**President Hemesath:** Good evening. Welcome to Saint John’s. I’m Michael Hemesath, President of Saint John’s University. And I’m honored to be with you this evening for the eighth annual Eugene McCarthy Lecture of Conscience and Courage in Public Life. We are privileged to have with us this evening Abbot John Clausen, the former president of Saint Benedict’s, Sister Colman O’Connell, and several Saint Ben’s and Saint John’s trustees, who are here just to make sure we are staying on the straight and narrow. Also joining us this evening are Senator Eugene McCarthy’s daughter Ellen McCarthy, his son Michael McCarthy, and other members of the McCarthy family and friends.

We are gathered here tonight to have a conversation about conscience and courage in public life to honor Gene McCarthy. Saint John’s was always in Gene’s blood. While only nineteen years old, Gene graduated from Saint John’s with top academic honors, while also excelling in baseball and hockey. He inspired countless students in our classrooms here on campus, and was even a member of the monastic community for a short period of time. Even though Gene’s life guided him to congress eventually, Gene never left this place. We found him visiting the campus and community often during his public days. Tonight we also want to recognize a man who demonstrates Gene’s values of conscience and courage each and every day, former US senator Dave Durenberger.

We are grateful to Katharine and Dan Whalen for endowing the Eugene J. McCarthy Center for Public Policy and Civic Engagement at Saint John’s. Through the centers programs, internships, and other student opportunities we carry on Senator McCarthy’s commitment to the common good and to civic engagement. While the Whalens are unable to be with us this evening please join me in acknowledging their wonderful support for the Eugene McCarthy Center.

*[Applause]*

And now I’d like to introduce Dr. Matt Lindstrom the Edward L Henry Professor of Political Science and Director of the McCarthy Center.

*[Applause]*

**Matt Lindstrom:** Thank you President Hemesath, and welcome and thanks to all of you for your attendance and support of the eighth annual Eugene McCarthy Lecture. Tonight we welcome back to campus Senator Durenberger and Gary Eichten two iconic Johnnies who manifest our impressive tradition of graduates working on behalf of the common good with a spirit of civil discourse. I’m especially grateful to both of these gentlemen. For their involvement not only tonight, but with the McCarthy Center really since day one. Finally, a big thanks to Minnesota Public radio who is recording tonight’s event and will rebroadcast this or broadcast this in the near future. They have a little bit of an in, there’s someone on the stage here, so that’s helpful.

*[Laughter]*

It is my distinct pleasure to serve as the Director to the McCarthy Center, and have the opportunity to really work closely with so many impressive colleagues, alums, and students. And one of those students, in fact is Katie Tillman who will introduce our distinguished guests. Katie is a senior Political Science double major with German and Poli Sci as I mentioned, from Shakopee Minnesota, and has been involved with the McCarthy Center for the last several years. She is a recipient of the McCarthy Center’s John Brandl Scholarship for summer internships and in fact spent last summer in Bosnia working at the Center for Civic Initiatives. So thank you Katie for introducing tonight’s guests.

*[Applause]*

**Katie Tillman:** Thank you Professor Lindstrom. It is an honor for me to introduce tonight not one but two very exemplary individuals. Both of whom have their humble beginnings here at the College of Saint Benedict and Saint John’s University. First, Gary Eichten. For the past twenty years, Gary has graced the morning routines of many Minnesotans as the humble yet insightful host of Minnesota Radio’s Midday Program. The remarkable lifelong career in broadcast journalism began when Gary took a job as a student announcer on the little start up radio station called KSJR here in Collegeville in 1967. This little station evolved into Minnesota Public Radio, the station that 800,000 people across the state know and love today. In his over forty years at MPR, Gary has served in a variety of capacities, as News Director, Special Events Producer, Station Manager, and host of all the major news programs. He has had the honor of interviewing figures like Governor Jessie Ventura, Governor Mark Dayton, and former Vice President Walter Mondale. He had the burden of communicating the news of Paul Wellstone’s death to the people of Minnesota as the events unfolded in 2002. His passion and talent has not gone unnoticed. Gary has received several national awards for his career in journalism, including the Corporation for Public Broadcasting’s award for Best Local News Program. Additionally he contributed to the development to two Peabody Award winning documentaries. In an era in which journalism has been plagued by talking heads and negative rhetoric, Gary Eichten represents a beacon of sanity. Tonight Gary Eichten will be interviewing our eight annual McCarthy lecturer, right here on stage. Please give a big welcome to former Midday host and MPR Editor at Large Gary Eichten.

*[Applause]*

Thank you*.* Now it is my pleasure to introduce this year’s Eugene J. McCarthy Center Lecturer Senator Dave Durenberger. Dave is an extinguished alumnus, policy maker and author and he is well acquainted here on our campuses. He was born in Collegeville and grew up at Saint John’s. His father George was the athletic director here at SJU. He attended Saint John’s Prep School and graduated from Saint John’s University in 1955. While on campus, he was involved in the ROTC program, eventually going on to serve in the United States Army as an officer in Military Intelligence. He attended law school at the University of Minnesota, and served as then governor Herold LeVander’s Chief of Staff from 1967 to 1970. Dave was elected to the United States Senate in 1978 and the seat formally occupied by Mireille Humphrey after the death of her husband, Hubert Humphrey. He had the honor of serving 3 terms, the longest of any Republican Senator in the history of Minnesota. During his 17 years in office, Dave has impacted many facets of the policy making process. He served 16 years on the on the senate’s finance committee, 12 years on Environment and Public Works, 10 years of Health, Education, Labor and Pensions, 4 years on Government Affairs and 8 years on the select Committee on Intelligence. His passion for health care reform inspired him to lead the Minnesota Citizens Forum on Health Care Costs by the appointment of Governor Tim Pawlenty and inspire his authorship on two books, “Prescription for Change” and “Neither Madmen or Messiahs”. Of all these accomplishments, it is his dedication to bi-partisanship that makes him a true testament to the values embodied by Eugene McCarthy. Whether it was President Bush’s 1,000 Points of Light bill or President Clinton’s National Community Service Act, Dave Durenberger was always willing to reach across the aisle and vote with the interest of the American people, not just his party, in mind. His long career in public service serves as an inspiration for aspiring leaders on both sides of the aisle. Please join me in welcoming Dave Durenberger.

*[Applause]*

**Dave Durenberger**: Thank you all very much.

**Gary Eichten:** Thank you Katie. Appreciate it. But we’ve asked Senator Durenberger this evening to look back on that long distinguished career of public service and take a look at some of the lessons that have been learned and some of the lessons that probably still need some learning. Senator thanks for joining us this evening, I appreciate it.

**Dave Durenberger:** It’s my pleasure to come home.  
  
**Gary Eichten:** So, before we get into public policy, this that and the other thing, what did you want to be when you were growing up here in Collegeville? Did you want to be a US Senator?

**Dave Durenberger:** No. Even a year before I ran in my senate race I didn’t want to be a US senator. (Laughter) I wanted to be a priest for a long time. It was probably my junior year of high school that I wasn’t cut out for it. Latin was a requirement, I wasn’t that good at Latin, I think there was more that was required than just Latin. (Laughter) That’s the one thing I remember wanting to be and after that, it was like of like “Ok, let’s see what tomorrow is.”

**Gary Eichten:** A lot of people have already asked me to ask you about gridlock; polarization. Might as well get right to it as long as we are here to talk about civic engagement, civil discussion, and all the rest. First of all, has Washington always been like it is today?

**Dave Durenberger:** Let me tell you my first introduction to Washington, DC. This happened before I even got to the senate floor. There were twenty of us elected in 1978, half Republican, half Democrat. I took office before everybody else did. I was 81st in seniority, and I had never even seen inside the senate before. So, what I did have, within 48 hours of my selecting to the senate finance committee, the most powerful blah blah blah, was a handwritten letter from its chairman, Russell Long of Louisiana. I didn’t know Russell Long, I knew of Huey Long of Louisiana, but I didn’t know Russell. So I had this handwritten letter from Russell Long which described in summary detail the relationship between Minnesota and Louisiana, going back to the Louisiana Purchase. So, when I met him I said, “With all due respect, Mr. Chairman, I know I have a lot to learn, I want to start with that letter you wrote me. You know, what does that mean?” And he said “Well,” this was 1979, and were our second energy crisis, oil and gas prices are going through the roof. “This year, were going to have windfall profit stacks on gas and oil before the committee. And in Louisiana, all we do is produce gas and oil. And in Minnesota, all you guys do is burn it. So, if it’s just between the two of us, guess who wins? And then he said very quickly, this I will never forget, he said” Fortunately, the founders of our country decided there should be two of us, there should be one body, legislative body in this country, in which there were two senators from every one of the states.” And by the time, he said this precisely “By the time all states have been heard from, we get national energy policy, because its good for my constituents, and its good for yours.” That’s the senate I went into.

**Gary Eichten:** It doesn’t sound like the Senate we know today.

**Dave Durenberger:** No, its not the senate we know today.

**Gary Eichten:** We have an election in two months, and we expect dramatic change as a result. Are we in a position that we can expect the voters to make, to insist, basically, that by golly, we want some change. We want action in Washington, or more of the same?

Dave Durenberger: So, my one experience with that kind of election was 1978. People were to quote the movie Edward, “Madder than Hell.” They decided that since the Democrats were in charge and inflation was going up and Jimmy Carter couldn’t find, you know, whatever it was he was looking for in Tehran at the time, they decided to use Republicans. And, I was one of them, Rudy Boschwitz was another. And we were being used. So today, you look at the polls and it looks like the republicans are going to win the senate again, at least the latest poll that I saw. But behind that, polls are telling you that congress has a 7% approval rating with all these people out here in this audience, not just in Minnesota but all over the country. That’s interesting. David Brooks in the New York Times said “We have a crisis, we have a morale crisis. People don’t know who to trust.” So, maybe a bunch of mad people go to the polls and a bunch of Democrats say they should go and vote so the Republicans don’t get in, but there is a significant number of us, who wish we had better choices that we have been given in the last year, and that we might be given at the polls today. And I’m not sure where we are all going. I know both sides, in Minnesota, would like me to endorse them. I’m sure other former senators have been asked the same thing. But, because I have the feeling that I just expressed to you, with my experience about the United States Senate, at a time like this, what an incredibly important body it is. I can’t just be, you know, if I’m a republican so I give an automatic republican endorsement, or if I were a Democrat, an automatic Democrat endorsement, I just think right now, times call for something else, and if we don’t get it from the candidates I’m not sure right now where we are going to get it. It’s a burden I feel.

**Gary Eichten:** We should clarify you were elected as a Republican,

**Dave Durenberger:** Yes

**Gary Eichten:** Basically a lifelong, but no more? Or are you still? What do you call yourself today?

**Dave Durenberger:** I still call myself a Republican, but as soon as I describe what kind of Republican I am I get in trouble because I want to use words like pragmatic. You know. I never got anything done without finding a Democratic senator who’s constituents had the same kinds of problems my constituents had, and together we’d design a solution. In so far as the difference between liberals and conservatives ally on the role of government we’d find a way to do it. And that’s why I was successful.

**Gary Eichten:** How is Barack Obama done as president? Now you supported him, when he ran correct?

**Dave Durenberger:** Well, I voted for him. Cause the other choice was John McCain, and I knew John McCain pretty well.

*[Laughter]*

I served with him, served with him for a long time. John has many strengths and he’s got a couple of critical weaknesses. So, yes I voted for him I walked the line June 4th. I did not go to a Democratic primary, because I’m not a Democrat. In Minnesota people were standing blocks long to get into their primaries. But on June 4th the snow was gone the ice was gone and 35,000 Minnesotans were lined up to get into the Xcel Energy Center. On June 4th which was when Barack Obama, Senator Obama, and Michelle were here. To do their fist bump and say “Here we go.” And I walked the line for an hour and a half, just asking people who recognized me “What are you doing here?” And every one of them said. First, not one of them said anything bad about George Bush. Every one of them said “I’m here to see history made.” 35,000 people, I will never forget that. So, history’s being made in October, I think 17th, 17th of September the whole financial industry is collapsing. The President of the United States and the Secretary of the Treasury call both the Republican and the Democratic candidates to the White House. Guess who steps up and says “I’ll help you bail out the financial industry.” It was not John McCain. It was Barack Obama. I mean why would a Democrat want to bail a Republican President, or his Secretary, or even some of their followers out of this. But he did it. And then he took on the challenge in the middle of 700,000 people a month being laid off from their jobs, not just laid off but just getting rid of the jobs. He decided to take on something that no other president had been successful at, passing a healthcare reform bill, and not one single Republican supported that effort. Even though it improves the quality of healthcare, the effectiveness of healthcare, and expands the coverage. It takes the burden off of all of us who pay health insurance for having to cover out of our insurance plan people who don’t have coverage. He did that, and what happened? So, I’m not making excuses for the President. I’m not making excuses for the fact he has improved his golf handicap from twenty-two to eighteen. I wish he had the gift of communicating with us today as well as he did during the campaign. Wednesday night is going to be the first time we see him in a long time, in whatever time he’s going to get from the networks and the cables and so forth, to talk to us about something that none of us understand, and a week ago he said he didn’t have a strategy for it. I’m sure it’s hard to understand, but it’s not impossible. Nobody out here believes that the President of the United States hasn’t got all the information that’s available on this ISIL or whatever it is. And there is a lot of things he can’t do about it, but he ought to by now be able to frame the issues for us so that when we have to face him we can say “Yeah, God I’ll write my Senator and my Congressman to get behind you.” He hasn’t been able to use his natural gifts and that hope-y change-y thing or whatever it was that everybody said that they expected from him and he hasn’t been able to use that to communicate with us as well as he could.

**Gary Eichten:** I’m just going to say, besides some specific policy ideas that Barack Obama ran on, he also told us he was going to change the culture in Washington. And if anything it’s become more divisive and more polarized. Why was he not able to do that?

**Dave Durenberger:** Because he’s trying to catch it in the middle of a cycle. It’s like stopping a sled on an icy hill, or your car, you know when your car starts spinning out of control on ice. It’s pretty hard to stop it in the middle before it hits another car or something like that. He meant it when he said it. Every one of us said right on, but half the country said “Not with that guy.” And a good share of those people didn’t like the fact that he was an African American.

**Gary Eichten:** Do you think racism is a big part of that?

Dave Durenberger: Oh, of course! Good question, you look at the polls, look at where the votes are coming from, look at the heat where someone says don’t go soft at a certain point if you want to get any republican any democratic votes. Look at who’s in trouble in the senate. The last surviving Democrat in the South is David prior, or David Prior’s son, Mark Prior. You can’t tell me there isn’t a lot of that going on in America. But there’s a lot of other negative feelings, too, being expressed.

**Gary Eicthen:** When you were riding high in the Senate in the 80’s, there was talk that Dave Durenberger might end up as a presidential candidate, did want to be president?

**Dave Durenberger:** Never. I had a colleague in my class that I came in with 1978, Larry Pressler, from South Dakota, who told us about 6 months after he’d gotten there that he should be president. Now he’s running for senator in South Dakota again, I think. But I recall looking at Larry, talking to Larry, and I said, ‘Oh my god’ what makes you think you can be president? He said, well I don’t know, it’s worth trying and that was about it. No. Honest to God no, never. I learned, I don’t want to say I loved the senate, that’s not the appropriate expression. But I learned early on to appreciate what an incredible gift that office is, and you don’t want to waste a lot of time. You know, and taking advantage of it. And the President has a whole different set of priorities and expectations and things like that. But this body, unlike the house and like lots of other places, there is nothing like it in the world. And everybody kind of, like, knows that. And I was privileged to discover that early on as I’m sure Gene did when he had that same opportunity. For me, it was just not time to be wasted. It was just not an opportunity to turn my back on. And I ended up being pretty good at it.

**Gary Eichten:** The people who did run for president got elected. In your lifetime who’s the best president, and who’s the worst one

**Dave Durenberger:** That’s the one question I didn’t think you were going to ask. The President that was able to get the most out of the time that he had was George H.W. Bush. Ronald Reagan, by comparison came to office with 16 brand new senators and the big swing in the country, ‘we’re tired of inflation’ and high interest rates and stuff like that. We’re ready for anything and we get President Reagan. With him came a vision he had a lot of momentum and a lot of us took advantage of that momentum, but a lot of us also had to do a great deal to reshape some of the ideas that he had in order to make them effective. The 1986 tax act was a good example of that. For a person who had a short term with Democrats in both the House and the Senate, I would say George H.W. or ‘41 did, in one year I recall, we did the Americans with Disabilities Act. We did the Clean Air Act, and incredible piece of work with a Republican President. We did the Civil Rights Restoration Act and there were probably other things. He also had the gift of people that worked for him in the White House were not second guessing him around the Senate or the House or something like that. He had a very loyal staff and a very committed staff. He never tried to bite off more than he could chew, except in Kuwait, but that’s a whole other issue. As an underrated President, I’d like to nominate him for your list. I’m going to put somebody else on the list as worse even though his record says we had a great economy and all the rest. I only put Bill Clinton on that list because we have not, in my lifetime, elected somebody with that much potential and that includes Barack Obama. Bill Clinton has the most unique gift God’s ever given to any human being. That’s something God didn’t give him but he acquired some other place I think. We all talked about this, when you were with Bill Clinton you were the only person in the room, even though there was thousands of other people. As soon as you walk out the door everything that he told you everything he was going to support he was going to do he would change his mind. He never took advantage of the opportunity given all that talent that he had when he was president.

**Gary Eichten:** He of course faced impeachment, Richard Nixon almost was impeached, well he was on the verge of being impeached when he left, but is that a good way to deal with presidents you don’t like?

**Dave Durenberger:** I suspect not (laughter). No its not, those were just circumstances that were unique, both in a way did themselves in, but I don’t know if in this day and age if impeachment is still an appropriate tool. I haven’t given it a lot of thought, but I don’t think its an appropriate tool, certainly this talking about impeachment with the current president, especially when the talk is coming from people who have down everything they can to cut him down, is inappropriate.

**Gary Eichten:** Can we talk about your situation for a little bit? You were really one of the most influential senators in America, there was talk of you running for president even though you weren’t really interested and then you had your fall from grace in 1990 when the senate voted unanimously to censure or denounce you for misuse of public funds. I don’t want to regurgitate all of that but what I am interested in Senator is, from a personal view point, I mean you came from this background of ethics, of morality, you lived your life like that and you were on top of the world, and then your weren’t. What’s that like?

**Dave Durenberger:** On the bad side its hell, on the good side its opportunity. The first term I spent four years trying to get reelected otherwise all of the work would have been wasted, but in my first term I discovered what I could get done in a second term. So the second term became a large part of what happened. I spent all of my time in that second term with this job I had and all of these opportunities to be seized. Did you know a United States senator can pick up the phone and talk to anyone in the world and they will answer the phone? That’s incredible. But the bigger gift is the gift you have whether its education, healthcare, environment, or all these kinds of issues, but putting together the legislative process you are elected to deal with and I burned myself out on that process and what I did was delegate a whole lot of my personal responsibility that I should have been accountable for to other people and when the 1988 election came along and a bunch of lawyers part of Skip Humphrey’s Campaign filed a complaint with the ethics committee because I took my son Michael to Puerto Rico with me and the company that sponsored my trip to Puerto Rico paid for Michael’s trip, that became an issue in my campaign. That’s how I got to the ethics committee. But by the middle of 1989 my first year in the Senate I discovered that after me were the Keating Five, Alan Cranston and Al D’amato, there were about 8 or 9 United States Senators, but I was the first one of the list. And I knew what being first on that kind of a list meant. So I asked, well actually even before that, this is important to me at least, just the fact that I had to deal with delegating away what was my own responsibility because of the power that I thought I was able to use for good purposes taught me something about myself that I didn’t like and I changed who I was as a person and I will never regret that. That’s when I say it was a good experience. I was a changed person from that day on. I won’t go into the rest of the details but it was reflective in everything that I have done after that and as I hope that I do today. With regard to the Senate unanimous vote, I did that on purpose. I went to those who were closest to me and who were helping me in my defense, to ask everyone on the senate to vote for my censure and they did.

**Gary Eichten:** How long did it take you to get over that whole process?

**Dave Durenberger:** I haven’t gotten over it. But I can tell you what it did for me as a person, helping me recognize the person that I could be and should be as a part from being the Senator, that sort of thing. I went, for example, just to give you and illustration, to Tim McGuire, the editor of the Minneapolis tribune, and the Minneapolis Tribune had done a better job than anybody else at cutting me down wherever they could, and we sat down over lunch one day and we talked about what he was doing, what I was doing and I wasn’t trying to render or solve any problems, I just wanted him to understand what was going on with me and I wanted to understand what was going on with him. During the course of that time we spent together he broke down and cried, he told me nobody has ever talked with him like that before. He then began to tell me the story of his life. We have ended up, even though he is now in Arizona, in a small group of Catholic men who meet every morning that talk about our faith, our walk of life, the trial others are having that we can contribute to in one way or another, so I use those just as an illustration of, and I’m sure other people have been through a lot worse than what I have been through, but in a way, I don’t want to say grateful for having gone through this because you can’t be, the people who have to live with this are my family, but they also get to live with a little better person than I was when this all started.

**Gary Eichten:** You mentioned religion, what role, in your mind Senator, should religion play in the public sphere? Is it purely a private thing, is there a role for religion to shape public policy, what’s your thinking on it?

**Dave** **Durenberger:** Oh, you better, and I hope maybe I’ve alluded and I haven’t done it maybe as well as I should but I hope I’ve alluded to the fact that your faith is a very personal thing to you. And mine is to me. One of the greatest gifts I’ve been given is produced right here at St. John’s University. Every morning I open it up, and it’s “give us this day our daily bread.” So, my faith is very private to me I’m a Catholic and I practice and so forth, but my faith is very private to me. And in the United States Senate, every Wednesday morning a group of us, there were as many as twenty-four, twenty-five, men and women who got together, and they still do this they’ve been doing it since 1952, Jewish senators and you know, regardless of the background, get together and talk about their faith to each other. And it’s very important to who you are as a person and to understanding who the people are who you are dealing with when you are in an intimate kind of situation like we’re in. But when it takes the next step, which get into what we call the activity of the religious right the social issues and all the rest of that sort of thing. Where someone in that religion is telling you that this is what you have to do as a United States Senator, No. You can’t do that.

**Gary** **Eichten:** Is there a time that you look back on and say “This is the golden age of politics in America. This is the time we should look back on, learn those lessons, conduct ourselves as people did back then”? Any time like that?

**Dave Durenberger:** Not in my life time. I’m hoping the golden age is out ahead of us. I have to hope that, to be optimistic, and I have to be optimistic because today I talked to a whole bunch of these students who weren’t even alive when I left the senate, when I left the senate, not when I got in but when I left the senate. That’s a marvelous opportunity to listen to people like my own grandkids who want to believe that in the people that we elect every time we go to the polls, there’s hope. This change you can believe in and the hope and everything like that, the 35,000 people that wasn’t just Barack Obama, that’s something that everybody feels, and the worse things get, the more of us feel that, and the more of us need that. And so I don’t think there was ever a time when any kind of a golden age. The time I served, with the example I gave you of Russell Long, and the many example I could give you of the work that I did with my Republican colleagues and my Democratic colleagues. For me that was a golden age. That was a golden age. And that’s the way the senate can always operate. And what has torn it down was decisions taken principally on the side of the house, Newt Gingrich is the best figure of it, that the only way Republicans can be a majority party is to tear down the democrats and sometimes people who don’t agree with them who are republican. Why do you think all the moderates, so to speak, like me, left the United States Senate with two, three, four exceptions, Arlen Specter switched parties, by 1996, ’98, 2000? Because there was a deliberate effort, I saw it with Jim Jeffords who just died recently, a deliberate effort to change the nature of the party and the kind of people that represent it. And that’s still going on. It hasn’t changed to this day.

**Gary Eichten:** But if you’re a real believer in conservative causes why is it inappropriate to say, “Well Mr. Durenberger we appreciate your service, but we want somebody who is more in tuned with our beliefs”?

**Dave Durenberger:** Well, the definition of “our beliefs.” If I wanted only Catholics, I don’t know what we all believe. Are we Catholic sometimes? You know what I mean? In my day, our beliefs came from where we were born, and the people we were raised with, our families, where we were educated, communities like Gene and I grew up in, Watkins, Collegeville, St. John’s, all that sort of thing. That’s where our values developed, and our beliefs developed, and we added to that in our parties broad platforms. Very representative of every one who says “I have a liberal inclination” or “I have a conservative inclination.” In those days as they were described, and mainly in the view of the role of government. And broad platforms, inventive platforms, and those platforms went with us into the office, whether it was governor of Minnesota, the legislature. I’m talking now about the sixties and the seventies and so forth. Those were the days when you stood for something, and you knew who was a Republican because they were you know, here’s the process by which you were selected or who was a Democrat. Today you start with the three things, whatever they are, if you don’t do these three things, if you disagree with any of these things, you can’t make it. And the other thing is currently that my party does better than anybody else, I think, is tell you what they’re against. “I’m against government, I’m against regulation, I’m against taxes.” So, let’s see, six years later, what have you accomplished and how have you accomplished it? So, it isn’t going to work. So, beliefs, I don’t know what the beliefs are today when I look at Republicans.

**Gary Eichten:** One more question then I want to open it up to audience questions, so get your question ready and we will get to you in just one more please. Eugene McCarthy probably best remembered as the man who challenged his own president and tried to stop the Vietnam War. How would you like to be remembered?

**Dave Durenberger:** Well, let’s see, I don’t think the memory I want people to have is the personal relationship we’ve developed. I can’t say I can go to New Hampshire and stop a President or something like that. I told the students today, one of the students asked me what was my proudest moment or proudest achievement. I thought for about one second, I thought about the answer to that, what do you mean proud. Then it came to me, the thousands or more people that have stopped me at one time or another since I got out of the Senate to thank me for something that I did or my staff did, while I was in the senate, for them. I don’t know how many times I’ve told my former colleagues who all worry about the legislation they pass and that sort of thing, that is not what you are going to be remembered for. You are going to be remembered for all those relationships you build one person at a time, one incident at a time, one problem at a time, one challenge at a time. I really have little reason to doubt that’s the best way for anyone who wants to go into public service, whether it’s the mayor of Saint Cloud, the County Commissioner of Stearns County, or it’s a Congressman or a United States Senator, you want to be remembered for how solid those relationships were and how faithful you were to the commitments that you made.

**Gary Eichten:** Former Minnesota Senator Dave Durenberger.

*[Applause]*

**Dave Durenberger:** Thank you.

**Gary Eichten:** Alright, now I would like to get some audience questions. I can’t see you. Oh, there we go. Do we have people lined up already over there? Oh, excellent. Well let’s start over here.

**Makenzie Krauss:** Hi, my name is Makenzie Krauss, and first and foremost I wanted to thank you for coming out here tonight. It has been an honor having you as a guest here. This past summer I was one of sixteen students from Saint Ben’s and Saint John’s who got to participate in the Washington DC study program and I know that we all gained incredible insight into the lifestyle of working in public service. And I was just wondering, what was the most fulfilling aspect of working as a Senator?

**Dave Durenberger:** You’re question is what is the most fulfilling aspect of public service. Again I’m going to start by saying it’s the relationships you make, and how you build on those relationships, whether they’re for your own moving yourself forward, or it’s doing it for other people. But, I say this because I believe that you do not have to be a United States Senator to have a huge influence, but you have to be involved in public service. And that can be the work you do, most of it will be work you do in the community, there are so many opportunities today in every community in America for you to discover things about yourself that you never knew existed in public service. You can get appointments, you can get employment, you can get elected if you choose to do that. I was always a believer in Federalism and the best government is that closest to home, and now I know the most effective government is that closest to home. So if you were to ask me, “Where do I start if I want to go into elected office?” I would say, “I would set my sights on school board, county commissioner, the city council, even if it’s the planning commission, maybe it’s the park commission, maybe it’s the…” You know? It’s just right today where people don’t do the stuff their doing in Washington DC to each other. It’s at the local level and it’s just going to be the greatest place in the world to get started there’s so many opportunities, you’re going to learn so much and by the time you decide you want to run for congress or president or the senate, you’re going to be more than prepared.

**Gary Eichten:** We’re going to this side of the aisle.

**Gary Osberg:** My name is Gary Osberg, with Minnesota Public Radio, and my question is what specific legislation would you recommend that the administration go for to improve the Affordable Care Act?

**Dave Durenberger:** To improve what?

**Gary Eichten:** The Affordable Care Act.

**Dave Durenberger:** Oh, The Affordable Care Act. Sure, much of that law, as I indicated was based on stuff that we had worked on in the past. If the republicans had participated in the drafting of the Affordable Care Act, they could have done a couple things that I think are important, and one of them is in the potential for privatizing the Medicare program. We experimented with that back in the 1980’s, and getting private insurance companies involved in selling Medicare. Not just supplemental to the governments Medicare, but the Medicare program itself. We were using what’s called health maintenance organization, HMO’s that were incredibly successful. But, not many parts of the country had them. Since then, the course of privatization has been called the Medicare advantage program. And what the Medicare advantage program has become is a private rip-off, in effect. I know people get benefits from it, rip-off is too strong a word. We paid for private Medicare in our experiments in the eighties, 95 cents on every dollar we were spending on the government was a run Medicare program. Now they’re paying something like $1.10 or $1.12 or $1.15 to these private insurance companies to do the same thing. My point is that if it’s constructed appropriately, you can run a private Medicare program that in effect will bring most of the talent of the private side, and a lot of the effectiveness that they’re going to be achieving. That’s one of the things. The second one is the tax subsidies. Right now, we subsidize poor people through the Medicaid program. We subsidize better off people through employer paid health insurance, nobody’s paying any tax on that. And if you get old and disabled, then we put you back in the poor people’s program again, called Medicaid, not necessary. One of the vehicles for getting to the ideal world is to change the tax subsidy so that it more adequately affects the costs of the health care benefits in a given community, adjusted by the person’s capacity to pay. You don’t need a special welfare program to do it. That’s going to take some time to work itself out. There are a number of other things I could talk on. I mean long-term care insurance, God almighty, probably wouldn’t have gotten that one done. But why we sell long-term care insurance to people that want to protect their assets with disability insurance to young people who would never use it? I don’t understand. We could sell private disability insurance to everybody in America when they’re young. When they age into their disabilities, eventually even I will, you’ve got insurance coverage. You’ve got private insurance coverage. It always comes at the end. Thank you for the question, those are three things republicans could do.

**Edwin Torres:** My name is Edwin Torres, I’m a junior political science major. First of all, thank you for coming, I’ve had the pleasure to be around you for a couple of hours, this whole entire day. It’s been a great honor to get some of your wisdom. My question is kind of broad, so I’m not sure how you will answer it. Often we hear how bad the government is doing, how good the government is doing, or not enough that the government is doing. In your own perspective, what is the role of government?

**Dave Durenberger:** What is the role of government?

**Gary Eichten:** Yes, Nice small question. It sounds like one of those questions, do you still use those blue books that you have to write the essays in?

**Dave Durenberger:** Well, I can tell you one thing, and get a different answer depending on what part of the country you go to. This is one of those countries where people, culturally, people think very differently from one part of the country to another. In the part of the country we all come from here, in Minnesota, the answer was given to us by the people who settled this state. They were basically Yankee entrepreneurs from New England who were fairly frugal people, but they had a social conscience, as well. And by Northern European immigrants. A lot of those values are still here, and they all recognize that sometimes government’s most appropriate role is to provide for everyone, but only a few can access on their own means. An education, health care, national defense. A lot of issues that relate to education, health care. Obviously the role of the government in issues like the environment. Suppose you left it to the market to clean the air, you’d have to market to clean water. What would a market-based system do? On the other hand, role of government, in the Clean Air Act of 1990, we designed something called best available control technology and we gave the industries incentive to set the health standards for environmental air pollution because if they could enhance the environmental controls of the air they would get rewarded for developing the product. We did the acid rain trading and we created a market for dirty air or clean air depending on how you look at it. If we recognized where most the pollutants were going, and there were a lot of coal power plants there, so how do you trade off between the old and the new, how do you use the tax code to trade that off and clean the air? There are a lot of examples that we don’t have time for tonight about how you use government but all of them have the same thing in common, that if we are going to live in a society or community that we can all be proud of, all be proud of, then the role of government is to make that possible for every one of us. How do you think civil rights, how do you think women got the right to vote, you could go on and on with this kind of an issue. But there are just sometimes that the collective efforts that we put in to these kind of things are essential to make the whole community, the whole society a better place and a better place in which to live.

**Gary Eichten:** To follow up, you said earlier that the closer the government is to the people the better the government, how in the world can a locally-based governmental unit, whatever it might be, deal with things like acid rain, national defense, civil rights, don’t those big issues require a national response?

**Dave Durenberger:** Well you know, there’s a lot of different ways to look at the whole issue. One of the things I did before I got too far into that sort of thing was I wrote out in conjunction with the work that I did with governors and with the County Board, the National Association of Counties. But I wrote out eight principles for the role of government in improving the function of markets and then I wrote 10 principles for the national government and I started with national security, national defense and I went to income security, I went to things that crossed state borders like dirty air, a variety of things like that but that left a whole lot of things that the state/local government could do better. In 1982 when President Reagan said with regard to the disadvantages some people had because of where they lived, he said let them go with their feet and a lot of us got together after that, Democrat and Republican governors, and I and a couple of other people and said that’s not adequate Mr. President and we helped him create a new federalism proposal and we got him to agree that the federal government should swap with the states. If the states took the long-term care program, the federal government would take over the acute care for the low income people and then we took all of the existing health and social programs into a block grant that we offered to the states and as they bought down the block grants, the services, they said “we’ll take responsibility for it. This is our effort to get the South to step up and do some of the things the neglect doing for their constituents. The incentive would be that we would take the excise taxes the federal government was levying in those states, we take them out of the states. We’d get all the telephone tax business, a lot of this sort of thing.” That is the last effort anyone has made at trying to work out this problem of what should the federal government do, what should the state government do. But it’s critically important because there’s half of this country the states are willing to step up on a whole lot of issues and the other half of the country, they’re not willing to do it. Then they get the benefit of not having to raise their income taxes and stuff like that.

**Gary Eicthen:** We have another question over here please.

**Alex Henning:** Hi, I was in the student open forum earlier today, and you alluded to something about how we as an American Government aren’t good at making long term solutions to things. You actually have a track record of, with the Clean Air Act, having long term solutions to these sort of problems. How do you think we can improve that long term decision making with things like Social Security now?

**Dave Durenberger:** In income Security?

**Alex Henning:** Social Security.

**Gary Eichten:** Long term decision making. How can we get ourselves focused on the long term?

**Dave Durenberger:** I’m only doing this because sometimes my hearing aids aren’t functioning. The biggest part of this is presidential leadership. Cause he’s got the voice. To the degree that the president can set a longer term agenda. That’s probably the best way to approach it. Otherwise it’s done by people how have six year terms and they all belong to the United States Senate and when you can get Republicans and Democrats to agree on setting a long term agenda, it happens. That’s one of the ways we approach all of the health policy issues. I mean we did health reform through Medicare, Medicaid and whatever we could from 1982 until the Clintons got there in ’93. And when we were in the majority, the Democrats knew we were going to set the agenda and we were going to remind them they set the agenda when they were in the majority, and we have an agenda in the finance committee in particular, cause you’re talking about tax policy, Medicare, Social Security, and so forth that is always long term. Everything has a long term impact. And so it was much easier because we trusted each other, we knew where each other was coming from. When they were in charge we’ll work with them, when I was chairmen of the health subcommittee on all those issues, whether it was X. Bacchus or J. Rockefeller, they brought the Democratic votes. When they were the chairman and George Mitchell was the chairman, I brought the Republican votes. I mean they trusted us, our colleagues trusted us to do that, but we as finance committee members had a kind of a vision, it wasn’t one day at a time. We instinctively, because we all worked together on a whole lot of issues, and discussed these tough ones all the time. And when we tested them with demonstrations, like I was talking about earlier, we found out, yes this works, that doesn’t work, whatever the case may be. So a big part of it gets back to how well the members of the Senate or even the House are prepared to work together. And in health policy we did that with the house in the old days. The house was controlled by the Democrats. But there were really good Republicans as well, and the Republicans on the Ways and Means Committee could get along with most of the democrats on the Ways and Means Committee as well. And when we went to conference committee, usually the Democrats wanted to do more than we were willing to do. But we always found a way to resolve it. The Clean Air Act, There were only five of us, three Democrats and two Republicans on the Senate Conference Committee on The Clean Air Act, there were 144 Congressmen and we found a way to get the job done. And most of it went in our favor because we were used to working together.

**Gary Eichten:** Last question for you, we’ve been talking about polarization, division in Washington, gridlock, there seems to be no end to the world crises that we’re dealing with right now. Are you pretty optimistic though in the face of all of that that things will work out well? That we are on the right path?

**Dave Durenberger:** Yes, number one: I have to be optimistic, number two: I know it can be done, it has been done in the past. You can tell in Minnesota already, the negative approach that the Republicans are used to taking is starting to crack a little bit. You can tell it by talking to people who live through this period of time in the first ten twelve years of this century that things aren’t going to last. So, yeah, I’m optimistic but it can’t be done without help, and so the problem we have right now is the low morale that David Brooks talked about, the low morale in the country and the seven percent approval rating that the congress currently has, and who is going to go vote, who’s going to go vote who they are going to vote for, and what they are going to get out of the people that you vote for. I don’t have a magic bullet except me and who I say I might support or something like that. And the other people are just like that, other people who have served the way I have. And it’s time that a lot of us stepped up to the plate and said there were better days and a better future lies ahead and enough already. Lets expand both parties so that Conservative Democrats at their party and more Moderate Republicans have a chance at their party because the only thing that divides them is, relatively speaking, their views on the role of government. But we were talking about this here earlier, this can’t last the way it’s been going now. Last point I’ll make, because I missed it this afternoon, is the power of a few people and the power of money. I don’t know the answer to that one. I knew the answer, I did the seven Republicans along with the Democrats that McCain finally did in the Senate. Unless we find a way to break the power, in particular the power that the Supreme Court has given to Corporate America and money, these things become a lot harder. But even then, they are doable.

**Gary Eichten:** Senator Dave Durenberger. Thank you for joining us, and thanks for your public service.

*[Applause]*

(End)