



Oral History Interview of James McGovern (OH-013)

Moakley Archive and Institute

www.suffolk.edu/moakley

archives@suffolk.edu

Oral History Interview of James P. McGovern

Interview Date: August 15, 2003

Interviewed by: Joseph McEttrick, Suffolk Law School Professor and Beth Anne Bower, Moakley Archivist

Citation: McGovern, James P. Interviewed by Joseph McEttrick and Beth Anne Bower. John Joseph Moakley Oral History Project OH-013. 15 August 2003. Transcript and audio available. John Joseph Moakley Archive and Institute, Suffolk University, Boston, MA.

Copyright Information: Copyright ©2003, Suffolk University.

Interview Summary

From his district office in Worcester, Congressman James P. McGovern, current member of the House Rules Committee from the Third District in Massachusetts, discusses working with Congressman Joe Moakley. Congressman McGovern talks about his role as legislative assistant, press secretary and legislative director between the years of 1982 and 1996; how the Moakley congressional office operated; and the important role Joe Moakley had in the Massachusetts delegation. Congressman McGovern also describes his campaigns for congressional office; recounts lessons, advice and support he received from Joe Moakley; and concludes with Joe Moakley's legacy of public service and commitment to the people of Massachusetts.



Oral History Interview of James McGovern (OH-013)

Moakley Archive and Institute

www.suffolk.edu/moakley

archives@suffolk.edu

Subject Headings

Boston (Mass.)
El Salvador Politics and Government
Legislators Massachusetts
McGovern, James P., 1959-
Moakley, John Joseph, 1927-2001
Strategic Defense Initiative
United States. Congress

Table of Contents

Part 1

Becoming interested in politics (pre-1982)	p. 3 (00:27)
Working for Congressman Moakley (1982-96)	p. 6 (06:57)
The Massachusetts delegation (1972-2001)	p. 14 (24:00)
Running for congressional office: 1994-Third District	p. 15 (28:00)

Part 2

Congressman Moakley's health (1995)	p. 18 (03:33)
Running for congressional office: 1996-Third District	p. 20 (09:01)
Relationship with Joe Moakley	p. 26 (23:05)

Part 3

Congressman Moakley's legacy	p. 28 (00:20)
Moakley as a model public servant	p. 30 (05:17)

Interview transcript begins on the next page

This interview took place on August 15, 2003, at Congressman McGovern's district office,
34 Mechanic Street, Worcester, MA.

Interview Transcript

PROFESSOR JOSEPH P. McETTRICK: This is Joe McEttrick of the Suffolk University Law School Faculty with Congressman James P. McGovern, and Beth Bower is the archivist for the Moakley Archive. And this is August 15, 2003.

And Congressman, we just really wanted to have the benefit of your contact with Congressman Moakley, and we'd like to ask you a number of questions and suggest that you take us wherever you want the conversation to go.

I guess the place to start would be to talk about yourself, first of all, and to have some biographical information on where you went to school and where you grew up, and what really took you to Washington in the political sphere. And then we can go on to talk about your contact with Congressman Moakley. So why don't you just start by telling us a little bit about yourself?

CONGRESSMAN JAMES P. McGOVERN: Well I was born and raised right here in Worcester. I went to the Worcester Public Schools for my elementary education, Burncoat Elementary School. I did my junior high school years and my high school years at Worcester Academy, and then ended up going to Washington for my college education at American University, where I earned a bachelor's degree in history and a master's degree in public administration.

My interest in politics really began when I was at Worcester Academy in junior high. And it was 1972 and there was a presidential election going on between Richard Nixon and a guy named George McGovern,¹ who happened to be no relation but I thought he had a great name. And I had a lot of teachers who were very involved in that campaign.

¹ George McGovern (1922-), a Democrat, represented South Dakota's First Congressional District in the U.S. House of Representatives from 1957 to 1961, then represented South Dakota in the U.S. Senate from 1963 to 1981. He was the Democratic presidential in the 1972 election, but lost to incumbent Richard Nixon.

And I became very much an admirer of George McGovern and respected his views on ending the war in Vietnam and protecting our environment, and helping people who had fallen through the cracks and who don't have anything. I appreciated his words on civil rights and justice, and so I volunteered on that campaign and was very happy in November 1972 when McGovern won very convincingly the state of Massachusetts. I was depressed when he lost forty-nine other states.

McETTRICK: But you were only responsible for Massachusetts. (laughter)

McGOVERN: But yeah, I figured if they had given me the opportunity to run the whole thing, he would have been president. But my interest in politics just remained, and I knew early on that I was interested in government and in public service. I didn't ever think I wanted to run for anything, but I knew I wanted to be part of it. I appreciated early on that government could be a force to change things for the better, and so continued this interest.

My parents wanted me to go to Holy Cross College which is here in Worcester because they wanted me to stay and live in the same house. I'd still be there if they had their way, but I wanted to get out. And so I went to American University and interned in the office of George McGovern, and worked my way through college in his office. And then in 1980 George McGovern lost his Senate seat and I then went to work briefly for the House Ways & Means Committee. And it was only a temporary job at the time.

And when that was over with, I had heard from somebody that a congressman from Massachusetts was looking for somebody to work on their staff, and they were looking for somebody preferably from Massachusetts. And they told me his name was Joe Moakley. And I knew a little bit about Joe Moakley, not a lot. What I knew about him was that he beat Louise Day Hicks² and that he had ran for Congress as an Independent in order to take her on, and then changed his party affiliation back to what he was originally, which was a Democrat, once he got in. And I thought it was such a gutsy maneuver, and I was never a big fan of Louise Day Hicks,

² Louise Day Hicks (1916-2003), a Democrat, represented Massachusetts' Ninth Congressional District from 1971 to 1973.

even as a junior high school student, but I just admired what I thought was his incredible courage of taking on the establishment.

And so I interviewed with some of the people on his staff, and didn't hear back from them for awhile. So I thought I didn't get the job. And then several weeks after the initial interview, I got a call asking me to come back for a second interview, which I did. Again, it was with the staff. And then the third time I was to come back and meet with Joe Moakley, and I remember going to see him. And he was uncomfortable, I think, with the whole interview process. And he said, "I don't even know what to ask, to be honest with you. I mean, I'm just looking for somebody who's good. Are you good?" And I said, "Yeah." (laughter)

McETTRICK: You had the right answer.

McGOVERN: So he looked at my resume and he noticed that I had worked for a package store for awhile, which was my father's package store. And he said, "Oh, that's interesting, that's great. I like that, that's nice." So it was just kind of an awkward first meeting, and not because he was difficult to have a conversation with, but I think he just never felt comfortable kind of judging people, I think that's what—when you do a job interview, you've got to end up judging who's good, who's not so good, and who's bad. And so I kind of left that, thinking he was a nice guy but I didn't really know whether I'd get the job. And then about a week later, I got a call and they said, "Do you want to start?"

McETTRICK: Wow. So this would be the first part of 1981, probably?

McGOVERN: Well, it was actually in 1982, yeah.

McETTRICK: Nineteen eighty-two. So do you think there was anything in particular in the interview that did it, or you're really just not sure?

McGOVERN: I think the experience at the package store put me over the top, I think that had to do it.

McETTRICK: There was some kind of common ground or understanding there, I guess. So what did he have you do when you first joined the staff? What were his committee assignments?

McGOVERN: He was in the Rules Committee when I started.³ So what I did, basically, I started off I think making twelve thousand dollars a year.

McETTRICK: But you knew the terrain, well, at least on the Senate side although the House was—

McGOVERN: And I was a kind of legislative correspondent/legislative assistant. And basically I kind of took the things that no one else on the staff wanted to do.

McETTRICK: And how large was Congressman Moakley's staff in those days?

McGOVERN: Oh, it was basically—I think total at the time was about eighteen or twenty people in Washington and his district, combined. And I ended up doing issues like foreign affairs and defense and some environmental stuff. But none of the other more senior legislative assistants—whatever they didn't want to do, I did. And so that's how it kind of all began.

McETTRICK: Now who were the people in the office at that time? Who was his Chief of Staff?

McGOVERN: John Weinfurter⁴ was his chief of staff; Sophie Hayford⁵ was one of his legislative assistants, who is still working on the Rules Committee. Mary Herlihy-Gearan⁶ was his scheduler. And in fact, I just came from a weekend with her and her husband. Mark Gearan,

³ The House Rules Committee is responsible for the scheduling of bills for discussion in the House of Representatives. According to the Rules Committee website, "bills are scheduled by means of special rules from the Rules Committee that bestow upon legislation priority status for consideration in the House and establish procedures for their debate and amendment." (See <http://www.rules.house.gov/>) Congressman Moakley was a member of the House Rules Committee from 1975 to 2001 and served as its chairman from 1989 to 1995.

⁴ John Weinfurter was a member of Moakley's congressional staff from 1981 to 1996.

⁵ Sophie Hayford was a member of Moakley's congressional staff from 1977 to 2001.

⁶ Mary Herlihy-Gearan was a member of Moakley's congressional staff from 1981 to 1984.

who used to work for President Clinton, was the former head of the Peace Corps; now he's the president of Hobart-William Smith College. So we just came from visiting them. But she was the scheduler.

Carlton Currens⁷—I don't know what happened to him but he was a legislative assistant. I'm trying to think who else: Joyce Roberts⁸ was the receptionist. And when I first started, that was kind of the team. Jack Dooling⁹ was his chief counsel on the Rules Committee at the time, a brilliant man who died prematurely, very young, but was an expert on all the rules.

McETTRICK: So you were not on the staff? Were you on the Congressman's personal staff?

McGOVERN: No, I was on the personal staff, right.

McETTRICK: And I suppose it's difficult to recall because the years have a way of blending one into another, but what seemed to be the principal focus of the office? At that time, what were the issues, sort of the buzz in the air when you first arrived?

McGOVERN: Joe was always a very hands-on, kind of nuts-and-bolts, bread-and-butter politician. His big thing was, "Answer every letter that comes in here. I want everybody who calls here to get a response." And be responsive to all constituents that call in. I mean, a lot of the constituent work was done up in the district office, but if somebody called in and they lost their passport and they're stuck someplace in India, we were the ones to try to help sort that stuff out.

He was working on this fire-safe cigarette issue¹⁰ at the time when I had arrived. He was involved in a lot of banking issues. But he was known primarily at that time as the go-to guy

⁷ Carlton Currens was a member of Moakley's congressional staff from 1980 to 1987.

⁸ Joyce Roberts was a member of Moakley's congressional staff from 1980 to 1985.

⁹ Jack Dooling was a member of Moakley's congressional staff from 1974 to 1988.

¹⁰ After a family in his district died in a fire that was caused by a cigarette, Congressman Moakley obtained passage of the Cigarette Safety Act of 1984, which established Congressional committees to determine if a fire-safe cigarette was technically feasible, and the Fire-Safe Cigarette Act of 1990, which required the government to develop a test to assess how "fire-safe" a cigarette was. As of 2008, there was still no federal law mandating fire-safe cigarettes, but sixteen states, including Massachusetts, have regulations in place.

when you needed to get something done. And somebody who everybody went to because he was on the Rules Committee and had a very influential position. He was also the head of the Democratic Personnel Committee, which was kind of like the patronage committee. And so he was enormously popular because if you wanted to get somebody a job as a Capitol Hill police officer, or in the folding room or in the post office, he was the guy who you went to and he divvied out those assignments.

McETTRICK: Now who was the chair of Rules at that point—this was Tip O’Neill’s¹¹ speakership?

McGOVERN: When I first started, Richard Bolling¹² was. And then after Bolling was Claude Pepper,¹³ and then after Pepper was it was Moakley.

McETTRICK: And who was the Speaker when you started?

McGOVERN: Tip. Tip O’Neill was.

McETTRICK: And then how long did Tip serve until?

McGOVERN: Tip was there until nineteen—I think he left in ‘86, I’m pretty sure it was ‘86 was when he left.

McETTRICK: So did you feel yourself gravitating towards certain types of issues?

McGOVERN: Or maybe it was ‘84. [sic—1986] I’m not sure; my mind isn’t as good as it—

¹¹ Thomas P. “Tip” O’Neill (1912-1994), a Democrat, represented Massachusetts’ Eleventh and, after redistricting, Eighth Congressional Districts in the United States House of Representatives from 1953 to 1987. He served as Speaker of the House of Representatives from 1977 to 1987.

¹² Richard W. Bolling (1916-1991), a Democrat, represented Missouri’s Fifth Congressional District in the U.S. House of Representatives from 1949 to 1983. He was chairman of the House Rules Committee from 1979 to 1983.

¹³ Claude D. Pepper (1900-1989), a Democrat, represented the state of Florida in the U.S. Senate from 1935 to 1950, then represented Florida’s Miami-area congressional district in the House of Representatives from 1963 until his death. He served as chairman of the House Rules Committee from 1983 to 1986.

McETTRICK: Did you find yourself being pulled to certain issues, or was it really utility in the infield or whatever comes up?

McGOVERN: When I showed up to work for Moakley—I had, again, the experience of working with George McGovern and I was a political activist in college. I had been arrested, but I did a thousand different—

McETTRICK: Arrested in a good cause?

McGOVERN: Yeah, in a good way, in a good way; not very bad. I mean, I organized demonstrations at my graduation. You know, I came from a very activist—I wanted to change the world; I wanted to work for Joe Moakley not just to help Mrs. O’Leary find her lost little social security check, but I wanted to change the world. And so any opportunity that came my way to do anything that I thought was profound, I jumped at it.

And I remember what he did—one of the first things I worked on, I had a group of constituents come to see me, who had just come back from Chile; this was in maybe December of ’82 whatever. And they were very concerned about the human rights situation there, and were concerned that the Reagan administration was going to certify that human rights had improved and send all this military aid down there, and wanted us to see whether we could get some support to oppose that.

McETTRICK: And was this the Pinochet government?

McGOVERN: Yeah, Pinochet still was—in fact he’s been a fixture there for as long as I can remember. But I remember going to Joe Moakley and saying, “Look, I had this meeting and I was really impressed. And they showed me their notes, and what’s going on is awful.” And he kind of looked at me and he smiled, and he rolled his eyes maybe a couple of times and said, “Fine, go ahead and do it. Get something together and let me look at it.”

And so when we circulated the letter throughout the entire Congress, getting signatures on it opposing the certification of human rights improvement in Chile. It didn't do any good but I think it was the first substantive thing that I remember working on.

McETTRICK: Now what did you take away from those first few years? I think Joe is the sort of man that you'd constantly be learning by observing him. And how did you grow as you worked in the office?

McGOVERN: What I walked away with those early weeks as I was trying to size him up was that he was a guy who was willing to do things. He was a little skeptical about some of the ideas that I brought to him, but if you could convince him that it was a good idea and there was merit to it, then he would, then he'd agree to go along.

And what I learned later is that it was more than just "agreeing to go along." I mean, he's very casual in his approach to things. There was never a very formal situation where there's a thousand memos going back and forth. When he agreed to do something, then he put his whole heart and soul into it, and carried it to the furthest point that he could take it. And so we did stuff like that on human rights.

I remember I had brought to him some experts on space-based weapons. And this is before Ronald Reagan gave his "Star Wars" speech.¹⁴ Moakley already had a couple of amendments to prohibit anti-satellite weapon testing. And then we had a bill that we drafted to prohibit the deployment of a space-based ballistic missile defense system. And he got into that.

I remember we had a briefing one day with Carl Sagan,¹⁵ who came down and briefed some of his colleagues. Richard Garwin,¹⁶ who was very involved in the development of our most sophisticated weaponry, was also there. And Moakley, again, he would always say, "I'm not an expert in the specifics here, but I'm smart enough to know that if we start going down this path,

¹⁴ In a March 23, 1983, speech, President Ronald Reagan outlined his plan for the Strategic Defense Initiative, which would involve using ground and space-based systems to prevent nuclear missile attacks against the United States. The speech has become known as the "Star Wars" speech.

¹⁵ Carl Sagan (1934-1996) was an American astronomer, astrochemist, and author.

¹⁶ Richard Garwin (1928-) is an American physicist.

we're going to expand the arms race into outer space and it's going to cost us trillions of dollars, and it's going to come out of the things that I care most about.

“And the other thing I've learned from scientists and experts is that there's no such thing as a 'perfect' missile defense system. You can always find ways around it. So this is crazy; let's not rush down this path.”

And he became really prominent for his advocacy of arms control and leading the effort to try to stem the expansion of the arms race into outer space. I noticed a couple of columns. I know there was one in the *[Boston] Globe*; I think it was by Susan Trausch. And I don't remember quite when it appeared, but I think it began with saying, “Joe Moakley is not a twilight zone type of guy. But yet, he's championed this issue.” And again, he really got into it and held dozens of briefings and brought in experts. He had amendments on the floor to try to influence the debate.

And again, for some it would seem out of character, but for those of us who were closest to him at the time, it was very much in character because—he looked at it, “This is taking away from things I care about: people.” And so he thought it was worth the fight.

McETTRICK: Now how did your world change over the years and in the staff as time went on?

McGOVERN: I became a full-fledged legislative assistant, then I became press secretary/legislative assistant, and then I became press secretary/legislative director. My final years there were kind of like, you know, do whatever he wanted me to do. I handled the press but I also helped steer his legislative agenda, as well.

McETTRICK: I remember when we were talking to Congressman Moakley, he had pointed out at one interval in the conversation that he had never really made a television ad for campaigning, and that he really saw himself as coming from another political era in many ways. And I was just curious—you said that you handled press relations for him. What was that like? Was he

seen as being different in approach from other members of Congress, or how did he do other things?

McGOVERN: One is—I think you could talk to a lot of reporters. They would say he was very different in the sense that there was total access. And Joe Moakley, unedited, unplugged. No off-the-record comments; everything was on the record, and he would just tell you what he felt.

McETTRICK: Now did that make your job easier?

McGOVERN: Yeah, I'd sit there going, "Uh-oh, that's a headline. Oh, boy." But he would say what he felt. And so he was a fascinating interview, he was a great quote, because he would just spew these things out, exactly what was on his mind, and not couched in any kind of careful political or diplomatic terms. He just said what he felt—boom, that was it.

McETTRICK: So how did the legislative director aspect of the job work? It's one of those titles you think you know what it means, but what did it mean on a day-to-day—how was legislative policy generated, or how did his concerns get focused in terms of that legislation?

McGOVERN: A lot of it was just making sure that the others on the staff had the support they needed and help focus them a little bit on making sure that they kind of finished what they started. And for me, on the issues that I cared about, it was making sure that they moved up. I was involved in a lot of different—his work on El Salvador; his work on Cuba, the work on refugees that he championed. But making sure that the staff was focused and that we were doing more than just saying, We care about this issue. We were actually getting things done.

McETTRICK: What do you think it was about Congressman Moakley that meant that the office could get things done? What made him effective with his colleagues in Congress? Because there are some congressmen who never really seem to accomplish much, but Joe did a lot in Congress. And how did that work from your perspective?

McGOVERN: Well, when I first got elected to Congress he gave me a bit of advice that I thought was amongst the best advice that I've ever received from anybody. And that is: If you want to be effective here, get to know everybody on a first-name basis. It's not the people who give the most speeches or hire the most expensive press secretaries; it's the people who build relationships with their colleagues here. Those are the people who get things done.

Because not everything that Congress deals with is a partisan issue; not everything is an issue that splits evenly between Democrats and Republicans. There are a lot of things that get done that aren't so partisan. But the way you get them done is, you talk to your friends and say, "Will you help me do this?" And, "Can I get your vote on this?" And, "I know you're from Alaska, but this is important in Massachusetts." And if there's a good relationship there, if there's this feeling from your colleagues that, Geez, he's a nice guy, I want to help him out, he's fair, then you get things done. And that's how he did it.

There was nobody I ever met in Washington, whether they're a member of Congress or a member of the Senate, or staff or anybody, who did not like Joe Moakley. Everybody liked him. They all thought he was a good guy. And he was. But I think that enabled him to get things done.

I remember when he became the chairman of the Rules Committee, I remember a reporter said to him, "Well now you're in charge; you can stick it to all your enemies." He said, "Look, no." He says, "For some people, power is the ability to say no. There are lots of people in Washington who say no just because they can." He says, "To me, power is the ability to say yes. I mean, I want to say yes to everybody; I want to help everybody." And that was his approach on everything. It was about helping people, saying yes to people.

I mean, you came in, and no matter what you asked, he wanted you to leave with a smile on your face. And the only way he could do that was by saying, "Yes, I'll do that for you, I'll help you do that." And sometimes it had to do with legislation; sometimes it was silly things that people came in to talk to him about. But he wanted to be able to say yes.

McETTRICK: Well, it was frequently said in the newspapers that because Joe was a senior member of the Rules Committee that he had a special role, therefore, in the Massachusetts delegation. And the delegation was really well positioned in that era, with Speaker O'Neill and the Rules Committee. How did that come about within the delegation? What would be the relationship between Congressman Moakley and the other congressmen? Now, was there a close working relationship out of it?

McGOVERN: Yeah, absolutely, there was a very, very close relationship, and Moakley learned a lot from Tip O'Neill. Tip O'Neill deserves a lot of credit because his obsession was not only about his own position and his own ascension to the speakership. But I think he knew that part of what would be good for Massachusetts would be to make sure that everybody was positioned on key committees that could actually make a difference.

And so when Tip went to run for the leadership position, he was on the Rules Committee. And he went to Joe Moakley and said, "Look, you should go on this committee. This is a good committee for you; this is an important committee for our delegation. We need to keep it in the family." And Joe Moakley did, and he made sure that others were positioned in Appropriations, and Energy and Commerce, Transportation. All the committees that mattered, we'd have somebody on.

When Tip left and then Moakley became the dean, Moakley kept up that tradition, making sure that members of our delegation were on important committees that were helpful to the state, and not on committees that didn't mean much for the state. And so even today, the Massachusetts delegation is still rated amongst the top delegations in terms of clout because we're all positioned on good committees. And we owe that to Tip O'Neill and we owe that to Joe Moakley. But Joe understood it just like Tip did.

McETTRICK: So there was really an obligation to the newer members of the delegation to really bring them along for the benefit of the people of the Commonwealth that was really a stated objective?

McGOVERN: When Joe Moakley was dying, we had a conversation about the Rules Committee. I was on the Transportation Committee and on the Resources Committee, which were two great committees. And he said to me, “I think it would be good for you to be on the Rules Committee.”

And I said, “Well, it’d be great to be on the Rules Committee,” because I had worked with him all those years, and for part of my time I was on both his staff and on the Rules staff. But I said, “I don’t know whether that’s within the realm of possibility.”

He says, “If you’re interested,” he says, “I’m going to make the pitch.”

I said, “Well, I know Gephardt¹⁷ has promised the seat to a lot of”—because Gephardt was the Minority Leader at the time, and to be put on the Rules Committee, either the Speaker of the House or the Minority Leader have to appoint you. And I said, “I know Gephardt has promised it to a lot of people.” He said, “I have a plan.” I said, “What’s the plan?” He said, “I’ll say, ‘Dick, I’m dying, I’ve got three months to live. I have one favor to ask you. Will you help me?’ And get him to say ‘yes.’ And say, ‘I want to get McGovern to go on the Rules Committee.’” He said, “How can he say no?” (laughter)

And that’s what he did. And Gephardt came to me and after Joe died, tried to see whether I would reconsider and let him out of his pledge. And I said, “No, I’m not. This was important to him, it’s important to me, it’s important to our delegation.” But that’s how I got on the Rules Committee.

McETTRICK: Sure. Which really introduces another topic, which is that you yourself are now a congressman and maybe you could tell us a little bit about the transition over time from being on Joe Moakley’s staff to the idea that perhaps you should run for Congress, and what role did Joe have in your maturing as a candidate for Congress.

¹⁷ Richard Gephardt (1941-), a Democrat, represented Missouri’s Third Congressional District in the U.S. House of Representatives from 1977 to 2005.

McGOVERN: In 1994, I decided I was going to run for Congress. Peter Blute¹⁸ was the congressman from this area, in the Worcester area, the Third District. And he's a personally nice guy, but I just disagreed with everything that he stood for. And I just thought, You know, maybe it's worth coming back to my district and taking a shot at this, and seeing if maybe lightning will strike.

McETTRICK: So his district covered the city of Worcester?

McGOVERN: Yeah, Peter Blute included Worcester.

McETTRICK: And was he the only Republican in the delegation?

McGOVERN: No, no, Peter Torkildsen¹⁹ was the other Republican. And so I went one day to talk to Joe. I said "Look," I said, "You may think this is crazy, but I want to run for Congress."

And he said, "Where?" (laughter)

McETTRICK: Did he take the news well?

McGOVERN: I said, "In Worcester."

He said, "Oh, Jesus. Well, can you win?"

And I said, "I think so."

And he said, "Jesus, are you sure this is what you want to do?"

I said, "Well, I feel this is the moment."

¹⁸ Peter Blute (1956-), a Republican, represented Massachusetts' Third Congressional District in the U.S. House of Representatives from 1993 to 1997.

¹⁹ Peter Torkildsen (1958-), a Republican, represented Massachusetts' Sixth Congressional District in the U.S. House of Representatives from 1993 to 1997.

And he said, “Well then, if you feel it, then do it.” And he said, “You know, when I ran for Congress against Louise Day Hicks, everybody told me not to. In fact, even my good friend Tip O’Neill told me not to, and supported Louise Day Hicks for reelection. And I did it because I just felt it was the right thing to do, and so I’m not going to talk you out of it.”

He said, “I don’t know what kind of chance you have, but if you want to do it, you do it.” And it was a very easy conversation. And I thought it would have been a more—I was worried that he would feel—you know, might feel embarrassed, or he might feel awkward that someone from his staff was going to run against somebody from the delegation. And he may have felt those things, but he never let on. He just said, “Look if that’s what you want to do. If you’ve made up your mind just do it.”

END OF PART 1

McETTRICK: Yes—Jim you started to tell us your—mentioning to Congressman Moakley that you were interested in being a candidate for Congress yourself. So this would be for which race?

McGOVERN: This was 1994.

McETTRICK: Nineteen ninety-four, and so what happened after that? After that conversation when you got the green light, or was it blinking yellow?

McGOVERN: So I worked out a leave of absence, which was something he had never granted to anybody before. His philosophy was when you leave, you leave. And I was prepared to leave, and he said, “Look, let’s just work it out that in case you don’t make it, you can come back.” And so I came back home and ran, and it was a very crowded Democratic field. And in retrospect, I ran kind of a not-so-good campaign.

McETTRICK: So your fight was in November.

McGOVERN: No, I was there. My big battle was getting to the primary first, which was in September of 1994, and there were a lot of candidates. And to be honest with you, things that I thought would be difficult were easy; things that I thought would be easy were difficult. And I just wasn't prepared for that. My biggest fear would be that I would look ridiculous if someone asked me a question and I wouldn't know the answer, or I'd sound stupid. I mean, that's kind of the—do I know enough to go on the campaign trail and to present my issues?

And that I found was easy, relatively speaking. The difficult thing for me was just the retail politics, just walking into a room of five hundred senior citizens and joining them in a line dance and shaking hands. I just wasn't comfortable, I wasn't at ease; I just hadn't done that before. You know, singing songs and all the—

Or selling myself to voters; it just never occurred to me that it would be difficult to say, "Vote for me 'cause I'm great." I mean, it's easier to say, "Vote for Joe Moakley. Geez, he's done a great job, he's the best." "Vote for me 'cause I can do the best, and I'm the best"? I mean, I come from a family where my mother used to yell at my sisters for looking in the mirror too long. So it just was awkward.

And notwithstanding the awkwardness of the campaign, I lost my primary. I came in second, I think, out of eight candidates. It was a close primary and I came in second. And when it ended, on primary night, I was relieved because I wasn't very comfortable as a candidate.

So he called me up that night and said, "What the hell happened?" (laughter) I said, "I lost." "Yeah, I saw that. Why?" I said, "Well I don't know, I'm going to have to figure this out." "Yeah, I'll see you in the office next week." And so that was his words of comfort on that night. But I went back, figuring I had gotten this out of my system.

McETRICK: Now who was the victor in that primary, how did that person make out?

McGOVERN: State Representative Kevin O’Sullivan, a good man, a great state rep who ran—and Peter Blute decisively beat him in the fall, again, so Blute went on to win his second term. By that point, Blute was considered unbeatable.

And so I figured, I’m done, and I went back to doing the stuff that I cared about. I was pretty happy, but still kind of aggravated that Peter Blute was still there. And then Moakley got sick. His liver—he needed a liver transplant; the hepatitis had reoccurred. He had asked me to be his healthcare proxy, which I was, and his wife got sick at the same time. And it was a really—I remember—an awful several months. And I don’t remember the exact day that he had the liver transplant but I know it was around the fourth of July of 1995, I’m pretty sure, because him and his wife had adjoining rooms at Mass. General Hospital. I remember one night seeing the fireworks outside his window.

And one night after coming home from seeing him in Boston—I had just arrived in Worcester and my mother said, “They just called. Moakley is ready to get his transplant.” And it was going to be done down at the University of Virginia, and we were going to take a plane out of Norwood Airport, on one of those little Med Jets. And the plan was for me to meet him there, and get on the plane with him and go down.

And so I had a friend of mine drive me to the airport. In fact, the guy who drove me was this guy Bob Patton. He’s a retired firefighter who still drives me around; he still gets lost. But we got lost that day getting to the airport, we couldn’t figure out where the hell the airport was. And I was like, “He’s going to die if I don’t get there.” I mean, I didn’t have a cell phone—“Could we call and tell him to take off?” or whatever.

And finally I had arrived at the airport and there was the plane, all ready to go. And if you ever know anyone who’s had a liver transplant—I mean, you don’t get the transplant until you’re about to die. The ammonia levels increase in your head so you hallucinate; it’s hard to focus. It’s an awful situation to be in, but because of the shortage of organs, they hold off until the very last minute.

So I get into the plane, and he's sitting up with a cup of black coffee. And he says, "Where the hell have you been?" I said, "Well, I got lost." He said, "Jesus Christ!" And then he kind of went back into a trance.

McETTRICK: That made you feel good.

McGOVERN: Yeah, and then we got to the hospital, and it just seemed like we waited forever. And he was with it, and he joked with the doctor. He says, "Doctor, please don't give me Mickey Mantle's old liver," because Mickey Mantle had just had a liver transplant. And he said, "And don't give me a Republican liver, 'cause I'll definitely reject it." So I mean, he was joking with them before this kind of life-threatening surgery.

And then it took him a long time to recover. In fact, a lot of people don't know it, over the years, all of his different health problems. He only had a piece of one kidney, that's was all he had. He called it his "kid." And I remember one of the things that is not uncommon when you have a liver transplant is that your kidneys sometimes shut down temporarily. But since he only had a piece of one kidney, the doctor was nervous that we'd have to put him in line for a kidney transplant, because how was this little piece of kidney going to survive? And so he was on dialysis, I think, for a couple of weeks as we were trying to figure out what was going to happen. And then miraculously the "kid" kicked in and he didn't need a kidney transplant.

But it was during that period I lived out of a Howard Johnson's hotel in Charlotte—is it Charlotte or Charlottesville? I can't remember now; I put it out of my mind, but where the University of Virginia is.²⁰ I lived at a Howard Johnson's hotel; my wife spent most of her time up in Massachusetts with Evelyn,²¹ who was sick. And so I had a lot of time to think. And I had just kind of convinced myself that I should give it one more chance against Peter Blute.

McETTRICK: Now what position were you in, on Joe's staff?

²⁰ The University of Virginia is located in Charlottesville.

²¹ Evelyn (Duffy) Moakley (1927-1996) was Congressman Moakley's wife. They married in 1957.

McGOVERN: I was the legislative director/press secretary.

McETTRICK: So essentially what you would have been doing?

McGOVERN: Right, yeah. And so I decided to myself that I'd want to do this again, and my wife came down to visit me for a weekend and we went out to a nice restaurant. And anyway, we got talking about the congressional race and I did the reverse psychology on her saying, "You know, I got a bunch of calls from people who think I should run again, but I don't think I should, do you?" I tried to go that route, you know. And she saw through it; she knew that—she said, "You've already made up your mind, so why are we even having this conversation?"

And so Joe finally got dismissed from the hospital, and it took awhile. One of the things the doctor told him was, "Please don't make any public speeches or don't make any big decisions for at least a couple of months, because it's going to take that long for the medication to kick in. And until that time, you're kind of in a manic stage. But give this two months, and you'll be as good as new."

Which he didn't want to do, and was trying to make—during that time he thought about retiring and thought about—he talked to me about, "Maybe I could be ambassador to El Salvador; maybe I should be ambassador to Cuba. And maybe I should do just something dramatically different with my life now."

And I said, "Well, why don't we talk about that in a couple of months, as the doctor said?" And he kept on talking about "Well, I should do something different." So he grew a beard. And a couple of people said, That's a bad idea. And in fact, he was in a supermarket in South Boston and one of his constituents, an older lady, said, "Joe Moakley, is that you behind all that facial hair? Act your age!" But he said, "Look, I just want to do something for me. And it's either grow a beard or buy a Mercedes, and if I buy a Mercedes all the unions will be pissed at me, so I'm going to grow a beard."

McETTRICK: Now what was your advice to him on the beard? Were you pro or con?

McGOVERN: I was so nervous—I was very protective of him at the time, I found, because I didn't want him to do anything rash. And the beard was the last thing on my mind. And I had showed up to work one day and he said, "Well, I think I'm going to quit. I think I'm going to say I'm not going to run again." And I was like, "Ohh!" So he had already set up a press conference without me knowing about it, and I told him, "I'm not going to be part of it because this is dumb. If you want to retire in two months, I'll work with you on the speech; it'll be great. But you got to do what the doctor tells you to do."

Anyway, after long conversations—I think also that we hooked his wife up to the—she was in the hospital; she told him, "Don't think you're coming home to me, 'cause I don't want to be used as an excuse here." I don't know what happened, but at the end of the discussion, he understood that this was a rash decision and decided to go up and just tell people, "Look, I'm going to run again."

So I prepared a ten-sentence statement which he went up to the Press Gallery and discarded, and gave a rambling press conference that, if it were me, that would have been the end of my political career. But with him, people loved him so much and it was so endearing in some respects that this guy just didn't want to give up, that this just kind of—it added to the legend of, Joe won't go, Joe's going to fight, he's going to keep on fighting.

I remember coming back with him—I forget what we were doing; I don't remember—but everywhere he'd walk on the street, people would roll down their windows and say, Hey Joe, keep fighting! We're with you, we're with you! And if that were me, it would be, See ya! Go, retire! Get outta here! They wanted him to get better and they just were with him. It was just remarkable, I mean, the affection.

And then the two months went by, and it was like, Bing! Everything just clicked. And he was sharper than ever before, his spirits were good. He was focused, he was energetic. He wanted to take on the whole world, and it was amazing. And one night he came up to me, we were out to

dinner or something and at the end of the evening he said, “You know, I’m glad I didn’t leave because,” he said, “I love this job so much. I don’t know what the hell I was thinking.”

But anyway, shortly after, when he got back into the swing of things, then I went back to him; I think it was in January. I said, “Look, I want to do this again.”

And he said, “Well, fine, but we’re going to do this differently, this time around. And you’re going to listen to some advice, and you’re going to run a campaign that’s a lot different than the one that you ran before. You got to learn a few jokes, and you’re going to start acting like a human being on the campaign trail, and not like a robot.” And it was kind of frank but fatherly advice.

McETTRICK: But a great coach to have.

McGOVERN: Oh, yeah, you know. I said, “I can’t tell jokes like you can.” He said, “Tell the Murphy the Spy joke.” I said, “Every time I tell it, people look at me like I’m crazy.” He said, “Your delivery is off. Got to work on the delivery.”

But he paid a lot of attention, and he’d check in almost every other day. You know, “What’s happening today?” Or, “I heard this today,” or “I heard that,” or “Have you got any money from this guy?” or “Has this guy come forward for you?” And “I heard someone saying this about you, which was not so nice. You’d better call him up and schmooze this over,” all that kind of stuff. And he made a whole bunch of appearances out here for me; helped raise a boatload of money.

Sometimes he was too helpful. I was running against Blute; John Tierney²² was running against Peter Torkildsen. The conventional wisdom was I was supposed to get creamed, and Tierney was supposed to sail to an easy victory over Torkildsen. And the national unions had these independent campaigns going on. They had invested in Tierney’s race, and they didn’t invest in

²² John F. Tierney (1951-), a Democrat, has represented Massachusetts’ Sixth Congressional District in the U.S. House of Representatives since 1997.

my race. And the question was, “Why ain’t you helping McGovern out?” And one of the AFL-CIO spokesmen said, “Because we’re only going to help people that we think have a chance of winning,” which Blute then held up and said—I should tell you, by the way, I had no primary, too. So I won a landslide victory—

McETTRICK: Oh, so that’s what I’d like to know.

McGOVERN: Because Blute was supposed to win so easily, I had no primary. The former mayor of Fall River, John Mitchell, was going to run against me, but then he got indicted so he decided not to enter the primary. So it was just me alone.

But anyway, Moakley’s madness—I told him, I said, “Gee, wouldn’t it be nice if the unions helped me out, too?” And so he called up John Sweeney, the head of the AFL-CIO and said, “You’ve got to help McGovern out; you’ve got to help McGovern out.” And then he called the *Boston Globe* and said, “The unions are going to help McGovern out. I called Sweeney and I chewed him out, and they’re going to invest in his campaign with these independent expenditures.”

Well Sweeney then calls back and says, “We can’t do independent expenditures, which are supposed to be independent, when you’ve just told everybody that we’re going to invest in his campaign, which implies it’s not independent. Now we have to stay away from him *totally*; we can’t get near him in any way.” And so anyway, sometimes he went a little bit overboard.

But he checked in with me, and on election day I was convinced I was going to lose, for two reasons: One, the *Boston Globe* editorial page endorsed Blute, and when I asked why, they said, Because you’re going to lose, and not only are you going to lose, you’re going to lose big. And so we want to be balanced here; we need to endorse a Republican and therefore we’re going to back Blute, because Torkildsen is going to lose to Tierney, no doubt about it, and Blute will beat you. So we figure we got to be balanced; this is the race to be balanced in.

McETTRICK: And that made you feel good, going in?

McGOVERN: Yeah, I was like, “I thought you had a soul, but I guess you don’t.” But anyway—and there was no indication from anybody that all the articles that appeared the day before and the day of, were that this would be an easy Republican win.

And so Moakley called me in the morning and he said, “I feel good. You’re going to win today.” And I said, “Well geez, I hope so. I don’t know what-the-hell else I could have done, but I just don’t sense it, I don’t feel it. I mean, I feel like I’m at a wake.” Everybody was coming up to me and saying, You ran a good race. Hey, someday. You know? But he says, “You know, you’re going to win. I know you’re going to win.” And I said, “Well, I hope you’re right.”

Then at eight o’clock at night when the polls closed, almost all the TV stations and the radio stations said Blute had won. I mean, I went to change and give my concession speech, and when I arrived at my headquarters, the numbers were coming in and I was winning. And as it went on, I won. And Tierney, interestingly enough, was in a recount because it was so close in his race. But I won overwhelmingly, and the first person I called was Joe Moakley.

McETTRICK: No kidding.

McGOVERN: Yeah, he went, “What did I tell you this morning?” I said, “Yeah, you told me I was going to win.” “What the hell were you worried about?” “Oh, nothing, just my whole life was on”—and the next day, I did a series of standouts, you know, holding a thank you sign, and he joined me in Attleboro, which was a place where I surprisingly won. I was supposed to get creamed there and I won. And he stood out with me. I got a great picture of me and him standing out, holding a thank you sign. But he was very proud.

McETTRICK: And why do you think he was so confident that you’d win? I mean, he had good political instinct, obviously.

McGOVERN: Yeah, I mean, I don’t know whether he really was, or whether he was just saying that to get me through the day. Maybe it was the new medication he was on that made him think

more positively. But I think he just sensed it. I mean, I was here every day campaigning and so it's hard to see the progress you're making when you're just in it every single day. And he'd come in every few weeks, and he'd just pick up signals from people who a couple of years earlier were saying, There's no way, to now, Hey, things are moving. And so I think he started to feel the momentum was on our side.

And I think for him that victory—I mean, it was huge for me. I can't recall a time in my life when I was more elated, when I won that night. But I think for him, too, this was the most exciting thing that's happened to him since his election in 1972 because he was very much a part of this.

And for some, my running was—people were saying that Moakley is making me run. Well, he wasn't; he didn't want me to run. I mean, he wasn't urging me to run; he wasn't against it, but he wasn't urging it. He was giving me advice, but this wasn't Joe Moakley's agenda to spread his power throughout the state. I mean, this was two friends, two very close friends, and he was helping me by just giving me advice and keeping me sane.

McETTRICK: You know that's an amazing story. So then you had to shift gears because now you were coming into the Congress. And how did your relationship shift, then, with Joe when you had to vote yourself?

McETTRICK: Two things: My first plane ride down to Washington as a member of Congress, he was on the same Boston flight I was on. And we walked onto the flight; as we were walking on, he turned around and he said, "Hey, Jim, will you hold my bags, please? Thanks." So in that regard things didn't change too much.

And then I remember, at our first Democratic Caucus meeting, I wanted to show some independence so I purposely sat away from him. And I saw him standing up looking around. And I'm like, "Who's he looking for?" And he said, "Hey, Jim!" So I said, "What?" figuring he had something important to tell me. He says, "Call Deborah, tell her I want a turkey and cheese on white bread, and easy on the mayo, and a cup of black coffee." I said, "Geez, I thought now

that I'm a congressman I won't have to do that anymore." He says, "Do you want that seat on the Transportation Committee?" (laughter)

But what ended up happening is that, for me, it was a tough transition because I knew everybody who was down there, and I had a very different role up until just then. But Joe made it very easy. And he watched out for me, made sure I got a good committee assignment. He knew it was important to me to deliver some money back home in my first year, and pulled out all the stops to go to bat for projects in Worcester and Fall River and Attleboro, and made sure that I came back with a lot of money. And then what ended up being a pattern was that at every vote, I'd sit down and he'd sit next to me, and, "What's new? What's going on?" And so it just developed into more of a colleague-to-colleague relationship.

But with him, for me, it was more than a professional relationship; it was almost like a father-son relationship. And it's hard to describe to people, but I feel like I've been through so much with him. I mean, the legislative stuff, but the sicknesses, and—you know, everything. And so it was more than a professional relationship or a colleague-to-colleague relationship.

I mean, it was more personal; it was family. And look it, I got a great father, but I had another good father. I mean, I had two fathers, that's the way I look at it, and he took care of me.

McETTRICK: You know, it's interesting, we've talked to several people that have worked with Congressman Moakley in different contexts, and that word always comes up, the idea of a family and the loyalty of the staff. Could you tell us a little bit about that, how his staff was affected by the illness, and so forth? But what was it, really? What was the glue that really made that staff into a family, I guess, would be the question?

McGOVERN: I think just everybody loved him, and everybody respected him. And one of the things that I think some people don't understand is that not every congressional office is the same. There are some congressional offices, when you walk into in Washington, where no one on the staff can call the congressman or the congresswoman by their first name; it's very formal. There are some offices where you can't go see your congressman, if you're working there,

without going through a chief of staff to get permission to go see the congressman. I mean, there are some people who run their offices in a very, very formal and regimented way.

With Joe Moakley, even the first words out of his mouth when you ever met him, whether you were on the staff or not, was, "I'm Joe; call me Joe." And everybody had access to him who worked for him. And it got to the point where people had access to him not just with regard to their day-to-day work, but people would go to him, I've got a family problem, or I've got this problem or that problem; can you help me out? And he did.

I mean, there are thousands of examples where he fixed things for people on his staff, in their personal lives, that that's not in his job description. But he genuinely cared about everybody. He didn't have any kids of his own so I think he kind of looked at all of us as his brothers or sisters, or sons or daughters. And a loyalty developed there that really was—it was incredible. And I don't think there was anybody on his staff who didn't feel loyalty to him, absolute loyalty to him. I mean, there's not a person on his staff who wouldn't jump off a bridge if he said—if he said, "Jump off a bridge," we'd all jump off a bridge. I don't want to imply blind loyalty, but just an enormous respect for him and for what he was about and the kind of person he was. And he wasn't perfect, but he inspired that kind of loyalty.

END OF PART 2

McETRICK: Well I think that from your remarks, it's clear that in a very real way, you are part of Joe Moakley's legacy, in that he really brought you into the task and prepared you for it. But how would you describe more broadly what Joe Moakley's legacy is? The reason we're interested is because part of the function of the Institute is to explain that legacy and to bring it forward to younger people and to those who might be interested in politics.

So how would you see Joe's legacy now as we proceed over time?

McGOVERN: I think there's a lot of different things. One is everybody who has been touched by him or who's worked with him, I think, believes that public service is a good thing, that

government can be a force for good. Moakley's admonition to us all the time was, "Remember, no person is unimportant; everybody deserves to be treated with respect." And I think he set a high standard for government service, I mean, he really did.

And all of us who are in Congress now in this state are conscious of the fact that his service to his constituents was legendary. And we're always being told by somebody, "If only Joe Moakley were around, he'd get that done like that! Well, why can't you do it?"

But he took an interest in every single case. Sometimes he'd be in his office and it would take too long for someone to pick up the phone. He'd pick up the phone and then he'd be doing the case work, and he'd follow up. And there are lots of stories of individuals—not even in his own district—where he made a thousand calls to fix something, or get their heating bill paid for, or their electric bill paid for.

So part of it is that government service is honorable, public service is honorable. Joe Moakley's life was honorable in every single way. Politics is a good thing, it's a good profession, the way he defined it. And it's about helping people.

The other thing is, on the issues that he's worked on. I mean, El Salvador is at peace today because of him. He did it; he created a climate where the UN could come in and begin the process of negotiating a peace. And the people closest to those negotiations will tell you that Moakley did it, the UN people will tell you that. The guerillas will tell you that, because they didn't think the U.S. government was serious about peace until Moakley cut off military aid to the army.²³ The army will tell you that they got serious because Joe Moakley sent a signal that the blank check has just ended. And so he created a climate where this could happen, and I think that's important.

²³ In December of 1989, Speaker of the House Thomas S. Foley appointed Moakley as chairman of a committee to investigate violence in El Salvador, specifically the November 16, 1989, murder of six Jesuit priests, their housekeeper and her daughter at the University of Central America in San Salvador. The investigation determined that the Salvadoran military was responsible for the murders, the U.S. aid to El Salvador was subsequently ended.

His help of the Salvadoran refugees created this thing called the temporary protective status,²⁴ which is used to protect refugees from all kinds of countries where there's violence. So millions of people are being protected because of what he's done.

You look at Boston, at the skyline, the courthouse, Boston Harbor—that's Joe Moakley. Even in Worcester here, I mean, I can take you on a tour of Worcester and show you Joe Moakley in Worcester. I could take you to show you Joe Moakley in Springfield, and Joe Moakley in Fall River, and Joe Moakley in Lowell and Lawrence. I mean, he's everywhere.

So much of what is positive in this state, so much of the government investment, is because of Joe Moakley. Now a lot of us take the bows for it, because that's the way he wanted it, but the way these deals were made was with his strong arm behind it. I mean there's so much in this state, so many federal initiatives that have Moakley's fingerprints all over them. So I think that's part of his legacy. And the other thing, too, is he just was a good man. And there are good men and good women in politics, and I think he's evidence of that.

McETTRICK: It would seem that part of your experience with him is his ability to bring younger people along; the idea that there are those that come forward and say that they're interested in public service, and he seemed to have a way of bringing the best of them. Can you tell us a little bit about that? I mean, since you're in office now, yourself, how do we bring people like that along and get them into politics?

McGOVERN: You take them seriously, you believe in them, and you give them room to grow and to fight for the things that they care about. I mean, politics and government is not that interesting if you're doing things that you don't think is important, if you don't feel that you're

²⁴ Starting in 1983, Congressman Moakley introduced legislation to protect Salvadorans in the U.S. using the "Extended Voluntary Departure" provision that allowed a temporary stay of deportation and work authorization. Moakley was finally able to pass legislation that granted Temporary Protected Status (TPS) to Salvadorans in the Immigration Act of 1990 (PL. 101-649). TPS grants temporary legal residency and work authorization to immigrants fleeing civil wars, natural disasters or other conditions in their home country for a set period of time. In El Salvador's case, TPS has been extended several times since 1990. The TPS designation has been used by other countries experiencing civil unrest and is administered by the U.S. Citizenship and Immigration Services (USCIS). (See <http://www.uscis.gov>.)

helping people. And I think he enabled us, those of us who worked with him, to spread our wings and do our thing.

And he used to joke; he used to tell people that, “Jim McGovern is my good left hand,” as opposed to his right hand. He said I’m always reeling him in, to get more into the mainstream, because he’s too “out there” with these liberal causes and stuff like that. But a lot of these things he believed very strongly in. And he helped take some of the things that I thought were important and made them happen. And so for me, working with him was always a rewarding situation. Because it wasn’t just about showing up for work every day. It was about actually pursuing some things that I had an interest in.

McETTRICK: Joe seemed to leave me, when I interviewed him, with the idea that, well, he was fortunate because he was the product of another political era that put a lot of emphasis on constituent service and real retail politics. And he thought that things seemed to be shifting to the point where it was hard to pursue that model any longer because of the realities of holding a congressional office, of fundraising and so forth.

How do you see mixing those ideas together, Joe Moakley’s approach with success in the political environment that we’re in now? Is it possible to bring those things together?

McGOVERN: I think that Joe Moakley’s brand of politics is still very fashionable amongst people. Maybe some politicians haven’t found it to be fashionable, but I think most people—and most of his constituents will tell you they appreciated a representative who was responsive, who cared about the little details in their life which may be little in the sense of the big picture, but were huge in their individual lives.

And he cared very much about those details, and about people. He remembered everybody he met. If he’d meet you, he’d say, “Oh, Joe McDonough. Was your grandfather John McDonough? And didn’t he marry that lovely girl, Mary O’Leary?” And I mean, just the family tree—he knew more about your family than you did. But he had this passion for it.

And again, he believed that every person was important; every person deserved to be treated with respect. And I think we need to try to recapture that. And I think people who have worked with him, who have been touched by him, are very much dedicated to that. I spent an awful lot of time, more than most of my constituents, doing one-on-one office hours, and meeting with small groups, and calling people on the phone, and writing notes and stuff like that, in part because of what I learned from him. A lot of my colleagues don't think you need to do that, and maybe you can glide by without doing that. But the bottom line is that if you want to be relevant in people's lives you've got to be there, and you have to be willing to help.

And he was always there, and he was always willing to help, and he was not so big and fancy that people felt uncomfortable approaching him. Nobody ever felt shy about going up to him, no matter where he was. I mean, they'd knock on his door in the morning, and they'd be there at his front doorstep, asking for help with something. I'm sure Evelyn, his wife, thought that was annoying some days, but on the other hand, it's really wonderful that people felt so comfortable.

The other thing too is—I said this when I spoke right after he died—that I think he is an incredible tribute to South Boston. South Boston is a very complicated place, and I think the fact that someone like him could get elected, continue to get elected, and to do some of the things that he has done, which—some of them are very worldly; some of them are also very parochial. But to be able to do all he did, I think, is kind of a tribute to that community in so many ways.

He loved South Boston, he just loved it. And I think some people's image of South Boston was tainted by some of the racial divisions in the 1970s. I think he's helped show that South Boston is a much more open and diverse and tolerant community than some may have thought. Not being from South Boston, but as someone who's come to appreciate South Boston, I think that's a nice little addition.

And then I think that one of the final things is—I said this when he died—I said, "You know, he taught us how to live and he taught us how to die." I've never seen anybody die with such grace and humor, and calm and—I mean, it was incredible; it was inspiring.

I got a call from the doctor one day, shortly before he died. He said, “Look, the leukemia is spreading and things are going to move quickly, so we want to find out whether he wants to stay here, Bethesda Naval Hospital, or whether we want to bring him back to Boston. And if we need to do it, we have to do it *now, today.*” So we had votes, but I left. I went up to see him at the hospital. And before I said anything he said, “What’s wrong now? I mean, you wouldn’t be here, there’s votes going on. What’s going on?” I said, “Look, they had a couple of questions and they wanted me to ask them.” And he said, “What are the questions?”

I said, “Do you want to be here, or do you want to be in Boston?” He says, “Where in Boston?” I said, “Do you want to go home?” “To my house? On Columbia Road?” I said, “Yeah.” He said, “I haven’t had that place cleaned for three months. It’s a shithouse. What do I want to die in a dirty house for?” I said, “Okay, well, what about Mass. General? Do you want to go to the Mass. General or a hospital up in Boston?” He said, “What the hell’s the difference between being in this room or that room? And the other thing is—if I’m up there, then people will know more about every little ache and pain I have. I mean, look, I’m totally at ease here.”

And then he said, “You know, it’s amazing but I have not lost a minute of sleep. I’ve slept like a baby.” He says, “I’ve eaten well, I’ve had good bowel movements, everything has been great. I mean, no complaints,” he says, “it’s been unbelievable.” He says, “I’m not weary, I’m not nervous.”

He said, “The only complaint I have is that they don’t have HBO in the hospital and I missed the season finale of ‘The Sopranos’.” He said, “That’s the only thing that bugs me. But I read the review and it said it wasn’t that good, so I didn’t miss much.” And he said, “Maybe I’ll catch it in the re-runs.”

But I left him that afternoon, figuring there’s nothing imminent here; this could go on for a long time, because he was sitting up, looking great, making phone calls. When I walked in he was having an argument with a college president—I’m not sure what college it was—about trying to get some girl into the school. And he said, “I need to know now so I can call the parents, and at least get credit for the fact that I delivered on this thing.” But that’s what he was doing.

And then at about four o'clock the next morning I got a call that he had started experiencing pain for the first time, and so they put him on a morphine drip, and he just kind of slowly went into a coma. And then a couple of days later, on Memorial Day, he died. But it was traumatic for everybody around him, but for him it just wasn't—

The courage to be able to look at all this the way he did—and he said to me that part of it was that he had had so many near-death experiences, that he's "been here before." It's like, "I know all of it is about to happen, so it's nothing new to me." And he said, "I've done everything else in my life, so I might as well die now, you know?"

But there just was no fear, but a total—kind of at peace with everything. And very worried about everybody around him, making sure everybody was comforted, and comforting people. Knew every nurse, every doctor, the person who brought the food, knew the people who mopped the floors. Apparently, when he was alone, he would just kind of wander the halls and just talk to people. And they all liked him.

I wrote this in an Op-Ed piece after he died, and there was a male nurse; his name was Joe RouLaine, who—you know, this is Bethesda Naval; this guy was military through and through: "Yes sir, no sir. Can I get you a pillow, sir? Can I get you any Jell-O, sir? Here's a tissue, sir." Anyway, he was watching Moakley constantly. And this guy, his wife had just had a baby two weeks earlier; he helped deliver the baby. Talk about—I could barely be in the room when my wife had the baby, but he helped deliver it. And when Moakley was in his coma state, right before he died, I don't know if he could hear us or whatever, but this was Lieutenant RouLaine's last day before he went on a three-day leave. And I think he knew that he wouldn't be there when he came back. So he asked—the family was there—whether he had permission to say goodbye. And he got up and said, "Mr. Moakley, I don't know if you can hear me, but it's been an honor to get to know you. And I appreciate all you've done," and kissed him. And it was—well, anyway.

McETTRICK: That's extraordinary, Jim, it truly is. And you're right; really there are some people that really do teach us how to deal with death and how to die. And he certainly was one of them. Well, you've been very generous with your time.

McGOVERN: No, my pleasure.

McETTRICK: Was there anything else that you wanted to get to, or Beth, did you have any?

BETH BOWER: No, I don't.

McETTRICK: We don't want to miss the opportunity.

McGOVERN: I think we've really—

McETTRICK: Thank you very much.

McGOVERN: No, my pleasure.

McETTRICK: I think we've learned a lot. Thank you.

McGOVERN: All right.

BOWER: Thank you.

END OF INTERVIEW