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The Exit Interview : Senator Gary Peters

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DURATION

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[00:08:00] Steve Grigorian

Good afternoon once again. Good afternoon. Once again. Thank you, thank you. Welcome to today's very special meeting. If you're a fan of summer, you've got about eight hours left because fall begins at 820. Collective BU, please, for the summer from the summer lovers. That would be me. So. But enjoy. I hope you had an enjoyable summer. Uh, 92 years of incredible speakers and networking. And that tradition continues today especially, we want to welcome our members. If you're not a member yet, give me 10s to convince you your next prospect client job, maybe best friend is right in this room if you want to build your network and learn from thought leaders on stage, we invite you to invest in you and join today. You can do it quickly at econ club.org. Kindly silence your cell phone so we do not disturb today's program. And you've been with us before. You know, we have a tradition of starting with a pledge and a prayer. So please stand and join me as we honor our country with the Pledge of Allegiance. I pledge allegiance to the flag of the United States of America and to the Republic for which it stands one nation under God, indivisible, with liberty and justice for all, and kindly remain standing.

[00:09:25] Steve Grigorian

Our invocation today will be delivered by our good friend, Reverend Rev. Geoffrey Drutchas, president of Fish and Loaves. Thank you. Thank you.

[00:09:33] Rev. Geoffrey Drutchas

Let's bow our heads in a moment of reverence and prayer, shall we? Gracious God, as we gather this noontime for both program and meal, we acknowledge with thanks. The years of dedicated public service devoted to our Great Lakes state by Senator Gary Peters. At a time when the integrity of our nation's leadership seems more tenuous and uncertain than ever. We are grateful for the example that Senator Peters and others, stalwart and virtue, provide, guide us all in the present time to reflect more deeply on what each of us might do to ensure the greater well-being of our local communities, our state, our nation, so that greed and selfishness do not prevail, and the needs of all who inhabit our fair land are truly respected and met with thoughtfulness and compassion, which best honor our heritage as michiganians and Americans. Amen.

[00:10:29] Steve Grigorian

Thank you. Yeah. Thank you. Reverend. You may all be seated. A couple of special thank yous. First to WJR, who's doing their focus show outside the room. Also thanks to Wdiv local four. Lawrence Tech University and Detroit PBS for live streaming. Today's meeting. Rich Hamburg deck board member is with us. Thank you Rich for all you do for the deck. You're doing incredible things with Detroit PBS. Thank you. A couple of things on your tables. First of all, our sponsor brochure. I just want to take a moment to thank those sponsors. Make no mistake, we could not be here without their generosity. So thank you to the sponsors in the room. If you're interested in becoming a sponsor, we'd be happy to talk with you. There's terrific benefits. Also on your table is our seasonal lineup. And like I said last week we gave you your summer fun and now it's time to get to work. Our fall season is red hot, and next Tuesday we'll be right back here on this stage when we host Federal Reserve Governor Michael Barr just a couple weeks later, on October 14th, we're going to get you all fired up for the Final Four in Detroit next April. We've got an event called the Final Four Tip Off event that's selling very well.

[00:11:47] Steve Grigorian

You want to get your tickets on that. And of course, October 20th is an important meeting here at the Masonic. We have worked really hard to land both U.S. Senator candidates who want to take Senator Peters open slot beginning January 1st, and that would be Mike Rogers and Abdul El-Sayed, and they'll be right here on the stage, along with Jason Colthorp from Wdiv. So plenty more to come. Get your tickets before they sell out. And you've been with us before. You know, we'd love to say hello to our students. They're here today and always, courtesy of our generous corporate sponsors. Their day already began with a private reception with Senator Peters. Just hold your applause. I want to let you know who's with us, and then we can give him a big applause at the end. We've got students from Lake Orion High School. Thanks to Adam and E Lawrence Technological University students. Thanks to Dao students. Renaissance high. Thanks to Community Foundation for Southeast Michigan. Thank you, Nicole and Janice. University of Detroit Mercy. Thanks to Lauren and Mike from Consumers Energy. And finally, University Prep sponsored by bedrock today. Thank you Jared. And now, please join me in a round of applause as we welcome those students and thank their sponsors.

[00:13:08] Steve Grigorian

All right. 92 years of speakers that tell the history of our country. Senator Peters today joins a list of 15 others who have spoken on this day. And those include a number of politicians. 1952, one of your predecessors, Blair Moody. Uh, 1998 then Congressman John Kasich was on our stage. 1986 Pat Robertson, 2003 Senator John Kerry and then from the CEO world. 2008 Andrew Liveris from Dow. Senator, this is your fifth visit to the deck and we are so always honored to host you. Congratulations on being our 16th speaker on this day in Deck history and thank you. Give him a round of applause. And finally, we want you to use your smartphone to be involved in today's program. You can take lots of pictures and share on your social media network, but also you can shoot the QR code on your table and send a question in for the senator. And all right, let's get this show on the road and turn this over to our presiding officer. Jared Fleischer is the CEO of bedrock. Jared and his bedrock team continue to do incredible things for the city of Detroit. And the DEADECI am honored to have him as a deck board member. Ladies and gentlemen, please welcome Jared Fleischer.

[00:14:39] Jared Fleischer

Thank you, Steve, and good afternoon, deck members and guests. I have the honor of introducing our speaker today, U.S. Senator Gary Peters. But before I read the official bio, I'm going to tell a point of personal privilege here. So one of Gary's, uh, original staffers, her name is Alyssa Malil and basically a daughter to you and to Colleen, and she happens to be my wife's best friend. And I found out that if we bring my wife's best friend with us when we travel, then she keeps my wife busy and I can go and play golf or do my own thing. So she is truly. They say that we are in a throuple, but really it's. That's my motivation. Um, but, uh, she is family to me. And I've always felt because of that, that you are, uh, you and Colleen are extended family as well. Um, now we'll get to what they put in your official bio, because I don't think any of that made made the cut on the Senate website. U.S. Senator Gary Peters has represented the state of Michigan in the U.S. Senate since 2015. Gary was first elected to the U.S. House of Representatives in 2008. I remember it. Currently, he is the ranking member of the Homeland Security and Governmental Affairs Committee. He also serves as a member of the Armed Services Committee, Appropriations Committee and Commerce, Science and Transportation Committee in the United States Senate. Gary is recognized as one of the most effective and bipartisan senators. His bills signed into law help address issues that are important to Michiganders, including protecting the Great Lakes and securing historic funding for restoration efforts. Strengthening border security, supporting our nation's veterans and service members, making government work more efficiently and saving taxpayer dollars. Gary is a product of Michigan schools and has lived in Michigan his entire life. Our moderator is a familiar face to all. Jason Colthorp. Colthorp. I should know that, sir. You've hosted me graciously many times. Jason Colthorp anchors Wdiv Local Four's morning show and he hosts the Can't Miss Flashpoint on Sunday mornings. Ladies and gentlemen, please give a warm welcome. Detroit Economic Club. Welcome to Senator Peters and Jason.

[00:17:09] Jason Colthorp

I think that was more for you than for me. But a couple of things left out of the bio. By the way, the beard came in around 2020. Do I have that right?

[00:17:18] U.S. Sen. Gary Peters

Probably about that. Maybe earlier. I have to ask my wife. She's the expert on that.

[00:17:23] Jason Colthorp

I just I came across a picture without the beard and I went, oh yeah, that's right. That seems like a lifetime ago. The other thing. Do you ever talk about being in the US Naval Reserve? 15 years in there.

[00:17:36] U.S. Sen. Gary Peters

Yeah. Yeah.

[00:17:37] Jason Colthorp

What did that. Because I was amazed that you did that after. Or kind of in the middle of getting five different degrees that you have. But what did that kind of set you up for and teach you? Did it lead you more to public service after that?

[00:17:50] U.S. Sen. Gary Peters

Yeah, it did. And it's something I always wanted to do. I want to serve in the military. And actually, when I was going to in college, I thought about perhaps doing that right after college, but I didn't end up doing that. So I still wanted to serve. And so I applied for a direct for a commission into the into the US Navy. And it was later because you have to be at least 35 years old to get a commission. And I ended up getting it when I was 34 years and 11 months old. So I used to joke, I'm the oldest ensign in the Navy as a result of that. But it was an incredible experience. I had the opportunity to serve with some of the most patriotic People, men and women that you'll ever meet who are in it for mission and and care about this country and love this country. And I remember that service all the time. And it's become very helpful in my work on the Armed Services Committee.

[00:18:41] Jason Colthorp

I was just going to say it would set you up perfectly for that. And you heard me mention five degrees. Five is kind of the number five times that the DECSA member of the Five-timers club. Did we get him a jacket for that.

[00:18:51] U.S. Sen. Gary Peters

By the way?

[00:18:52] Jason Colthorp

We should, uh, well, as we mentioned now, uh, you leave after two terms in the Senate, three terms in the House. Uh, after all that time, what would you say is the difference in Congress today than when you got there?

[00:19:07] U.S. Sen. Gary Peters

Yeah. It's, uh, it is different. Uh, there's there's no question about it. I've got my colleague here, Debbie Dingell, as well would see the differences. The thing that's different over that time is it's just harder to get together, to do things in a bipartisan way and pass legislation. You know, I take great pride in that. As Jared mentioned in the in the opening, you know, I've I've passed I've had more of my bills, standalone bills signed than any other U.S. senator that's been serving during this time. And I do that because I always seek out a Republican co-sponsor. We do it together and then build a coalition in order to to get that passed. But I have what I have seen over that 18 years, it gets harder. And part of the reason is the folks who I work with, who want to legislate, who want to be lawmakers, who are willing to work with a Democrat and and find common ground that when they leave the Senate, for whatever reason, they tend to be replaced by a new person who is either who is usually more extreme, either to the right or to the left. They're not folks who are trying to find that common ground. And it's become more difficult. And it's been more difficult for me also, because even if I can pass stuff through the Senate, I got to get it passed through the House. And I rely on great friends like Debbie. But when I when there when we're in the minority there, I have to deal with the majority of Republicans. And I've just noticed the difference When I go there, I'll meet with a chair of a committee and talk about my bill and how it's bipartisan, how we want to work together. But if it's somebody I haven't worked with yet, they're just a little standoffish and there's like a little bit of a wall when you go in there like, why is this guy coming in here? Why is he doing this?

[00:20:41] Jason Colthorp

Yeah. What's your.

[00:20:41] U.S. Sen. Gary Peters

Motive? Yeah. What's what's the back story here for you? And, but, but once you talk and I talk about, uh, you know, find out things that we could have in common, it's really ideal if there are motorcyclists. I'm really in really quick. If that happens, unfortunately, that doesn't happen enough. But and then but then they'll get more relaxed and then you have a relationship. And so, you know, I have one of the chairs now, a Republican chair. I have like, I have several bills over in the House. Debbie. Just so she knows, but I one of the Republican chairs, the Senate. I really want to help you here. And you've been great. I'm going to get some of these done before you leave. And that's the Republican chair that. So it's because of that relationship you build.

[00:21:20] Jason Colthorp

And you kind of mentioned when people get beaten and more extreme members come in. And we've seen, at least on the Republican side, the president kind of primaries some guys. And afterwards they are. Then they start speaking out against the president. What do you make of that, number one? And does that make it harder? Do you see for bipartisanship to flourish in the future?

[00:21:40] U.S. Sen. Gary Peters

Yeah, it does. I mean, because, you know, with the president, I mean, he's obviously a hyper partizan, polarizing figure. And it's tough because the folks that he supports tend to are going to completely support him when they come in and tend to be more extreme. I'll give you an example from from that race. If you look at the people that I've worked with over the years in passing bills, John Cornyn is one of those individuals, the senator from Texas. Uh, I have a great relationship with him. We do a lot of work together. And when I was when I've been ranked as the most effective, he's always been ranked the second most effective. So he gets things done as well. And to do that, and yet in Texas, he was running a primary with a very polarizing figure, the. And who then? Donald Trump has supported and is now the nominee. But he's really polarizing. And he turned his back on John and John lost the race. So here he is, a guy who's delivered for Texas. You know, obviously I want the Democrat to win. But but here's a gentleman who I work with who's a friend who literally delivered for Texas in passing important legislation to help his constituents. But that didn't matter. The more extreme candidate got the president's endorsement, and he's now the nominee. And that's what we're seeing right now. And that's not a good trend. We got to try to fix that. I don't have the easy answer to do it, but that has to change for our democracy to work the way everybody in this room wants it to work.

[00:23:03] Jason Colthorp

Yeah. When you think about it, the number one and two most effective members of the Senate on each side leaving at the same time, that's that's going to be difficult. And when we talk about extremism, even your own party, the Democratic Party, has seen a big shift. Where do you kind of gauge the party right now.

[00:23:22] U.S. Sen. Gary Peters

Well, you know, the Democratic Party has always been a very big tent party. So we have all those factions within our party all the time. So they're always there. The thing we have to learn is that once we get past the primaries, that we come together and unite and understand that it's important for us to, to, to be united. It's a team sport. A team sport needs folks to be united. But you're seeing how split it is. We saw that here in Michigan with this primary between Haley Stevens and Abdul El-Sayed. That was a close race. It was one point. It's really very, very, very close. And that's where our party is. The test will be how do candidates do in a general election. That's the ultimate test. I say so when folks say where's the party going? Where's it going to be? It's like we are not in the majority if we don't win purple states. So that's why Michigan is getting such attention that we're getting right now for obvious reasons. And you always.

[00:24:15] Jason Colthorp

Have you got involved in the primary endorsing Haley Stevens and obviously now Abdul El-Sayed is the nominee. Do you plan to campaign for him or speak out for him?

[00:24:26] U.S. Sen. Gary Peters

Yeah, I've already endorsed him.

[00:24:27] Jason Colthorp

Oh you did? Okay. Um, when you think about other progressives, uh, what is the biggest challenge for them? Because we see it's happening in Wisconsin, New York, and here in some cases, what are their biggest challenge if they win and go to Congress?

[00:24:43] U.S. Sen. Gary Peters

Well, the biggest challenge will be to, to be willing to work with the other side. And there's folks who'll never agree with you. They're going to be people that are equally far right on the other side that you can't work with, but try to try to reach out to get some, some, some relationships there. The Senate, you need it more. So as long as we have the filibuster rule, you need 60 votes. So you can't do a lot of legislation unless you actually get somebody from the minority party. That hasn't happened much this year for a variety of reasons. The one way that they get around it is a reconciliation process through appropriations, which is getting in the weeds here, but it only requires a majority vote. And so they try to put as much as they can in there. But a lot of the other stuff that we do, the stuff past that, I pass a lot of that actually, we get it done with unanimous consent. Even unanimous consent is really hard. One person can say no. I remember when I, when I first came into the the Senate, someone said, Gary, you're going to love the Senate. I go, yeah, I think it's going to be great. Why is that? They go, because one senator has a lot of power. I'm like, yeah, that sounds good, but there's a problem. What's the problem? One senator has a lot of power, and I've learned that all too often when you get this close to getting something done, you get 99 people with you. And then one senator says, no, we can't move it forward. I object and I want X, Y, and z before I'll let you do this. You know, all the backroom kind of talking in politics that you have to have to try to cut a deal to get it done. So that's not going away anytime soon.

[00:26:15] Jason Colthorp

Yeah. Before I talk to you about the new job that you're about to take, let me. You're going out on top. I would think that you've got to be happy with a lot of the things you got accomplished with Selfridge coming through here near the end of your term. You've gotten a lot of good things done for veterans along the way. Several things. But when you look back, is there going to be one issue or one bill, one law that you think, man, that was the one.

[00:26:38] U.S. Sen. Gary Peters

Yeah, I mean, so I mean, some of the big issues that I worked on, but there was like, we worked as a delegation, but certainly the auto rescue was critically important for, for, for me coming in and, and making sure that we were had the rescue plan in place because it would have been absolutely catastrophic for our region and, and for, for the country, really. And I was particularly involved on a piece of that. And that was making sure Chrysler was a part of that deal. You know, everybody said, well, let's put GM. Obviously GM is really big. We got to help GM. Chrysler was getting pushed aside and I got very engaged in that. In fact, I remember very vividly a meeting that I had during the crisis. And I met at the Chrysler headquarters, you know, over by I-75, the headquarters up at the top and with the CEO and all of his key members when I was there as the member of Congress representing. And he said, he said, Congressman, I want you to be really clear where we are right now. We can't go through a chapter 11 reorganization. The credit markets are absolutely frozen. There is no way we could get any money if we don't get help from the federal government. I'm going to have to liquidate this company, just liquidate everything. And actually, I looked around the room and these were his senior execs there. Their face was like, I don't know if they'd ever heard him say that. Those words came out that they were going to liquidate the company. And, and I had these visions. I look out and, you know, there's that massive parking lot. I just thought, this parking lot is going to be empty and there's going to be grass growing there and no cars.

[00:28:02] U.S. Sen. Gary Peters

And they'll be be shuttered and it'll be catastrophic. And, and Chrysler has to stay there too, because you need the supply. The supply network has to have all three, not just GM and Ford, but it was it wasn't easy and we had a lot of our members. Debbie knows, you know, we had a lot of members of Congress that were around the country that are saying, oh, let them go bankrupt. You know, that's okay. That's that's capitalism. We're alive. If they go under, that's it. And I'm like, no, you can't have a manufacturing sector in America if you don't have an auto sector that's healthy and vibrant. This affects everybody. And we made the case aggressively. And then the one thing that started to turn it were the auto dealers got really involved as they should. And then people around the country were like, oh, our auto dealers need cars to sell. Yeah. Oh my gosh. So yeah, we like our auto dealers. They support the Little League and you know, all of the other things in our community, like maybe we should work to do it. So it came together, but that was critical. And then we got Chrysler back in and, um, and I was lucky I did that because I had a really tough campaign in ten, which was a really bad year. Uh, and, uh, Chrysler had this massive town hall that filled this massive auditorium. And I had the Sergio, the CEO at that time got up in front of me. He said, we wouldn't be here if it wasn't for Gary Peters. I'm like, oh, that's great. Thank you. That's really helpful. Did anyone get that on tape? It's like, yeah, let's get that down.

[00:29:27] Jason Colthorp

So that's going straight in the campaign ad. Uh, and then and recently with Selfridge, that was a big that was a big one to get a new fighter jet there. But this time you do it with an adversary in the white House. How does that make things different at the finish line?

[00:29:43] U.S. Sen. Gary Peters

It just doesn't matter. We got it done. You know, this has been a long time thing that we've been working. We have these two aging squadrons, the tankers that we got. So at first we got the KC 46, which was very important. And part of that was that, uh, which helped our negotiation is that this is where we're in the majority. I blocked the Air Force secretary from getting confirmed under the Biden administration, which was really good. That usually gets their our attention. Because remember, one senator has a lot of power. So he wasn't going to get confirmed until I got some sort of commitment. And we worked together and our delegation worked together. And then they said, well, we'll get you the these tankers. And it was due. These were old tankers. The ones we were flying right now are, are very, very old. In fact, we did a press conference when they announced the tankers, and we had one of them behind us, one of the older aircraft and one of the master sergeants came up to me and he said, he goes, Senator, yeah, we're happy what's happening here, because, you know, this plane was built in 1958. It is really old. And I'm going, yeah, that's old. I was born in 1958. And he goes, oh, I'm sorry, I didn't mean to say that. I go, this is a vintage aircraft. So it was time for it to go.

[00:31:02] U.S. Sen. Gary Peters

So we got the KC 46 in and those will be around a long time. And they're actually they're more than just tankers. They have a great deal of capacity. And I've been doing a lot of work on this to make sure they get additional emissions because they have command and control abilities. The future of the Air Force are also unmanned aircraft, and we call it collaborative combat aircraft that will fly along missions with them. And you can actually have a command center in these tankers that have a lot of fuel to go very far downrange, let's say in the Pacific, if we have to go very far downrange there, as well as controlling these aircraft, and that's going to be at Selfridge. And then, of course, with the F-15s that you're referring to, which came in later with with Donald Trump's help, that's a big deal because they're going to be around a long time too. So so we have those locked in, but I've been working on other things. At Selfridge, I was able to get bills passed and appropriations through my work for a Northern Border Missions center, which is with the Department of Homeland Security. And now we have this mission center that coordinates all of the border security from from Maine to Washington state, all of the northern border. And it's going to happen in Selfridge, which gives the DHS major DHS mission.

[00:32:08] Jason Colthorp

Yeah, really good stuff. Whenever somebody invokes our age, it does grab our attention. A kid on the golf course once noticed my three wood and he said. He goes, yeah, my grandpa's got one of those in his basement in his basement. And I went, well, it's time to buy a new three wood. The Great Lakes is also something I know. Just about everybody in the Michigan delegation works on this at some point to try and make it better, and I've talked to the congresswoman about it. On flashpoint with her adversary, uh, other Tim Walberg was there for that. And just to hear how everybody kind of gets their hands dirty to try and make sure the Great Lakes are, um, continue to be a wonderful resource in your 18 years from the beginning to now, where are the Great Lakes in your mind? In a good spot.

[00:32:51] U.S. Sen. Gary Peters

Yeah, there's certainly a lot better than they were 18 years ago. We've been able to do a lot of great things. The Great Lakes Restoration Initiative, which was passed in ten, uh, has been a major changer. Billions of dollars have been going in. Just just if you just think of the Detroit River area and up into Port Huron. I think over \$250 million of cleanup to make sure we're cleaning up the old toxic sites that were here from our industrial heritage, the water, the watersheds are cleaned. And that happens all around the Great Lakes basin. That has been major. We have to now extend the law. It actually expires at the end of this month. I have the Senate bill to make sure we expand it for the next five years. It's a major focus of mine. The other one that that I worked on specifically too, is we're concerned about oil spills in the Great Lakes, and particularly with line five in the in the Straits of Mackinac. It's an old pipeline. It's just sitting right on the top of the lake bed, basically a very dangerous place. And in fact, just a few years ago, it got hit by an anchor, which is everybody's everybody's nightmare scenario. And they weren't able to take a look and see exactly how bad that was until they got an underwater submersible that took two weeks to get here.

[00:34:04] U.S. Sen. Gary Peters

And then they found out it was a gouge, not a dent. A gouge is a whole lot worse. That could have been catastrophic. And any spill there is major. And it was interesting in committee hearing two things. We had a hearing in Commerce Committee on the the Gulf disaster, the oil disaster that we had down there. And I was asking the experts there about freshwater oil spills in freshwater. And they all said, we basically don't know how to clean up oil in freshwater. I go, what do you mean by that? They said all the research has been done in saltwater. And so some of the things we do like what they do is they actually spread the oil around. They disperse it. If there's a because there are little microorganisms that live in saltwater that actually eat the oil. And nature heals herself with the oil, but they do not live in freshwater. So that you can't and you can't just spread around oil in the Great Lakes when 15 million people drink water out of the Great Lakes. So we need to research that. I asked the commandant of the Coast Guard when he came in for a confirmation hearing.

[00:35:02] U.S. Sen. Gary Peters

How confident is he that he could clean up? Because they would oversee a cleanup in the Great Lakes, especially in the Straits of Mackinac. He says, I'm not confident at all. I'm very concerned. So we I was able to create. We now have now in Michigan, a Great Lakes center of expertise for oil cleanup. It's at state at the Lake Superior State College up in the Soo. It all has now state of the art equipment there to train crews on how to clean up oil spills so we don't have to wait two weeks for a a submersible. It can be there like in an hour and a half. It's a very close. And we have we're gaining the expertise there to make sure we're cleaning up oil spills, not just in the Great Lakes, but all of freshwater. That's done in conjunction with the research center in Ann Arbor as well. And that center now is going to make it even better. We're going to be able to protect the Great Lakes from what is. It could even be an oil spill from a from a freighter. You know, it doesn't have to be an oil pipeline. It's just a ticking time bomb. We need to have that expertise, and we're getting it now.

[00:36:00] Jason Colthorp

Yeah.

[00:36:01] U.S. Sen. Gary Peters

Sorry, a long answer, but important.

[00:36:02] Jason Colthorp

It's good. Yeah, very much so. All right. News broke yesterday. After you're done in the Senate, you're planning to take the director of center for the Political Future at USC. Southern Cal, little LA trip out there. Uh, tell us about that job. What attracted you to that? What attracted boy? What attracted you to Southern California?

[00:36:22] U.S. Sen. Gary Peters

Yeah. I don't know how compares to Michigan winter. I'll find out soon. But what attracted me and they reached out to me about it. But, you know, as we talked about, I really take great pride in working in a bipartisan way, bringing people together. This is a center that that's what it does, is how do we change the dialog and find common ground and very contentious times through a number of programs, bringing people in, working with a Republican who actually I'll be working closely with Mike Murphy, who's actually from Detroit as well, before his long political career in campaigns and do that. And then I also, but I really wanted to teach, I taught before I got into politics, I had an investment career, but I also taught at Oakland University business classes and finance at Wayne and Central Michigan. And I was actually on my way to go into academia when a congressional seat opened up for Joe Knollenberg had. And folks encouraged me to run. And so I put it all on hold. Uh, and so I always wanted to kind of get into academia. And then with USC talking about this is the center, and I'm going to be an endowed professor of political science and international relations, which allows me to work with students to me that I'm so happy we've got students here today because many, many young people don't really want anything to do with politics. It's very toxic and they want nothing to do with it, but they have to we have to get young people engaged in a meaningful way, and not just political science students, but from all whoever you are, whatever your background is, and you don't have to go into political office, you don't have to work in politics, just being an active voter and somebody engaged in the process is critically important.

[00:37:59] U.S. Sen. Gary Peters

So I want to get in that that classroom. So I'll be teaching there. So and they're also they're opening up. Uh, they just bought a building in Washington, D.C. and they want to expand the program and they want me to kind of build it out in Washington. But I want to be clear. My wife, Colleen, here, and I got to make it clear to my daughter, Madeline, to my my family. We're all my family's in Michigan. We're not leaving Michigan. We're staying in Michigan. I'm a Michigan resident. We're going to continue to be here. It is an academic schedule. So that's the summers off. That's a great time to be in Michigan. So so I'll be but I'll be going back and forth, obviously. But my roots are here in Michigan, and I've also been talking to our some of our local universities. I just talked about Oakland. You here today, but also Michigan State and U of M, they're all Big Ten schools and and the Big Ten. And I've had conversations with all. I mean, the Big Ten wants to be more than just an athletic conference. They also want to be an academic partnership as well. So I think there's some real opportunities for us to to work. I like the fact we'll be bringing Michigan to both the East and the West Coast, too.

[00:39:04] Jason Colthorp

I like the sound of that. Yeah.

[00:39:05] U.S. Sen. Gary Peters

Bring the purple state to the to the coast. It's about time.

[00:39:09] Jason Colthorp

Well, nobody thought for a second you would be taking your motorcycle rides out there in the summer up here. I mean, it doesn't get better than Michigan. Oh, no. On those. Yeah.

[00:39:16] U.S. Sen. Gary Peters

Yeah, absolutely.

[00:39:17] Jason Colthorp

All right. Little, uh, rapid fire here. Uh, we'll see if we can get short answers. Maybe. Maybe not.

[00:39:23] U.S. Sen. Gary Peters

If it's short, like I've given you so far.

[00:39:25] Jason Colthorp

That's right. Uh. Give me. Is there an issue where your party is wrong?

[00:39:31] U.S. Sen. Gary Peters

Uh, well, we were wrong. We've gotten better at it. Uh, as border security, we should have done a much better job of that before. It was a frustration for me as, uh, as I was chair of Homeland Security at that time. Uh, we should have been more aggressive in that area. Uh, and, uh, that was an unfortunate result that led to the change that we have right now.

[00:39:52] Jason Colthorp

Who's your favorite GOP lawmaker?

[00:39:55] U.S. Sen. Gary Peters

Oh, boy. That gets me in trouble.

[00:39:58] Jason Colthorp

Well, you've already said nice things about John Cornyn and he's still technically around, but yeah. Well, do you have a favorite that you like working with other than Senator Cornyn?

[00:40:06] U.S. Sen. Gary Peters

Well, the other the other senator that I do a lot of work with is James Lankford from Oklahoma. He he is, you know, he's he's very he's one of probably one of the most conservative members of the Senate. But he is an absolute gentleman with 100% integrity. And I can work with a man like that. And we do a lot of work together.

[00:40:26] Jason Colthorp

Do you have a favorite Democrat?

[00:40:28] U.S. Sen. Gary Peters

Not okay. Now that gets me really.

[00:40:29] Jason Colthorp

Present company excluded. So you can't name anybody in this room?

[00:40:33] U.S. Sen. Gary Peters

No. I have a lot of favorite Democrats to do that.

[00:40:38] Jason Colthorp

Always a politician.

[00:40:39] U.S. Sen. Gary Peters

Yeah.

[00:40:39] Jason Colthorp

It'll never, never end. Right.

[00:40:43] U.S. Sen. Gary Peters

Ask ask me next year. That's a I know.

[00:40:46] Jason Colthorp

I figured.

[00:40:46] U.S. Sen. Gary Peters

This on the stage next year that I'll be completely liberated.

[00:40:50] Jason Colthorp

There's there's three months left. I just figured, oh, boy, let me tell you about, you know, um. Uh, so let me ask about security as well, because Senate Armed Services, uh, and getting back to what you work on in your mind, how secure is America right now?

[00:41:08] U.S. Sen. Gary Peters

Well, we're secure, but it is a persistent threat, absolutely persistent. The cyber threat is significant. We have to make sure we're always on. That is probably one of our greatest vulnerabilities is that, uh, it's frustrating right now because one of our one of our most effective tools in cybersecurity is a cyber sharing agreement that allows or really allows companies when they're hit with a cyber attack to work with Cisa, which is our cybersecurity agency within Homeland Security that I, that I oversee, uh, to understand what's happening, you have to have situational awareness. Um, one thing a lot of companies don't like talking about a cyber attack for a variety of reasons and business reasons, but you got to know what's out there. The FBI estimates that even now that we probably only have 40%, we only know about 40% of the attacks that are occurring in our country. That's scary because we got to know about all of them to be able to really understand how we fight against that. So there's a bill that we're trying to get extended. I did. I was the lead on a bill, cybersecurity incident reporting bill that has did pass the Congress.

[00:42:18] U.S. Sen. Gary Peters

We're in the rulemaking process right now. That's going to close a lot of that gap. It's one of the other bills that I'm very proud to have sponsored. Actually, when when we passed that, the Washington Post said it was the most significant cybersecurity bill in history. So I said, take that, George Washington and Abraham Lincoln. We got we you know, I know you're great, but man, we did the best one in history. And as that goes forward, that'll help close that gap. The other one, though, that I'm really concerned about two hour drones. That's a significant a significant threat. We're seeing how effective drones are in Ukraine right now in the war. It's changing the dramatically. We're seeing it, unfortunately, with Iran, too. And a lot of the drones in Ukraine are also Iranian. And so in the Gulf and the the what's that doing to U.S. forces which are not fully prepared or we weren't to deal with the drone threat. We were firing incredibly expensive, multi-million-dollar weapons to take down drones that cost 20 to 50,000. The math doesn't work very well on that, and we have to reassess that.

[00:43:25] Jason Colthorp

Has that hurt the arsenal as well?

[00:43:27] U.S. Sen. Gary Peters

And all public sources show that, you know, that's a that is that is an issue. But the domestic threat too, is that it's easy to put a on these drones. It's easy to put a grenade or some sort of explosive advice device on it. We were finally able in legislation that I wrote to get it through, through the reconciliation, to expand the number of agent authorities and expand agencies. So it's not just the federal government to protect folks from drones. I will say that the one group that was my biggest supporter, and they were very outspoken, who said, we got to have this legislation, was the National Football League, the NFL already we've had games that have been paused because a drone comes over so far, it's just some crazy hobbyist that wants some pictures or something to do it. But you can imagine something, not a camera on that drone. It would be absolutely catastrophic. We've got to be able to defend against that. We have to have awareness as to where they are, how we take control. Right now, the techniques are primarily to take over the communications to bring it down safely. But with artificial intelligence, AI and AI married with GPS, they can be completely independent. So the problem set is incredibly complex right now that we're working on. We still have a ways to go, but I'm really worried about that.

[00:44:47] Jason Colthorp

I'm worried about the 60% of attacks we don't know about. Now that you've said that, I've got about two minutes before we take some questions from the audience, is there anything we didn't cover that you wanted to make sure you mentioned?

[00:44:57] U.S. Sen. Gary Peters

I think we did it here. Throw the audience. It's good.

[00:45:00] Jason Colthorp

Okay. Now, that's not a politician. Yeah yeah yeah, yeah.

[00:45:04] U.S. Sen. Gary Peters

Do you want to.

[00:45:05] Jason Colthorp

Move.

[00:45:05] U.S. Sen. Gary Peters

To filibuster for me?

[00:45:09] Jason Colthorp

Senator Gary Peters, everybody.

[00:45:19] Jared Fleischer

Okay, Senator, we are joined by our young leaders today, as you know. So I'm going to choose a couple of initial questions in that vein. I'm going to choose this one because it also made me chuckle. How do you foresee the political landscape changing as the old guard of politics retire? And I presume that's you and Mitch McConnell move together in the, uh, lumped together in the same boat.

[00:45:45] Jason Colthorp

You don't retire the way Mitch retires.

[00:45:47] U.S. Sen. Gary Peters

Yeah.

[00:45:48] Jared Fleischer

You know.

[00:45:48] Jason Colthorp

Really.

[00:45:48] Jared Fleischer

Retire. But I think there is a real question there about, you know, generational change. And for example, you know, the average age of our senators in an era of frontier technologies like AI does age equal experience and wisdom, or do we need generational change or it's an individualized issue?

[00:46:06] U.S. Sen. Gary Peters

Well, I think generational change is always good. I mean, that was part of the rationale for, as I mentioned, for me, not to run for reelection. That, you know, our founders thought you go to Congress and you serve and then you go back to private life and someone else gets there. And I think it's a good thing. That's why we also, uh, Kylie and I decided to announce two years early to give plenty, plenty of time for people to get out there and do what they had to do. I wanted to keep the seat blue. Obviously, as a Democrat to go forward. But there will be changes. I mean, the and that's good. The part that I'm worried about. Back to what I was saying, is that what I see a lot of in politics right now is more performative. It's performative politics as opposed to substance related. And actually, how do we come together to get things done? And partly is that the, the more the, the more clicks you can get, the, the more attention on social media you get is better.

[00:47:06] Jason Colthorp

Better than the actual results.

[00:47:07] U.S. Sen. Gary Peters

It's better than the results. Uh, where you raise money now to online, you raise money the way you raise money. I can guarantee you if I put out an email and saying, I just passed a bipartisan bill, the Republican did this. Nobody gives me \$20 for that. But if I throw a rock at somebody and say, I can't believe they did this and that, boom, you get, you get money. So, you know, that's, that's from a campaign perspective. And then you get the media clicks as well. And it's even with television, with all due respect, certainly your program is different. But but but but if but if you want to get on to like one of the cable shows, if we call up and say, Senator just passed this bill, would you like to get them on? They're like, oh, well, okay, but will he talk about news of the day? We've got some real news of the day to talk about.

[00:47:54] Jason Colthorp

A little guilty there.

[00:47:55] U.S. Sen. Gary Peters

Yeah, yeah. So guilty a little bit. But that's part but that's the way it is. And so so that performative politics gets rewarded. And so that's why you're seeing the changes that you're seeing, why it's harder to bring folks together. Now, part of that, and we were talking about this with the group that I was with before with the students. It's also because of our, of our of all of us. It's not just Congress. Our society has gotten more polarized. We've become more Partizan. We have we're all guilty of that here. I mentioned to the students there is recent polling that asked folks, would you be disappointed if your son or daughter married somebody with the opposite party that you are in? And it was over half of America said that. Now that's a change. You wouldn't get that in the past. There are other reasons why people might get not happy with the choice of your son or son or daughter. Madeline. I like my son in law just to make sure Matt's great, but you may have other reasons and I don't know. Anyway, the you know, you might have other reasons, but to say party, that just shows how how in a silo we are right now. And so it's no surprise that that's who gets elected and who gets sent to Congress. And so it's kind of a feedback loop, but I would call it a, you know, it's a negative feedback loop we're having. And I think this that's what we're going to see going forward unless we change it. Part of what I want to try to do at USC and other places, working with other universities here in Michigan.

[00:49:20] Jason Colthorp

I think that's a good first step.

[00:49:22] Jared Fleischer

Okay. In defense of your youthfulness and vigor, if that question was directed to Mitch McConnell, we would have just gotten a thumbs up. That's okay. Another question from our young leaders. If you could single handedly reform one thing to make the legislative process better, what would it be? And I'd personally ask you to expand that just from kind of inside the halls of Congress to, you know, our political system more generally, for example, redistricting Michigan here we have the Independent Citizens Redistricting Commission, you know, pros and cons. But on the other hand, the race to the bottom of redistricting that we had across the country, I think, was odious for for most Americans. If you could single handedly reform one aspect of our of our process and structure to make our political system work better, what would it be?

[00:50:12] U.S. Sen. Gary Peters

Well, I think you raised that. I mean, gerrymandering is a is a huge problem because we now have we have very few congressional districts that are actually competitive in a general election. We know pretty much. And that number keeps going down every every single year it goes down. And so then there's just massive amount of money that's put into those few districts as well. And so if you just say if you own a TV station around those districts, that's a good thing because lots of resources go go into it. But then and then you also get the partizanship that's in the primary as well. And so it is it is very, very difficult if we could change that. And I think our commission did a good job where we have more competitive districts, and you certainly shouldn't be right now the system around the country, and we saw it firsthand with what what Donald Trump did is that we have politicians picking their voters. It should be voters picking their politicians. You know, it's the other way around. And yet that's not what, what what we have. But I would say also structurally within the Senate, I mean, some things that that I would do. One is that that one power, we should not just have one person that can stop everything, because that prevents a lot of really good legislation from getting passed.

[00:51:20] U.S. Sen. Gary Peters

If you have one person for whatever reason they have, it should be the the will of the majority of the Senate that wants to get behind something. And so those kinds of rules that limit it, there are old rules. They're arcane. It only makes us dysfunctional. Much more than we probably are right now. As having some of those rules in place there. And even like the reconciliation that we have where we pass appropriations bills, that reconciliation, which didn't require 60, it only required a majority, was originally put in place to try to reduce the deficit. So you always had to reduce the deficit and you could have fewer votes to do it. Now it's been used actually increase the deficit massively. The big, big, beautiful bill that was passed was done in reconciliation, and it added over \$1.5 trillion to a \$40 trillion deficit. That shouldn't be we shouldn't make it easier to go into debt when we make it easier to go into debt. All of our children, all of our students are going to pay more. It's destabilizing our country. We've got to bring the debt down. And we have a rule in place now that instead of incentivizing doing the fiscally responsible thing, we're doing something that's fiscally irresponsible.

[00:52:28] Jared Fleischer

Amen. Okay. I'm going to make the last question from the audience a political question. And I chose this one because there's something pregnant in it as well. You'll see what I mean. What are your thoughts on Trump guaranteeing all American adults \$5,000 if the GOP wins the House in the Senate?

[00:52:47] U.S. Sen. Gary Peters

Well, that is absolutely outrageous. You know, outrageous. You know, there are laws on the books. You can't buy votes. That's called bribery and buying votes. That's patently illegal to say we're going to give you \$5,000. Of course, he did say we're going to. Taxpayers are going to get money for Doge. That didn't happen because it actually didn't save any money. He said, we're going to give money for the tariffs. That didn't. It just cost the average family thousands of dollars. I'll just remind everybody I'm going to be a little partizan here. But you know they are in complete control. If you want to actually help consumers stop this war in Iran, win the damn war and get out of there so we don't have oil prices and diesel at an all time high and gasoline prices at \$5. It's costing everybody money. It's putting us deeper in debt, tens of trillions of tens of billions of dollars for that. Well, these tariff policies also raising the cost for everybody. And they should stop going after the Canadians. The Canadians are our friend. We really appreciate them as Michiganders. They're our friend. So if you change those policies, people will have more than \$5,000 in their pocket. That's the way to fix it with good policy, not bribing people.

[00:54:13] Jared Fleischer

Okay, we're going to move from the audience questions to our lightning round. These are more personal questions, Senator. Um, question number one, something on your personal bucket list.

[00:54:27] U.S. Sen. Gary Peters

Something on my personal bucket list travel or does it can be anything I want to go to? Let's unpack that out. I want to go to Mongolia.

[00:54:36] Jared Fleischer

Okay.

[00:54:37] U.S. Sen. Gary Peters

I just popped in my head.

[00:54:38] Jason Colthorp

The country or the barbecue?

[00:54:40] U.S. Sen. Gary Peters

Yeah. That's the country. The country.

[00:54:43] Jason Colthorp

The barbecue is underrated, though.

[00:54:45] Jared Fleischer

Okay.

[00:54:47] U.S. Sen. Gary Peters

I may have to settle for the barbecue. Maybe. Probably. Probably. Does that count?

[00:54:51] Jared Fleischer

It absolutely counts. This is a Rorschach test, my friend. It all counts. Something on your bucket list. Which is something that you will never do again.

[00:55:00] U.S. Sen. Gary Peters

That I'll never.

[00:55:01] Jared Fleischer

You'll never do again.

[00:55:03] U.S. Sen. Gary Peters

Um.

[00:55:04] Jared Fleischer

I guess run for Senate is possibly one. You know, that was fun for a while.

[00:55:09] U.S. Sen. Gary Peters

So, I mean, I just I've done some of this, I guess never to do again. I'm actually I'm really afraid of heights, so I will never do anything that's really high up. So for example, uh, which was really wonderful, the Mackinac Bridge Authority. I love riding my motorcycle across the Mackinac Bridge. That's amazing. But they said, you want to go to the top of the bridge and up on the spire. There they go. That's amazing. Nope. You're never going to get me to do that. That's never, never going to happen.

[00:55:37] Jared Fleischer

So if I could synthesize this, the senator wants to go to Mongolia, but he does not want to go to the top of the Great Wall. I think that's that's the synthesis there. Okay. Person other than a family member that you would love to have lunch with, we can go living or or deceased. We can open it up.

[00:55:53] U.S. Sen. Gary Peters

Oh, well, if it's deceased, the president that I've that I've always admired is Theodore Roosevelt. So I would love to to be with him.

[00:56:04] Jason Colthorp

Uh, zero cyber attacks on his watch, by the way.

[00:56:07] U.S. Sen. Gary Peters

Yes. Oh, shoot. He did not pass the most significant in history, though.

[00:56:11] Jason Colthorp

Little known.

[00:56:11] U.S. Sen. Gary Peters

Fact.

[00:56:14] Jared Fleischer

So I'm curious because you were in business before, uh, public service. Question here. What did you want to be when you were growing up?

[00:56:21] U.S. Sen. Gary Peters

What did I want to be? That was easy. I wanted to be a fighter pilot. Wow. Yeah, I always I always wanted to. Uh, no, I just talked about heights. I'm not. I'm not afraid of heights on a plane. Got it. I'll stay in a perfectly good airplane. I'll be happy to do that. But don't get me on the top of the Mackinac Bridge. Don't do.

[00:56:37] Jason Colthorp

That.

[00:56:38] U.S. Sen. Gary Peters

But, yeah, I wanted to be a fighter pilot, but I have glasses. And so I never had real good eyesight. And so that was I wasn't able to achieve that. But I did go on to get my private pilot's license. So I do have a license. I haven't flown in a long time, but it's something, something I'd love to do more.

[00:56:58] Jared Fleischer

There you go. There you go. You know, I was so diligent about the time that I needed to start, and, you know, I should have asked the question. When do I need to end? That would have been a great question. Okay. After the final questions when I need to end, sir. Looking back in time, what advice would you give to your 25 year old self.

[00:57:18] U.S. Sen. Gary Peters

To 25 year old self.

[00:57:19] Jared Fleischer

To your 25 year old self?

[00:57:21] U.S. Sen. Gary Peters

Yeah, I I think, you know, the, the thing is, is that you always be willing to take risk. Um, I think we've done, we've done a lot, haven't we. Uh, risk, but to, to, to be willing to take a chance because you don't, you, don't you, you can be really surprised when you take chances. What you can achieve, you may or may not work out, but that's fine because I've also found out when for all of our young folks here, when you don't succeed at something, you usually learn a whole lot more when you don't succeed than when you do succeed. Because when you succeed, you figure you know all the answers and you're the smartest person in the room. When you don't succeed, you really do a self-awareness test and you become a better person as a result of that. So always be willing to, to take, take a risk and understand that regardless of what happens, it's going to be good for you.

[00:58:10] Jason Colthorp

That was going to be one of my questions, but I ran out of time. You lost one of the closest elections ever for Attorney General. Did that make you better for it? Because sometimes people wilt and that you never hear from them again. But obviously that wasn't what happened with you.

[00:58:22] U.S. Sen. Gary Peters

Yeah, that's when I ran for attorney General. It was I lost I lost by 5000, I think 210 votes, something like.

[00:58:32] Jason Colthorp

Some four digit number.

[00:58:33] U.S. Sen. Gary Peters

Approximately approximately, I think was that which which is less than one vote, a precinct.

[00:58:39] Jason Colthorp

What did you learn from.

[00:58:40] U.S. Sen. Gary Peters

That.

[00:58:41] Jason Colthorp

Is the question. Yeah.

[00:58:42] U.S. Sen. Gary Peters

Well, yeah. Well that was back to the perseverance because I mean, it was also shows that conditions were out of control. One thing that happened that year, which is why I really like mail in ballots, because that year, uh, we had an ice storm starting at 3:00 in the afternoon, uh, in southeast Michigan. And those are where Democratic voters are. So that could have, you know, who knows, but that, you know, could have could have done it. But there is a perseverance. It didn't happen, but we still stayed active. I still wanted to make a make a difference. And then I was in a position when that congressional seat opened up or didn't open up. We had an incumbent there, but we decided to run again for Congress. That I ran for Congress. So had I won the ag race, I don't know if I would be the US senator sitting here right now. So that race allowed me then to spend 18 years in Congress, that chances are I would not have happened.

[00:59:34] Jason Colthorp

Yeah.

[00:59:34] Jared Fleischer

Ladies and gentlemen, I'll go back to where where we started. Senator Peters consistently ranked among the most effective and bipartisan U.S. senators. Senator, you represent the best tradition of public service. Thank you for being here. Thank you for moderating. And I'll turn it over to Steve to close.

[00:59:52] Speaker 3

Thank you.

[01:00:18] Steve Grigorian

Well, Senator, Senator, that was proof of how much we love you and how much we appreciate your incredible service to our country and state. Thank you for always saying yes to the Detroit Economic Club over these years. And thanks to Colleen for sharing your husband and Maddie for sharing your dad. We appreciate you doing that, Jared and Jason, thanks for your important roles. Outstanding job. Jason, we're going to see you in a few weeks when we have the senatorial candidates back at the Detroit Economic Club. Ladies and gentlemen, tell your friends and colleagues to join the DC. We're a fun group of people on time. Every time. This meeting of the Detroit Economic Club is now adjourned. Thank you.

END OF TRANSCRIPT



Automated transcription curated by MIRS' staff. We apologize for any misspellings.