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CONGRESS

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REFLECTIONS PROJECT
REPRESENTATIVE HENRY HYDE
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LINDA DOUGLASS: Ok, so let's start at the beginning of when you came into the Congress. You were swept into this place on a sea of Democrats.

REP. HENRY HYDE: That's correct.

DOUGLASS: What was that like?

HYDE: Well I was too dumb to know how dangerous it was. I just looked around at my district, which had been a Republican district and continues to be one, and I was so delighted at winning the election that I didn't attribute any cosmic consequences to it. But when I got here, I found out we were a rare breed, and Carl Albert was the speaker, the interesting man. And I think one of the first things I did was meet Millicent Fenwick, which made me ready for just about anything.

DOUGLASS: Was she wearing a hat?

HYDE: No but she was smoking a pipe, and it was aromatic, which I thanked her for, but Millicent was one of the most charming, delightful persons I had the good fortune to meet. She and I used to have lunch occasionally and exchanged witticisms. She would quote some famous poet or pundit and I would try to match her and. I can't say I ever matched her very much. One of her great lines to me was, "we proud men, pompously compete for nameless graves, while some foundling of fate stumbles his way into immortality." That was the sort of thing that we exchanged back and forth.

DOUGLASS: So what you're saying is, even though the Democrats were massively in control and you were a member, at that time, of a tiny minority, relatively speaking to today's differences, the relations between members of parties were fairly cordial?

HYDE: At certain levels they were, but not pervasively so. We were tolerated barely. But as for getting something done, that was very difficult to do.

DOUGLASS: If you were a Republican?

HYDE: Yeah, that's right. The Democrats controlled the committees, the subcommittees, the administration and the House and they, as I say, barely tolerated us.

DOUGLASS: Much is made by those who like to reminisce about the good old days of Congress, about more cordial relations between members of opposite parties. They used to dine together, the weeks were longer, they spent more time together, there was more interaction between members and families. Is that true or not?

HYDE: It seems to be true. When I got here, you had the older members who seemed more convivial and able to get along with each other. Silvio Conti was an outspoken Republican appropriator, but at the same time was a dear friend of Tip O'Neil. Bob Michel, who was our leader after John Rhoads, was a very close to Tip O'Neil. So there were friendships that manifested themselves quite a bit. There were some sharp edges around some of the members, but it seemed the older, more professional politician as against the eager, younger, "I want to reform the world" type seemed to get along better. And Claude Pepper was one of the great debaters. He would always refer to you as "my learned friend." And of course, it's hard to get mad at someone who's pronouncing you as a learned friend.

DOUGLASS: Well, I want to ask you about that part of the change, a little bit later, but, I want to sort of stay in somewhat of a chronological line and ask you about your first major legislative accomplishment. Brand new, in the House, at the height of the Women's Movement, right after the Supreme Court had made the Roe v. Wade decision that made it possible for women to get legal abortions in every state, you passed the first major piece of legislation restricting abortion by prohibiting the use of federal funds. Did you have any idea at the time that you would be the person who would be the leader of what has now become a very robust pro-life movement in the Congress?

HYDE: No I had no idea. It was all quite fortuitous or accidental. I got into the issue about 1968 when I was a member of the Illinois General Assembly in the house and a member there had a bill liberalizing abortion. At that time, it was a crime in Illinois and most states. And his bill was in the vanguard of the liberalizing movement. And he asked me if I would cosponsor it. I was pretty ignorant about the subject and I said, "Let me study it." I got a book called The Vanishing Right to Live by Charles Rice, a professor at Notre Dame, and it covered the death penalty, assisted suicide, abortion, all of the various life and death issues. And I read it, and I decided that I couldn't cosponsor the bill, I had to oppose it. So I opposed it. It's a subject nobody likes to talk about, nobody likes to really think about. And I found myself a cult of one getting up and being willing to, willing to debate this issue. But I became convinced it was right, and I decided to fight abortion and so I did in the state legislature; and when I got to Washington, I found a different climate. Nobody did anything. They filed Constitutional amendments prohibiting abortion and then forgot about them. Nothing ever happened. One day on the floor, they were debating the funding for the Department of Health and Human Services. Then it was Health, Education and Welfare. HEW. And I was on the floor quite by accident in the back of the chamber, and Bob Bauman, who was then a member from Maryland sidled up to me and said, "Henry there's \$50 million to pay for 300,000 Medicare abortions in this bill. We could knock that out if you want." I said, "Sure, why don't you?" he said, "Oh everybody knows where I'm coming from. You're an unknown quantity, why don't you do it?" I said, "Sure, I'll do it." We got some paper and wrote in with a pencil an amendment striking that appropriation from the bill. And I stood up and said, "Mr. Speaker, I have an amendment at the desk." And we were off and running. Quite by accident, that's the way it happened. And we debated it and nobody expected us to win, but we did.

DOUGLASS: You were vilified by the abortion rights people.

HYDE: The ladies in the chamber were Bella Abzug, Yvonne Braithwaite-Burke who later was attorney general of California, Pat Schroeder, a pretty hefty crew of opponents to my position. So they demanded a separate vote at the end of the bill and we got a bigger vote against abortion than we got the first time. The senators were confident the court would knock it out as not equal protection of the law or some other Constitutional theory, and so they didn't fight the bill. They knew it would go down and it went to federal court in NY. Judge Dooling, I'll never

forget because I testified. And we finally won that case and the US Supreme Court, Harris v. McRae. So that's how it happened, quite by accident.

DOUGLASS: How do you now feel about that achievement?

HYDE: Well, I think when I appeared before the final judge, it may be the only thing I'll have on my side, so I think it was substantive, we stopped federal funding. We didn't stop abortions, but they—Supreme Court-- decided that the right to do something did not require the right to be funded for it. Free speech is a right we all have, but the government doesn't have to buy us a megaphone. And so, one may have the right to abort their child, their unborn child, but the government doesn't have to pay for it. And that's been the law ever since. That was an accomplishment and we've had some steamy debates on that. Ms. McKinney got in one of them once that added little flavor to our discussion, and we've prevailed so far and I'm proud of that.

DOUGLASS: Now you were in a front row seat as the Republican Revolution unfolded. Did you at the time believe that what were very different tactics by the minority, much more combative, much more confrontational tactics, were going to succeed in getting you the majority. And did you approve of the way that Newt Gingrich led that revolution?

HYDE: Yes I do, I think Newt was a—I hesitate to use the word “genius,” but I think he is a brilliant political thinker and tactician. And I think he played it just right. I don't know of anything he did that was wrong, or over the line. He was creative, he was thoughtful. The Contract with America was a good idea. It focused public attention on an agenda that we thought was compatible with most American people, and so I thought Gingrich deserved all the credit in the world for steering us, navigating us, to the majority. I didn't expect to win. Sometimes it's tough to handle prosperity, but I found myself as chairman of the Judiciary Committee and the rest, as they say is history.

DOUGLASS: But you were talking earlier about, for example, there was a type of Republican—Bob Michel was a name that you mentioned, who was friends with Tip O'Neil. Gingrich had a very different approach to moving out of the minority into the majority. In watching all that, what was your reaction to that kind of a change?

HYDE: Well I feel more comfortable with Bob Michel, singing the Whiffenpoof song but achieving nothing. I shouldn't say achieving nothing. Bob is a remarkable mentor for many of us, but we nice-guyed ourselves into impotence. It wasn't until a hard-edged, aggressive, energetic counter-thrust from Newt Gingrich that we achieved any stature or power. So, the one was more comfortable, the other less so, but one was not successful and the other was. So it's hard to argue with success, I believe they say.

DOUGLASS: And how do you think, looking back over these 12 years, how did your party handle power, the new power, after nearly half a century, at the beginning and how is it handling it now?

HYDE: I found that the real power, of course, is in the leadership. They decide the direction we're going in and how we're going to do it and who's going to take us there. And we have a large group of disparate people in terms of their philosophy, I found that it isn't so much Republican versus Democrat as the west Coast and the North East and the South and the Midwest. Each region has their own agenda, their own interests and concerns and you have to be mindful of that. But, I think the revolution Newt Gingrich started... they hate him because he was successful. Just as they hated Nixon and they hated Reagan and then Bush, that seems

to be their stock in trade, personal disparagement. But I can't complain about the victories that Mr. Gingrich won. Every one of us would do it differently and maybe not as well.

DOUGLASS: There was a period of time he was obviously, it was all new and changing, and he was a controversial character and there was a period of time when, there were some in the party who were unhappy with him, and finally after the '98 elections, he decided to take himself out as Speaker, and some people thought, that you should be Speaker. Did you think about approaching that job and think you should have?

HYDE: Well I had heard that, and I was asked by some people, but I had more of an interest in some of the issues than I did in the administration, than I did in politics as such. I knew the speaker would have to balance our conservatives with our liberals and try to make them work together, and that would be a massive job and also you spend an awful lot of time as speaker traveling around the country, raising money, which is not my cup of hemlock as all. So I decided I'd rather be pointing with pride and viewing with alarm from the hustings than to be speaker. Not that I could have been, but that happy thought was pronounced once or twice.

DOUGLASS: So, let's talk about President Clinton for a second. First I want to ask you what you thought about him as President. Did you have personal encounters with him and what did you think about him as a President during his Presidency?

HYDE: Well I thought Bill Clinton could have been one of the great presidents. He had a charisma about him that was strong. People paid attention to him, he listened, he was smarter than everybody thought, and I had no great quarrel with Bill Clinton. I didn't interface with him very much, as the saying goes. I was at the White House, in fact, after the impeachment I was invited over to talk about gun control and the President treated me as though nothing ever happened and I treated him as though nothing ever happened between the two, a remarkable tableau.

DOUGLASS: So as Chairman of the House Judiciary Committee, you did indeed preside over the impeachment of President Clinton and you had some very difficult choices to make, because after the '98 election when the Republicans lost seats, some of the party blamed impeachment for that. Some in the party lost interest in pursuing the investigation of his conduct during the Monica Lewinsky affair. But you made the decision to go ahead. What fueled your determination at that time?

HYDE: It was a very difficult decision to make. When I got here, I'll never forget the invective that was directed towards Nixon. Some members I won't mention, some very respectable members, but if you mention Nixon, you could see the steam come out of their ears. They were furious at him. I was somewhat surprised—that's a propos of nothing except Mr. Nixon was vilified and had the good sense to resign. Mr. Clinton was successful in making the subject of our differences sexual misconduct, rather than slander, I'm sorry, rather than perjury. We felt that he, that the President had lied under oath several times to the Grand Jury and also to the court in the Paula Jones case that he was, he put the fix in the Paula Jones case. And we felt that lying under oath was a high crime or a misdemeanor, especially for the President, who is under a Constitutional mandate to take care that the laws are faithfully executed. So we knew we couldn't win. We knew we didn't have the votes in the Senate and even in the House for removing him from office, but we felt we owed it to the American people to say one set of laws applies to everybody. We had some hundred people in prison for the crime of perjury, and how could the President, who turned and looked in the camera and said, "I had no relationship with that woman." That of course wasn't the issue. It was lying under oath. And so, that's why we decided that we owed it to the institution to go ahead.

DOUGLASS: Just to continue where we just were about your determination to pursue this as a matter having to do with the President lying under oath. The polls at the time showed that country didn't want to impeach Clinton. Did your fellow Republicans privately, any of them, or even the leaders, try to talk you out of moving forward?

HYDE: No, on the contrary, there were people that came up and said, "Does your party believe in anything? Does it stand for anything? If it does, then you should impeach the President. If we don't—if we're all the same, we're all taking care of each other, looking the other way, then then let it go." We felt that we owed that much to people to uphold the rule of law. And when the President himself fixes a case, which is what he tried to do with Paula Jones, you know, his license was suspended. I mean that's serious for a lawyer to have happen. But for the President to lie under oath is very serious, and so, I felt—believe me, nobody knows more than I how unpopular this was. I'm driving down King Street going home one night and a woman is yelling at me, and I rolled my window down and she said, "I hope God strikes you dead." You know, that was one of the nicer things. I was leaving the Hyatt House one Sunday morning and I heard this huge hissing—I, it sounded like a giant tire was losing its air, I turned around, the whole lobby was hissing me. It was a UAW convention (laughs) and somebody recognized me—I looked back and smiled...

DOUGLASS: But how did you feel about that?

HYDE: Well one doesn't feel comfortable, but I got my share of appreciation as well.

DOUGLASS: The decision was made—very controversial in the eyes of the public—to release all of Ken Star's evidence, some of it very graphic about Mr. Clinton's relationship with Monica Lewinsky, unread, unreviewed by anyone. How did that happen?

HYDE: Under the law, the special council, the Independent Counsel shipped over to us some 50, as I recall, cartons of evidence, transcripts, pictures, letters, all sorts of things. The question was how much of that should be revealed to the public? Because of the fabled public's right to know, which the press is always reminding us of. And so, we discussed that. Two prominent Democrats: John Dingle and Dick Gephardt insisted that we reveal it all, because they were fearful we would hold back exculpatory material that would favor Clinton and release selectively only things that would disfavor Clinton. So, to guard against that possibility, they said, "Release it all." Well that's what we finally did. John Conyers was part of decision making and so we did. And we were sharply criticized for doing that, as a lot of this material shouldn't have gone out.

DOUGLASS: In retrospect looking back at what came out to the public, what is your view of it now?

HYDE: In retrospect, a lot of things could have been done differently. Senator Feinstein put together a resolution really condemning the President—it was far more, volatile, shall we say, than our bill of impeachment. I oppose that, in retrospect I probably should not, I probably should have let that pass and gone, because I knew we couldn't get the votes to remove him from office. But we had to do the best we could do and we did. But retrospectively, that resolution, I didn't think it was Constitutional—there's no provision in the Constitution for Congress giving a report card on the Executive as such. We all do every election, but a lot of things would be done differently. I would have insisted on the right of our counsel to take the deposition of Ms. Lewinsky. But the senators wanted us to get out of town as quickly as we

could, and they wouldn't give us permission and they really ran the impeachment trial under the law.

DOUGLASS: Why in retrospect would you now, if you had it to do over again, support what was much more of a reprimand, but was not impeachment?

HYDE: Because it was doable, and impeachment was not. Impeachment was—we knew we couldn't win. We got, we did impeach, the House did vote to impeach, and so there will always be an asterisk after President Clinton's name. And that is no small accomplishment. But all things considered, in retrospect, perhaps the resolution would have been enough.

DOUGLASS: It's been said often, that it was really Mr. DeLay who led, who kept the resolve together to pursue the impeachment of President Clinton and that he was the one, more than anyone, who prevented even a vote on an alternative, such as a censure motion, which would have punished him, but not caused him to be tried and tried to remove him from office. Is that true, and what role did he play?

HYDE: It's true, the censure vote was not permitted, although I permitted it in the committee. DeLay never said a word to me during the entire impeachment process. He never told me or suggested or asked me to do something or not to do something. He stayed away from me, as did Gingrich. I was the sole decider of where to go and how to get there. I'd like to blame somebody else, but I can't.

DOUGLASS: But do you, it sounds as though you still feel that it was an absolutely defensible course of action. Do you regret it, or do you feel proud of it, or is it just simply what it was?

HYDE: It was, it had to be dealt with, it had to be confronted. I'm proud that I did my duty, as chairman of the Judiciary Committee, I was in the same position Peter Rodino had been in when Nixon was under fire. I'm proud of the job I did. I tried to be fair. I gave everybody a chance to say what they had to say. I did not want to be accused of running a kangaroo court. You know, it's funny. When the Philadelphia convention—those of us who were managers of the impeachment were treated like we were in the Witness Protection Program. I mean, nobody officially wanted to come near us. But as I walked through the streets of Philadelphia, people would spontaneously applaud. I got quite a bit of that, which was rewarding. Made you feel, made you feel good.

DOUGLASS: How do you feel that you were treated by the Senate and your own party in the Senate?

HYDE: Not well. As I said, they wanted to get out of town, they didn't want to be bothered with this, and there were a couple of senators who were helpful to us, but for the most part, we were rather brusquely treated and it was a shame.

DOUGLASS: But how did you react to that?

HYDE: I didn't greet it with any joy or pleasure, but I didn't expect a great deal from that great body and I wasn't disappointed in that regard.

DOUGLASS: Two more on impeachment, and we'll move on. It was a partisan effort in the end, on both sides, the parties decided at a certain juncture in the investigation to go in very different directions. What do you think are the consequences for the future of that development, which I know that you didn't want it to play out that way, but it did.

And what do you think the consequences for the future are, because of the fact that it was partisan on both sides?

HYDE: Well, I think a similar situation depends on the personalities involved. Another person as chairman of the Judiciary Committee might have decided that this is something that we shouldn't get into. Another person would feel the other extreme. I think it depends on the personalities involved and the general political situation in the country, so it's pretty hard to predict.

DOUGLASS: What do you think about Mr. Clinton today, looking back at him. What do you think about him? Do you have an opinion of him?

HYDE: Well I think he's doing exactly what he should do. He's going around the world, speaking, getting the accolades that a former President gets, and I think he's leading a useful life. He's not spending every minute on the golf course. I have no quarrel, I think he's been a pretty good ex-President.

DOUGLASS: I just wanted to follow up on my question about the polls, which did show at the time, early on that the people didn't think he should be impeached. Do you think that public opinion polls should matter in a decision such as whether or not a President should be impeached?

HYDE: I think they should be taken into consideration, but they shouldn't be determinative. A public opinion poll is a measurement of the opinions, which are as valid or invalid as the information upon which they're based. Most people don't have any opportunity to go into the nuances of controversies. They read a headline, a paragraph, they see a soundbyte, and therefore their opinion is to move the world. It doesn't work that way, really. On the other hand, people running for election have to respond to the wishes and feelings and emotions of the electorate. So you can't ignore them, but it depends what the issue is on, is about. If it's life and death, if it's war and peace, you have to do the... you have to be prepared to lose your office over an important issue. I think that's the test. If you're ready to say, "Ok, I'm, I wanted to be a senator, I've been a senator, but I give it up on this issue, whether it's the war, or stem cells, or something controversial. But give me some principled people and the country will make it." But they're getting hard to find.

DOUGLASS: It has been said often these days that relations have coarsened here in Congress. And I want to ask you a few questions about whether that's true, and if so, why that might be. And my first one, how have the media, and how has the presence of the media in Congress, affected relations? And you've been here all the way from the time when there was no camera in the chamber to today, when every word that is uttered by every member who wants to speak into a camera is on some 24 hour cable, if it's inflammatory enough. So, how do you think the media have affected relations here?

HYDE: Oh I think the media has become a participant. The media, instead of merely reporting what's going on, has become increasingly an advocate. This is sometimes subtle, sometimes not so subtle. But, I think the media has a profound effect on this democracy we live in by helping shape people's opinions, which harden direct elections. So the press is the most powerful instrument, more powerful than even the presidency in shaping people's opinions, upon which decisions at the polls are made. Polling is a very unscientific way to measure reality. It measures how people express their views on certain controversial issues. But how the question is asked, when the question is asked, the question before, the question after, all of these things can, in clever hands, can shape the answers you get from polls; and you can't ignore them. You just have to get your own out there.

DOUGLASS: Do you think that the media have contributed to a perception amongst elected officials that the more inflammatory your rhetoric is, for example, the better off you are as an elected official?

HYDE: Yes I think that's very sadly true. I think to get your name in the paper, to get attention, you have to be inflammatory. Routine disagreements don't get you very far, but if you can make an accusation of some kind, the press will leap at that, and I don't blame them, that's their business. But, the press is powerful and especially in a democracy.

DOUGLASS: So then let's talk about how this affects policymaking, not the media, but just the whole general rise in combativeness, if it is on the rise. Some say that there is a cycle of revenge that is underway as the balance between the parties remain so close, so that the goal of each party is to make sure that the other party doesn't have a victory. It's more important to make sure that the other party doesn't win something than it is to actually achieve something. That is what some of these experts say. Do you think that's correct?

HYDE: To some extent. I've been blessed by having as my counterpart in international relations, where I'm the chairman, Tom Lantos, who is a very bright Democrat from California, who is more than bright. He's brilliant, he's knowledgeable and he puts American first—ahead of his party, and ahead of his politics. And I try to do the same thing. But, we get along famously and I'm proud of our friendship. That isn't to say that he isn't a hard line Democrat, he is, but we do find in the matters of the UN and matters of arms exports and the Middle East and the rest... I can count on him to think straight and he relies on me. And I wish the whole Congress worked as well. Now you can take another committee, say Ways and Means, where you would have Bill Thomas and Charlie Rangel, two strong personalities who I doubt if they can agree on Tuesday following Monday. But I've not had the fun or the pleasure of serving on their committee, but personalities have a lot to do with it.

DOUGLASS: But, having said that, your relationship with Mr. Lantos is often described as an exception, rather than the rule. And you hear the Democrats complain all the time the rules are such that they aren't allowed to offer amendments, that they aren't allowed to participate in some negotiations over legislation, that they aren't invited to some conference committees. A, is that correct, and if it is correct, does that have an effect on policy?

HYDE: Yes it does have an effect on policy and it is true, however, I can remember when on the Judiciary Committee, there would be a conference committee under the Democrats and they wouldn't tell us where it was. So we couldn't find it to show up where we're supposed to show up. The Democrats are very partisan, the Republicans are—can be very partisan, there are isolated islands of nonpartisanship which glitter in the dark. But I think we could be a lot less partisan towards each other. But look, power is what it's all about. The election that put in Mr. Reagan disappointed an awful lot of Democrats, and as we go down the Bush duo, the two of them, father and son, they've gotten to the point where they're livid about that. They should relax, take a deep breath, their turn will come.

DOUGLASS: And what about the fact that it seems, and maybe this is a media issue as well, that more and more complicated issues are dealt with as though Congress has a gun to its head, as though, some very complicated matter is rushed to the floor when there are finally the votes, and there's often a complaint by members that they don't have time to read the legislation, there isn't quite as much committee deliberation as

there was in the past. Do you think that the policymaking process is working as it should?

HYDE: I don't know... that problem of the members not getting to read the bills is true, but given the time, many of them wouldn't bother to read the bills anyway. You rely on your staff. You have a good staff, as I do, and as Mr. Lantos does—they do an awful lot of the tough work on legislation, especially complicated, so those complaints—it's tough to get an idea through, and this leadership wants it to get through. But they schedule the bills, they schedule—they tell the Rules Committee what to do. I shouldn't say that, but that's the truth. It's an arm of the leadership, a proud arm of the leadership, but leadership calls the shots pretty much and if you have a success, leadership and take credit for it.

DOUGLASS: And that's a change. Because it used to be that the committees had the power to write the legislation—the committees that dealt with the issues. And now it's the leaders.

HYDE: Every committee chairman is a lame duck, which is a result of the silly term limits, which has taken many a good person out of this arena, I think of Bill Armstrong of Colorado, what a shame that he left. He'd be a good candidate for President. There are many wonderful members of Congress... here's Bill Young, chairman of appropriations, wonderful chairman, knowledgeable, fair, well liked, it's not a good idea.

DOUGLASS: The policymaking question, again, just having to do with, squabbles between the parties, political jockeying, the press of business, the policymaking question that seems to be on the minds of many these days, is whether Congress has the capacity to make long range policy—policy that is flexible enough to still work in the future. I'm just thinking of policy having to do with, say, immigration. That's just an issue that's before the Congress right now. There's Medicare, and what has to be done to change Medicare. There's climate issues, if there are such issues. There are issues that continue to evolve. Do you think Congress has got the capacity today to tackle those issues that need rather flexible solutions?

HYDE: Immigration is one of the major issues right now. It deserves the best thinking possible from both parties. I don't think, let's put it this way, the issue is so acute right now, there isn't time to think of the long-distance consequences. Everything we do on immigration has ultimate consequences. 10 years from now, what we do today will have some effect. But, we have all we can handle now, trying to decide whether to secure the borders first, whether to build a fence, whether to grant amnesty, or whether to have a workers' program or what to do. And, that's one of the features, or unpleasant features of being Speaker: you have to juggle all these various interests and try to come out with something that'll work, rather than stalemate, and that takes good will, brains and luck. 3 qualities that are not an easy reach.

DOUGLASS: Two criticisms that uh, former Speaker Gingrich made of today's Congress in a speech recently were that Congress is ceding too much power to the President, to the Executive branch, and that Congress is not engaging in enough oversight of the Executive branch. And his point was that Congress has allowed itself to be weakened as a branch. Do you agree with that?

HYDE: Perhaps, not wholeheartedly. There's only so much you can do. Oversight requires some cooperation from the agency that you're overseeing, and sometimes it's dragging, they drag their feet. You can wait weeks and months to get an answer to a communication. I think each committee should have an oversight subcommittee and they should have resources and subpoena a few records occasionally. I think we could do more in oversight.

DOUGLASS: People say that Congress is polarized these days, but I've heard some say that polarization is a good thing, that sharply defined views is healthy for democracy, and if you were there for Mr. DeLay's farewell speech, he spoke disparagingly of compromise, because it dilutes principle, in some cases. Do you think that polarization, if it exists today, is a good thing, or not?

HYDE: I don't think it's a good thing. I think each party ought to believe in something, they ought to adhere to a set of principles. They ought to be able to articulate them and implement them. But at the same time, we all should understand that the other guy has a point of view, too, based on his or her experiences in life and her adherence to what they're pleased to call principle. You can't get anywhere in a stalemate, you just get your temperature up and your collar gets hot and nothing is accomplished. I think you can do more by trying to compromise. I think we do a remarkably good job considering all of the polarization that's inherent in this body we call the House of Representatives.

DOUGLASS: People say you're a statesman. They call you that all the time, I've always said that about you. What is your definition of a statesman?

HYDE: Putting the country first. Putting the welfare of the country... there are times when your personal... well, take take for example Senator Lonerica when we were fighting to keep Castro's hands out of Nicaragua. That was not a very popular struggle, and I think it's putting principle ahead of personal gain or political gain. That's what a statesman would do.

DOUGLASS: And do you think there are many statesmen in Congress?

HYDE: I think there are lots of potential statesmen. I think there are some pretty good people here, really outstanding. Duncan Hunter is a is a man of high principle—encourage in a very tough job. We're lucky to have him. There are a lot of good people. I I resent seeing cartoons that characterize Congress as a failure or as a funhouse of some kind. There is a guy who is doing cartoons for the Washington Post that loves to generalize that all of Congress are stumblebums and crooks and bribe takers. There are a few, but my goodness, the Good Lord had 12 apostles, one of whom went wrong. 1/12 I guess we should be allowed that. But there are lots of awfully good people, family people with a sense of sacrifice and devotion to our country and they don't get recognized like they should.

DOUGLASS: So do you think that the complaints about lobbyists playing too much of a role in writing legislation and having too much access are overblown?

HYDE: I don't know that you can have too much access in our country. I mean you should be available to talk to people. It depends on the moral character of the member. The lobbyist wants to talk me about something, he may know something I need to know or may not. But, a lot of contributions, in a business that you have to raise money all the time. I don't know how you do that unless you talk to the people who have the money.

DOUGLASS: Well you're one of the people who didn't like to raise money. I thought that's why you didn't run for the Senate.

HYDE: I hate fundraising. Having your hand out really, it is the least charming thing you have to do in this business. But it's a necessary evil.

DOUGLASS: Do you think there's too much money, though, in the system?

HYDE: Oh yeah, yeah. I think when you start talking a million and a half in this ordinary district you know that's big dough.

DOUGLASS: And why is that not a good thing?

HYDE: Well people don't give you money all the time unless they want something. There are other contributors who like you and they like what you stand for and they want to see you return to office, those are the good guys. But those who say, "vote for me, I'm this and I'll and I'll give you a check." That's bad.

DOUGLASS: Final question here: when you leave, when you finally pull away from this place, what do you think you're going to miss the most?

HYDE: The chamber. Standing there and looking over the chamber, all those people trying to get attention, "Mr. Speaker, I have an amendment at the desk." I'll miss all that. I'll miss this whole place. I'll miss looking at the Capitol as you drive up. This is... we are the custodians of democracy here. The whole world envies us, even though we don't envy ourselves. The world does. Tear up the immigration laws, you'll see the biggest swimming match you ever could imagine, cross the Atlantic and the Pacific. It's a great country, and it's an honor to have been here, and it was all too fast.