

# Interview of Dave Durenberger and Jon Schroeder

September 5, 2020 | Interviewed by Ember Reichgott Junge

Ember Reichgott Junge: [00:00:00](#)

Hello, and welcome to Saint Paul, Minnesota, where we'll talk about today how chartering went national. My name is Ember Reichgott Junge. I'm the Lead for the National Charter Schools Founders Library, a library started over two years ago to record and archive the origins of chartering and the documents and the oral histories from the pioneers themselves. We are so fortunate today to be interviewing two real pioneers of chartering who helped to make the federal chartering work happen. We are in the backyard of Senator Dave Durenberger, a Republican United States Senator from Minnesota, who served from 1978 to 1994. He is the author of the first Charter Schools Program, the first federal funding that ever was passed in our country. Let me first tell you a little bit about the library. We are part of the National Charter Schools Institute in Mount Pleasant, Michigan. Over two years ago, CEO Jim Goenner said, you know, we need to capture the work of the origins of (chartering) in the Library because (chartering) is about 30 years old.

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In fact, 2021 will be the 30th anniversary of chartering. And we're so fortunate that many of our pioneers are still here today to share that history. That history is so important because not only are we recording the documents and such for the future, but we're informing the future of chartering. We're learning the lessons from history for the future. And that's why I think these are so incredibly important. You can see our oral histories and documents on our website, which is part of the National Charter Schools Institute. So today here in Saint Paul, Minnesota, we are in the beautiful backyard on this glorious summer day with United States Senator Dave Durenberger. Later on, we will bring in his policy aide, Jon Schroeder, but for now I want to start with our senator, a senator who was always known as a moderate, pragmatic Republican here in Minnesota, who was elected in 1978. I want to welcome you Senator Durenberger.

Hon. Dave Durenberger: [00:02:15](#)

Thank you, Ember. And thanks for introducing me to the work that you did in the Minnesota legislature that made my work in Washington possible.

Reichgott Junge: [00:02:25](#)

Well, in that regard, I should mention that I was the author of the Minnesota law, the first law in the country for chartering.

And I had no idea, to be perfectly honest, that anything was going on in Washington while we were struggling here in Minnesota. But let's talk about that. You started out really as a health care senator and somehow you got involved in all of this in 1991. Tell me about that.

Durenberger: [00:02:51](#)

Well, I think the reality was people in health care called me that because as two of the current leaders of the Senate Finance Committee told me a few months ago, Chuck Grassley, the Republican and Ron Wyden, the Democrat, "We've been trying to pass legislation, but the Republicans won't let us do it. And so both of us have been saying, Republican Democrat, we've been saying, why couldn't we send it to Dave? And what they meant was I chaired a subcommittee on Medicare and Medicaid. And I had people like George Mitchell and Max Baucus from Montana and, and Jay Rockefeller from West Virginia as my co- chairs. And when we were handed an opportunity by our colleagues on the main committee we seized it and it didn't matter whether it was a tax bill, it was a health bill, or it was something else. I mean, we all operated that way. My interest was in representing Minnesota, not just doing health care, because I'd come out of a community that I understood over a long period of time was a place where ideas mattered. And, that's the way I'd rather be thought about in terms of picking up an idea that you really got going in Minnesota and attracted my attention in Washington.

Reichgott Junge: [00:04:14](#)

You are all about ideas and that's why you were so effective as a US Senator. And your ideas were broader than education. They were in health policy. They were in the intelligence work you did as well as in education. Talk about your focus on ideas, because I think that's so important for people to hear about today.

Durenberger: [00:04:34](#)

It was at a time when in Minnesota, two thirds of the (state) senators were called conservatives and the other one third were called liberals. As we had referred to them all the way back since 1913, they were conservatives, they were liberals, not Republicans and Democrats. And you could see there's a reason for making that distinction because there's two different ways of looking at government. And the question is how effective is each side or the proposing side at making their case to the other side. And I landed there in 1966 (as staff to Republican Gov. Harold LeVander) when both sides were ready for change. And we did a lot of it in that period of time. And then the subsequent administration of (Gov.) Wendy Anderson, a Democrat. So I got raised on that before I went to the United States Senate. And I couldn't not think about what I had learned

in places like the Citizens League and in the Twin Cities that, you know, there are options available to us when it comes to changing the role of government.

Reichgott Junge: [00:05:41](#) Like what? You were always so focused on results. Talk about that.

Durenberger: [00:05:45](#) Sure. Let me start with something that is, is controversial, you know, today, and it's always been controversial and that is, we created the first, the nation's first Department of Human Rights.

Reichgott Junge: [00:05:58](#) Hmm. That was controversial?

Durenberger: [00:05:59](#) Yes. That was in 1967. And that was done by Republicans and Democrats. And, you know, we had one of the first (in the nation) Pollution Control Agency, one of the first environmental at the state level, an environmental department involved in both developing and implementing national environmental policy. And I could go on into a variety of these in a variety of these areas, but behind a lot of this, were members of the Senate and the House who had worked with something called the Citizens League.

Reichgott Junge: [00:06:36](#) And this is the *Minnesota* Senate, right?

Durenberger: [00:06:38](#) The Minnesota organization called the Citizens League. That's right. Exactly. And it was people who worked in business. They worked in the professions, law and doctors and people like that. But they took a time out of their life to work on community and to work on options to the way things had been done in the past. And we're at that same point today, obviously, whether you look at the national level or the local level or the state level, we are eager to find better ways of doing things. In Minnesota we always found those ways because the conservatives were willing to work with the liberals and the liberals were willing to work with conservatives. So the role of government may have changed depending on who was the most persuasive, but the idea that we needed to change, we needed to do better, we could do better, never left this state. It's always been there.

Reichgott Junge: [00:07:35](#) That focus on the need to change comes about because you're talking to one another. Right? And you're actually having conversations. It's not about partisan finger-pointing.

Durenberger: [00:07:47](#) Right? Yes. It's not about you know, who raised the most money for their campaigns and who raised the most money for their issue or who had the most influence or the best lobbyists or

something like that. It was all about an issue. The consensus was there, it's the issues. It's time for change, time for a change.

Reichgott Junge: [00:08:10](#) And the Citizens League was very much a start of that. The Citizens League was focused on results, but also was focused on this idea about a different role for state and local government, a role that wasn't just government doing everything but something else. And you were deeply involved in that. Talk about that.

Durenberger: [00:08:31](#) Yeah. And we called it by the time I left the governor's office in 1970 and got more involved in the League itself, we called it Public Service Options. And so you, you could walk through a variety of public services.

Reichgott Junge: [00:08:49](#) So define what you thought about in Public Service Options. How is it different than what had already been going on?

Durenberger: [00:08:56](#) Well, there's nothing that was going on other than we were, we were doing the basics until somewhere in the 1960s, which is transportation, economic development, all of that. There was no Metropolitan Council, you know, there were none of these kinds of agencies in the state government that guided the development at the local level of public services. And one of the things that we recognized in the Public Service Options in the Citizens League was that you don't need a new government agency to solve all your problems. If we have a government agency that has jurisdiction, whether it's in transportation or it's in education or healthcare or something like that, their role is to set the policy framework, but not to do the implementing of it. Somebody else is a little more likely to be doing the implementation of it.

Reichgott Junge: [00:09:57](#) You were giving them the freedom to run it the way they thought best for the best results with the money you gave them, provided they gave you the results that you were looking for, right?

Durenberger: [00:10:10](#) That's the key point, that's right. You still retain because you're dealing with public money, you still retain the opportunity to compare results, you know, with the investment that the public has put into it.

Reichgott Junge: [00:10:25](#) So this is a key point. It's all about contracting, isn't it? So the government doesn't have to implement everything. They could hire someone more expert in it to achieve those results, right? As long as with the public dollars, as long as they performed.

Durenberger: [00:10:42](#) Right, you can't, it's impossible to think about a senator or representative or a president or anybody like that is able to do, you know, whether it's health, education or welfare, they're not qualified. They might be specifically qualified if they got an MD or, you know, a doctorate in education or something like that. But the people that are most qualified are those who in that community have been raised up for a specific profession. But when you're dealing with heavily financed professions or services, then you start having another story because then you're raising taxes and education, you know, is one of those examples that we are likely to get into here, because so much of the resources, in fact, practically all of them on the public side are coming from public resources. But you still need the ability for new ideas on how to do it, to enter the field in that particular community, and for the government to assess, you know, where shouldn't we be putting our resources.

Reichgott Junge: [00:12:00](#) So this different way of government service was pretty revolutionary at the time in all those different areas. And I know you've told me that people in Washington said "What?" That's not something they were familiar with. Would you do me the favor of now bridging that over to your work in education and how that same approach was what brought you into the chartering idea?

Durenberger: [00:12:31](#) Sure. I think it probably came from me. What the senator does when the senator is not on the floor, is he stays in his office afternoons and meets lobbyists. And so there's the lobbyist for the Minnesota School Boards. Oh, there's the Minnesota Principals Association. Oh, there's the Minnesota Federation of Teachers. No, there's the Minnesota Education Association. They're here again to lobby for what?

Reichgott Junge: [00:13:06](#) For more money.

Durenberger: [00:13:08](#) That's exactly right. They want more federal money. What you don't say is that means there's going to be more federal--the more money we have come in, the more the role of the government might increase. But I want to just ask you all one question. And I asked this of teachers, superintendents, principals, you know, anybody's association. I asked them the same question. "When's the last morning you got up and couldn't wait to get to school?" And I'm here to tell you in 16 years, no one ever answered that question, and think about that. (ERJ: Wow) "When's the last morning when you woke up, you couldn't wait to get to school?" (ERJ: And you were talking to teachers, administrators...) That's Right. Exactly. And that is a lesson I will never ever forget because to forget, it would

assume that they're trained to do a job and, you know, that's why we spend all that money, and that's why all our kids go through the system and stuff like that.

Durenberger: [00:14:09](#) But if they aren't in love with that job, how can they be in love with these kids? And if they're not in love with these kids, how are they going to be able to handle the really difficult kids? The ones that are challenged by the environment in which they were raised, for example, as opposed to the more privileged kid, how are they going to relate to that? And why can't they get even more joy out of working with a challenge child than one who is much less challenged? And so all of this is stored in the back of my, somewhere, the back of my head. And it's still there for that matter because you know, the opportunity to do something about it came along through you and your colleagues in the Minnesota legislature.

Durenberger: [00:15:04](#) But it also came from the person probably I remember the best at the national level: Al Shanker from the AFT, the American Federation of Teachers. (ERJ: president of the national American Federation of Teachers.) Yes. Yup. And he was, he saw this same challenge. And I don't know how often I remember being on either the phone or he was in my office, or I went to something that he was at just to listen to the way in which he articulated this challenge that you and I are talking about and why. He didn't come selling a plan. You know, he had some suggestions if you ask, like every good lobbyist has some suggestions if you ask, but he didn't come with that as much as he came with first making sure you understood the problem, and then were you willing to listen to what could be done and what the role of the national government should be.

Durenberger: [00:16:05](#) And so doing that was just like me. I mean, I could relate to this guy the way I can relate to myself. 'Cause that's what I always did. That's why I had people like Jon Schroeder working for me, you know, because I knew when I hired him that Jon could figure out what's the problem, you know? And not just who's involved, which happens too often, but what's the problem they're involved with and what are the options and who are the experts in each of these options and how do we get from here to there? And they have to ask that last question, because the role of government, either at the local level, the state level or the national government is going to be the financing, if it's public education, we're going to be putting public dollars into it, whichever level it is.

Durenberger: [00:16:53](#) And so each of us has this responsibility to know we're making wise investments because we're taking other people's money

and putting them into other people's kids. And I always judged, and I'm sure Jon did too, because that's why he was so valuable to me. And, you know, and other people that worked for me and other areas, you always judged the effectiveness of your work on the basis of the people who say you added something, you know, just in a way of thinking about defining a problem or defining an opportunity or making a suggestion about, you take your suggestion and want it to be implemented or something like that. Well, you know, Jon or the senator asked the challenging "Why?"; tell me why yours is better than what, and that sort of thing. But knowing the questions to ask is the key to getting the right answer. And when we got to charter schools, it was really the lesson that we had that I'm talking about, plus the lesson that you learned and you learned for all the rest of them as you and your colleagues in the Minnesota Senate and House were dealing with a similar kind of question, which is okay, "What's the role of public money going through the national level of government in improving the quality of every day in school for every one of those kids?"

Ember Reichgott Junge: [00:18:25](#)

What's interesting about what you said, it was Al Shanker, the national president of the American Federation of Teachers who also influenced me to create the first charter school state law in Minnesota, because he spoke at the Itasca Seminar here in 1988. So both of us were influenced by a visionary union leader, really, to get this underway because for his thinking, he was basically saying that the districts had a monopoly on the students. I mean, in other words, there was no way that they could go anywhere else. Right? So they had total control on what would happen in the districts.

You mentioned Jon Schroeder and I'm pleased to have Jon here with us today as well. As you mentioned, Senator, he was your policy aide for many years on education, but you (to Jon) worked in Minnesota, you were also part of the Citizens League that he mentioned. So you were also deeply embedded in this idea of how government could work differently. You were watching the chartering legislation as it passed through here. It was signed in June of 1991. You were apparently watching all of that happen. Tell me about that.

Jon Schroeder: [00:19:42](#)

Well that was the job. I went to work for Senator Durenberger in 1984 and worked for the first four years in the communications area. And I had just prior to that been with my wife, Dana, the owners and editors of the Grant County Herald weekly newspaper in Elbow Lake (Mn). And so I had this immediate experience in communications that tended to be a good fit. I had known Senator Durenberger through my work

prior to that with the Citizens League. And even earlier than that, while I was still a student at Macalester College I had an internship and then was employed after I graduated with the Minnesota Constitutional Study Commission chaired by former Governor Elmer L. Anderson, and Senator Durenberger was the executive secretary of that commission. So we went back all the way to 1971 and had this parallel experience, when I worked at the Citizens League for five years, (and) we stayed in touch when I was in the weekly newspaper business. And then when we decided to sell the newspaper, it seemed a natural good fit for both of us to go to work for him. So we had this common, common set of experiences, common mindset coming out of, especially the work at the Citizens League. And a deep respect for Minnesotans.

Reichgott Junge: [00:21:24](#) So talk about your focus on education and how you were watching the charter school work. Then of course, the role of Ted Kolderie here in Minnesota, who was a big part of the Citizens League work as well.

Schroeder: [00:21:36](#) That's right. Well yeah, Ted was my boss. He was the executive director at the Citizens League. And particularly after the 1988 election, when I became the policy director for Senator Durenberger, my assignment was to look for good Minnesota ideas and bring them to Washington, and having that Minnesota base was critical. And the primary area I focused on was both pre-K, K-12 and also postsecondary education. And naturally with the past connection with Ted Kolderie, I was closely monitoring the charter school law, and trying to think ahead to, okay, you know, if and when this passes, how could we be helpful in spreading this idea across the country?

Reichgott Junge: [00:22:32](#) And that was a very difficult question because it was a state-based law and education is normally state-based. So the real question that confronted the two of you together was how does the federal government get involved in this? If you pass a charter school law in Minnesota and it spreads to California or Massachusetts, what's your role and how did you create that role? Senator, we'll start with you.

Durenberger: [00:22:58](#) Sure. Well, first instinctively, because I had worked at the state level first with the governor and I worked at a time when government was changing and the role of government was changing, I think I had the advantage of knowing that it's really, really important to be a creative state. When it comes to public policy, you kind of like attract some big companies to come to your state, or you keep the companies here that you have, who grew up here, so to speak because you're creative, you try to

find better ways of doing things. And it isn't just to hold down taxes as much as it is to improve the quality of life in the state. Meaning the people that they get to employ are better prepared for those jobs than would people in some other place. So people who basically run the community in the larger sense of, in an economic sense, are very sensitive to the quality of education. And so you can see that at the state level, as I was maturing in this whole process, we were the community development in the larger community of the United States, you could see the states that made a difference, you know? And so it was to our economic advantage. It was to our personal advantages. It got us, our kids into better, a better graduate school someplace else in the country, if that's what you wanted, or it got you better jobs someplace in whatever the horizon might be. So there's that motivation, but the other one, and probably the biggest one, is that you're tested all the time by the people you live with and how good you are, not by elections, but by how effective your work is, and it's going to happen in your social environment and your work environment and all your volunteer work, whatever the case may be, you're being tested.

Durenberger:

[00:25:12](#)

But if you're smart enough, you know, you always know how to ask the right question. Well, what would you do? Right? That's the question. What would you do? And so you ask the "What would you do?" question often enough and believe it or not, that rarely happens at the national level, right? Rarely. Rarely. Most of the time you're being lobbied by somebody in some government someplace, or maybe even the national government or by a lobbyist from a private corporation, but rarely do the people on the streets of Washington or in the bars or in the schools, or in the churches ask you, what would you do about a problem like this and have an answer. Would the people have an answer if you asked them that question? But it happens in states. But in Minnesota, it happened all the time. And it's what made us good at what we do.

Durenberger:

[00:26:03](#)

And it's, it's that in particular, the big challenge, that's one thing to do it in healthcare, because nobody quite understands that one, but in education, everybody thinks they know the answer because they've either been there or they've got kids that are there now, or whatever the case may be. So they have an opinion and they also get taxed once a year on you know, the measure of proof--the tax is a measure of how good we're doing in our community, as well as other things are. So it's here that you want the basic decisions about why am I a teacher? Why am I a principal? Why am I a secretary? Why am I working for XYZ school? You know, Why?, Why? Those why questions are

better asked at the state and local level than they could ever be done at the national level. The national level, we want a better workforce. We want better people. We want to be more persuasive as an economic entity. We want to be ready for crises that come someplace else in the world. And that means, you know, we have to have the people who can do it. We want people with ideas on healthcare and other things, to come out of the school system.

Reichgott Junge: [00:27:24](#) So were you talking to the people in the charter schools or the people who were trying to create charter schools to ask them why and what they needed?

Durenberger: [00:27:32](#) Yeah. That's where you start with first, what's a charter school. You know, if that's the first question you ask, then somebody says, I got an answer to your question, senator--it's charter schools. OK, what is that? And the answers that I can remember best always came from teachers. They said, "It's where I feel like I'm doing something for somebody I see every day, but whose family I may rarely meet." And that's a little different from a whole lot of other enterprises that government gets involved in, where there's a measurable dollar product at the other end, but watching a five or six year old or a seven year old or eight year old's eyes light up every single day when you know what that kid goes home to at night. Wow. That's a big deal.

Reichgott Junge: [00:28:39](#) Most teachers can say that in their work, but what was it that was distinguishing for you the charter sector? Why was that different?

Durenberger: [00:28:49](#) 'Cause it gave opportunities to teachers and professionals like that to demonstrate that there's a better way. There's a more effective way. (ERJ: Did you see some of that?) Oh, sure. I saw that in communities in Minnesota. It's not hard. It's not hard to distinguish. I told you when people come to Washington and they couldn't answer the question, but that doesn't mean there aren't some success stories going on in Minnesota, there weren't some success stories. And with people like Jon and so forth, I knew where those (were)--I was told you ought to go here. You ought to go there, you ought to meet so and so, you ought to come to a meeting I'm holding with a bunch of teachers, you know? So it's within the system, just like AFT is, that happened to be the leader Shanker, but go inside the system, go inside the school in which teachers are teaching for all the right reasons and say, how did you get there? And most of the time it would be, it was just a heck of a lot of effort and I don't get any special reward, but if they were in a charter school, it was different. (ERJ: How so?) Because their goal was

to improve the quality of the outcome of their work over time. And to make them basically to make teachers better professionals, to make everyone inside “the school” subject to both the personal and the relational satisfaction that comes from doing the right job for the right reason for the right kid.

Reichgott Junge: [00:30:23](#)

So, Jon, going back to the question about, so what does the federal government do? How did you come about figuring out what legislation should be introduced to assist these charter schools that are now struggling to start in Minnesota?

Schroeder: [00:30:45](#)

As the law passed, and people started to emerge who were wanting to start charter schools, most of them were teachers or former teachers, parents, community leaders, leaders in communities of color, low income communities. The message that I heard was their number one need was for startup funding, you know, in terms of the governmental role here. And if, as the Senator has said, government provides the money, it's two things. One is that in order to have a platform and have influence and have people listen to you, you have to have a bill. So that was a given from the beginning that we would want to have a bill relating to charter schools at the national level. But then piggybacking again on what he's been talking about, the question is what is the appropriate role of the federal government, particularly in an area that historically has been predominantly responsibility of state government and carried out at the local community level. And with this combination of understandings, we're up against the traditional way that the federal government gets involved in things, which is to start a grant program usually, (a) competitive grant program in this case particularly for something that's new and starting up, where you apply directly from the community to the federal government. The federal government tests the criteria to determine priorities and award grants. The local community responds to what the federal government sets out and to guidelines for applying for money. And the money goes directly from the federal government to the entity, in this case, a school. And the federal government is responsible, the Department of Education is responsible, for overseeing that grant, whether it's being used properly. That didn't fit with all of what we learned over time in this kind of parallel set of experiences. And so what should we do differently? And the answer to that was grants to states, because in addition to having a bill that would raise the visibility of the issue and help educate colleagues in Washington and people in other states, we wanted to build an incentive into this program to states to adopt policies, laws, like Minnesota had, and not just have charter school laws, but do it right. And there were some flaws and some political compromises that

had to be made in the Minnesota law, which were, I think, later fixed. But the principal advantage from the beginning of the Minnesota law was the autonomy coupled with accountability for each of these schools--autonomy from school districts and the ability to do the kinds of things that Al Shanker described to the Senator over time. And so what we ended up with was a new program to provide grants to states that had charter school laws that met basically the Minnesota model.

Reichgott Junge: [00:34:57](#)

Let's start there because that's a real key point. And by the way, as you get into the legislative process here, just jump in on each other, because I'm sure you're going to remember stories back and forth. If you recall, Jon, we had some deep compromises in the Minnesota law, and one of them was that only a district could authorize a charter school, no one else; there was no state authorizer or nonprofit. And you took that out of the, in other words, I think your desire was that the funding would only go to a state that allowed more authorizers. Is that right?

Schroeder: [00:35:38](#)

Well, certainly the priority would be given to those States. You know, again, we didn't want to prescribe and dictate how to do this. We wanted to be deferential to state policymakers, but we had some real, you know, important standards and principles that we applied: that these are public schools, that they didn't charge tuition, that they didn't teach religion, that they were open to everybody, (they) serve people equally. If there wasn't room, there'd have to be a lottery. Money would go directly from the state to the school, not passing through a school district. These were all important essential elements, really, of the Minnesota law. And so those were the guidelines and the priorities, you're right. The one big change we did make was on the question of who could grant charters and oversee charter schools. And we wanted to get that out from under the long-established exclusive franchise of school districts. And this ended up really being, I think the most central issue in the whole effort over three years to get this legislation enacted, was making sure that states had the option to have authorizers other than local school districts. And here's where we quickly ran into a really critical ally in Senator Ted Kennedy. And I defer to Senator Durenberger here in describing how that relationship was established over the entire 16 years that you served in the Senate.

Reichgott Junge: [00:37:20](#)

Before we even do that, I'd love to start back just to where you introduce the bill. I want to bring Senator (Joe) Lieberman into this too. So we'll come back to Senator Kennedy if you don't mind. (Jon: Sure.) I will say this as the author of the Minnesota law that was signed in June of 1991, I was stunned that within

several days after the passage of this bill in May of 1991, you were talking about it on the floor of the United States Senate. And I thought, how did you know about it? And you were lauding it as a bipartisan effort in Minnesota that you thought had potential. And this was just days after it passed. So what was going on there behind the scenes?

Schroeder: [00:38:11](#) Well, as we discussed earlier, this was my job to look for good Minnesota ideas and bring them to Washington. (Durenberger: You weren't just looking at the newspaper and finding some bill passed. You were following that!) Yes, that's right. Yeah.

Reichgott Junge: [00:38:29](#) (To Durenberger): Who did you go to for the Democratic co-sponsor on this bill?

Durenberger: [00:38:33](#) Well, I went to a guy that I had gotten to know because I got raised up on the Collegeville campus with a bunch of Catholics and this was the first Jewish Senator I'd ever spent any time with, Joe Lieberman. What I'm getting to is that he invited me to a Jewish ceremony. Why? I don't know, but he did, you know, and that started the relationship because we talked about what did it mean? You know, what did it mean that I was Catholic, he was Jewish and that sort of thing. And you know, it was the level at which relationships evolve. It doesn't just because you brought your family to Washington and they went to the same school and things like that, which we often talk about. It's little things like that. And I found in Joe, a person I could trust. And I knew also, the main thing I think, was Joe was interested in getting a job done. And that was his goal.

Reichgott Junge: [00:39:43](#) Why was he even interested in charter legislation that came out of Minnesota?

Durenberger: [00:39:47](#) Well, because he represented Connecticut, right? Exactly. And because he was there for the same reason I was there. Not all the ideas come from Minnesota or from Connecticut, you know, they come from a variety of places. You gotta be tuned in. It helps to be on the right committees, to have a committee assignment that makes this sort of thing relevant. But as I found with Joe, in most cases the issues that he and I were attracted to were the issues in which you couldn't identify the sponsors of this thing as Republican or Democrat. No, you focused right on the issue of what it is and why are you doing it. And what's unique about the way your people do it versus the way my people do it and to make those comparisons. So it was almost like we talked about the Citizens League when you get people talking about this sort of thing. Joe was a curious man. And he remained that way to this day. So I told him about it and he got

immediately interested, meaning he had an opportunity to do something with it,

Reichgott Junge: [00:41:03](#) July 31, 1991, the charter school legislation was introduced by you. And I believe Senator Lieberman as co-sponsor correct? (DD: Yes). So you were able to get him on board. And I think this is what's relevant here within a month, within a month of the signing of the bill in Minnesota. That's how quickly. And then there was response by the editorial board of the Washington Post, I believe. So you had some great feedback on it, but you still were just introducing an idea that was brand new.

Reichgott Junge: [00:41:34](#) So I know that (in) the first round you needed to get some help here. And this, by the way, is when President (George H. W.) Bush is in power, if you will. And he's interested in private school vouchers. So talk about that now in that year 1991-92. You're working with President Bush, Secretary Lamar Alexander, and you are trying to make this happen, this charter legislation happen with Senator Lieberman's help. Tell me about that process. Maybe Jon, you start.

Schroeder: [00:42:10](#) I first have to add one more thing to the Lieberman story that's parallel to our experience and how we got involved. There was a school superintendent in Connecticut--Steven Tracy I think was his name--who somehow learned about charter schools and really was the one who made this a home state issue for Lieberman, and worked with his staff and with us. And they didn't have a law by then. And it took a while and it's still a pretty weak law and they don't have a lot of schools, but there was a home state interest that got communicated to Senator Lieberman. And with the Bush administration, Lamar Alexander had been just like Bill Clinton, an education governor, just like Rudy Perpich (MN). And, you know, these people talk to each other and Alexander seemed like a good candidate to approach.

Schroeder: [00:43:10](#) Now, President Bush had a strong interest in education. He convened all the governors to have a summit. I think it was in Charlottesville, Virginia, and they reflected on the issue in the context of the report that had been produced during the Reagan administration a few years earlier making a cry out to the nation--a Nation at Risk-- on the outcomes that were being observed in K-12 education. And so the Bush administration seemed like a good place to go. And we were fortunate to have half a day here in Minnesota with Lamar Alexander, where we brought in the Republican legislator who had coauthored your bill in the House and others who were interested in starting

charter schools, to really try to educate the Education Secretary on this opportunity, and followed up as best we could.

Schroeder: [00:44:33](#) It ended up that the administration's insistence on having vouchers in the education bill, private school vouchers, became an insurmountable barrier to bipartisanship on the issue. And even though we had Senator Kennedy's support we were unsuccessful in getting charter schools into the Bush education initiative, which ended up not being enacted because of this partisan divide in large part around vouchers. And as you had learned in Minnesota, this couldn't happen, this was too radical an idea to happen without bipartisan support. And this is why you, and we ended up seeking and finding a middle ground, a new approach to improving, reinventing. And that was what we called the bill: The Public School Redefinition Act, redefining public education, not by who owns the buildings or who hires the teachers, but by the results and choices within public education that parents or families and students would be able to make. So we tried very hard with the Bush administration. And I know, I think, they were supportive of the idea but that was overwhelmed by their insistence on vouchers, much of which we've seen repeated in subsequent Republican administrations, including the current one.

Reichgott Junge: [00:46:19](#) For me as the author in Minnesota, one of the ways that we were able to sell our Democratic colleagues on chartering was that it was an alternative to private school vouchers, a way to bring in public school choice. Talk about that, the distinction between public school choice and chartering and private school vouchers and why you believed you needed to stick with the chartering versus the voucher idea.

Durenberger: [00:46:44](#) Sure. It's basic to public education that you take all comers, basically. I'm reflecting the way we thought those days, I don't know if that's the way it is these days. But you think about the school district, and you think everybody that can't afford to be someplace else. And the fact you take people that just want to be close to home, that sort of thing. Private schools on the other hand, they have to earn their right to be there. So they have to charge something in order to deliver their services; they can pick and choose who they take. And it wasn't, I can't say that there's anything wrong, essentially, if that's what a nation would decide to do that it's going to fund both public and private. But I can tell you, because I know something about the social determinants of health, I know something about the disadvantages by race and economics and so forth of a whole lot of Americans, that the public school system, no matter how well or poorly it happens to be run, can't be put in a position

where it has to compete literally for federal dollars with the private sector across the board. It just isn't who we are as Americans. We can find opportunities in the public school system to do as good or better job as a lot of, not all, but a lot of private schools do, but you have to resource that in some fashion that isn't only dependent on a local school district on property taxes or on a state's capacity to levy level taxes.

Durenberger: [00:48:53](#)

Think about, you know, the states in this country today who don't tax themselves and still get federal benefits of one kind or another. And then think about Minnesota where something like 80% of the money that we pay into the federal government we get back in the form of benefits. Whereas you can go into a lot of southern states and some western states and you'll find they get back \$2 on every \$1 because they just won't tax. And then they offer the opportunity for business to "come here, because we don't have high taxes!" So an instinct in a Minnesotan is not, it's not just good government, better education and the improvement of public education. It's (that) we're already paying a lot to make a system, whether it's healthcare, education or anything else, to make that available to every person, regardless of their economic or social status or racial status or whatever the case may be. We're willing to tax ourselves to make that happen, which is why, you know, we pride ourselves on being able to do that when we can afford to do it, when there is an opportunity such as you introduced us to, through the charter school movement, to get the national government, helping us do that for the right (reasons), for the same reasons that make us, you know, a good state and education state. You want to seize that.

Durenberger: [00:50:39](#)

And that's what charter schools ended up being, not just a way in which you can take your, whatever it is, your little dollar voucher. And you can go to public school this, or private school that, or the fancy one down the road over there with your voucher. No, that wasn't what we were up to.

Reichgott Junge: [00:51:00](#)

And this was a key distinction that you had to sell to Senator (Ted) Kennedy, going back to what you were saying, Jon, on that and the colloquy that occurred. Maybe Senator, first of all, you might want to talk about your relationship with Senator Kennedy, who is of course, a very progressive, what we call progressive today, but liberal senator. You're a moderate Republican. He is a liberal Democratic senator. But somehow you were able to sell him or convince and persuade him that chartering was for public schools and to get his support. So talk about that.

Durenberger: [00:51:41](#) Sure. The Kennedy that I knew and that I met first in 1979 when I got to Washington had been there for enough years so that he was no longer trading on brother's famous or otherwise, you know, that sort of thing. He was no longer trading on just reputation. He had concluded that he had to work for this job, you know, and I can illustrate it by this. I happened to be at a meeting of the Senate Finance Committee on which I was lucky enough to be a member as a brand new Senator in 1979, on the first day that Russell Long, its Democratic chair had ever allowed Teddy Kennedy, the Democratic chair of a different big committee, Health, Education, Labor, and Pension to come and testify before the Finance Committee.

Durenberger: [00:52:41](#) And I didn't know it at the time because I'm a brand new Senator, but that was history in the making both for Russell Long through invite. And that said from Long, it said, we need to do something about healthcare and we're all in this one together. And it may also say that he saw the handwriting on the wall because he could see more Republican senators getting elected. But it said something about Kennedy as he walked in. I find this hard to describe without getting a little emotional, but you could all, as the time came for Kennedy to show up, you could feel the environment in the room changing. It got quieter and quieter and quieter because this was the first time the two had ever been in the same place talking about the same issue. And I don't need to describe what he ended up talking about or how that happened, but I want to say that it was a time in history that took the measure, not only of Russell Long, and people like me who were brand new, but of Teddy Kennedy himself. And I think he, at that particular point in time realized that (being) Kennedy just wasn't going to get the job done. He had to find ways to get the job done and that meant he needed people on the other side of the aisle. On his side of the aisle if Kennedy said, let's do this or that, well, they get on board. But they looked on the other side of the aisle for people that actually cared like he did about a lot of these issues. And so that was our initial attraction, I think. But it was only later on that I realized it became a much more personal thing than I can even imagine, because I would get invited to his home and things like that.

Durenberger: [00:54:46](#) But most importantly was the time that my first granddaughter was born, Sarah, and she was going to be born in Caesarian section and I knew the hospital, I knew the time and all the rest of that sort of thing. But we were having the first hearing on the bill that Bill Clinton had introduced—Mrs. Clinton had introduced--and I'm in that committee and I'd been a little critical of the bill or even having it heard. But I was in a situation

where Sarah was being born out in Minnesota. And I was sitting in this first hearing on that bill and I was going in and out and in and out. Finally, when I went out to the cloak room and took a call from my son, he said, it's Sarah, she's so many pounds, so many ounces. And when I, when I tell it now I break down, you know, because I felt that the emotion was so incredible, but here's the story. When I came out, Kennedy grabbed the gavel and he hit the gavel on the table and he said, the Chairman uses prerogative to recess this meeting to announce the birth of Sarah Marie Durenberger, with her pounds and ounces.

Durenberger: [00:56:25](#) And it's like, wow. So there are other stories like that, you know, that tell you something about the relationship and the importance of these relationships in actually getting things done. And the importance of having a Kennedy on board with you was not just the name Kennedy, but the fact that he could make a difference in how you chose to present the bill. So he could give you some experience and some instincts about how best to present it and what to say about it and what to promise and what not to promise, what to stay away from, and things like that. And so the fact that we had this kind of a relationship was not just doing me a favor or something like that. It meant that he was going to pay attention to what this chartering business was all about. And he was going to pay attention by getting interested in what was going on in Massachusetts.

Reichgott Junge: [00:57:32](#) So obviously relationships are so important and you had a strong one with Senator Kennedy, but now Jon, talk about the politics of that. How important was it for the future of chartering that Senator Kennedy was on board?

Schroeder: [00:57:50](#) I think one of the lessons early on learned here personally, was that when you have a controversial issue, something new like this, you build support from the center out, or maybe even slightly left of center out, but in both directions. And that's not how we do things today, you know. And the issue is in 92, when we had the Bush/Alexander initiative that insisted on having vouchers, you know, the Senator has explained very well I think the policy rationale, the human side of all of these options. I mean, I totally agree. I also saw quickly the political side of this and that if you wanted to get something done and that's an open question sometimes, but in those days, I think it was a driving force, and certainly Kennedy was a *legislator*, you know, he was a "Doer" and you know, their relationship was critical.

Schroeder: [00:59:17](#) I spent a lot of time in Washington based in Minnesota. And I sat in a lot of meetings of Senator Kennedy's committee. And I could just tell whatever the issue was healthcare, education,

that there was this chemistry between the two of them, and one, you know, more senior than the other; one in the majority party, one of the minority party. But Senator Kennedy really understood the need for bipartisanship. And I could just see when Senator Durenberger would speak on some issue or ask a question of a witness, that Kennedy respected him greatly and paid attention and listened. And that played out on this issue. And one of the things that Senator Kennedy was willing to do was what's called a colloquy, where senators have a kind of setup conversation to establish the legislative intent.

Schroeder: [01:00:30](#) And this is not only important in the legislative process, but it can be referred to by judges, the judicial branch in determining what was the legislative intent here. If we're going to be deferential to the legislative process, what did they intend this to be? And, and this is where for the first time we had this really important person in the process on the Democratic side at the national level, affirm that charter schools were public schools, were part of public education, and therefore eligible for funding under the Bush Alexander initiative. Unfortunately, that as I said earlier, didn't end up happening. It didn't happen because of the partisan divide around it.

Reichgott Junge: [01:01:22](#) So wasn't Senator Kennedy though, and during this colloquy on the floor where he's accepting the public school in a conversation with Senator Durenberger, isn't he taking a risk, because isn't he strongly supported by the national unions. So isn't that part of why he was so important to this?

Schroeder: [01:01:43](#) Yes, that's true. And you know, this was a new idea at the national level. Al Shanker of course, had been an advocate for the general idea, although I think his preference would have been to keep this within the control of school districts and school boards. But there was one thing I do recall, was a letter of opposition from the National Education Association. So that was one advocacy group on the other side of the issue. But I think that really the biggest barriers to getting this passed were unfamiliarity with the concept, with the idea of trying something new--doing something new, being deferential to states, and not having this cast in a traditional "either—or," made harder than "public or private." So this whole notion of reinventing public education and redefining public education at the same time was probably more of a barrier than heavily partisan opposition; (acorns falling from trees!) more of a barrier I think then heavily as it is today, Interest group involvement.

Durenberger: [01:03:47](#) Yeah. the other reason Kennedy was important was that (from) the end of my service, and up until just fairly recently, relatively recently, the Newt Gingrich period I guess you'd call it, the House had been Democrat for 50 some years, 58 years, I think, to be precise. And so it was real easy for a liberal chair of an education committee to kill anything that came over from the Senate unless it had Kennedy on it, if that's what they wanted to do and if that's what the so-called interest groups wanted done. And that was true, not only in education, but it was a true in everything that we did. At various times that getting a ranking, getting a George Mitchell, and he was the majority leader for the Democrats, or getting a Kennedy on any issue and so forth was really important when you knew you were going up against the committee chairman in the House in conference between the two bodies on issues like this, you know, who was beholden to the stakeholders that opposed the legislation, having Kennedy on there made a difference.

Reichgott Junge [01:04:49](#) So you've got Kennedy behind you, but as you mentioned, because of the voucher issue that was being presented by President Bush at the time, the bill did not pass. So then we have an election and President Bill Clinton now is in the White House, has defeated President George H.W. Bush. We all know that President Clinton is very much a supporter of chartering, and was very helpful to me as author. We worked together over the years. So now you have Secretary Dick Riley and you have the president behind you and you decide now that the vehicle is going to be the Reauthorization Act and Kennedy is still with you. All right. Now you're coming up to 1994 when the bill is actually in play. So who wants to take it from there?

Schroeder: [01:05:50](#) One of the things that when the bill was reintroduced in '93 and the new Congress came into office with the new administration, was we added a House a companion bill (ERJ: very important. Rep. Tim Penny and Rep McCurdy.) Right, right.

Schroeder: [01:06:14](#) Yeah. And Rep. McCurdy at that time I believe was the president or chair of the Democratic Leadership Council. So he was in a leadership position in the Democratic party and a visible, credible lead sponsor in the House, along with Congressman Petri from Wisconsin who was one of the lead Republicans on the committee. And it really came down by mid-1994 when they were putting these bills together on the floor, both houses. For us on our little piece of this, this new federal charter school grant program, the big issue came down to be who could grant charters or what states, which states that authorized charter schools--only by districts or with other authorizers--could qualify to participate in this program and in

turn, make grants down to their schools and prospective schools.

Schroeder: [01:07:21](#) And coincidentally, and I think this was consistent with his general philosophy and his relationship with Senator Durenberger, it was helpful that Massachusetts charter school law which had passed by then by 1994, had an authorizer for charter schools and overseer of charter schools other than local school districts. And in Massachusetts school districts could not even grant charters. It was all done at the state level and by an entity other than the state department of education. So it became a home state issue for Senator Kennedy as well as, you know, his philosophy, instincts, and relationship with Senator Durenberger. And that was very helpful. And it really came down to, you know, this was a big issue in finalizing the conference committee agreement.

Reichgott Junge: [01:08:24](#) Whether you have, whether you allow the States with just district-only authorizers to partake in the grants, or if you require that they have other authorizers to partake in the grants.

Schroeder: [01:08:41](#) That's right. And this is an issue today, you know, and I think that there are people within the education establishment teachers, unions, administrators, school, board, people, others who you know, are resigned to the idea of having charter schools, but would like to keep this under district control. And this is where, and that was the house position at the time in 94. And it was, it was essential I would say that Kennedy took the position on our side and in the interests of his own state to defer to states on who could grant and oversee charters and own that. And that made a huge difference. It was also very helpful that the Clinton administration took that same position. Secretary Riley, a former education governor himself was extremely central to this. We worked closely with him with his staff, senior people in the department, they fashioned what eventually was the so-called compromise on this issue, which really was supportive of the Senate position.

Reichgott Junge: [01:10:08](#) And just so I understand, everyone could partake of the grants, is that right? As you say, defer to whatever the state had. So could a district-only state also partake of the grants?

Schroeder: [01:10:24](#) That's true. And again, you know, philosophically being deferential to states requires you to accept that choice, but it requires the district-only perspective to defer to those states. And it's really many of the states now that have alternative authorizers. You asked the question of mandating alternative

authorizers. And that you couldn't be eligible for these grants unless you had alternative authorizers. I think that would have been our position as we were trying to influence states in how they set this opportunity up. But the other side was unacceptable of only having district sponsorship and oversight of charter schools. And so deferring to States whichever route they chose was a reasonable allowable end point here. And, I have to say that over time, the department of education under all the presidents that have followed Clinton, Bush and Obama were particularly strong on this, that they actually established a priority for states that had alternative authorizers in awarding grants. You know, the criteria that they set up for, it was a competitive program among the states. And the reality is that today you're more likely to get a grant with which you can make subgrants down to schools if you have alternative authorizers.

Reichgott Junge: [01:12:16](#) And why was it important to you Senator then that, as he said, the House position was only district-only states get it. (Schroeder: Right.) Why did you fight against that position for something broader? Why is district-only not sufficient for you?

Durenberger: [01:12:36](#) For me, it's always been options. It's always been giving people a chance to do something at a local level that better suits the local level. And I think. . . that was the way I know I felt at the end of this thing.

Schroeder: This is varied from state to state, of course. And for sure there are some states and some school districts that have effectively used this opportunity. A reality in Minnesota has been that districts have backed off chartering and today we have, I believe, two school districts in Minnesota that oversee charters—Winona and Northfield. Northfield in particular has been, I think, doing this right and been responsive to proposals from local community groups, teachers, and others to authorize schools. They're not authorizing anymore. They have two charter schools in the Northfield school district that the district is overseeing and, you know, is part of public education in Northfield.

Reichgott Junge: [01:14:13](#) So we're in 1994 and the bill is passed, finally. And you of course are retiring from the United States Senate that very year. So I think it's one of your last speeches on the Senate floor. Talk about your feeling, your emotion when that actually was accomplished in 1994.

Durenberger: [01:14:36](#) Yeah. I was pleased to have done it. I was pleased to have a four- or five-year effort over, with but I knew instinctively as I know today, it takes more to do public education right than

(what) charters are going to be able to accomplish. What I enjoyed most about the bill was the work on passing it, and what I saw of it afterwards was the people, the teachers that I got to talk to. I mean, I couldn't come home without Jon having arranged by (some) coincidence, he's got this group of teachers together who are participating in a charter. His goal is somewhere between educating me and saying, you know, you deserve to know what you're accomplishing here, because what we're really trying to do is improve the quality of education for every single kid that comes through our public school system.

Durenberger:

[01:15:51](#)

And my justification for that, I think lies in the fact that for all the wrong reasons, some people are using the charter schools provision today as a means of federally funding private schools. If we wanted to do that, we would have had to call every governor in and say, we're kissing off the public school system in this country. (ERJ: And what causes you to say that?) Just experience and watching, particularly the Republicans, but there's an instinct that grows out of the people from Indiana. And I know that because they did the same thing in trying to kill health reform with walk around medical savings accounts and things. Oh, here, use your medical savings account to buy doctors. Well, that presumes that you know in advance that you know what you're getting for your money, before you cash in your whatchamacallit.

Durenberger:

[01:17:06](#)

I like the public school system. I think it's a critical part of this country. It is even more critical when you think about it in the context of racial and economic disparities in this country. It's hugely critical. And it is so important that every one of those little kids not only has a good mom and a good home, which they don't all have necessarily, but a good day in school, because to them school is community. It's the one time to get out, to get to know other people and how those people live and you make friends and all of us, that sort of thing. And we have a public school system that relies much too heavily on regulation. We're going to do regulation. You gotta do this. You gotta do that. You know, dadadadada dot a dot. It should be instinctive to everybody in that school system, that they have the opportunity to help some little person whose parent they might never get to know really well. And I believe that way down deep in my heart.

Durenberger:

[01:18:15](#)

And it's at the point where as far as my (lack of) support for vouchers, it is all about saving the public school system. That's how important it is. And that's my answer. That's why I don't vote for Trump and why I don't appreciate a lot of these other things that my party has turned on, because they're turning

down opportunities that only professionals in education can really understand well, if they have the opportunity, as I learned from all those teachers that Jon introduced me to. Every one of them has the ability to tell me from experience why a charter that they're involved in was important. And I'll bet you today, if I went and found every one of those people, they would say, and not only that, but, they would have some other suggestions about how the whole school ought to change in order to be saved.

Durenberger:

[01:19:28](#)

And I don't say save just for those who are racially or economically disadvantaged, because I believe that with the right opportunities, every one of those five-year-olds is as good as every other five year old or six year old or seven year old or eight year old or nine year old if they have a chance to get to school. It's that critical in our society right now, but you can't get it into the conversation without having somebody raise the issue of vouchers or, you know, all the rest of that sort of stuff. And they've done it from day one to try to discredit or to dilute the value of charter schools. It's been a long time that these people have been at it, and it's up to communities like the one you and I live in to do something about that, to actually prove that chartering works.

Durenberger:

[01:20:28](#)

We're not doing that well enough. We could be doing great here in the city of St. Paul--right here in the city of St. Paul. In the days we could out and have coffee before we recorded this, I loved to meet people who were involved in charter schools. And every one of them will tell me there's charter schools and then there's charter schools. (ERJ: Meaning?) Meaning some of them work and some of them don't work. And that doesn't mean to me, at least, it doesn't mean there's anything wrong with the charter school definition. There's something wrong with our understanding as a St. Paul community or any community in this state about what it means, the little people to be able every day at eight o'clock in the morning or whatever their time is, to have one of the most welcoming experiences and enjoyable learning time in their life. And why waste that on simply setting up a piece of, some kind of a competition if you will, with a local public school, local non-charter school. I'm just saying to you, because you're the person who got us all started on it, that there is so much potential that still hasn't been realized in charter schools and come to this community.

Reichgott Junge:

[01:22:02](#)

How do we do that? What lessons have we learned? How can we realize that potential for chartering?

Durenberger: [01:22:07](#) You find the leadership, you know, you go back and talk to all the people that we learned off of, they're all still around. Go to Joe Nathan, as an example, or lots of other people. You guys know the difference. You know which ones work and which don't work.

Reichgott Junge: [01:22:22](#) I know we have to close here pretty soon. But I'm just so fascinated by the fact that you served in that time period up through 1994. To your viewpoint, how have the politics and the governing changed from the time you served to today, which is August of 2020? What is so different about it today?

Durenberger: [01:22:48](#) Oh, the only decision that people seem to make in elected office today is which party they're going to run on. And once they decide that, they're either a Greater Minnesota party or they're a Metro Minnesota party. What does that mean? It means that in a community, like I live in, in St. Paul, if you come from one of the communities so-called, (ie) Hmong community or Hispanic, or you're a refugee, the refugee communities and so forth, you're almost a "sure in." The Democratic party has gotten just as lazy about these sort of things as the Republican party has. And they've cheapened their brand. I mean, take a Kennedy and a Durenberger, they've cheapened their brand as DFLers, or as Republicans, because they're allowing people to run for city council or even school board and so forth in our larger city, who speak for a certain community.

Durenberger: [01:24:00](#) And it used to be so much different, and it needs to be in some way, but you and I talking about it, aren't going to get the job done and even voting against Donald Trump isn't going to get the job done. It's a bigger one about the future of Minnesota. And it has to start at the grass roots and it won't start with Governor Walz saying "One Minnesota." It's the right theme, but it isn't going to happen. It isn't going to happen. It is going to start from the bottom up. It has to start with a community. And not in the sense of, you know, are you from Ethiopia? Are you from, whatever it is, born into permanent poverty in the South or something like that, not in that sense, but in the sense of being a part of a community that prides itself on every single person at every opportunity that community has to make life better for the people that live in it. It has to get to that.

Durenberger: [01:25:11](#) I've thrown in with guys at the Minnesota League of Cities, because that's where the future is gonna come. It's gonna come at the city level, it's going to come at the community level. And there's getting back to--getting back to the sense of community, being all of us, not just where you came from or what you stand for, but it's all of us who live within this, whether it's the East

side or it's Crocus Hill or wherever it is. You know, we are one, we are one community and there's nobody arguing for that. It isn't caused by anything specific, but if the DFL party would change, the city would change. If the Republican party changed in Greater Minnesota, I swear, it will make it easier out there. Our two political parties have lost the meaning that, Teddy Kennedy and Dave Durenberger and the feelings that we had for each other in the not so long ago, in the Senate of the United States. And it's about that simple. It's not going to start in Washington. It's going to start here.

Reichgott Junge: [01:26:33](#) Well, Senator your viewpoint over the years, your leadership has been so unique and that is exactly why I long for those days when we can bring it back, and it's been too long. And thank you for the service you've done, not only in education and chartering, but healthcare in so many different ways. I, as a younger Democrat, I've been inspired by you as a Republican that I've looked up to and I appreciate your service. So thank you. (Durenberger: Thank you very much.) And Jon, you are a member of the National Charter Schools Hall of Fame for the work that you've done, we'll have more talking with you later, but I just want to ask you, given what you've just heard, is there anything more you want to add to this interview today that maybe wasn't covered as to bringing chartering national?

Schroeder: [01:27:23](#) No, I think well said, and particularly applying what this opportunity represented and the successes that we had at that time in helping to take charter schools nationally, has significant relevance for today. We've learned a lot. There's a lot of potential here. There's been some significant successes. There's a lot more to be done. And I think we look for leadership to help make that happen.

Reichgott Junge: [01:28:03](#) I want to thank you for joining us today for the National Charter Schools Founders Library. My thanks go to our two guests today, incredible pioneers in chartering: U.S. Senator Dave Durenberger and Jon Schroeder. This is Ember Reichgott Junge, and check out the website at the National Charter Schools Institute for this oral history and the documents that will go with it. Thank you so much.