacent to the building where they live. Which is primarily cared for by the neighbors since the city doesn't fund it adequately to keep it the lovely small park that the neighbors would like it to be. And, of course, the residents of the area around the park were absolutely delighted that the kids, who have no roots in Washington, thought to give their excess funds to the park association. And even though three or four thousand dollars may not seem like a tremendous amount of money, you can buy an awful lot of shrubbery and flowers and things to enhance the pleasantness of that park. And the residents were so pleased with the gesture that they turned around and gave a perfectly lovely catered picnic in the park for the kids before they left to show their appreciation for their community-mindedness.

KULYK: Have other groups of pages contributed to the Capitol Hill neighborhood?

ANDERSON: Well, part of their experience, is we require all of them to be involved in some form of community service. That is coordinated by their school, which is located in the Library of Congress. To see that they do something, ah, that does something for the people of the community and to, as part of their growth experience, give them the sense of their civic duty to be active participants in society, not

just takers but also givers, to be acute to those who have needs which hopefully none of them will ever have. And the kids do that very gladly. I haven't personally been involved in that program, so I couldn't describe the activities that they're involved in but they are required to perform a certain number of hours of community service as part of their page experience. And that's something that began two or three years ago.

KULYK: Did you ever, or are you currently assuming an activist role in any way, either with federal or local issues?

ANDERSON: Not really. I'm a dabbler. If I see something that compels my attention I'll get involved in it. Or find out who is and join the effort. But not in an ongoing way.

KULYK: What do you see the future of Capitol Hill to be? What would you like to see?

ANDERSON: Oh, I see Capitol Hill flourishing indefinitely. The neighborhood, setting aside its proximity to the seat of government, is a charming place. It's a very inviting place. It's quaint, it's lovely, there's a very strong sense of community these days among the people who live here. It's a shared concern about the neighborhood, not just proprietary about the properties that we may own, but to see that the neighborhood continues to be vigorous and prosperous. We spent a lot of time trying to keep our public schools together because if we don't have schools, we won't have families. And the young families anchor the neighborhood that come in with their children and enroll them in schools. The schools don't exist, the families won't either. And we'll go back to what we once were, a more transient type neighborhood with people coming and going as employment guides them to do, as opposed to people planning to put down roots and planning to stay 20 or 30 years, or even a lifetime as I have.

KULYK: And how do you see the future of the relations between the District of Columbia and the federal government?

ANDERSON: Well, I don't think it will ever be an entirely happy marriage, but I think that it's at least a marriage that can become a marriage of convenience. The District of Columbia has always been something that politicians who don't live here find convenient to kick around for home consumption. You know, if we decide to legalize marijuana, as some jurisdictions have done, it's easy for people who like to pose for "holy pictures" who don't approve of legalized marijuana to beat up on the District and try to overrule the City Council. The same can be said for an endless list of issues to which attach some controversy: gay marriage, euthanasia, you know, I'm not saying any of these are good or bad, but these are things that various locales around the country have decided to deal with according to the collective viewpoint of the people who live in those localities. But whenever something like that is done here,

Congress immediately has to get involved in it to show that they're on the side of right, at least as right is perceived in the congressional district or state that they happen to come from. And the temptation is just overwhelming for them to meddle for that reason. It has nothing to do with, uh, saving the people of the District from themselves, because we're quite capable of managing our own affairs very comfortably, as people throughout the United States seem capable of doing. But it's simply a way of posing for "holy pictures" to be used elsewhere.

KULYK: Do you have any final thoughts?

ANDERSON: The city of Washington to me is a wonderful place. I can't imagine living anywhere else. When I left office some years ago, people kept asking me, "Donn, where're ya gonna go?" To which I would look surprised and say, "Do I need to go somewhere?" And occasionally, people would say, "Well, you're not going to stay here, are you?" To which I would ask, "Is there something wrong with here? I think here is quite delightful." As a matter of fact, just look around at the several million people who come here every year for a once in a lifetime visit. It's a place that people want to see.

Now that I'm retired, I have the leisure to enjoy all those things that draw millions from elsewhere, our world-class museums and galleries, the kinetic arts, ah, the city is culturally alive. Anyone who gets bored here isn't trying. There's no reason for not finding plenty to do on a regular basis in the city. And it's human scale. It's a very inviting place. Climatically, it's hard to beat. We have four distinct and lovely seasons and none of them terrible extreme. It gets hotter and more humid in other parts of the country and it certainly gets colder and snowier elsewhere. It's, to me, an all around delightful place to live and if you do get bored or want a change of scenery, we're very close to other major urban centers, if you like cities. Baltimore, Philadelphia, New York, ah, Richmond is a growing thriving place. Or you can get out into the country in a half an hour or so if you want to look at trees and God's creation, it's just very convenient. I can't imagine not living here, so much so, that a decade or so ago, I bought a lot at Congressional Cemetery here on Capitol Hill where I will repose with some of the early leaders of the nation, including three of my early predecessors. So I have made my commitment.

KULYK: I think that's about it. I definitely thank you for sitting down with me this morning.

ANDERSON: It's been a delight. Thank you so much.

END OF INTERVIEW