

(Music)

Mark Masselli: This is conversations on healthcare. I am Mark Masselli.

Margaret Flinter: And I am Margaret Flinter.

Mark Masselli: Margaret, I should not have been surprised that the day after our show with Jennie Chin Hansen President of AARP I received another AARP invitation to join up. They really want me to join. Do you think it was the interview?

Margaret Flinter: No, I think you really qualify for membership and I am hoping you will take them up on it but seriously AARP doesn't miss to be. The bigger news was the next day they came out in support of President Obama's healthcare reform initiative.

Mark Masselli: But remember the order from their lips to our listeners' ears then to the president. By the way Margaret, when are we going to have the president in our show?

Margaret Flinter: Not to worry, I will be sure and let you know and I am working on it.

Mark Masselli: Speaking of guests who have had their president's year, today we are going to hear from Congressman Joseph Cao who spent a lot of time this weekend talking with their president as he was the lone republican who voted for the affordable healthcare for America Act.

Margaret Flinter: It was a memorable moment on Saturday night watching on C-SPAN when that one lone republican I-vote went up on the score cards. It was really a courageous act by the congressman and he is an amazing individual and we are looking to learning more about him today.

Mark Masselli: We will hear a little bit about his remarkable journey from being born in Vietnam to becoming congressman for the district that represents New Orleans.

Margaret Flinter: We are also going to hear excerpts from the floor of the House of Representatives it was a night when the voice of the people really put some wind into the sale of health reform and we are going to bring that to you today.

Mark Masselli: What an amazing event, I know why because it was on my Facebook sharing the news as I listened on the iPhone to this historic event.

Margaret Flinter: And knowing that you are a TV free household I was busy emailing you trying to say get the kids to a television so they can watch this historic event.

Mark Masselli: We did stay connected.

Margaret Flinter: And speaking of trying to stay connected let's hear from a listener last week who commented on our Greenhouse Project. Terry Daniher wrote in "I really enjoyed today's program. I know the show is being geared to our policy makers but today's information hit home for me. I am beginning to think about living situations in my elder years and it was conferring to you know that there are situations being developed that challenge that traditional convalescent home.

Mark Masselli: Thanks Terry it hit home for a lot of us who are thinking about better ways to care for the aging of an American population.

Margaret Flinter: And just a reminder to those who can't listen to the entire show, we have added a website it can be found at CHCRadio.com. Click to hear all of our shows and get transcripts as well.

Mark Masselli: And if you want to give us some feedback on our show email us at conversations@chc1.com. Now let's get an update on healthcare headlines.

In this week's headline news when HR 3962 reached the threshold of 218 votes on Saturday night a chair went up and congress was ready to move on to the next battle in this year's campaign for significant health reform. The all members present, all gallery seats filled on Saturday night was testimony to the historic nature of the house vote as the week began the democrats around the offensive. Former president Bill Clinton addressed democrats in the senate at their weekly caucus meeting to tell them they must pass healthcare legislation as soon as possible to salvage the economy. He said healthcare reform is an economic imperative. Meanwhile Senate Majority Leader Harry Read is waiting to get a cost estimate for his healthcare bill from the congressional budget office before publicly unavailing it. He may bring the bills to the floor as early as next week. While the senate has yet to even see the bill it will debate. Democrats are already concerned the debate will be held up by issues like

the inclusion of a public option as well as abortion language in the bill. The Stupak Amendment that was passed by the house Saturday night prohibited the use of federal funds for abortion and it was critical to HR 3962 passage. Senator Ben Nelson of Nebraska made it clear that the senate health reform bill will face the same challenge and he said if it doesn't make clear that it does not fund abortion with government money you can be sure I will vote against the bill.

Mark Masselli: This week's news maker interview was with Congressman Joseph Cao who represents the second congressional district in Louisiana but first here is a background report on Congressman Cao.

Margaret Flinter: When Congressman Joseph Cao cast his electronic iVote for HR 3962 late Saturday night. He suddenly went from relative unknown to perhaps the most talked about republican in America. Unlike Senator Olympia Snowe of Maine who has kept both parties guessing about her final decisions on the Senate Health Reform Bill, Congressman Cao had not stated publicly that he would be voting in favor of the bill. On Saturday night after the house passed the amendment prohibiting federal support for abortion under the public option and after his party leaders had given rousing condemnations of the bill he cast his iVote. He had been clear that Public Funding for abortion would guarantee his No Vote saying I have to live with myself. Now at 42-years-old he was born at the high of the Vietnam War 1967 in Saigon now Hồ Chí Minh City. That makes him the first Vietnamese born, Vietnamese American to serve in the House of Representatives. His first foray into politics weren't successful. He lost a run for Louisiana House of Representative seat but later was appointed by Governor Jindal to a seat on the Orleans Parish Board of Election Supervisors. Clearly Hurricane Katrina was a pivotal experience for him. In the period after Katrina he became an activist on behalf of the victims of Katrina often going head to head with the FEMA office in New Orleans. When he got to Congress he quickly grabbed headlines announcing that his staff was investigating the FEMA office and accusing them of widespread discrimination, cronyism and nepotism. When he was elected in 2008 to represent Louisiana Second District, he was the first republican to represent that heavily democratic district in over a hundred years. He defeated 9-term Democrat William Anderson who was under indictment during the campaign and Congress' Committee assignments or Homeland Security and Transportation and Infrastructure. Well others in Congress have come from poor backgrounds and made their own fortunes in the world. Congressman Cao is cited is one of the poorest members of Congress. Congressman Cao came to the United States as an 8-year-old refugee. His father an

officer in the South Vietnamese army was a Prisoner of War who ultimately rejoined his family in America years later. Cao's family settled in Houston and Congressman Cao went on to distinguish himself academically with degrees in physics, law and philosophy. He is devout Catholic, who spends several years as a Jesuit seminarian before deciding that the priesthood was not his vocation. And although, he distinguished himself as an advocate for people with his work on immigration issues particularly the Boat People of Vietnam. It was Hurricane Katrina that seems to have given him the spark for his political ambitions and his first month as a Congressman he was greeted warmly by the Republican Leadership, House Minority Leader John Boehner reportedly wrote a memo, "The Future is Cao" but that was all before Cao's Saturday night vote which wasn't so significant in terms of outcome, the democrats already had 218 I-votes needed to assure victory, but for what it represented the sole republican vote on an issue for which house republican leaders have said earlier that day, not a single republican will vote for this bill. So why did he do it? Perhaps it was a combination of voting his conscience representing the will of his constituents and practical politics, there was no shortage of opinion on this following his vote. Congressman Cao represents an extremely democratic district that went all out for President Obama in 2008. Voting against the President's agenda would have made for a tough reelection in his district next year. The economists point to the changing nature of Vietnamese American politics as another reason, saying a candidate has to appeal to the other minority groups as well, Latino or African-American within their districts. The Huffington Post said President Obama basically bought him off by promising to address problems in Cao's district. And The Hill's Molly Hooper reports that Cao waited to cast his vote until the moment when it no longer mattered how he voted making it just symbolic, whatever the reason it looks like it came as a surprise to the republican leadership and is likely to make him one of the most watched members of Congress and perhaps the most analyzed Louisiana politician since Huey Long for sometime.

Mark Masselli: Joining us by phone is Congressman Joseph Cao who represents the Second Congressional District in Louisiana. Congressman, thank you for speaking with us today.

Congressman Joseph Cao: Thank you for having me on this show.

Margaret Flinter: Welcome Congressman. Now you are the only republican to vote for the HR 3962 an act to provide affordable quality healthcare for all-Americans that took some courage. You have said it

was the right thing for your constituents. Tell us a little bit about what you mean by that?

Congressman Joseph Cao: My district in the southern part of Louisiana which comprises mainly of New Orleans and the surrounding areas. It's a very poor area with a lot of people who are uninsured and I believe that we need to provide healthcare insurance for them and this bill I believe would be able to do that. Along with that, I thought the prohibitions against the preexisting exclusions and the other provisions on bill at least will be a very beneficial for the people out here.

Mark Masselli: Congressman you held many town meetings with your constituents to talk about Healthcare Reform, tell us what you heard from them?

Congressman Joseph Cao: Mainly people convey the desire to have Healthcare Reform after there were a few number of people who were angry and afraid and rightly so because it's a very complex bill. But overall I wanted say between 60 and 70 people wanted the Healthcare Reform and I informed them that, I was leaning towards supporting it as long as we fixed the abortion language on the bill and I was able to push that along with the complex _____10.25 shift and other pro-life members of the US Congress to push for pro-life language on the bill and once that was successful, I was able to support the Healthcare Reform Bill.

Mark Masselli: And Congressman you have had the opportunity to talk with President Obama. Tell us how receptive he has been to the concerns that you have asked him to consider about the needs of your district and your constituents?

Congressman Joseph Cao: The administration and we have had a very strong working relationship. We have worked well together in the past nine months to address many issues of recovery, for example just in FEMA alone, we have been able to push out over one billion dollars in recovery money. So I was talking to the President to encourage him to continue working with him in the areas of the recovery. I expressed specifically the needs of the Louisiana with the FMAP-6 with the situations concerning Charity and Methodist as well as the issue of community disaster loans, so he is fully aware of those issues that are of priority for us down here.

Mark Masselli: The President has said he wants a bipartisan bill, but so far all he has on the Republican side is yourself and Senator Snowe. Do you have any advice for the President on the ways to further bipartisanship on this all important Health Reform Bill?

Congressman Joseph Cao: I believe that the administration has to encourage the Democrat leadership to involve more Republican members in the discussions, in the debate. We have been pretty much shut out of the conversation and I hope that the administration will encourage the Democrat leadership to encourage the Republicans to the conversation.

Mark Masselli: This is Conversations on the Healthcare. We are speaking with Congressman Joseph Cao, who represents the Second Congressional District in Louisiana. Congressman Cao was the lone Republican vote as the House of Representatives took a historic step forward in passing healthcare legislation.

Margaret Flinter: And you know, I think one thing that everybody does agree on is that the HR 3962 to provide affordable quality healthcare for all-Americans is a long bill, about 2000 pages and that's not really surprising, it covers a lot of territory. But we will be interested in hearing what elements of the legislation stand out for you as the most important?

Congressman Joseph Cao: I thought it was important that we have the individual mandate requiring everyone to have healthcare I believe that. We as a country have to provide healthcare for our people and for those that cannot afford it, so we should be able to help them to subsidize some of the expenses. I believe that the provision preventing preexisting exclusion was an employment provision because often times, many insurance companies try to not provide coverage for people who are sick or at least not pay for some of the extreme expenses for them to do so, so that I believe that provision was also very important and then the provision, for example, allowing at least providing incentives for people to go into the medical field because eventually we will need more medical providers not just nurses so and so forth. Those incentives were extremely important. So there are good things as well as there are some things that concern me, but overall I thought, I need to just support the bill.

Mark Masselli: Congressman, you were born in Vietnam in Saigon, now known as Ho Chi Minh City, you have had a remarkable journey from there to representing the Second Congressional District, which

encompasses the City of New Orleans. Can you tell our listeners a little bit about your life journey?

Congressman Joseph Cao: Oh, yes I came over from Vietnam, when I was 8 years old with an older sister and a younger brother. I was eventually raised by an uncle. My father was the military officer. He was imprisoned after the Vietnam War for about seven years in the Reeducation Camp. My mother stayed back in Vietnam to raise five of my sisters. I spent the first four years of my life in Goshen, Indiana and then moved out to Mississippi for one year and then grew up spending my middle school and high school years in Houston. I went to college afterward joined the Society of Jesus to become a catholic priest. I didn't quite make it best six years in the society in which I received my motivation to enter in the religious life. Afterwards I left that society in 1996 and went to Virginia for a year to teach middle school. I went to Capitol Hill to lobby for refugee issues. I went to law school, got my own law practice, got married have a family and decided to run for Congress.

Mark Masselli: And you are still very young, you've done a lot.

Joseph Cao: I am only 42, even though for a last couple of days, I feel like 70.

Margaret Flinter: Well congratulations on all of that. And as you say, you are a first-term congressman and certainly casting such a major and dissenting vote from your party that's difficult at any phase. You have got some good presidents in history, congressmen and women from both sides who went against the party vote, but maintained successful careers in the House of the Senate. What did you see most in government and in governing, what are the key issues in addition to healthcare that you are tracking?

Congressman Joseph Cao: The main issue in healthcare, obviously we are down here, we need tremendous help with respect to shared _____16:25. But overall, I believe that as a congressional member as well as being a representative of this district, I hope to continue to be able to give required service to this area to bring the necessary federal funding to help rebuild this area, that has been my main focus when I came to office nine months ago and it will continue to be my main focus for the future. So I hope to be able to give my contributions to the people of second district and I hope that I will continue to represent them well.

Mark Masselli: Congressman the images of Katrina are seared in our minds. We have all read about the experiences of doctors and nurses and patients of charity hospital and also how much of the healthcare workforce and infrastructure was lost and may not fully return, can you share with us your attitude towards healthcare and the needs for health reform and how that was shaped by your Katrina experience?

Congressman Joseph Cao: Well after Katrina, obviously the big charity system down here was destroyed. The hospitals down here were pretty much over extended. There is a lack of community health centers and there is a lack of medical doctors and medical nurses. This particular bill will provide incentives for medical homes, more community-based medical clinics, which I believe should move towards the future because often times people show up in our emergency rooms and essentially making medical care much more expensive than if they were to go to community medical clinics to get minor issues addressed. So I believe that the healthcare reform debate at least just healthcare reform bill will provide incentives for medical homes, for community medical clinics, for more medical providers to provide people with access to medical care because after Katrina many people of my district did not have access to medical care and I believe that this bill will provide at least a pathway to get that done.

Mark Masselli: Congressman Cao, thanks so much for speaking with us today.

Margaret Flinter: Thank you congressman.

Joseph Cao: Thank you very much.

Mark Masselli: We just heard from Congressman Cao, the most talked about politician since he broke with his party and voted with the democrats on Saturday night for healthcare reform.

Margaret Flinter: There were strong and eloquent voices before and against the bill on Saturday night, we are going to hear some of those voices and let's start with the republicans, we will hear from Minority Leader John Boehner of Ohio and then Minority Whip Eric Cantor of Virginia.

John Boehner: I rise in opposition to this bill. One of the issues in this bill that is of concern to members on both sides of aisle has to do with the sanctity of life.

Eric Cantor: There are times in this body, when we real can't tell the difference between us Republicans and you Democrats, and this is certainly one of them. The Democrats' solution is a 1990 page trillion dollar overhaul of a healthcare system we know. A sweeping new entitlement that raises taxes, cuts benefits to seniors, it spends over a trillion dollars that we don't have.

Mark Masselli: The republican certainly had passion in their rhetoric, but their health proposal was ill-conceived as we hear from Representative John Dingell who struck the gavel in the House, when it approved Medicare in 1965.

John Dingell: I won't begin by spending much time on the bill offered by my Republican colleagues. It is really no exception truth for HR 3962. According to The New York Times and I think this sufficiently disposes to the matter. The Republican amendment does almost nothing to reduce the scandalously high number of Americans who have no interest and it makes only a token stab at slowing the relentlessly rising costs of medical care. Interestingly enough, under the Republic amendment individuals would pay up to \$8,821 more and families would pay \$8,188 more under the Republican plan when compared with HR 3962. It's not in the public interest that we should do that. But first is what was the problem when my dad introduced the first legislation in 1943 that there are now some 47 million Americans without healthcare. This will give many of them adequate healthcare and a decent choice of what they will have before them at the best possible price through an exchange which will make it possible for them to choose without having to worry about understanding the language of Philadelphia lawyers and really define print that can only be read with a magnifying glass. Today, it's maybe tough vote, but it was in 1935 when we passed social security. I hear my colleagues tell us of the economy, jobs in the financial system overhaul desperately needed. True, but that was the case in '35 when we pass the social security act.

Margaret Flinter: Representative John Dingell really gave us that historical perspective. And now the last two speakers before the vote was taken Majority Leader is Steny Hoyer and Speaker Nancy Pelosi.

Steny Hoyer: Because I want to say it to every Americans, Americans facing down illness. Never again, never again will you be denied coverage because you have diabetes or asthma or some other disease or because you are pregnant or because you have anything else your insurer

decides is a preexisting condition. Never again will your coverage run out. Never will you find that coverages all you paid for was actually not there at all. And never again can insurance companies drive out competition and set premiums as high as they like because there will be a public insurance option and a transparent marketplace to keep them honest, to keep them competitive, to bring prices down.

Nancy Pelosi: There is a cap on what you pay in, but there is no cap on the benefits that you receive. It works for seniors, closing the doughnut hole, offering better primary care and strengthening Medicare for years to come. It works for women presenting insurance companies for charging women more than men for the same coverage. No longer will women, being a woman be a preexisting medical condition.

Mark Masselli: Each week Conversations highlights a bright idea about how to make wellness a part of our communities and everyday lives.

This week Bright Ideas looks at dance and the powerful connection between dance, community, and health. Throughout the ages, dance has been a pleasurable and an important community event whether around the tribal fire, in an outdoor meadow or in a formal ballroom. In England, the Community Dance Foundation puts dance at the forefront of its health and well-being initiative recognizing the benefit of dance, dance artists and practitioners work across the health sector in key ways managing illness, health education and community development. In fact, the National Health Services has key initiatives underway, at looking at ways dance can prevent falls in the elderly, tackle obesity, and reduce heart disease. The Foundation for Community Dance has a vision statement, a world where dance is part of everyone's life and engagement with dance part of every community. In our own community, we have seen the power of dance and getting people out of their houses, off their couches and into smoke and alcohol free environments where they can boogie the night away. We call it Vinnie's Jump and Jive and it's right here on main street Middletown. Well, it's salsa, swing, tango or hip-hop, it's fun, it's healthy and you cannot help and engage with some new people. And for the kids, Vinnie has a program to bring community dance teachers into the school, Recess Rocks. For more ideas and starting your own dance, go to www.communitydance.org.uk or to www.vinniesjumpandjive.com. Fun, active, engaging community dance. Now that's the bright idea.

Margaret Flinter: This is Conversations on Healthcare. I am Margaret Flinter.

Mark Masselli: And I am Mark Masselli, peace and health.

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