

An Interview with  
**Claire McCaskill**

at the State Auditor's office in  
Jefferson City, Missouri

**06 April 2000**

interviewed by N. Renae Farris



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## PREFACE

Claire McCaskill was born on July 24, 1953 in Rolla. The daughter of William Y. McCaskill, Sr. and Betty Ann Ward McCaskill, she spent her childhood in the towns of Houston, Lebanon, and Columbia. After graduation from the University of Missouri in Columbia, Ms. McCaskill entered into the legal practice and relocated to Kansas City where she eventually became the Jackson County Prosecuting Attorney. As a Democrat, she served in the Missouri House of Representatives for three consecutive terms, elected in 1982, 1984, and 1986. She has served as Missouri State Auditor from 1999 to the present. For her most recent official biographic entry, see the *Official Manual of the State of Missouri*, 1999-2000.

I met with Ms. McCaskill in the office of the State Auditor in the Missouri Capitol Building. Portraits of past State Auditors encircled the room, which imparted a sense of history into the atmosphere. Interrupting her extremely busy schedule, Ms. McCaskill graciously agreed to meet with me beyond the amount of time that had been allotted. During the course of the interview, we discussed events in her life and her experiences as a State Representative and State Auditor, particularly as related to her gender.

The interview was recorded on Sony C60-HFB audio cassettes (normal bias), using a Marantz PMD-222 manual recorder (set on automatic recording level) and a Shure VP64 omnidirectional microphone attached to a floor stand. Except for occasional background noise caused by Capitol Building construction crewmen, there are no interfering sounds, and the recording is of generally high quality.

The following transcript represents a rendering of the oral history interview. Stylistic alterations have been made as part of a general transcription policy. The interviewee offered clarifications and suggestions, which the following transcript reflects. Any use of brackets [ ] indicates editorial insertions not found on the original audio recordings. Physical gestures or pauses are noted by a combination of *italics* and brackets [ ]. Any use of parentheses ( ) indicates a spoken aside evident from the speaker's intonation, or laughter. Quotation marks [“”] identify speech depicting dialogue, speech patterns, or the initial use of nicknames. Double dashes [--] and ellipses [...] are also used as a stylistic method in an attempt to capture nuances of dialogue or speech patterns. Words are *italicized* when emphasized in speech. Particularly animated speech is identified with **bold** lettering. Underlining [   ] indicates a proper title of a publication. Although substantial care has been taken to render this transcript as accurately as possible, any remaining errors are the responsibility of the editor, N. Renae Farris.



**[tape meter, 002; begin side one, tape one. Start of interview]**

RF: I'm Renae Farris and I'm here in the Capitol Building in Room 224 on Thursday April 6, 2000 interviewing Claire McCaskill, Missouri State Auditor. I'd like to thank you again for agreeing to do this.

CM: Sure!

RF: As I mentioned, this is biographical. Could you tell me when, where you were born?

CM: Sure, I was born July 24th in 1953. My family lived in Houston, Missouri. My father's family had the feed mill there, but there wasn't a hospital in Houston. So mom had to go over to Rolla. So I was technically born in Rolla although my family lived in Houston when I was born.

RF: Houston is roughly halfway between Poplar Bluff and Springfield, isn't it?

CM: Right. It's in south central Missouri. Texas County, which is the largest county in the state of Missouri and located, oh, you know, another "fer piece" from Rolla. (Laughing)

RF: Do you have any brothers and sisters?

CM: I do. I have an older sister, Anne Moroh. She currently lives in Long Island. She's two years older than I am. My younger sister, Lisa, who is four years younger than I am, and then I have a baby brother. Who's, oh, how many years younger than me... Seven years younger than I am, Will.

RF: That would be William, Junior?

CM: Right.

RF: Your father's full name was...

CM: William Y. McCaskill, and he [her brother] is William Y. McCaskill, Jr.

RF: What was your mother's name?

CM: My mother's name is Betty Ann Ward McCaskill. Her maiden name was Ward, and she was originally from Lebanon, Missouri.

RF: Does your family go back a long way, time-wise, in that area?

CM: Yes! In fact I have on my wall a composite of the General Assembly I believe from, 1817, 18, [*pausing momentarily to think*] 1867, something like that, I need to check what year it was. But many, many years ago... with my father's *grandfather* in it who was a member of the General Assembly from Texas County. My mother's family, part of her family is the *Harlin* family which is a well-known family down in the Gainesville - West Plains area. They were bankers. There were seven brothers, the Harlin brothers. They had banks down in southwest Missouri and that was her [McCaskill's mother] grandfather, one of the Harlin brothers. Her mother's father. I don't how many generation Missourians I am, but we've been here a while.

RF: Were your parents interested in politics?

CM: They were. I was told to say "Trick or treat, and vote for JFK" when I was seven years old in the 1960 Presidential campaign. As long as I remember, when I was a young child, they were involved in helping candidates. I spent a lot of time handing political literature as a child, and going to stump speakings which was the *traditional* way back in those days of getting to know the candidates. Everyone would gather on the courthouse lawn and all the different candidates would speak and hand out emery boards and fans. My sisters and I always had fun running around picking up all the fans and emery boards that other people had discarded. We had quite a collection at a young age of political

memorabilia. Which I wish I still had, by the way! We talked politics around the dinner table. Neither one of my parents (when I was a child) had run for office and neither one of them were lawyers but I was definitely exposed to a high interest in politics from a very young age.

RF: What do you think made them so interested in the political scene?

CM: I don't know. My mother was a political science major in college. I think that they just both gained an interest in it growing up and liked it, and thought it was interesting, and thought it was an honorable profession. So I never had anybody *discouraging* me from doing this. I mean, my family *encouraged* me in terms of my goal of holding elective office. I not really sure where their interests came from, but it was certainly there. And certainly it was in a large degree responsible for me being exposed to as much political involvement as I was, by the time I graduated from college.

RF: And they were Democratic, also?

CM: They were. Now it's interesting, because their families... They don't come from a large... My great-grandfather Young was a Republican in the General Assembly and my mother's mother was a Republican.

**[tape meter, 050]**

So it's *bipartisan*, in terms of the family tree. It's not like we've all been Democrats forever, but certainly my mother and father were very active in the Democratic party.

RF: You moved to Columbia at some point during your childhood?

CM: Right, I moved to Columbia when I was in the... Well, it was before I started school. I was still a toddler when we moved to Columbia. Then I attended public schools in

Lebanon. [*Correcting herself*] Well, we moved to *Lebanon* when I was a toddler, and I attended public schools in Lebanon until the fourth grade. And then in the fourth grade we moved to Columbia. I finished out my public schooling at Columbia. Grade school, junior high, high school, undergraduate school, and law school, all in Columbia.

RF: Why did you all move up there?

CM: My father was an insurance salesman for Prudential Insurance. When he left the family business, the feed mill business (at my mother's urging) and moved to Lebanon, he became an insurance salesman and sold life insurance. Primarily his client base was at Fort Leonard Wood, which was very close to Lebanon. I think he did well enough that the company, Prudential Insurance Company, wanted to promote him to a regional manager. So as part of that promotion, he was transferred to Columbia. So that's why we moved.

RF: At one point your father became the Superintendent in the Missouri Division of Insurance?

CM: Correct. Governor [Warren E.] Hearnes<sup>1</sup> appointed my dad to head up the Department of Insurance in state government.<sup>2</sup> That would have been in basically my junior high years. He held that job for, oh gosh, two or three years in the latter part of the Hearnes administration.

RF: Was there a time limitation set on that [position]?

CM: Well, it's a political appointment, so when Governor Hearnes left office... [the position ended.]

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<sup>1</sup> Democrat; From Mississippi county; First elected Governor in 1964. Served until 1973.

<sup>2</sup> See the Official Manual of the State of Missouri: 1969-1970, pages 315-316; 1971-1972, pages 313-314.

RF: So when [Christopher “Kit”] Bond<sup>3</sup> took over [a new person would have been appointed.]

CM: Correct. He left at that point in time that Bond became governor.

RF: I also saw somewhere that your mother became the first woman on the Columbia City Council.

CM: Yes. She ran for the city council. I’m trying to remember what year it was, but I would have probably been a sophomore in high school because it was at the point in time that it was very embarrassing.<sup>4</sup> My mom is very outgoing, she’s very outspoken, is a *classic* example of a woman who was highly educated but was never paid for any of her work. She never had a job that gave her *money* outside the home. She was very active in the community. She ran for the City Council and was the first woman elected to the City Council. The night she got sworn in was *very* embarrassing because we all went down to the City Hall for her to get sworn in. And in Columbia, of course, there’s a lot of journalists because the School of Journalism [is there,] so there’s *always* somebody taking pictures and there’s *always* someone writing something down. So she took a bag with her, a big brown grocery sack bag, and wouldn’t tell any of us what was in it. Well, we’re sitting out there in the audience and they call her name to come up and have her seat. She takes this brown bag up there and they swear her in. And then she opens this brown bag with a great deal of ceremony and proceeds to take an apron and tie it on, then proceeds to take out pictures of all of us and set them on her desk, and then a vase of flowers or something. You know, it’s her symbolism that a mother and a woman has arrived. Of course, this got huge coverage in the media and we were all mortified. My

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<sup>3</sup> Republican; From Audrain county; Served as Governor 1973-1977, 1981-1985.

<sup>4</sup> Circa 1968-1969.

sisters and I were just like “Oh, my gosh!” We survived that, but at the time we didn’t think that we would.

RF: (Laughing) I can imagine! You said you did go to University of Missouri-Columbia.

CM: *[Affirmatively]* Uh-hmm.

RF: When did you graduate?

CM: I graduated with a degree in Political Science in 1975. Then I immediately went on to Law School at [the University of Missouri at] Columbia and graduated with my law degree in December of 1977.

RF: I also thought I read somewhere that you worked as a waitress while you were going to school?

CM: Yes, I did. I worked as a waitress from the time I graduated from high school, really. I didn’t work during the school year in undergraduate school. I worked every summer as a waitress down at the Lake of the Ozarks, the Lodge of the Four Seasons. I started out as a bus girl the first summer, and the next summer they let me be a breakfast waitress. Then the next summer I think I got to be a banquet waitress, and by the time I finished law school I was working as a cocktail waitress. Then I also worked as a waitress during law school at a restaurant that’s now gone, Bobby Buford’s. Helped open that restaurant.

**[tape meter, 100]**

I was also the first bartender at the Hilton hotel that opened, which is now the Holiday Inn that’s out there by the mall. (I can’t remember what Holiday Inn.) But anyway, I did, I waited table for most of my college years in some capacity. *A lot* of hours waiting tables in law school.

I've said this before and I really mean it, I think that what I learned during that work experience has been more valuable to me in political office than anything else. Because you learn a lot about people when you wait on them, and you learn about how to communicate. and you learn about how to calm people down when they're upset or frustrated, and you learn how providing information in a friendly manner can produce great results. In that instance, really good tips! (Laughing) You get exposed to all kinds of people. My waitressing experience ran the gamut from a discotheque cocktail waitress to the friendly bartender that's at the hotel bar that talks to people (you know, business men and women that are coming through) to serving people breakfast at a resort. So I really had exposure to a *lot* of different people which I think was really helpful.

RF: Must have been sort of difficult though, trying to go to school *and* waitressing. You were an honors graduate.

CM: Yeah, it was. You know, it's funny, I'm sure at the time it was horrific but I don't really have any memories about it being just *awful*. I think part of it was that I really didn't enjoy the environment of law school. I had been an overachiever as a student and had always gotten good grades in high school and in college. When you get to law school everyone there is so competitive, and everyone there has always made good grades. So there's this atmosphere of stress and one-upmanship and "I think I can do better than the next guy". I found that terribly... [*pauses*] I mean didn't enjoy being around all that. I found comfort and solace in my friends at the restaurant because they were normal as far as I was concerned. So I didn't spend a lot of time hanging around the building, at Tate Hall (which that's where the law school was at that point in time). I spent more time...

When I was studying, I was usually studying on my breaks at the restaurant or I was studying at home when I got home. I didn't hang out at the law school too much. I think frankly it probably gave me perspective, because when everyone else was stressing out because they weren't thinking or doing anything else but law school, I was trying to figure out whether or not I'd made sure I'd turned that steak in medium rare or well-done and done it right. I think it probably provided a good *relief* for me from the academic stress of law school.

RF: Did you ever consider being anything else, going into any other profession other than the legal profession at that stage?

CM: I really didn't. I really had made up my mind that I was going to go to law school way before I got out of high school. In my undergraduate years I was getting a degree that I knew was not marketable in and of itself unless I wanted to become a teacher. I'd got that degree because I knew I was going to go on to law school. So from my first day of college, I knew I had to concentrate on good grades because I knew I wanted to get into law school. But I really didn't make up my mind finally on... Even though I had *toyed* with the idea of running for office and I had teachers as young as the seventh grade telling me I *should*. I had a particularly influential professor at MU who *really* encouraged me and wrote a recommendation letter for me for a program where he told some people that he did not doubt that I would hold elective office some day. I wasn't as sure. Right out of law school in fact, I... My job I really wanted out of law school was to be an investigator for the NCAA.<sup>5</sup> There had never really been a woman hired. They

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<sup>5</sup> National Collegiate Athletic Association.

hired a lot of young lawyers to do their investigative work on NCAA violations. I really wanted to do that, and I interviewed for it. I knew some of the people there because I had been what's called a "Missouri Hostess" at MU. That's a group of women that are selected...

**[tape meter, 150]**

I mean I think some of it had to do with looks, but you did have to know something about athletics and football because they wanted you to help recruit athletes in a way that you could really answer substantive questions and be knowledgeable about the game. I was familiar with someone who had been at the university who had gone to work for the NCAA. They'd never hired a woman and I had this fantasy that I would be the first woman investigator for the NCAA. I made the finals, but they didn't hire me. So I then made other career choices and ended up following this path. I wasn't *positive* the day I graduated from law school that I'd want to do politics, but it became clear.

RF: What do you think it is about you that made them see at such an early point that you [would be in politics?]

CM: Oh, my big mouth probably. (Laughing) In terms of studying when I was younger, I really didn't enjoy science. I mean, anything that had a right or wrong answer was not my cup of tea. I wanted to argue about stuff. I wanted to debate different ideas. So I really enjoyed history and social studies and all those areas. I mean, I would rather write an essay question any day than do math computations. So, I think that was it. I did public speaking from a very young age. My dad *really* encouraged me to do public speaking. He was a big believer that the school systems don't emphasize public speaking

enough, that it doesn't matter how much you learn if you can't communicate it, that that's probably one of the most important skills you can have in life. And so as young as seventh grade, he was really pushing me to enter speech contests. I think him doing that and me doing speech contests at such a young age, it really helped my communication skills. I had more confidence and poise maybe than some of the other kids that age because of that experience in speech contests. That might have been one of the reasons that the teachers kind of said "Claire, you ought to look at... [politics.]" Where else can you argue and give speeches but politics, right? (Laughs)

RF: After you obtained your law degree, you wound up in Kansas City. How did that come about?

CM: I wanted to get out of Columbia. I'd been a "townie". I had been in Columbia long enough, as far as I was concerned. That's why I went summers to law school. I wanted to get out more quickly. I was to leave a semester ahead of the rest of my class because I took extra classes and classes in the summer [since] I was so anxious to get out of Columbia. I knew I wanted to go to Kansas City because I didn't know anybody in Kansas City, and no one knew *me* in Kansas City. I wasn't "Betty's daughter" and I didn't have any family there. I really wanted to kind of make it on my own.

So that's why I chose to go to Kansas City, and that's why I began interviewing in Kansas City. As I mentioned, the first effort I made was to try be an NCAA investigator. But then I really tried to get hired by law firms. And had no luck. I was asked back for a couple of interviews at a couple of law firms. My grades were not *bad*, but mine were not... I mean, I'd been busy waiting tables, right? I was firmly in the middle of my

class. I wasn't at the top, I wasn't at the bottom, I was that good middle. So I *scrambled*, really, to get employed. I had difficulty finding employment and I really wasn't employed until after I'd left school. I was still looking.

[I] ended up getting a job as a research attorney for the Court of Appeals, which you know, was just dreadful, it was just *awful*. (Chuckles) It was like one long piano lesson for me. You didn't get to have very much contact with people, it was mostly about the written word and reading law and writing law. I liked the kids that I worked with that were *clerks*, but you know the judges... I wanted to go out and slay some dragons. I didn't want to be buried in a stack of books. I made it through that year, but I think they were just as glad to see me go as I was to go, by the time my year was over as a research attorney for the Court of Appeals.

**[tape meter, 200]**

My next job was with the [Jackson County] Prosecutor's Office. This is one of those things that happens that at the time you don't realize how important it is. I had interviews set up with both the Prosecutor's Office and the Public Defender's Office because I knew I wanted to get into the courtroom. I knew I wanted to do courtroom work, and I knew that those two places were the most *likely* places that I could actually get into the courtroom quickly. Because the Public Defender's Office and the Prosecutor's Office try a lot of cases. I don't think most people realize how few lawyers try cases. Very few. Less than ten percent of the legal profession ever gets into a courtroom except in the criminal law. So if you want to do trials as a young person there really is only one place to go and that's into the criminal practice. I had an interview set

up at the Prosecutor's Office and an interview set up at the Public Defender's Office. I went to the Prosecutor's interview first and they hired me on the spot. So I never made it to the Public Defender's interview. Then for most of the rest of my adult life I have spent working in and around the criminal justice system as a result of that.

RF: I believe I found that you spent four years as a felony trial prosecutor?

CM: Right.

RF: Specializing in arson?

CM: Yes, but *first* I didn't specialize in arson. When I was hired in the Jackson County Prosecutor's Office, there was one other woman that worked there at the time. [When I started working there,] there weren't *any* other women. They put me, as you would expect, doing the "girl crimes". I was doing food stamp fraud, and then they had me doing a whole lot of sex crimes. Child abuse, child assault, and sex crimes cases. I was single, and I finally went to my boss and I said, "You know, this is becoming problematic for me, because they all are beginning to look guilty. Every man is beginning to look like he's a creep that's committed some horrific sexual assault." I asked him and *lobbied for* a position that was opening up on a grant that was going to be a full time arson prosecutor.

So for the last two years I was there I specialized in arson, which was wonderful. Because it was challenging. Arson cases are difficult to prove. I enjoyed that, I enjoyed the challenge of the circumstantial case. Most of them *are* circumstantial. I was able to start a task force on arson where I reached out into the community and brought in insurance agents and firefighters, everybody who deals with the crime of arson. And try

to get them all to work together so we could really try to do a better job. That was very successful. We were *very* successful. We had one of the highest conviction rates for arson in the country. I ended up going around the country and helping train other prosecutors on how to do arson cases.

So it really gave me an expertise and some credibility that would have been more difficult for me to obtain had I not kind of worked on that specialization. It also allowed me, when I decided to run for office, [to be] very marketable. Because insurance companies want to hire lawyers that know how to prove arson. Because they don't want to pay the claims to people who have burned their buildings. So it allowed me to slip into a specialization in private practice that would complement the time that I would spend in the General Assembly when I made up my mind to run for state representative. It really was great. To this day I have an incredible amount of affection and nostalgia about all of the people that I worked with and met during that period of time. And [I] have continued to be a real advocate for funding and effective laws as it relates to that whole field of fire and fraud and arson because of that.

**[tape meter, 250]**

RF: You mentioned you did run for state representative. What made you consider doing that?

CM: You know, that's the funny thing about politics, is a lot of it is timing and opportunity. You can't really plan it out, because it has to do with when is there an office that you're interested in that is winnable, that is open. It's very difficult to run against incumbents, so it really is when does somebody decide to move on, and are you in the right place and is it the right time in your life to try to meet that challenge? So I had met the state

representative where I lived, and he came to me and said (this was in 1982), and he<sup>6</sup> said, “I’ve decided I’m going to run for Congress, and if you’re interested you would have an opportunity to run for my seat in the Missouri House.” I was what, twenty-seven [years old] I guess, and I thought that sounded like a great idea at the time. Although looking back on it, I was very naïve because I didn’t really have any political connections in Kansas City, I didn’t really have an organization base support. I was everything you’re not supposed to be. I was single, I wasn’t married. I was young. I had way too much blonde hair. I rented, I didn’t own. I mean, I didn’t even own a pet for the picture. You know, you’re supposed to have the picture with your family when you run for office. I didn’t have anybody to be in the picture *But*, my family was very supportive of me doing it, and so I decided to do it. [I] began in the very early months of 1982 knocking on doors. I ended up knocking on over 11,000 doors over the next nine months. I was elected, without a whole lot of money, but a lot of shoe leather. To this day I run into people who remember me in Kansas City knocking on the doors. And to this day, I can take you around the borders of my then legislative district. I remember it so well because of all the doors I knocked on, even though the lines have changed. I remember the lines of my district because of the door knocking. It was difficult because I was still working as a prosecutor. So if I was in trial I wouldn’t be able to knock, because you really have to work sometimes very late into the night. I would take my vacation time to make up for it the next week. If I was in trial, I would take a week off on vacation. I’d saved up a bunch of vacation time. Once daylight savings time hit, I was able to knock from about

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<sup>6</sup> Jack L. Campbell. Democrat; First elected to the House in 1980 to what was then House District 31.

4:30 in the afternoon until it got dark. So we got it done! I got elected, and came down to the General Assembly. Bob Priddy<sup>7</sup> tried to research this at the time, I wasn't the first woman attorney [in the General Assembly], but I was the first woman attorney in a long, long time.<sup>8</sup> He wasn't even for sure. He believed that there had been a woman attorney back in the early part of the century.

RF: Yes, I believe she was one of the very first women. Not *the very first*, but one of the first.

CM: Yeah. But since then he had told me a lot of the women who'd come to the General Assembly came because of their husbands. Their husbands had passed on, and they took over their seats.

**[tape meter, 300]**

Then obviously there were a lot of women here at the time that had been active as teachers and other things. There really hadn't been for many, many years a woman down here who had the legal background. So, it was great.

RF: You might not have been the *first*, but you were at least the *only*.

CM: I was certainly the only. It was great! I had so many things going against me in terms of credibility in this particular body. I had interned in the General Assembly in 1974 as an undergraduate student, and I had interned for Sue Shear.<sup>9</sup> Who is somebody that I hope that this state will recognize historically because of her importance and the role she served in the General Assembly for so many years. I watched how she was treated when

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<sup>7</sup> News Director for the Missourinet radio network.

<sup>8</sup> The first female attorney in the General Assembly was Gladys Berger Stewart. Republican; From Douglas county. First elected to the House in 1934. Served until 1945. Fifth woman to be in the Missouri Legislature. For biographical information, refer to the Official Manual of the State of Missouri: 1935-36, page 97; 1937-38, page 106; 1939-40, page 103; 1941-42, page 113; 1943-44, page 113.

<sup>9</sup> Democrat; From St. Louis County; First elected to the House in 1972. Served 26 years in the legislature. Retired May 1998. Obituary in the St. Louis Post-Dispatch, November 16, 1998. Pages A1, A5.

I was an intern. They were very patronizing and dismissive of Sue when I was an intern. Things hadn't changed *that* much when I got here some nine years, eight years later!

It was good that I was a lawyer, because I got put on the legal committees. Traditionally women had put on Education; Children, Youth and Family; social kinds of things. But because of my legal background I was put on Judiciary committee, and because of my background in fraud and arson I was put on the Insurance committee, and I was put on the Civil and Criminal Justice committee. So I had committee assignments that were non-traditional for women and had some expertise in the criminal law. There weren't many people down here who had been prosecutors! So as a result I was able to sponsor legislation, and *more* importantly help other legislators with legislation dealing with crime and the criminal statutes. Which really helped me in terms of getting a position in the General Assembly where I could be effective and I wasn't just dismissed as some young blonde. You know the old stereotypes of "ditzy blonde". Well, that really helped overcome the "ditzy blonde" stereotype. I was fortunate to come with that credential.

RF: You were put on the Elementary and Secondary education committee, *at first*.

CM: Budget Committee. [*Affirmatively*] Mm-hmm.

RF: But I did notice that in your second term, that's when you seemed to "move up". So I guess they finally figured out what your qualifications were.

CM: Yeah! Yeah. I think I was able to make enough racket that I... Frankly, there were so many legislators that wanted to be on the Budget committee for education, because education is obviously such a big part of the work here. So, it really wasn't a problem.

There were plenty of people who wanted to be on that committee and I was anxious to move into more of the legal areas.

[tape meter, 350]

RF: You'd mentioned Sue Shear. Who are some of the other ladies you remember from that time?

CM: Well, it's interesting. Some of them, I don't want to mention their names because there was some significant "Queen Bee" syndrome that I encountered. Women who had been here for a long time and who were very established, who *liked* the fact that there weren't a lot of other women. I will be very candid. There were some very difficult days for me down here, *personally*. Because I really want people to like me, you know I'm human. This place can be very cruel. I spent more time behind closed doors in my office crying than probably people realized at the time. I think I was pretty good at putting on a pretty strong *surface* appearance. My fellow lawyers in my class, for example, unbeknownst to me (there were seven of us) had formed a club they called the "Six Pack," which were all of the lawyers of course except me. Unbeknownst to me, they had been meeting and part of their discussions at their meetings was how to mess up my legislation. Finally one of the lawyers came to me and said, "Claire, I can't do this anymore. You need to know this is going on." So I was very hurt by that. I look back on it now, and I realize how silly they were being, how immature it was. But at the time, it was hurtful. The same thing with some of the women. I mean, some of the women were *not* as open as I would have liked because I think they were... I don't know if it's fair to say "threatened" or

“jealous” or whatever, but the idea that I had a professional credential that allowed me to work in a non-traditional area... I think it [made them uncomfortable.]

**[tape expired. tape meter, 389; end side one, tape one]**

**[tape meter, 003; begin side two, tape one]**

RF: Sorry about the interruption.

CM: That’s okay! So anyway, I really didn’t have... Now, as time went on there were a couple of women from Kansas City that were very welcoming. And as time went on, it all worked out. I ended up making friends.

It was a *very* sexist place! There were things said to me that part of me wishes that I would have raised a ruckus about. On the other hand, I knew... And I kind of had already taken this tack, in my career. You know, when people said things that were inappropriate to me in terms of being sexist. Whether they’d been inappropriate jokes, or inappropriate comments, or whatever. I just kind of made up my mind early that I was not going to be confrontive about those things. Instead, I was just going to try to do it in a different way. If an opposing counsel on a case was “honey-ing” me and “get me coffee, honey”, I would do it and then I’d just try to make sure I was prepared enough that I just kicked his tail in the courtroom. And so I kind of did the same thing down here. I tried to have a sense of humor, and take it with a grain of salt, and realize that the institution was not as progressive as I would have liked it to be. I got along fine, and got a lot of legislation passed. And made a lot of good friends, which many of whom I am very close to to this day.

So it was a great experience, and it was very interesting being the first woman *pregnant* in the General Assembly. I got married after my freshman term, my first term.<sup>10</sup> In the interim between my last two years I served, I had my first [child, a] son. So he came down with me to the General Assembly in 1988 and was here with me that year. I was pregnant in the session of 1987. It was interesting, watching them all go from (you know, not all, a few) inappropriate comments to very paternalistic: “Claire, how are you feeling?” “Gosh, how much weight are you going to gain?” You know, all those things.

I wouldn't have traded my six years down there in the General Assembly for anything. Because for one thing, I learned *so* much. I learned so much about compromise, I learned so much about the process of government. I learned so much about *strategically* how to get something done within government, how you need to lay the groundwork, and get your allies, and reach out to the right groups. I learned a lot about campaigning, too, because I always had an opponent. So I really think that those six years were invaluable to me as I went on to the next level in terms of elective office.

RF: Did you ever have any legislation or any encounters with the more politically powerful legislators at the time where you were in conflict?

CM: Oh, yeah!

RF: How would you battle somebody that would have a lot of power?

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<sup>10</sup> To David W. Exposito.

CM: Well, you know I had trouble with Bob Griffin.<sup>11</sup> I was too independent for him. Bob was a very strong leader. An *effective* leader. He wanted me to vote... I remember him calling me into his office when I was a freshman to vote for something. And I told him I wouldn't do it. You know, there was a price I paid for that. I didn't get a chairmanship as *early* as other people in my class. I think part of that was that the leadership knew that I wasn't as controllable, maybe, and that may be not fair to my other classmates that got chairmanships. I'm not saying *they were*, but I think that's one of the reasons I didn't get a chairmanship as early as some of my other classmates did. But I have fond memories about some of the challenging of the status quo. In fact, the Speaker [Bob Griffin] wanted me to vote for somebody for Majority Floor Leader, and I told him I wouldn't do it because this man had lied to me. I knew he was lying to me, and so just wasn't going to vote for somebody who had *lied* to me. I told him, "You shouldn't trust him". As it turned out, that was Tony Ribaudo.<sup>12</sup> [That] was who he wanted to vote for. Well, of course, as it turned out Tony Ribaudo turned on him and tried to take him out as Speaker.<sup>13</sup> And I had a great "I told you so," because Bob was just really strong-arming people to vote for Tony for Majority Floor Leader. My sense was he wasn't the right guy and I think I ended up being right.

And then we took on Dick Webster<sup>14</sup>, which was very interesting.

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<sup>11</sup> Democrat; From Cameron. First elected to the House in 1970. Served as Speaker of the House 1981-1996. Convicted in 1997 on federal bribery and mail fraud charges. At the time of this interview, he was serving a four year prison sentence at Eglin Air Force Base in Florida.

<sup>12</sup> Anthony "Tony" Ribaudo. Democrat; From St. Louis. First elected to the House in 1976. Served for around 20 years.

<sup>13</sup> In 1995. This event also had political fallout for Ribaudo's career.

<sup>14</sup> Richard M. "Dick" Webster. Republican; from Carthage. First elected to the House in 1948; served until 1954. Was briefly Speaker of the House in 1954. First elected to the Senate in 1962, served until his death in March 1990.

**[tape meter, 050]**

Dick Webster was a very powerful State Senator. Republican. Minority party, but nonetheless you wouldn't have known it. He really controlled the State Senate for a number of years. [He] certainly controlled it when I was here. Well, his son<sup>15</sup> got elected Attorney General in 1984. Bill and I served together my freshman year. He was in the House.<sup>16</sup> He got elected Attorney General in '84, and so Dick Webster proceeded then for the next four years that I was down here to do everything he could to promote his son, and promote his budget and make sure that his son was going to be Governor. I had noticed the incredible increase in the Appropriations to the Attorney General's office. This was really the precursor to the Second Injury Fund scandal.<sup>17</sup> What was happening is they were using the Second Injury Fund cases as a way to reward contributors. That ended being part of the reason Bill ended up getting indicted.<sup>18</sup>

I had talked to Bob Holden,<sup>19</sup> who was the chairman of the Appropriations committee for General Administration. I was the vice-chairman. We decided that we would expose this incredible increase in appropriations and try to stop it. So we did up charts and graphs and had a press conference and said, "This is nepotism. These budget increases are not warranted. This needs to stop. This is just about the senator protecting

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<sup>15</sup> William L. "Bill" Webster. Republican. Served as Attorney General from November 1988 until January 1993. Was regarded as one of the "rising stars" of the Republican party.

<sup>16</sup> First elected to the House in 1980. Served through 1984.

<sup>17</sup> A state fund which was to pay medical benefits to people who had sustained injuries on the job that were made more severe by previous medical problems. Some lawyers hired by the state involved in this scandal had asked doctors to inflate the disability ratings of some patients. This would lead to higher monetary settlements to the patient, and therefore higher legal fees. Some of these same lawyers were political campaign contributors.

<sup>18</sup> Bill Webster was not convicted regarding the Second Injury Fund Scandal. However, in June 1993 he was convicted on unrelated federal charges of conspiracy and embezzlement.

<sup>19</sup> Robert L. "Bob" Holden. Democrat; From Greene County. First elected to the House in 1982. At the time of the interview he was State Treasurer and a gubernatorial candidate.

his son. This kind of power is not healthy for government.” Oh, my gosh! Well, it was just a brouhaha! I mean, the Democratic members of the Senate (*one* of whom still serves today) were quoted in the paper the next day calling *us* “asinine”! I mean, we were Democrats, these guys were Republicans, and our own *party leaders* were calling us asinine! They really circled the wagons.

It was funny, because Dick Webster sent a runner down to my office. My office was in the basement, of course. (Chuckling) You know, I was down in the first floor. I was sitting at my desk the next morning after we’d done this on the Floor. We’d succeeded in cutting their budget on the Floor of the House. Now it ended up getting put back, a lot of it, in conference. But we’d succeeded in getting cut on the Floor of the House. This guy comes in my office door (and I didn’t know who he was) and he goes, “I’ve been sent by Senator Webster, and he just wants you to know that all your legislation is dead for the session.” And by gosh, it was! He’d killed everything I had my name on for the rest of that session.

RF: How do you politically survive something like that?

CM: Well, I was able to kind of maneuver around it. I learned a lot from it. I learned to anticipate the consequences of your political actions. I was able to ask other people to sponsor amendments for me. I ended up getting some things done, but I didn’t get them done in a way that it was obvious that *I* was getting them done. Now, that was fine. I’d gotten enough done. I wasn’t really worried about getting credit for anything that year. I think the stand that we took was important enough and principled enough that I felt good enough about it that I didn’t really care. It was o.k.

RF: After your last term in the House, what did you do then?

CM: Well, I had *planned* on... This is a good example. My former boss (as [assistant] prosecutor), Albert Riederer, had told me he wasn't going to run again. And so the timing of -- (and this is more important for women than men) -- the timing of my decision to have my first child and all of that was kind of prefaced on the fact that I knew it was going to be impractical for me to go back and forth with a toddler. I didn't think it was healthy for the toddler -- (for *Austin*. I shouldn't call him "the toddler") -- for *Austin* to not have that much time with his dad, or not that much time with me when he was so young. So I had pretty much made up my mind that I was going to go home after three terms. I also made up my mind I was going to go home and run for [Jackson County] Prosecutor, because I didn't think my boss was going to run again. Well, I filed. Or announced that I was going to file. I think I actually filed, even. And then he decided he was going to run again. So I had to basically back off, because somebody else filed. A three-way race was going to make it easy for this third person to win who would *not* have been good for the community. And so all my political supporters began convincing me that I should back off and let Albert have another term. So we had a meeting. Some of my supporters were there, and Albert's supporters were there and some people that were friends with both of us. I said, "Okay, I'll withdraw, but I want your word that you won't run again next time and that you'll support me." And we kind of memorialized that with a handshake and so forth.

So then I practiced law, full-time, for two years. Which was also great, because I was able to go into practice with a young man that I had worked with in the Prosecutor's

office who was godfather to my son and remains to this day one of my dearest friends. He's a tough, tenacious street fighter and he's done *extremely* well in private practice. He's a multi-millionaire now.

**[tape meter, 100]**

We opened a practice together, and that was fun, but I didn't enjoy it as much as I had the public arena. All the paper bogged me down, I didn't like the stress that comes with private practice.

So I ran for [Jackson] County Legislature in 1990, continued to work in my private law firm, and served on the County Legislature for two years. Just after my third child was born, I then announced that I would run for Prosecutor in December 1991. Lily was born in November, so just as soon as I had her I announced [my candidacy], and then ran for Prosecutor in 1992. Now the funny thing is, Albert had begun making noises that he was going to run again. So I had to (I was on the County Legislature)... I had to *really* go after him, which was very awkward for me because he had been my former boss and we had been friends. But I was so frustrated because I realized, "If I don't aggressively go after this, I'm never going to get my turn." So I pretty much began criticizing him publicly and the way he was handling the program in his office. And [I] was to kind of *gel* the political climate to the point that they are now going to *him*, and say "No, you can't run again." So *he* backed off this time. I ran, and after a tough primary fight where I was outspent two-to-one, still won and was elected Prosecutor in 1992.

RF: You were endorsed by the Kansas City Star, and diverse groups like Freedom, Incorporated, [and the] Heart of America Labor Council. How much of *that* do you think really contributed toward your being elected?

CM: Well, it's interesting. I was endorsed in the *Primary* [election] by the Kansas City Star. They didn't endorse me in the General [election]. They endorsed the Republican in the General. You know, I have a checkered... They always endorsed me strongly in my races for state representative. I was very disappointed when I didn't get their support in the General. Then this last time, I didn't get their endorsement either, either in the Primary or the General. So I've been on both sides of the table with the Kansas City Star. I really think the reason I won was I ran a smarter campaign.

I was able to get the endorsement of Freedom, which people didn't expect because my opponent was an *old* political name in Kansas City and his father had a lot of political connections in Kansas City. And he had been Assistant Prosecutor also. There was kind of a belief that he would get Freedom. But I really worked hard at the membership of Freedom. I didn't just go to the muckety-mucks in the Freedom, Incorporated organization. I really visited with a *lot* of people that were active in Freedom and was able to get their endorsement.

And Labor, same thing. I've had a mixed bag with Labor. Even though I had had a good record with Labor, they had not always endorsed me fully and completely. In fact, some of the Labor... Heart of America Labor Council endorsed me in that primary, UAW<sup>20</sup> did not. Some of labor was with me, some of them weren't with me.

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<sup>20</sup> United Automobile Workers

But what I did was, I didn't raise near as much money as my opponent, but I was very careful about how I spent it. I didn't spend it on really anything but television. And I waited. And as it turned out, he had spent money on so much other stuff that at the end of the race, right before voters made a decision, *I* had as much time on TV as he did even though he'd had twice as much money as I had. So it was by saving my money and being very careful and not... This is something I carry forward to this day. My campaign money is *precious* to me. It is very hard to get and I just really am just very... I turn down people all the time that call and want me to place ads in programs, because I don't think it's a good use of my campaign money. So, I think that's really ... We did good TV. I think my TV ads were good, I talked myself on the ads. He went negative and said a lot of terrible things about me and my family. We didn't do that. We stayed positive. And it worked.

RF: Hadn't you and some of the other candidates agreed to the "Clean Campaign"?

CM: Yeah, well, candidates always go through those machinations. As it usually happens, the one that's behind gets nasty and the one that isn't doesn't. Sometimes the negative works and sometimes it doesn't. I mean, if it's artfully done and not too confrontive. But this was very confrontive, though. He was basically accusing my husband of running a drug house.

**[tape meter, 150]**

It was nasty.

The endorsement that was probably the most meaningful to me in that campaign was the Fraternal Order of Police. To be a woman, and the first woman running for the

Prosecutor's job, I knew that it was very important that the community be reassured that I was tough enough to handle the job. Well to me, it was *very* important that the police were supporting me, because that would tell the community, "Well, gosh, the police would know if she's tough enough to do this job." And so getting the endorsement of the Fraternal Order of Police I think was the *key* endorsement for *me*, in that particular situation. We talked a lot about having that endorsement in my paid media. That I was the only candidate endorsed by the Fraternal Order of Police.

RF: As Prosecutor, you went after the adult stores in the area, you created domestic violence units, there are just a number of things. Would you like to tell me a little bit about them?

CM: Well, I'm a big believer that government needs more creativity. That we have a tendency in government to do things the way they've always been done. If you look around in the business community, imagine what kind of condition the economy would be in if the business community had that attitude. We certainly wouldn't have the Internet, we wouldn't have a whole lot of other things. So *I'm* a big believer in creativity, and the way I viewed my job as prosecutor was that it wasn't just about processing cases through the criminal justice system, that we should be pro-active in the community. We should be trying to figure out ways to *solve problems*, much like you think of community police. You know, community police, this is really going back to something that we used to do in the old days. Somebody walking the beat, that knew the neighborhood, that knew the problems, trying to pro-actively figure out if this kid's about to get in trouble, and figuring out how to get him somewhere so he doesn't get in trouble. Well, that's kind of

what my view was of the Prosecutor's job, that we should be out there in the community figuring out how to solve problems.

So, as a result of that, we were able to do a lot of initiatives that were very cutting edge, that had not been done before, whether it was drug court or the truancy program. You know, putting someone in the police department on a full-time basis as a liaison. The Fathering Project, where we began bringing dads in that were not paying child support. Instead of threatening with jail, we began requiring them to participate as a parent on the theory that a father who is spending time with his child will pay support. A father who's not seeing his child is less likely to pay support. That was like kind of stepping back from the child support problem saying, "O.K., What we're doing now is not working, let's see if there's another way to try it."

So we did do a whole lot of... We did a sting operation as it related to methamphetamine precursors. Instead of just going after the drug dealers, we started going after the retail businesses that were selling the ingredients to make meth. Which was *very* effective, because the businessman... You know, people that are hooked on meth and are drug dealers, there's not really a deterrent effect to prosecution. I mean, they don't get it. They're stupid enough to be a drug addict (I shouldn't say drug addict because there are some smart people that are drug addicts) but a drug dealer, they're not going to get it. But a businessman, you know, he *got* it, that if he's going to get prosecuted for selling cases of cold pills... Which is what these guys were doing, they were selling *cases* of this stuff, *knowing* that these guys didn't have a real bad cold, that they were going to use it to make methamphetamine.

I *loved* that job. It was great fun! We had the largest prosecutor's office in the State of Missouri. We handled more felonies, sent more people to the penitentiary in the six years I was Prosecutor than any other prosecutor's office.

But at the same time, I'm really proud of what we were able to create in terms of really fixing problems. The problem with crime is that politicians *want* to just talk about locking people up forever because they think that's what people want to hear. I think that's really underestimating people.

[tape meter, 200]

I think they realize that it's a hard problem. It's not just as simple as building more jails and locking people up forever. It's *not* so simple as that stupid "Three strikes you're out" thing that everybody wanted to talk about because it was finite and it was an analogy we all understood. It is much more complicated than that. You've got to be in the schools, you've got to have treatment, you've got to have mentors, you've got to be over in juvenile court doing drug tests. I mean, there are so many things you've got to be doing to be effective. I'm real proud of what we did there, and part of me still misses it. But I'm *glad* I made the decision to move on when I did, because this job presents a whole new set of challenges that in many ways are like the challenges of the Prosecutor's office but just a little different.

RF: As Prosecutor, you did take over the prosecution of some particularly horrific crimes personally. I read some of the details of them just in preparation for this [interview], and I found some of it *stomach-turning* and yet I know I only got just the surface of it. How do you handle something like that?

CM: Well, it stays with you. I mean, there's no question that there's crime scenes that I will *never* be able to forget, because you come face-to-face with animal behavior that we all like to believe is not *possible* in human beings. The children's cases were the hardest. I wish, looking back on it, in some ways I hadn't seen some of the crime scenes involving children because they are so hard to get out of my mind. There's a couple of deaths particularly that I can dwell on easily because they were so hard.

*But*, having said that, the nice thing about being a prosecutor is you can act on it. You know, you feel like you can really do something about it. You can bring justice to this situation. That was very rewarding. The time I spent with the victims' families and with the victims... You know, some of the rape victims that I worked with back when I was just twenty-three and twenty-four years old. I'd recognize them if they'd walk through the door right now because they were brave and I admired their courage, their tenacity in terms of trying to help me get justice for them.

I think it probably... The Prosecutor's job is one job in the public sector that is a wonderful job because you *must* stay in contact with the people you represent. I think it's sometimes too easy when you get into a job like this [*gesturing around room*] that you don't have the day-to-day contact with the real world. Well, you *have* to have contact with the real world when you're the Prosecutor. So I think it's a really good way to ground someone who wants a career in elective office because you realize that your actions have real consequences to real people. The laws they pass down here, I know how they impact people, because I've seen it. I've *seen* the victims be able to stand up in the courtroom and have the cathartic experience of talking about what they think should

happen. Well, that wasn't possible before we worked on the Victim's Bill of Rights<sup>21</sup> down here. The victims weren't heard from at that point in time. So, I've seen how positive that experience has been for victims and I see the value in that.

That's why I get so frustrated when people are so cynical about government and the people that participate in government. Because I think if they had been in my shoes and seen what I've seen, they would have a lot more faith in our system of justice and our system of government. Because there are a whole lot of things about it that we're doing right, a whole lot. More than we're doing wrong, for sure.

**[tape meter, 250]**

RF: The year from December '93, that full following year was pretty rough one for you personally.<sup>22</sup>

CM: (Chuckles) Yeah, it was tough! It was tough! It was a tough year!

RF: Your husband was arrested for marijuana possession in a public place, [on the Argosy V] riverboat casino. You did condemn what he did and said that he deserved whatever he got for it. And then your brother failed to pay the taxes on your condo at Osage Beach.<sup>23</sup> How on earth did you get through something like that, being in the public eye?

CM: Well, you know. I don't whine about that. I knew the choices. I get frustrated with people who are in the public sector and particularly people who run for office and particularly in office like I was in. There were a lot of benefits to having that office. I

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<sup>21</sup> Enacted in 1986. Gave the victim of crime some of the rights guaranteed to the defendant.

<sup>22</sup> A series of painful events took place during that year, beginning with the death of her father, William Y. McCaskill, Sr. in December 1993.

<sup>23</sup> William McCaskill, Jr., her brother, used her condo with the agreement that he would pay the taxes on it. He did not, and did not tell her. It was eventually placed for auction to pay the back taxes. Which she, upon discovering it, immediately took remedial action.

got prestige in the community. I got a lot of attention. I was treated with respect in a whole lot of places. I made a good enough living. I *knew* when I ran for that office that my personal life was fair game. I tried not to whine about it.

I did get upset that when my former husband<sup>24</sup> got caught that the media... There was one media outlet that camped out in my yard. I was out of town when it happened. They actually approached my toddlers, my little children and their babysitter trying to get them to talk. You know, “Where is she? When will she be back?” You know, that kind of stupid 60 Minutes kind of thing. And that was frustrating to me because it was hard enough without them exposing the kids to it. But I had a lot of advice on how to handle that. I was in California when it happened. It was on my birthday. This was in the summer of 1994. People said, “Oh, you need to come back and say he’s innocent until proven guilty.” And “Oh, you need to have a press conference and hold hands and say he’s going to seek treatment” and all that. I just decided that I was going to go back and say exactly what I felt. You know, I was just mad as hell! I was just furious that he’d been such a *jerk* and done something so *stupid*. So I came back and said that. “You know, it’s going to take me months before I get over the urge to kill him.” And I was quoted in the paper as saying that. It was really funny, because it touched a nerve with people. I got phone calls and cards and letters and flowers. People were sending [notes saying] “Hang in there”. That’s when Bill Clinton was going through all this, I kept saying “Why doesn’t she [Hillary Clinton] really say what she thinks?” That’s what was so *phony* about it. I guess people could say she was classy but I wouldn’t have ever done

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<sup>24</sup> McCaskill and her husband divorced in 1996.

that. I would have said, “You know, I’m moving out of the bedroom and we may patch this up, but he’s a jerk and I’m furious at him and I think the country should be furious at him!” That’s what I would have said if I was Hillary Clinton! And that’s the way I’ve kind of handled stuff like that. I’ve tried to be really open and honest. I’m human, my family’s human. We aren’t perfect.

I think that people are very forgiving of human frailties. I think what they’re unforgiving of are people who aren’t willing to take responsibility or who aren’t willing to be truthful about it.

**[tape meter, 300]**

I think the rationalization and the obfuscation, trying to make it look better than it is. I’m a big admirer of Harry Truman, and if there’s one thing his career should role model to people is that being up front saying exactly what you think is usually not going to get you into trouble. I made it through that. People thought I was dead, politically. People thought I’d never survive. Obviously, I did. So, I guess it worked! (Laughs)

RF: You certainly proved them wrong! In ’98 you were elected to the office of State Auditor. What connection did you make between what you were doing and the State Auditor’s office to make you see that as a natural transition?

CM: Well, I didn’t at first. The Governor<sup>25</sup> came to me and asked me to run. and he was very persuasive. He was persuasive on a number of different levels. He knew I was interested in running for state-wide office. He knew that if I waited until this year (2000) that it would be very crowded, as it is. That a lot of people would be out fundraising. That it

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<sup>25</sup> Mel Carnahan. Democrat. From Phelps County. First elected as Governor in 1992.

would be very difficult to raise money, as it is. He really believed that I had a very strong base in Kansas City from which to run. He was right about that. He talked about the beauty of not only the work of the State Auditor's office in terms of having the ability to go in any part of state government and look around and try to fix things, but also the cycle that it ran on. You run in an opposite cycle of everyone else. It's a little easier in terms of getting the attention you need to become electable and so forth. He came to me in December, and I discussed it with my family. I had since been divorced and so I was a single mom, so *clearly* this was a big decision because I was going to be moving the children. Not only to a different community, but away from their dad. And so I discussed it with their dad and discussed it with my family, and made up my mind that it was the right thing to do. Then [I] began in earnest in February to run for the office, which was like a *sprint* because I only had like six months to raise over a million dollars. And it worked out. My goal is to someday be governor.

And this is an *incredibly* wonderful job because what I basically am is eyes and ears to the taxpayers. That means anytime I see anything in state government that I think in hinkey or not right, or they're wasting money, I just go in there. I don't have to wait for the police to bring me a case. I can go make the case that I want to make! That I think *should* be made. Or at least expose that there is no case to be made. We do that a lot, too. And that's fine.

It's really very similar, because it's an investigation. It may be a financial investigation, it may be a performance investigation, but it's an investigation where you have to have all your facts. And you have to make *sure* that you're right. You have to

have a thorough investigation. It has to be *credible*. You have to be able to present it in a way that people understand.

**[tape meter, 350]**

Well, that's not very much different than what a prosecutor does when they file a case. So it really is more similar to my former job than people probably realize. It's a *wonderful* opportunity to impact government in terms of really making meaningful change. So I'm glad I made the decision.

**[tape meter, 356; end side two, tape one]**

**[tape meter, 003; begin side one, tape two]**

RF: O.K., We were talking about your job as the Auditor. In the race for this position, in the primary, you ran against Steve Conway of St. Louis.

CM: *[Affirmatively]* Mm-Hmm.

RF: I thought it was interesting because it seemed almost like a rivalry between St. Louis and Kansas City. Did you ever see much of that in your earlier political occupations?

CM: No, no, because I had never... Because obviously, state-wide is a whole different deal. Almost overwhelming in terms of the diversity of the constituencies that you are seeking to serve and the differences between the Bootheel and north St. Louis and the differences between Albany and Springfield. It's wonderful. I love this state. If anything, the experience of running for state-wide office just makes me love it even more. It's a wonderful place, and beautiful and the people are great.

But the St. Louis-Kansas City thing was interesting. I spent a lot of time in St. Louis in the primary. Which was a luxury for me, because I didn't need to be in Kansas

City. Because I was so well known in Kansas City. My numbers were so strong in Kansas City. I really just needed to pay attention in St. Louis. It was a good strategy, because my opponent didn't really *try* to do much in Kansas City. His strategy was to do the whole eastern side of the state. So he kind of gave me west, and so then I had to kind of try to do as well as I could in St. Louis and in out-state. So I tried to keep him busy in St. Louis making sure that his base was secure. I was able to pick off some support in St. Louis. Not a lot. He obviously won St. Louis and the St. Louis area, but I was able to pick off enough that it kept him busy at home, and kept him from going out into other parts of the state and spending as much time as he probably needed to [in order] to prevail. I was also lucky in that he was well-known in St. Louis but not near as well-known as I was in Kansas City. So my numbers were so strong out of the Kansas City area that it was just very difficult and turned out to be impossible for him to overcome.

RF: I noticed that in the General Election, you were running against the Deputy Auditor<sup>26</sup> then. All the other candidates, even in the primary, had been CPAs<sup>27</sup>. That is one thing that some people had questioned about you, is that you were not a CPA. How is it that you think that people wanted you in this position rather than someone with that qualification?

CM: Well, I wasn't really running against anybody in that race. I was really running against the CPA qualification. That's the way both campaigns against me were couched. It wasn't about you're picking between St. Louis and Kansas City, or Claire McCaskill and Steve Conway, or Claire McCaskill and Chuck Pierce. You were picking between a CPA

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<sup>26</sup> Charles A. "Chuck" Pierce; Republican; Served as Deputy State Auditor from 1993 to 1998.

<sup>27</sup> Certified Public Accountant.

and somebody who wasn't. I'm the first non-CPA elected to this office in twenty-five years, so it was a huge hole to crawl out of. Our polling... Asking someone if they think the Auditor should be a CPA is asking like "Do you think your minister should believe in God? *Of course*, the Auditor should be a CPA." That's just a knee-jerk reaction. So I had to spend a lot of time convincing people that this particular job was not about being a CPA. It was about having knowledge of the state government, knowing where to go to audit, prioritizing the audit resources. Audit selection is really the name of the game. *Knowing* if the audit you're doing is really going to have any impact for Missourians or if it's going to gather dust on a shelf and never be looked at. And management... I'd had more experience managing an office of professionals than either... than my Primary [election] opponent certainly. My General [election] opponent, he was a good man. He was qualified for the job. I just think that he had had *no* political experience. (Chuckling) He hadn't spent any time behind closed doors crying in the basement of the Capitol when he was in [the] General Assembly. He didn't have as many contacts in his party. I think it was difficult for him to get traction in terms of support because he was not well known even amongst his own party.

So I think that my political experience combined... That really helped me in terms of knowing what kind of campaign to run, once again saving my money, not wasting my money. We never printed yard signs. We saved *all* the money for television. We had one little hovel of an office in a basement without a window. I only had two staff people. This was *not* what people picture as a state-wide campaign. There was no store front with people on the phones and seven phone lines and all that. It was a *very* skeleton

operation because we knew what we needed to do. And so I think we were *very* good about spending our money smart.

[tape meter, 50]

We were able to get enough TV. A lot of it was about name recognition and how much TV you had.

It was very close. I mean, I barely won. I only got forty-eight percent of the vote. I didn't even get a majority. The Republican Party gave him a *lot* of money at the end. If the race had been a week later, I think I would have lost because they really started just funneling huge amounts of money to him at the very end. And at the end, every day my heart was beating faster because I could see, I could *feel* him coming. I could see the number of ads he was buying and that we were almost even in the amount of ads that had been bought. In the end, the difference was that people in the Kansas City community -- and I'm not just talking about Jackson county -- I'm talking about Clay county, Platte county, Harrisonville, Cass county, Lafayette county. They felt like they knew me, too. Because even though I'd just been the Jackson County Prosecutor, I had had enough media exposure and enough radio talk shows and all that, *that* was the difference in the election was the people who felt like they really knew me and thought that I'd (hopefully) done a good job in the other jobs I'd had.

RF: So in a race today, you would say that getting the media coverage for yourself would be one of the key factors?

CM: I think what people forget about... I think they get very [cynical], oh, you know, "Those politicians just want a headline." When I talk to business groups, I say "Now just

imagine if you're the CEO of a major business, and the *only way* your board of directors finds out how you're doing is how the media covers you.”

[tape meter, 066]

**[Brief interruption by Capitol building workmen coming into the room trying to gain access to the exterior of the building through the office window. Tape recorder shut off briefly.]**

[tape meter, 068]

RF: You had pledged to make the [State Auditor's] post more prominent, and I think you've done that in your career. (Chuckling)

CM: (Laughing)

RF: The Auditor's position seemed always to be in the background before, but lately you've certainly been in the news quite a bit with the audits of just variety of ...[agencies]. Division of Aging, Land Trust of Jackson County, and Mizzou<sup>28</sup>, and Southeast Missouri State, and other universities. The question would be how do you come about finding out, how do you select these particular institutions to audit?

CM: That's the fun part of this job! The ideas come from a variety of places. The [Division of] Aging audit, I talked about nursing homes during the campaign because I read an article on the airplane going from St. Louis to Kansas City during the campaign about hearings that were going on in Washington about the failure of states to adequately police nursing homes. So I thought, "Well, that's a great idea because that's a good example of a performance audit." [I thought] that I could explain to people, "This isn't about financial audits only." Because that's really where the CPA thing was coming in, in

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<sup>28</sup> University of Missouri-Columbia.

people's minds. They see a green eye shade and a calculator. They think that this is just about adding up figures. They didn't understand what a performance audit was. So I used the nursing home example during the campaign to say, "A performance audit would be checking to see how well the State of Missouri is doing in its job investigating nursing homes." So that was really the fulfillment of a campaign pledge, that I would in fact do whatever I could to shut down money going to people that had nursing homes that were abusing the elderly. So, that's where that one came from.

We did one on the Sunshine Law. I was talking to somebody one day, and we were talking about how much the Sunshine Law gets abused. I was just saying, "You know, there ought to be way we could check compliance with that." Then that night, [when] I was in the shower I thought, "Why can't we just sting them like we did when I was a prosecutor? Why can't we send them a letter as if we're somebody else, certainly not as the State Auditor, and see if they give us the records?" That's how that one came about. So, sometimes it's things that are going on in the media that I think, "OK, we need to take a further look at that." And sometimes it's just a matter that we as a whole process look at where all the money is going in state government. We look at programs that have been created and how long they've been in existence, and how much checking has there been done to see if they're actually accomplishing anything. The audit plan changes constantly. In fact, it drives the staff nuts because I'll say "OK, we've got to do this one. Take that one off, we've got to do this one."

**[tape meter, 096]**

**[Interview pauses briefly due to noise caused by Capitol building workmen.]**

**[tape meter, 098]**

CM: It's an evolving document and it changes monthly almost. And a lot of it I just know from being government. I know where we need to look. I know where there's some weak points.

**[tape meter, 100]**

In the future, I would always recommend that whoever gets this job have experience in other levels of government before they do this work. Preferably, in state government. Either in the legislature or some other executive position.

RF: I've noticed that from a lot of the background material I've read on you that you seem to be very family-oriented. How difficult is it for you to be a working mom, especially with a job like this?

CM: Well, I just basically do kids and job. You know, like I told my friends, "I'll see you in a decade." I don't do lunches.

RF: No social life.

CM: Yeah. I don't really do have much of a social life. Now, I make a big effort for the children to be with their father, and so there are some weekends where they're in Kansas City with their dad. And then I might do some stuff that's more social for me. I'm not complaining about that. My children are... They're the whole enchilada as far as I'm concerned. They're where I have the most fun (with them), I am happiest when I'm with them.

You know, that's another area. How dare... If I whined about that... I've seen single moms that make one-fifth of my income that are managing children and they don't

have somebody helping them answer the phone. And they don't have somebody, a staff of people that are trying to help them get their job done. It's just *them*. They have a car that doesn't work very well or sometimes no car and they're trying to make ends meet. How dare me complain?! That this might be a little tough? It is a little tough.

But people are very understanding about it. I'm *very* up front with people. They want me to give this speech in May and we kind of committed to it, and then I realized it was the last day of school. I realized my kids were getting out of school at eleven. Well, I had agreed to give this speech at ten o'clock down at the Lake [of the Ozarks]. We called them this week, I told Joan<sup>29</sup> "Call them and just tell them I refuse to not be there when my kids get out of school for the year. I want to be there to pick them up when they get out of school." You know, that's a really fun time! Do you have children?

RF: No.

CM: You remember when you were a kid, the day you got out of school, how it felt? Well, I don't want to miss that! I want to be there the day they get out of school! So I told them, "Either I'll do the speech at nine or I just won't be able to make it." It may make some people angry, but that's OK. In the long run it's more important to me to do those things. And really women need to realize this. I try to say this to young women all the time.

I think too many women are waiting to do politics until their children are grown. And really there in some ways a political career has more flexibility. Yeah, I've got to work weekends, and yeah, sometimes I've got to work at night. But on the other hand, there's nobody that's going to tell me I can't take off at two o'clock and go watch my

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<sup>29</sup> Joan M. Doerhoff, the executive secretary in the Auditor's office.

kids in the assembly. I don't have to worry. If my children are really sick, by gosh, I stay home with them. Because I don't have a nine-to-five or an eight-to-five job where I'm punching the clock. So as long as I'm... I take my computer home. I get on the computer after they go to bed at night and I handle all my e-mail between like... I try to get them done between 9:30 and 10:30 so I can watch David Letterman. But I work that hour at home after they're in bed and that works for me. Yeah, I'm working, but I'd rather be able to do *that* and have the flexibility to go help in the computer lab at my daughter's school. I think it's something women should look at. It's difficult during campaign times and I would not recommend it to anybody who doesn't have a *strong family structure*. My mother is there for me with my children. Their dad is... You know, he wasn't the best *husband* in the world, but he's a good father. My sister. They're willing to help and care for them in a loving, nurturing family environment when I *have* to be on the road for campaigning. So it's worked out. They're pretty good debaters already. My son is debating the death penalty with me now daily because he's become convinced that the death penalty is a bad idea. And I'm a supporter of the death penalty. And he's now beginning to say that he wants to be a lawyer, so we'll see. I'm a little frightened at how that all might turn out, but...

RF: How old is he now?

CM: He's twelve.

RF: Twelve? And already he's debating that?

**[tape meter, 150]**

CM: Yeah, he was the one that was born when I was in the General Assembly. So when he's over here, he always likes to walk down there and lord it over his sisters, "I was born when Mom was here." He's twelve, and then Maddie is ten, and Lily is eight, so I have sixth grade, fifth grade, and second grade right now.

RF: Gosh! Quite a handful then!

CM: Quite a handful! Quite a handful! I mean, our house is... we have lots of action!

RF: (Chuckling) I can only imagine. How big a role does your religious faith play in your life?

CM: It plays a very big role. I converted to Catholicism during my marriage and my children all go... It's very, very important to their father that they are in parochial schools. It frankly is not as important to me, because I came up through the public school system. The most important thing, I think, with the school system is you get an education. But it's *really* important to him and so it's not something that I'm willing to fight about. Because we have the wherewithal to be able to do that and them getting an extra dose of faith at school is OK with me. I don't think you can ever get too much.

I was raised in a family that went to church every Sunday and I got my five year Sunday School pin. My grandmother played the organ in the First Christian Church in Lebanon, Missouri almost every Sunday for fifty years. So I grew up crawling around on the pedals up under the organ at church. I think it's good that my children are having that kind of constant exposure to the faith community at a young age.

It will be up to them when they get older. They may convert to another faith. I hope it's Christianity if they decide not to stay Catholic, but obviously I became a

Catholic as an adult. They would be free to choose whatever faith that they're most comfortable with. There's some things about the Catholic faith that (some of the positions of the Catholic *Church*, not the *faith*) I disagree with. But at the end of the day I like the constancy of my faith.

The *most* important thing my faith does for me is give me perspective. It is very easy to start thinking you're important. You know, [*gesturing around the room*] I'm in this beautiful office, I'm in this *incredible* building that is just *unbelievable* when I drive up to it every day. I look at it and I think, "My gosh! How many people get a chance to work in a place like this?" People are deferential to you, and of a sudden you get to thinking [how important you are.] Then when you are praying and you're in church, you realize what a little bitty small speck you are and how much *more* important those things are.

I'm *very* uncomfortable with elected officials who proselytize. I'm *very* uncomfortable with elected officials who use their faith as a two-by-four in terms of the government taking social positions. I am *very* disgusted with the religious right in terms of some of the methodologies they're using. I think they're very unchristian-like to try to influence the political world. *But*, having said that, *when asked*, as I was in this case, I'd be *happy* to tell people how important my faith is to me.

RF: Looking back over your political career, what do you think was your greatest accomplishment? At least to date?

CM: [*Thoughtful pause*] This is a weird thing to say, because saying you're a good politician is a little bit like saying you're good used car dealer in our society. But I'm a good

politician. And to me that's not dishonorable. Because I think a career in politics in an honorable profession. I'm proud of the way I've been able to overcome some odds, political odds. A lot of people didn't think I could win this race. I wasn't a CPA.

**[tape meter, 200]**

I'm proud of what I've learned and the strategies that I know to win, that I understand the process, and that I understand how important it is to reach out and communicate with people. I'm really proud of that. I think that there have not been enough women who have excelled at the system of learning how you go for elective office and win elective office. How you raise the money, and how you put together a campaign, how you decide what issues are important. The nuts and bolts of winning elective office, there is a skill involved. I think too many women have walked away from the nuts and bolts thinking that somehow they're not going to be good at it or it's beneath them. I'm proud of that. And I'm proud of the skills that I have acquired.

And I'm really proud of what we did at the Prosecutor's office in terms of being able to maintain an image (that was [in]correct, it wasn't just an image) that I was very tough on crime. But at the same time, being able to put programs in place that I think women traditionally would have trouble doing. Because people would say, "Oh, they're just being a social worker" or "They're being soft on crime" or "Oh, she's being a girl. She's worrying about this mother and her babies when she should be worrying about locking them up." Walking that line of being tough enough as a woman but *still* being able to implement programs that had a softer approach, I'm very proud of that because I think that's a delicate thing for a woman to do. There's this old thing that we say: "If

you're a woman lawyer or a woman politician, it's a very thin line between being effective and being the "B" word." I think I've been able to manage that line, and I hope I can continue to manage the line. But it is a struggle. You come on too strong, and all of a sudden... *not the men*, [but] the *women* are no longer interested in helping you. So being warm and open and *vulnerable* enough to people, so that people see who I really am but at the same time refusing to budge on the things that I really believe in -- that's the goal here. If I can maintain that balance, then when I'm finally finished with my career I'll be *very* satisfied.

Especially if my girls don't have to be firsts. I've been a lot of firsts. And people say, "Well, aren't you proud of being first?" I brought my daughters in here the first day and I [*gesturing at a portrait on the wall of her office*] pointed at that picture of Margaret Kelly and I said, "Look, isn't it great you guys? We need to celebrate. I'm not the first!" That's a great thing! The *thrill* of being the first, believe me, it's much more thrilling to be the second because that shows that we're really making progress. That pretty soon it won't even be an issue whether it's a woman or a man. It's just whether or not they've got the qualifications to do the job. So I'll be really thrilled when there's no more firsts.

RF: What do you feel so far has been your biggest disappointment?

CM: [*Long thoughtful pause*] That's really hard. I've been disappointed in people. I think my biggest disappointment is when people are not truthful with me. I was very disappointed... It was very important to me who succeeded me as Prosecutor, because so many things we'd started I really cared about.

[**tape meter, 250**]

The person who had the authority to appoint my successor basically lied to me about what she was going to do when I left office. That was very disappointing to me. There have been other instances when people have not been truthful with me.

And I've been disappointed sometimes in my inability to manage my time as well as I would like. My failure to *make* time for people sometimes. I was just disappointed today because this man wrote me this letter. (It got to my desk, thank goodness.) It said "For Claire McCaskill Only." He proceeded to tell me in this letter how he had been *trying* to make contact with me. And that he'd had a meeting with somebody in my staff, and then he'd had another meeting with somebody on my staff, and then he'd called and they'd try to get him to talk to another person on my staff. That was disappointing to me, because I realized that even though I can't take every phone call (and I think everybody *knows* that, I can't take every phone call), I've prided myself on accessibility. So I was disappointed that there was somebody out there that trying so *hard* to make contact with me and that they couldn't get through. We've got to work on that, too.

RF: Where do see yourself after your term in office as Auditor?

CM: Well, hopefully... I really want to be Governor. That's the goal. And I don't know if that will happen or not. I've always been real up front about that. It kind of interests me that people who run for office always go, "Oh, well, I don't know. We'll have to see." In [the] private sector, if you're in the mailroom, you say, "Yeah, I want to be the CEO [Chief Executive Officer.]" Getting promoted in our society is a good thing. And the way you get promoted is you do a good job and your bosses say, "Hey, I think you can handle more responsibility." So I've always been up front about wanting to get

promoted. I don't think it's anything to be coy about. So, yeah, I'd like to get promoted. The *only* way I'll get promoted is to do a good job here. It's not like I'm already focused on "What do I need to do to be Governor?" I *know* what I need to do to be Governor. I've got to do a really good job as Auditor! I'm really focused on that for at least this term, and another. And it may be that something else will come along that will be more interesting to me or another opportunity.

But I really think this job is a *great* place. The Governor's job is an executive job. It is managing people who are doing a job. What you really have to know about to be Governor is you have to know how to manage people and you have to know state government. Well, there's not a better job in state government to learn about state government than this one, because we spend all our time poking around learning about state government. So I feel like this is a great place to *prepare* for the job of Governor and I'm hopeful that someday my bosses will promote me. Unfortunately, it will be another first! But the good news is, it would be the last first! And the next woman, wouldn't have to be first anymore.

RF: Do you have any closing reflections you might want to offer?

**[tape meter, 300]**

CM: You know, I think that in terms of history, I think that the intersection between motherhood and public life is an important one to look at. If my career can do nothing else, I hope that it provides a road map for young women to realize that... Yeah, my personal life hasn't been a complete success. I hate to fail at anything and *clearly* the failure of my marriage is the *biggest* by far, the biggest disappointment of my life. It

wasn't a *professional* disappointment, but nonetheless it was the biggest disappointment of my life. But I don't believe that that divorce in any way was related to my work because I got married after I was doing this. I had already run for office, so it wasn't a situation where it was my career that caused the breakup of the marriage. It was unrelated factors that caused the breakup. Aside from the divorce, I hope that people would look at my career and say, "You know, women can do this. And they can do it and give birth, they can do it and raise children, they can do it and be a good mother. They don't have to have *debilitating guilt* about doing it and being a good mother." If nothing else, if I provide that for some other young women, then I'll be a *very, very* happy woman. That's why I try to publicly let people know as much as I can that this has been a juggling act in some ways but one that I think we've been able to manage. So that's important to me for people to know that.

RF: Well, I'd like to thank you again for sitting for this interview.

CM: You bet! Thank you!

RF: Thank you very much.

CM: [*Affirmatively*] Uh-huh! Thank you!

**[tape meter, 330; end side one, tape two. End of interview]**