

REFLECTIONS PROJECT
SENATOR TOM DASCHLE
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LINDA DOUGLASS: Well let's start off by talking a little bit about your early history, because you came from the House to the Senate.

SENATOR TOM DASCHLE: That's right.

DOUGLASS: Back in those days what did you notice was the biggest difference from being in the House and being in the Senate?

DASCHLE: Well I think the most important thing is the personal relationships that you develop along the way. In the Senate, you don't really have much of an opportunity to create those personal moments with fellow members. I mean you're not, there's a little bit more distance between the senators than there are among House members. And you're kind of all, it's like a college class in the House: There are younger members thrown together. And it's not as reverent, and it's not as, probably, as just revered in sort of an institutional sense. But there are big differences. You have a huge staff in the Senate, in the House you're limited to 16, 18 people. I think I had 125 staff at the end of my Senate career. So there's just a huge difference in resources and kind of a sense of camaraderie that comes in the House versus the Senate.

DOUGLASS: Well, I want to ask about the relations between the House and the Senate as we go on. But you really were there in one of the more extraordinary times in our history for many, many reasons. So let's talk first about the tight, tight margins that existed the whole time that you were in leadership. You went from being; I was counting back, minority leader to majority leader briefly to minority leader to majority leader to minority leader which was a reflection of the times. You wound up making at one point what would be historic 50/50 Senate power-sharing arrangement with your counterpart Trent Lott. How did that work out? How was that as a way of governing?

DASCHLE: Well just— just to clarify, I— I think it's fair to say I ran for majority leader in '94 and we narrowly lost the majority. And so I ended up, even though I ran for majority leader, being the minority leader because of the narrow loss in '94. And then from '94 to 2000 I was the minority leader. 2000, we won; I became the majority leader, and then went back to being the minority leader in 2002. So your point is well taken. And all that time we were a couple of votes one way or the other either in the majority or in the minority. At one point in 2002 Senator Lott

and I actually had to negotiate how one governs with a 50/50 Senate. That's never happened before; and so we actually had to work out a power-sharing agreement, sharing responsibility, sharing power. We even had notions of changing chairs half way through the Congress and trying to figure out just how do you govern when its exactly 50/50. And we worked it out. And I give him credit for working with us to try and accomplish something that had never occurred before.

DOUGLASS: Was that, in retrospect, a situation that forced you got to go on and play nice? Was that perhaps better in terms of actually accomplishing anything in the Senate, or was the reverse true– it would just create a stalemate?

DASCHLE: Well it depends on the circumstances in, I think it was really a tribute to both caucuses that in spite of all the turbulence and in spite of all the difficulties that came with the presidential election of 2000 and then this 50/50 Senate of 2000, that we were able to work through how we were going to govern, how we were going to actually try to make the institution work in spite of the fact that there was no majority. We did that. And then in September of 2001, just 9 months into that working relationship, two things happened. One: One of the Republicans crossed over and became a demo- became an independent, and that's shifted the balance 51/49. And then of course 9/11 occurred; and in that time frame from 9/11 to about 11/11, two months, it was an amazing machine. We just pumped out legislation. We worked very, very closely together seemingly 24 hours a day, 7 days a week. We were just pouring it on and doing a lot of things that, in retrospect, maybe we acted too quickly on. But nonetheless it showed what one could do in spite of the fact that you had a very, very narrow majority. It was an incredibly intense and intriguing time and it was amazing to be a part of.

DOUGLASS: I guess when I was thinking of you having been majority leader for a month back in that sequence. I was thinking of the 2000 election, which was this historically contested election where Al Gore, the Vice President at the moment, was briefly the tie-breaking vote. Although I guess that was actually a lame duck Senate. I was always curious how the Democratic senators reacted to that contested election, because the election, that was resolved where Gore won the popular vote, but President Bush won the electoral vote as a result of the recount in Florida. Democratic activists around the country were enraged, but the Democratic senators seemed resigned, not enraged, and did not protest when they voted to confirm the outcome of the election finally after the recount. In the House, what was the mood then? How, what was the feeling inside the caucus at that time?

DASCHLE: Ah Linda that's such a good question because it was it was really a time of incredible uncertainty and turbulence. Newt Gingrich and I just had a debate in front of the Supreme Court a few a couple weeks ago, and he was arguing that we really ought to take another look at judicial review, and maybe we shouldn't abide by what the Supreme Court decides as its interpretation of law from time to time if

there is sentiment against it. And my argument was: What if Al Gore had said I'm not going to accept the Supreme Court decision? It was a 5-to-4 decision, politically motivated. I'm not going to accept it. For the life of me, I can't imagine what would have happened to the country had he made that decision. We talked quite a bit during that time, and I know he was getting under; he was under incredible pressure to do exactly that, to say we're going to do, we're going to stick this out; and we're going to see if we can resolve it in some other way. Take it to the House of Representatives if we have to, but we're going to do that. He didn't, and I remember so vividly his call where he told me he had decided to accept the decision and he's going to announce it to the country.

DOUGLASS: How'd you react to that?

DASCHLE: Well, I had mixed reaction frankly because I was caught up in it myself. I felt very, very troubled by it, but I admired him immensely for having come to that decision. And looking back, I'm confident he made the right decision, even though it was so painful for many of us at that moment. But when he made that decision I felt we owed our allegiance to him and to the country institutionally. And so we chose not to fight it. And we were of course criticized and even ostracized by some. But I felt it was what we had to do and we had to move on. We had to start governing. We had to respect the institutions of this republic and that's basically what we decided to do.

DOUGLASS: Do you think that the Supreme Court decision was politically motivated?

DASCHLE: I don't know. I don't know that anyone will ever ultimately come to any, any definitive conclusion. I have my suspicions but obviously that's a choice that was made, and we have to respect it.

DOUGLASS: So in that time, just to finish that point off about that period of time, you were all, you were divided 50/50. And you were, both sides, both parties, trying to woo people from the other party to come over so that you one of you would have the majority. And ultimately you did succeed in-- Jim Jeffords, the Republican from Vermont did cross over and become and independent, which gave you the majority. You were talking at least at the staff level to John McCain in those days. How interested do you think he was in becoming a Democrat? Do you think he seriously considered it?

DASCHLE: I do. Oh, it was more than-- we were talking to John, personally and very directly and privately on several occasions. And we thought that at one point that he would be the more likely of the three people. We were also talking to Lincoln Chaffee and Jim Jeffords, of course. And so Jim kind of surprised us one day when he called and asked us to meet him secretly at 6 o'clock in the morning in his hideaway to discuss how we might do this. We had open minds and quite a bit of communication with the other two. John McCain was very angry at George

Bush for the way he was treated in the primary campaigns and his anger and his frustration with the Bush political machine was a big motivation. We talked a lot about his conservative views on abortion and on some of the social issues and how much of an impediment that would be. But he was very, very interested for awhile. And it was an interesting series of discussions and conversations with him.

DOUGLASS: So you think he came close to switching parties?

DASCHLE: I think so.

DOUGLASS: Even though there was a philosophical disagreement, you, and you think it was because of the way he was treated in the primary by the Bush people? Or do you think that there was a certain comfort level with the Democrats that would be sufficient for him to cross over? Did he communicate that to you?

DASCHLE: Well, John worked well with us. I mean there were so many occasions when we would work on legislation together. He would look for a prominent Democrat to work with on a number of things, whether it was campaign reform or, now its climate change. But over the years, it was it was commonly understood that if you wanted a Republican partner, John was one of the people you could often times talk to. We all had a good friendship with him, so it transcended politics. It, he is truly somebody who could work both sides of the aisle and has great friends and relationships with people on both sides. So the personal relationships, I think, created the environment where you could actually talk about doing something professionally or politically. Then add to that the frustration that he had especially towards Bush and that first year following the presidential election and he had the right mix for at least the possibility of serious negotiations.

DOUGLASS: You finally got into the majority thanks to this move of Jim Jeffords and had just a heck of a time managing those Democrats throughout the entire time that you were managing them, either from the majority or minority leader. When President Bush, as one of his very first acts, wanted to have the Congress pass his one- point- what wound up being a 1.2 trillion dollar tax cut... it was larger than that to begin with, Democrats, several of them, went along and supported it even though Democrats generally were against it. What were the dynamics in those days that were causing those Democrats to feel that they should support the President in something that perhaps some of those who voted yes didn't really believe?

DASCHLE: Well I think it was a couple of things. First of all, after 9/11, the President-- the President's popularity soared. I mean he was up in the 80's at one point, hard as that is to believe now. And because he was so incredibly popular and because we had a surplus, there were a few of my colleagues who felt that the combination of concern about their own future elections, concern about taking on a popular President. And a cushion of budget surplus gave them a little bit more

flexibility and freedom to ultimately side with the President against the caucus when it came to something of this import. And you know, it's one of my greater disappointments frankly, because I think so much of what we're now facing deficit wise and the disparity between the rich and the poor in this country came in part from that huge tax cut.

DOUGLASS: Well I wonder if this is an example of the difficulty the Democrats had during your time there of settling on what they were for. Because I wonder, do you think there was, even though President Bush certainly did not come into office with a mandate in 2000, do you think that there has been sort of ongoing pressure on Democrats that's been hard for the leadership to manage, to be more conservative because the country generally has embraced conservative officeholders?

DASCHLE: Well I actually think 9/11 changed everything. When, before 9/11, the President was really struggling. I mean there were numbers that showed he had, he was having trouble with his own party. He was, he was, there was a sense of drift. And amazing in that short period of time, he never really was able to put it together. And in part because of the narrowness of his election and part because his, you know, some of his arrogance was already coming through. And I think 9/11, of course, gave everybody— caused everybody to pause and to look at him in a different light. He was now the leader in a crisis. And for a period of time he filled that role very, very well. He appeared to be strong, resolute. He had Democrats and Republicans supporting this effort to respond to the terrorists attacks in a way that united the country. And it was only when he decided to use that incredible power that he had acquired through 9/11 on other issues like the tax cut and going to war and other things that were not directly related to the response of the terrorist attack that the divisions start showing up again. But I think Democrats were very concerned about taking on a President of his popularity and looking un-American, or that guy was accused of being un-American many, many times and unpatriotic and— and I think that was the fear. People were concerned about that rap and that. To a certain extent, was a major factor in keeping the unity within our caucus.

DOUGLASS: Well I definitely want to ask you about the events, political events around 9/11. But I want to go back to something you just said. You didn't hesitate to say that President Bush shows his arrogance. That was a word you used, and I noticed when I was reading your book, that you described him as having had a swagger when you first met him. I want to just take you back for a minute before we go forward to 9/11 to the time we were talking about, when there had been a closely contested election. There were very bruised feelings on all sides. How did he handle that in your memory when you first began dealing with him, before September 11th, when there was this very sharp and painful divide between the parties? How did he behave? How did he handle that in your perspective, and what impact did his behavior have on relations at that time?

DASCHLE: Well initially I think he handled it reasonably well. He made the point, shortly after that decision by the Supreme Court, to come to the Hill and to talk to the four leaders personally. And I'll never forget his first visit in my office. He shook-- I had some swinging doors that are kind of like a bar, a western bar, they just swung and I can still recall him coming through the door just kind of banging the doors open and just, you know, with that swagger just shaking everybody's hand and then coming into my office and sitting down. And we started talking about what kind of relationship we hoped we could have. And it was, I thought, it was an odd conversation for a couple of reasons. One, his-- his very first statement to me, at least that I can recall, was, "I hope you never lie to me." And I thought that was an odd thing to say to somebody you hardly knew. And I, what else could I say but, "I hope you never lie to *me*." And so we, we started in a cumbersome way. And the second thing he said is., "I just want you to know I'm in charge." And I'm thinking, why would he feel the need to say he's in charge? The Supreme Court just made him President of the United States of America, and he's telling the Democratic leader of the Senate that he's in charge. I-- and I quizzed him about what caused him to feel the need to express himself that way. And he said, "Well, you know there's been some talk about role the role the Vice President's going to have. And I just want to you know the decisions are going to come to my desk." And, and so we got through that, and the other thing--so we got into a little bit of a debate about alternative energy, which I care about deeply. And he said, "There's only one real word for my energy policy, and that's drill." And so we got into a discussion about the efficacy of drilling as an energy policy. But, so, it was an odd conversation overall. But the fact that he made the effort to come to my office was something that I felt was of value, and it was, it was a nice gesture. He then also offered to speak to my caucus. We were going to have a one-day retreat, and so he actually came to the caucus and said a few words and answered a couple questions. And so he got off to kind of the right start, and then about a month after that invited my wife and I to the to the residence for a dinner. And we had a quiet private dinner and-- and so it started off well, but it didn't last.

DOUGLASS: **Did you ever really have a relationship, do you think, with each other?**

DASCHLE: Well, right after 9/11. There was about 6 weeks, 6 weeks to 2 months, where we talked almost every day. We, we really shared a lot of things and developed kind of a rapport and a friendship that, I thought was beginning to feel kind of a natural affinity. But it didn't, it didn't last, in part because I think he and his people felt the need to take that popularity and use it for their agenda, which, of course, they, they did with the tax cut and with a lot of other things that I disagreed with.

DOUGLASS: **Let's talk about September 11th , and much has already been written about this, but I remember you and I had talked on the anniversary about the evacuation, the day that you were whisked away to a secret bunker. You and**

the other leaders, cut off from the rest of the Senate, who were milling around the streets trying to figure out how to operate the legislative branch. And you were in this bunker together with some of the leaders. How well do you think that was handled that day? That is, the government stood and survived, but how well do you think the management of the government on that crucial day was handled?

DASCHLE: Well I think the management part of it was abysmal. I mean it was just terrible. We had, there were so many things, I mean, I think at the end of the day the fact that that we, in spite of all the managerial issues, came together and responded proved that that you don't really need necessarily all the pieces to fit to be able to make it all work. Anyway, it was, it was a abysmal day. Nobody, we were all taken out of the Capitol, and the very first place we went was the top floor of the police headquarters just a block or so away. And we were all in one room together, and I remember literally standing in line behind the other leaders, single file, as we were all trying to use the one hard line that worked to call our families. And someone felt we'd be more secure if we pulled the shades down. So we pulled the shades down, and it almost felt claustrophobic in there. You know we were all standing, not knowing what to do. So what do politicians do when they don't know what to do? Or they, we made-- we put a statement out saying we're all fine, and we're defiant, and you know. And so then we didn't know, and there was a lot of difference of opinion on where to go. So some went out to Andrew's Air Force Base. I actually went over to a staff office, a consultant office of ours, and it was decided after that that we would maybe go to the secret undisclosed location. And I thought it was kind of funny, because I was, we were being helicoptered off the front lawn of the Capitol, there were SWAT, a SWAT team circled with the helicopter lifting away. And just as we were lifting off, somebody asked if we could pick up Trent Lott out at Andrew's Air Force Base. And I thought; this is bizarre. We're car-pooling to this secret undisclosed location. And as we picked up Trent and his, another staff person, we flew over the Pentagon and saw the damage there. And it was amazing. But we got there. And we still didn't know for sure what to do. And so we talked about what we ought to do and then decided to come back and make that defiant statement on the Capitol steps that night, where we broke into a song and held hands and came back into work the next day.

DOUGLASS: Did you have any contact with President Bush during all of this?

DASCHLE: No we didn't. We had contact with Vice President Cheney but not with President Bush.

DOUGLASS: Was that of concern to you?

DASCHLE: It was. We were unclear as to the whereabouts of President Bush. In fact we were told conflicting stories about where he was. And it appeared to us for a while that nobody knew where he was. But we did talk with Vice President

Cheney at times and with other government officials who were sharing what they knew about what was going on.

DOUGLASS: So just, you mentioned the moments after, the days after this event, where he rose to really bring this country together and made a speech to the joint session of Congress. And there's a famous moment where the two of you hugged. How, how were you, the two of you, do you think, feeling about each other right then and thereafter? What, what was the dynamic of your relationship right then?

DASCHLE: Well I think it was, we were thrown into something neither of us anticipated. We had not had a difficult relationship prior to that, but it wasn't close. I mean after the dinner that I had had with him, things started to unravel relationship-wise. And of course this threw us back into a situation-- I had-- I had encouraged the President to have weekly meetings with the leadership, taking a chapter out of Dwight Eisenhower who met with Lyndon Johnson and Sam Rayburn every week. And I felt that it was important, that if you're going to have a good relationship, there had to be a lot of communication. Because you can't, you can't relate if you can't communicate. And he chose for whatever reason not to do that until 9/11. And then on 9/11, I remember he called me and said, "You know, you had made a good recommendation and I didn't follow up on it. And I want to do that now. And I want to meet every week if not more frequently." And so we started meeting and is in his little office off the Oval Office, and at 7 o'clock for breakfast. And I think that began in part this, this cementing of a relationship in a very difficult time. We all were saying the same thing. We weren't Republicans or Democrats. We were Americans trying to respond to a crisis. And there was an element of trust. I can recall on more than one occasion, we would have debates and somebody had to-- debates in the best sense of the word, discussions, where there were differences of opinion-- and the President or the Vice President actually sided with me a couple of times. And it was an indication that we really were going to be bipartisan and, and that lasted, as I said, for about a month maybe 6 weeks.

DOUGLASS: And then what happened?

DASCHLE: Well we started to talk about the economic issues that were facing the country. And during that 6 weeks, we had actually brought in a lot of experts: Economists, former treasury secretaries, Bob Rubin and others, to share with us what should we do about getting the economy going again. And, and of course there were a lot of differences of opinion. But it was my hope that we could continue to work together as we had done with all the post 9/11 legislation. And I'll never forget it, one of these breakfasts, the, the President looked at the Speaker and almost simultaneously, when we were talking about how we were going to do the economic piece, they both said to me after looking at each other: We're going to do this through what they call regular order. Well, regular order means running through the committees and cranking up the, it's short-hand for more partisan

approaches to legislating. And it was going to be regular order. Well regular order means you don't work things out. You fight them, fight about them all the way through the process. And that's exactly what happened.

DOUGLASS: So, now you're back to having partisan battles with each other, the Democrats and Republicans, you and the President. There, there was a big debate over whether or not to establish a Department of Homeland Security. President Bush initially opposed it, wound up embracing it. There was legislation before the Senate right before the November '02 elections, and the Democrats chose not to pass his bill, which would have weakened the rights of government employees in this department. That may well have opened the door to what has become a pretty successful strategy by Republicans of attacking Democrats for being weak on national security. So two questions: Number one, do you see that debate as having opened that door; and number two, would you have done that differently if you could do that debate over again over the homeland security bill?

DASCHLE: Well it, it just seemed to us that the, that the administration was using this legislation to to really to trample on the rights of people who work for their country and, in roles outside the military, it gave the employers the right to fire on the scene, on the spot, without any opportunity to be— to be defended or to— to appeal the decision. And in some ways, it was a precursor to a lot of the debate we're having right now on Guantanamo and habeas corpus and everything else. I mean Constitutional rights, worker's rights, so many of the things that we've achieved over 200 years were being rolled back. And it really deeply offended many of us. And unfortunately, they had a nominal Democrat whose name was Zel Miller, who gave them a lot of credibility in this, who, who repeated the same lines as the President, that in the name of security we had to give up some of the rights that we have enjoyed in the past. Well, many of us didn't think that way. And, and unfortunately people like Max Cleland, in particular— in that particular race, paid a very, very high price. Because they did use it, and they used it effectively. I think it's a sad chapter in America history when people who, who for all the right reasons, defended the rights of our Constitutional prerogatives for all the right reasons, were defeated in the name of of security and the war on terror.

DOUGLASS: Did you see that coming, though, what it's become today? First it was the homeland security department debate. Later, it's the war in Iraq, which we'll talk about. But could you see this, suddenly coming down the road towards Democrats that Republicans would routinely accuse Democrats of being weak on national security in a way that Democrats clearly felt for some time was difficult to fight back against?

DASCHLE: We, we didn't see it. We didn't think it could be as successful as it turned out to be. I mean, we could see it coming. I mean, obviously they were doing it at the time. But we just felt that the American people were smarter than

that and that we'd be able to respond in an effective way to these ridiculous charges. But you had, you take money and repetition and some credibility on the part of, you know, that comes from one or two Democrats acknowledging the authenticity of the assertion as Miller did, and you've got the makings of a political disaster. And that's what happened.

DOUGLASS: You, you made it really clear you had deep reservations about authorizing the President to invade Iraq, and you stated those publicly. And Democrats were trying to find a position. There was a lot of disagreement inside the Democratic Party in both houses, and your counterpart, Minority Leader Gephardt in the House, wound up making a deal with the President, at least from his point of view, to support the President in seeking this authorization to go to war in Iraq. Did you feel that you didn't have any moves left at that point, that you had to go along, and if you did feel that way, why?

DASCHLE: Well I, you're right Linda. Our caucus was divided literally right down the middle. We had half in favor, reluctantly, and half in opposition. And-- and so it started with that, this notion that however we go, we're not, not going to unify our caucus. There's a great deal of skepticism by then about Bush and what he had in mind. He appeared to want to fight rather than talk. And many of our caucus members negotiated various scenarios requiring that we go to the U.N. and requiring that we build greater alliances with other allies before we did anything. And we, for the most part, were able to get some of this nominally incorporated into the-- into the agreement. Dick Gephardt was a little more forward- leaning on all of that, and that was a factor. I mean we, we had to make some decisions about where this country was going to go. They told us they had weapons of mass destruction. They were going to use them against the United States. This was one year after the 9/11 attack, and so, who are we to challenge the entire intelligence community who said this is the fact? These are these are the circumstances. You've got to understand the critical nature of taking Iraq out before they, they come after us. So based on incredibly faulty intelligence and the assertions of this Administration and over the reluctance and skepticism of many, many of my colleagues, reluctantly I concluded that it was probably better to give the benefit of the doubt to the Administration and-- and move forward with this resolution. It's one of my biggest regrets and biggest mistakes in public life.

DOUGLASS: Were you upset with Dick Gephardt, who I know is your friend, for siding with the President and not leaving you many options?

DASCHLE: Well, we all have to do what we have to do, you know, there, I'm sure there are times when I did things that that didn't comply with his expectations. It was not what I wanted but it was what we had to do. And I don't fault him at all. I don't question his judgment. He had a little different take than I did, but by and large, he's a a very close friend, and I'm willing to accept, you know, the fact that leaders have to make choices and decisions. He made one that I wasn't entirely in compliance with. But-- but it was one I respected nonetheless.

DOUGLASS: What role did election-eve pressures play on some Democrats who decided against what was clearly their own idea of what was their better judgment? What role did election- eve pressures play?

DASCHLE: Linda that's a hard question to answer, because I would never use any specifics here. But I think it played very consequentially. I don't think there's any doubt that, that election-eve political pressures were perhaps the final factor for many people as they made their decisions about how to vote on this. So I was worried about that. I, there was a conversation at one of these breakfasts-- I can recall talking with the President saying, look your father had to make a similar choice and your father moved that choice beyond the election. We didn't vote on the first Iraqi resolution until after the election,. We were in a lame duck session. I said, I implore you to do the same thing. He looked at the Vice President, and there's some eye contact, and then he looked at me and said, "We can't do that." So they wanted to apply the maximum degree of political pressure to get their position and, and to pass it. And that's what they did.

DOUGLASS: You have been very forthcoming in talking about how much you regret your own vote. Because, again, you stated all kinds of objections and raised some scenarios which came true. It turned out Iraq was not particularly adept with democracy, with no history. You raised the question of sectarian violence, impending sectarian violence. But do you think that, given that it was giving the President an unusual power, that is to wage preemptive war, do you think the Congress spent enough time on that issue before voting?

DASCHLE: I don't. I-- since we made a mistake I guess I'd have to say no, but yeah, it wasn't for lack of debate. I mean it was-- we had spent a good deal of time over a period of time talking about this and trying to figure out how to do it. My preference, again, would have been to wait until after the election so that there was no political pressure. Everybody could've voted their conscience. They could've had the benefit of additional time to handle intelligence data, which turned out to be so faulty. So I guess the short answer is no. But, but at that moment I guess I felt we had we had adequate time to think about, about the circumstances and respond.

DOUGLASS: And then finally there were some Members, there was always an anti-war group inside the Democratic caucus, and as I recall senators Kennedy and Byrd pushed for a second vote, another vote, before actually going to war. Why did you leaders decide that might not be the best course, to have a second vote at this point with troops amassing?

DASCHLE: Well our feeling was at that point that we were going to lose that vote by a large margin. And I felt that it was, it was, it would be seen as a sign of weakness. On the first vote, we were, we were trying to make a statement here that all these conditions and all these things that we had negotiated, as good as

they sounded, needed to have the weight that we were trying to imply as we talked about them. And to, to concede that another vote was necessary diminished to a certain extent all these things that we had tried to put in the first series of-- of requirements of the Administration. So that was really it. It was sending a mixed message that I thought complicated our situation even more. That was a tactical question, and I can see where people would disagree. But-- but that was how we interpreted it. And I think the leaders were fairly united in that, in that interpretation.

DOUGLASS: Let's talk a little bit about partisanship in the Senate which, as in the House, has been steadily on the rise, certainly since you were there. This is a very broad question. But what are the factors in your tenure that you think were the high points? I mean I, certainly we, and I want to talk about President Bush and these last few years. There was impeachment; there was the Republican revolution. Many things happened. The media's changed. What do you think sort of has led to what some say is even a dysfunctional level of partisanship?

DASCHLE: Well I-- I you start with personalities. Because I thinks its-- it's the personalities involved that create a large part of the environment. You know the leaders have a profound influence on how well this plays out. And Newt Gingrich was a very, very partisan leader. Tom Delay is a very partisan leader, you know? And I think that the combination of--of personalities, and there's-- there's a notion when you-- when you've been subject to abuse, payback is really part of the process. And there's a tremendous amount of sense of payback that, you know, "We were under their thumb for forty years and by God we're just going to , we're going to, we're going to do the same thing. But it is-- it's even going to be tougher. We're going to, we're going to, you know--I call it majorityism. Majorityism is when you, a majority, decides that it's only the majority that's required to do anything. And there's a really sense of majorityism in the Congress today that's just, that's the immediate-- if I could put my finger on one thing, it would be the airplane. The airplane has destroyed, to a certain extent, what environment we had up until the 1950s. And I say that because airplanes have made things all too easy now for-- for members to leave. They leave on Thursdays. They come back on Tuesdays. We really only have about a day and a half each week to work together. And that day and a half is exacerbated by all the pressures Members feel when they come back. So they just aren't here like they used to. And when they were here, they created the social fabric that allowed for real communication and dialogue. I mean the poker games and the shots of whiskey at the end of the day and just the camaraderie that came with outings and getting to know each other. And, you know, that's all almost lost today. Most members don't know the families of the Members that that they work with, they don't, they don't know much about their past. Senator Reid, right now the current Leader, is actually going through something that I never thought of doing but I think is a good idea. He is actually having each member introduce themselves to the caucus and talk about their personal lives and who they are and-- and things that their caucus members may not know anything about. And you know, its, it's a reflection on how little we

know each other. That's why I always felt CODELS were such a good thing. Because you develop bonds and relationships that you otherwise just never had the opportunity to get before. So the airplane. The second is your business, the media, you know? And when, so much of what dialogue occurs now occurs through the media instead of privately. You, you walk to the media, you make a proclamation and the other side is going to respond. And so-- so much of the debate goes on between Members and especially among leaders through the media instead of privately. And that's unfortunate. I think there's also much more sensationalism today than there should be, and, and the media loves a good fight. And so reporting on good fights and-- and stupid things that happen gets compounded and, my, and probably magnified. And then of course money. Money drives so much of this, and I think that's a big, big problem for us today. The money hunt is just obscene. And then finally, just a-- just a physical lack of-- of appreciation of the institution. I say physical lack because it's, there's, it's not just a lack of appreciation from a historical point of view or from just this patriotic point of view, but there's, we've actually seen a degradation in the facilities themselves as a result of deep cuts in maintenance and the budgets for the Capitol. So all that comes together to create a totally different environment than we had a fifty years ago.

DOUGLASS: Given that the public has such a low regard for the legislative branch, at least has for some time now, the last several years, given that the Members don't seem to have the same regard for the legislative branch that they once did, the institution of Congress and of the Senate, what can be done about that? Because surely it has a damaging effect on policy-making and decision making in our country.

DASCHLE: Well it's very hard to answer that question, because you have to go back to, first, the personalities. I mean, I think you've got to have people making leadership decisions with an attitude that we've got to find common ground. We've got to find a way to, to overcome our differences and govern. You know, this Administration shows an entirely different and somewhat radical strategy. Their strategy was- we don't have to come to the middle. We have to energize our base. Well, if liberals do that, if, if that, if they one day take over and their purpose, their goal, their strategy is to energize the base, that means they go to the left rather than find common ground in the middle. And so long as that happens, whether it's right or left, you don't find that common governance that, that comity, because no one's looking for it. And that's-- I fault these guys for that as much as I'd fault them for anything. It's a great political strategy. They're winning. They-- they are probably are not going to continue to win elections but they were winning elections for a while, based on this "energize- the- base" approach. But it's one hell of a bad way to govern. And until we understand that, you can't make any institutional changes that will overcome that attitude or that strategy. But institutionally, I think we've got to come back to more of an adamant determination to stay here, to do our work, to govern and, and I think probably the only thing that will solve that is a major renovation of our campaign finance laws so that the hunt for money doesn't become so much a part of the process.

DOUGLASS: The Senate is this venerated institution, and yet it seems as though it was bullied by the House quite a bit in the last few years—partially, I’m sure, because all one party controls both houses and the Executive branch to boot. But, just an example of your own having been on the receiving end of this, some of the conference committees— that is where the House and Senate negotiate legislation— have not only frozen out Democrats but have frozen out particular Democrats, such as, in your case, in the Medicare prescription drug legislation. You are the leader of the Democrats in the Senate. You’re a senior member of the Finance Committee, and the House chairman would not allow you to participate in negotiations, although you had been elected, correct? – By the Senate to do that. How, how did that happen?

DASCHLE: Well it, how did it happen? They just decided that— that they didn’t want, they felt that— that because we weren’t supportive of what they were trying to do, that our opposing voices were no longer welcome. So they physically locked us out. And, you know, at that point we should’ve just called an end to the— to the negotiations and said, look, until we’re all together, this is this is ridiculous. You can’t just physically lock out anybody, especially the leader of the— the Senate Democrats. But that’s what they chose to do. Unfortunately there were again members of our caucus who felt that in spite of whatever indignities that might have entailed, getting the legislation passed was important and that it was critical to keep negotiating. So they did.

DOUGLASS: And that brings me back to— brings me back to this question about Democratic unity, which was always something you sought and had trouble finding, as Democrats often do. Why do you think that the Democratic Party in Congress has had such a tougher time settling on positions on not only economic issues, as we discussed earlier, and some social issues, not as many, and certainly national security issues? Do you think it’s because, or let me ask it this way: Did President Clinton’s philosophy leave enough of an imprint on the Democratic Party to create any kind of a framework for unity? Or did it not leave an imprint on the Democratic Party so that there is still a search for what Democrats can coalesce around?

DASCHLE: Well I think that there was a very good imprint. I mean, Bill Clinton’s approach to governance is very similar to mine and to many others who believe that there’s ample opportunity for good progressive legislation so long as there’s— there’s an understanding that it’s going to take compromise. I mean, you can’t be resolute you can’t be dogmatic with regard to a position and expect to find enough of a consensus with 535 members of Congress. You’ve got to be flexible. And he certainly was. But I think an answer to your question about unity; I think we’re just a more diverse group philosophically. We’ve got conservatives, liberals, moderates. It’s hard to find too many liberal Republicans any longer. You can find some moderate Republicans, but it’s almost impossible to find a liberal Republican

today. But you can find many conservative Democrats. And so I think the diverse nature of our caucus' lead us to have greater difficulty in reaching consensus on some of these issues. But, you know, we historically, I'm told that we had the greatest unity within our caucus that we'd ever had in our caucus' history. But on some of these very prominent issues it was it was still impossible.

DOUGLASS: Just-- just about 6 or 7 more minutes of your time senator. The impeachment of President Clinton was obviously a traumatic event for the country and certainly for the Democratic Party. What impact do you think that event has had, if any, on the way that Congress is able to function these days?

DASCHLE: Surprisingly I would say that it's probably had very little effect. I mean, I think the Senate handled the impeachment challenge extremely well, if I say so myself. Senator Lott and I worked very, very closely together. We trusted each other. We saw the debacle in the House and had a conversation, in fact on my birthday, December 9th, where we agreed that we were not going to let the Senate degenerate into that kind of raucous circus. And, and I think we at every step really made an effort to make the right decisions procedurally and to, and to do what we had to do in spite of how much we hated to have to do it at all. My goal was to-- was to respond as effectively as we could. And it turned out we had, we did have unanimity on, on the impeachment articles in the Senate on the Democratic side. And that made the job a lot easier for-- for both senator Lott and myself.

DOUGLASS: Although Democrats really had a tough time finding a way to defend President Clinton during that period, even President Nixon during the height of Watergate until the last moment had much of the party behind him, Democrats were very reluctant to defend President Clinton. Why was that, do you think?

DASCHLE: Well we were-- we were just flabbergasted. First of all, having been assured that none of this was true but there were-- I guess I would-- I would differ with your assertion in one way: There was strong support and almost unanimous support from the beginning that whatever the President did, it did not reach the definition of high crimes and misdemeanors. There was very little debate about that. There were a couple in our caucus who struggled with it, but, but by and large, that was understood. And we had no problem saying this is not an impeachable offense. But we were offended that somebody of his stature and, you know, the-- the role model to the world, if not the country was--was-- you know-- abused his power and did such stupid things. And gave opportunities to the Republicans to do the kinds of things they were doing. So it was, it was just our chagrin at the incredible inability of the President to make a good decision, a personal decision that, that I think-- and it was that anger and that frustration that led most Democrats to oppose and not defend him.

DOUGLASS: The impeachment trial was yet another interesting example of how well you and Senator Lott wound up working together. He is a conservative, and you certainly have been described as a liberal. Your personalities are very different. Your styles are very different. You're both partisan in your own way. Why do you think you were able to work together as well as you did? I mean, is it accurate to say that you worked well together for the most part, and why was that?

DASCHLE: It is accurate, and in fact I still consider him a good friend today. I think in part because we created the chemistry required for trust and for communication. We talked many times every single day. We, I think, we were thrown in the fires together with impeachment, with 9/11, with the anthrax attack, with the power sharing requirements of the 50/50 Senate. So all of that required that if we were going to govern, we had to find a way to work together. And we both developed, I think, affection for the other and therefore a friendship that allowed us to do it a lot more effectively than a lot of people would've guessed.

DOUGLASS: Did you feel bad for him that he wound up saying what he said and ultimately causing his own downfall as Majority Leader?

DASCHLE: I did. I did, in fact we talked on several occasions during that time. It was not meant to be what it sounded like it was and he's a— Senator Lot, genuinely likes people and he, we, he had a great affection for Strom Thrumen and— and I think that it just came out wrong, it wasn't what he had intended it to mean but because it was so misunderstood, he— he paid a heavy price.

DOUGLASS: How would you compare your working relationship with him to your working relationship with Senator Frist, when he became the Majority Leader?

DASCHLE: Well Senator Frist had an entirely different style. He wasn't as much of a personal communicator. He preferred email and Blackberrys, and he was much more partisan, far less one to seek consensus and common ground. He, I think decided that it was his job to carry out the Administration's mandates and dictates as much as he could. So we had to work through that, and it wasn't nearly as close or an effective as a relationship as it was with Senator Lott or, before him, I worked with Senator Dole for two years.

DOUGLASS: Did that relationship, which wasn't as close, did that have an effect on policy making, decision making and ultimately the public interest?

DASCHLE: Oh I think it did. No question. I mean I think the two leaders have to work together, because it sends exactly the right message, you know, when they are working together, about the degree to which chairs and ranking members work together. Senators have to work together. I mean, if you don't have the comity at

the top, you can't possibly expect it to occur anywhere through the ranks. And so people look for signals and look for some indication as to how much cooperation's there's going to be. And if there's not much, there won't be much at the lower ranks as well.

DOUGLASS: He broke with the traditions of the Senate and the etiquette of the Senate, the courtesy of the Senate, by engaging in an active campaign on behalf of your opponent in South Dakota when you were running for reelection. Did you take that personally? How did you react to that?

DASCHLE: Well I was I was disappointed, just because of the comity lost, just the sense that this was sort of the declaration that our relationship is over. And I fully expected to win. And I, I was troubled on how we were going to try to work through that. I knew that we both had a job to do and we'd do the best we could. But it was, in spite of the fact that I was personally affected by it, I think I can objectively say that it really was a blow to the comity required of two leaders as you try to manage the Senate under, especially under, these difficult circumstances.

DOUGLASS: You just said you expected to win. At what point did you realize that you weren't going to win?

DASCHLE: It wasn't until 2 or 3 o'clock the morning after the-- the day of the election. I mean we, we had gone into the election in our own polling showing us a couple of points up and we felt reasonably confident that it was going to be close, but that we we'd pull it out. And their, their voter turn out was spectacular. Ours was very, very good. But they made up the difference in that 1 or 2 percent by a more effective voter turn out than we had.

DOUGLASS: And do you think that in addition to those local issues that no doubt were enormous factors in your own defeat, that the concerted national campaign that was waged against you by Republican leaders-- who called you an obstructionist and who accused you of whenever they could of not being patriotic enough because you criticized the President about the war from time to time-- do you think that had an impact on the voters in South Dakota?

DASCHLE: Oh I do. I think, you know, they, it was, it was a moment that the Republicans probably relish. Because it doesn't always happen, all the things coming together. We had a very popular President at the time with a war that, at that point, enjoyed still pretty broad support... with conservative issues like gay marriage and abortion very prominent, and an effective candidate besides. So all of that put together was, was a tremendous series of events that, that caused them to be quite successful.

DOUGLASS: When you made your farewell speech in the Senate chamber-- this is perhaps another example of how things have changed-- very few Republicans showed up to hear it. Did that surprise you?

DASCHLE: I don't know if it surprised me as much as just disappointed me. I think there was, there was a great deal of peer pressure from the Republicans not to come.

DOUGLASS: From where?

DASCHLE: From-- from the White House, from Senator Frist's office. And I think they were, they were intimidated about coming. And so several Members afterward said that they wanted to come but they, they were discouraged from coming. And they, they wanted to express how sad they were at the way this has all played itself out. But then most of them emphasized, "Please don't say anything about my conversation with you publicly. I'd rather not be quoted on this, but I just wanted you to know personally."

DOUGLASS: Final question here, do you think that Congress is heading toward, if not having already arrived at, what might be called dysfunctional? Do you think that they are at that point?

DASCHLE: I think that there is a real potential for dysfunctionality. I'm concerned about the direction the institutions are going in. You know, the so-called nuclear option, which was designed to take away yet another one of the pillars of of the institution that is the filibuster, is an incredible illustration of the degree of lack of reverence and lack of respect for the institutions of this republic. So, more of that could be devastating to the institutions themselves. But with good leadership and-- and with some newfound respect, that I'm confident could be could be found, I think you have to be an optimist.

DOUGLASS: I have to ask you this; might you run for President some day?

DASCHLE: I don't, probably not. But you never say never.