Disability Unscripted 2020: Samuel Habib Interviews Senator Jeanne Shaheen, Democratic candidate for Senate
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Samuel Habib: Hi, Senator Shaheen. Thank you for taking some time for this interview.

Senator Jeanne Shaheen: Thank you. I know your father.

SH: I'm Samuel Habib

JS: Yes

SH: I am 20 years old and I live in Concord.

JS: Where are you going to school Samuel? In NHTI. Are you understand what I am saying?

SH: Yes.

JS: Okay.

SH: We will be sharing a video and text on social media before the election.

JS: I appreciate that.

SH: I use a communication device to communicate and have pre-programmed questions for the interview in advance. I can also speak but it takes a lot of energy and it can be hard to understand me. Feel free to ask me to repeat myself if you do not understand me.

Protection and Advocacy System for New Hampshire
SH: I'd like to ask you about six issues that are important to people in the disability community, the budget, healthcare, special education, employment, housing and voting.

JS: Very important issues all. So I'm ready to begin whenever you are.

SH: Given projected shortfalls of state revenues, many states may be forced to make cuts to programs that support the health, safety and independence of people with disabilities. What kind of solutions would you propose to ensure that people with disabilities are not disproportionately impacted by these budgetary deficits?

SH: Yeah, those were huge challenges when I was governor and I pushed always to try and make sure we had services for people with disabilities. Now that I'm in the Senate and we're looking at the federal budget, I have been working to try and ensure that President Trump’s effort to block grant Medicaid does not happen. I think that would have a negative impact on people with disabilities. I have been pushing to increase funding for IDEA, something that I have tried to do and supported ever since I was in the state Senate in New Hampshire. Have also, am very concerned about the Affordable Care Act. I know we're overlapping some in terms of the topics but I think it's hard not to do that because as we think about the budget, as you all know, the budget is really about our priorities. What are we gonna invest in? What are we gonna put our money towards? And we need to make sure that the budget at both the state and federal level treats people with disabilities fairly, in the same way that it should treat all of our citizens so that everyone has equal opportunities to independence, to a good job, to a good education, to healthcare when they need it and that’s where I have tried to focus from the time I was elected to the state Senate, as governor, and now as a United States Senator. So I am on the Appropriations Committee in the Senate and I continue, along with my colleagues, democratic colleagues on that committee continue to push back against some of the cuts that the Trump administration is trying to make to Medicare, Medicaid and other programs that help people with disabilities.

SH: COVID-19 has threatened to overwhelm the resources of medical providers to a point where doctors may be forced to choose which patients receive treatment and which do not. No
one wants to limit medical care for COVID-19 patients, but plans need to be developed in case rationing becomes necessary. Currently, an advisory committee is developing guidance for hospitals. What would you want to see included in this guidance?

**JS:** Well again, I think that's why it's so important that we're able to preserve the Affordable Care Act and my concern is that as the Supreme Court takes up the lawsuit that would overturn the Affordable Care Act, that it presents real challenges for everyone but also for people with disabilities who benefit from some of the habilitative and rehabilitative aspects of the Affordable Care Act, as well as just the coverage, for people with preexisting conditions. If COVID is considered a preexisting condition and if the ACA is overturned, we are gonna have millions of people who are gonna be at risk for health insurance coverage because of that and as you point out in your question, one of the challenges with the coronavirus has been ensuring that people get care that they need, that they're able to get testing when they need testing and be able to have that covered under their health insurance or Medicaid or we had some provisions in the initial bills to respond to CARES that would cover some of that. We need to ensure that hospitals are able to continue to do their voluntary procedures because as I'm sure you know, hospitals in New Hampshire have been very hard hit, not just by the cost of providing care for people with the coronavirus, that's been a huge impact, mostly in four hospitals, two in Manchester and two in Nashua but the suspension of other services to people has had a very big impact. I've been working in both the CARES Act to try and ensure that we can get coverage payment for hospitals who had to suspend coverage, who are in financial difficulties. I continue to work on that. That was a big issue in the CARES Act in terms of getting some agreement that would support hospitals. It's something that I continue to work on as we look at loans that hospitals have taken out to try and cover their expenses. The program through CMS is very high interest rates, very quick payback period and it further disadvantages hospitals in a way that will have an impact on treatment, which is what I know you're concerned about, is how do we ensure that as you say, how do we ensure that everyone gets equal access to treatment and making sure that the funding is there for hospitals, for medical providers is absolutely critical. We still have some more dollars that we passed in the CARES Act that have not yet been distributed and we need to get those out and we need to continue to address the loan program so that hospitals don't have to pay back the high amount that is required under the initial loan program and that they have more time to pay it back. So it will be something I will continue to push for as we try and get another package of relief from the coronavirus through and as we look at what I hope will be a new administration that will take a far more expansive and progressive approach to ensuring that everybody has the same access to treatment.
SH: I have been included in regular classes since elementary school and that helped prepare me for college. What will you do to help kids with disabilities be included in regular education and college?

JS: Well again, in terms of K through 12 education, I think continuing to push for IDEA funding is really gonna be important because that's how we ensure that students have the supports they need. The government, as you know has promised to provide about 40% of those funds for the cost of education at the federal level, they've only done about 15%. I have been on a number of pieces of legislation to try and increase those dollars and continue to do that in the Appropriations Committee and we've had some success but not nearly enough to make the kind of difference that we should.

The other area is higher education. I'm a cosponsor of the RISE act, which would provide more transparency for what schools are doing to help students with disabilities. It would also eliminate the need to, again, qualify as a disabled student in order to get access to services and provide additional help in other ways. So I would hope that we might get some success in getting that through but the funding areas as you know so well are the places where we need to focus to try and help support community based services to support home health aides, all of the people, your assistants, who can help make sure you get access to the information as a student, that you can access facilities and get what you need.

SH: One in five Americans, including 19% of likely voters experience a disability, what will you do to help more people with disabilities get jobs.

JS: As you know, it's an ongoing challenge. It's something that I worked on as governor. We were able to make some progress but we've got to do more. I think one of the things we need to do is to help educate employers about the skills and the talents of people with disabilities so that they understand what benefits people with disabilities can bring to their jobs. That will be very important as we look at what we've got to do but again, that's another place where we need to provide some funds to help, not just with the education but help to provide some matching dollars would be one way to do this. It's something that we do for people who have been unemployed to try and work with employers to get them back to work. Well, this is another area where that kind of matching fund, working with employers could make a very big difference.

SH: What steps would you take to increase the availability of accessible housing for people with disabilities?

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**JS:** Well, one of the things we put into the CARES Act was some additional funding to help for housing with people with disabilities. As you know, affordable housing has been a huge issue in New Hampshire for some time and we need to do more. There is legislation that I'm co-sponsoring with Senator Brown that would provide additional rental assistance help. It's something that we need to make sure is available, not just to anyone who needs rental assistance but to also to people with disabilities who need rental assistance. So we've got to provide more of that and we've got to look at flexibility and programs like Medicaid. When I was governor, one of the things we did was to get a waiver from CMS so that we could retrofit homes to keep people in homes so they didn't have to go to institutions. That is something that is a no brainer because I know you would rather be at home independent than be in an institution, I think that's true of most people and we need to provide waivers and we need to be able to use our Medicaid dollars to ensure that we have that flexibility to help people do that.

**SH:** If accessible voting equipment was purchased with federal funding, it cannot be used in local or municipal elections. What steps would you take so that accessible voting equipment is available in every New Hampshire election, including local elections?

**JS:** Well first of all, I don't think it makes sense to say we're gonna provide accessible equipment but you can only use it in a federal election. As you know, our elections are localized. We go to our town hall, I vote in Madbury. I go to the town hall in Madbury to vote and I'm not just voting on the federal officers, I'm voting on the state officials as well. So it doesn't make sense that we would have that equipment only be available for federal elections when people need it. So that's one change that I would make. The other thing I think we need to do is again, to look at support that states and local districts need in order to conduct free and fair elections. We put $400 million into the CARES Act to address election security, which also meant how do we ensure that people can get to vote. We tried to do more of that in another package of assistance to respond to the coronavirus. Unfortunately, we've not been able to get agreement in Washington to do that but it's something that we need to continue to support because as you know, and we need to remind everyone, especially at this time of the year, when we're so close to this election that is so critical for our future. We need to make sure that everyone who wants to vote is able to vote and that their vote is counted and that means ensuring that there is equipment and technology available for people with disabilities, as well as for those people who may not be able to get to the polls because they're worried about the coronavirus. That's why I've been a proponent of ensuring that everyone can get access to absentee ballots so that people who can't go to the polls on election day still have a chance to vote. That's critical to our democracy and it's critical to ensure that
everyone, regardless of gender, of economic status, of background, of ethnic origin, disabilities, whatever it is, that everyone has that right to vote.

**SH:** Those are all the questions I have for you. Thank you so much for taking time to do this interview.

**JS:** Thank you Samuel for your willingness to do this kind of really very helpful information and the documentary that you're gonna be working on. Explain to people where all of the candidates are on the issues that are important to the disabilities community. I appreciate that because you're gonna help me reach a lot of people that I wouldn't be able to reach on my own. So thank you very much, keep it up.

**SH:** We will let you know when it goes live.

**JS:** Oh, good. Thanks very much. Have a good day and let's make sure that everybody gets out to vote on November the third. Bye.