

**GROVER NORQUIST, PRESIDENT, AMERICANS FOR TAX REFORM,
IS INTERVIEWED THE ATLANTIC ECONOMY SUMMIT 2013**

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SPEAKERS: GROVER NORQUIST,
PRESIDENT,
AMERICANS FOR TAX REFORM

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CLEMONS: Grover we're going to sit down and continue our discussion.

You guys may not know it, Grover Norquist won a couple of years the humorist of the year it was at the -- the -- the most...

NORQUIST: Funniest celebrity in D.C.

CLEMONS: ... funniest -- funniest celebrity in D.C. How did you do it? You were beaten by -- by a White House speech writer the next year who -- who interpreted Arianna Huffington, right?

NORQUIST: Well, yeah -- oh year, he was great.

I have helped out for them to find center right talent.

CLEMONS: Right.

NORQUIST: So my job is to get Republican Congressmen, Senators, folks in the press to help participate and if I can't find enough of them, then I go on so I've gone on a couple of years and it's been great fun. I -- - started thinking about doing maybe ten years ago, you know, sort of on the bucket list and it's frightening and terrifying and when it works, it's great fun.

CLEMONS: He's drafted me into it so I'm frightened and terrified right now so I may be on but I need some help from the audience later of how to -- how to deal with humor...

NORQUIST: It's on C-SPAN, you can YouTube it when -- once you've done this, you're out -- and Ralph Nader's going to be joining it this year.

CLEMONS: Oh that's great. I was on -- I was on C-SPAN -- well I'm on C-SPAN a lot, but Jay Leno to a clip one time of the top ten people who had appeared on C-SPAN with the worst hair. I was number ten. Yeah, so truth in advertising.

In any case, Grover you were -- you were talked about by the president of the United States a lot. There was a day when we had John McCain over for the Washington Ideas Forum and he -- and -- and Senator McCain, I know you're friends, nonetheless, said the age of Norquistinism is over and talking about it. But it doesn't seem to be over at all, that -- that you seem to continue to have a profound influence on American politics from ATR, that the oaths, the Wednesday group meetings and what not.

Despite you having substantial differences with -- with other Republicans out there, so how are you -- who -- who are you -- how are you doing this and -- and who are your enemies right now politically? Because they seem to be both within the Republican Party as well as in the other party.

NORQUIST: Well, two things. Americans for Tax Reform, the group that I had, we asked people to take the pledge so we have 219 sitting members of the House who've made that commitment in writing and kept it and taxes will not be raised in the next two years -- the next four years. That just isn't going to happen. So if you're making plans and you're building a castle in the air and it includes a tax increase, your castle isn't going to get built.

Think through how else you want to handle things. And we were told that that was going to fall apart in 2011 and then 2012 and each time, it --it didn't. there were various Republicans, a couple of Congressmen, a couple of Senators, always the same five guys they drag out and say, see, many Republicans are thing -- having impure thoughts about tax increases and the point is they're having impure thoughts but of them pulled trigger and none that actually tried to raise taxes. And it was the same five guys that kept recycling.

And at the end of the day, the modern Reagan Republican Party will not raise your taxes and the reason they've come to that understanding is that they watched in '82 when Reagan was offer \$3...

CLEMONS: Right.

NORQUIST: ... in spending cuts for every dollar of tax increases from the Bob Dole pre-Reagan Republican led Senate and the Democrat House and the tax increases were real and we're still paying them and the spending cuts never happened, not \$3, not \$2, not \$1, spending went up, not down.

Then eight years later, George Herbert Walker Bush was offered \$2 of imaginary spending cuts for every dollar of real tax increases, which I thought was cruel. If you're going to lie to somebody, offer them \$10 of imaginary spending cuts, why \$2? Two is their way of saying you're a cheaper date than the last guy -- which I thought unnecessarily cruel on their part and of course, they took the tax increases, we're still paying them and spending went up, not down.

So at the end of the day, whenever tax increases are on the table, spending cuts, whatever is being discussed disappear. Tax increases push spending cuts off the table because tax increases are what presidents, Congressmen, Senators, governors do instead of reforming government.

When you take tax increases off the table, as happened in 2011 with the Budget Control Act and that -- the post super committee, we've got two and a half trillion dollars in -- in law, spending reductions, no tax increases at all.

So the argument that I got from a handful of Republicans in private and some would argue it publicly, is oh Grover, we might be able to get for, you know, teeny tax increases, huge spending cuts. Well, in theory you could, in theory there are pink unicorns, but there aren't pink unicorns and there aren't such deals to be made and therefore, what -- but when you take tax increases off the table as governors are doing across the country as we did in 2011, we actually get the spending reforms.

CLEMONS: As you, you know, one of the main things that you and I have talked about before that I -- I don't fully understand about those who supported your oath is -- is -- are those that nonetheless committed a lot of resources and a lot of soldiers on two wars.

And huge, huge sums of money spent, but no tax increases. So on one hand, you have national need and that national need might be, you know, to fight an enemy abroad, it might be to invest in Head Start because education of -- of -- of these young children matters a lot. It might be, you know, any number of other -- other important national interest, which very few people might dispute at that -- at that moment, but yet, the -- the strength of the anti tax raise lobby, if we'll call it is so enormous that we get bizarre things where we go and have trillion dollar wars but not pay for them. How do you reconcile that?

NORQUIST: Why would raising taxes have made the occupation of Iraq and Afghanistan for the last ten years more successful?

I mean these are two different decisions and I think at the end of the day, you can make the argument for attacking and knocking the Taliban out of power, you can make the argument for knocking the Ba'athist out of

power in Iraq, it's hard to make an argument for occupying those two countries for ten years, but that made us stronger...

CLEMONS: Well I would argue it didn't.

NORQUIST: One could make that argument.

CLEMONS: And...

NORQUIST: One could argue that Iran is infinitely stronger than it would have if we hadn't taken that approach but the -- that the Taliban is stronger if we hadn't taken that approach and it certainly cost U.S. dollars and lives and -- and limbs.

And -- but so the one does not justify going in and raising taxes, you really have to decide whether certain spending and commitment of -- of lives and -- and energy are worthwhile. Is that a good idea or not? and I think it's important that we need to -- and -- and the center right conservatives, Republicans need to look at defense spending with the same jaundiced eye that they do other kinds of spending.

CLEMONS: I think you've brought that to it when you would go on Colbert and -- and John Stewart and -- and talk about the money we were spending. Tell -- tell -- I was telling this, do you know how much money we're spending in Afghanistan a year, right?

NORQUIST: Yes, it was significantly more than...

CLEMONS: You know, the GDP.

NORQUIST: ... GDP...

CLEMONS: A hundred and twenty billion, and you did -- really I -- I went back and looked at it last night, \$120 billion a year in a country that's \$14 billion from GDP.

On -- on the question there...

NORQUIST: IN theory, you could have bought it for less.

CLEMONS: Yeah, yeah.

And the -- and the -- on the side of, you know, Medicare, Social Security and -- and again, you look at the - these issues which are very contentious parts of -- of the debate, whether you cut those back and, you know, Paul Ryan in the budget he comes out -- as I understand it, rolls back Obamacare completely as a way to pay for this which -- which -- which sounds unrealistic and I don't necessarily debate that or not.

But -- but it is the question of how you deal with these -- these, what have become almost sacred cows, national entitlement structures that deal with many people who've fallen out or fallen behind or aren't taken care of. How in your -- in the Grover Norquist world would you deal with Social Security and sort of entitlement reforms.

NORQUIST: Sure.

You had over the last several years, this discussion that, oh my goodness, why has nobody come up with an idea on how to deal with entitlements? How come nobody's come up with an idea about how to balance the budget? Which is a little bit odd to hear because Paul Ryan has not only designed the Ryan plan out 75 years, but gotten the modern Republican House of Representatives to pass it twice and then get reelected.

So there was originally a thought on the part of Democrats that -- that that was a poison pill, that passing reform with Medicaid, Medicare and other entitlements would, in fact be touching the third rail of American politics and they went out and fondled the third rail of American politics and got reelected.

With Obama winning a strong presidential election, the Republican House reelected itself having voted for that.

See, what the Ryan plan does is it basically takes all of the various means tested welfare programs and there are 185 of them if you add them all up. Some people think a few more but at least 185 and ply their -- the block granting that Clinton did with aid to families with dependent children.

So the one singular success of the Clinton years, the Republicans said we'll do that many times with Medicaid and food stamps and housing programs and others. That saves a great deal of money, give states a lot of flexibility and if we have 57 states taking different approaches, I think that's quite helpful in trying to find out the best and better ways of doing that. Medicare obviously was -- was a bipartisan proposal up before the (inaudible) started running away from it, which I think is a very healthy one which will keep it going. But those sorts of reforms, and I think Social Security should eventually put into a 401K, IRA status which is prefunded and everybody controls and owns their own FICA taxes saving for the future as Chile and a number of other countries have done.

So the reforms and how to do them are out there, people have shown they can get reelected having offered those. We're now waiting for a Republican Senate and a Republican president and then that's the future.

With the (inaudible) have not yet done is actually write down, which is this whole -- what we're going through now: requiring the Democratic-controlled Senate to do what it hasn't done for -- for 1,414 days -- 1,414 today, they haven't done a budget. And now they're gonna be forced to if they want to get paid.

And if they have to write down their thoughts, it clarifies both for them and for the American people the direction they want to take the country in. And they also have to elect 20 Democratic senators in 2014 having done that. And I think it'll be healthy and a healthy exercise to have them actually write down what their budget would look like (inaudible) the Republicans have done it in the House. And I think it's a good idea.

CLEMONS: Were you surprised by the last election despite, you know, Paul Ryan (inaudible) but -- but I know we had you in New York once and you had a great plan (inaudible) at the time, but the tide sort of shifted the Dems way, particularly in the Senate. Were you surprised by the strength in the last election?

NORQUIST: Well, at the end of the day -- yeah, two things, the Republicans held the House. And because of the way it's redistricted -- the Ds redistricted Republicans out of seats in California and Illinois...

(CROSSTALK)

CLEMONS: They learned -- learned a little bit from Tom DeLay.

NORQUIST: Yes, that's right.

And the Republicans redistricted in the red-controlled states in a way not to grab for all the marbles but so even in a strong D year they'll hold the House. Whereas 10 years ago they redistricted Pennsylvania so that in a really good year they had many seats, but 2006, 2008 they gave away five or six of them. So you're looking at a much more stable Republican control of the House.

But if you also want to understand the future of the country, there're 25 states today after the last election with a Republican governor and a Republican house and senate -- 25; 165 million Americans, a majority of Americans live in Republican-controlled states, big states -- Pennsylvania, Ohio, Michigan, Texas, Florida; and it's not just Wyoming.

And there are 12 states -- California, Illinois, Maryland, Massachusetts, Minnesota -- that have 81 million. So a quarter of the American people live in states where the Ds run everything. And more than half the country live in states where the Rs run everything.

And unlike Washington where you've got gridlock because the Republican House can't make the Democratic Senate and president do anything and the president and the Senate can't make the Republicans do anything; they're not raising taxes and they're not gonna be reforming entitlements over the next two to four years because (inaudible) going in different directions.

But at the state level you have not conflict but confluence. And so I was just in Louisiana. The governor there's planning on abolishing the state income tax and the state corporate income tax. North Carolina...

CLEMONS: Bobby Jindal?

NORQUIST: Bobby Jindal.

Not a bad way to introduce yourself as a potential presidential candidate. Gridiron (ph) went well.

(CROSSTALK)

NORQUIST: ... abolishing the state's income tax may be even better. Brownback is doing the same thing in Kansas. I was out in Kansas for his State of the State address where he walked through how they're gonna abolish...

CLEMONS: So tell me what -- what did McDonnell get wrong in Virginia that he got barred from CPAC?

NORQUIST: Two things. He...

CLEMONS: Didn't get barred?

NORQUIST: No, no, he didn't get barred. I'm on the board of ACU.

CLEMONS: I knew. That's why I was going to ask you.

NORQUIST: No, he got an invitation...

CLEMONS: And NPR got it wrong?

NORQUIST: If -- if they said he was barred, yes.

He got an invitation, like a bunch of other people and didn't get back. And then...

(CROSSTALK)

CLEMONS: Oh, so it's his fault?

NORQUIST: Well, yeah.

CLEMONS: Yeah. OK.

NORQUIST: But at some point he probably decided not -- why did he not get back to (inaudible)? Because he knew what he was doing, which was organizing what, unfortunately, became a \$6 billion tax increase to pay for Metrorail.

CLEMONS: I see. So -- so -- you -- before I invite people up to the microphone (inaudible) I'll really ask - ask folks there, because I know I -- I fudged it when we had Grover come in. You said -- it's very interesting -- that after the fiscal cliff deal in which, you know, taxes did go up on -- on certain Americans with incomes over -- over \$400,000, you said, "Talk to Robert Reich, Peter Orszag and other interesting, serious Democrats. They're very unhappy about what just happened. I'm happy. It ought to give you a little bit of clue about who won round one in this fight."

So in -- is it your assessment that despite that tax increase that -- that Republicans essentially did a deal on that overall that was a loss of a battle, not the loss of a war. I mean, how does the -- how does the Norquist world look at that?

NORQUIST: No, I'd -- I'd go further. That's when Obama lost control of his second term.

Let's look at what happened. There was -- because the 2001 Bush tax cut and the 2003 Bush tax cut and the MT (ph) patch, which (inaudible) repeatedly extended. All three of those tax cuts and a handful of others all ended on January 1st two months ago. And if nothing had happened, if Obama just sat there or the Senate had just sat there or the House just sat there and they didn't pass an alternative tax plan, there was a \$500 billion tax increase in 2013; \$5 trillion tax increase over the next decade.

What -- what the president did was he took 85 percent of the dollar value of that tax cut and took it off the table, left it with the American people permanently -- permanently.

And Bush made the comment -- he said if they'd offered me permanency in 2001, 2003 for 85 percent of what I'd got, I'd have done that in a second to get it permanent. What we got was temporary because it was done through budget reconciliation, could only be done in a 10-year window.

Had the president instead said OK -- he was so focused on nicking the wrench and (inaudible) pound of flesh, "Ha ha, I got rich people. You lose," that he missed that he did that. OK, could have had the whole thing. He got 15 percent of it, getting 1 percent of the population hit.

Had he said, 'I'll give you the same deal but for the next year and every year we'll extend these tax cuts, temporary tax cuts, and you'll have to re-up them,' then when we sit down and talk about the sequester or the budget questions, he'd have had the sword of Damocles hanging over the Republicans that if you don't give me what I want on spending I'll lower the boom on taxes. Instead, he gave it all away and he has no currents (ph).

So he thought that somehow he'd won the fiscal cliff because of his strong personality or because he -- "I won the 2012 election. I get to tell everybody what to do. I have this moral authority. The country's with me." And you've seen the collapse in that in The Washington Post front page today on the -- on the -- the numbers collapse and people's sense of that.

But it wasn't his personal strength or popularity or -- or having won the election; was he had all the cards -- "If you don't do what I say it's \$500 billion tax increase." He could have taken anything off the table and that would have been what happened because he had complete control.

Now we go to the sequester. If nothing happens, if the House, Senate and the president don't vote an alternative, we have a \$1.2 trillion spending cut. And then the president starts now-nowing (ph) the Republicans saying, "OK, you have to do this, this and this," and they just sort of look at him, you know, "What are you talking about? We don't have to do anything. We won. And unless we put our signature to something, we win. So why would -- why would we walk into a negotiation to give away that which we won in 2011 that by the way was your idea, as Bob Woodward pointed out."

So by allowing those temporary tax cuts, which gave him tremendous leverage, to become permanent, he gave away his leverage for the next four years.

CLEMONS: We'll go to Jed Schilling (ph) in a second, but -- well, it's just the political tactic. I mean, I was fascinated by the president -- President Obama's framing of you. And he said, "We need to do essentially what Grover Norquist has done in climate change. We need to do what Grover Norquist has done in the (inaudible)." It basically -- it's -- it was a statement of respect for what you had achieved, if -- if not substantively, at least tactically in the U.S.

And when I go back and I look at your fellow travelers in the Reagan era -- people like Ralph Reed, Karl Rove and others that have been there -- you've turned out to be the most resilient, the one who's continued to come back.

I mean, Carl goes up and down. He's back again. Ralph Reed may be -- may be back again. But did -- did -- you haven't gone through same somersaults they have, so I'm interested in -- in how the oath and your focus on taxes came about, and any kind of -- kind of handicapping you can quickly give us about, not your rivals, but other kind of Republican activists and -- and their methodologies. And then we'll jump to Judge Schilling.

NORQUIST: Sure.

Look, the taxpayer protection pledge has several advantages. It's very succinct. It won't raise taxes. No net tax increase, OK?

CLEMONS: Shorter than a twitter line?

NORQUIST: Yes. And some...

CLEMONS: He tweets @governorquist -- @governorquist, right?

NORQUIST: I do. 48,000 tweeter friends -- twitter friends -- which is very interesting. It's like Haiku or something to try. And you can think in 140 characters. You -- when you type it, you know you -- you've hit the zone.

When I started doing it, I used to end up with many too many, and then I'd have to edit down, but twitter is an art form. And great fun.

But what we did with the pledge is, it's simple, it's binary -- "yes, no."

Some politicians and -- and groups will -- "Here's our 25-point manifesto, and if you don't agree with all 25 points, we hate you." Well, first of all, it's too many to remember. And what about the guy who's with you on 20 (inaudible), not 25?

CLEMONS: Hmm.

NORQUIST: Is he the opposite guy? It's easy for me to keep track of my friends and the guys who took the pledge and kept it. People who have the door open to tax increases, we can have an argument with. And I can work with many people, but I don't have an argument with anybody who takes the pledge and -- I may disagree with him on different issues, but at H.E.R. (ph), it's pretty binary.

So I think that clarity, plus, it has popular support and intensity.

CLEMONS: If somebody violates the pledge, do you let them come back after they've sort of--

NORQUIST: First of all, very few people actually break the pledge.

CLEMONS: Hmm.

NORQUIST: And George Herbert Walker Bush is my poster child for -- you know, nobody's life is a complete waste. Some people serve as bad examples.

(LAUGHTER)

"Children, don't do that." Have 'em pickled (ph) in a drawer on the desk. No, it's, "don't do this"...

CLEMONS: Yeah.

NORQUIST: ... it's the wrong way to go. You had a -- here, you had a president -- was a very successful president.

CLEMONS: Right.

NORQUIST: Kicked Iraq out of Kuwait and didn't get stuck occupying the place for a decade. Managed the collapse of the Soviet Union without a lot of blood on the floor. And then he...

CLEMONS: Violated the oath.

NORQUIST: ... shot a hole in the bottom of the boat...

CLEMONS: Yeah.

NORQUIST: ... with tax increase and the boat sank.

CLEMONS: Hmm.

NORQUIST: Kind of demonstrates the power of the tax issue.

CLEMONS: All right, we got a few minutes.

Judge Schilling (ph)?

NORQUIST: Sure.

QUESTION: You know, this is interesting, and you're clearly opposed to any increases in tax, but going back in history, there are major tax increases. In order to support the funding of World War II, and some of the southern borders. Would you have supported those taxes, or would you have opposed them?

NORQUIST: Well, not having been there, the -- obviously, two things happened there. I would -- I was a very big fan of the Byrd Committee, which was established during World II. It was the opposite of the Appropriations Committee, and that's one where the other committee had come up with pieces of legislation and programs to de-fund. That's why the CCC isn't still around, and the WPA isn't still around. That committee put together legislation to cut those in half and then to phase them out.

So when Truman responded in Korea, North Korea, he had a 25 percent across-the-board cut in other spending to handle that.

So I think, first, two things. First, you have to ask yourself: Is this a necessary war -- World War II? Yes, we were attacked. But not all the wars -- I mean, Spanish American War did not start with viciously attacking us.

QUESTION: (inaudible) tax increases in World War II.

NORQUIST: I presume so, but not being a complete historian, I'm more focused on what they did on cutting spending in other places.

QUESTION: (inaudible), I can't -- yeah...

QUESTION: The other point is I understand you were not supportive of the war in Afghanistan and Iraq, which led to (inaudible) expenditures based on (inaudible).

NORQUIST: I was not -- one second -- I was not -- I did not object to knocking out the Taliban, which took 3 months. I am a critic of the idea of staying and occupying the place afterwards.

QUESTION: (inaudible) occupying (inaudible)

NORQUIST: That's not a war. That's an occupation.

QUESTION: (inaudible) the people who supported that, who paid for it through higher taxes? Would you support that?

CLEMONS: And then I've got to end it, because we don't have enough time to go back and forth. I'm sorry.

NORQUIST: No, the government -- the government does a great number of things -- the government does a great number of things that waste money and are destructive. And that's not an argument for raising taxes to pay for them. It's an argument for stopping doing wasteful and destructive things.

CLEMONS: Yes, sir? We'll go lightning round, so ask the question. Yeah.

QUESTION: All right. Jeffrey Lynn (ph) from Senator Angus King's office.

I was wondering, if you had to choose, Mr. Norquist, sir, if you would choose between (inaudible) tax reform, if you had to cap the deductions or eliminate certain exemptions, which option would you take, sir?

NORQUIST: As long as it's revenue-neutral, you're taking rates down. I think they're both fine. There are some deductions and credits that ought not to be there in the first place. There are others that you might say, well, those have virtues, but -- but, you know, cap them at a certain level. They're only (inaudible) 85 percent or 75 percent.

I think they're both good ways of doing -- of -- of freeing up resources that you can then use to reduce marginal tax rates for people. I think some deductions and credits -- charitable contributions -- you might want to cap, as opposed to say no. There are others such as the tax credits for, you know, making energy out of watercross or whatever the thought of the day is, that you could probably pass on having at all.

CLEMONS: So we have Governor Pawlenty here. I'll take just your question, your question, Ed, real quickly. Just make them real brief and we'll give Grover the last word.

QUESTION: (inaudible) had been no tax cuts, Bush tax cuts (inaudible), probably would be in a much more favorable (inaudible) situation right now. The debt would be much smaller and (inaudible) over the last (inaudible).

CLEMONS: I will log that as a comment, not a question, but thank you.

And yes?

QUESTION: I'll see if I qualify as a question.

In this last election, you called this a victory that the House stayed Republican (inaudible). The Senate, however, the Republicans won, and you'll correct me if I got this wrong, eight states -- the worst performance by a major party in about 40 years. Was that a success? And if the Democrats had done it, would you be reminding me of it?

NORQUIST: The Senate?

QUESTION: The Senate contests last year and the Republicans (inaudible).

NORQUIST: The Republicans -- the Republicans did much more poorly in the Senate races than they -- than they expected to certainly at the beginning of the year. They were expecting to win states such as Vermont and Florida. They thought for sure North Dakota and Montana, Missouri, Indiana. These were all for-sure states.

And they turned out -- and Maine -- when...

QUESTION: (inaudible) election for the Republicans.

NORQUIST: No, the Maine -- the -- the -- Senate races were -- were very bad. I don't think any of those guys lost because they were for limiting government and low taxes. The fellow from Missouri managed to lose rather descriptively and interestingly all on his very own over in the corner, not in any way associating himself with the modern Republican Party when he did that.

The House, I would argue, had the benefit of -- of actually running on a plan to balance the budget and reform entitlements, the Ryan plan. I think there's great virtue in -- in putting something in writing and winning with that. Then you have the moral authority to say, "And now we govern."

The counter to that was what happened after Obama won in 2008 and then he dropped \$800 billion on the table with the stimulus and said, "Oh, I didn't tell you about this?" And his numbers started to collapse and you got the reaction to which cost him the House in 2010 because he hadn't told people he was going to do that. And even when he sort of said what he wanted to do on healthcare, he hadn't put together a 3,000-page piece of legislation.

If he had -- if he vetted that with the American people, I don't think he'd have been pushed -- and gotten elected -- I don't think he'd have done poorly in 2010. He wouldn't have had the push-back. It's really a good idea to tell people ahead of time what you'll do with power, rather than give me power and I'll tell you what I'll do with it. I think that's a very dangerous way for politicians to operate. I much prefer -- which is why the pledges work. The pledge is out front.

It's not like Democrats don't have pledges. The AFL-CIO -- guys who get elected make promises to the AFL-CIO and the trial lawyers that are very extensive and very complete in private, not in public. I'm for public commitment.

CLEMONS: Well, I just want to say I'm grateful to Grover Norquist, who has spoken at many of the Atlantic forums and my past New America forums. And I say this publicly, I've always admired how you have succeeded in Washington. I tell people, you know, D.C. is a free trade zone. People can organize, pursue what they want. You've done very well, and so a lot of the criticism you've taken is in part based on the success of what you've achieved.

That said, I've also been fascinated by some of the battles you've had within your party. The Republican Party is one that occasionally goes through purges and, you know, it may not want gay people. It may not want people, you know, who aren't into the whole issue of who's the pope today. And you've been battling for a big-tent Republicanism and you are someone who went in, to Jed Schilling's (ph) point, raised and told a lot of conservatives how much these wars were costing. And I saw it from polling, it changed the way -- and I think the White House was counting on that conservative report to keep Afghanistan going and you kind of broke the back of that.

NORQUIST: It's also why the president misjudged when he thought Republicans would fold on the sequester.

CLEMONS: Right.

NORQUIST: Because he listened to four Republican senators and congressman who are on C-SPAN a lot saying that they'd get the vapors if the defense budget was nicked. And he thought they were speaking for the whole party.

CLEMONS: So ladies and gentlemen, please give a round of applause for someone many call the most powerful man in Washington.

(APPLAUSE)

END