THE CULTURE OF CONGRESS, YESTERDAY & TODAY
Woodrow Wilson International Center for Scholars
Monday, April 31, 2012

Jane Harman:
I want to thank all of you for coming and especially thank the Bipartisan Policy Center for partnering with us. Dan Glickman apparently has two roles, only two?

[laughter]

At the Aspen Institute and also heading up the Democracy Project for the Bipartisan Policy Center and the topic of today's conversation could not be more timely. Let me recognize, though, colleagues that are here, former colleagues, like, let's see who's here. Bart Gordon is here. Mickey Edwards is here. Vin Weber, Vin.

[inaudible]

Earl Pomeroy is where? [inaudible] Ah, hello Earl. Is Tanner here? No Tanner. Tom Downey and Vin Weber is AWOL, but we expect him to come soon and Jim Dykstra was a staffer for Steve Horn in another century who was in the office adjacent to mine and part of my bipartisan cred [spelled phonetically] and is a longtime member. Sadly all of us know from experience how the entrenched partisanship makes it almost impossible to get anything done on the Hill anymore. There's a new book. I don't know who's having the book party for the... there it is. It's even worse than it looks. Have you read it yet, Tom?

[laughter]

Tom Downey:
I have, I have.

Jane Harman:
The title is colossally depressing, but I believe that and I also you know I've heard them on the radio talking about one party is more at fault. I guess I'd like to talk about, myself, how are both parties going to fix it. Here he is. And who might you be?

[laughter]

Male Speaker:
Late.

Jane Harman:
How are we going to fix it? Well, some of us have been teaming up to offer suggestions about how to fix it. Perfect timing, and I'm holding up a reprint of a political article from August 12, 2011. It was brilliant, by Weber and Harman, entitled "Politics Aside, Debt Solution Clear." Debt solution, to us, was and certainly still my view, I assume its Vin's, that Bowles-Simpson was the place we should have started and still the place where we should go. At any rate, at the Wilson Center we, like some of the other groups in this room, try to behave in a bipartisan-nonpartisan manner to use our convening platform to provide a safe political space to discuss tough issues and that is exactly what Don decided to do today. John Tanner, who has been here before, that's what Don decided to do today. This afternoon's round table will focus on I think a real constitutional crisis in Washington and that is the incredible-shrinking Congress and our inability to get anything done there and, I would add, the fact that the Courts and our Executive Branch are enlarging to fill the gap. For those of us who served, I think honorably, both as members and staff, that is not only I think not what the Founding Fathers and Mothers had in mind. But it is a colossal waste of talent and it is a colossal waste of appropriate exercise of constitutional responsibility. So you are going to hear this from others who have thought about today's session more deeply than I have, but I am here to learn myself and to say to many good friends that you deserve a lot of points for trying to get it right. Now we are all on trial for fixing the problems that others have created. Thank you very much for coming.

[applause]

Don Wolfensberger:
For those of you who may have just come in let me reintroduce myself. I am Don Wolfensberger with the Congress Programs here and your co-moderator today. In a bit I will have our other co-host from the Bipartisan Policy Center, John Fortier, the executive director of the Democracy Project say a few words.

But I do want to welcome you all here. I see a few new faces. This is our penultimate program you might say of the Congress Series that we've had here over the last twelve to fifteen years. I guess it's about thirteen years. But we're glad that we've had such a good turnout for this program because we've got some high-powered folks here and I expect a very good dialogue to ensue.

The Woodrow Wilson Center, by way of background, is created back in 1968 by an Act of Congress. It was actually Pat Moynihan's idea when he's a staffer at the White House and he talked with some folks and got the thing rolling for a living memorial to Woodrow Wilson on Pennsylvania Avenue. And here we are. But the idea was to bring together the best of the policy-making community with the scholars, the thinkers, and the doers, you might say, and exchange views on important issues of the day and so we've been a very small part of that. We do about, you know, five or six meetings a year with the Congress Programs but there are about 800 that go on in these facilities over the course of a year. So you can imagine the type of discussions that do take place here.

Pleased today that we have not only a good head table of folks that are going to do some provoking, or provocateurs, but also some former members of Congress, some former staff people and some people that still work on the Hill. So I think it's a good mix of folks as well as some political scientists that work in the area and write about the Congress so I think we've got that mix that Woodrow Wilson had in mind. What I would like to do before I introduce our head panel is have the microphone up here and start with Jeff, but give your name, your current affiliation, if you worked on the Hill, the last Congressional office you worked with, if you are a former member of Congress just give your state and your district that you were with. Go ahead.

Jeff Biggs:
Jeff Biggs, with the American Political Science Association Congressional Fellowship Program, and I spent seven years working, well, first as a Fellow when he was the whip, then for Majority Leader and Speaker Tom Foley.

Chris Dearing:
I am Chris Deering from George Washington University. I am a former Congressional Fellow and I work for George Mitchell.

Rochelle Dornatt:
I am Rochelle Dornatt. I am the chief of staff to Congressman Sam Farr. This year marks 31 years that I have been on the Hill.

Don Wolfensberger:
Congratulations.

Rochelle Dornatt:
Thank you. I've done House, I've done Senate, I've done leadership, and I’m still going.

Don Wolfensberger:
You look the same.

Male Speaker:
Ain't that right.

Jim Dykstra:
I'm Jim Dykstra with Edington, Peel & Associates. My last job was chief of staff for Steve Horn, and that's where I had the great honor and pleasure of working with Congresswoman Harman.

Mickey Edwards:
I'm Mickey Edwards. I run a political leadership program for the Aspen Institute, and I represented Oklahoma's 5th district for 16 years.

Alan Freeman:
I'm Alan Freeman. I retired at the end of January after almost 38 years on the Hill, the last 35 of which in the Senate Parliamentarian's office. I was Chief Parliamentarian for most of the last quarter century.

Male Speaker:
Good to have you here Alan.

Dan Glickman:
Thank you. I am Dan Glickman. I run the Congressional Program at the Aspen Institute and a Senior Fellow at the Bipartisan Policy Center, so I am double dipping today. And I was a Congressman from the not-so-bipartisan state of Kansas for 18 years.

[laughter]

Bart Gordon:
Bart Gordon. I'm at K&L Gates. I just retired after 26 years from Tennessee, including being Chairman of the Science Technology Committee.

Matthew Green:
Matthew Green. I teach political science at Catholic University and in my previous incarnation I was fortunate enough to be a

colleague of Rochelle Dornatt's and work for Congressman Sam Farr.

Kent Hughes:
Kent Hughes at the Wilson Center here, run a program on America and the global economy and my last position on the Hill was as the Chief Economist for Majority Leader Robert C. Byrd.

Charlie Johnson:
Charlie Johnson, former House Parliamentarian, retired eight years ago.

David Carroll:
David Carroll. I teach Political Science at the University of Maryland. I specialize in political parties and political institutions.

Keith Kennedy:
Thank you. I am Keith Kennedy. I am with the law firm of Baker Donelson, which is Howard Baker's firm here in Washington. I spent 28 years in the Senate, a good bit of that as Staff Director of Appropriations, first for Mark Hatfield and then for Thad Cochran.

Male Speaker:
Okay. Up here.

Matt Wasniewski:
I'm Matt Wasniewski. I'm with the House History Office where I've been for about 10 years, the last year and a half as chief historian.

John Tanner:
John Tanner. I've spent 22 years in Congress in Tennessee's 8th Congressional District and I'm the prime policy group here with a law firm in Nashville, Miller & Martin.

John Sullivan:
I am John Sullivan. A few days ago I finished 25 years with the Office of Parliamentarian in the House.

Monty Tripp:
I am Monty Tripp with ABB. I spent 13 years in the House, the last few with Bill Clinger on the Government Reform Committee.

Philippa Strum:

Philippa Strum, former director of U.S. Studies here at the Center. Before that I spent 35 years as a political scientist teaching American Government, trying to explain to students what exactly it is that the Congress does. It's uphill.

[laughter]

Male Speaker:
Some of us are still trying to figure it out.

Colleen Shogan:
Colleen Shogan. I work at the Congressional Research Service where I head up the Government and Finance Division and I am also a former APSA fellow and Senate staffer.

Don Ritchie:
I am Don Ritchie. I am the Senate Historian. I have been with the Senate Historical Office since 1976.

Earl Pomeroy:
I am Earl Pomeroy, presently at Alston Bird Law Firm, but previously 18 years representing the state of North Dakota.

Jim Pfiffner:
Jim Pfiffner, George Mason University and a political scientist.

Scott Lilly:
Scott Lilly, I'm at the Center for American Progress. I've been there for eight years, before that I was on the Hill for 31.

Frances Lee:
I'm Frances Lee. I'm a professor in the Government and Politics Department at the University of Maryland.

Walter Oleszek:
I'm Walter Oleszek. I've been at CRS since 1968 and worked differently in the House and the Senate, and I guess that's it.

Male Speaker:
Hand the mic to Tom Slider over there.

Tom Sliter:
I'm the late Tom Sliter with the John Stennis Center for Public Service for the past 8 years and previously was 22 in the Senate.

Don Wolfensberger:

Okay, thank you. Did we get all the round table folks? Okay, let me introduce briefly our panel and just let you know what started the idea of the Culture of Congress series. And this is really the first, but we thought we would get a historical perspective today looking at the culture of Congress, yesterday and today and see how things changed, when they changed, why they changed and so on. Then, in the future, we are going look at such things as the culture of committees, culture of budgeting, culture of leadership and so on. But I thought this would be a good starting point for us, and I'm just proud to be able to be cosponsoring this with the Bipartisan Policy Center where I'll be moving on in a few months. But John, would you like to say a few words as Executive Director of the Democracy Project?

Male Speaker:
Sure, thank you Don. I'll be very brief. First of all I am always impressed with the Wilson Center events and how tight a ship you run. You even take attendance and everybody's here so all introduced ourselves.

[laughter]

We are delighted at BPC that to be working together with the Wilson Center on this and as Don mentioned we are really looking forward to continuing this conversation so at least in the fall, if not sooner, we are looking to host a second event at BPC and want to continue this important conversation down the road.

Don Wolfensberger:
OK. You all have the handouts if you are watching our live webcast. These things are on the Internet on the Wilson Center page, on the Congress page of that. But we are just pleased to have first of all, as our lead provocateur, Julian Zelizer, who prepared a paper on this subject and he is going to summarize that paper for you. You have the full paper in front of you. But Julian is at the Princeton University if you could let me just grab a couple things here. Show and tell. Julian's first book, which I got before I even knew him, was "Taxing America: Wilbur Mills, Congress and the State, 1945-1975." But this, I take it, might have been an outgrowth of your Ph.D. dissertation. Is that correct? And this won two awards so that's not bad coming off of a Ph.D. having your first book win two very prestigious awards. One of his most recent, not the most recent, but is one that I have done a lot of reading on over time, and I went back to it this weekend I was looking at it, but it is on Capitol Hill, “The Struggle to Reform Congress

and its Consequences: 1948 to 2000." But it's just chock full of good stories and great historical research. I kind of got lost in some of the footnotes. It was so fun, because he obviously got lost in a lot of file boxes and found some nice little tidbits there. But we are pleased to have Julian here as our lead presenter today.

Tom Downey is someone who I remember very well from the class of 1974, the Watergate babies. Tom was elected from New York at the age of 25. I think you might have served previously on a Suffolk County Board. Is that correct? But he was one of the young members that came to the Hill, a very large class, and they kind of shook things up. And we'll maybe hear more about that as time goes along, but three committee chairmen will never forget Tom and his cohorts.

[laughter]

Tom did go on to do some very fine work on the Ways and Means Committee. He and I have already had a small debate here before the program started, but I'm sure we're going to carry that discussion on as we go. But he's one of my favorite members from that class, even though he was on the other side of the aisle. But he was a very thoughtful member, at the same time having a great sense of humor. Some call him a wiseacre, but then I've been called that too.

[laughter]

Vin Weber, another one of the most thoughtful members I think of the House of Representatives over the years and one that I've admired greatly. But Vin was elected, I think, four years after Tom in 1978 and they both

Vin Weber:
80

Don Wolfensberger:
-- or 1980, sorry.

Vin Weber:
I dragged Reagan in on my coattails.

Don Wolfensberger:
Okay.

[laughter]

But he was one of the founding members of the Conservative Opportunity Society, which Newt Gingrich and Bob Walker and some others founded. But they sort of laid the groundwork for the Republican takeover several years later. But they were involved in a lot of special orders which some of the House Parliamentarians here will, I'm sure, remember late into the evenings. So we've gotten, that's our head table. We've heard from John already, so without further ado, I am going to turn things over to Julian. Each of our presenters can speak either from their seats or from the podium, it's up to you.

Julian Zelizer:
Thanks for having me, and it's an honor to be here with all of you and thanks, Don, as always, for bringing me to one of your events. The culture of Congress has become a subject of intense discussion. We've seen a series of Representatives and Senators step down from their positions complaining about how the institution works and how ineffective Congress has become. Olympia Snow, one of the recent people to express these opinions, said I do find it frustrating that an atmosphere of polarization and "my way or the highway" ideologies has become pervasive in campaigns and in our governing institutions. And most, most recently the article by, and now book, by Mann and Ornstein has raised the issue of what's happened to the culture of congress and what is to blame. Trying to analyze the culture of congress is a very difficult thing, unlike campaign finance contributions or roll call votes, it's not the kind of precise issue that scholars certainly like to look at. We're talking about the informal rules of the game; the rhetoric and ideas that shape behavior on Capitol Hill, the rituals of interaction between members and trying to understand how they impact the institution. But the culture of the institution plays a big role in how it works, or how it doesn't work. So it's certainly worth having this discussion, both today and in public debate. And there is some evidence to support the idea that the culture of Congress has deteriorated. Certainly there are many people who have served in the institution, or are currently serving, who express these kinds of concerns to make it seem that things are in fact worse than they used to be.

In the paper that I wrote I focus on three different cultures of Congress, three different aspects about the institution, that are very different that might call for very different kinds of changes, but which all certainly produce the kind of atmosphere that we have today. One is the media culture, one is the governing culture and one is the money culture of Capitol Hill.

So in the section on the media culture, I argue that in fact the changes that we've seen in the news cycle and in the distribution of information have been quite significant. They're as important as parliamentarian rules, they're as important as committee structures, they're as important as almost anything else I would say that a legislator faces on a daily basis. And over the past forty years the news cycle has been transformed. The relatively slow and contained news cycle that existed in the 1950s and 1960s, which offered legislators ample time to respond to stories as they emerged, and which preserved some space for governance, is rapidly disappearing. We now have a media culture, which is ongoing. It is instantaneous, and where there is very little space for deliberations to take place without them being leaked to the media. I go back to the era of newspaper and, you know, major network television.

And in the paper I try to go over the actual pace of the news cycle, which is remarkably slow. Just the way television news was produced, as many of you will remember, was very different than today. With the gathering early in the morning of the producers trying to figure out what stories to work on for the day, usually scrutinizing the major city newspapers and then sending out reporters at the different bureaus to go work on the stories, report back to central command at around 3:30 in the afternoon where the segments are then vetted and we saw how things were developing. The anchor had to approve in the final decisions, which were made about 5:30 pm, for the evening news. And then the news, of course, was limited not just to half hour evening news, but within that, within commercial space, we're talking a little over 20 minutes. That was television news until the 1970s.

And obviously there was much tighter editorial control, much tighter control from producers, in terms of what can go out. And the media culture has dramatically changed since that time. Although we often talk about the advent of television as the key moment in political news, I would argue cable television had a more dramatic effect on the way this all works. From the start, cable and politics went hand in hand. Ted Turner launches CNN in 1980 and there went the old news cycle and we moved into 24-hour news a day. News was reported instantaneously with rapid speed. Stories made it on to the air, and quickly we can see a deterioration of editorial controls over what information was disseminated. Cable television, even though ownership consolidates since the 1980s, over the media there is more

intense competition among the different outlets that are producing the news. In the two decades that follow CNN, news shows proliferate at a brisk pace; CNBC, MSNBC, FOX, and many other stations are all competing for viewers' eyes. Where all the original news shows of the 60's centered on hosts reading dry descriptions of daily events, cable-era news revolved around celebrity hosts challenging their guests. In the aftermath of Watergate, no reporter wanted to be the person who missed the next big scandal. And all the hosts wanted to be the person who was the center of attention. The suspension of the Fairness Doctrine is another milestone in 1987, a key regulatory decision that also further remakes the way in which news could be presented.

Shows are no longer constrained by the need to give both sides equal airing, and we see the development by the early 1990s of a much more partisan media culture, not just a quicker, not just a more instantaneous one. And then computer technology in the 1990s is the next stage of this historical development where not only do the number of outlets to disseminate information expand very dramatically, but the intermediaries of the old media start to lose their power. People have the ability as a single person from their basement or from an office building to get information out quickly, nationally, internationally, and it’s very difficult to control. And this then affects the older, more established media institutions which try to compete with the internet outlets. So you have in the first section the development of this hypercompetitive, very somewhat chaotic media world. And I think that's become an important part of what we are talking about when we talk about the culture of Congress.

The second part of the paper talks about the governing structure, which is probably the one most familiar or most discussed in panels like this. The decline of the committee-era system, you know as someone said, "This isn't Wilbur Mills'..." I can't remember the term he used. "It's not Wilbur Mills' world anymore." And we saw the decline of the committee-based system in the 1970s for many reasons, from institutional reforms pushed both by the Watergate babies as well as the young Republicans of the late 1970s, to demographic changes including the sorting of voters. As the South became Republican and liberal northeastern Republicans seemed to vanish from the electoral map. For many reasons you have the creation of a much more partisan congressional system where the parties are more disciplined, the parties are more coherent and there is much less room for people in the center.

And there is also less autonomy for committee chairs as you saw in the Wilbur Mills era. People who would serve for a decade or more in the same position and develop very thick personal networks and institutional knowledge over the course of their period. One thing that I've learned in studying that 50s and 60s period is how important that was. Not simply cause people felt good or people liked each other, which certainly wasn't the case. Just listen to the Lyndon Johnson tapes and you'll hear the kind of rhetoric, which sometimes make today seem tame, about how they thought about members. But there was a certain insider knowledge because of the durability of these leadership positions. People knew each other on the Hill, they had fought the same battles over decades. By the time Johnson is President most of the committee leaders, most of the leadership, had already fought over issues such as civil rights and Medicare. They knew how they ticked, they knew a lot about their opponents and their allies. And the informal ties that bound this family of legislators in the 1950s and 1960s, who operated often behind closed doors, gave the culture of Congress a very different feel than it has today. It often facilitated negotiations within the House and within the Senate. It often facilitated negotiations between the Chambers or with the White House that the institution often made difficult.

Elected officials in this era governed in an environment where the media and the rules afforded them a certain amount of insulation and secrecy. If you listen to the material, or you read the material from the 1960s, we can now see within Congress and in the White House the debates over Vietnam unfold. Really dramatic stuff from the 64-65 period where Richard Russell is warning Johnson, this is a bad idea, there is no need for this war, we are getting ourselves in a big mess. You know a few years ago you could see President Obama debate over Afghanistan in real time. It seemed that Politico was actually in the room kind of simulcasting the debates between Biden and him, and similarly on Capitol Hill. So the governing culture is more partisan, it's more open, it's more porous, and I would argue that you have fewer members who have the same kind of insider networks and knowledge that people in the committee era used to have. All of these changes result in a contemporary institution where partisan leaders have a lot of ability to run roughshod over members that threaten to bolt from their Party and I think that causes some of the problems that we are here to discuss today.

Finally I talk about the money culture which is a different set

of problems on Capitol Hill, and it's certainly that's one that's always highlighted by the departing members, as much as ideological polarization. Now, importantly, money and politics have always gone hand in hand, so we need to avoid a kind of nostalgia that somehow the dollar wasn't very important before the 1970s. Lyndon Johnson, to continue with this theme, you know was famous for his close relationship with the Brown & Root Corporation, which donated huge sums to his campaign, to the war chest or the Democratic Party. It was later said that Johnson's campaign was Brown & Root-funded and Robert Caro, in his earlier book, talks about Johnson receiving big stuffed envelopes of cash to finance his campaign. But the nature of campaign fundraising changes after the 1970s. Most importantly, obviously, the costs keep rising as a result of television. But the campaign finance reforms passed in the 1970s have some unintended consequences. We have reforms that don't provide any kind of public funding for congressional campaigns, at the same time that limits are established on how much can be raised. So the costs are rising, legislators have to raise money from a much broader base of support than they did, the old Brown & Root days are gone in addition to the old days of Wilbur Mills, and so the time spent, the attention spent to fundraising increases as a result.

And there are other factors we can discuss that I have in the paper; the proliferation of lobbying organizations during the 1970s, increasingly sophisticated techniques that interest groups can put to apply pressure on legislators, to recent Supreme Court decisions that overturned some of the restrictions that existed. So during these decades the combination of rising costs, campaign finance reforms and expanded lobbying operations in Court decisions resulted in a constant cycle of fund raising on Capitol Hill. So these are the three aspects of the congressional culture. They're not the only ones, but I think they are very important, looking back, looking with historical perspective about what actually has changed on Capitol Hill. The task of legislating is never easy. We do have to avoid a kind of nostalgia. You could read about Howard Smith creating a dysfunctional Congress that didn't work, that didn't do anything in 1961 and 62. You could superimpose the headlines from then to today and it is remarkable and important to remember that.

But, at the same time, these are, I think, some distinct changes that have taken place and it's made an institution that is always difficult by design even more difficult. And the question is, do routine decisions become impossible? And maybe that's the danger zone that we are now entering. We have a

culture where legislators spend more time dealing with fundraiser, they are under more pressure from organizations and individuals, they are trying to operate in a very transparent, and very difficult to control, media environment, and in a governing structure that doesn't privilege leaders who are primarily interested in obtaining legislation. If legislators are hoping to break out of the current state of stalemate and gridlock and maybe some people in the room have answers as to how that will happen, or on the panel. They will have to undertake significant changes. It's not about one election bringing in a new group, it's not about one President coming and changing the culture of Washington, as President Obama can tell you. Some of the forces will be impossible to reverse. It's not as if we are going to dismantle the kind of media institutions that we have today. Those are ours, that's what we will live with, and that is the environment in which people will govern for the time being. But clearly there are areas we can discuss such as campaign finance reforms, strengthening the FEC, alternative forms of funding for politicians, we could talk about procedural reforms, like the kind undertaken in the 1970s or mid-1990s, that might strengthen committees and strengthen committee leadership rather than weakening them, reforms on the filibuster which has become obviously a key tool of partisan combat in recent years.

So, that's what I lay out in the paper, those are some of the issues that I try to put on the table and it's a little different than the Mann-Ornstein critique I think about what's happened because I think there are bigger forces than one party over the other. There are bigger issues than just extremism versus moderation. There are some fundamentals about the way in which Congress works, the way in which Congress, the environment in which it operates, that I think make it very difficult to quickly reverse some of the trends that are bothering legislators and the public. Thank you.

[applause]

Tom Downey:
When I accepted this invitation I thought like many of the other Wilson Institute meetings that I participated in I would be sitting out there with you listening to some scholar talk about these issues, and we have heard one. Now you have to listen to me and Vin, which is a frightening thought when I think about the collective wisdom and talent sitting out there and I see my former colleagues laughing.

[laughter]

Let me say that the Congress of the United States that I came to in 1975 bears absolutely no relationship to the one that exists today. The professor talked a little bit about the media culture. Of course, I think it's fair to say that the difference between the 70s, the 80s and the 90s and today is manifestly clear. By 24-hour news cycle that only relishes the sensational over the thoughtful. The demise of great newspapers and columnists, the coverage that one used to get on Long Island by two or three reporters from Newsday who were actually interested in what we did, two from the Times, one from the Daily News, and the Post that we had routine relationships with. And there were actually occasional thought pieces in places like the Daily News when I was in Congress. All of that has changed. We don't need to talk a lot about it. Fox News has changed the very nature of how one party talks to its supporters. I think it is nothing that we're going to change right away, but it's something that we need to be cognizant of.

The money. I ran for Congress in 1974. I never thought I had a chance of winning. I was running in the second most Republican district in the state of New York at the time, and when Gerald Ford pardoned Richard Nixon he made my career possible.

[laughter]

And, thankfully very few people showed up to vote in 1974, and those that did voted democratic, and I wound up winning a congressional seat. And when I arrived in 1974, I was squired around by a colleague, a former colleague, Allard Lowenstein, who wanted me to meet all the old bulls in Congress and get a sense of what you were expected to do and how you were expected to behave here. I know that's hard to believe, but I remember one time in my first term that John Dingell took me aside and he said, "you know, you're going to conduct your first hearing on this all-important subcommittee on small business, and I want to make sure you do it properly. I want to make sure you pay careful attention to what the witnesses say and make sure you respect what your Republican members on this subcommittee have to say and do." It's hard to imagine that sort of activity occurs today in the Congress of the United States. So I got elected. I spent $65,000 to get elected in 1974, and like a good Democrat I raised $43,000.

[laughter]

I was 12 grand in the hole and I didn't think I'd ever be able to pay it back. It took me almost a year of two fundraisers and I remember when I did my second one in Washington. Dan Rastenkowski said, "How many are you going to do here? Two fundraisers in Washington D.C.?" He said, "You need to go home and raise the money where you should be raising it." Well, I don't have to tell anybody here I once attended a fundraiser for one of my friends in the Senate who I came to Congress with, and he did a fundraiser every single day that he was in Washington. That is, to talk about cultural change, would be to so understate the way that money has influenced politics. I mean, when I look at Bard, or Earl, or John, they were in Congress during the time when it really changed profoundly. We've raised money, but nothing on the order of what you do today.

And here's the biggest cultural problem. In 19 -- in the 70s and the 80s, we selected our leaders because we thought they would be good ones. We didn't select our leaders in the Congress because they were the best fundraisers. We selected them because there was some other attribute of personality, or conviction, or courage, or knowledge that we thought was important. I remember in 1977 when we had this great battle for who was going to be the majority leader of the United States. I was for a guy by the name of Dick Bolling. Because Dick Bolling appeared to me to be one of the great scholars and thoughtful men of our age and I thought this is exactly what I wanted to have in my leader. Today if you want to run for an office in the Congress of the United States and you aren't the best fundraiser, you don't have a chance. It's not like you're particularly relevant. So the money, the coarsening of our culture through the 24-hour news cycle are two of the overwhelming elements that have caused the change. This book, and I'm not here to do a book report, but I will for a minute. And I'm sure Vin will get equal time and Mickey may need some and Don, I know, will want some.

[laughter]

The scholars, Thomas Mann and Norm Ornstein are familiar to all of us. Obviously we've read their work. We pay great attention to them. They are thoughtful men. And they've done something that scholars don't normally do. They have named names and called one party out. And they have said that in the House of Representatives, and to a lesser extent in the Senate of the United States, the extreme nature of the modern Republic Party has made it impossible to govern. And I believe that to be true. On the 26th of January in the year 2010, Kent Conrad and

Judd Gregg had a resolution before the Senate that would have set up a 18-member bipartisan panel, like the BRAC Commission, to take the tough decisions that the members are all afraid to do themselves but know need to be done, package in the form of a resolution and send it to the Senate and to the House and actually do what we know needs to be done; taxes, all the other painful things that we are wrestling with today. Six members who had co-sponsored the bill, voted against it. Mitch McConnell, who had spoken the year previously about the need for the bill led the effort to stop it.

Now, I don't think it's unreasonable to look at the events of the 26th of January 2010 or the debacle that was the extension of the debt limit and come to a different conclusion. Now, I fully expect, and Don did before we started talking, Republicans to defend their right to take different positions. They should, of course they should. They have different views. But at some point, at some time, we as a country have to actually figure out a way to solve our problems. Because the threats that our country faces are very different than the ones that we faced in the past. We're not going to be able to have a military the size of the one we have had in the past, we are not going to be able to have retirement plans and health benefits like we wanted to or expected to have. And telling people about that will require the energy and courage of two political parties working together, not one trying to stab the other in the heart.

So what does Norm and Tom recommend? Well, to sum it up, they recommend for the problem of a lack of democracy, more of it which I heartily agree with. They say that we need to make sure that voters are encouraged that we make registration easier, and more ubiquitous, that the rolls be kept more accurately, that we make it easier, not harder, to vote, that we think about something as radical as the Australian system of voting, where people would be required to vote, so that we will be talking to both parties, Democrats and Republicans to a larger group of people who are not just partisan and not crazy on either side, but who are interested in the solution to problems. They recommend, and I agree, that we need to do something with respect to the DISCLOSE Act. It passed -- failed to pass by one vote in the Senate, it was important to try and remedy some of the problems that we see with Super PACs. I think that Citizens United is a perfectly dangerous -- the irony that it played out by forcing the Republicans to live with its aftermath is too delicious, but it is a bad court decision, and it -- we will live with its consequences for a long time. Members of Congress who have tough races tell me that you can expect to raise $1

million or $2 million and then you have no idea at the end of the year, or at the end of the campaign that another $1 million or $2 million might not be dropped down on top of you, that you have no control over. This is not the way to run elections.

Lastly, let me say in the presence of the Senate parliamentarian and others who are here, unless that great body figures out a way to become more of a majoritarian [spelled phonetically] institution, we will not solve any of these problems either. The filibuster rule is abused in a way that I think no one ever really contemplated, I understand the mores of the Senate and I understand the different ways in which they conduct their business, but they need to be able to make decisions. This is not an easy time for our country, and it is very troubling to me to see the Congress that I revere be in a position that it is. I mean, it is right after the debacle on the debt limit, the rating -- the approval rating of the Congress was at 12 percent, a historic low. I don't expect this election to change the character of the House of Representatives dramatically or the Senate, and I expect the president to be re-elected. And unless we can figure a way to do some other things, I see no reason why the last two years don't get repeated the next two years.

So, this is a very urgent time, and it is important. Norm and Tom would tell you that it is important for those of us who are keepers of the institutional flame in history and memory to speak out, and as well as it is for those who are in the media to do a better job of educating people to the serious consequences of the congressional mess that we have today.

Don Wolfensberger:
Thank you, Tom.

[applause]

Vin Weber.

Vin Weber:
Well, I'll be a little briefer than my colleague. Thanks for inviting us, and welcome to all my former colleagues around the table who are here. I want to thank Tom for that appeal to bipartisanship and that --

[laughter]

-- attempt to bridge the partisan differences in this town, particularly by noting that, you know, Mickey Edwards and Don

and I might actually respond to Tom and Norm's book. He's actually moved the ball quite a bit forward because usually Democrats don't acknowledge Republicans read books.

[laughter]

Not all of this, by the way, has been -- polarization has been bad, we finally have Allen West, you know, proving what many of us have suspected, that there's 70 or 80 communists in the -- you know.

[laughter]

Male Speaker:
Members of the Communist Party.

Vin Weber:
Members of the Communist Party in the Congress of the United States, if this had come out in the -- when we were in Congress, surely your name would have been on the list, and --

Don Wolfensberger:
As a charter member.

Vin Weber:
But I would say to my friend Dan Glickman, if they'd only counted farm policy votes, so would you and I.

[laughter]

I thought that Julian's overview was excellent, I really agree with the critique, I don't intend to reinvent it or recap all of it, or even most of what Tom said, which I do agree with most -- underline most, Tom. Not quite all. You know, we've -- most of us have talked about this a lot. I've talked a lot with Mickey and Dan because I'm involved also with the Aspen Institute where they're doing some really, really fine work. Lot of people are doing some really fine work, and you know, I get asked in forums all the time, "What happened? How did this polarization and partisanship come about?" And it reminds me of one of my favorite jokes, which is the snail and the turtle, you've probably heard it. The snail is mugged by the turtle, and the cop came and asked him, "What happened?" and the snail said, "I don't know, it all happened so fast." And, you know, when people say -- I think -- I really think, if you think about it, that's a joke you can use a lot. When you think about, how did this all happen to us? Well, it all happened so fast, but it's

really been going on for a long, long, long time. And it's problematic.

I -- rather than repeat a lot of what Julian or Tom said, I would just add a couple of things. One of the things I always say when I talk about partisanship, and that's usually how the question is framed, is what's led to this increased partisanship, I try to get my audience a little bit intrigued by saying one of the main causes of the increased partisanship in American politics is the weakness of political parties. And that automatically gets them to sit up and think, but I really, really want to emphasize that. The political parties as -- I mean, I kind of grew up in the party, my mother was a county chairman -- or woman, and my father was a county chairman and all that stuff. And I started going to political events when I was a kid. Parties, if you think about it, at their -- first of all, I'm not a romanticist. Parties have flaws and they can be corrupt and all that stuff, but parties really have an interest in coalescing a majority because they want to win. A lot of the problems that we have in politics today, it seems to me, have to do with the fact that, yes, interest groups have supplanted the functions that political parties used to play, at least when I was growing up, and I think that Julian talked a little bit about the financial and economic side of that, so did Tom, certainly all true.

But I would point to another side of it, which is that the platform or issues or constituency motivational side of politics has also been taken over by interest groups. Today, if you're a Republican running for office, of course your ultimate goal is to get endorsed by your party, but you probably care more about what the single issue groups think, what do the taxpayers' groups think, what do the right-to-life groups think, what do the anti-gay marriage groups think, what do the anti-cap and trade, anti-global warming groups think? And contrary to Tom and Norm's thesis, there is a similar dynamic on the Democratic side. If you run on the Democratic side, it's of course, what do the public employee unions think, and what do the environmentalists think, and what do the feminists think, and you can go on down the list.

The problem is that in quite contrast to -- at least in my view -- the motivation of parties which is to ultimately get to 51 percent so that they can win, interest groups have a different set of motivations. They want to get more donors, they want to get more activists, and they get them by distilling their message down, not by broadening it out. And I think that

explains an awful lot of our politics in this town, and in this country today is the people that are really driving our politics do not have an interest, do not have the motivation to try to put together majoritarian [spelled phonetically] platforms because it doesn't serve their own interests. That's been a big change in the politics of our country, it's been a change taking place at least for about 30 years, and I think that that is one thing that I would identify to contributing to the problems that we've got today.

Some of the other problems are really just fairly basic. When the Republicans took over the Congress in 1994 election, and since then, I talked to people about this, and I say, it wasn't just that the Republicans had not won the Congress for 40 years, it's that they had really never been competitive and had no hope of winning the Congress for the previous 40 years. All the time that Mickey Edwards and I were in Congress, we never went into an election really thinking, this time we're going to take control. We'd go in thinking, well, we're going to gain some seats, maybe we're going to gain a lot of seats. Control, nope, not on the -- not on the agenda. Ever since that 1994 election, with maybe one exception in 2008, both parties have gone into every election with at least some reasonable expectation that they could prevail and take control of the House, the Senate, the presidency, you name it. Almost no exceptions to that. Normally, we would think that competition is a good thing in our democracy. I certainly think it is, but you can't deny the fact that it has changed a little bit the nature of the debates that we're having in this city and around the country when people believe over a period of many, many years now that every issue is the issue that's going to decide control of the House, control of the Senate. Give us Florida, give us Ohio, control of the presidency. We're finding out that competition is great in theory, but has a few downsides in practice. What can change all this? I'm not totally pessimistic, I'm somewhat optimistic. I think as we approach the issue of campaign reform, finance reform, I would do something that nobody is much talking about, goes back to my earlier point, I think you got to figure out how to strengthen political parties. And that may mean to the -- I would even agree with the sentiments on -- that Tom expressed on Citizens United, but I would go a step further and say if we're going to get rid of Citizens United, and that takes either a Supreme Court decision or constitutional amendment, the campaign reformers also ought to go back and look at what they've done to crippling the parties -- crippling our ability to finance campaigns through the most accountable mechanisms. I mean, this is really a perverse system if you think about it from any

standpoint where it -- regardless of where you are on the ideological agenda, if you're a traditional campaign reformer, you know, you've got unlimited amounts of money being spent in politics, but it's being spent in the most unaccountable way. That's partially because of Citizens United, I agree with all that. It's also because we put laws in the name of campaign reform on the books that prevent us from giving money where it is most accountable: to political parties and campaigns where it can be fully disclosed, yes, regulated in terms of in its dimensions, and where candidates have to take outward responsibility for it.

Now, maybe we're going to reach nirvana someday where one side or the other wins everything they want, but we have the worst system of all, and both sides need to give a little bit to reform, and get a system that is both accountable and strengthens those institutions that have --actually have an interest in achieving a majority in our process as opposed to narrow partisan interest. And finally, I can't say enough about the fact that you can't -- I don't think you can do this without presidential leadership. I actually think we've had two presidents in a row now, President Obama, President Bush, who came to office believing and wanting to change the culture of Washington. They're very different men, obviously, but I think they both thought that they could do it. They thought they could it through force of personality. Personalities are very different with George Bush and sort of a good old boy Texas way, thought he could do what he did in the Texas legislature, sidle up to those guys down on Capitol Hill, you know, bring them up to the White House, and we'd work things out. And President Obama in a very different way, much more high tone, much more academic and intellectual, sought to increase the level of the debate and he thought that he was going to override partisan differences that way. I think what we've got to realize is that this is a nitty, gritty problem. You have to have real, honest to God, political skills, and work it every day ala Lyndon Johnson who we talked about before, ala Bill Clinton. I mean, we achieved a great deal under Bill Clinton, and it wasn't because there was lack of partisanship, we had that little thing called impeachment which took place. Maybe because Newt had to get out the back door of the airplane. I've always thought that Clinton's real regret was that Newt didn't get out of the back door of that airplane about 15 minutes earlier.

[laughter]

But Clinton understood how to work the process, and didn't -- that's -- this is not a criticism of either Bush or Obama. The next president has to figure out that this is a nitty gritty mechanical problem, you got to put together real plans to achieve bipartisanship. You're not going to do it by changing the natures of the people that are in office. But it's worth working on because I do agree that everybody who's talked here about the stakes that we face as a country, they couldn't much be greater.

Don Wolfensberger:
Thank you, Vin.

[applause]

Let me explain, now, the format. First of all, apologies to the public audience, this is one of the few times, though, that we confine the questions, comments, and so on to the roundtable, and then if everybody gets talked out before our two hours, then we will recognize folks from the audience, but my apologies on that, but what we'd like to do is for folks that are on the roundtable, one, I did ask you all to think about what one thing about Congress you would change if you could, and how you would do that. I'm not going to ask that you necessarily pin that to whatever comment or question you might have, but do write it down on that little card that I handed out because I would like to collect those at the end, and then if you'd like to work it into the time that you are speaking, fine. We'd like to hear it. But what I'd to do is get your reactions or comments on anything relative to our topic today, just put your little tent card on its edge if you want to be recognized. And please confine your questions or comments to one minute. Don't feel you have to address a question to one of the provocateurs here, but feel free just to offer your own observations, but try to keep it to a minute, and if you've got a follow up, do a double pump with your card and we'll give you 20 seconds or so to ask a follow up question or comment on something that somebody has just said so you don't have to wait for a long time to respond. So with that, we'll go first to Dan Glickman.

Dan Glickman:
Well I want to thank Tom and Vin for an presentation, two people I've -- moral value and great leaders, but that's 10 seconds, so I'll try to get to the rest of it.

[laughter]

Nobody said anything about the public here. What the public expects, and who are these people? What do they want out of our system? And one thing Tom Brokaw talks about is the lack of common ground -- common experience in this country. When everybody was forced to be drafted in the war, they hated it, but they worked together, and so one of the things that strikes me is the public's expectorations are askewed, in large part because -- I hate to blame them, and I'm not, but they do have this sense of common ground or shared experiences. And that makes it a lot tougher for political leaders who often don't have the same thing either. They haven't either served in the military or been part of some sort of a national system so they have to work together. So that ethic is not part of our national culture, it's not congressional culture anymore, and I just think it makes it a hell of a lot harder to try to influence the public and to lead them, which is what political people have to do. They have to lead public, in many cases lead them into things they don't want to do. But when people haven't experienced that world, it's a hell of a lot harder to do it, and so I would just say, do you think that's a factor and what can we do to try to build a national common ground so that the public and their politicians are more in sync on an agenda that's better for the country?
Don Wolfensberger:
Any thoughts on that?

Vin Weber:
Absolutely. I mean, it's -- as Julian said, when he made his excellent presentation, he -- none of us altogether could even get to about half the reasons I would say, and I would say that the fact that no one needs to get any news from any source they don't agree with anymore does kind of matter. You know, if you're a conservative, you watch Fox News and you listen to Rush Limbaugh, and you go to, you know, a couple of right wing blogs, and if you're, you know, liberal you watch, you know, Rachel Maddow and you know, go to huffingtonpost.com and nobody -- it's not only that there's no common experience, it's that we all only seek out "news sources" in quotes, that reinforce what we already believe, and it contributes to this polarization, at least that I try to talk about when I was talking about the interest group as opposed to a political party interest in our political process.

Julian Zelizer:
I agree with that, and I think that one of the things that we need to do is we need to think about how you broaden the base of people who participate in elections. I mean, the Pew Charitable

Trust said that in 2008 there were 2.2 million people who were not able to vote because of registration problems. We've got to get beyond that, I mean, the idea that we have the tools to make voting ubiquitous, make it easy, I think we need to be talking to larger groups of people, and we need to encourage them to participate and we make it hard for people to register. We make it hard for people to vote. It should be easy to do both.

Male Speaker:
And, you know, one -- the negative response is -- in 9/11 was a comparable at least common experience for the country of the nature of World War II, and what that generation had. And it had no impact after a few years.

Dan Glickman:
Do you think, just to follow up, any form of universal service in this country would drive people to believe they're all part of a common experience in America, and therefore they have a bigger stake in our county's future?

Tom Downey:
Well think about for a minute Danny what they do in Australia where every citizen is required to vote. It is a fairly fundamental change from what we have today, but they have to pay a fine of several hundred dollars if they don't vote.

Don Wolfensberger:
Can they vote for none of the above?

Tom Downey:
Yes, they can vote for none of the above, but it is a different idea. And in fact it would force us to be talking to different people. Take the race in Montana, my favorite political race, Jon Tester versus Mr. Rehberg. Rehberg has to appear a little bit more reasonable than the other members of the House of Representatives. That's why he hasn't voted for any of the budgets that the Republicans have offered. When you have to speak to a broader group of people, and when you don't have to speak to just the people, as Vin has pointed out who either agree with you. You've got to moderate, and you have to spend a little bit more time figuring out how the people who don't agree with you are going to react to some of your ideas. I say that sort of democracy. That sort of idea is something that we need to think about in this country.

Don Wolfensberger:

Okay, let's bring it over here to Philippa Strum. Wait for the microphone please.

Philippa Strum:
Thank you. I just, to follow up on what Dan Glickman asked, it seems to me particularly as I consider myself a Democrat with a small D, I'm all for more people voting, and for doing whatever it takes to make that happen. But if you go back to what the founders were talking about when they thought they were establishing a democracy here. It was a place where an enlightened citizenry would participate in the political process, and that's one of the reasons that Jefferson talked about education being so crucial as well as the media if you will, the press of his time. I don't understand how we can talk about what's happening to Congress without talking about the electorate in more detail, and particularly the lack of education in what used to be called civics in the electorate of the United States. It seems to me that if you look at some of the stuff, maybe it's just the most dramatic stuff that you see on the media of somebody holding up a sign saying, "Don't let the government mess with my Medicare." And, you know, one can go on, and on with all of the examples. What we're seeing is a population that has been taught basically that it has rights, but it doesn't have the responsibilities of citizenship. And that means it doesn't have the responsibility to stay informed. It does seem to me we have to be thinking about what's happening in our education system, not just what's happening on the hill.

Julian Zelizer:
The great book on the nineteenth century, "Political Parties", the historian Jean Baker wrote about how did Americans come to accept the idea that parties were legitimate? And she looks at a variety of factors, but one of the things she looked at were text books in schools, and how they changed over the course of the century, and how kids started to learn about what these were, and what these institutions meant. So, you know I think obviously from civic education in the schools which has certainly diminished in some ways. In terms of basic institutional lessons to something like Teach For America as I'm thinking I'm on the Wilson School admissions, and a large number of these students that's what they did. And it, I don't know if that's because of who they are already, or that has an influence they then are interested in public service. There are programs like that, but I think for a year you can, kind of steal away someone from the market, and get them to think about this. So from the education to the experience I think the civic part is important. That said you can find, you know in the '50s and

‘60s you could find pockets of citizens, or a lot of them who’s views were way off in terms of what’s going on. And part of the role of leadership is to overcome that, not just to be guided by it, and so there is, kind of part of the nitty gritty aspect of the president or congressional leaders that will have to work with the electorate we have, and figure out how to still achieve these aims.

Don Wolfensberger:
Okay I’ve got Colleen Shogan, and then Mickey Edwards, and then John Tanner, so Colleen.

Colleen Shogan:
One underlying theme that I’ve heard from everybody’s comments, but hasn’t been explicitly mentioned is really the role of time. Whether or not you think money is corrupting in politics or not it takes time to raise money. And whether or not you like the, you know the advent of social media, or the explosion of cable news, or all that type of attention it takes time to engage in that type of representative politics, and resources in a congressional office. And if you add up all that time and resources you have just a very little sliver left now for policy making which I think is really the root of a lot of these problems. And we all know that if you want bipartisan, good policy outcomes, sensible policy outcomes you can’t put that together in, you know two or three hours on, you know Thursday afternoon so that people can get on the plane, and get back home. You have, it takes time in order to do that, and if you could please comment on the role, how member’s time has changed since when you came to Congress, and now. And what role that plays in this problem that we’re dealing with.

Vin Weber:
I’ll start, and try to be brief. First of all the instantaneous news cycle is a big part of what we’ve talked about. That I would just throw in there also, the proliferation of Poland, you don’t have to wait 24 hours to find out what the public thinks about any given issue now. It’s, we got it all right now. The lifestyles of members of Congress has changed to deprive them a lot of time, this is, we haven’t talked about this yet, but I’m sure most of you have in one form or another. The fact that members of Congress particularly in the House don’t really live here anymore, and they get on the plane, they like to get on the plane Tuesday morning. They may have to go as early as Monday night, and they surely want to be out first thing Thursday, and that’s driven partially by the fact that they don’t have a family here anymore.

That's because we've gone through several election cycles, almost 20 years where somebody or the other is going to get beat up at a campaign, because his residence is in Mclean, or Chevy Chase, Not Pittsburg or Peoria. That's changed the culture of the whole city, but it's changed the House particularly, and I think that it has changed it in multiple negative ways. Members don't have an opportunity outside of business hours, if you will, to get to know their colleagues, particular the colleagues on the other side of the aisle. And it, you know takes away from the time that you can actually spend to think about doing things. So I think that's, I think that's a big, big problem. One of the great ironies, everybody whose become speaker since I left anyway has pledged that they were going to change the schedules of Congress. They all have, and they've all made it worse.

Don Wolfensberger:
Tom mentioned though how much more money members are expected to raise for their campaigns. One thing that's not been mentioned is how much they have to raise for their party now. I mean you are assessed dues depending on what your committee position is, whether you're chairman, or sub-committee chair, or whatever. Is that cutting into member's ability to spend time here in Washington on policy matters?

Male Speaker:
Sure, and it just ups the ante for everybody. That really began, -- no I don't know whether it began, but certainly when Gingrich became speaker that was a very big part of his revolution on the House side. And he really pushed particularly committee chairman into raising money. I remember Bill Archer [spelled phonetically] who was the ranking member of [unintelligible] to become chairman was, kind of the last holdout. I mean he didn't really think it was his job to go out and raise a lot of money. It was his job to be the chairman of the Ways and Means Committee now that we're in the majority. And finally they didn't really threaten him into it, but it was made very clear this is now part of the job. And raising money for your party is, it's true on both sides of the aisle now.

Tom Downey:
And given that fact, and Democrats are as guilty of it as Republicans today. So this is where I can be bipartisan. The fact is that the members who were senior when I was there tended to be beyond political problems. They usually came from completely safe districts, and they spent a lot of time worrying

about the committee understanding a lot of the issues. And what happens, I mean you're right about the time, there's just much more of it is spent, I mean Earl is probably in a better position to tell you what it was like to represent a competitive state, and have very tough elections, or barred toward the end. You raise a lot of money --

Vin Weber:
Earl can tell you what it's like to represent a noncompetitive state. [laughs]

Tom Downey:
Right, noncompetitive now. It is, you're much more beholden to the people who've given you the money. You can't not be. I mean it's not like you're going to do what somebody is telling you is raising the money, but you're going to be answering their phone calls. They're going to have a different level of access to you than ordinary citizens, and you're going to feel however cold blooded you might be about the money you're raising, somewhat more beholden to somebody who is busy trying to help you get elected.

Don Wolfensberger:
Okay I've got Mickey Edwards, and then Jon Tanner, and then Jim Dykstra.

Mickey Edwards:
Thanks Don and John, for, you know, putting this on. I think it's very important. I want to draw the distinction between polarization and partisanship which are two very different things with different roots, and different kinds of solutions to whatever problems there are. When I was elected as the only Republican in the Oklahoma delegation, my district hadn't had a Republican since 1928. A Democrat named Tom Steed who was chairman of an appropriation subcommittee, very powerful Democrat, took me around. Took me to his office, showed me his files, showed me how to do case work, you know how to make sure that I got reelected. And my relationship with Tom Downey would have been that if he took a position on an issue that I happened to disagree with, you know, to vote against it, but not to raise money, and to contribute to a pot to try to knock Tom off. That's all changed. So I think the problem at least in terms of partisanship is systemic. It's not been the, about the parties themselves per say. It's about the power we give parties over our nominating systems, our election systems, our redistricting systems, and so forth. So that what you have is that whether you saw it a couple years ago in Delaware and Utah. Now you've

seen it for Democrats as well that when you go to the poles in November you're only choosing between the kinds of candidates who have been able to make it through these very intensely partisan, hyper partisan, ideologically zealous primaries, you know, which drive the two parties further, and further apart. Redistricting is controlled by that way so that you end up with more, and more partisan and ideological electorates choosing the people who get elected. We have, almost every state 46 of the 50 states have sore loser laws. You run in a primary, and you lose you can't be on the ballot in November. So you're choosing only between these more extreme ones. And finally, you know committee assignments, I sat there on the, you know committee that chose what committees other members would sit on. And you'd get a seat on Ways and Means, or Appropriations, or Armed Services if you promised to stick loyally to the team, you know. That's before there were any hearings, before you read the bills you stuck to the team's position. And so to some extent, you know, the fact that we've allowed parties to have that kind of control has driven us apart, has made it much harder to compromise, because compromise now is seen as selling out. So, and seen that way by the people who dominate the primaries, the people who do the redistricting, the people who make the committee assignments. So I mean I think the problem is much more systemic than just, you know whether you have to raise a lot of money, and so forth.

Don Wolfensberger:
Any comments on that?

Vin Weber:
I would comment, because, you know, Mick and I are very close. There is an argument between your point of view and mine which we're not going to resolve, and that is I think at the end of the day parties properly reformed are the solution. And I think that the problem is the transformed nature of the parties, that's what I was trying to say. I don't disagree with anything you said, but I think it's because political parties today are something different than they were 30, or 40, or 50 years ago, because of this interest group politics. And my preference would be to figure out a way to change that. To have responsive, part of this is because, you know, I for eight years I chaired the National Endowment for Democracy. A lot of you are involved in pro-democracy activities. When you get outside this country, particularly in countries without developed civil societies, without developed democratic governments, one of the most important things we do is figure out how to help, and develop responsive political parties. So I resist the notion

that parties themselves are the problem, and I gravitate toward the notion that we've got to figure out it is that is corrupting political parties, and reform them.

Don Wolfensberger:
Okay, anybody else have --

Julian Zelizer:
I mean there's also back in the '70s the argument was that, I mean partisanship was the answer. So the political scientists in the room remember all the studies by political scientists in the '60s and '70s of the committee era saying there was too much compromise, there was too much bipartisanship, and the answer are more coherent, forceful, disciplined parties. So in some ways we got what we wanted. I mean that was part of a goal of the reforms, and to offer voters a clear choice, but the second question is also, kind of the tools parties use to fight each other. I mean that's a different issue. Has there been an escalation? Was the debt limit, was that a legitimate, kind of way to have a battle over deficit reduction and spending? Is the filibuster as a normal tool of [unintelligible], threat of a filibuster a legitimate way for the parties to fight? And so you can, kind of, separate those two. You could be true partisan. You could support the partisanship we have, and then, kind of, turn the question to the rules of the game, and the kind of issues, and the kind of weapons that are used in the fight. And think about are there ways to draw back? Are there ways to curtail some of that without losing the partisanship? I mean when Tom DeLay retired, he made a speech which was, "This is good. I stand for what I did. I stand for strong parties." And you could read democrats in the '70s who probably sounded very similar in terms of their aspirations of what parties could do. And so I think there's two separate issues between partisanship, and the means of partisan warfare.

Don Wolfensberger:
Tom [unintelligible] one of the things that I think I raised at a previous seminar that you were here many years ago, but when I recall your freshman class, sort of, revered Dick Bolling, and the fact that you had read as I had in grad school, and undergrad school his books, "House Out Of Order" and "Power In The House". And he really was saying that you've got to have more responsible government, party government in Congress, and you don't need Czar speaker. You don't need king caucus, but some kind of a blend of the two where the caucus is acting to help shape the agenda and so on, but the leadership also has powers to, sort of replace the committee chairman being, sort

of, the semiautonomous [unintelligible]. Did that make a big impression on you at the time?

Tom Downey:
Yeah it did. I mean we removed four committee chairmen my freshman year from power, and that was considered revolutionary. Roy Pattman [spelled phonetically], Jamie Pogue [spelled phonetically], [unintelligible], and Wilbur Mills [spelled phonetically], and they for various reasons, we made them come before the [unintelligible]. We interviewed them, and we found for whatever reason each of them not wanting, and we took away their committee chairmanship. If you recall back then, not that many people here do. It was, kind of, a revolutionary moment to try and take away the baronage from some of the committee chairman. I mean it's timid compared to what goes on today, but back then we had had the house for 20 years. We were going to have it for another 20, and I think Vin made a very important point about stability here. The fact is that the very nature of the battle, because there is so much at stake tends to make us more extreme, and that's why I don't believe that there are simple changes in the institution that will help us. I think that there need to be very big structural changes. I would increase the size of the House to 500. I would have commissions, either national, or state redistrict the lines so that it's taken out of the hands of political people. I would do, as I mentioned before I don't want to beat the Australian ballet to death, but I want to make sure more people are voting, more people are registered, that it's really easy to do that. Because that will force a change in the system that I don't think we're capable of doing by ourselves.

Don Wolfensberger:
John Fortier, do you want to weigh in at all? I want you to participate in this.

John Fortier:
Sure, sure. Well I tell you on that point a lot of the party system in a way underlay this committee system. Right? The Democratic Party was the majority for a long time, and yet couldn't always agree, and therefore leadership wasn't centralized. It was decentralized. It was in committees, and when you got big majorities of liberals in 1974 you were able to, sort of, force more of the opinion of the Democratic Party. So the pendulum has swung very strongly to polarized parties and centralized leadership. And I think the old system underlay the committee system, but is there some hope in moving power away from the center, and restoring some semblance of committees, or

is it just, does the party system fit so well with the current committees more under the leadership system that we can never go back?

Don Wolfensberger:
Well I think one of the things that Tom's group did, yes they removed four chairman, but the other chairman who weren't removed were more responsive to the party caucus. And the fact that you had a rule brought into your caucus before you got there even, that you had separate votes on committee chairman I think helped you forge that kind of responsiveness. That's my sense, but I guess John's point I guess is the pendulum swung so far that pretty soon --

John Fortier:
Are we too --

Don Wolfensberger:
Leaders are dictating too much to the committees, and maybe committees don't have enough leeway on their own. Do you get that sense?

John Fortier:
Right, I think that that is a result of a party that has to now be centralized in its response to issues, because of the new cycle.

Male Speaker:
Right.

John Fortier:
And it has to be more centralized in its command and control of the resources for its members to get elected. So I don't see it going back as long as the people who are raising the money are calling the shots. We're never going back to a day when the, figure out what do they say about Wilbur Mills. One of the committee chairman said of him, "I, you know, always bow low when I see the chairman of the Ways and Means Committee." You know, now with all due respect to Dave Camp [spelled phonetically] most people couldn't pick him out of a line up. So the fact is that I think for forces that we've talked about here, the centralization of the parties, at least in the House, that's not going to change any time soon.

Don Wolfensberger:
I agree with that. Okay I've got John Tanner, Jim Dykstra, Monty Tripp, and Earl Pomeroy.

John Tanner:
Thank you, thank you all. It's been really interesting, and informative, and constructive I think. In 1962 in a case from old congressional district in Tennessee's supreme court in a case of Baker versus Carr, not Howard Baker, it determined that seats based on population had to have approximately the same number of people, and that the court did have jurisdiction. Up until that time it basically said that's separation of powers, that's legislative branch, we're judicial, blah, blah. Tennessee had not reapportioned the state legislature since 1901, and Memphis was getting really short changed from Nashville, the state capitol. Anyway they turned it over to legislature. Today, some 50 years later there are only 91 seats until this latest round of redistricting left in the House that are even within the hypothetical margin of error of a 50, 50 voting pattern. Mickey Edwards has written about this I know. We had a bill we sponsored, [unintelligible] the blue dogs for four terms to try to change it. The reason I think it's important is because what it has resulted in, in my view is overlaying a parliamentary system on a representative system, and it doesn't work.

You know in a parliamentary system there are only two branches of government. The reason I say this is because during this last decade when Republicans had it all, and Democrats would have probably done the same thing, I'm a blue dog I get it from both sides. But what we saw happen was this parliamentary system at work. We were, the Congress was appropriating $100 billion dollars in supplemental appropriations. Emergency supplemental for the war in Iraq without a hearing, without anybody looking at it, without any way to do it, because the House didn't, and the Senate didn't want to embarrass the president. That's not the role of Congress. The role of Congress is to oversee the executive branch no matter who is there. It's not one team. It is a separate and equal branch of government, and that's why I think if we could do one of two things, one is change the way the country is being gerrymandered through the years to try to get at this parliamentary problem, and the other is universal service as Danny talked about. Nobody has a stake in the action any more in this country. You can actually grow up here, and never do anything to earn, or to discharge responsibilities of citizenship. And I think you can see the moral and political degradation of the system since the draft was stopped in the '70s. Thanks.

Don Wolfensberger:
Jim Dykstra?

Jim Dykstra:
I'll try to be brief since a lot of the discussion subsequent to my putting my card up has been focused on the pervasive significance of money, but I really think that underlies the problem in a multitude of levels. And until we address that, and you are asked for our proposed solutions, I unfortunately have none. I think, you know public financing is the only one, and we can't afford it. But, you know, I had lunch today with a chief of staff for a freshman member, and I told him I was coming to this. I said, "What would you say?" And he was right on this point, and he tied the confluence, I think Colleen was the first to note it, and I know Congressman Downey noted it. The confluence of time and money, you're here only a few days, and you've got your own fund raiser. You're expected to show up to support other people's fund raisers. It's freshman member. He's got a leadership pact already, because that's all part of the track if you wish to be a, you know, a subcommittee chairman, or a committee chairman.

And you're going across the street, and dialing for dollars. And I think most members came here because they wanted to effect policy, but unfortunately, you know, they're glorified fund raisers for themselves and for their party. So, and meanwhile he was saying that, you know, again time that could have been spent perhaps getting to know some of their other colleagues on the other side of the aisle. You know they're at these fund raisers rather than having that opportunity, or for that matter meeting with their legislative assistants to discuss policy. So it's nothing that hasn't been said, but I just wanted to note that this was something I got directly today from a guy who is in the middle of it right now.

Don Wolfensberger:
Monty Tripp, Earl Pomeroy, David Karol, and Keith Kennedy.

Monty Tripp:
To pull together a lot of what I think everybody has been saying is interest groups may or may not be problems. Certainly fund raising seems to be a problem. Everybody agrees with that. I think that everybody agrees that redistricting is a problem. One of the things that I don't think we've talked about is how the lack of substantive knowledge among the leadership and committees is changing the way people legislate. If you don't have somebody who's known an issue area for 20 years, is steeped

in it, and you trust to lead you on it whether it's, you know Henry Waxman on Medicare, or pick somebody on trade policy. Does that change the way legislation is happening? We don't have anybody that we trust, because committee term limits have lost that level of in depth knowledge.

Don Wolfensberger:
Anybody want to comment on that?

Don Wolfensberger:
I think the Democrats do not have the term limits in their [unintelligible] rules. Republicans have it in House rules, term limits for both committee chairman and subcommittee chairman. Democrats don't have it in their [unintelligible] rules, and dropped it from the House rules when they were in power, but it raises a good question. People come early now to subcommittee chairmanships without having all that much expertise built up over a few years on the committee, or a subcommittee, and that seems to be hurting something. I saw a double pump there Scott. Scott Lilly?

Scott Lilly:
I just think that it's enormously --

Don Wolfensberger:
Microphone, yeah.

Scott Lilly:
I think that's enormously important. In 1980 -- or, in 2000 Ralph Regula [spelled phonetically], who probably knew more about public lands, and the Park Service, and interior issues of anybody in the Congress was forced to give up the interior subcommittee, and was assigned to go to the labor H appropriations subcommittee which is probably the biggest, and most complicated headache there is. And he had never served a day on that subcommittee in his entire tenure. Woodrow Wilson I think said that that the thing that turns politicians into legislators is service on committees, and development of expertise. I think that's what softens a lot of the partisan edges that have existed in the institution, and when committees start to fall apart, and I think they really have completely fallen apart then the ability for people to reach common ground is, that venue has been eliminated altogether. Worse than that is that the six year term limit sets up a bidding war in which the leadership asks for the highest bid in terms of campaign contributions which I think has repeatedly got the party that did that into trouble. And it ought to be banned on just an

ethical grounds even if it wasn't the question of destroying expertise.

Don Wolfensberger:
Good point. Anybody else on that point? My next person would be Earl Pomeroy, and then we've got David Karol, Keith Kennedy, and Tom Sliter.

Earl Pomeroy:
Notion of just how difficult it is to anticipate the effect of reforms I'm for limiting the duration of chairman. You know this lavish devotion to the Democratic party seniority in my opinion has tended to reward those from the safest seats at the expense of those struggling to maintain a swing district. It has produced unfortunate results in that way, but moving to basically a fund raising base as credential for chairman is really been a bad alternative around on the other side. You know we're all talking about, first of all great panel. I've expected a lot of the professor, but, you know, Downey and Vin.

[laughter]

It's wonderful. Really, really good insights today.

[laughter]

You know we're talking about Washington based problems, and how we might fix some societal based. One thing that I wonder about, it's fascinating to think about the country, big, vast country being so narrowly divided. It's evenly divided, but it's close. I think that the country isn't nearly as polarized however, meaning there's a lot more centrist thinking in each political party than would be reflected in the memberships on the hill. To what extent do you all think the public can rein in these parties, and snap them back to center a little bit? I remember a discussion we had in our caucus, where it was raised by some leadership that our problem was a disaffected base. We had pitch to the base, this is the last Congress. Counter point was made our problem was we scared the hell out of Independents, and we lost them all.

Well basically we went with the theory the problem was the base. We lost the Independents in the election, and we had the worst election outcome since 1938. In believing we had a few more seats apparently to lose we reelected the entire leadership team. On the other side I think the Republicans with the House [unintelligible] are really moving into very politically

dangerous territory. It's profoundly different. Its directives obviously presented, but I think that it is politically unlikely to be popular if people understand it. If there is a snap back there by this broad ballast of voting centrists is there any chance that the voters themselves can make this process, make the Congress a little more functional? I'd just be interested in the panel's responses.

Julian Zelizer:
[unintelligible] The only way this happens is some significant electoral fear. You know the normal course of Congress is not to reform itself. It's to talk about the problems, and then not do anything about it. And the moments of serious reform, meaning '70s even mid '90s are progressive era. That's about it. And if you think of the '70s you had a major, I mean this is what it took, huge scandal, presidential scandal, but that bled into Congress. Meaning what you said that they weren't going to elect a Republican again, they weren't going to come out in your district.

And Watergate hovered over the '70s reforms where the parties were scared that if we don't do something there's some kind of a consequence. You had a significant electoral turn over come out of that with the Watergate babies, and then in '94 same thing with the Republican class. And, you know in the '70s you did have presidential leadership for reform. I mean say what you will about Jimmy Carter, but in his early presidency he made government reform his, one of his signature issues. And so there were, kind of, three things going on at once that I think created the perception that if you don't do something there will be consequences to the party in charge, and I think that helps. So can an election where the center matters move towards some of the reforms? It probably could have some affect, but the cynic says you need a lot more to really get at the kind of issues from [unintelligible], to campaign finance. To have one of those moments, one of those rare moments we've had where the incumbents say, "Okay, let's fix things." I think that's part of the mix, but that is how it works though.

Earl Pomeroy:
Julian, isn't the danger less from centrist voters snapping parties back to the center than it is members now worried more about people on the extremes of their party challenge them in a primary? I'm hearing this more, and more. That if I'm not voting conservative enough I'm going to have a more conservative challenger. I'm not liberal enough, I mean there are a couple

Democrats I think were defeated in the primaries because they voted against Obama's health care. So --

Julian Zelizer:
Well if you have a [unintelligible] moment, meaning the kind of '64 elections recreated in primaries. It's recreated in congressional races to the point for the Republicans are saying, you know, "This is too much. This is going to cost us our seats." Or the Democrats saying the same, that certainly could have. That's a different way in which it could play up, but it does have to have some electoral foundation, or the incentives for reform just aren't, there's no reason to undertake this other than wanting the institution better, but unfortunately that's not enough.

Male Speaker:
Earl I think that the, wasn't it true that your state increased the opportunity for voters to register at motor vehicle bureaus?

Earl Pomeroy:
We're the only state that has no voter registration what so ever.

Male Speaker:
Right, so is it same day validating? I mean can you --

Earl Pomeroy:
Walk on up with me ask you to sign an affidavit. It's literally the most open in the country.

Male Speaker:
And how do you think that that affected you in your last election? Did it help you, or hurt you?

Earl Pomeroy:
There was just a tremendous reaction in a, kind of, a conservative place anyway against consolidated Democratic control, and the fear that there was a very aggressive federal agenda. They recoiled against it. Well I, in the past have been able to distinguish myself from some of the Democrats in Washington it was just such a frightening prospect the Democrats were out.

Male Speaker:
Right, so the fact is that it was easier to vote, and they were more likely to vote against you, or there was a reaction to what was happening.

Earl Pomeroy:
Yeah, my defeat was a direct result of the reaction of Independents to the last Congress. And I'm just wondering, you know, okay the Democrats didn't heed that call in any way by their subsequent leadership election, but over time, this is, kind of my naïve hope for something. Maybe a party would heed that kind of electoral outcome, and start to adhere a little more toward a centrist path. Although Don's point about these seats, these dead safe homogenous seats do change the whole paradigm and you don't have only have to --

Tom Downey:
I don't know anybody who thinks that the current system of districting for the House is anything other than a monstrosity for the most part. And I mean if there's somebody here who'd like to defend it I'd like to hear an argument for it.

[laughter]

It is, it's ridiculous, and I perpetuates exactly the problems that we've talked about. But I mean your question is really good. I don't know, Fox News is not going to change. The cable networks are not going to change. The loudest, and most strident voices are not going to go away. Citizen United is here to stay. So unless there's something that I'm missing in terms of what's going to change, unless you figure out, I mean you could turn around, and maybe make the argument to me privately that might more democracy resulted in you having to work at [unintelligible] as opposed to being in the Congress.

[laughter]

Male Speaker:
Like working there.

Tom Downey:
Yeah, well I'm sure you do. I would have preferred you'd have stayed in Congress, but I don't think that, you know, absent something external to this process I don't see it changing very much. And that means, I don't know what, but I don't, I'm not really optimistic --

Vin Weber:
I wish I could be more optimistic. You think about a couple periods where there was a real impulse to move to the center. Certainly after Goldwater, the Republicans had a real impulse to

move to the center. Elected a lot of people like Howard Baker, and Charles Percy, and people like that, and during the Clinton years the Democrats were reacting to a sense that they had moved too far to the left maybe since [unintelligible] or whenever you want to date it. And Democrat leadership council, and things like that. Well look at the discussion around this presidential election now, and whoever loses there's going to be a bunch of people in either the left or the right that are going to say it's because they weren't pure enough.

Don Wolfensberger :
Right, well exactly.

Vin Weber:
I mean, you know, you can already, on the Republican side it's really clear, you know, Mitt Romney, the right wing of Eric [unintelligible] have already laid up the foundation for saying we nominated somebody that was too far to the center. And, but it's true even on the Democratic side. If Obama should get beat you can bet that the left is going to say it's because he compromised too much. He didn't push forward with the agenda more aggressively enough. So I, you know, I'm not sure that anything is going to snap us back in the short term.

John Fortier:
I can add to the pessimist, but maybe have one but of optimism.

[laughter]

You know I do think that, again this sort of turtle mugging story. The long story of 40 years.

Don Wolfensberger :
It's actually the snail that got mugged.

John Fortier:
Yeah I know.

[laughter]

The turtle did the mugging.

Don Wolfensberger :
Oh, okay.

John Fortier:

So, yeah we've been talking about seats being realigned for a very long time, but you know I look ahead at the House elections this time. I mean I like to put out factoid, there may be only white southern blue dog left, Jim Cooper [spelled phonetically] after this election. The number of seats that you can hold, a Democrat can hold in a very Republican territory, maybe there'll be four of five members left. You'd say that it's a plus 10 Republican district. There are almost no Republicans that hold very Democratic territory. So we've, you know this long story we've gotten almost to perfect realignment, and so that's very hard to see how you want to move away from that. The people who are voting for president in one election are voting for representatives of the same type. The maybe positive side is you do look around at some European parliamentary democracies, and occasionally, you know they have more or less two party coalitions where they're fighting for the middle, and sometimes they complain as boy they're all looking the same. And there's some way in which one party, at least for a while in the U.K. a new labor, sort of stuck a middle ground, you know, where the really did quite well. And then the conservatives had to, sort of, fight their way back to the middle. Just because the two parties are, sort of perfectly separated doesn't mean they absolutely have to be here. They might be here, but it's hard to know what's going to drive them there. Perhaps, you know some leader coalition who finds that way to keep the base, and move there very successfully making the other party think, yeah there's a need to move back there as well.

Don Wolfensberger:
Dan Glickman did you have a double pump follow up?

Dan Glickman:
No I'll wait.

Don Wolfensberger:
All right we'll put you at the end then. David Karol, and then Keith Kennedy, and they we've got Tom Sliter, Scott Lilly, but he still has something more, and Jeff Biggs.

David Karol:
Okay, thank you. It's great hearing from people, such a wealth of experience in this room.

Don Wolfensberger:
I just want to thank Tom Downey. He has to run, but thank you for coming.

[applause]

David Karol:
He has to go to a cell meeting.

[laughter]

I just want to say a couple things. I want to focus on political parties, but just quickly, actually I would say, and can't usually say a sentence like this, but I would say it's almost a consensus in political science that redistricting may be corrupt, and may be objectionable in various ways, but that it's not a major factor behind the more cohesive polarized parties that we have today. And that it's actually normal for there to be a lot of safe seats. People who are similar tend to live together. People who are similar tend to have similar views, and that's not because of redistricting commissions, or legislators redistricting. My point about parties is that I agree with a lot of Vin Webber's description of what's happened, but I would say that those are not weaker political parties. They're stronger political parties. They're just changed, and that the political parties that we had, which, you know, these big regional divides within each party much less ideologically cohesive were very abnormal. If you compare it to other democratic, stable countries, and even in our own history we had more polarized parties in the nineteenth century.

So the period when Tom Downey got to Congress, and even when Congressman Webber and Mickey Edwards, that was if you look at much of American history, and almost every other successful democracy like Australia, Canada, Britain, Western Europe. These are, it was anomalous. People disagree. It's normal for people to disagree, and it's normal for people who disagree to get into different parties. So our parties are normal in now compared, if our bench mark is other advanced democratic, stable, successful countries. What is not normal is a political system that has so many veto points, and the founders set this up. It's true. And we had a period when we had this with polarized parties, but the government did almost nothing in the nineteenth century. Government shut down, people wouldn't have noticed if the federal government shut down.

[laughter]

So what, it's normal to have these parties. It's normal to have a large active government whether it's a conservative party, or

a liberal party in power. What's not normal is having so many veto points. Other countries do not have two Houses with equal power like the House and the Senate. They don't have an independent elected president in most countries, and even if they have some of those things they certainly do not have the filibuster. And there's been so little talk about that today maybe because a lot of people here today are from the House, but it's shocking to me. We, not easy to change the Constitution, and I think these political parties are natural and normal. And so it's not that easy to change them realistically, but we could at least make a government so that if people win the election as the Democrats did in 2008, and as the Republicans did before that, that they can govern. And that they, the thing of the public doesn't know whose fault it is, because they don't know, you know, he blocked us from doing this, they blocked us from doing this. I think that's what we can hope for. And I think that's a reform that's doable.

Don Wolfensberger:
Okay. Anybody on that? Keith Kennedy then.

Keith Kennedy:
Thank you. I have a couple of, sort of, smart aleck remarks, and then try to respond to Don's charge about what we, if there was one thing we could do to change Congress what would it be? I'm sorry Mr. Downey left, because he talked about how it's inevitable that to some degree members of Congress are going to be to some degree beholden to people who are supporting their reelections, but it made me think of the old, the mantra of Jesse Unruh the Speaker of the California House who used to say, "If you can't drink their liquor, steal their women, take their money, and still vote against them you don't belong in this business."

[laughter]

The second, sort of smart aleck remark has to do with Don's comment in his paper about what we need is a return to regular order. You know we don't need a whole new set of rules and procedures we just need to stick to the ones that are there. I completely agree with that whether it's out of nostalgia or other reasons, but the problem I think with returning to the regular order is that it's been so long that nobody knows what it is.

[laughter]

Having said that if the Senate would enforce Rule 16, and if the House rules committee would not routinely issue rules waiving all points of order against legislation I think we could clean up the process a great deal. Now the more substantive comment, and perhaps a more provocative about the one thing that I would suggest the Congress do, and it would be to repeal the Budget Act. The Budget Act was written in ’74 as a political document in defense of Congress against a president who was scoring political points about a seemingly over spending Congress. It wasn’t true at the time, but he was scoring political points. I think ever since 1981 every budget resolution that’s been considered in either house has been considered on virtually, strictly a partisan basis with rare exception of one or two votes here or there. It immediately drives the Congress into the kind of parliamentary situation that Mr. Tanner was remarking on. It becomes what was intended to unify Congress against the president now divides Congress itself along political partisan lines. It has been used to abuse process whether the old Gephardt rules to adopt a debt limit without actually voting on a debt limit, or the whole process of reconciliation that has done great damage to the committee structure in the Senate. I think it’s really out lived whatever useful purpose it once had, and now does more damage than good.

Don Wolfensberger:
Thank you Keith. Anybody want to comment on that? Mickey Edwards you have a quick comment on that? All right. Take, wait for the microphone here.

Mickey Edwards:
Several years ago while I was at the House I had the opportunity to sit on a panel with a number of the senior leaders from both parties, and the only issue we agreed on was that creating the budget committee was a serious mistake. And I believe that very deeply. I think it has really screwed up the process, and for no good purpose, you know. So getting rid of the budget committee would really help move things along in a much more bipartisan way in my opinion.

Don Wolfensberger:
Okay. Tom Sliter.

Tom Sliter:
Thank you Don, and I’d first like to say that you’re, sort of cementing your image as the claude [spelled phonetically] reins of the Wilson Center.

[laughter]

You have managed to round up all the usual suspects for a very interesting and timely session so I want to add my thanks to you for doing this. The second thing is I guess, and not to pursue the Casa Blanca analogy too much, but we shouldn't be shocked that when the Congressional campaign committees, the party organizations are both pursuing a strategy designed to excite their bases, to excite the activists which is where the money is, which is where the activists are, where the yard sign posters are. And they do that with inflammatory rhetoric that feeds exactly their, that demographics' view of life that somehow after doing all the campaigning asking them for money. As Tom said heeding them for, you know, at least paying attention to them, listening to them. That we not only get their policy positions, but we also get their course culture. And the nature, I mean there are probably a number of rules changes that would help ameliorate the present gridlock, but I think none of them, it's all dressing around the edges until we get to the sense that the culture that we are fostering through the political campaigning that we are doing is rearing its ugly head when we try and then turn around, and then govern in Congress. And I think that's especially true in an era when an apparent pledge to a special interest group seems to overcome and trump one's sworn oath of office. And so I think this question is probably a little bit larger than just the culture of Congress. I think Congress is a representative body. We are representing unfortunately a not so attractive part, or piece of our culture.

Don Wolfensberger:
Okay.

Male Speaker:
I agree, I got a quote our former colleague Barney Frank [spelled phonetically] who came into Congress in 1980. He was, some of you probably remember this, he was at the town meeting once, and he was getting hell for the Congress. And he'd listen as only Barney, wouldn't listen very long then he [unintelligible], but finally he said, "You know Congress has got its problems, but the people are no bargain either."

[laughter]

Julian Zelizer:
Okay, just can I add? The interesting thing though is public policy doesn't swing to the extreme. So in this system where

everyone is playing to the extremes, you know, the liberals are frustrated because health care reform was a series of compromises that moved at far, much further to the center than they wanted. And conservatives are angry, because Mitt Romney in fact reflects the Republican Party in their mind. So there is an interesting phenomenon that the electoral cycle might do that, but in terms of governments we actually move to the center. And I don't have a point with this, but there is a difference in the kind of governments we have, and the kind of campaigning, and culture we have. And it's not clear to me, kind of why that doesn't foster more support for the people who actually benefit from the policy.

Don Wolfensberger:
Okay, let me just say we've got six minutes left, and six people with points to make so rather than have any follow up comments from others here they are. Scott Lilly if you still want to make another point, Walter Oleszek, Jeff Biggs, Dan Glickman, Don Ritchie, and Kent Hughes.

Scott Lilly:
I just say I won't agree with what was said about the Budget Act. I think that really would make a difference, but as much as people look at process and institutions, and cultural changes and so forth I think sometimes that there's some serendipity involved, and there's a great man or lesser great man. I think if Edward Mattick [spelled phonetically] had two more votes in Republican conference in 1989 when he ran against Newt Gingrich as Whip it would make an enormous difference. I mean I think if you go through the things people talked about today. Centralization of power, or over centralization of power and leadership, the demise of legislative committees, the demise of legislative values, money demands on legislators for legislative purposes, and most of all vitriolic rhetoric I think it really was a single individual that made a big difference in the way the Congress is today.

Don Wolfensberger:
Okay. Walter Oleszek.

Walter Oleszek:
Well actually maybe that's a question that Vin Webber ought to respond to at some point after I make my remarks, and that is

[laughter]

And that is a lot of people like Scott, and certainly Jim Cooper

recently publically declared that Newt Gingrich is really the person who caused the great [unintelligible] relationships between the parties on Capitol Hill. Anyway there are a lot of reasons for that, but the points I want to make are these. First it's a good program, and I think the fact that there's a big turn out here indicates that we have a large amount of people here who are concerned about the Congress which I think is obviously very healthy for the political system. Secondly that we've gone through these eras before. I remember, you know, the books written by Dick Bolling [spelled phonetically] who I worked for, "House Out Of Order", or "Deadlock Of Democracy in '63", or "Congress The Sapless Branch", and now you move up to where we are today, and you have, "The Broken Branch", "The Second Civil War", "Fight Club Politics". Well I don't know where we're evolving to, but my sense is that where we are is in part because we have a polarized country particularly amongst the attentive public, and that is reflected in a polarized Congress.

Now my concern in part is everybody in this room has their own view of a philosophy of government. How do you compromise, how do you when that's a bad word, how do you work with people in both parties who have very firm views about the role of government? How do you work with them when they are perhaps, the bad word would be ideologically minded, that don't bother me with the evidence, or the facts. Here's what I think, and here's what ought to be done. So how do you work with, you know, the two parties that are so divided on the big issue of the role, and size, and reach of the federal government? And I'm also concerned, really I think there's a shortage of members for various reasons who are institutionally minded. If we really want to take care of the House and the Senate, certainly Dave [unintelligible] was one of them. They guy I used to work for, Dick Bolling. I would commend David Dreier as another one today, and people in the United States Senate as well. And the only point I would make about the filibuster would be, I'd leave that to, my friend, my close friend Alan Frumin, the Senate Parliamentarian, but it cuts both ways.

Don Wolfensberger :
Or we could say Al Franken.

Walter Oleszek:
No, no. Well we could say Al Franken.

[laughs]

You know the filibuster cuts both ways. You know it's a source of gridlock, yes, but it's also a source of bipartisanship. And I guess I'll leave it at that. Unless you want to talk about Newt, and the fact that he's to blame.

[laughter]

Don Wolfensberger:
He's got a boat right after this program so we'll get back to you with a mail on that one I guess unless you have anything quick to say about it.

Vin Weber:
Look I'm not going to defend everything that Newt did in his time. I wasn't even there when he became speaker, but I am going to say the Republican Party was in a permanent minority status, and Newt had a powerful message to Republicans which basically was keep on doing what you're doing if you don't mind never being in the majority. And you can't, whatever we're going to talk about here, and all the issues we're going to try to overcome. It can't boil down to simply one party has to accept minority status. That's not realistic.

Don Wolfensberger:
Okay. Jeff Biggs, Dan Glickman, Don Ritchie, and Kent Hughes, quickly.

Jeff Biggs:
Okay, it's dangerous to borrow too much from parliamentary systems, but unless you really believe the court is going to reverse or modify Citizens United, or that single interest groups are going to disappear, I would look at the Canada Elections Act. And in Canada the longest campaign they've had was in 1926, 74 days. They average 36 days. It would be complicated, but I think we ought to drastically reduce the period of campaigns in the United States. They don't educate the public. They are a great reservoir for all this money, and with limited time you couldn't saturate the market with that money.

Don Wolfensberger:
Okay. Dan Glickman.

Dan Glickman:
I just want to, Vin said at the beginning, or I think it was Don, if we're not careful we're going to create a system where the executive branch has much more power, and the legislative

branch has a lot less power. Well I think we're probably moving in that direction, because America is very polarized, and America's leadership is changing rather dramatically in the world. And we're no longer the top dog in the world where it's a very competitive world. And I happen to be one of those elected officials who also worked in the executive branch, and I can tell you it makes a big difference when the executive has a bully pulpit, and uses it well, and effectively.

And I think we saw a failure of that when President Obama did not endorse full sense [spelled phonetically] commission, because what it did is it created a void and nothing happened. Nature abhors a vacuum, and we had a vacuum that was created that we're still resolving right now. So as we look at the Congressional Branch, the president is always the leader, is always where the direction the country is going to go, and the Congress responds. It may tinker with it, or it may stop it, but we can't talk about the Congress without talking about the president. And it is true the weaker Congress has become the more likely the president is going to assert himself. I think that's a fact of life anyway, and we need to have an executive branch who knows how to use the bully pulpit, and knows how to affect politics as well. And that's easier said than done. I saw a president, I worked for a president who had his ups and downs, but by in large he knew how to do that very well. And without that I don't think Congress is going to be able to accomplish a huge amount on its own.

Don Wolfensberger:
Good points. Don Ritchie, and Kent Hughes will have the last word.

Don Ritchie:
Julian, as somebody whose written about instructional reforms it strikes me that so much of what you've said today is that what effects Congress is really external to Congress rather than internal. And I wonder how Congress can in any way internally reform when in fact it's the political system outside the political parties, the money, the media, that you've identified as the problem with the culture. These really seem to be beyond institutional reform.

Julian Zelizer:
In 10 seconds, some are the filibuster, the structure of the committees are tangible campaign finance reform, is something Congress can deal with. Others, you're right, and I don't think it's going to be an area of reform. The media is what the media

is, and I think it’s, kind of fruitless to try to reform somehow those areas.

Don Wolfensberger:
Kent Hughes.

Kent Hughes:
Vin Webber introduced the idea that the people are no bargain either. I mean I think there is a pogo problem here, and it’s a product of the last 50 years or so. We had a depression, and a World War II that created a big active, and many people would say necessary government. Then you had the Vietnam War, Watergate, stagflation, eroded popular confidence in the ability of that government to work effectively. At the same time you have left them a traditional American demand for small government coupled with enormous support for the big services that the government provides, and that’s a real challenge. I do think if there is an answer, and I would play off what others said including Mr. Tanner about the lack of a shared national mission, and a shared national experience. If there’s hope it’s striking to me how the Teach For America program is dramatically over subscribed. That the Peace Core is over subscribed, so there may be something stirring among younger Americans that will help over time, lead us in a different direction.

Don Wolfensberger:
Thank you Kent. I think that’s a very appropriate final work, and join me in thanking our panel and each other here.

[applause]

[end transcript]