

Interview with Norman Mineta
September 11, 2006
Interviewer, Ronald Sarasin

Introduction by Ronald Sarasin, President of the United States Capitol Historical Society

Ronald Sarasin: Welcome to the second interview in the United States Capitol Historical Society series of interviews with Former Members of Congress. My name is Ron Sarasin; I am a Former Member of Congress from Connecticut, and also President of the United States Capitol Historical Society. Our guest today is Former Member Norm Mineta of California. This is also a first interview in a special series we have planned with Asian Pacific American members of Congress. In these interviews, Former Members will relive their experiences and memories of people and dates and events that took place in the United States Capitol. It's our hope that these recollections would provide listeners with a deeper appreciation for the human dimension of representative government in this temple of liberty we call the United States Capitol.

Norman Yoshio Mineta was born in San José, California on November 12, 1931. His family was one of thousands of Japanese Americans interned during World War II. He graduated from the University of California, Berkeley with a B.S. in business administration, and then served as an intelligence officer in the U.S. Army. His public career began in 1967 when he was appointed to the San José city council. Elected mayor of San José in 1971, he was the first Asian-American mayor of a major U.S. city. Norman Mineta was elected to the U.S. House of Representatives in 1974 and served from 1975 to 1995. President Bill Clinton appointed him Secretary of Commerce in 1999, the first Asian Pacific American to hold a cabinet post. And in 2001, President George Bush appointed him Secretary of Transportation, a position he held until July 2006.

Secretary Mineta's Memories of Taking the Oath of Office as a Member of Congress

Ronald Sarasin: Norman, in our interview with Tom Foley and Bob Michel, they spoke about how moved they were the first time they were sworn in as Members of Congress. You first walk on the floor and you're asked to raise your right hand-- what were your thoughts on that occasion?

Norman Mineta: Well, first of all I was carrying my son, who was three years old and when Carl Albert (Speaker of the House) asked everyone to raise their right hand. So I am holding Stuart in my left hand, *[corrects himself: left arm]* and raising my right arm and the only thing that I could think of at the time was, 'What's a little kid like you from San Jose, California, doing in a place like this?' And I was thinking... 'It can only happen in a country like the United States of America.' It's just hard to imagine, that let's say in 1942, being evacuated from your home, placed on trains under armed guard, transported off to camp. And here some twenty some years later being able to be sworn in as a Member of the Congress.

Ronald Sarasin: And now when that happened you were ten, eleven years old? *[Sarasin referring to Mineta's experience at one of the Japanese interment camps during World War II].*

Norman Mineta: Eleven years old.

Ronald Sarasin: And what was that like? I mean did you, did you really understand what was happening? I can't imagine what it could have been like when an entire community is uprooted and then moved off to Wyoming.

Norman Mineta: And for a ten to eleven year old kid it really didn't have the impact. But I had only seen my dad cried three times: once was on the seventh of December *[referring to the Japanese bombing of Pearl Harbor or December 7, 1941]* because he couldn't understand why the land of his birth was now attacking the land of his heart, the second time I saw him cry was on the 31st of May 1942 when we were boarding the trains to leave San José to go off to camp, and the third time was 1956 when my mother passed away. But the impact was really on the adults, on my older sisters and my brother. For me as an eleven year old, an eleven year old kid, this was, 'Oh Boy! An overnight train ride, a long train ride.' And once we got on those trains, there were armed guards at end of each car, so we couldn't move from car to car. But I was wearing my Cub Scout uniform, and a baseball, baseball glove and baseball bat, and when I got on the train, the MP's confiscated the bat on the basis that the bat could be used as lethal weapon. But I was in my uniform because the families were all going to be confined to one car, and you couldn't move from car to car, so Boy Scouts and Cub Scouts were used as messengers between the cars. So I was in my uniform, my Cub Scout uniform.

Ronald Sarasin: And they set that up ahead of time?

Norman Mineta: *[nodding yes]* And they had set that up ahead of time.

Ronald Sarasin: Wow!

Norman Mineta: So it was a different impact in terms of an eleven year old perspective versus my dad whose insurance business was all of a sudden terminated in February of '42. So then they had to, my folks had to store everything; we can only carry the luggage we could take to camp.

Ronald Sarasin: So your family was uprooted and your father's business was just stopped, and then how long were you in Wyoming, in the camp?

Norman Mineta: And first we went to what were called "Assembly Centers." And what the army had done was to commandeer all of the racetracks and fairgrounds in Washington, Oregon, and California because those facilities had built-in living quarters, namely horse stables. So we were going to Santa Anita, the race track in Southern California. So this was May of '42 and we were there until November of '42.

Ronald Sarasin: Wow! At Santa Anita?

Norman Mineta: *[nods yes]* And then in November '42 we were then transported from Santa Anita, California to Heart Mountain, Wyoming.

Reflections of His Congressional Mentors and Colleagues

Ronald Sarasin: Many Members recall it when they first reached Congress they found a mentor, someone who they looked up to and who kind of guided them along. Was there anyone in the House that you looked to at that time?

Norman Mineta: I was very very fortunate in that, Carl Albert, the then Speaker was a very good friend of my brother-in-law, who was a Executive Secretary of the Japanese American Citizens League, and then he became the Washington representative for the Japanese American Citizens League here in D.C. And over the years he got to know Carl Albert real well, so when I got sworn in, and right after that I build a relationship with the Speaker because I was also president of our Freshmen class, so I had a

great deal of contact with him. But I was also fortunate to have both Pasty Mink and Congressmen Sparky Matsunaga as my mentors in the House and my very very good friend Congressmen Don Edwards, who had the adjoining district to mine in San José. So that was the sort of the senior leadership who I turned to. Senator Inouye was already in the Senate, and of course I turned to him for a great deal of assistance as well, but the closer ones at hand were Sparky and Patsy Mink.

His Early Life and Experiences

His Family's Internment during World War II

Ronald Sarasin: We talked a little about your early life and what it was like as a young boy of ten and eleven years old to be relocated and taken from your community and then moved into an interment camp. And that of course happened to thousands of Japanese families. And yet rather than bitterness that I think you would have been entitled to, to the United States; you came back and gave back in public service in a variety of ways and continue to give back. Did that early life, and those early experiences, you think affect your outlook on public service or why you thought it was very important to be involved in it?

Norman Mineta: No question it did. We also had an individual, who was an immigrant from Japan who said what happen to the Japanese community should never ever happen to anyone else again. And in 1946 as people were coming back from the camps to the communities he said that "one of the reasons that the Japanese Americans were evacuated and interned even though the total number was one hundred and twenty thousand was that we really didn't have access to the political leaders of those times." And he said, "We ought not to let that happen again!" So in San José, this individual and his name is I. K. Ishimatsu. Mr. Ishimatsu would go around collecting one dollar, two dollars from people, here they were just returning from camp, had nothing really to speak of, and then he would buy two tickets to the Lincoln Day Dinner of the Republicans and two tickets and the Jackson Day Dinner of the Democrats and sent two young Japanese Americans to those functions, because he wanted their visibility to be known and to then make some connection to the political leaders of the two parties in our area. Well, by about 1960 or so I became the beneficiary of one of those tickets as well, but again, I think your basic

premises Ron that you talk about, to me it has always been amazing that something like this happens to one hundred and twenty thousand people and that there isn't ranker or bitterness that came out of this, but there is a very very strong conviction in the Japanese American community that something like this should never ever happen to anyone again. And so I think that's the beauty of it and in terms of what Mr. Ishimatsu was trying to do, trying to develop people to be active in the community. I remember when, when it became possible that I might be appointed to fill a vacancy in the city council in San José and I was talking to my dad about it because I was in business with him. I was a partner of his in the insurance agency and brokerage business. He says, "You know I always wanted you children to be active in the community, but I never expected anyone to be in political office." He said in Japanese there's an old adage about if you're in politics, "That if you're in politics, you're going to be like a nail sticking out in a board." He says, "You know what happens to that nail... it always gets hammered." *[Sarasin laughs]* And I always think, 'Papa, you were so right about being hammered if you're in politics.' But by the same token, I think the evacuation and internment was an example of where people should of stood out, be ready to be hammered on a constitutional issue of that nature. And so I think I encourage people to be like that nail sticking out on the board.

Ronald Sarasin: If that gentlemen sent you to a Lincoln Day Dinner instead of a Jackson Day Dinner would you be a Republican today?

Norman Mineta: You know Ron, I was a Republican, no I was a Republican.

Ronald Sarasin: Really?

Norman Mineta: And, until nineteen...I guess it was, in fact it was 1960, until then I was a Republican--until the Kennedy-Nixon election.

Meeting Alan Simpson and their Friendship

Ronald Sarasin: I know I have read several times in several different reports about your relationship with Al Simpson. And you knew Alan Simpson, senator from Wyoming, since you were both young children. How did that come about and was it a really relationship?

Norman Mineta: Oh, I love Alan Simpson! What happened was that when we were moved from the assembly center which in our case was a race track, Santa Anita race track in Southern California. And we were moved the more “permanent” camp in the interior and those camps were build in Utah, Colorado, Arkansas, Arizona, Idaho and Wyoming. So the camp we went to from Santa Anita in Southern California was to Heart Mountain, Wyoming, which was twenty miles east from Cody, Wyoming. When we got there in November of 1942, schools weren’t ready and the community elders in that camp wanted to make sure that us young people had something to do so they had written to the Boy Scouts of America and the Girl Scouts of America to have them come in and organize troops in the camp. So they came in and organized troops in Heart Mountain as they did in other camps. So we would have a jamboree in the camp, and so our scout leaders then invited Boy Scouts from outside the camps to come in. But here we were a community of thirteen thousand people, behind barbed wire, with guard towers every two to three hundred feet with searchlights and machine guns. So when we or our scout leaders said come on into the camp for a jamboree, they said, “No, no, no, were not going to come in... those are POWs! We are not going to go in there.” So finally our scout leaders would say, “Hey hold it! These are Boy Scouts of America, they’re wearing the same uniforms you do, they read the same manual you do, they are going after the same badges, merit badges you do.” So finally the Boy Scouts from Cody came in. And we had our rope tying contest, and we had our, you know, with the knives... carving contests, and then we go paired off into tents. And so we got paired off into tents and we build our pup tent and the first thing you have to have is really a moat around your tent to protect it from the rain water, and it just could rain in Wyoming at anytime. So, this kid and I built our moat and then he said, “There is a kid from my troop in that tent below us, I don’t really care for him and I was wondering if I could let the water exit that way?” [*Sarasin laughs*]. It was no skin off my goat so I said, ‘Sure.’ So we did, so we cut our moat and the water to exit that way. And it rained, and our moat worked perfectly, and the rain water went to the tent below, and the tent pegs pulled and the tent came down. And this kid is sitting there going, “He he he...ho ho ho...ha ha ha,” about the tent going down next door to us. I kept saying, ‘Alan, will you please shut up so we can get some sleep!’ Well that was Alan Simpson, and we were both eleven years old. The amazing part is that through Junior High, High School and College we wrote to each other. Well in 53’ when I graduated from Berkeley; I had my ROTC commission, and went straight

on active duty, went on overseas, and lost track of him. And then in 1971 when I was elected mayor, the Associated Press had a small story about me having won the election for mayor. In the body of the story it said, "Mineta was one of 120,000 of those of Japanese ancestry who were interned in camps; he and his family were in Heart Mountain, Wyoming." So the *Cody Enterprise* then picked up on the story, printed it. Alan was practicing law in Cody, and next thing I get is, "Dear Norm, congratulations on being elected mayor of San José. I have been wondering what the heck you have been up to all these years." And in 1974 I got elected to the House, and in 1978 he got elected to the Senate; and our friendship combined again as if we were still sitting in that pup tent. He and Anne [Mrs. Simpson] are very dear friends to Deni [Mrs. Mineta] and me, and I just love Alan and he is just a great friend, and so it is a great friendship.

Thoughts on His Congressional Campaigns

Part One

Ronald Sarasin: In 1974 you decided to run for Congress. What do you remember about your first campaign? And then your subsequent campaigns, your next ten after that? And how do they change over that time? How about the first one?

Norman Mineta: Well, the first one was, was one that I wasn't really contemplating doing. I was mayor of San José; I already indicated that I was going to seek reelection as mayor in 1974. And at quarter to six on a Sunday morning, a friend of mine called me up. He says, "Norm, have you seen the paper?" And I said, 'Are you kidding? Its quarter to six in the morning on a Sunday (*Sarasin laughs*)... of course I haven't seen the paper!' 'Why what's the matter?' He said, "Charlie Gubser is not going to seek re-election." I said, 'Well that's nice, he served us well.' And he said, "No you don't understand, you've got to run for office or run for Congress." I said, 'Jim, I already announced I am going to seek reelection as mayor.' And Tom Bradley, Mayor Tom Bradley from L.A. came up and we did a fundraiser in November of '73. So I said, 'Thank you for calling, but go back to bed!' Well that night, he and some others invited about twenty-five people over to the house....to my house...inviting themselves over to convince me that I should really take a look at this thing. Well, it had been a Republican seat for close to fifty years, forty-eight as I recall, and so I didn't know whether a Democrat can win this seat or not. But after looking at a

number of factors for about three weeks, and this is during the whole Watergate time period, I decided to run.

Campaigning, Part Two

Norman Mineta: So I returned all the money I raised as Mayor and said, 'Here is your money back, but you know I am now running for Congress. So feel free to donate to the campaign.' Interesting enough I did get more money back than I had returned. And so, it was a primary in which there were about six or seven running and the Republican in the November election was a very good friend and a very good candidate. And it was just, to me you know a good campaign all the way around. The interesting thing is between my primary and the general; I spend a total of two hundred and seventy thousand in the 1974 race. My last one in 1994 I think I spent something like one million six hundred thousand. The first time was fifty-two percent, and in my subsequent elections I don't think I fell below sixty percent. But that also required me to over the years to come back three weekends out of the month. Come back on Friday, Saturday, Sunday, and take the red eye back to D.C, get to D.C. six in the morning, and start the week all over again. So those were tough years in terms of the travel back and forth to the district. But to me there was nothing more rewarding than to be representing a Congressional district and being able to relate to people and their concerns. I always felt very strongly about accessibility and accountability. And I think again it goes back to my own experience in terms of the evacuation and the internment of those of Japanese ancestry. And we couldn't...we didn't have access to our political leaders at the time. And I didn't want to be in that position of saying . . . in having someone saying, "Well I wanted to talk to him but didn't have a chance to." And so I always had an accessibility process, but I also felt very strongly about accountability. And so I really enjoyed my twenty-one years in the House of Representatives. You're much closer to the people there over the years. Over the years people were saying, "You oughta considered running for the Senate." But, I always felt that when you're in the House you're representing the people, and when you're in the Senate you're representing issues; and I felt more comfortable representing people and their concerns. I did that kind of constituency service as a member of the city council, as mayor, and now was doing that in terms of constituency service as a Member of Congress.

Ronald Sarasin: Constituent service has always been a big role for a Member of Congress, and your ability to get back there, the fact that you went back, all the way to California every weekend or almost every weekend is an incredible burden. I don't think, part of... I guess the glamour of being in Congress is the responsibility to do that. And I'm not sure most Americans appreciate how difficult that is, to hop on an airplane, Thursday or Friday and then come back again Sunday night so that you're there early Monday morning.

Norm Mineta: And I would always fly coach. And I remember one time after I got married in 1991, my wife convinced me that we ought to upgrade to first class. So we got off the plane, and as soon as we walked out of the plane, there was a constituent who wasn't happy to be on the plane saying, "Well, I hope you enjoyed your first class seat Mr. Congressman!" (*Mineta reenacts the situation, Sarasin laughs*). And I thought...and I turned to my wife and I said, 'Now do you understand why I never fly first class.'

Ronald Sarasin: That's right, that's always the way.

Legislative Accomplishments

Americans With Disabilities Act of 1991

Ronald Sarasin: Norm, you're identified in general with a lot of major pieces of legislation, but three in particular. What are your recollections about the Americans with Disabilities Act? And then how did that come about?

Norm Mineta: Well, for me it goes back to when I was first sworn in as Mayor of San José. A friend of mine who had been confined to a wheelchair all his life came to me and asked me, if that first week as Mayor if I would stay in a wheelchair as much as possible. And I did that, I had the wheelchair in the back of the car, take it out, get in and go into City Hall. I would fall on my butt and I couldn't get up over the curb, couldn't go to the bathroom, and couldn't get to the water fountain... just things we take for granted everyday. And then when people were talking about putting the Americans with Disabilities Act together, they came to me and asked me if I would put together the transportation portion of that bill. So reflecting back

to my mayoral days, I worked on the transportation piece of that with disability rights organizations in Washington D.C. And to me that was a great period because it gave me an opportunity to work with people in the Bush, first Bush... forty-one administration, President George H. W. Bush, and with Justin Dart who was the chair of President Bush's commission for those with disabilities. To me that was a real honor and privilege too and that time to spend on working with all these organizations in putting the ADA together.

Ronald Sarasin: That was an amazing piece of legislation.

Intermodal Transportation Efficiency Act of 1991

Ronald Sarasin: One of the other areas of interest on your part was the Intermodal Surface Transportation Efficiency Act of 1991 (ISTEA). How did that come about?

Norm Mineta: Well, I was chairing the Surface Transportation subcommittee and working with the chairman of the full committee, Chairman Bob Roe, and the ranking Republican on the full committee, Congressman John-Paul Hammerschmidt of Arkansas, and working with Congressman Bud Shuster, Republican ranking member on my subcommittee. We put together the ISTEA, the Intermodal Surface Transportation Efficiency Act. And that was the first major re-write of the National Defense Highway Act since when President Eisenhower had signed that legislation in 1956. So I spent a great deal of time putting that together with what we called "The Big Four". And so it was again--it was a monumental piece of legislation because it was part of the era where people were trying to get more power to the states and local governments to be involved in the process on what kind of highway projects or transit projects would be constructed.

Civil Liberties Act of 1988

Ronald Sarasin: The Civil Liberties Act of 1988 is also something that you were credited with being a major moving force behind it. How did that come about?

Norm Mineta: Well, it started out with the National Japanese American Citizens League at their 1978 convention, passing a one sentence resolution saying that they were going to undertake legislative legislation to seek redress and a national apology for the wrongful internment and evacuation of Japanese Americans during World War II.

Ronald Sarasin: And then you had other colleagues involved in that program. Who did you work with to make all that happen?

Norm Mineta: Well, after the National Japanese American Citizens League had passed the resolution, Senator Inouye, Senator Matsunaga, the late Congressman Bob Matsui from Sacramento, California, and I got together wondering, "What are we going to do with this one sentence resolution from the National Japanese American Citizens League?" And Senator Inouye said, "You know if it hadn't been for the Warren Commission to talk about the Kennedy assassination or the-- there was another commission to look into the killings at Kent State. And those became best sellers, they were well known by the public and the two issues really surfaced. And he said, "Until we get the American public educated about what happened in '42 and then our colleagues will then understand." So Senator Matsunaga talked about his bill on relating to Native Hawaiian claims. And so I had a legislative director by the name of Glen Roberts, and you might remember his brother Steve Roberts, who is a reporter with the *New York Times*. But Glen was really a bright legislative director, and so he took Sparky's bill on Native Hawaiian claims and re-wrote it to set up another commission, and this commission was called The Commission on Wartime Relocation and Internment of Civilians. And so that legislation got passed. I believe it was in 1978, and then in 1980 that commission report actually came out. And it said that it was a gross injustice in terms of what happen to those of Japanese ancestry and said that it was due to wartime hysteria, historical racial prejudice, and weak political leadership. And so they concluded that Congress should apologize on behalf of the United States of America and pay redress payments of twenty thousand dollars per person. So we, Glen took that commission report and again put all of that language into legislative language which was the Civil Liberties Act. And then on August 10th of 1988, President Reagan signed that bill and so it became known as the Civil Liberties Act of 1988.

The Asian Pacific American Congressional Caucus

Ronald Sarasin: Toward the end of your Congressional career, you co-founded and chaired the Congressional Asian Pacific American Caucus. Why was the caucus founded and how did you go about establishing it? What have they accomplished? And has it fulfilled the vision you had when you created it?

Norman Mineta: Well, as a member of Congress I would look at the success of the Congressional Black Caucus or the Hispanic Caucus and think, 'Gee, we don't have one, for... a caucus that looks out after the interest of Asian Pacific Islanders.' And so I started enquiring about the Congressional Black Caucus and the Hispanic Caucus operated. And then called on not only Asian Pacific American Members of Congress, but more importantly those Congressional districts across the country where you would have a relatively large Asian Pacific American population, and enlist those members to join the caucus. And so we had a bipartisan caucus that dealt with education, technology, Asian Pacific American issues; as they relate to scholarships or internships. And it got developed that way. And I also set up at the same time, an organization outside Congress and that's today known as the Asian Pacific American Institute for Congressional Studies. And so that became the outside organization to support the Asian Pacific American Congressional Caucus.

Ronald Sarasin: Do you think it has fulfilled the vision you had for it? Or is it still a work in progress?

Norman Mineta: Well, I think it has done a lot of good in terms of advancing those interests as it relates to specific things relating to the Asian Pacific American community, in especially where it involves education and health issues. I think we made a great deal of advance in those areas.

How Serving in Congress Prepare him to be an Executive Department Secretary

Ronald Sarasin: When you were in the Congress you chaired the Public Works and Transportation Committee that dealt with executive departments. And then you became the Secretary of Commerce and then the Secretary of Transportation, and you had to deal with Congress. What memories stand out in both of those positions, on both sides of the desk so to speak? As a member dealing with the Secretaries and as a Secretary

dealing with the Members of Congress, did serving in Congress prepare you to be a Secretary of a major cabinet department?

Norman Mineta: Well, as chairman on the full committee on Public Works and Transportation, one of the responsibilities you have is always oversight of the department within the jurisdiction of your committee, and of course that was mainly the Department of Transportation. So we would have hearings inquiring about the progress of the legislation that was passed by Congress and how was the Executive Branch implementing that. So we had a lot of oversight hearings about programmatic issues. So both under President Clinton when I was Secretary of Commerce and under President Bush when I was Secretary of Transportation; I always looked at it in terms of what we had to do in our departments. As our doing are own oversight about what were we doing in the department so that we could answer to the Congress as their exercising their checks and balances over the Executive Branch of how we were meeting the goals set by Congress. So from a secretarial perspective, I understood what committee chairs were going to be asking about and I was in a position to reflect how best we could answer those inquiries.

Ronald Sarasin: Were the chairmen of the committees that you dealt with as Secretary were as understanding as you were, when you were the chairman? *[Mineta laughs]*

Norman Mineta: No, actually we had a good working relationship between the department and the Senate and House Committees, both Authorizing Committees as well as the Appropriations Committees.

His Role in Responding to the 9/11 Terrorist Attacks

Part One

Ronald Sarasin: Today were speaking today on September 11, 2006. And five years ago on September 11, 2001 you were the Secretary of Transportation. And tell me just what happened to you during that day? I know one of the things you did almost immediately was to ground every airplane in the country, which had never been done before. And go through that day with us as you learned of things that were happening and what kind of experience that was for you.

Norman Mineta: I was having breakfast that morning with the Deputy Prime Minister of Belgium who also is the Minister of Transport in Belgium, Isabelle Durant. And I had with me at the breakfast meeting Jane Garvey, who was the Administrator of the Federal Aviation Administration. The three of us were having breakfast in my conference room and John Flaherty, my Chief of Staff came in and said, “May I see you Mr. Secretary?” So I excuse myself and went from the conference room to my office, and at the other end of the office is a television set. And so as you look at the TV set it’s obviously the World Trade Center and black smoke was coming out, and I said, ‘What the heck is that?’ And he [*Mineta’s Chief of Staff*] said, “We don’t know. We’ve heard that general aviation aircraft into the building, we’ve heard commercial aviation into the building, and we’ve heard maybe possible internal explosion, but we don’t know.” So I am sitting there looking at the TV, and I said, ‘Keep me posted. I am going to go back into the breakfast meeting.’ So I went back in and explain to them what I have just seen on television. And about six or seven minutes John came back in and said, “May I see you Mr. Secretary?” So I excuse myself and went back in. And he said, “It’s been confirmed that it was a commercial airplane that went into the building.” So I walked up closer to look at the TV set and I am trying to assess the size of the hole in building number one. And as I am looking at the TV set all of a sudden from the right side of the screen comes a gray object that goes across the screen and sort of disappears, and then from the left side of the screen is this yellow white-orange billowy cloud all of a sudden. And I go, ‘Holy cow! What the heck is that?’ And so I looked at the scene for a little while and then I went into the conference room and I said to Mrs. Durant, ‘I don’t know what is going on in New York, but I know I have to attend to it, and Jane you’ve got to get back to your operation center at FAA.’ And by the time I came back into the office, we had a call from the White House, saying “Get over here right away!” So I grabbed some manuals and some papers, went down to the car, and we sped over to the White House. And we are going West Executive Drive people were coming out of the White House; people were coming out of the Executive Office Building. And I said to my driver and security guy, ‘Is there something wrong with this picture? We’re driving in and everybody else is running away.’”

9/11, Part Two

Norman Mineta: So I went into the Situation Room and got briefed by Dick Clark and then he said, “You’ve got to be in the PEOC” and I said, ‘What’s

the PEOC?' And he said that it's the Presidential Emergency Operations Center. And I said, 'I have no idea where that is.' And there was a Secret Service agent standing there and he said, "I'll take you over right away." So we went over there, and when I got there the Vice President was there. And this is the bunker that was under the White House; so there is a long conference table probably oh... twenty feet, twenty-five feet and about eight feet wide. And between each of the seats there is a phone here *[points to his left and right side]*. So with this phone *[pointing to his left side]* I set up a line to my office and this one *[points to his right side]* to the operation center of the FAA; and I just kept them open all day long. And so trying to access what was going on, and at that point the two planes had gone into the World Trade Center in New York. And then there was a young man who came in and told the Vice President that there was a plane coming down river. So with the phone on the right and I said to Monte Belger, the Deputy Administrator of FAA and I said to him, 'What do you have on radar?' He said, "We have a target but the transponder has been turned off. So we don't know what the plane is, what altitude... we don't know anything about the plane, speed or anything." So I said, 'Where is it?' He said, "Well, it's roughly in the Great Falls area." So as the plane progressed closer in, this young man would come in and inform the Vice President where the plane was. And I would say, 'Monte, where's the plane now?' And he said, "Its somewhere between Rosslyn and DCA National Airport." Then all of a sudden he said, "Uh Oh we just lost the target!" I said, 'Where did you loose the target?' And he said, "Somewhere between Pentagon City and National Airport." And about that time someone broke into the conversation and said, "Mr. Secretary we have just gotten word from an Arlington County police officer saying that he saw an American Airlines go into the Pentagon." Well, when you see one of something happen it's an accident, when you see two of the same thing happen it's a trend, but when you see three of the same things happen in a very short period of time then it's a plan. And so I said to Monte Belger, 'Look we have got airplanes that are unidentified *[corrects himself: not unidentified, unaccounted for]*." And we have maybe about seven or ten unaccounted for airplanes and we didn't know what was going on. So I said, 'Monte, bring them all down.' And he said, "We'll bring them all down per pilot discretion." And I said, 'Screw pilot discretion! Bring them all down!' Because I didn't want a pilot let's say over Kansas thinking "I want to sleep in my own bed. I am heading to L.A.; I am going to fly on to L.A." I wanted to get all of the planes down; so we can start putting all of the pieces together. So with the skills of the air traffic controllers and the professionalism of the flight deck

crews and the cabin attendants; we had 4,638 airplanes in the air at the time, and in something like two hours and twenty minutes they were able to bring them all down safely and without any incident.

9/11, Part Three

Norman Mineta: And I have a computer on my desk that shows all of the airplanes in the air and my office knew that we have given the order to bring all of the airplanes down. And so they come in to watch that computer and see these dots disappear during the course of that two hours and twenty minutes. So by about, I'd say between twelve fifteen and twelve thirty there wasn't an airplane in the sky; first time since Orville and Wilbur had been in the air. And then we started letting certain airplanes get into New York with, because we needed medicine, we needed canine crews, and others coming back to the New York area. So I was there in the bunker till about quarter to five in the morning...I mean in the afternoon. In the mean time, the President was now flying back to Washington D.C. from Nebraska, and then he was scheduled to give the National Address that night, originally scheduled for 7:30 p.m. but got slipped back to eight o'clock. And then after the eight o'clock national address, which I think lasted about ten minutes; he then had a National Security Council meeting in the bunker, in the PEOC. Now I am not a member of the National Security Council, but because of the events of that day the President had me stay for the National Security Council meeting. So I probably finally left the White House closer to eleven, eleven fifteen that night.

Ronald Sarasin: What an experience.

Norman Mineta: It was.

Ronald Sarasin: I am sure one you would never have to go through again.

Norman Mineta: Absolutely not.

Ronald Sarasin: Was the bringing of the planes down part of a contingency plan that had been in existence [*Mineta nods no*] or just something that you said, "We have to get them down because we have a few we don't know where they are..? [*Mineta nods yes*]"

Norman Mineta: We don't know where... we did not know, we did not know what was happening. And so I said to Monte, 'Bring them all down.' So we were trying to, as we were checking with all of the airlines having them inventory their own aircrafts to where they were and everything. And we still had seven to ten unaccounted for airplanes. So given the horrific nature of what had already happen and how we didn't know about the Shanksville airplane [*a reference to United Airlines Flight 93 that crashed on 9/11 near Shanksville, Pennsylvania*] at that point. And yet you know... you knew from what Al Qaeda had always talked about military icons, government icons, and commercial icons. Well they struck the commercial icon, the World Trade Center, now all of a sudden they struck the Pentagon, the military icon. So after we heard about the Shanksville plane going down, you know people were surmising that it was either heading for the White House or the Capitol to get at the government icon.

Ronald Sarasin: And most likely the Capitol, I would think.

Norman Mineta: True.

Ronald Sarasin: You can see the Capitol...

Norman Mineta: [*interrupts Sarasin*] Much more visible.

Ronald Sarasin: But you don't see the White House very well. And with the kind of damage it did to the World Trade Center, can you imagine the damage would have occurred if it actually, if that plane had actually hit the Capitol? [*Mineta shakes head acknowledging that it would be a shame if the plane actually hit the Capitol building*]. It's just hard to, hard to think about of those who have had the opportunity to serve in there and feel comfortable...

Norman Mineta: [*interrupts*] Absolutely.

Ronald Sarasin: ...wandering around the building.

Thoughts on the Current Partisanship in Congress

Part One

Ronald Sarasin: Let's shift back to some contemporary issues. There is a recent book that had been written by Congressional scholars, Tom Mann and Norm Ornstein; arguing that an increasing partisanship in Congress has undermined both public confidence as well as Congress's own ability to perform its constitutional function. How do you compare your experience in Congress with what you've seen in Congress today? And do you think that there is an increase in partisanship? And has it hindered the ability to legislate and if so what do you suggest if there is any solution to it?

Norman Mineta: Well, I think there is no question that the partisanship today is much sharper, much stronger than it was when I left in 1995. And that probably started occurring in the '92 the 1992 time period and increased in the 1994 time period. I remember when we could--when we could sit down and talk about a lot of things, argue them all out, have fierce battles on the floor, and still be able to go out to dinner and have drinks with friends on the opposite side of the aisle. I remember, and I cherish those moments when I would be invited every so often to those barbecues that Tip O'Neill and Bob Michel had with a poker game. And I remember in the early days, you were there *[speaking about Sarasin]* with John Rhodes as the leader and the working relationship with Speaker Albert or Speaker O'Neil. And it's just very very different today...the kind of conversation doesn't go on. We used to have our first vote on Monday at noon; the last vote was three o'clock on Friday. Today the first vote is 6:30 *[p.m.]* on Tuesday and the last vote is on Thursday night. So members rush in Tuesday afternoon do their vote that Tuesday night, Wednesday do their business, Thursday do their business and out Thursday night or Friday morning. And they don't get to know each other, and so when you don't know someone very well it's probably easier to grind at them in a much more personal way. And I think that there is that much more divisive partisanship today on both sides of the aisle. And I really think that there has to be an interjection of more time being spent even in terms of the way markups occur. We used to have markups in subcommittee, report the bill out to the full committee, have a markup there, and report out the legislation to the House floor. Now subcommittees are doing hearings, oversight hearings; but most of the legislation is being marked up at the full committee level and not even at the subcommittee. So I don't think that there is as much of the deliberative legislative process occurring and then on top of it the divisive partisanship that seems to be occurring.

Part Two:

Norman Mineta: You know as Secretary of Transportation I have spent a lot of time on the Hill talking to Members. And I'll say, 'Have you talked to Congressman Smith about this?' "Who is Congressman Smith?" 'Well, he is your colleague on your committee.' "No, no, I haven't talk to him." And so the kind of conversations we used to have are--just don't exist. And even, I think in the Democratic side and the Republican side; just recently I heard this term "RINO" (Republican In Name Only). Now these are the Moderate Republicans who are being isolated by the more conservative members of the Republican Party. And some of that maybe occurring on the, with the...what do they call it? The yellow....

Ronald Sarasin: The Yellow Dog Democrats.

Norman Mineta: Yeah, as compared to the others, the more liberal Democrats. But I think it's not good for the country. I think it does add to the cynicism of people about politics. And I think we really need to return to some semblance of trying to look out for the needs of our country as a whole instead of just looking at things from a partisan perspective.

Ronald Sarasin: With the schedule they keep today, I am amazed they can do any oversight at all; which is part of the role of Congress. Not just legislating, but seeing if the laws that passed years ago are working and accomplishing what they are suppose to do. But I don't know where they have time?

Norman Mineta: It's sort of interesting that, I believe it was in the 90th--you came in the 93rd Congress?

Ronald Sarasin: Yes, '72, 1972.

Norman Mineta: And I think there were something like four hundred recorded votes in that secession. Today the number of votes is somewhere in the sixteen hundred level, but they're on, they're on less important issues than the four hundred votes you cast in the 93rd. And you've got, what was the other one they had the other day on slaughtering of horses.

Ronald Sarasin: *[in unison with Mineta]* Horses, yes.

Norman Mineta: And I think they spent something like three days on that legislation. And it seems to me, I am not there right now but, it seems to me that there ought, there should be more important issues that ought to be occupying their time, than on three days on slaughtering horses and horse meat used for human consumption.

Maintaining Security and Protecting Civil Liberties

Ronald Sarasin: One of the important issues facing the nation today is the need for national security while still protecting civil rights and maintaining the freedoms are nation cherishes. As someone whose civil rights were clearly violated by the internment process of Japanese Americans during World War II, what is your perspective on the current situation?

Norman Mineta: Well, there's no doubt that national security has to be an important facet of what you do but there are also ways of dealing with national security in a way that protects the civil rights of individuals. And when the original surveillance bill passed, I was a member of the House Intelligence Committee. And it required the administration to go to court, to the special court under the FISA Act to have surveillance approved. And that was done purposely in order to protect civil rights, recognizing the need of national security, and that's why this tribunal, this special tribunal, was set up for these surveillance cases to go to that three-court, three judge court to have them looked at. So I think that there are ways to do that and still at the same time protect the civil liberties of individuals. And so I would hope that in this next Congress that they will deal with that issue and for what I understand there seems to be a growing support for doing that again.

How He Would Like to be Remembered

Ronald Sarasin: You will remember that on the House Floor above the Speaker's platform the words by Daniel Webster. That when I first went there I could read from there, and now when I'm asked, "What does that say?" and I say, "I don't know I can't read it." But what it does say is, "Let us develop the resources of our land, call forth its powers, built up its

institutions, promote all its great interests and see whether we also in our day may not perform something worthy to be remembered.” In your career you have accomplished a great many things, certainly an awful lot to be proud of. And over and above the things that you have accomplished, how would you like to be remembered?

Norman Mineta: Well, again I guess the whole issue of being a good listener. Listening to all the kinds of points of view that that you have coming at you. But by the same token none of us can do things to satisfy everybody, so you have to find out what is it going to be the best for the greater good. And so over the years whether it was a member of the city council, mayor, member of Congress or the executive branch, I am always trying to figure out what is that path that gives you the greater good. So I always hoped that I could end up with people looking at me in terms of what I have done over the years.

Ronald Sarasin: Well you have had an amazing political career and you have certainly have managed to look out for the greater good. Thank you sir, you have been an amazing guest. I have learned a lot Norm, just having the chance to talk to you at this event. I am proud to be able to say that I served in Congress with Norm Mineta. Thank you, sir.

Norman Mineta: Well I am glad to be with you Mr. President.