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**Disability Unscripted 2020: Samuel Habib Interviews Representative Chris Pappas,
Democratic candidate for Congressional District 1**
drcnh.org/videos/disability-unscripted-with-samuel-habib-chris-pappas-interview

Samuel Habib: Hi, Representative Pappas, thank you for taking some time for this interview.

Representative Chris Pappas: Hi Samuel, it's nice to see you, and thanks for making time for us. I'm really looking forward to the interview today. And I appreciate your interest. And all you're doing here.

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

CP: Well, it's nice to meet you, Samuel. And I'm Chris Pappas. I'm the Congressman for the First District in New Hampshire. Well, I don't cover Concord, I have Manchester and the Seacoast and the Lakes Region in my district. And obviously, we're in the middle of an election right now. And there's lots to talk about in terms of the issues, but glad that you, you know, help set this up. I think it's important that everyone's included in the conversation about, you know, the issues at hand, and also making sure that everyone can safely vote.

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.

CP: Okay, I certainly will. I look forward to the questions.

SH: I'd like to ask you about six issues that are important to people in the disability community, the budget, health care, special education, employment, housing, and voting. 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?

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CP: Well, I don't think we should be cutting vital services at all, especially during this pandemic, especially when we need to be supporting the needs of all of our citizens. One of the priorities that I have in Congress is providing federal support to state budgets to make sure that we don't see the kinds of cuts that unfortunately have been reality, in too many recessions in the past in New Hampshire. This funding, I hope can be provided in an upcoming COVID-19 relief package. It's something that I've been fighting for with my colleagues on both sides of the aisle. And I found that there's a lot of agreement around New Hampshire, from our state and local officials about the need to protect these vital services. So this funding, you know, would be there to deal with the lost revenue that New Hampshire is experiencing right now. What we don't want to have happen is people doing the budget to have to make tough choices of either raising taxes during a pandemic, or cutting vital services. I know we've made strides in recent years, at addressing the waiting list, and making sure that people have access to the services that they need. And so I think that the most important thing I can do my federal role is making sure that the support is there for New Hampshire state budget, to make sure that programs are strong and we can continue to make improvements.

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?

CP: Well, thanks very much for the question. I know early on in this pandemic, we saw disruption in care, across our state and across our country. And I'm deeply concerned about the long-term implications of that. And the fact that, we can't be in that situation again, we've got to make sure people are getting the care that they need that our health care system is strong that our heart hospitals are financially viable, and that people are able to see their providers and caregivers. One element that I hope will be in upcoming COVID relief legislation is additional direct support to our hospitals and health care system, to our community health centers, and other providers to make sure that they can weather this storm. They're dealing with loss revenue right now, they've had to reconfigure their operations, especially to deal with COVID patients safely. But we've got to make sure that other vital services and care, can continue uninterrupted. So financial support is really important. And just our overall strategy with respect to COVID-19 is so important, we need to do more testing, treatment and contact tracing of the virus, we've got to stay ahead of this, because if we don't, we're gonna see the numbers continue to rise across the country. And it's gonna have disastrous implications for important care and our overall health

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care system. We've got to make sure that our public health networks are well equipped as well, in making sure that, we can do the contact tracing to find out if someone has been infected, how to keep those around them safe. We also need to make sure we have the personal protective equipment that's required to create a safe environment, in our medical facilities in home care and long-term care. And we need to be making more that right here in the United States. And that's why I've called on the Administration to deploy the defense production act to make sure that our healthcare system and facilities are well stocked with these necessary supplies. So there's a lot of issues, we have to focus on moving forward. But we've got to do everything we can to stay ahead of this pandemic and prevent a potential second hit here in New Hampshire. And we do have to have plans in place to make sure that vital care and services continues, even while we can care for our COVID patients. So expanding capacity and making sure that our healthcare system is nimble, is flexible, and responsive is very important.

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?

CP: Well, thanks for the question. And, I know right now, there's a lot of focus on education, and making sure that we have safe environments that we have the technology needed to make sure students of all abilities remain connected to their classrooms. And that's so vital for throughout this pandemic, but certainly beyond as well. I'm a strong supporter of IDEA, the Individuals with Disability Education Act, as a cosponsor of a bill, HR 1878, which would provide the full federal commitment for special education programs. This was a law that had been passed in the 1970s, but the current federal allocation is only about 15% of the costs that are incurred by our school districts. So we've got to do more to make sure that funding is there to ensure that educational services can be offered to everyone. And that we have high quality education for everyone in our public schools. I'm also looking at how we can provide direct funding to local governments through COVID relief, this is going to be really important to keep educational services in place. Again, just like the state budget is going to experience disruptions because of COVID and loss revenue, we wanna make sure our local budgets also are strong. And that includes our school districts so that we have the right teachers, support professionals and faculty in place to make sure that the, you know, education system moves forward and meets everyone's needs. So I think we do have some opportunities, as we think about the pandemic, to make sure that we're enhancing the technology that exists in our school districts. There's a wide degree of variance from school district to school district. And we can do a lot better by providing from some federal support to make sure that that technology is in the classroom. And it's with

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our students to make sure it's meeting their needs and ensure that their education can continue through COVID and beyond.

SH: Do you think that the ADA and IDEA are being properly enforced in New Hampshire and nationally? And if not, what will you do to make sure that these laws are actually followed and enforced?

CP: Well, I have heard concerns about that. And I'd like to work with advocates like yourself in organizations to identify places that, that those laws aren't being followed. I think those are important, bedrock laws that protect individuals with disabilities. And we've got to make sure that we allow people the independence and the freedom and services that they need, that spelled out in those in those vital laws. So I guess I look to the community in New Hampshire, to help me understand additional steps that we can take in Congress to address shortcomings, and work with stakeholders here in New Hampshire, to try to make things better. Ultimately, we can't move forward as a country, if we're leaving people behind, or we're leaving people out, we've got to create an inclusive future where everyone can thrive. And following those laws is an important aspect of it.

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?

CP: Well, thanks very much for the question. One of the places that I've been focused in Congress is on my work as a member of the Veterans Affairs Committee, and there were significant steps we should take through the Veterans administration to make sure that we're meeting the needs of individuals who have served this country who have worn the uniform of this country to ensure that they get access to the services care and employment opportunities that they deserve. So our committee has been working on legislation and focused on how we can make things easier to make those connections with our veteran population, our disabled veteran population and make sure that they're able to get into the workforce, stay there and earn a good living. To the extent that there are barriers, I think we need to work to address them, I think, making sure that our state governments have the funding and resources they need is vitally important. Making sure that our education system is strong and can provide opportunities for individuals who are leaving school and to allow them to go on out into the workforce is really important. There's some really good partnerships in New Hampshire, between our business

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community and with our educational institutions. And we should look to support those relationships, because that allows, you know, individuals to get the skills that they need and to, you know, be able to find employment that will allow them to, succeed as they move forward. So, I think everyone has a role to play, and everyone has, you know, should be welcomed into the workforce. We've got some great companies who are doing that. And, we wanna support and expand their ability to continue to open the doors of opportunity to everyone.

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

CP: Oh, well, thanks very much for the question. And we have had people with disabilities working on our campaign. And, I think it's an exciting opportunity for people to, you know, get experience about what our democracy is, like, what a what a campaign is like. And, it's been really great to connect with some of these individuals, we, I think it's all about creating an inclusive and welcoming environment where everyone can participate. And there are tremendous opportunities for people to do that, not just through politics, but in government services. Well, we have a couple of offices in New Hampshire, we have an office in Washington. And, we really seek to make sure that, we're creating a diverse team, and we welcome opportunities to, you know, make sure that individuals with disabilities are able to see the government side of the work that we do as well.

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

CP: Well, thanks very much for the question. You know, the housing issue that we're facing in New Hampshire right now is really severe, we have a lack of affordable housing, it's made worse by the pandemic, I worry about a lot of folks who are struggling to make ends meet to keep a roof over their head. And we've got to make sure that we're doing all we can during this tough time to meet the needs that are out there. One of the bills that I'm supporting is called the Disability Integration Act. And it ensures that individuals who are eligible for care are able to receive services and it prevents insurers and government from imposing any barriers to access. So I think this is one way that we can look at making sure that people's needs are met in the housing space, we really shouldn't. We really need to ensure that there's sufficient availability of affordable and accessible housing and it's got to be integrated, and we've got to make sure that

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there's no discrimination in the housing space whatsoever. So we've provided some support through COVID relief legislation to housing entities in New Hampshire. And I'm also supporting legislation that would establish programs and requirements that assist individuals with disability and the elderly as well, with disaster preparedness and finding shelter and housing that is accessible. But I think we really have to look at all levels of government, we've got to work with our local partners, we've got to work on, you know, work with our state partners and federal partners to make sure their resources and that the housing stock is adequate. And right now in New Hampshire, it's not adequate. And so, we need a community on off approach to help bring about the kind of development and accessibility modifications that meet the needs of staters.

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?

CP: Well, thanks very much, I think we should look to provide some flexible funding that can meet the needs for all elections. You know, We did provide New Hampshire with some support through the CARES Act that helps voters with disabilities, have a secure way of privately and independently voting. I'm also a supporter of a bill called HR 1. And it has a provision in it called the Disability Voting Rights Act, which would look to increase protections for Americans with disabilities who are a voting age, there are a lot of barriers that exist in elections, the type of equipment that's available, registration procedures, that aren't easy, polling places, and voting machines that just aren't accessible. And so we've got to work on all of that to make sure that everyone has a safe and accessible experience, either before election day voting by absentee or in person on election day. And really, we've got to make sure that we make it easier and not harder to vote. So I'd like to see some flexible support to states to procure that equipment, to make sure it's on hand and do all we can to sort of have a bill of rights for the disabled community when it comes to voting. Because we know there are so many barriers, and we can't afford to let anyone not be able to participate if they would like to.

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

CP: Well, Samuael I want to thank you as well. We covered a lot of topics and I really appreciate the questions. But also, the way that this will get out to others who learned about these

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issues just like you are, so. Thank you very much for your time. I hope you're staying safe. And it's really a pleasure to spend some time with you. And I hope you and your family stay safe, you know, and thanks for thanks for doing this, We really, really enjoyed it.

SH: Thanks.

CP: Okay, take care. Bye bye.