

GUEST: PAT SAIKI 1

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Aloha no; I'm Leslie Wilcox of PBS Hawaii. In today's *Long Story Short* we get to chat with a former Hilo girl, public school teacher, wife and mother of five who became a U.S. Congresswoman and head of the nation's Small Business Administration. A conversation with Pat Saiki, next.

Patricia Fukuda Saiki is not one to let racial discrimination, gender bias, government bureaucracy or social injustice get her down. She's worked to put them down. Obstacles she faced early in life and early in her career motivated her to take action. And to hear her stories, you can see why.

My parents were, well, let me put it this way. My father was the original feminist. He had three daughters. There were three of us; I was the eldest. And he said, You can be anything you want to be. But look at school teaching and look at nursing as the first two priority occupations. But other than that, you can choose to do whatever you want to do. And he wanted each of us to be a star tennis player, like he was. He was a tennis coach at Hilo High School. So he trained each of us to play tennis, and he called us Sonny Boy; 'cause he had no sons. [chuckle] But we felt a sense of independence, and my father gave us that. My mother, of course, was a seamstress; she worked with her hands. And she supported us all the way. So growing up in Hilo was nice.

When your dad said you can be anything you want —

M-hm.

Did he truly mean that? Because —

He really —

-- he did direct you to teaching and nursing.

Well, he thought those were two honorable professions. But, he said, if there's anything else you want to be, go for it.

And were other parents of that age saying, Find a good guy, get somebody to support you?

[chuckle] I don't know. I would suspect so. But he was very independent, so he made us feel very independent.

Why do you think he was so independent with his girls?

I don't know what it was. But he was a sort of a trendsetter in that he wanted to excel, and he wanted to push us into competing, and you know, that sort of thing. Even if we were girls, just girls, he felt that we could win. So he was a champion, in my book.

Did you feel racial prejudice?

No, not at all. No racial prejudice. Maybe some sex bias. But other than that, nothing that we couldn't overcome.

What kind of sex bias?

Well, you know, girls are not supposed to march forward and speak up too loudly. You have to sit at the table on the ocean side, instead of the mountain side, because men are higher than women. That sort of thing. And that's old, old style Japanese folklore, I used to call it. And I broke all those rules.

And what —

It was okay.

-- happened to you when you broke those rules?

Nothing. Because my daddy backed me up. [chuckle]

Okay; so you became a teacher.

M-hm.

And you thought that was what you were gonna do for the rest of your life?

Yes, I really did think so. I found it challenging. I graduated from the University of Hawaii. And the interesting thing is, because we were not a wealthy family, we knew that we had to help each other—my two sisters and myself, we knew we had to help each other. And because I was the eldest, and I stayed in the dormitory for one year, at Hale Laulima, which is right across the street from your studio. And I was able to stay there for one year. After that, I said, the sister below me wants to go to the mainland to school, we don't have the money, so give to her; I'll work. And so I got a job with Rudy Tongg, who started Aloha Airlines. It was called TPA, Aloha Airlines. And we had those propeller planes, the D6s, you know, propeller planes. And we worked—there were five of us from the University of Hawaii who were the weekend girls that came down and took over from the regulars.

Back before they were called attendants; you were a stewardess.

I was a stewardess; that's right. And we worked weekends, holidays, vacations, and we got double pay when the volcano erupted. In those days, we'd fly right into the crater. Of course, my parents almost had a heart attack every time I took that flight. But it paid my way through school. And so my second sister—my sister just below me—got to go to Teachers College in Iowa. And we both helped the third one to go to school. So it was an adventuresome period, a fun time, and we earned our money, worked hard. Oh, and then my first job was at Punahou School. Dr. Fox, who was then the principal of Punahou, came up to the University and looked over the flock of people that he could hire, and he said, Well, Pat, why don't you come over and teach at Punahou; we need some local girls. So I was one of the few local girls, the first ones, to be on the staff at Punahou. And it was exciting, because you know, here, you're breaking ground and you're forging ahead into an arena where nobody else had been.

Were you sort of a quiet groundbreaker, or were you pretty flashy?

[Chuckle] some people would say I was flashy.

Because you spoke up quite a bit?

Oh, yes; because I was outspoken, and because I said my piece. And I enjoyed the years at Punahou. And after that, of course, I got married to my dear husband who was an obstetrician gynecologist. We went to the mainland, I taught there in Toledo, Ohio. And that's a whole new and different adventure, because the people in Toledo had nothing, no idea about what Hawaii was. And now here I was, teaching their kids. So I—for discipline purposes, what I did was I told the—my children—I shouldn't say children, they were eighth-graders, eighth and ninth-graders. I challenged them to behave and perform, and I will teach them the hula. Now, I was not exactly what you would call a connoisseur of the hula. But I had watched it enough to know —

[chuckle]

-- what to do. [chuckle] And we would put on a May Day program, and we rehearsed, and we got those kids in line. And I'm telling you, I never had a discipline problem. In fact, at the same time, the parents invited me to their homes, because I had never been exposed to the bar mitzvah, I had never been to a Polish wedding, an Irish wedding; I had never been to any of these ethnic celebrations. And so I was exposed. First time I went to a Jewish store and ate those nice, big pickles. And it was wonderful teaching there and meeting these kids and these families while my husband was doing his residency in OBGYN.

Sounds like you got a chance to introduce them to Hawaii and break some of the misconceptions about this place.

Exactly; right. Of course, they thought we lived in huts and —

M-hm.

-- wore hula skirts all the time. But we were so dynamic in our May Day presentation, that the chamber of commerce of Toledo, Ohio invited us down to put on a performance in middle of town. And the school was very happy; they got a bus for us, and we went down there, parents all came and joined us. And you're right; they were exposed to what Hawaii really can be like, or is like.

So at that point in your life—you eventually had five children —

Yeah. [chuckle]

And you're married to—he became chief of staff at —

Yes.

-- at a hospital. You could have just settled into a life of raising kids, and done a wonderful job being a wife and mom.

Oh, I could have; yes. Except —

I'm not saying you didn't, but you also did other things.

Yeah; I could have done a lot of things. I had many, many choices. But there were several things that pushed me into the political arena.

Pat Saiki was a woman of action and the arena she chose in which to take action against social injustice was politics.

The one thing that really hurt my feelings was when we came back from the mainland, and we wanted to buy a house in Aina Haina. Well, the Aina Haina association met, and denied us.

Because?

We were Japanese Americans. People forget that this kind of prejudice existed, you know, just fifty years ago, sixty years ago.

So this was in the 50s?

Yeah.

Wow.

We came back, and that didn't set well with me. Okay; that was one reason.

So what did you—where did you relocate? Did you take no for an answer from Aina Haina?

We had to. So we rented a house on Crater Road, and then eventually bought a house in St. Louis Heights. But the other reason is that, as a schoolteacher, I was teaching at Kaimuki Intermediate then; today it's the Middle School. Here, we had a different set of rules that were dictated to teachers by the central office of the Department of Education. And I'm sure the old-time teachers will remember this. We were told what to teach, when to teach it, and how to teach it. And we had to teach history from the beginning of the book, to the end of the book. No skipping; no idea of doing team teaching with a teacher who was teaching English. I wanted to join up with English and history —

M-m.

-- and we could time it so that we could see American history growing, along with English literature. No, no, no, they said, you can't do that. I mean, you have to stay in your classroom and do what is supposed to be done. Well, I said, Is that right? Is that how we're going to teach here in Hawaii? And as an eighth grade teacher then, I began to realize that I had the thirty children in my class in my hands. I could determine their destiny, because I had to track them. I had to say which ones could go to college, and which ones can't.

Because they—in those —

They tracked them.

-- days, you were in different tracks?

Tracked them. That's right.

Oh.

Different tracks. And so I said, That's not right. You know, who am I to tell a child, that child can never go to college? Forget it. We're gonna give that child every opportunity to excel, and go as far as he or she wants to. Well, this was not according to the rules. So I had a few difficulties with the principals and district superintendents, et cetera, et cetera. So then, I organized and got other teachers who felt exactly like I did; and we formed ourselves into a loose association. I went down to the HGEA office, and talked to the leadership and said, What you need is a teachers' chapter of the HGEA, because we have no unions around here.

Was that before the Hawaii State Teachers —

Before —

-- Association?

-- the HSTA, before the AFT, before anything. No other organization existed. So HGEA created a chapter for teachers. And I said, Under those circumstances, I want to sit on the board of directors and have an equal vote. And I want to be able to lobby the legislature on behalf of teachers. And Charlie Kendall was the big boss then. There's a building named after him today. But he was farsighted; he and I sat on my patio and drafted up the charter for the Hawaii teachers—the teachers chapter of the HGEA. And that kicked in to a very vibrant organization, and we gathered many, many members, about three thousand teachers all signed up. And we became a force. Then, the HSTA was created through the HEA at the national level. And that's when I said, We are going to disband because the HEA, Hawaii Educational Association can lobby in Congress. Whereas, the HGEA cannot. And we need Congressional help. And so I disbanded the whole organization. [chuckle] You ever heard of an association being disbanded? Well, it did happen. And then the teachers came to me and said, Well, why don't you run for office, you can represent us in the Legislature, not through the organization but as an independent. And so I did run for the Constitutional Convention, though, at first.

Was that a nonpartisan race then?

Nonpartisan race.

1968?

Yeah; 1968, and I got elected.

M-hm.

So then, I was approached to run for the State House of Representatives, and by the Republicans.

Now —

And I decided, well, that would be a challenge, wouldn't it, in this state.

Well, you know, I've always wanted to ask you that.

[chuckle]

I mean, you were probably a young teacher at the time of the Democratic revolution of 1954, where AJAs, got into power.

Yeah.

And you weren't among them; instead, you went against the grain a little later and —

That's right.

-- ran as a Republican.

Because I saw what was going on in the State, and I knew that we had to have alternative choices. We had to have representation from both sides; not just one party, but two-party representation. And I felt very strongly at

that time, that the Republicans were not doing well at all, and the Democrats were running roughshod in many ways. So I decided that, Hey, what I'll do is, I'll run for the other party, and make a few more waves.

Did the —

Which I did.

-- Democrats try to woo you?

Oh, yes; oh, yes. Oh, yes; they did. But they were not successful. [chuckle]

Because you wanted to shake things up.

Yeah; yeah. That's what I wanted —

But it was a lonely job much of the time.

Lonely, and difficult.

M-hm.

But you know, people can—people who believe in you don't care about your party; they care about you as a person, as an individual, what you stand for; and they'll vote for you no matter what party you're in. And that's what I learned, as I ran for public office.

Pat Saiki was elected, as a Republican, to serve in the State House of Representatives from 1968 to 1974, the State Senate from 1974 to 1982, and the United States Congress from 1986 to 1990. Thanks to her efforts and the work of many others in her lifetime, we know the truth of the cliché, "You've come a long way baby."

In the State House, you were able to do some things that when women look at what they have in society now, it's hard to believe that all of these things occurred just in the last thirty, fifty years.

That's right. It's been —

Certainly within —

-- very recent.

-- your adult lifetime.

Absolutely. When I got involved in politics then, President Nixon appointed me to the National Association of Women.

M-m.

It was kind of an interesting organization at the national level. And so I was, of course, pleased at being appointed, and went to Washington and sat in on many of the meetings, and watched the Congress perform, et cetera, et cetera.

This is while you were in the State House?

This was when I was in the State House. And at that time, the whole interest of women being equal rose up.

And you had—you remember some of those women who were really outstanding in what they were—they burned their bras and, you know, they marched around and they did all their things. And they were stunts, but they called attention, the media's attention to what was going on. And it aroused my curiosity to come home and take a look at the laws that we have. And by golly, with Pat Putman's help in the Legislative Reference Bureau, I asked her to review all the laws that were on the books, and see where there may be discrimination. At the same time, I asked her, and the lawyers, to draft up an equal rights amendment; because this is where the national effort was going. And so we prepared this package of twenty-eight bills, and the Equal Rights Amendment. And I had some good friends in the Legislature—I didn't work alone; I mean, this was a bipartisan effort, although a lot of people didn't know it. But people like Senator John Ushijima from the Big Island, his wife Margaret; we had Pat Putman, we had quite a few others —

M-hm.

-- who were Democrats, and committed ones. John Ushijima introduced a companion —

In the Senate.

In the Senate. And I told him, If you can do this, I'll do the lobbying in the House. And we did; and we were successful.

Well, what are some of those bills that came into law as a result of your steering things through?

Well, there was so much. I don't think the young people today remember. A woman could not have a credit card in her own name. She couldn't own a mortgage in her own name. And if she were divorced, she had all kinds of problems; her husband—ex-husband had to give permission for her to be able to have access to the bank account. I mean, these were crippling things that held women back. And the private sector, as well as the public sector, could determine the wage of a woman according to the lowest wage of a male in the same job.

That was all legal.

All legal.

And people took it for granted?

And took it for granted. We changed all that. And a woman who was pregnant couldn't get maternity leave, with pay. You just couldn't do it. And we had to change that. We had to change—oh, and if a person wanted to use her maiden name for whatever reason, professionally, or whether when—after divorce, she wanted to retain her maiden name, can't do it. We changed it; so that today, a woman can use any name she prefers. But the Equal Rights Amendment went flying through our Legislature, because people here understood. The legislators knew that this was the right thing to do for all the women in the world, especially in Hawaii. And you know, we had the very highest percentage of women who were working.

M-hm. That was in 1972, when the ERA —

Right.

-- passed here.

Right.

In fact, a Star-Bulletin columnist, Richard Borreca, did a column a year or so ago where he said an intern in the office couldn't believe that it was such a big deal when you steered that —

M-hm.

-- that bill through, because —

M-hm.

-- it just seemed like that should have happened, you know, a hundred years ago. But it didn't.

It didn't.

It happened in 1972.

That's right. And that wasn't that long ago.

M-hm.

And those were fun years, because we had interested people, concerned people, thinking people, who looked at what Hawaii should be, and how people should be treated. They weren't that concerned about the petty little things that today, sometimes, take up too much time.

Why do you think that is?

[SIGH] I don't know. It's partisanship gone to the edge, to the far end. It's the lack of appreciation, I think, of what legislation could do, instead of holding back and trying to constrict and sort of confine people. You don't have the big thinkers anymore. And in those days, it was fun to work with Jack Burns, Governor Burns. And we had Tadao Beppu, who was really terrific.

You're naming Democrats here.

Yeah; they were all pals. I mean, we used to fight like heck on the floor of the House, or on the floor of the Senate, but after that, we went out and had saimin, you know, and we talked about legislation. But I will tell you, the most fun I had, really, was when we joined up with a rascal group of Democrat senators and formed a coalition. Dickie Wong, Cayetano was involved in this, and so was Abercrombie. And we took the power away with half Republicans, half Democrats, and joined the coalition for two years.

And that was called the dissident faction —

The —

-- by the media.

-- dissident faction by the media; right. And I was fortunate enough to head up the committee on higher education. And it was at that time that we created the Kapiolani Community College up at Fort Ruger. I worked with Joyce Tsunoda —

M-hm.

-- who was chancellor at the time, and we not only drafted up the legislation to make this exchange, which was acceptable to people like Jack Burns, who really wanted that area for a medical school. And we plotted out the parking spots; we wanted to make sure that we had enough parking, so the neighbors would not have to put up with students parking in their streets. It was —

And it happened within a fairly —

Two years.

-- compact period of time.

Oh, Fudge Matsuda was president of the University at the time. I called him up; I said, Fudge, two years, that's all you've got, because that's all I'm going to be chairman of this committee; let's do this in two years, and get it done.

And look how long it took to get the medical school and West Oahu University.

Right; right. But we did that—oh, and the same year, we built the law school library. So in those two years, we accomplished a tremendous number of things.

Okay; and what do you attribute that to?

Again, to the coalition; we had the power, we had the votes, and we could move it through. We had Governor Ariyoshi who was open-minded about things.

So it wasn't about, as you said, partisanship to the max; it was about bridging gaps.

Right; it was bridging gaps.

And it was people who liked stirring up a little dust too.

Yeah; that's what it was.

[chuckle] What was it like working with the media at the State House? I mean, you saw the advent of television and now we talk about how there isn't a lot of time given to television news in terms of digging out stories.

M-hm.

Have you seen a change in media news coverage?

Oh, yes; oh, yes. Because I remember Jerry Burris when he first started, and Borreca. You were there. Lynne Waters was there. I mean, there were many, many people who were part of the legislative scene. And you had a role to play, and you played it well. And we could talk to you. I don't know what it's like today. I thought you people did more in-depth.

M-m.

And you came to seek answers.

And you took some hard questions, right?

Oh, always; always take hard questions. And tried to be very honest, and straightforward. And so I congratulate you too, for all you did.

Thank you very much. You're from a neighbor island and —

M-hm.

-- you made it in the big city of Honolulu. And then you distinguished yourself representing Hawaii in Washington. How do you look at where we are as a state, and how do you feel about Hawaii today?

I think there's hope for all of us. People in Hawaii are real. They're true, they're honest, they're straightforward, and they're sympathetic. They believe in this State, they believe in each other, they believe in family. And they're very close. And this is something that no one can take away from us. And so we will meet the challenges of the future.

You say that, but look at the big dispute we're having over rail. You know, people saying the city can't handle a big job like that, I mean, we have some major issues that we can't seem to solve, or get together on.

We will. We will. It's an issue that has come to the forefront; it's an issue that is going to be dealt with people — honest people, thinking people. And in the final analysis, it'll be solved.

Why do you think we'll triumph over this? What makes you think that?

Because people are going to realize that—it might take time, though, but people will realize that we are not solving any problems by taking these partisan stances and by being so negative about things, and not having an overall view of what is in the future for us. And I have every faith that they will; no question about it.

And you've always had faith, haven't you?

Oh, yes; always. Always.

Pat Saiki is a get-it-done sort of person – a believer in cooperation across the political aisles;- and not, as she puts it, partisanship gone to the edge. She says she's *pau* running for elective office. But she is working for improvements in how Hawaii faces another social issue: eldercare. More on that as our conversation continues with next week on *Long Story Short*. Please join me then. I'm Leslie Wilcox of PBS Hawaii. A hui hou kakou.

Video clip with production credits:

Were you good at everything?

No.

What weren't you good at?

My golf game has gone to pot. [chuckle] It's not as good as I would like. There are things that I would like to do. I've never learned to play the piano, which is something I've always wanted to do. I haven't yet done it.

Do you plan to?

Yeah, I think so. I think I'll pursue that. So I have other goals.

GUEST: PAT SAIKI 2

LSS 206 (LENGTH: 27:19)

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Aloha no; and welcome to *Long Story Short* on PBS Hawaii; I'm Leslie Wilcox. Last week, Pat Saiki recalled a time in Hawaii's history when there was bi-partisan collaboration in the State Legislature, instead of what she calls "partisanship gone to the edge." A Republican, she served as a State lawmaker, U.S. Congresswoman and head of the nation's Small Business Administration. More with Pat Saiki next.

Pat Saiki, wife, mother of five, and public school teacher, entered politics in order to open doors for people, especially women and minorities. And though she was another kind of minority in Hawaii, a Republican, she was able to work across the political aisle to get laws changed. When collaboration failed, the former Hilo girl could be a fierce opponent.

Did you ever look at yourself as others might be seeing you, or did you do a lot of introspection that way, or did you just say, Whatever?

Whatever.

This is who I am.

That's right; exactly.

And you didn't—did you look for mentors or people who could show you by example?

There weren't any. [chuckle] You know. There—I hope that the women who follow after me will pursue their goals and find the successes I did. And like I say, my life with my children, though—I mean, throughout this whole thing, the five kids were raised well, I thought. And my husband was a big help; he was the kind of support that you don't see or get very often.

I've heard you credited for co-founding the Spouse Abuse Treatment Center.

Oh, yes.

Is that right?

Sex abuse; yes. You know, I have to give credit to my husband for this one. My husband was an obstetrician gynecologist. And he was involved as chief of staff at Kapiolani Medical Center. And he knew about these cases of violent abuse of women, for whatever reason. He wanted to give them help. If they were raped, at that time, they were sent to the morgue to be—shall we say, examined by the pathologist in the morgue.

Wow.

He just didn't think that this was right. So he came home one day and he told me, You know, we've gotta do something about these women who are being abused, these women who are suffering, not only at the hands of their husbands, but at the hands of those people who really care less about the value of women, respect women. And so he said, What do you think we can do? I said, Well, you're at Kapiolani Hospital, it's a medical hospital, it's a women's medical hospital; isn't there something that you folks can do there at the hospital? I said, Why don't you talk to Dick Davi, Richard Davi, who was then —

Who was the head of —

-- CEO —

-- Kapiolani, right?

Yeah; Kapiolani. So he did. He chatted with Dick Davi, and then he came home and told me, You know, Dick Davi understands the need for this; we have to provide some place where women can feel safe, where women can come in and tell us their story, that they can be examined by physicians, and be given the sympathy and the help with very sympathetic people. He says, But how are we gonna do it? We need money. I said, That's when I come in. We'll see what we can do to add this program to the budget, as an add-on. [chuckle]

And you were a Republican in the minority.

Oh, yes; Republican in the minority. But you see, it's very easy to tell the story of distressed women, or it could be these legislators' daughters, it could be their wives, it could be their aunts, it could be anybody close to them in their family. They understood. As long as you presented it to them on a personal basis, these legislators, whether they were Democrats or Republicans, understood the need.

Are you saying —

And they supported me.

Are you saying nobody did any horse trading, that they didn't say, Well, I'll support that if you support this? But, otherwise, you're not gonna get my vote on that one.

Not on this one; not on this issue. You can horse trade on something else, but not on this one. This is an emotional issue. And there is no need to do any horse trading. And I made it personal to these people. They understood; so they funded it, and it became an add-on to the budget. Later, we wanted to include it as part of the Health Department's budget. And today, there's an organization that really promote—the Sex Abuse Center. And, they've done their own fundraising, and they're making themselves more independent.

But back then is when rape victims stopped having to go to the morgue to be —

Oh —

-- **questioned.**

Yes.

And —

Can you imagine —

-- **counseled.**

-- that? I mean, thirty-five, forty years ago, that was it.

They weren't being counseled, actually, now that I think about it.

Not counseled.

They were simply being—their statements were being taken.

That's right. And they were sent down to the morgue, and they were examined there, and the police went there, and got the report, and that was it. So I think the Sex Abuse Center of today has done much to help the women who have been caught in this situation.

You know, being a Republican in Hawaii at the time—you were serving in the State House—in the minority in the State Legislature. But on the other hand, you were a Republican in a time of Nixon, followed by Reagan, followed by George H.W. Bush.

M-hm.

Did that help you?

Yes, I think so; because I got good ideas from the national level, as to what was available, and I could bring that home. And let's go back. Let's go back to Ronald Reagan—when we passed out of the Congress the Reparations Bill.

For Japanese Americans?

For Japanese Americans who were interned during the war.

Did you have a personal connection with internees?

My uncle.

M-hm.

My uncle and aunt; my uncle was an alien, and he worked for a cracker company in Hilo. And he ran also a taxi company. He left those businesses in the hands of my father, because he was taken away and shipped out to Topaz, Utah.

M-m.

My cousins then had to go up to Topaz and be interned with their parents. So 'til today, I have a cousin; we call him Topaz. [chuckle] But this Reparations Bill had been sitting in the Congress for years, and years, and years. And Republicans were especially hesitant about passing a Reparations Bill for a minority group; until I got elected. I got elected to Congress, went into the Republican caucus room, and I said, What the heck are you guys doing? Do you know what this means? Do you know it happened? Do you know why it happened? And I'm going to lay on the biggest guilt trip you ever had, and I want you to pay attention, because I'm going to do it now. And I laid it out to them. Newt Gringrich, all of these people were there at the time; he was —

This was when you were a —

-- the leader.

You were a brand new, fledgling —

Congressman.

-- **Congresswoman.**

Freshman. Who pays attention to freshmen Congresswomen? But Hawaii never had a Republican in the Congress, so my Republican colleagues paid attention. If I could make it through this State, I must have something that I could share with them; which is what I did, and laid it out on the Reparations Bill, and I got their vote. And so the bill passed the Congress, and then we had to deal with President Reagan. Is he going to sign, is he not going to sign? And the White House people called me and said, I think he's going to need a little nudging here. So I went down the White House and talked with the president. And I'm not saying that I did it; you know, I'm not claiming that. But I'm saying that maybe I helped move it along.

Well, what did he say when—or did—was he aware of the issue when you spoke with him?

Yes, he was aware of the issue. But he had to think twice, he said, about giving reparations to one segment of the population; there are many, many others who have been discriminated against for one reason or another, and so forth. And he had his arguments, but in the final analysis, he did sign it. So I'm proud of that because I feel the Japanese Americans who were interned—it happened so —

M-hm.

-- unfairly, and unjustifiably.

Former President George H.W. Bush said this about Pat Saiki: “She’s an effective, compassionate leader whose voice gets heard, who makes things happen.” The first President Bush appointed Pat Saiki to head the U.S. Small Business Administration. That, after she gave up her Congressional seat to make a run for U.S. Senate against Dan Akaka and lost. She served two terms in Congress.

I got to see you in Washington, DC when you were the fledgling Congresswoman. How would you describe how you carried yourself? I mean, you had a big learning curve; anybody who enters —

Oh, yes.

-- Congress does. But were you feisty, were you statesman like, or how did you handle yourself?

Well, I don't know how people looked at me, except that they knew this was a strange kid from Hawaii, the little island in Hawaii; Oriental. They called me a freshman person who needed to be trained, you know. And I bowed my head, and I said, Yes, I'm here to learn.

Because seniority is considered everything.

Seniority is considered everything. And I'm here to learn, so I need for you to teach me. And I think I could work with those people, and we got a lot of things done. It's amazing how much was done with this kind of attitude, where you don't strut around and say, Well, hey, I'm the new kid on the block, and you know, I'm gonna show you a thing or two. Instead, it was, I'm here to learn; teach me, and we can share things.

And did you like that job? Did you want to stay in office for quite some time, as it seems like everybody who runs for the Hill wants to stay forever. Did you want to stay in the House for longer than you did?

No. [chuckle] No.

You ran for Senate.

Yes. The House is made up of four hundred and thirty-five people. In order for you to get anything done, you have to deal with four hundred and thirty-four people. And you have to do it every two years, while running a campaign. And I had to run here every two years. And it's a struggle. I wanted to go in the Senate, where at least you had six years.

M-hm.

And you had only a hundred bodies there; you had to deal with only ninety-nine. I figured the math is for the Senate. And the opportunity came, of course, unfortunately, when Senator Matsunaga died.

M-hm.

And so I felt—and my husband did too; he says, Look, you're not in this game, this political game for any self-aggrandizement or motivation, you're here to do a job, and you have to do what you think—you have to do it the way you think you can, and do it most effectively. So if you feel that you want to run for the Senate, hey, run. If you win, you win; if you lose, you lose. You haven't lost anything.

Although you had a pretty sure thing hanging on your—you would have hung onto your Congressional job.

Well, so I was told by my Republican colleagues who wanted me to stay. But you know, life is too short; you have to do what you feel you have to. And so that's another reason that I decided to go for the Senate.

So you launch yourself into a Senate race against one of the most beloved men in Hawaii, Daniel Akaka.

Yes. He was. Danny is an honorable man; no question about it. But when Matsunaga died and created that opening, I felt that I should go for it. So after discussion with my husband and my campaign people, I decided that I would make a run for it. Well, it also caught the attention of the White House. And this is now George H.W. Bush. He called me, and asked for me to come down to the White House; he had something to discuss.

Was that a kick when he called you, or was that just sort of life on —

It's always —

-- Capitol Hill?

-- a kick when the President of the United States calls you. And it, you makes you—well, you gotta go.

You don't say, Oh, I'm busy.

[chuckle] No, you can't say, Well, make an appointment. No; so I did go down to the White House. And George Bush was very interested in my running for the United States Senate race. And I said, Well, yes, but it's going to be a tough race, because Hawaii is a Democrat state, and Senator Akaka, who is now the incumbent, because he was appointed to that position by Cayetano —

These jobs just don't come up very often.

They don't come up very often. And it's gonna be a tough race, so I am thinking it over. I'm looking at possibly running. He says, Well, is there anything I can do? Well —

M-hm.

-- yes, Mr. President, there is something you can do. What is it? I said, Well, the first thing you have to do is stop the bombing of Kahoolawe. He says, Kahoo what? He calls in John Sununu, who was Chief of Staff — he says, John, come in here; now Pat, will you spell this out? Kahoolawe; I did. I did for John Sununu. And I said, Mr. President, it's very simple. I did my research, and the bombing was permitted by executive order of the president. Therefore, the president can rescind the executive order, and the bombing can stop; it's part of the RIMPAC exercises.

And the military desperately wanted that island because —

Oh —

-- it was a great —

-- they wanted it.

-- place to target —

To do —

-- bomb —

Yes.

-- practice.

But I explained to him the dangers of the continued bombing; how our state is populated, how the tourist industry has grown, especially on Maui. And when the bombs hit Kahoolawe, the windows shake in Lahaina, and in the whole island. And one day, a bomb is going to go astray, Mr. President, and I don't think you want to be responsible for that. I think it's time for us to return that island, a sacred island, to the Hawaiian people. They have wanted that island back, because it is a place where they pray, and they have their history of that island. So he says, the president says, Well, I don't see why we can't do this. We'll have to tell the Navy to go find someplace else to bomb. Well, it didn't take two months. I called up Hannibal Tavares; remember Hannibal Tavares?

The mayor of Maui County.

That's right. And he was chair of the Save Kahoolawe Project.

And there was a group; lots of folks who'd been fighting the target bombing for a couple decades at that--
Decades.

-- point.

Decades. And I don't know if they ever did their research to find out that it was a presidential —

M-m.

-- order; because it would not have been that difficult, I think, except maybe they were all Democrats, and we had a Republican president. But Hannibal was a Republican. So I called Hannibal, and I said, Here, this is the news; we'll see what happens. Two months later, John Sununu called me and said, The president just rescinded the order. I said, Where are you gonna bomb? He says, Well, I don't know yet, but that's up the Navy.

And—

[chuckle]

And that was—at that point, you were already in a fight for Senate with Daniel Akaka?

No, no; it was at that point that I determined that I would run.

And you had something to hang your hat on —

Yeah.

-- as far as —

That's what I thought.

-- I got the president to do this.

I thought so.

That was a tough race.

It was a tough race because Dan is so beloved, you know, and he's one person that you really don't want to defeat. And although I ran as —

Well, it must have been hard —

Oh, yeah.

-- attacking him, because he is so —

I couldn't attack him.

-- genuinely nice.

Yes; I couldn't attack him.

But you did very well, when you launched. You were —

Yeah.

You were ahead in the polls.

It was circumstantial. It was the year when the president had said, Read my lips, no new taxes, and he went back on that word, and everything began to crumble after that.

We also saw excellent Democratic feet on the ground —

Oh absolutely.

-- helping —

Oh, yeah. The marchers —

-- Congressman Akaka.

-- came out. Yes. The unions came out, the marchers came out; they got their act together, and, although I was doing real well in the polls and everything, I was defeated. And it was an honorable defeat; it was an honorable try. I don't regret it at all, and I'm glad that Dan Akaka is still healthy and well, and working hard for us.

And you've always been for the Akaka Bill, haven't you?

Oh, yeah.

Are you surprised it has not gone anywhere? Not far enough, anyway.

Well, no, I'm not surprised, because of the way the voting is going on there. I mean, it's so partisan, and it's caught up in that whole mishmash of emotional bills. And this one has, of course, all kinds of nuances.

Pat Saiki has been able to make her voice heard and make things happen, especially for women and minorities. She's a political veteran and risk taker who's quite familiar with both victory and defeat.

You've won some big races, you've lost a couple of big ones.

Big ones, yes. [chuckle]

The Senate one was a big one, and then the race —

The governor.

-- for governor was a —

Yeah.

-- big one.

That was a big one; right.

What was that like?

Well, that was tough; that was a real tough race, because it was a three-way race between Cayetano —

And Fasi jumped in.

Frank Fasi jumped in, myself; and Cayetano won. But he did not win with a huge majority of the vote. And Fasi leaked off quite a few of my votes, and that's the way the cookie crumbles, I guess. It was one of those things. I don't know if the State was ready for a woman governor at that point. They are now, because they elected Linda Lingle after that, and she was reelected after that.

Do you feel it was a timing thing?

Politics is all timing. Everything about politics is timing. It's who you run against, when you run. It's like Kirk Caldwell situation with the Office of the Clerk, and when he resigned his House seat, and when he got his papers ready for the Senate race, and all of that. I mean, it's all a matter of timing. If Ann Kobayashi had announced earlier, if this and that; if, it could have been different.

And so—but you say you don't have any regrets. You—it must be hard when you don't really have control over these elements and these factors that can completely bash your chances.

Well, it's—but you know, I go back, and I reflect on the times when I was in charge. Like when I was the head of the SBA.

Okay; this happened after, right?

Oh, yeah.

Okay.

So I lost the race for the Senate. And George Bush, the president, called me at home, and asked me to come back to Washington, and take —

How many—how many times did the president —

[chuckle]

-- call you?

Do you know, I got a call from President Reagan, who wanted me to go, and I did, to the Contras in Nicaragua. I took that flight because he asked me to. George H.W. Bush wanted to talk to me about the Senate race. And he also called me after the race was lost, and asked me to head up the SBA.

Were you the first Asian to ever head a federal agency?

Yes. And the first one from Hawaii too.

And a woman, at that.

And a woman, at that. And I loved it; it was wonderful. I mean, there you are; you know, you're heading up this agency, you've got four thousand employees, you've got a six-billion-dollar loan capability, you have almost a four hundred-million-dollar budget, and you can direct things. You can get things moving.

Did you enjoy that more than politics? Although, I know there are politics in those high level government jobs; but did you miss the elective politics?

No; at that point, you know, I sank everything into this job. I had to fight with Dick Cheney at one point; he was Secretary of Defense. And I wanted that ten percent of all federal contracts in the Defense Department to come to Small Business. And he was a little hesitant about that, but he finally gave in. And so ten percent; ten percent of all federal contracts had to be referred to minorities. And so we had to control all that, and make sure that, truly, they were minority corporations.

Lots more accountability as the —

Right.

-- head of an agency than in a place with four hundred thirty-five votes.

That's right; that's right. It was—that's a different job. You know, you go out and you try to get the votes to support your stances. In this other case, you have to be responsible and prove that what you're doing is right.

Oh, remember when we had Hurricane Andrew in Florida, and Hurricane Iniki within a couple of months.

M-hm.

Iniki was in Hawaii, I got a call from the White House. They said, Pat, this is your state; your state is going to be in the middle of this huge hurricane. I think you'd better get over there right away. So I handled that and tried to get loans for those people on Kauai. But you're in charge; you know, so it was a different experience. But it was enjoyable; it was fun. I'm glad I did it.

And why did you leave it?

Oh, I had to. Change in —

Oh, change in — uh-huh.

Yeah; Clinton came in.

Okay.

Remember?

That's right.

George H —

So there's no way you were gonna say —

No.

-- Excuse me, Mr. President —

No.

-- I'm a Republican, but I —

No, we all had to turn in —

-- really like this job.

-- our resignations at that point. So after that, I came home.

Oh. And then I'm sure a lot of folks said, Pat, I'm glad you're back, 'cause we want you to do this, and—
[chuckle]

--will you run for that, and what about that?

Yeah, but you know, I feel like I've done my job; I've done my duty. I enjoyed every minute of it. I hope that I contributed something that's worthwhile. And I think I have, with help from a lot of people, Democrats and Republicans.

Is there something —

And I have no —

-- you would have done differently?

-- nothing to regret.

No regrets?

No regrets; no regrets at all. And so today, I sit on the board of governors of the East West Center, which is an institution that I really believe in. I helped to move it along in its early stages when it was developing. And I have another cause, and that is to try to get help for the elderly, for those who are in need. I took care of my father, who died two years ago. He lived with me, I took care of him at home. That's when I found out that we need to have home care. People want to stay home when they get old; they don't want to be stuck in an institution at the costs that are exorbitant. And so we have to find ways to give them the kind of life that they deserve, after they've worked so hard.

Excuse me; but that sounds kinda like a stump speech.

Well, no, no. It isn't.

You've ruled out politics?

I've ruled out politics, but I play politics from a different position now. I'm trying to influence people to think like I do, and think ahead. Because the biggest tsunami that's gonna hit this state yet is the elderly; the care of the elderly. People are getting older, and we're not ready.

Pat Saiki went from Hilo to Honolulu to Washington DC, always a change agent. Now she's set her sights on improving Hawaii elder care. From her record, we know that her voice can be calm, persuasive, collaborative; and it can be feisty, even fierce. I'll be listening for her in the eldercare debate. Mahalo to Pat Saiki, and to you, for joining me for this *Long Story Short*. I'm Leslie Wilcox of PBS Hawaii. A hui hou kakou.

Video clip with production credits:

I just have one more thing to ask. You know, I got to see you in your office, in Congress, on Capitol Hill, did a couple of news reports about you then. And then many years later, after you retired, and I think you were taking care of your father at the time, you had girls' night out, and you and some —

[chuckle]

-- women friends were at the Blaisdell watching a show. And I was sitting, I think, in the seat—oh, the row in front of you. And you guys were having a ball; you were passing around kaki mochi, and —

Yeah, yeah.

-- li hing mui, and —

[chuckle]

-- you said, Hey, Leslie, you want some? You just looked like you were having a great time.

Oh, I do. I did, and I still do.