

Congressman Rodney Davis Transcript

CHERVENAK: Representative Davis, thank you so much for joining us.

REP. DAVIS: Hey, thanks for having me on. Appreciate it, Matthew.

CHERVENAK: Why don't we start with your district. How is it unique? And how has it changed over time?

REP. DAVIS: Boy, it is unique. As a matter of fact, the Democrats in Illinois who had super majorities in the House and the Senate—and also had a Democratic governor back in 2011—they gerrymandered this district to include four public universities, four private universities, and it touches eight community college districts. And it was a district that was drawn to elect a Democrat by the Democrats, and we won in spite of that, in spite of those numbers, and in spite of what their intentions were.

I won the closest Republican victory in the nation in 2012, and the Democrats drew this district to include some rural areas that had traditionally been blue-collar, labor union Democratic areas. What they didn't account for over the decade were those blue-collar workers coming toward the Republican party. Those blue-collar workers have given me my margin of victory every single time that I've run the five times throughout this decade.

That's what makes this district unique. The blue-collar wave we saw early on going Republican helping me as a pro-labor Republican. And now we're seeing it across the board and across the country. I think that's one of the biggest changes that the Democrats didn't account for when they thought they were going to win this district eight years ago.

CHERVENAK: And so when you think about your district, obviously, you think about where it is now, where it has been. Where do you think it will go in terms of the next five, ten years since that you'll have to contend with that obviously as it moves forward?

REP. DAVIS: Well, I think because the number of people in the public universities I have, my district has a hundred thousand new people that come into it every four years that have no connection to the district other than being students there. That is, I think, going to continue to keep my district ever evolving. That's just the way it is with that population.

I think you'll see more people move into the university areas. We've seen some of those counties be some of the only downstate counties in Illinois to experience population growth. So I expect those trends to continue, and I would expect population trends to continue positively on the Illinois side of the Mississippi river down in the metro east St. Louis area, which is part of my district, too, in Madison County.

CHERVENAK: Let's move on to the work in Congress. My first question along this line is, Which bills do you decide to submit? And why do you choose those? And what do you do to try to get

them passed?

REP. DAVIS: Well, some of the bills that I submitted are ideas that I come up with and came up with before I even got elected. As a matter of fact, I got legislation passed in April that created a student loan repayment program that allows employers to help their employees pay down student debt. And the employers are incentivized to do it and the employees get a benefit tax free of up to \$5,250 dollars a year. It was a pretty easy idea because it's the same tax provisions that employers currently had and currently have for tuition reimbursement. Student debt in this country outnumbers all auto and credit card debt combined, so passing this legislation right before a pandemic, not many people have heard about it.

So it's things like that. That are ideas that took me eight years to finally get turned into law that I come up with just in my normal conversations. I'll take ideas for legislation from constituents, constituent meetings. I passed the Hire More Heroes Act to incentivize our small businesses to hire more veterans because a veteran in my Veterans Advisory Council said, Why do veterans who don't get their healthcare through Obamacare, why do they count towards the employee limit? So, we exempted them if they get their health care through the VA or through TRICARE.

Those ideas are things that come up during meetings, come up with during interactions. But some ideas, too, are brought to me by my colleagues, and my colleagues will ask me my opinion, ask me to be an original cosponsor. And then I go ahead and do that because good ideas aren't limited to just what I come up with in my district. There are a lot of good ideas that come from my colleagues who I've gotten to know really, really well over the last eight years.

CHERVENAK: And so, once you've had a bill and you've submitted it, what do you do to try to convince the committee where it's sent or afterwards on the floor with leadership. What activities do you engage in to try to increase its percentage for passing?

REP. DAVIS: I'll go all out. I mean, I'll have meetings with leadership. I'll have meetings with the rank and file members on the committee. I'll have meetings with the committee chairs and ranking members. And that's why we've been very successful in getting some really good legislation either put into larger bills to pass or pass on their own.

I remember my freshman year when I got the idea for the Hire More Heroes Act, I went in and spoke with then majority leader Eric Cantor's policy director. I laid it out, and I remember him looking at me, going, That's a really good idea. Well, it wasn't a matter of months later, I was able to get that bill on the floor and get it passed. So it took another Congress to be able to turn it into law, but then again, good things happen when you're willing to wait and not willing to try and force the issue.

CHERVENAK: What about the earlier stage on the co-sponsor's side, particularly with members across the aisle. How do you do that? Is it more relationships?

REP. DAVIS: I've gotta go vote. Hold on.

CLIP 1

REP. DAVIS: You got to hear the process there!

CHERVENAK: Yeah, that was fantastic. Thank you.

REP. DAVIS: Your question was about some of the ideas—.

CHERVENAK: Yeah, my question is around the co-sponsorships. In the early stage, how do you get people across the aisle to help you in your cause for a particular bill? Is it personal relationships you're driving? Is it, are you using leadership to try to drive that process?

REP. DAVIS: No, usually not leadership. Usually, it's personal relationships. And we also use our time and our staff to go in and figure out what the priorities are for some of our members that I've already developed personal relationships with. They may serve on the committee of jurisdiction with me, or without me, and then we go in and plead our case to say, Hey, this would be a great bipartisan bill that could help you and your district because of A, B, C, and D. It helps me in my district because of A, B, C, and D. And it's good for America.

So that's how we, that's how I do it. But I'm listed as one of the most bipartisan members of Congress. I'm number 13 on the Lugar ratings in the last Congress out of 435, so I make it a habit to develop these personal relationships early on in my career; I made it a habit early on my career. And I try to urge everyone to follow what I've tried to follow since I got to Washington. And that is, when I leave this place, hopefully, you'll be able to ask anybody that I would have served with number one, Do they know who I am? And number two, they ought to be able to name something we worked on together.

CHERVENAK: Well, that's my next question actually is with, other people have a bill, and it comes to you, you have to decide whether to support it or not, What are the driving factors? Does it really come back to your district? What's the thought process you go through with either yourself or your staff to determine where to come out on a particular bill?

REP. DAVIS: Well, number one it comes back to my district. The district that I represent is my number one priority, which is why when I'm asked to cosponsor different pieces of legislation, I usually ask somebody in my district that is working with that issue to sit down, talk to me, and explain why this legislation is important and asked me to co-sponsor. It's the same thing I used to get on most legislative caucuses. My requirement now is to have somebody from my district ask me to do so because then I can put a face with the name and the cause. And if I have concerns about the issue, I know I can go back to that person in my district for advice and consent and also legislative idea.

CHERVENAK: So you really use your district and your district office people as kind of the analyst to assess the value of that bill for your district.

REP. DAVIS: Absolutely, I do. But my DC office knows my district well, too. But you're talking to a former district staffer—I was a district staffer for 16 years, so I love that district perspective of being in the district office, traveling out about in our communities. But I make sure our DC office staff knows number one, what the district encompasses, what industries make up the district, and who, that when the district constituents call, they are number one priority. I remind them every day that without our constituents that call us every day, I wouldn't be able to be here to be elected and to serve this district and I wouldn't have been able to hire any of them either. So, customer service is priority number one.

CHERVENAK: Let's move on to some of the rules. I know you've been involved in the Modernization Committee. I really enjoyed a lot of your questions during those hearings and your approach. So I'm curious through this process and some of your background, When you think about committees in specific, rules really are going to determine a lot of things—what bills get through the committee, what are reported et cetera, which ones they take up. What changes would you make to the rules? That would improve Congress as an institution whether you're in the majority or the minority at any particular time?

REP. DAVIS: Well, number one, I would change the rules that have been implemented by this Democratic majority to allow the minority a voice. We're not going to win votes, but we've always given the minority a voice in what we call the motion to recommit. And now we've had to go and create motions to recommit at the committee level, and it's led to more polarization.

We've got to make sure there's consistency in security posture between the House and the Senate. The security of the House should be no different than the security of the Senate. There's no better day to talk about what was wrong with this posture than March 3rd and March 4th.

March 4th we were supposed to get 50,000 people coming to Washington, DC, to attack the Capitol, according to the intelligence that was laid out by the Democratic leadership in the House. We finished voting on March 3rd instead of voting on March 4th. We basically evacuated the Capitol, but at the same time, the Senate security officials deemed that it was safe. They said, Well, the lodging occupancy in the DC metro area is only 31 percent. We're not seeing an explosion of campground activity. We're not seeing 50,000 people traveling to DC in a low traffic environment. We're going to go ahead and have votes.

I was in the oval office the next day with President Biden, Vice President Harris, Secretary Buttigieg, and a few others, and Vice President Harris got called over to cast a tie-breaking vote. So when the American people see that the House evacuated because of an imminent attack, but the Senate is comfortable enough to bring the vice president to the north side of the Capitol when the south side was evacuated, they see politics rather than consistency and security within the rules.

And covid response is the exact same. We shouldn't have two different covid responses between the House side—and the Capitol on the south side—and the Senate side on the north side. They should be consistent.

That to me is the biggest problem we have in Washington right now. Leadership wants to play politics instead of actually establishing good policies that can help lead us into a better posture nationwide.

CHERVENAK: Well, if we go back to the committee side where we're talking about rules and procedures, are there any methods or rules or things in a committee that you think would help improve the workings of a committee that would lead to more optimal outcomes, if those are bipartisan outcomes?

REP. DAVIS: Well, the committees need better ratios. Our ratio should reflect the slim majority that the Democrats have, and I think that leads to more compromise, leads to more bipartisan solutions.

CHERVENAK: And when we talk about things like the majority of the committee members forcing the report of a bill or which bills come up in committee for debate, are there any areas around there where you think the process could be improved and made uniform across the two chambers?

REP. DAVIS: I believe if you give most committee chairs the opportunity to run their own committees without leadership's interference then we can come up with good compromises. But the problem is the Democrats who are in charge right now aren't given that leeway. And that's frustrating because I came when we were in the majority and there were times on the transportation infrastructure committee I'd get upset with my chairman, Bill Shuster, because it seemed to me he was pushing some more Democratic priorities than some of the ones I wanted. But he sat down, and they made a deal. And I respect that. And in the end, we all got a majority of what we want.

And that's really my philosophy on how I vote on bills in the House. It's—and in committee—it's, Do I agree that this is 75, 80 percent good legislation? And if so, then I'm going to vote yes if that means then I only have 20 to 25 percent still to fix. I fixed 75 to 80 percent of my problems and then I go fight another day to only fix 20 to 25 percent.

And that's a philosophy I've tried to pass on to a lot of members because it's really easy to explain a vote. I can always find a problem with the bill. And, I mean, you can use the one that a lot of my colleagues use is, Well, I didn't read it.

Well, whose fault is that. Read the bill.

But finding a way to explain to constituents who are upset about a certain provision in a bill that the overall package was beneficial to them and to our constituency and the country is a lot

harder to do. It takes more effort, but I think it makes you a serious legislator when you're willing to take that effort.

CHERVENAK: So it sounds like your recommendation is to allow the leaders of the committees to have more autonomy from the leadership. Is that right?

REP. DAVIS: Hang on. [Votes in virtual committee]

CLIP 2

CHERVENAK: It's an insane way to work. I'm very impressed.

REP. DAVIS: There you go. I'm listening. I'm listening, so go ahead.

CHERVENAK: My question was around, just to clarify, it sounds like you think that if the committee leader has more autonomy from leadership that would result in better outcomes for the committees in terms of collaboration.

REP. DAVIS: Absolutely, it would. I think our committee chairs and ranking members need to be able to craft their legislation that's beneficial to them. And then we know who to blame if there's not bipartisanship. Right now, I believe it's too leadership driven, and I can tell you that's a difference between the majority that I served under when the Republicans had it versus what I've seen over the last two, two and a half years.

CHERVENAK: So what about on the floor then? You mentioned the motion to recommit being the key thing. Are there any other changes to floor procedure that you think would be better? A lot of people talk about open rules or certain kinds of rules. Any thoughts there?

REP. DAVIS: You know, it depends. I mean, the open rule process can be hijacked. But the problem is the House floor itself has been hijacked by the inconsistent covid response that comes from Speaker Pelosi. So the bottom line right now because we're in the midst of this pandemic—and the special rules that make voting take all day that used to take us about an hour—that needs to change.

As we see more and more members of Congress be vaccinated, the staff being vaccinated, and we see the end of this pandemic coming, the Speaker has got to open the floor up. Right now, the way we're operating is it doesn't allow me as a very bipartisan member to go to my other bipartisan colleagues on the other side of the aisle, share ideas, and then we take those ideas to our leadership, into our committee chairs and ranking members, and then they become our ideas instead of just partisan ideas.

And that I think is the most frustrating part about House operations now. There are great ideas. We can social distance. We can figure out how to run the House floor operations in a much

more consistent manner that leads to more bipartisanship, it leads to more agreements, but right now we're not able to do that.

CHERVENAK: So you think that physically being together is a key component of the floor operations side?

REP. DAVIS: Absolutely, it is. I mean, a year ago on the Select Committee on Modernization, we were debating about how to get more interaction between members of Congress, and then all of a sudden, covid. No one wants to talk to each other. And I think it's led to the historically high partisan temperature that we see in Congress right now.

CHERVENAK: Well, let's move on to the question of time. So how do you spend your personal time under normal circumstances? I'll say whether DC versus the district. And legislation versus oversight versus campaign activity.

REP. DAVIS: Well, timewise it's really set by the schedule you have for votes. And this Congress, the schedule has changed multiple times when usually it's set in stone and you can begin to plan your schedule months in advance. I'm here in the district today, as you can tell. I'm sitting in my kitchen, but I'm voting in a transportation infrastructure markup as we speak.

Unfortunately, we didn't have that when we were in DC last week. I don't understand why we don't have these markups in DC like they used to be while we're scheduled to be in DC. If they want to do it remotely, we could do it from our offices. But in the end, what happens is because of this, this now overtaking of our district work period time, we're less able to go out into our communities, to talk to our constituents.

And I think it's really hurt members of Congress from being able to get back to their district and understand and get a sense of what the important issues are out in our communities that we serve. Because that face-to-face meetings, face-to-face contact with our constituents is essential for us to make good decisions.

CHERVENAK: So what would then your ideal allocation of time be in terms of constituents versus DC? And then within that DC period, how would it be broken down?

REP. DAVIS: Well, my ideal time would be with constituents all the time, but we got to go do our job. We've got to go vote. I would like to see us be in DC on a schedule similar to what we had when we were in the majority. You were there two to three weeks a month. If you came in on a Monday, you left on a Thursday. So you knew at least you had a few days that you could be out into your community but at least then have a day to spend with your family because that matters too. You've got to be able to do the things that made you who you were before you were a member of Congress. And I think that type of schedule allows us to be better representatives.

And also we still need to continue to make sure that when voting we have to figure out a way to get people back into the Capitol so we can have constituent meetings between votes, like we used to, but at the same time protect the lunch hour and the dinner hour so that we can actually do some political things while we're out in DC too. Because you have to be able to squeeze that time in, and you ought to be able to have some consistent scheduling issues too.

There's always going to be, there's always going to be hiccups. I mean, we're in Congress, we get that. We can adapt. But, let's minimize the chance for hiccups as much as possible.

CHERVENAK: And what about your time in the Capitol when you're doing oversight work versus legislative work? I mean, do you have a sense for that? Do you feel like you're not doing enough oversight compared to what you'd like to? Or is there more time that you wish you'd spend on doing the legislative side of things? What's your opinion on that balance?

REP. DAVIS: Well, a lot of our oversight responsibilities, because of remote hearings, have been more limited. As a matter of fact, the House administration committee that I'm the lead Republican on, we've had one hearing this Congress. That, to me, is clearly not enough, especially since our committee has oversight jurisdiction over the Capitol Police, the Sergeant at Arms, and the Architect of the Capitol—the three people that we ought to have questioned already as to what went wrong on January 6.

So, I think the remote environment has exacerbated the political tensions and temperatures. But, at the same time, it's also allowed committee chairs to not be forced to have those face-to-face conversations.

CHERVENAK: Let's move on to the next question which I have about the management aspect of your job. I mean, you spent a long time as a staffer in the district, so you have a lot of experience as a staffer. And then also now a number of terms as a congressman. How do you manage your team? How do you leverage them? How do you measure their performance?

REP. DAVIS: Well, number one, I hire the best people, and I give them the autonomy to make decisions. I tell my top leadership in my office and on my committee that if I become the conflict resolution department, then I made a mistake in hiring you guys because you're going to be the ones bringing me some suggestions. But if I have to resolve conflicts between personnel in the office, then you're not doing your job.

So I have an approach that I learned from my boss John Shimkus as his former staffer. Many staffers will come into Congress, and as John Boehner warned me at the time, you're going to become "a damn micromanager" is what he told me. And early on, he was worried I was going to do that. But then in the end, he actually said, You know what? You've listened to me well and have allowed your team to do their job.

And really that's what allowed me to put myself in a position to be able to run for Congress because I was given so much flexibility and opportunity to do my job on behalf of John Shimkus

for 16 years that when I decided to run for office I had Democrat-elected officials calling me and saying, What can I do? You were always here.

Because he allowed me to do my job to the best of my ability on his behalf. And when I'm able to do that, I always am able to remind those officials I work with that I wouldn't have been there to help them without John Shimkus believing in me. So, in turn, it helps him.

And my staff is the exact same way. I know that they're going to do everything to the best of their abilities. And when they do a good job and they have the flexibility to make those decisions, then it's going to make me look good politically too.

CHERVENAK: And is there anything specific for the legislative end of things, like your legislative director or chief of staff, you know, the groups that are more involved directly in the legislation. I think it's a pretty unique kind of job, and how to manage that role is, must be pretty unique in society. How do you measure that role? Have reviews, talk about performance?

REP. DAVIS: Well, what I do is I allow my top staffers—both in the district and in DC and on my committee staff—to really do the review process to really manage their employees that are under them. That's the approach that I think works best. It leads to less conflict resolution, and it allows them to have some authority over what our agenda is.

They help then lead us to what our goals are. What did they entail? How are we doing to fulfill our mission statement? And then they have some accountability over the personnel that they hire. So, in my case, all of the HR decisions, personnel decisions, I am a signatory, but I'm also one to say, Show me and tell me why this decision needs to be made. It's believing in them.

There are some members of Congress that micromanage every aspect of their office and their day. And that is something that I have tried to shy away from. It allows me to concentrate on meeting with constituents, allows me to concentrate on the political side of my job, but it also allows me to sit back and think at the 30,000 foot level about what's going to best impact my constituents positively.

CHERVENAK: Right, so you're really a fan of the delegation and autonomy of the staff to a certain extent?

REP. DAVIS: Absolutely, I am. I want them to tell me how best to do my job when it comes to their issue areas of expertise.

CHERVENAK: Great. Well, let's move on to another question that I've asked a number of scholars, and I'm comparing answers. So this one is about representation, and there's different views about what representation means in a congressional context. So, as a member, as someone who is a representative, How do you define what representation should mean for a congressman?

REP. DAVIS: To me, what representation means is you've got to do your job and be the voice of your constituents but at the same time be willing to accept something that's not so perfect but helps your constituents at a level that you can go back and explain to them why it was good for them and good for the country. Because every decision we make in Washington doesn't just affect our district, it affects the entire country.

REP. DAVIS: I gotta run. I gotta go vote again. I apologize.

CHERVENAK: No problem.

CLIP 3

CHERVENAK: So I guess my question about representation, maybe if I can ask you a little bit harder part of that question, which is, How do you represent the minority views in your district on the one side and also think about the future constituents on the other? We talked about the influx of people over time to the district. How do you consider their longer-term views even though they're not around today to vote or to have a voice?

REP. DAVIS: Well, here's the problem. We're policymakers. We can only address what's in front of us today with an eye on the future, which is why a lot of the legislative success I've had are going to impact those new residents coming into my district. I mentioned our student loan repayment bill that allows all employers to be incentivized to pay down student debt for their employees. That was under, that was because I knew I had a hundred thousand new students coming into my district every four years. And what do they leave with? They leave with debt. Hopefully, a great degree, too, but they leave with some debt.

So that piece of legislation in particular was looking ahead at what future generations are going to have to deal with when it comes to student debt. But, in the end, in the end we can only address the issues that are presented to us on a daily basis. And we have to take a yes or a no vote based upon the impact now and into the future for our constituents.

There are going to be people in my district that are never going to support me. They are never going to like what I do. But I've been there many a times when some of the loudest voices of opposition have said, Oh, I like when you voted this way on this bill.

But they're never going to vote for me anyway because they're always going to find another reason that makes them a partisan Democrat. So I've got to make sure we don't sacrifice our base but at the same time work those undecided, independent voters and the issues that are important to them.

And if you, in my opinion, because I'm ranked the 13th most bipartisan member of Congress, that, to me, shows that I'm focusing on legislating rather than just on partisanship.

CHERVENAK: Next question is, How should debate, deliberation, or dialogue occur or be structured in Congress? I know you've talked about this in the Modernization Committee, but I'd like to hear your thoughts on that.

REP. DAVIS: Well, they should give me more debate time because it's fun. And we try to make it fun while we're down there. Make my colleagues laugh, enjoy, and joke around a little bit because Congress can be really, really stuffy. But, I think it's all based upon timing. And there can be chances when there's too much debate time on the floor, and it just becomes redundant.

But in the end, give everybody a chance to have a voice. Sometimes in hearings, five minutes is not enough. And sometimes in hearings, in committee hearings, it takes too long to get to your questions.

But finding that balance between floor time and committee time, I think, is essential, and I just haven't seen that magic mix yet of making that happen.

I'm all for offering people more opportunities to speak, but at the same time my recommendations would be cut down on the committee witnesses, allow members to ask longer, have a longer time period to ask questions. I mean, there's no reason you need eight witnesses at a TNI hearing. Because by the time they're done giving their opening statements, you're already—and the chair and the rank are giving open statements and the chair and the rank of the subcommittee giving open statements—I mean, you're two hours in. And if you're in the middle of the dais or you're a freshman that means you got to dedicate four hours to that commitment.

So figure out a way to make it a little more time sensitive for your members.

I used to do that with a subcommittee that I ran. I would say, Look, I'm gonna give you my opening statement. I'm gonna let the witnesses give their opening statement. We had minimal witnesses, and we would, I would also wait to ask my questions till the end. Because I knew I had to sit there the whole time. So why am I going to take five minutes at the beginning to ask my questions? I control the time. So that's, that to me, is respecting your fellow members, too, and I think that's essential.

CHERVENAK: So my question is around talking with your colleagues, discussing, debating. That can be done in a committee setting. It can be done with cameras on. It can be done with cameras off in a more collegial atmosphere where there's not that kind of pressure. Do you feel like that would make a difference in terms of getting to bipartisan or more optimal outcomes?

REP. DAVIS: Ah, no. Because in today's day and age everybody's got a camera. There's never going to be a time when the cameras are off. And, unfortunately, I think the 24-hour news cycle and social media is stuck in a gotcha game and a cancel culture game to where it becomes more

about playing gotcha games with politicians and what they say rather than listening to their entire argument or listening to their entire interview for that matter.

CHERVENAK: So you think there's no hope to go back to some kind of a non-transparent way for discussion to happen or privacy among a committee or even on the floor?

REP. DAVIS: No, no. Unfortunately not. And really there's got to be equal treatment within the 24-hour news cycle and with social media giants that we don't see right now. I mean, in reality there's been no more of a transparent president than Donald J. Trump, but that transparency led to more criticisms.

And that is something that I've learned, too, in Congress. That, you know, you want to do what you can to answer reporters' questions and respond to the social media, but in the end, if somebody has an agenda that they want to play gotcha games, then they're going to pick something out that you said and try and make it an issue. And without giving the entire context.

So what's that mean? Is it better, then, not to be as open? Is it better, then, not to respond to everyone who walks up and asks you a question from the media?

Those are decisions that we, as members, have to make every day.

CHERVENAK: Got it. Next question is, and I think you may have brought this up earlier but, What fundamental institutional improvement should Congress make within a 50-year time frame?

REP. DAVIS: I gotta go get on this end.

CLIP 4

REP. DAVIS: Alright, 50 years? Go ahead. Give me the abbreviated question again. I apologize.

CHERVENAK: Sure, What fundamental institutional improvement should Congress make within 50 years?

REP. DAVIS: Hmm. That's an interesting question.

CHERVENAK: You're not used to thinking long term!

REP. DAVIS: Yeah, I would say to minimize the remote hearings and remote voting. Oh, actually the biggest fundamental change is to take away proxy voting that was just approved by the Democrats for this pandemic. It's led to less personalization and more polarization. That would be the single best thing that we could do to make Congress work better in the next 50 years.

CHERVENAK: So it sounds like, for you, a fundamental thing is this face-to-face interaction with your colleagues, whether it's on the floor, whether it's in committee, even if the cameras are on. Can you elaborate on that a little bit? What is it about the face-to-face discussions that is a positive? I mean, I can understand it from a human nature point of view, but I'm curious from your point of view having been engaged so long. Why is this face-to-face interaction so important?

REP. DAVIS: Because it allows you to get to know people other than the political caricature that they become in the news media. You find common ground. I mean, you'd be surprised that some of the folks that I consider very close friends, that if Fox News heard I was close friends with them or MSNBC heard that they were close friends with me, they would want to excommunicate us. But you find that, you know, we agree probably on 98, 99 percent of the issues, but the only thing you see on TV and social media is people fighting because it's entertainment value.

And I can tell you time and time again of where I've worked with individuals who become political caricatures on the partisan news shows, in the 24-hour news cycle, but in the end, we find common ground on issues like flood insurance. We find common ground on issues relating to college debt. Those types of issues can only be achieved by getting to know people on a personal level rather than over the phone or only through the media or social media.

CHERVENAK: And so do you support a lot more of things like retreats or other ways for people to get to know each other outside of what would typically be the political theater?

REP. DAVIS: I do, I do. But retreats are too, they're too structured. It doesn't allow you the time to get to get to know your colleagues because you're sitting in presentations and panels all day. And when you get out, you got to do your job, so you're on the phone, you're talking to constituents, you're dealing with family issues. And then you go into a reception. It's forced fun.

Let's get back to voting on the floor, where we can walk up to each other, ride the elevator with each other, talk to each other. That matters more. I'm a fan of retreats, but they're not the panacea.

CHERVENAK: Great. My last question is your priorities for the coming year. What are you working on? What do you want to try to get done?

REP. DAVIS: Well, my priorities are infrastructure investment. I'm the ranking member of the Highways and Transit subcommittee, the largest subcommittee in Congress, and I want to see us reauthorize the highway program to rebuild our crumbling roads and bridges.

I want to do my job and conduct effective oversight over the last farm bill on my House Ag committee that I was able to write. I've been able to help write two farm bills. And I want to make sure we put policies in place that are working.

But I think the committee that's taking up most of my time is the House administration committee that I lead for our side. And it's going to be getting the House back to normal operations. Getting people to be able to come visit the Capitol. Getting constituents back into our offices to relay their concerns. That, to me, is the top priority. And plus it goes together with what we talked about throughout this entire call. It's bringing people together. And, also, making Congress work better.

CHERVENAK: Representative Davis, thank you so much for your time. Much appreciated.

REP. DAVIS: Hey, great to see you. Thanks for having me on.