

**REFLECTIONS PROJECT**  
**REP. MARTIN SABO INTERVIEW**  
**December 6, 2006**

**LINDA DOUGLASS:** So, with that, Congressman-- I'd like to start by asking you the question that I've asked so many of the other members. And that is-- could you describe for us what it was like for you when you first came into the House? What sort of feelings did you have? Were you awestruck? Can you describe that?

**MARTIN SABO:** I'd been in the Legislature for-- 18 years. I'd been six years as Speaker. I did not consider running for Congress running for higher office. And I considered it at best a lateral movement-- maybe less. (LAUGHTER) But I'd been there long enough-- time-- and I-- you know, I'm interested in public policy. I'd-- thoroughly-- I would not trade my time in the Legislature for any of the time in Washington.

And so it was a new adventure. But-- it-- you know, I came with those roots, and that experience. And-- the Congress-- to what degree it's different-- it's bigger, it's more diverse.

You know, our state was diverse, but the diversity in the country's larger than that of a state--a new process. At-- to learn there were things in process that were different-- and it would surprise you. And-- some of the culture on how things operated-- was different.

You know, so there were things to learn-- new people to meet. And I came with a great group of people. We had 43 Democrats in that class. And unfortunately, I'm the last one of that class.

So, our class is-- we sort of think that we have a reminder-- Bob Matsui's widow, Doris, is a member. So-- technically she's a more recent member. She is really the only-- sort of-- representative of our class that came here as Democrats in '79-- left.

**DOUGLASS:** Now I know that you have lamented the polarization that has arisen in-- over the last couple of decades here of Congress-- between the political parties, and between factions of each political--

**SABO:** Yeah.

**DOUGLASS:**--party in some cases. Can you describe for us how it was different then from how it is now?

**SABO:** When I came, most members moved their families here. There was more socializing, I think, at both— within and across— party lines, so people got to know each other better. The work week was longer, so there was more time for some of those informal meetings— that could occur.

Now every— the last few years, it's just crammed into a couple days or a day and a half. And the— I just— there isn't time for people to talk to each other. An incredible number of— particularly in the— on the Republican side of people— I don't know who they are.

I see somebody presiding, and I ask somebody next to me, "Who's that?" And they say, "I don't know." You know? And so, it just— just the whole atmosphere is more separate than— any time— people don't know each other, it's—a certain edge that develops that doesn't exist if people know each other.

**DOUGLASS:** Well— but to what do you attribute the divisiveness here in Congress, as you've watched it over these many years— develop?

**SABO:** Well, lots of it partly reflects the country, I think. Country's polarized. And I suppose degree, you get some social issues. They—gin up emotions maybe more than if you were— fighting over a relative. The appropriation issue of how much or how much less on the bill.

But I think it also— you know, it's part reflection of society. But it's also a reflection that people are around here less. I think that less social opportunities, less, less— you know, just less culture of their getting together and getting to know each other.

**DOUGLASS:** You've talked about the fact that Congress doesn't work, as you said, "Doesn't work as hard."

**SABO:** Yeah.

**DOUGLASS:** I think some Republicans might argue back that it's just that they're not in Washington as long.

**SABO:** Yeah.

**DOUGLASS:** But the argument that was made by the Republican majority, when they came in, was that you shouldn't spend as much time here in Washington. You should be back in your district, and you should be able to go home and live with your family, in your district.

**SABO:** Yeah. And that may be that— you know— I expect there are several things that impact. Some of that's the politics. And some relates to housing costs in DC,

versus other places. Probably more spouses have a well established career, and are less likely to move.

All of those things impact—but we're ultimately here to do a job, and then that job is being in Washington and doing work here. And not simply passing an occasional law, but to be involved in significant oversight, and significant committee hearings, and significant amount of communication back and forth with other members. That's our job.

And— and there's plenty of time for doing politics. And still do our job. And you know, people had competitive races before, and somehow managed to win. And so, I just think Congress needs to spend more time here— more time for committee work— and sometimes just simply for people to talk to each other. And whether that means— you know, — five days a week or four days— I don't know— you know, that has— people shouldn't get dogmatic about that. But having everybody rush in Tuesday night and leave Thursday afternoon clearly doesn't work if you want Congress to be doing things. So—

**DOUGLASS: So, in other words, you think that has affected the legislating—**

**SABO:** Oh, sure.

**DOUGLASS: --process.**

**SABO:** There are fewer committee hearings— less oversight. I think in the recent years, it has been incredible up, down run— operation on lots of policy issues where what the committees do get overridden. And for a legislative body to work, you've got to have good committees functioning, who can spend time and develop some legislation. And that should be the basis of what we do on the floor, and not something that leadership all of a sudden in their limited wisdom decides to impose on the floor.

**DOUGLASS: How did you see the atmosphere here change from a Democrat control— now granted of course, it's much nicer for you to be—**

**SABO:** Yeah.

**DOUGLASS: --there when you were in the majority— and the Republican controlled—Did that make a difference? What was the impact?**

**SABO:** Well I think it's fair to say that there were a great many Republicans who were very aggressive in trying to get out of the minority. And their strategy was to tear down the institution, as well as deal with institution and with the substance.

And in part, that drive was successful. And and as a result they developed an edge in how people treated each other that hadn't had success before.

**DOUGLASS: Do you think that members coming into Congress now-- the new members coming into Congress-- have the same kind of reverence for the institution that you-- probably had when you came in in 1979?**

**SABO:** I don't know. I don't know. I don't know the background of all of them. I suppose the period I came, there were lots of Democrats who'd come in '74 and '76, who came with very limited experience.

Our class in '78 was very different. And then the '74 and '76 class-- most of us came with significant experience in other elective office. And I think we had significant respect for the institution of the legislative institutions in this country.

**DOUGLASS: You said that you think it's time for a new generation to come in. It's time for new blood here in the Congress. Do you think that members stay here too long as a rule or not?**

**SABO:** No, not really. And I'm not sure what context I said that. No-- the turn-- you know, in my class, we're all gone.

And-- the turn over is p-- it's pretty immense. And ultimately this place is governed by what people decide in their own district every two years. So, that we operate with term limits-- they're a two year limit.

And then vote-- the people have a right to make a choice, and then-- you know. This year we had dramatic change for Democrats. In '94 there was dramatic change for the Republicans. Who knows what next few years hold? But that's the ultimate right of the public. And the House is unique and all of us are up for reelection every two years. And you have to make your case.

**DOUGLASS: Let's talk a little bit about your tenure as the chairman of the Budget Committee at a very historic time for Democratic politics. And that was when President Clinton came in and decided that he was going to try to balance the budget, which was an unusual course for a Democratic President to pursue. First-- why do you think that the Democrats decided to embrace budget balancing after all those years? And that entailed not just raising taxes, but also cutting spending, which was an unusual course for the Democrats to follow as aggressively as they did. And I'm just going to add in there-- do you think it was the effect of Ross Perot to a certain extent on the-- on the issues that were debated in 1992?**

**SABO:** Well, maybe some. I would never accept the basic premise that somehow Democrats are less fiscally responsible than Republicans. My experience in both state and federal government is the opposite.

And it was clear-- we'd been struggling all through the '80s with the deficit. We had-- in 1990, we had a major agreement-- between Bush One and the Congress, which was Democrats in the House-- and I think it was a Republican Senate in-- in '90, when we did that agreement. The fact was that most House Republicans opposed Bush One in the-- what was a significant deficit reduction package. And then we had to do it all alone in '93.

So, that agenda-- really you have lots of Democrats, that we had to get our our fiscal house in order for the extended period of time. And Clinton provided the leadership. I'm not sure Congress could've done by itself. You needed what a President brings to the process. And we responded, and we did a significant-- deficit reduction that really was a base for us eventually moving to a balanced budget and then surplus. And then--sort of to my dismay-- watch us blow it again in the 21st century.

**DOUGLASS:** But that was a painful vote, wasn't it-- for a lot a--

**SABO:** Yeah.

**DOUGLASS:** --Democrats--

**SABO:** Yeah.

**DOUGLASS:** --raising taxes?

**SABO:** Yeah. That's never an easy vote. And--

**DOUGLASS:** And do you think as some of them believed-- that it did-- contribute to the ultimate loss of the Democratic majority--

**SABO:** I--

**DOUGLASS:** --in '94?

**SABO:** --I think it contributed, but I thought there were many other things that were more important. They were-- and the reality was that when we finished the budget process that year, and the reconciliation bill, I think the ratings for the President were quite high, the ratings of Congress were quite high. I've always thought that our failure after the high visibility of healthcare and not being able to do anything-- contributed much more to our loss of control.

I think the decision to bring the crime bill with the gun provisions up, shorten-- you know, three weeks before the election or four weeks-- contributed. And then I suppose there are times when-- it's just the mood that-- we want to change things. All of those, I think, were much more important factors than the fact that people had cast up votes on the budget.

**DOUGLASS: I want to pursue the healthcare question with you-- but I want to stick with this-- the budget of '93 for just a moment. Can you give us any stories of what happened behind the scenes there. Because it-- I can just imagine that it was an extremely tense operation.**

**SABO:** Yeah.

**DOUGLASS: You won by-- one vote, is that--**

**SABO:** Well--

**DOUGLASS: --correct?**

**SABO:** --there are two parts of it. In our Budget Committee, we dealt with the budget resolution, which was the broad framework. And then you get the reconciliation bill, which-- puts the specifics in place.

On the budget resolution, we spent lots of time-- in caucus on our side, talking to-- we had a committee from left to right, and we finally arrived at consensus. I'm not sure the administration always-- didn't always like what we did. The administration had a number of-- new programs that they wanted to pursue-- within the context of a budget resolution, and we assumed none of them.

**DOUGLASS: But the-- did President Clinton play an active role with you in Congress?**

**SABO:** Yes. I was in touch there and-- with his staff-- on a regular basis. But that-- they would've liked to add some assumptions and favorable words and some new programs. And we never thought it was appropriate to be pursuing new programs-- within the context of the budget resolution-- when we were both raising debt revenue and cutting other programs. And they would have had the choice-- following pay-go rules-- to do a new program, and it would have to come out of some other--

**DOUGLASS: That means--**

**SABO:** --source.

**DOUGLASS: --that if you spend money someplace, you've got to it somewhere--**

**SABO:** Cut it or--

**DOUGLASS:--else or vice versa.**

**SABO:** Yeah. Yeah. So, we didn't-- eliminate that possibility. But then we came to-- that bill itself, and it was-- I, frankly-- had privately been arguing for some changes. I thought we were in trouble and I was wrong by one vote. Fortunately we wanted-- that-- the one, that real-- the part of it that really gave us trouble was a gas tax increase.

**DOUGLASS: So, BTU tax?**

**SABO:** No, this is--

**DOUGLASS: This is the gas tax. Okay.**

**SABO:** Just a gas tax in-- in the-- in the final bill. And I-- I had thought that was-- and I was strong-- I'm strong-- advocate of gas taxes. I think we should pay more the actual cost of driving automobiles in this country than we do. It's heavily subsidized, particularly at the local level.

And I'd privately been arguing that we needed to drop it if we were going to be successful. And I didn't win that argument. I never made it publicly. I think that's the first time I've ever said that I was arguing that privately.

And-- but fortunately we won by the one vote in the House. And then-- as I recall, a tie vote in the Senate, with Gore breaking the deadlock. And that was really a historic bill that passed. And you always wonder how things are going to work. And the reality is, it worked much better than we expected. It-- the economy responded to us doing that deficit reduction package-- interest rates came down and the economy boomed. And in that debate, all the Republicans in the House-- their leadership were-- they were all arguing that if we passed this-- deficit reduction package, we were going to have -- recessions and bigger deficits rather than smaller ones. And they were dead wrong.

**DOUGLASS: You mentioned the healthcare campaign that was waged by Hillary Clinton--**

**SABO:** Yeah.

**DOUGLASS: --on behalf of the President to get universal health coverage, which crashed and burned in Congress ultimately. You're an activist, yourself, in the**

**health care area. What did they do wrong? And how much do you think that has contributed to the failure of Congress over the last decade to ever do anything else meaningful?**

**SABO:** Yeah. I thought their plan was too complicated. But where they always had trouble with major healthcare in this country-- Truman tried, didn't get any place. Bush-- not Bush-- Nixon, in '73 had a major proposal for requiring employers to offer healthcare in this country.

And when we started in '93, I asked one of my staff people, "What happened to Nixon's program?" And it-- as so often happens, there were conservatives who didn't want it. And for liberals, it wasn't good enough.

And they were going to do better next year. Well, next year never came, and nothing happened. If the Nixon program of 1973 had passed, we'd be so far ahead of where we are today. It's so incredible. And Clinton in the end, and-- we in the Congress-- had some that same problem. The conservatives were against it. There were elements of the left in this country that were unhappy with it, because it wasn't pure enough for the radiology people. And we never could-- and-- we just never could put it together.

**DOUGLASS: But did that team, led by Mrs. Clinton again-- did they work as closely with Congress as they should have?**

**SABO:** I don't know how to make that judgment. And -- I suppose in hindsight, they should have done it better in some fashion. I have another theory on what happened there with-- how it may have gone out different-- I might be totally wrong.

But as you recall, then Dan Rostenkowski was chairman of the Ways and Means Committee at that time. Had some legal problems and he had to take a leave of absence from that position. I've often thought that if that had not occurred, he might've been somebody who had the toughness-- to force compromises-- to make us do something significant. And I can't prove it.

I-- you know, but I've always thought you needed somebody with maybe his non-ideological approach, and his toughness to force people to get through some of their differences that-- it probably would've been some significant-- formed differently than what the President originally proposed. But there was nobody with that strength to bring everybody together. And he might've had it.

**DOUGLASS: What impact do you think the failure of that program has had on the Congress, and its ability or will to do something about the absence of health insurance for so many people?**

**SABO:** Well, I think it's hurt. And I'm not sure the Congress learned the right lessons. They-- but I think it-- clearly any plan that is going to pass probably requires some mandates and the Congress has been very reluctant do any mandates either on companies or on individual citizens.

**DOUGLASS:** **But why can't Congress tackle this issue? This would seem to be an issue where constituents would want help.**

**SABO:** You know--

**DOUGLASS:** **This is a question that really leads to our bigger question always, which is-- when there's a big issue that affects everyone, why is it that Congress seems to have such a tough time addressing it?**

**SABO:** It-- I suppose that you-- for Congress to address it without very clear Presidential leadership gets tough. And in '93, we failed even with the President very-- or '93, '94-- even with the President very committed to it. You always have trouble with how you pay for change. You always have people who get scared about change. And you find many people who would actually be the greatest beneficiaries being opponents.

If you step back from '93 and go back to the Reagan administration when we passed the catastrophic plan for seniors and then got repealed before it really went into effect. And I was one of the 40 or so who voted against repeal. You remember the folks pounding Rostenkowski's--

**DOUGLASS:** **Yeah.**

**SABO:** --car in Illinois. And the ironic thing was many of these people who were the most-- vehement against it were people who were going to benefit the most. And the same in '93, you would find-- people who were going to be the biggest beneficiaries didn't understand some part of it, so they were against it. Think all of it-- it's complicated, and it's changed. And I think the complexity of the the Clinton program made it difficult to explain, so that people could really understand it, how it would work for them. And it made it easier for people to distort.

**DOUGLASS:** **So, the chart--**

**SABO:** Yeah.

**DOUGLASS:** **--was really the thing that may have done it in.**

**SABO:** Yeah. Yeah.

**DOUGLASS:** The famous chart that Bob Dole held up on the Senate floor--

**SABO:** Yeah. Yeah.

**DOUGLASS:** --showing all the boxes and arrows.

**SABO:** Yeah. Yeah.

**DOUGLASS:** Well-- and we want to get into some other issues having to do with healthcare, but I want to get to Homeland Security now, because this is an issue where you really were there at the birth of-- for better or for worse perhaps, from your point of view-- of this new agency.

**SABO:** No-- see, I voted against it.

**DOUGLASS:** I know you did, but you were still involved in--

**SABO:** Yeah. Yeah.

**DOUGLASS:** --the discussion. (LAUGHTER)

**SABO:** Yeah.

**DOUGLASS:** And you were a very early and vocal critic of this whole agency. But I wanted-- but you were in the position to address the problem. Congress wanted to do something about Homeland Security. And before we get to DHS let's talk about TSA-- that's the Transportation Security Administration-- or agency. How well do you think Congress did in trying to cope with the clear vulnerabilities that existed in our airport screening system?

**SABO:** Oh, we've spent billions of dollars and I would-- I think it would be fair to say that the likelihood of somebody hijacking a plane and flying it into the World Trade Center today are significantly less than they were before TSA was created. It-- but it should be with all the money we've spent. There are still lots of vulnerabilities in air traffic safety in relationship to terrorism, but it's much less likely that the plane could be used as a weapon, is what you would say-- made-- 9/11 so devastating. And the other-- one hand, one has to say on TSA-- everyone was told it was going to be paid for by the fees. It's not. It's cost-- I think-- well over two billion dollars a year in addition to the fees. So, it's cost much more than anybody was told in this place.

**DOUGLASS:** And has Congress, in your view, done as well as it can do in overseeing this agency, and suggesting corrective action where needed?

**SABO:** I think over TSA, fairly well. But it-- we still have major technology problems, particularly in-- being able to detect explosives, which is very difficult.

**DOUGLASS: And why were you such a strong opponent of the Department of Homeland Security?**

**SABO:** I just didn't think it made-- that you could possibly put two-- 22 agencies together with no thought, no planning-- throw them together and expect them to be a smooth-functioning organization.

**DOUGLASS: And your verdict now?**

**SABO:** And I-- well-- I made the choice-- four years ago-- I was ranking Democrat on transportation, and we reshuffled and created the new subcommittee, so I guess, my good government instincts got the better of me. I decided well, I'll try and go there and see if I can help prove myself wrong. And after four years, I -- and I haven't proven myself wrong yet.

I don't have-- Hal Rogers (PH) has been chairman of our subcommittee and appropriations. I think he's done an outstanding job in chairing it. Lots of oversight, lots of things that-- because of the-- our subcommittee's involvement-- I think, put pressure on that agency to do things better. On the other hand, -- and sometimes I get upset with-- folks there, that they aren't doing things right, but then I figure-- why in the world would they ever take the job? You know, I think it's still in many ways an impossible task, and--

**DOUGLASS: What's impossible about it? Because-- there is an agency now, and it's been on its feet for--**

**SABO:** Yeah. And-- and it's getting a little better. But-- you know, I suppose the best example was FEMA. FEMA was a-- independent agency, doing well-- you know, Katrina speaks for itself.

It changed from a very-- lean agency that clearly had the ear of the President, and major-- had major-- cabinet post-- into a very ineffective group in-- response to Katrina. FEMA, as it existed before 9/11, was much better than the FEMA we saw-- during Katrina. And the---

**DOUGLASS: And we'll go on--**

**SABO:** --and I think that clearly was because of-- reorganization. The Coast Guard's there-- fortunately they haven't screwed them up yet.

**DOUGLASS:** The-- of course the primary function of the Department of Homeland Security-- presumably is to make us safer. Let's just talk about that for a second. There are many aspects of making us safer. People worried a lot at the time of its creation about bioterror, food safety, hazardous-- transporting hazardous materials, chemical plants, ports, trains, are we safer?

**SABO:** To some degree, but there-- in any country, like ours, that's big, free, free-wheeling, you're always going to have vulnerabilities. If there's somebody who wants to kill themselves to create dilemmas, you know, Israel has been trying to deal with bombers for decades and is still having problems. So we always have those vulnerabilities. But we have to try and do things that minimize it. But we also have to do things that make us prepared to deal with emergencies.

But it then has to be multipurpose. It may be terrorism, but at the same time we have explosions that occur for other reasons. We have the hurricanes, we have the floods, we have-- you know-- all of those-- you know-- we have-- are worrying about pandemic flus.

You know, how you-- the mechanisms in place to respond to that is not much different than what you would need to respond to a biological attack in some fashion.

**DOUGLASS:** So do you--

**SABO:** So it needs to be multipurpose.

**DOUGLASS:** Have you found that-- just in the way that it operates, it's being constantly pulled by what might be called parochial interests, in other words, this region wants more money than that region and feels it needs it, or somebody here wants more money for first responders and another one here thinks what you need is better infrastructure, those kinds of questions.

**SABO:** Yeah, but that's part of the beauty of this country, it's diverse. I happen not to be-- you know, there was all kinds of criticism that some of this money was going on a population basis to the states. The minimum guarantee was maybe too high but, you know, the conventional wisdom was that there were these wise people in the department who could figure out precisely on a needs-basis how much we could give to all those 50 states. I have never found those people. But-- you know, it's my excuse to the folks in New York, they were leading the argument for that, the 9/11 Commission was supposedly had all-- had divine judgment they were-- you know-- asked them, who-- who are these people over there who know how to do this on a needs-basis? Well-- I'm still waiting.

You know, so there are times this country's diverse, you've got to— get money out to the states, make them have some thoughtful plans on how to spend it. But, you know, I'll use my own community as an example.

We have significant— communication between our public safety folks, but it started in the 1990s. The local plans were in place. And— the cooperation between the fire and police and— all happened and was worked out. And— so it's in my community, the police can communicate with the fire, with the state patrol, and the Hennepin County Sheriff's Office. It's in place, but— there are lots of work— but if we're going to only fund interoperability, we do what the federal government so often does, is punish those who have already done something well.

**DOUGLASS: Good point.**

**SABO:** I've often thought that the— what happens at the federal level is all good deeds go punished at the federal level, if the states and local communities have done something.

**DOUGLASS: Okay, so what I want to do now is call upon you students. So what I want to do now, and just go ahead and raise your hands, whoever wants to ask a question and we'll start with you. And if you wouldn't mind identifying yourself, please.**

**STUDENT: I'm from the school of public affairs at AU. I've sort of concentrated on homeland security issues as part of my doctoral dissertation. What is your view in terms of Congress' role in mandating public/private partnerships? Should the government play a role, set standards for the private sector? Or should the private sector define its own standards?**

**SABO:** It's got to be a combination of both. We've got— I suppose, ideally, I'd like to see a system where we ask the private sector to develop the plans themselves and then we pass some judgment on whether they're really comprehensive.

**STUDENT: And in terms of risk analysis, there's been a lot made— and I guess Linda mentioned this in terms of allocating resources based on risk assessments. What should be on uniform way of making risk assessments?**

**SABO:** I don't think you can do it on a one— there's any one way to do it. Frankly, some of the most important work for Homeland Security is the intelligence work we do. And lots of that is not even in Department of Homeland Security. Most of it isn't.

That relates to what the CIA is doing, or the intelligence community outside of this country, what the FBI and other law enforcement people are doing in this country. That, I assume, is doing on a risk basis.

When we allocate some funds for ports, I assume there's some judgment and where the most important place for those funds are to go. So you could go through sort of a categorical-- programs and say that they are risk-based. Where I start having some problems is the distribution from the federal government to state and local government. Our-- we distribute it, supposedly, on risk-based, to local--a limited number of metropolitan areas. My own experience in my community is we knew zero way up here, way down here. I can't-- and going through long meetings, never figured out a good analysis of what that risk adjustment was. And then we had the grant going to the states. And I thought the department really had no great capacity to make significant judgments in the needs of varying states in this country.

I would have preferred to see us keep it on population, maybe the minimum guarantee was too high. But I don't think they have that capacity. And the reality is, the type of risk you deal with around the country varies. And I thought there was equity there.

**STUDENT: In terms of a criticism that the 9/11 Commission has made regarding the jurisdiction of DHS being answerable to committees and subcommittees across the House and the Senate, what can Congress do to change that?**

**SABO:** Well, we created, you know, in appropriations we created one-- one subcommittee for dealing with DHS. And I think that's worked well. I can't speak for all the other committees that are involved. You know, there is a new authorizing committee that has significant jurisdiction, but there are some others, you know, I think they're going to have to deal with the diversity of Congress.

**DOUGLASS: Okay. Thank you. Anybody else here? Okay-- yes. Just remember if you hesitate, I will always jump in with a question.**

**JESSE ROUCH: Hi Congressman, my name is Jesse Rauch. I am a former teacher--**

**SABO:** Okay.

**ROUCH: And currently am receiving my master's in public policy at American University. And my question is: You have been identified as one of the last authentic New Dealers, and a healthcare advocate. I would like to know how you think the next generation of congressional leaders should proceed on issues of poverty and healthcare for the poor.**

**SABO:** Oh, with the issue of healthcare, in many ways it goes beyond the question of healthcare for the poor. Healthcare for the poor-- basically is dealt with in the Medicaid program and there you deal with the state's abilities at varying eligibility.

In many ways, the real problem with healthcare are people above the very poorest, and who are marginally in and out of the labor market. And I think, probably, the best approach is to call on the states to develop some programs, provide funding to the states. In our state, we have extensive healthcare programs in place already. There are gaps, and some money to help close those gaps would be very helpful. And I think that's probably the most likely way to have a successful program and that would be my judgment.

The question of poverty-- you know-- I think the growing gap between top and bottom in this country is just a very fundamental problem. Clearly, we should significantly increase the minimum wage, but that's only part of it.

I think the capacity for labor to organize is incredibly important. That's been weakened over the years. And-- you know-- the industrial workers of this country didn't become middle class because government mandated it. It was because the government put in the process where they could bargain-- could organize and bargain collectively. I think frankly, think that in some of our education funding programs, we should pay more attention to folks who have gone into the labor market and help them get back for-- to school for additional training. In many ways, our school-- our education programs and our financial aid are geared to the people who go to school full-time.

And I'd like to see them more geared to allowing folks to go back for training on a part-time basis after they're in the labor market because part of reducing poverty-- or near-- you know-- below-- I don't know how you describe all the-- above poverty, but not very affluent-- earning capacity people is increased training. And they should be able to do that while they're still working.

But then you also-- if you're dealing with the basic question of poverty in this country, one of the very difficult issues to deal with, which I don't think we really know how to deal with in government, is the nature of the family. The reality is in this country, if you have a two-parent family, the kid is not likely to be in poverty. The odds of a one-parent family a kid being in poverty are fairly high. And-- that is part of the equation. We don't like to talk about it many times, but it's part of the equation, but also dealing with the whole-socio- economic issues that we have to face.

**DOUGLASS:** And I'd like to follow up actually, because he makes a very interesting point about you being described as one of the last of the New Dealers. Has your view of the role of government changed over the years?

**SABO:** Yeah, see, I'm not sure if I'm a-- where I fit into the New Deal. I describe myself as a liberal decentralist. And there aren't many of us around, I don't think, and there are very few conservative decentralists around. They are highly centralized in their-- I think there's a role for the federal government in providing assistance to states, but not mandating. And I-- you know, in some ways, I suppose, the New Deal was basically when you think of some programs like Social Security, it clearly had to be done on a federal level. Something like Medicare worked fine. Lots of that was, you know, FDIC insuring deposits, clearly had to be done on the federal level.

So much of the New Deal, I suppose, really were things that I fundamentally would agree with. But on the other hand, I have skepticism-- I'll use an example, No Child Left Behind-- I'd describe that as the ego of the right, the middle, and the left run asunder on the same bill.

And I just thought the basic premise of that-- and lots of the Democrats argued it wasn't-- failed because it wasn't funded. I thought it was just inherently over-stretching the bill-- the ability of the federal government to try and run-- elementary and secondary education in this country. And--

**DOUGLASS:** Why do you think your proposal to-- try to regulate, in some way, the size of corporate executive salaries, which you mentioned earlier, just hasn't seemed to go anywhere here?

**SABO:** Well, we actually have some limit in place. But what I was trying to-- my bill was one which said that for tax purposes, you could not deduct more than 25 times that paid the lowest-paid employee on taxes.

**DOUGLASS:** The corp-- the business?

**SABO:** Yeah.

**DOUGLASS:** The employer?

**SABO:** And-- and I understand the, you know, we didn't limit it, but we limited the tax. But I-- what I was fundamentally trying to say was a statement of values. And also that there's some relationship between top and bottom in our society, and it's gotten all screwed up, I think.

And you take any company, and everyone has some impact on the success of it. And I don't diminish the importance of leadership. I think leadership is incredibly important. But we're way out of whack in this country.

But my-- when I originally introduced that bill in '91, my concern was not the top, it was that we more focus on how we get the bottom up in this country. And also I-- philosophically, I thought there were things government could do like the gentleman's question, we can increase minimum wage. But at some point, I think-- the industrial and corporate leadership has to pay some attention to that issue because I think as we become more and more divided, and I think probably the numbers on-- on accumulation of wealth were even more out of whack than income. I just think that's bad for the long-term fabric of this country.

And so I-- if for no other reason than maybe an occasional irritant by some of the top corporate leadership when they see a proposal like that, makes them think about that issue in some fashion. Because I don't-- government will play some role in dealing with it, but it also has to involve what's going on in the private economy.

And, you know, we have a whole host of income support programs in this country-- you know, we have housing assistance, we have food stamps. I suppose if I had my ideal, people who were working full time shouldn't have to depend on the government for food stamps or for housing assistance, they should be getting enough with their working to pay those kinds of bills. But, increasingly, more and more people are depending on housing assistance, and that we give to some and not to others. Food food stamps goes across the board to everyone, a little more equitable. You know, so if we aren't willing to deal with it, what are we going to do? It's a mandate really that the federal government or state government significantly increase the money that they do in the basics of people's lives.

And that is the heart of the healthcare problem. You know, people don't have the money to-- it's not all of it, but a big part of it is people don't have the money to pay their health insurance premium if their employer isn't paying a significant part of it, and the political dilemma is finding that money to do it.

**DOUGLASS: Okay, let's hear from another student. Yes, back there please.**

**BRYAN DAY: I'm Bryan Day, I'm actually an alumni from Wagner and the director of the alumni program down here. So my question is-- if congressional oversight was all but abandoned in the 109th Congress, as many people are saying, what can we expect differently now that the Democrats are going to be chairing and taking over a lot of these committees that have Homeland Security, like, intertwined all throughout them?**

**DOUGLASS: And you can just add in there a little bit about your views of how the oversight-- how it was conducted.**

**DAY: And if cyber security will be a piece of that.**

**SABO:** I think you'll see significant more activity on oversight. Exactly how they structure it, I don't know. But I think it's got to be done carefully. Good oversight requires lots of work. It's simply not a committee hearing where a bunch of people sit and yell at each other. And it requires good staff work and so— and I— you know, there are experienced folks in doing oversight like John Dingell and Henry Waxman around, who I think know how to organize staff to do good investigative work, and I expect that to happen.

So I think one of the reasons they'll have more— a longer work week is simply there are going to be committees that are going to be doing oversight. But I hope it's targeted and on major problems, not sort of just simply gotcha stuff.

**DOUGLASS:** Tom DeLay said to us in our interview with him, you can ask a follow-up if you want. I didn't mean to chase you away there. That when you're in the same party, you don't do as much oversight. When the president and the Congress are in the same party. What about that?

**SABO:** Maybe some, but— I don't know— there was lots of oversight over Democratic administrations by Democratic caucus— and controlled congresses. I suppose if you really want to go back historically to Harry Truman when he was in the Senate and he had the commission that was following corruption and mispending in World War Two— it was certainly a Democratic administration, and that's been the pattern.

And— you know, I think— the Republicans under Clinton, they did some legitimate oversight, but then they were involved in lots of incredibly petty stuff that gave oversight a bad name and the pettiness of what they were up to at times.

**DOUGLASS:** The Whitewater investigation is what you're referring to? Or the—

**SABO:** Travel office.

**DOUGLASS:** Travel office in the White House.

**SABO:** You know, it's crazy. I don't know- you know, if the White House wants somebody else to handle their travel, I would think that's a basic right. You know, I couldn't believe what was going on there, that was just pettiness.

**DOUGLASS:** Okay. Anybody else here got a question? Yes, ma'am.

**TANYA BROTHEN:** Good afternoon Congressman, my name is Tanya Brothen , I'm originally from White Bear Lake, Minnesota, so— I'd like to thank you for all the work you've done for our state.

**SABO:** Where did you go to school?

**BROTHAN:** I went to White Bear Lake High School, here I go to American University.

**SABO:** Okay.

**BROTHAN:** And I'd like to know what kinds of challenges face the incoming freshman congressmen and women you feel that didn't exist for your class in 1979 and-- I suppose, conversely, what sort of advantages do they have?

**DOUGLASS:** Good question.

**SABO:** Yeah. You know, we were headed into budget problems. And the whole time I've been in Congress, we had budget problems, so that's nothing new. They-- what complicates that, we're getting closer to the arrival of all the boomers at retirement age, which is going to mean that it's a little tougher to deal with than it was even for us in the '90s. And-- I suppose it's a much more globalized world and the difficulty of dealing with those issues.

**BROTHEN:** Thank you.

**DOUGLASS:** Okay, good. That is an interesting point about the globalized world. But you mentioned social security here. President after president, and-- Ways and Means committee chairman after Ways and Means committee chairman-- commission after commission has tried to tackle the question of social security and what do you do to keep it from running out of money.

**You've had-- ideas yourself and made a proposal of your own. Why is Congress just simply, and the government even, Congress and the administration just unable to tackle that problem?**

**SABO:** See, I'm not convinced-- I think we have a real major problem in the long-term of healthcare costs. I am not convinced that same problem exists with social security. I have not looked at it the last two, three years now. But I spent-- you spend some time going through their actuary reports. I always thought they were very conservative on their economic assumptions. And when I got into it-- I discovered that their assumptions of long-term interest payments to the fund were significantly below the history of the last 20 years. If you followed the pattern of the last 20 years, the funds and the program were fairly good.

So I would not move to quick and dramatic change in social security based on those 75-year obligations. But there are two different issues with social security: One is the long-term solvency of the fund. A different issue-- it's related, but it's a

different issue, is our capacity to repay the funds the money we borrowed from it for the general treasury.

They're two-- those issues get all mixed up together, and they're different issues. And that relates to basic fiscal policy we have, not to the social security fund. You know, there's all this-- I think just crazy rhetoric at times, you know, the funds are simply pieces of paper. Well, every savings I have are pieces of paper. You know, I don't have gold in the-- you know-- they're piecing the best investments-- safest investments in the world have normally been considered to be US Treasury debt. And that's what's in the social security fund.

We have to have the resources to repay it when those the bills come due. And that's the tragedy of the fiscal policy of the last several years because we removed the surplus, and we were actually paying down other debt and we were going to have the capacity there to repay the trust fund when those obligations come due. And so the problem-- the biggest problem with social security is not the fund, it's our capacity to repay our obligations to it. And that relates to tax and spending and fiscal policy, not to the fund. Medicare or healthcare is a different issue.

**DOUGLASS: But why does Congress just hit a brick wall every time either side tries to engage in a debate that will actually produce some results?**

**SABO:** Well, in the early '80s we had a commission-- and-- you know it was a real commission, Reagan appointed some, Tip O'Neal and the Democratic leadership appointed some.

It wasn't a phony commission like the Bush one where he simply picked some people who were nominal Democrats and would do what he wanted. The one of the early '80s were, you know, Claude Pepper who was Mr. Social Security was on it-- you know-- folks who were struggling to find what, then, was a very immediate problem. And they came to a solution and Congress passed it.

**DOUGLASS: So it can be done?**

**SABO:** It can be done.

**DOUGLASS: Yes, sir.**

**DAVID HUSBAND: Hello, Congressman, my name is David Husband , I'm a student at the College of William and Mary, up on the Hill interning this semester. I wanted to ask a question that sort of related to the previous question. She asked about freshmen congressmen.**

**And when you were a freshman congressman, you managed to get a first term on the appropriations committee, something which was described as an almost-unheard-of feat. And I was wondering if you could relate the story behind that, how you managed to accomplish that, whether it was really big for you, whether you planned it.**

**SABO:** Well, I'd asked for it. I'd actually-- came here thinking I'd like to be on ways and means, and somebody else from my region was running for it, so I switched to appropriations. Then the word was spread that no freshman would get on.

And I knew that was not totally accurate because California had lost several positions, somebody from California clearly was going on, and there were a couple of freshmen-- Julian Dixon and Vic Fazio were going for it from California.

So I assumed one of them would get it. But I thought the rest of us had no chance. I'd totally given up doing anything to get it. And all of a sudden I was pleasantly surprised to get a call saying that I'd gotten it, and there were actually three freshmen. It was Julian Dixon from California, Congressman Stewart, a newly elected member-- serve-- I think only served one term from Illinois, and myself had gotten on it. I'm not sure how it happened, but I am told that one of the people who really came very strongly out in support of me at a key point was Dick Bolling, who was chairman of the Rules Committee. And he was from Missouri, but he'd had some very close ties to Minnesota, particular with Humphrey in the point in time back in 1948 where there was a dramatic fight for control over the Democratic Party in Minnesota, and he was up there working as an ally with Humphrey, so he had some particular ties to Minnesota.

And he and I had had some very good conversations when I thought I had a chance when asking people for a vote. So you know-- that's all I know. So it was a pleasant surprise and I was assuming I'd end up elsewhere.

**STUDENT: How have Hubert Humphrey and Fritz Mondale inspired you in public service?**

**SABO:** Well I would-- Fritz-- you know is not quite a contemporary, but close. Humphrey was just an amazing person that, you know, he was sort of a political hero all along and an incredibly generous guy and didn't-- if anything-- Humphrey's problem was he was too nice. He could never stay mad at anybody for more than 30 minutes.

**DOUGLASS: Oh go ahead yeah. I see you were going to follow up.**

**STUDENT: I just want to ask a related follow-up to freshman congressman. You're being replaced obviously by the new Freshman Congressman Keith Ellis.**

**And I just wanted to know what you thought about him or the legacy that you've left or the connection to that. And also the controversy that's been caused, sort of, by him being the first Muslim to be elected to Congress. What are some of your thoughts on that?**

**SABO:** Oh that adds a-- I think a heavier burden on him. It--some folks want to be a theologian as well as a politician. And I think that's putting a-- heavy burden on anyone.

**DOUGLASS:** Good question. Okay, you there? Yes, sir.

**MICHAEL HAROLD:** Hi, my name is Michael Harold and I go to American University. I'm a senior this year. And my question is sort of more of a reflection on the institution at large. And you were, you know first elected into office at the state level when you were 22 years old.

**SABO:** Right.

**HAROLD:** Served for 18 years. You were elected to the Federal Government in 1978. So at this point in your career how much do polls matter to you? When it comes time to vote on an important piece of legislation do you vote by the numbers or do you vote by your beliefs? And-- so I guess-- to what degree do you feel that your decision making process is autonomous?

**SABO:** I describe the-- I don't know how to describe that in any simple way for myself. But you know, I don't know particularly-- I've never-- hardly ever taken a poll in my life. I guess in one or two elections I took a poll so--I've never been a poll operating guy.

But you have some sense of where people are and and sometimes it conflicts with what your better judgment is. How you balance those-- I describe it operates in 435 different ways around here. And if I expect there's-- everyone here who has made votes that they know-- they're going to-- are not the most popular in district because they thought it was important and the right thing to do.

On the other hand I expect everyone here at times has made votes that they think are not particularly good, but that's what the folks want back home and it's-- you know not that big a deal. And the other-- that I always say is an important factor in this process is the explanation factor. How much time are you going have to spend explaining some vote? And is it worth all the time and energy of explaining why you did something in contrast of casting a different vote?

And at times I think the explanation factor has as much impact on some issues, how people vote as, you know, whether they're following their own judgment or

reacting to what they perceive is a majority of public opinion in their district. But it blends different ways in everyone.

**DOUGLASS:** Well that's a very honest answer. The explanation factor. And I just want to squeeze in one question myself here on a slightly different subject. Because I had mentioned ethics. And we want to get to that. You were on the Ethics Committee.

**SABO:** Yes.

**DOUGLASS:** A very secretive committee, which has been accused lately, at least in the last several years, of being a somewhat toothless committee, that is not really doing what at least some would like to see the committee do. What is your view of how well the ethics committee does in policing the ethics of House members when necessary?

**SABO:** Well in the years I spent, I was-- there for a little over four years. We had four different chairmen. In the period I was on there we never had a vote that divided along partisan lines. We didn't have many votes, but if we did they didn't divide by party line.

You know, there are critics. I'm never quite sure what they want us to do. I was on one rather difficult case. We issued a report. You know, you don't expel members. You're dealing with people-- members-- who've been elected by the people.

We thought the person had some problems with what he'd done. We issued a report. And the voters in the next election changed who their representative was. That-- you know--the ultimate-- you know I think in this crazy, diverse world we have with all kinds of pressures going on -- you need people with basic character to get elected in this place.

But people in the individual districts have -- if they want to elect a scoundrel they have the right to elect a scoundrel. You know? You need two-thirds vote to expel someone. That's going to be very unusual. And I think you need some general rules in this place.

But the idea that you're going to micromanage everyone so that everybody's wondering-- walking around wondering if they've broken some rule, that's crazy too. You know there's some folks who I think really think should be elected, sent here, and what do we call those big domes? Biospheres or something? You know you put the-- the people here into a biosphere so they have no contact with anybody?

You know the reality of governing is you deal with the hustle-bustle of all kinds of folks who are interested in what we do. And people need to have capacity to deal with those pressures. You know, and the right for people to lobby-- you know, the basic constitutional right in this country is the right to petition your government.

And people petition their government by being organized and having some people lobby for them. You know that's our, it would be one for -- there would not be anybody lobbying this place and nothing would be happening. So we've got to - the bigger-- the more complex our society gets the more groups are organized and more folks putting pressure on us makes our job more tough-- more difficult, but that's why we're elected.

**DOUGLASS:** You have said and others have said as well of-- others-- who've-- we've talked to in this project that-- lobbyists are a not bad thing at all, that they are advocates for either a point of view or-- an industry perhaps that wants its point of view to be explained. But there is a view certainly that lobbyists are able to get access and have influence because of money, because of money in campaign contributions or trips or other benefits that are provided to members. And I guess the question is, does money influence-- policy here?

**SABO:** It can at times probably, but less so that some of those advocates think. You know-- campaigns cost money. And people are going to raise money. And-- you know it's-- and people have to learn-- to make that-- to deal with those competing pressures.

And that's not necessarily just simply related to lobbyists. It relates to the interests of lots of people. And-- you know-- there are two types of people who would not have the need for people being lobbying the place. And those are the people who-- where ideology gives them all the answers to questions. Or someone who's so smart they know everything.

And I haven't found any of-- anybody like that around this place. And I haven't found them out in the public. And-- so we have reporting requirements. And-- you know some of the things being talked about now I'm not particularly a fan of. But it-- when it comes to trips, the fundamental problem with Congress isn't that members are traveling too much.

If there's a fundamental problem is members don't travel enough outside of their little own domain. And so you have-- we have rules in place too, now that you have to report and they want quickest-- people want quicker reporting. Fine. And-- pre-clearance of trips, that probably makes sense. But the prohibited-- you know I think it makes this place even more polarized and more insular than it is now.

And some of the proposals are if it's only non-profits groups. Well-- in some of that-- in my judgment it sounds like if you go to some place run by academics that's good. But if you go anyplace where it's an association of people who actually build something or deliver a service then it's bad because they probably have a lobbyist. You know you I just don't know how you get into all of this, and I think you've got to have some regulation on it, some reporting of it, and-- you know the reality is of all the abuses people talked about--though people are going to jail because they broke existing law. And I think some broke the spirit of the existing regulations on travel and those have got to be enforced.

**DOUGLASS: Okay. Yes sir.**

**SPENCE DRY: Good afternoon Congressman. My name is Spence. I am an intern at the Brookings Institution. And I wanted to address your concerns over the shortness of the work-week for Congress. I was wondering if you could expound on what-- what does the average congressman or woman do-- when Congress is not actually in session? And how has that, would you say, changed over the years? And if you don't feel qualified to answer how it's changed for the average congressman. How has it changed for you specifically?**

**SABO:** Yeah I don't know how to generalize. And it's even harder to figure out exactly how it's changed individually. I haven't really thought about that particularly. You know, but we go to fewer committee meetings here than we used to. And there are fewer, you know, caucuses have task force on issues. I find I go much less to those types of things than before.

But part of that's also a change that happens if you have more seniority here. When you're-- when you're sort of mid-range, you have more flexibility and time. If you're a ranking member on the committee you've got to be at the committee meeting all the time. And you've got to spend lots of time visiting both staff and other people getting ready for those things. So I suppose the biggest thing is-- I'm not sure. To the degree that where my life is different, it's because of the shorter work week. It's part of that, but also when you're-- you have institutional responsibility on a particular committee, that occupies more of your time and you have some less time to do other things.

**DRY: Thank you.**

**DOUGLASS: Yes.**

**JENNY KEENE: Good afternoon, Congressman. My name is Jenny and I'm also from the College of William and Mary and I'm up here interning. And my question has to do with-- you'd just said that there needs to be some kind of basic character in the Congress and we read a couple of articles in preparation for this**

**interview that said that you had never made a criticism publicly of anyone-- Right or Left, Republican or Democrat. And I was wondering what you saw was the impact of this increased-- negative campaigning and how you have seen it change in your term or in your-- ?**

**SABO:** Okay there's much more of it. But -- and there's some of this that goes on here where individual members go out to districts and not necessarily ads, but just make campaign speeches that are negative about an incumbent -- Now I've never done that-- either here or in the legislature. I hate to say--

**DOUGLASS: Never-- never run a negative ad? You've never run--**

**SABO:** No I'm-- and I'm not talking about-- no I've not run a negative ad. I've run very few TV ads as a matter of fact. But I'm talking more in terms of relationship with your colleagues.

And-- I went from Minority Leader to Speaker. And I worked rather hard to try and switch -- get us from minority to majority status. I wouldn't-- as a minority leader I would never go into a majority member's district and personally criticize that individual. I might-- I would be negative about Republicans in general, but not about that person in particular.

And I just think the members need to-- and they-- more of that goes on than I'd like to see. I think on both sides where members go out and they're specific in criticism of colleagues. I've always thought that hurt the-- just sort of the basic nature of the place. And there are ways you can be critical of a group rather than individualizing it to an individual who's your colleague. And I always thought you should have great respect for your colleagues and not personalize opposition.

**DOUGLASS: Thank you. I want to put another question in on a different subject so we don't-- leave this one out. You were an opponent of the resolution to give the President the power use force in Iraq.**

**SABO:** Yeah. Yes.

**DOUGLASS: And the majority of Democrats in the House actually did vote against the War Resolution.**

**SABO:** And that's right.

**DOUGLASS: Even though-- ultimately the Senate did vote-- the majority in the Senate-- not of Democrats but-- it passed both houses. Your leader at the time, Dick Gephardt, was on the President's side.**

**SABO:** Yeah.

**DOUGLASS:** Your whip at the time, Nancy Pelosi, was not. She was opposed.

**SABO:** Yeah.

**DOUGLASS:** What happened inside your caucus there as you all came to make your own decisions? Was there-- was there argument in the caucus? Was there tension? And was there pressure from either of them or encouragement from either of them to go on one side or the other?

**SABO:** You know I don't know. I don't know that I was particularly aware-- the reason I voted that way that's what I felt. And I don't know that I was particularly impacted by the fact one-- with either way either one of them were.

**DOUGLASS:** Do you think it was a vote of conscience for most members?

**SABO:** You know I always hate using that word. Yeah I'm never sure what we mean by vote on conscience. It was-- it was a vote of judgment. Which I-- I think so, you know. Different people came to different judgments on it.

**DOUGLASS:** And do you feel that at this moment you made the right judgment?

**SABO:** Oh yeah. History's proven that was the right vote--. You know you never know if for certain on the votes you did--

**DOUGLASS:** You're one of the few who's been able to say that.

**SABO:** Yeah, you know. You--

**DOUGLASS:** I thought I'd add.

**SABO:** It-- you know, you make judgments and there's -- people always think that we operate-- in the-- the theory where we are absolutely certain every vote we make is pure -- you know-- but there's always the option you might be wrong. In this one-- I was fairly certain I was the right vote and history reaffirms it I think.

**DOUGLASS:** Any other students with questions? Yes sir.

**ZACHARY BRITTON:** Hi. My name is-- Zachary Britton. And I'm from Arnold and Porter. I have to say this, everything that I say I can't be-- is nothing-- has nothing to do with Arnold and Porter has everything to do with my myself.

**SABO:** Mmm hmm.

**BRITON:** I was-- I was wondering-- with regards to balanced budgets-- I know that you have been-- attributed with balancing the budget at one point in the past. I was wondering in future do you foresee Congress being able to operate under a balanced budget?

**SABO:** I think yeah. Yeah. What we did in '93 started us to a track-- it came a couple of years later, but I think what we did was a big part of it. I think they've got to try and get back in balance. I think it's going to be tougher than it was in '93-- for a couple of reasons.

We were helped somewhat in the '90s because of the change in the relationship between the United States and the Soviet Union. So defense spending was lower in that period of time. And the fact is that most of the-- you know the Army, most of their equipment is in ruins practically because of the war in Iraq. There's going to be I think significant rebuilding needed in terms of acquisition and DOD.

We have significantly improved salaries and benefits and health benefits in DOD. So the personnel costs are going to be higher. And the other thing is we're going to have the-- very quickly approaching-- retirement of Baby Boomers, which are going to add a cost that we didn't have in '93. So I think it's going to be much more difficult. I have no magic solutions for them

I think the first thing to do is quit digging the hole deeper, and get some pay-as-you-go rules back in place and then start working on it. Healthcare has to be dealt with. I think the first part of healthcare you have to deal with is the question of why there's some parts of this country where healthcare is much more expensive than in the rest.

And it's clearly not related to labor costs and it's not related to quality. And you start making high cost areas-- get their healthcare costs down. That is a significant impact on the cost of both Medicare and Medicaid in this country.

**DOUGLASS:** You-- had talked about-- thank you very much-- the-- performance of FEMA. The-- Federal Emergency Management Administration. It-- after the Homeland Security-- after it was absorbed into the Department of Homeland Security. Which brings me to a question about Congress's role-- with respect to reacting in the aftermath of hurricane Katrina. How do you think that Congress did in responding?

**SABO:** We passed a lot of money. And how well it's all been used I really don't know. That's one of the things people are going to have to follow. And-- you know I just noticed the other day there were problems with people-- you know-- a cut off

of people who need housing assistance and-- yeah-- the-- Congress is going to have to look at it.

And I'm not ready to pass a judgment. I'm sure that-- you know any time you have a big emergency like that -- you're going to have some funds that aren't in hindsight-- you can be critical of. It's a little different when you're doing it on the spot. So it it deserves a good look.

**DOUGLASS: Okay any more students? Okay, well, I want to thank the students for their questions. And I want to ask you a few personal questions and then we'll release you. You have served under many Presidents. We have Carter and Reagan and-- George Herbert Walker Bush and Bill Clinton and George W. Bush. Can you give us any insights at all into the personalities of the Presidents you dealt with? Any glimpse of personality that we might not know from your point of view?**

**SABO:** I don't know. You know I suppose I dealt more Clinton, an incredibly bright person, inquisitive mind. And-- but I don't know-- I guess everybody knows that so I don't know if that's anything unique, you know.

**DOUGLASS: But what -- one by one. What was your impression of Jimmy Carter? Did you have much dealing with him?**

**SABO:** Not that much. I was a freshman. I thought just a very serious-- good human being who's probably been a much better ex-President. It was sort of his-- initiative was gone those last two years in some fashion.

**DOUGLASS: And what about President Reagan?**

**SABO:** Charming person. Didn't know him much. George Bush, who would have seemed like-- if you could afford to be in his neighborhood, make a very nice neighbor.

**DOUGLASS: And this President Bush?**

**SABO:** Hard to read. I've been there for some meetings. He's always anxious to get out of the meeting with members of Congress and leave it to either the Vice President or some staff members. And-- and-- Bob Byrd will call him back and make him listen for awhile.

**DOUGLASS: And he takes those calls?**

**SABO:** Well, no. He's gets out of the room pretty quickly.

**DOUGLASS: Yeah.**

**SABO:** Yeah. And-- I never had the sense he-- I always had the sense it's pro forma and not that much interest in what members are saying.

**DOUGLASS: Now as you look back on your own career-- do you know at this point-- what it is that you feel proudest of looking back?**

**SABO:** I've been fortunate in both-- in both state and local government. And-- in federal government, I have been twice involved in big budget agreements. We had the '93 budget agreement where I chaired budget committee that we talked about.

Back in Minnesota in 1971 we did major overhaul of school finance, local government finance in 1971. When Dee Anderson was governor the Republicans controlled both houses. I was a minority leader and we were involved in negotiations that went on for a long period of time where, in the end, we did reform-- we had a huge increase in income tax, some in sales tax, to reduce property taxes in the state-- provide for a more-- a better formula for distribution of funding for elementary and secondary education.

Weighing the-- some need-base into it as well as per-pupil. And-- providing municipal aids to a high -- mostly urbanized areas that had high cost municipal services. It was called The Minnesota Miracle. In many ways it's been the framework of state-local fiscal policy in the state every since '71. So you know that was a highlight in '93.

But I also say that of all the things I've been, here was something I didn't have anything to do with in I in my first session. You know when you-- you asked about Jimmy Carter. I sat on the White House lawn when Carter with Begin and Sadat signed the Israeli-Egyptian Peace Treaty.

And-- I always thought in my mind, you know, this is something that might be in the history books a hundred years from now. And-- that would have been Jimmy Carter in the history books a hundred years from now when the others might not be. And I suppose the reality is it's almost 30 years later and I'm still not certain whether that's something that will or won't be in the history books 100 years from now. I thought it might-- had been indications-- the beginning of a very fundamental change in the Middle-East and all the hopes I had they haven't all materialized. And I hope sometime in the future they will.

**DOUGLASS: And if you have thought about this already-- what is-- in your mind, your biggest disappointment-- in your service?**

**SABO:** Probably-- that we haven't been able to figure out how to deal healthcare. We spent some time in Minnesota in the '70s-- trying to deal with healthcare. In part because we saw the-- problem of the increasing uninsured-- this is over 30 years ago-- and tried to do some things on the state level.

We actually did pass a catastrophic plan in Minnesota in the '70s that assured that nobody would be totally wiped out by a medical bill. It existed for a few years. And they got in a budget crunch and it was de-funded. And so that-- I haven't been involved in the details of healthcare here with my committees. But it's interested me for a long time. And the inability for us to find that political solution-- to deal with what I think is just an increasing problem in this country.

**DOUGLASS:** And then final question here-- which we've been asking everyone-- if you were to have someone describe your service, what would you like for them to say about your service here in Congress?

**SABO:** No. I suppose I would like to say that he tried to get into the nitty gritty of it and makes some things happen.

**DOUGLASS:** Excellent.

**SABO:** Thank you.

**DOUGLASS:** That's a very good concise answer. And thank all of you very much. Thank you so much Congressman Sabo.

**SABO:** Thank you.

**DOUGLAS:** It's really been a pleasure.

**SABO:** I enjoyed visiting. Thank you. (APPLAUSE)