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Disability Unscripted 2020: Samuel Habib Interviews Congressional Candidate
Matt Mowers, Republican candidate for Congressional District 1
drcnh.org/videos/disability-unscripted-with-samuel-habib-matt-mowers-interview

Samuel Habib: Hi Mr. Mowers, thank you for taking some time for this interview.

Matt Mowers: Absolutely, no happy to do it.

SH: I'm Samuel Habib, I am 20 years old and I live in Concord.

MM: It's great to meet you Samuel, really appreciate you, you know bringing light to a lot of these issues and for reaching out. Yeah, I've been looking forward to this, sorry it took a little while to finally get everyone on the same schedule, but now we can talk about all. Samuel what's on your mind? what can I help you with? any ideas you want me to chat about? or you know I'm happy to talk about anything on your mind.

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.

MM: Okay, Sounds good.

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,

MM: sure

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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?

MM: Sure, we'll Samuel, thanks for that it's an important question, especially given in light of everything going on with COVID-19 you know, you have a lot of expenditures right now as you know for State and Local Governments, and so, you know, a key piece of this is making sure that for State and Local governments the expenditures they've made in direct relation to COVID-19, that those are reimbursed, just the same way that we would for any other natural disaster sort of catastrophe that would have occurred, and there was emergency declaration for that. So, I do support that. I gotta tell you it's important issue to me, I worked in a Global Health Office at the State Department, and one of the things I was tasked with doing and actually worked on doing was expanding healthcare opportunities for those with disabilities. And so I actually brought in some new partners and you know, Tim Shriver from the Special Olympics is a friend and so we actually brought him in to actually do some work, to actually coordinate with and communicate with, to figure out ways we could better deliver services in many different countries around the world to those with special needs, and so, you know, we've ...it's an important issue, it's important issue to me, so you, we do need to make sure that that funding is protected at the state level and the way we're gonna allow, be able to do that is by making sure that the State and Local Governments are as impacted because the money they spent for COVID-19.

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?

MM: Well, I think one of the things that we really need to focus on is expanding Telemedicine. it's something that candidly we showed done for a long time, and unfortunately it really took COVID-19 in order to really expand that as an option. You know, especially there's a lot of areas of healthcare where, you know, that's gonna take on particular importance. You know, when you're looking at behavioral and mental health, a lot of those sessions are things that don't necessarily need to be done in person and can be done through Telemedicine. Initial consultations and visits are another aspect of it all. So I think as we expand those options and

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actually lean on Telemedicine as a bigger component of our overall healthcare system, that's gonna free up a lot of bandwidth and that's gonna be important especially in COVID-19 as folks aren't necessarily comfortable going off into a traditional healthcare center, because of everything surrounding contagions and the rest of it. so that they are gonna wanna communicate with their doctor virtually. So, I think that's one piece of it. I was talking to a bunch of folks from federally qualified health centers just a few days ago, one of the issues they did say was there's not enough reimbursement on Medicare, for Telemedicine. And so, I think that's something we can work toward and I would imagine there's a similar component to that on Medicaid and that's something else we can look to as well.

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?

MM: Sure, I think we've got to make sure to look, my wife and I live in Bedford, we don't have any kids there, but a lot of our friends do and part of the reason a lot of them live in Bedford is because they have a tremendous opportunities in the school district for those with special needs. And so, you know, we need to make sure that it's not just contained to a few select school districts around the state though. And so I think we need to work in contact with local school boards, as well as the State Department of education in order to actually develop solutions to make sure that there's really amazing learning opportunities in traditional classroom settings, for everyone with special needs as well. I think that's an important component of it, and if we do that, expand those options so it's not just a few districts. We're gonna make sure every child has opportunities, the same ones you did. You know, your incredible story to show the success of those types of educational opportunities. I just wanna make sure that they're out there for every Samuel, you know, in order to make sure everyone has the same opportunities that you did.

SH: What will you do to make sure that these laws are actually followed and enforced?

MM: Well, I think it's really important that you know, we have protections in our laws, both at the state level and the federal level to ensure there is no discrimination, and so that's an important component of it. We also need to make sure that we're working with states on enforcement of those laws, you have a lot of great entities at the state level, to ensure that there's no forms of discrimination that, and also makes sure that you know, students regardless of their, regardless of

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where they come from and regardless of any sort of special needs are able to reintegrate into the classroom in order to make sure that they have the same exact educational opportunities as anyone else. That's so important as you know, because we wanted to make sure that we're giving every child the opportunity to learn to their greatest potential. And there's a lot of amazing potential as in every single classroom that if we allow every student to have access to, they can thrive, which is gonna prepare them best for college as well, which is then gonna prepare them best for the workforce.

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?

MM: Well, it's a great question, and it's one that you know, we really need to focus on, here in our state because one of the challenges we have is we have tremendous educational opportunities and then it's not always linked to employers. So, you have a lot of people are graduating and then they're looking off to other places to move to. We need to be working much more closely with our university system to make sure that those who are being trained with specific skill sets are also being matched up with employers in our state. And I think there's just tremendous opportunities for everyone, including those with disabilities. If we continue to expand and grow you know, our economy here in New Hampshire, we're fortunate that with Governor Sununu, he's done a tremendous job growing our economy. you know, in a way that has ensured that New Hampshire continues to be a leader in the nation. You know, if you look at our unemployment rate coming back from COVID-19, we're down to 5.1%. Now pre pandemic we're at 2 and 1/2%. So we have a lot of work to do, but we look at 5.1% , it's well ahead of the rest of the country. And that's for a number of reasons, It's because Governor Sununu's leadership both in keeping our taxes low and spending in check here in New Hampshire, It's his ability also to lead us through COVID-19, but it's also because of the New Hampshire advantage and the New Hampshire way, which attracts so many people to have employment opportunities here. The biggest thing we need to do though, is continue to work with those industries to expand it. You know, I think there's a lot of great job opportunities that are gonna actually come as a result of what we've learned from COVID-19. We can bring back high-tech manufacturing for high skilled, high-tech opportunities in pharmaceutical production. That's something we can do here. We should work with the University System to make sure that students are then paired up with those job opportunities. And by the way, that makes ensures that we also have increased access to opportunities for those with disabilities as well.

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SH: What efforts are you making to reach out and employ people with disabilities in your campaign and your staff?

MM: Sure, well we have a great network of supporter and for our campaign and it runs the gamut of you know really reflects the state of New Hampshire. We do have folks with disabilities as well who are helping out on the campaign and volunteering, we have a pretty small staff We have about three staffers right now, so we're not, you know, we don't have a big team that's actually paid, but we are working to continue to grow opportunities for students of all tribes, including those with disabilities. You know, we have many interns that are students with disabilities of different forms. And we also have additional opportunities to get more people engaged. So, we were giving not just, you know, taking people on as volunteers, but really giving responsibility to people, giving educational opportunities, making sure that internships count for class credit, making sure that they're a bridge to employment down the road. And so we have a lot of opportunities our campaign, Samuel, we'd love to get you involved if you're interested, as well as anyone else that you know are interested in getting engaged in the campaign.

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

MM: Yeah, it's a great question, it's a real challenge here in New Hampshire. I mean, we have a real short housing shortage, for across the board. I mean, and we're gonna see continued increase in housing prices because of COVID-19 as folks move out of some of the urban centers, South of us, particularly Boston and New York and look for different housing opportunities So I think we're gonna have to be very mindful of working between local and state governments to make sure that there are housing opportunities for those with disabilities and so, and it has to, you know, be across the board in a number of different towns, it has to be done so in a [Indistinct] working though with the local communities. Too often, I think you have a lot of federal and state mandates that try to tell talents how they can build and what they can build for housing, and sometimes you know, you miss the mark, you just don't actually end up with the housing opportunities you really need. So, I think we do it in concert though, between a local government and state government, we can expand those opportunities if we have to. We have ab across the board housing shortage here something we were already on the cusp of already and COVID-19 is accelerated. And so we need to make sure there's more housing opportunities for those with disabilities.

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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?

MM: Yeah, we should make sure that a town that has that type of voting equipment presuming that they actually own it you know, it's not just something that's being provided on a short-term basis from the federal government, is able to be utilized for every election. That's just common sense at the end of the day, and so we need the integrity and sanctity of the ballot is important, and so making sure that everyone has the ability to, communicate their preference in a secure way that ensures the integrity of their ballot is so important. And this is actually something I worked on in other areas too, I mean I worked on ensuring that we had equal voting opportunities for those with disabilities across the world, because too often there is folks with disabilities are discriminated against in a lot of other countries, especially younger democracies, so we need to make sure that they do have those voting opportunities. And that, you know, I think it's common sense that if a town has that equipment for a federal election, they're able to use it for local and state elections as well.

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

MM: No, I was happy to do it Samuel, like I said, on the beginning, it's important topic and I'm glad you're bringing voice to it. If there's anything else that we can do to be helpful you know, don't hesitate to reach out, we'd love to continue to answer any other questions you have or be helpful just to you in any way possible, but certainly we're like, I mean it, when I say, if you or anyone else you know wants to get engaged in the campaign, we'd love to have your involvement.

SH: Thanks, we will let you know when it goes live.

MM: That's great. Thank you, Samuel. Appreciated it. Have a great night

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SH: Thanks.