

**Theodore H. White Lecture**  
*on* **Press and Politics**

*with* **The Honorable Alan K. Simpson**

*and the awarding of the*

**David Nyhan Prize for Political Reporting**

*to Leonard Pitts Jr.*

**2013**



**HARVARD** Kennedy School

**SHORENSTEIN CENTER**

on Media, Politics and Public Policy



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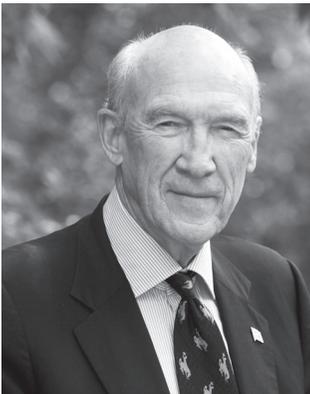




The Theodore H. White Lecture commemorates the life of the reporter and historian who created the style and set the standard for contemporary political journalism and campaign coverage.

White, who began his journalism career delivering the *Boston Post*, entered Harvard College in 1932 on a newsboy's scholarship. He studied Chinese history and oriental languages.

In 1939 he witnessed the bombing of Chungking while freelance reporting on a Sheldon Fellowship. In 1959 White sought support for a 20-year research project, a retrospective of presidential campaigns. After being advised by fellow reporters to drop this academic exercise, White took to the campaign trail, and, relegated to the "zoo plane," changed the course of American political journalism with the publication of *The Making of a President*, in 1960. The 1964, 1968, and 1972 editions of *The Making of a President*, along with *America in Search of Itself*, remain vital documents to the study of campaigns and the press. Before his death in 1986, White also served on the Visiting Committee at the Kennedy School of Government; he was one of the architects of what has become the Shorenstein Center on Media, Politics and Public Policy.



**Alan K. Simpson** served in the U.S. Senate (R-Wyoming) from January 1979 to 1997, where he was the Assistant Republican Leader, chairman of the Subcommittee of Immigration and Refugee Policy of the Senate Judiciary Committee, chairman of the Subcommittee on Social Security and member of the Committee on Aging, and chairman of the Veterans Affairs Committee. In the spring of 1997, Simpson traveled from Washington to Cambridge and served as the Visiting Lombard Lecturer at the Kennedy

School, under the auspices of the Shorenstein Center. From 1998 to 2000, Simpson was the director of the Institute of Politics, also at Harvard's Kennedy School of Government. In March 2010, Simpson was appointed by the president as the Co-Chairman of the National Commission on Fiscal Responsibility and Reform and he served on the Iraq Study Group in 2006. Currently, he practices law in Wyoming and is a frequent participant in national conversations about the media and politics, and fiscal reform.

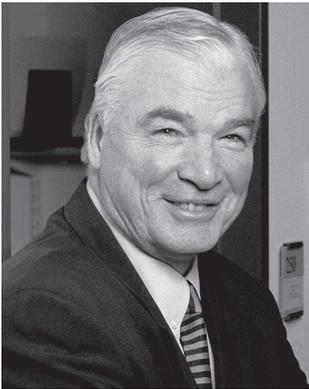




**Leonard Pitts Jr.** was born and raised in Southern California and now lives in suburban Washington, D.C., with his wife and children. He is a columnist for the *Miami Herald* and won the 2004 Pulitzer Prize for commentary. He is also the author of several books including *Freeman*, *Before I Forget* and *Becoming Dad: Black Men and the Journey to Fatherhood*. His recent columns on the fatal shooting of Trayvon Martin by George Zimmerman have garnered much attention from his peers and readers alike.

He is a three-time recipient of the National Association of Black Journalists' Award of Excellence, a five-time recipient of the Atlantic City Press Club's National Headliners Award and a seven-time recipient of the Society of Professional Journalists' Green Eyeshade Award.

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**David Nyhan** was a columnist and reporter at *The Boston Globe* for 30 years. A graduate of Harvard College and a Shorenstein Fellow in the spring of 2001, Nyhan was a regular participant in Shorenstein Center activities before, during and after his Fellowship. Nyhan died unexpectedly in 2005. In his eulogy Senator Edward Kennedy said of Nyhan, "Dave was a man of amazing talent, but most of all he was a man of the people who never forgot his roots....In so many ways, but especially in the daily example of

his own extraordinary life, Dave was the conscience of his community." The hallmark of David Nyhan's brand of journalism was the courage to champion unpopular causes and challenge the powerful with relentless reporting and brave eloquence. In his memory, the Shorenstein Center established the David Nyhan Prize for Political Journalism.



# Theodore H. White Lecture on Press and Politics

November 12, 2013

**Mr. Jones:** Welcome and good evening. I'm Alex Jones, director of the Shorenstein Center on Media, Politics and Public Policy here at the Kennedy School of Government. We're very glad to have you with us tonight on a very happy night. This evening each year at the Shorenstein Center is a real highlight of the year for us. It's our 27th year of existence, and one of the very first things that happened when Marvin Kalb became the first and founding director of the Shorenstein Center was that he went out of his way to create the Theodore White Lecture. And it has been ever since one of our big moments. And I'll have more to say about that a bit later.

As some of you already know, the Shorenstein Center was founded in 1986 as a memorial to Joan Shorenstein, a truly remarkable television journalist who died of breast cancer after a distinguished career. Her father, Walter Shorenstein, endowed the Center as a place for a focused and searching examination of the intersection of press, politics and public policy.

Walter Shorenstein not only made the Center possible, but remained vitally interested in what we do and was our unstinting supporter and friend. He was above all else a great citizen. And the Theodore White Lecture and the David Nyhan Prize are to recognize that same kind of engaged, activist citizenship from a journalistic perspective. With us tonight is Walter's son, Doug Shorenstein. Please join me in expressing our appreciation and respect for the Shorenstein family. (Applause)

A bit later you will hear from our Theodore White Lecturer for 2013, Alan Simpson. But first I have another task to perform, which is also an honor. In 2005 we established the David Nyhan Prize for Political Journalism in memory of our friend and former Fellow. David Nyhan was a man of many parts, a devoted family man, a guy who liked to call people "pal" and meant it, a man with a big personality and a very big smile. As a Shorenstein Fellow he created a kind of glow. Tonight we honor another aspect of David Nyhan, that of consummate reporter and political journalist, which is the role that occupied much of his life and at which he could not be bested.

David was a reporter, then a columnist at *The Boston Globe* and his work had both a theme and a character. The theme was always power, political power and also especially the abuse of political power by the

bigshots at the expense of the little guys. Yet he loved politicians. Well, let me amend that a bit. I think the current Congress would have sent him into a frenzied rage, which is also part of who he was. But he would not have been predictable. He was also always surprising his readers with his take on things because most of all, David Nyhan was his own man, and he called them as he saw them.

In his memory and honor the Nyhan family and many friends and admirers of David Nyhan have endowed the David Nyhan Prize for Political Journalism to recognize the kind of gutsy, stylish and relentless journalism that David Nyhan embodied. David's wife, Olivia, is with us tonight, as are his children, Veronica, Kate and Nick and other members of the Nyhan family and I would like to ask them all to please stand. (Applause)

This year's David Nyhan Prize for Political Journalism is awarded to Leonard Pitts Jr. This is Leonard Pitts on the recent film, *12 Years a Slave*, which has been called by many the most unsparingly honest and clear-eyed film ever made about slavery. "The film surprises you with its vast silences. It is an emptiness that at first seems jarring to sensibilities trained to believe every moment must be crammed. By contrast this movie takes you into moments of pregnant stillness, no movement on the screen, no dialogue, no swelling music to queue your emotions. At one point the camera takes what feels like a minute to study the face of Solomon Northup, the free black man kidnapped and sold into slavery. As he absorbs the awfulness of his predicament, he does nothing, he says nothing, he simply is."

It is that kind of powerful, evocative human writing that has earned Leonard Pitts a devoted following in his syndicated columns and his 2004 Pulitzer Prize for Commentary, as well as many other awards. Tavis Smiley of PBS has called him "the most insightful and inspiring columnist of his generation." He was born in California, entered the University of Southern California at 15 in a special honors program and graduated with a degree in English at 19 and he hasn't looked back. Leonard Pitts has a way. You may remember his angry, defiant column in the immediate aftermath of 9/11, which he called "We'll Go Forward from This Moment." It was an open letter to the terrorists and it went viral and has since been set to music, reprinted as a poster and even read on his show by a much-moved Regis Philbin.

He's a man whose words reflect his head and his heart. He has written books on fatherhood, and his book, *Freeman*, about a freed slave who goes in search of his wife in the immediate aftermath of the Civil War, won the Black Caucus of the American Library Association 2013 Award for Fiction. His loyalty is to his view of what is true. While he lambasted the authors of the government shutdown, he also wrote a stinging rant aimed at Barack

Obama after the Obamacare collapse that began, “Let us now praise competence” and compared Obama’s failure to George W. Bush’s disastrous response to Katrina.

Connie Schultz of *The Plain Dealer* in Cleveland summed him up very well: “Leonard Pitts refused to be predictable or to rest on his considerable laurels. He is funny when you think there is not a smidgen of humor to be found, enraged at the very moment we thought we no longer cared, and he shakes us up, just when we were so certain we have it all figured out. In other words, he makes us better for having read him.” To me he sounds a lot like David Nyhan. It gives me great pleasure to award the 2013 David Nyhan Prize for Political Journalism to Leonard Pitts Jr. (Applause)

**Mr. Pitts:** Wow. Thank you very much to all of you for that very generous applause. Thank you to the Shorestein Center for this award. I have to say I am very pleased and I am very proud and I’m also very sorry for myself that I never knew David Nyhan. I feel like I missed a treat just on what I’ve been hearing. But I have to admit, having said all of that, that I find myself a little surprised to be a winner of an award for political journalism. I have spent the last 20 years, when people ask me what I write about, I tell them that I am not a political columnist. And now I find out that apparently I am. (Laughter)

But what I always mean when I say that, I guess you can get a sense just by looking at some of the questions that obsess political journalists at this moment, I guess the biggest question of which would be, who is the frontrunner for 2016 in the Republican and Democratic primaries? Is Chris Christie our next president or is Hillary Clinton our next president and why? This seems to be a question of obsessive importance for a lot of my colleagues, and with due respect to them I suppose that there is a place for that. But that for me, as a political columnist, as a political writer, it holds no interest. For me, if you want to talk about politics, you don’t talk about it in this vacuum where it’s all a game of who’s up, who’s down, who’s in, who’s out, who is doing well, who is not doing well. These issues, these things, these people have real-life weight, real-life connotation, real-life impact. So rather than talk about who is in or who is out, I like to use the space that I am granted in the newspaper and on the computer page to talk about the lack of connectedness among us as Americans, this sense that this divide between left and right and red and blue is becoming something

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that is where we find ourselves living almost in alternate realities. That's politics to me. I would rather talk about the flowering of gay rights and how amazingly fast it has come to pass that the right of people to love who they love, as they wish to love and be respected for that has come to be an American ideal. That's politics to me. (Applause)

I would rather talk about the erosion of African American citizenship. I'd rather talk about the fact that 50 years, almost 50 years after the passage

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of the Voting Rights Act, suddenly we have to fight for voting rights again. That is politics to me, and these are the things that obsess me as a writer. These are the things that are important to me as a writer, how we treat one another as black and white, as men and women, as Jew and Gentile, as Muslim and as Christian, how we get along with one another as Americans and how we as Americans get along with the rest of the world—that, to me, is what politics is about. That, to me, is the highest cause that politics can serve.

I will flatter myself in thinking that your award, your giving to me of this award, suggests that I've done in some small measure what I set out to do in bringing light to those areas of politics and in making those things unavoidable for us to discuss, as I would argue they always should be and always should have been. Indeed, we should give the Middle East as much attention as we do our speculation as to Hillary Clinton's future two years hence, three years hence. Thank you very much. (Applause)

**Mr. Jones:** Sounds like the very best kind of political reporter and columnist as far as I can tell. Theodore White was a consummate reporter himself. And his passion was politics. He came to Harvard on a newsboy's scholarship. He went on to a very distinguished career as a journalist and also an historian. Indeed, Teddy White, as he was universally known, changed both political journalism and politics when he wrote *The Making of the President 1960*, about the Kennedy-Nixon campaign. For the first time, he raised the curtain on the warts of all sides of presidential campaigns and changed campaign coverage forever.

Ever since Teddy White, insider candor and behind-the-scenes drama have been a staple of campaign coverage. He followed that first book with three more, *The Making of the President* books in 1964, '68 and '72. No one

has yet surpassed those smart and groundbreaking examinations of what happens and why in the maelstrom of a political campaign, although some of you may argue that the recent books on the Obama administration come close. It is fair to say that Teddy White's heirs are the journalists of today who try to pierce the veil of politics, to understand what is happening and to then analyze and deliver the goods on those of us who are trying to understand.

Teddy White was one of the architects of what became the Shorenstein Center. One of the first moves Marvin Kalb, the Center's founding director, made was to raise the funds and establish the Theodore White Lecture on the Press and Politics in his honor. This year the White Lecture is to be delivered by Senator Alan K. Simpson, who seems to be known to most everyone as Al. That familiarity and informality and lack of pretense are signatures of the man. The other thing he is known for and much admired for is his astonishing willingness to speak his mind. It is not at all surprising that his official biography is entitled *Shooting from the Lip*. Al was born in Colorado, but has long been identified with the state of Wyoming, where his father was governor and senator.

In *Shooting from the Lip*, which is also a warts-and-all biography written in a large measure from the personal journals that he turned over to his biographer, the story is not a simple one of a young man inspired; rather, it tells how a young man who had spent time on federal probation, had returned from the Army and fell into a deep depression. Those of us who know Senator Simpson, Al Simpson, can only shake our heads in wonder that a man with the zest and exuberance of a teenager could ever be depressed. He shook that depression by getting elected to the Wyoming legislature, then to the U.S. Senate and after a single term to the position as Whip of the Senate's Republicans. For 18 years he punched political sacred cows, challenged the media and brought key legislation to passage in memorable fashion.

When he left the Senate, Marvin Kalb invited him to teach here as Visiting Lombard Lecturer. And he went on to be director of the Institute of Politics here at the Kennedy School. He has been looked to repeatedly for leadership, most prominently when he teamed with Democrat Erskine Bowles recently to seek a solution to what had been long regarded as a looming threat to our nation, our massive and growing national debt. He was, as his biographer observes, an exemplar of something that has all but disappeared: compromise.

"Throughout his career he has valued practicality over partisanship," his biographer wrote, "and during debate on important issues, he has taken a slice when a full loaf wasn't attainable." This is not to say that he hasn't been a powerful advocate. He has thundered for years about the

need to reduce the deficit and the danger of debt. And only last month had the honor of being lambasted by Paul Krugman in *The New York Times* column as a doomsayer. He doesn't seem to be swayed, as far as I can tell. He has outraged his fellow Republicans by blasting what he viewed as their crazy threat to shut down the government and the pervasive determination of the Tea Party crowd to brook no compromise.

As you might expect, the 2012 election campaign debate over tax increases and the debt ceiling crisis provided some vintage Simpson shooting from the lip. For instance, in the heat of the 2012 battle over whether some taxes on the wealthy should be raised, he said, and I quote, "I guess I'm known as a RINO now, which means Republican In Name Only, because I guess of social views, perhaps, or common sense would be another one which seems to escape members of our party....for Heaven's sake, you have Grover Norquist wandering the earth in his white robes saying that if you raise taxes one penny, he'll defeat you. He can't murder you. He can't burn down your house. The only thing he can do to you, as an elected official, is defeat you at re-election. And if that means more to you than your country, when we need patriots to come out in a situation when we're in extremity, you shouldn't even be in Congress."

To my mind, Alan K. Simpson is not only a patriot, but a statesman. Would that there were many more like him. It is my honor to present the Theodore White Lecturer for 2013, the Honorable Alan K. Simpson. (Applause)

**Sen. Simpson:** Of all the introductions I have ever had that was the most recent. (Laughter)

I can't tell you how I appreciated that. And I was born in Denver, but conceived in Wyoming. That's a distinction that I wanted to share. Well, it's a great evening for me. It's a great honor and a very certain privilege to be at this forum because at this forum with this university at this institute, I spent four of the most precious and satisfying years of my life, here at the Kennedy School, at the request of my friend Marvin Kalb who is sitting there this evening. He said to me in January of '97, when I left, "I want you to come to Harvard to teach." I said, "Hell, I've never taught anything." He said, "I know, but you have something to teach." And I thought, well, that's interesting. Anyway, enough of that. So Ann and I came. She's here tonight, 60 years with this glorious woman, there she is. And she said that living with me was much like a religious experience—a living hell! (Laughter)

She didn't say that! Now, so 60 years together, married all that time, of course, you don't even have to say that in politics anymore...I don't know why I even brought it up! We lived with the students at Eliot House in L22. We had the run of the place and the run of Boston. Dear friends were made

here in this special four years when I taught a class entitled “The Creating of Legislation, Congress and the Press.” Now, remember, I couldn’t have gotten into Harvard if I’d picked the locks! It was beyond my comprehension that I should be wandering about here, because I never graduated *cum laude*, I graduated “thank the Lawdy” in all my academic institutions. (Laughter)

Let me say I’m very pleased to share the evening with the David Nyhan family. He was a great guy. He was fair, firm, patriotic and a hell of a lot of fun. He was warm, wise and witty. He invited me to more “stuff” around here and you may recall his family saying, “Where are you going with that guy?” But he took me to his clubs and his organizations and it was a wonderful time. And there are dear friends here in this audience tonight, friends we made before and after Harvard, David and Rosalie [McCullough] there and Marvin [Kalb] over here. Oh, Lord, I started with Graham [Allison] and Richard [Parker] and Tom [Patterson] and Edie [Holway] and on and on. It was a wonderful experience. And I conducted and hosted many a forum in this wonderful place and now it’s all been re-done in a new and remarkable way. A great arena for discourse and discussion and diversity and thought.

I’ve always had a most interesting relationship with the press. I had the strange view that the First Amendment belonged to me too, a sick idea, I know, but just thought I’d throw it out there! And so I thought that I got to whack on them as they got to whack on me. It seemed to me that was very fair to do that. And it worked, because I always had another rule. In every case, when they’re after your butt, answer the phone. And I did that. No tricks. No slanting, no cover up, no gimmicks, just answer their questions.

I often enjoyed these Teddy White Lectures and the panel discussions, and so to be honored myself gives me great pleasure. In fact, a guy could even get a little cocky. No, I didn’t mean that, I just threw it in. Anyway, it tickles me to death to do this, because I met Teddy when I came to the U.S. Senate in ’78, ’79, and he was often in the halls because he was a journalist’s journalist. He was a denizen of Dorchester. That’s where he was born. And then Harvard, and as Alex says, he commanded respect. And not all of us in journalism or politics command much of that in these times.

I’ve always had a deep belief that two things could make things better and make the world of government and public service a better place. I think politicians should give up their cherished plea, “I want to go off the record.” That’s a cover-your-fanny special. Any journalist that listened too long to a politician who continually wants to “go off the record” should go into a new line of work. Then, of course, the other one is where the journalist, I think, would be to give up their sage-like “anonymous source.” I’ve

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never seen an anonymous source that said, "This is one of the greatest guys I've ever known." No, no, the source says, "This is a boneheaded, stone age, mouth breathing anthropoid," a high placed official source said. It's beautiful stuff there. We don't know who said it, probably the guy at the desk next door.

Well, anyway, that's all part of public life and politics. There are those

of us who like to grapple in this mysterious alchemy of politics. I would always say to my students, "So you don't like politics and partisanship, do you?" "No," they say, "it's stupid, silly, banal, ugly, childish, negative, bizarre, irritating and exhausting." So I tell them, "Well, then why don't you move to a country where they don't have any politics or any partisanship? Then write me a note and tell me how much fun you are having. You would find there the loss of freedom of speech, a loss of right of assembly, the loss of freedom itself." And I would say that you can't hate politics and love democracy. Take your pick. But you can't hate politicians and love democracy. It doesn't work that way.

And of course politics is on every tongue, the word itself. The word is interesting, comes from the Greek. The Greeks gave us the great word of democracy, including *demo*, *demo kratia*, so politics, *poli*, meaning many, and "tics," meaning blood sucking insects. (Laughter)

I had intended to leave that out, but I thought, well, what the hell, you have nothing to lose here. You have to know several other truths first, if you want to get through this kind of life's work—because politics in its

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own selfish state is barbaric—if that's all you were ever into is politics and you're consumed and obsessed with it, if that's all you have you're never going to make it. You have to have the softening agents of life, which are music and theater and

art and books and the visual arts and the performing arts and poetry, even if it's Robert Service. And without those things pure politics can bring a person down and it can bring a party down, it can certainly bring a country down.

As for me, I've been on the A list and the Z list. I've been the toast of the town one day and toast the next. I can tell you all about those later. And you have your skin ripped off and find out that it grows back double strength, an interesting and curious thing. Remember, too, several vital things that I do, humor is my sword and my shield. My mother taught me

that humor was the universal solvent against the abrasive elements of life. Don't ever forget that one. And another one, hatred corrodes the container it's carried in. And in this country, today, there is much hatred. I didn't say dislike, I said hatred. And it's a very corrosive, corrosive force.

So let me give you the definition of politics, there will be a test. No, not really. But it's mine. Nobody has tried to cabbage it and here it is, important: In politics there are no right answers, none, only a continuing flow of compromises among groups resulting in a changing, cloudy and ambiguous series of public decisions where appetite and ambition compete openly with knowledge and wisdom. That's all there is. And nothing you can develop that's better than that one.

And then always remember too the human comedy aspects of all this. That in whatever group or association you are connected with, whether your business, your church, your club, any confluence of your colleagues anywhere, your fellow humans, you must remember that about 15 percent of those good people are screwballs, light-weights and boobs. And you wouldn't want those people not represented in Congress. And they are, they're there. (Laughter)

And they're all ours. That's another one to remember. And so now, here we go. I know what time it is. I did not volunteer for the Debt Commission. Erskine and I were appointed by our president—he is my president, too, I feel strongly about that always—in January of 2010. And our commission worked for many months on this serious issue and turned in our report December 1, 2010, with ringing non-endorsements from the president and every other living politician. Now, you'd think we would be disappointed, no, we were

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just puzzled. So we just went forward, sturdily, because people would say, "Well, who voted for this stuff?" Well, it was a 67-page report called *The Moment of Truth*. It's written in English. There are not a lot of graphs and it uses words like "going broke" and "shared sacrifice," these are torturous words, and also "pain," we used words like that.

Five Democrats voted for it, five Republicans, one Independent, that's pretty good. That's a super majority of 18. So who voted for it? Well, I said Dick Durbin. Dick Durbin? That commie from Illinois, for God's sake. Well, Tom Coburn, Tom Coburn of Oklahoma, that right-wing kook, come on. And it said, well, that's what's wrong with your country today? You just identify a guy and then rip them right there. Durbin was a big help. Coburn was terrific. Andy Stern, the great union leader was a great help. Later he said, "I wish I had voted for it." He's working hard on things for the union movement and they need a lot of work. And he's in there, good guy.

Anyway, the president took a walk from it because his re-election was looming. And his base would have said: "Look, wait a minute there, pal, you didn't close Guantanamo. We have a big mark on you on that one. You

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**Health care is on  
automatic pilot and  
headed for Mt. Everest.**

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didn't knock the deficit in half. You got a big, big mark on that one. And now you're meddling around with the entitlements programs for precious seniors and veterans and you will be dashed to the rocks." So he stepped away, and I think at that time the Republicans prob-

ably would have caucused and said that if he'd voted for it, they would have decided to unanimously vote against it, because that's the bitterness that's out there and it's very real.

So, it was an extraordinary thing. Over on the right, as I say, the Republicans would have said, "Were they talking about taxes and revenue in there?" And they said, "Yeah." Oh, Lord, we can't have that. Grover Norquist will come to your home by himself with his white robes on and speak to you in a Messiah-like fashion. So Erskine and I said, "Well, we'll just hit the road, and tell people as we travel around the country, 'Pull up a chair, we don't do BS or mush and we'll tell you where your country is.'" So, here is where we are. Kind of short. We borrow 3.6 billion bucks a day. For every buck we spend we borrow 40 cents. We owe 16.5 trillion bucks, but nobody knows what a trillion is so that doesn't make a damn bit of difference to anybody.

Health care is on automatic pilot and headed for Mt. Everest. And forget what you call it—it doesn't matter what you call it, because there is no cost containment in it until 2014 or after. And remember the doc

fix? That was in the previous law that we would do something to docs on Medicare. And the minute we did it, they showed up before Congress said, “We can’t have this. You can’t do this to us!” So we did a “doc fix.” That cost us about \$140 billion in the next 10 years. We’ll do a “fix” for anybody who howls down the road, you can be assured of that. And they’ll be assured, too, because their contributions are unlimited to the campaigns and there’s no limit on the amount.

So, we were a little puzzled there. So I said, we have to tell them what a trillion is, Erskine. He said, well—Erskine is a numbers guy, I do the color. And so Erskine, I said, I’ve got it, Erskine, here it is. The big bang theory of the universe happened 13 billion 800 million years ago. And that ain’t even close to a trillion and we owe 17 of those babies. Now, that’s where we are. But then, of course, people go back to bed on that one, too. But I think it’s important to know that it is actually impossible to describe all that.

So, let me get to the great myths and distortion of the day. First, defense, with all due respect to Ash Carter, who I think highly of. We dug into the Defense Department. We had eight months to do so. Kent Conrad, Democrat, said are we really hollowing out our defense? And Admiral Mullen, former Chairman of the Joint Chiefs, said, “The greatest threat to America is not terrorism, it’s the debt and the deficit.”

This is because, you see, Defense is in a discretionary category. I won’t get fancy here. But when something is on automatic pilot like health care and Social Security, it will squeeze out all discretionary programs, culture, education, infrastructure, all those things will be squeezed out, period.

So that was Mullen’s thought and then we said, “What is it we have here?” Well, the Defense budget is about 630 billion bucks. I don’t use charts. And the defense budgets of the top 17 other countries on earth, including Russia and China—combined—is 540 billion bucks. Six hundred thirty billion for us, 540 billion for the whole big world out there, including Russia and China. Okay. We said, “How many contractors do you have in the Defense Department?” And they said, “Well, it’s quite a range.” And we said, “Could you tell us?” And they said, “Yes, it’s between one million and 10 million contractors.” And these are guys knocking down 200 or 300 bucks an hour. These are flag officers that have gone into the Pentagon—I don’t mind a guy going from a flag officer to Lockheed, but don’t go back in the service and start being an advisor to the Defense Department while you’re banging down 200 or 300 bucks an hour.

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**The big bang theory of the universe happened 13 billion 800 million years ago. And that ain’t even close to a trillion and we owe 17 of those babies.**

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So we said, "Well, that seems like a curious thing. Could we have an audit of that?" And they were just as bald-faced, they said, "It's impossible to audit the Defense Department—there is no way possible to do that." So we moved on. I am a veteran. If I hadn't been a veteran what I'm about to say would get my epaulets ripped off and you don't want to get your epaulets ripped off, that's very painful. I think it sounds like it anyway. So anyway, I was in the 12th Armored Infantry Battalion of the 2nd Armored Division, Hell on Wheels, and if I'd stayed another eight years in the Reserves I would be a military retiree. That's pretty good. There are only 2.2 million of them, a very small cohort of people. And they have their own health care plan, it's called Tri-Care. And the premium is 540 bucks a year and no co-pay and 85 percent of the money goes to their dependents and the cost per year is 54 billion bucks. Fair?

You don't want to talk about that or the VFW and the American Legion will visit your home at night. I remember both those groups, they found me and they know where I live. So, I said that just doesn't seem right. So we dug further. And we found there are 200 commissaries in the United States, they're right next to Kroger's and Safeway and they all are staffed by Department of Defense people. They were set up as a recruiting device, except the only problem is they're used mostly by retirees who can buy their scotch for 20 bucks a bottle and their lettuce for less. And that's the way that works.

But here's the best one of all, there are 64 Department of Defense schools in this country. Have you ever heard of those? They're in Europe and Asia and they should be. They are for dependents. Ann was a sub on one of those when we were at Fort Benning. Well, they all have a superintendent, they all have principals, they all have teachers, they're all a bus ride from a public school and they cost 51,000 bucks a student for less than 20,000 students. And we can't fuel the Harry Truman in the Gulf or give a hot breakfast in Afghanistan to the troops? Ladies and gentlemen, that's bullshit! And that is a phony tragedy to be visited upon Americans, that if you then challenge all that, you are a commie. You must not like veterans. Well, I like veterans. I am one.

In fact, when I left the Senate the veterans' budget was 49 billion bucks in healthcare for 5.5 million veterans and they get the best care you can imagine. I've been to Walter Reed. I've seen them after they pick them up at Ramstein and take them in and the wonderful things they do with them. Today that healthcare budget is 150 billion with 100,000 less veterans. So when somebody tells you we're not taking care of the veterans, that's a fake, that's fakery. It's lying.

So, that's quick coverage there. As I say, we were startled, absolutely startled at the cost. They really are the Department of Everything. They are

into education, they're into energy, they have a program called the Grill Sergeant, and I don't know what that costs, but the guy can tell you, for he is a member of the DoD, he can tell you how to grill things. Absolutely unbelievable.

Quickly now, as to health care, forget the names and the nastiness, forget that. Call it any name you want, it can't possibly work, because we spend twice as much on health care as any other developed country on earth and that would be okay if the outcomes were good. However, our outcomes are 25th to 50th in the world. And that has to do with child mortality, preventive care, and such gauges. It's the monster of the midway. It's the mastodon in the kitchen. Run your brain just a little without getting into theory. There are people who take theory and try to make it work in practice, but there are other weird people who take something that works in practice and try to make it work in theory! That's a different kind of cat.

So, here it is. You're going to take care of a pre-existing condition in a three year old who could live to be 60. One person in the United States weighs more than the other two—that is a statistic. It is and it's not a funny statistic at all. You've got diabetes Type A and B endemic throughout this country. You've got people who choose to do booze, tobacco and drugs and if you think they're going to head for the wellness program next week, the drinks are on me. You've got 10,000 folks a day turning 65. You've got to do something with tort reform. I'm a trial lawyer, and we have two sons who are trial lawyers. And they say, "Hey, Pop, what are you up to?" Well, you've got to do something about the cost of defensive medicine. You've got to do something with doctors. You can't just continue to do this doc fix and all the rest of it.

You've got to do something with Medicaid where all parties run off to the Governor to see who can dump most of it on the federal government and get it off the states. You've got to do something with hospitals who keep two sets of books instead of one, and that happens in every hospital in America. You've got to do something with providers who make something for 83 cents and sell it to the feds for \$3.50. You've got to do something with the guy who could buy this building, and he gets a heart operation for 200,000 bucks and never even gets a bill. Who is kidding who? What a business? What can you not start to believe?

So, then you've got a wonderful one called Part B premiums in Medicare. That's voluntary for seniors. You don't have to take it—it's for phy-

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**You've got people who choose to do booze, tobacco and drugs and if you think they're going to head for the wellness program next week, the drinks are on me.**

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sician re-imburement and durable goods—but if you do you only pay 25 or 35 percent of the premium and the guys working in the kitchens at Harvard Yard are paying the other 65 or 75 percent. What’s fair about that? Tell me. That’s this country. I think people can handle the truth, if not shrouded by full-page ads from the “senior groups.”

And the final blow here is Social Security. Well, that’s really it. I have had more guff from people over 60, the nastiest bunch of emails, brutish stuff, foul. And people over 60 aren’t even affected by any reform that’s ever been yet suggested and they howl like a gut shot panther because they are goaded on by the “senior groups.” And forget whether Social Security is part of the national debt or separate, it’s the biggest expenditure of the government, so if you want to play hide and seek with it, go ahead, but it won’t go away. It’s 900 billion negative cash flow today and it started down that road in May of 2010 and in the year 2033, 20 years from now

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you’re going to waddle up to the pay window and get a check for 23 percent less. And who is telling us that? The Trustees of the system, vital and respected Republicans and Democrats.

Everything I’m saying you’ll want to go and look all this up because some will say, “God, that Simpson came

in here and just ranted, ran around and used figures that just don’t jibe. Well, anyway, hang on tight. I’m damn near through. And of course, how about your grandchildren and your children? I asked the AARP [American Association of Retired Persons] higher ups, I said are there any patriots in here or just marketers? Go look at their publications. It’s about cruises and insurance and chairs and scooter things to go, and erectile dysfunction ads—critical things there of course—and other things like that. It’s funny, but it ain’t funny. It is a marketing paper. And I said to them, why don’t you get in the game and they know fully what to do. And what they need to know is to do the change to the CPI [Cost Price Index], I know that sounds crazy. The president has suggested we go to this new formula, a change in CPI. Erskine and I also recommended it.

Now the AARP is doing full page ads of people with tears running down their cheeks saying they are going to be “out to lunch” forever if the CPI is changed. And yet if we do it, it can save about 120 billion over 10 years. Anyway, the Social Security trust fund money wasn’t stolen. The reserves weren’t stolen by politicians. The law provided that if the government needed bucks, then you went to the reserves—you pulled it out—there are T bills in there, gilt edged. When government needed the bucks you went and got it out and put in the IOU notes, and it works.

So Erskine, I said, why don't we do something good? We didn't touch SSI. We didn't touch food stamps, we didn't hurt the most vulnerable. We said let's give the lowest 20 percent 125 percent of poverty. That'll cost. Let's give the older, add an extra kick, from 81 to 85, an extra 1% kick a year. Go to the changed CPI and then, a critically important step would be to make it more progressive. We did. We change the bend points, but that's inside baseball, don't pay attention. And then we said we should raise the retirement age to 68 by the year 2050. The AARP said how will old people ever be able to prepare for that? (Laughter)

I said, well, they've got 40 years to figure it out, I think they could probably track it together and don't forget it's already going to be 67 in the year 2027. I just heard my wife clear her throat, which means I must move on quickly. You didn't hear it, but let me tell you, I do—it's like a dog whistle! (Laughter)

A final note. And you've heard that phrase at every talk you've ever been to. And another one, "in conclusion," and then 20 minutes later they are still at it! No, just relax, Alex, just sit right there. And a final note, the tax code. Let me tell you, Erskine and I dug in there, and our eyes were bugged. The tax code has 180-plus things in there called "tax expenditures." Well, what are those? Well, they're spending by any possible name you can conjure. They are deductions, loopholes, earmarks, they cost 1 trillion 100 billion a year. And the total income, individual income in 2011 was 1 trillion 100 billion bucks a year, so it sucked it all up. So we said, we've got an idea. Get rid of all of them and go to a tax system similar to what people have been crying for.

Broaden the base, reduce the rates, get spending out of the code, we said, okay, we'll do that. So we said if you go from 0 to 70,000 grand you pay eight percent, 70,000 grand to 210,000 you pay 14 percent. Anything over that you pay 23 percent and take the corporate rate to 26 from 36 and go to a territorial system where you can bring the bucks back into the U.S. without getting it hit twice. And as Erskine says, at that point, his Democrat pals will come up to him and say, good Heavens, you don't want to do that, those corporate people will just use it to pay dividends and buy back their stock. And Erskine tells them: "What the hell is wrong with that? At least it would be spent in the United States." So those are the perils of what we do. And if you have a cherished sacred cow and you want to put it back in, then what rate are you going to raise? It's called, "if you want it, pay for it." We've made promises in this country we can't possibly keep and never will keep.

The final shot is that only 20 percent of the American people use 80 percent of the stuff in the tax code. Try that one again. So when people say, well, yeah, but 48 percent of Americans don't pay any tax, I say, yeah,

that's true. But only 20 percent of the American people use 80 percent of the fun and games in the tax code. That doesn't seem quite fair to me and remember, only 27 percent of the American people itemize on their tax returns, which means three-quarters of our fellow citizens have never heard of the goodies in the tax code. So if there is anyone I haven't pissed off yet, if they would raise their arm and I'll talk to them later. (Laughter)

We're at a point right now where Dick Durbin used to say, "Where is the tipping point?" And I like Dick Durbin. I think he's terrific. He kept asking, where is the tipping point? And Erskine and the money guys know where it is. There's a name for it. It comes quick. It could come in two years, two months, but when it comes it's fast. You grab your money,

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"something" is happening. So the people that then will have loaned us 20 trillion bucks will say: We still love you, but you have a dysfunctional government, and you're addicted to debt, you have a lot of resources and yet we want a little more money for our money. And at that point inflation will kick in and interest rates will go up and the guy that gets hosed is "the little guy" that everybody talks about, day and night, the little guy. A terrible irony.

So I think we're at a point now where Americans have to remember that they're citizens first. They've for-

gotten that. They're not members of the NRA first, or the AARP first, or the Club for Growth first, or the AFL-CIO first, for God's sake, they are citizens first. And for God's sake, if they can't begin to think about what they're going to leave behind and what's happening when the groups that push their elected officials and those officials then worship the god of re-election. So, I am glad to leave you with some of this. The other hope, and this is very critical, the other hope I see is this. This president and any president wants a legacy, that is what they all want and they should want. And if he doesn't get more involved with Congress and get his hands dirty, as Senator Angus King of Maine has said, he's got to come around and pull a Lincoln and get right down in it with the Congress—and if he doesn't slow the growth of health care, and it can be done, we've recommended what we did in our commission, and restore solvency to the Social Security system for 75 years, he will have a failed presidency. And he doesn't want that. No one would.

But the point we are at right now, with all the anguish you've been grousing about recently, the sequester and the cliff-hanging didn't really affect two-thirds of the American budget, just one-third is what was dealt with. You didn't get anything big because they won't touch what I've just discussed. So, with that, let me just share one, maybe corny, thing with you: I think we forget too much. I think we forget our greatness. I think we forget our role in the world, and yet not be arrogant. I think we forget we're the only nation on earth founded on a belief in God. Whether you like that or not is not the issue. That's the way it was.

We forget our strengths, we forget our blessings. We forget our roots of escaping tyranny, religious tyranny and all tyranny. We forget we're one of the first countries on earth to free the slaves. I just think we should treat ourselves with a lighter hand and be tender with each other. Remember, too, it must be a pretty good country, or why would everybody on earth be trying to get here? We should be proud of our heritage and our generosity and our hospitality and our diversity. And as civil wars tear at the throats of other countries, remember, we had one, too. It was brother against brother and in just five days, more died than died in the whole horror of Vietnam. Five days. And we lost over 700,000 in that civil war.

I think we should be slow to judge others, swift to defend the weak, steady in our resolve to combat evil and ready at all times and places to speak well of a pretty damn fine experiment, which is called America. Thank you, very much. (Applause)

**Mr. Jones:** Thank you, very much, Senator. We now come to the part where we invite you in the audience to ask questions. We'll try to persuade Senator Simpson to say what he really thinks. (Laughter)

**From the Floor:** Hi, thank you so much for being here. I'm a sophomore at the college. I was just wondering if you could touch on a little bit about campaign finance reform and if there are any changes you would like to see and if there is anything that you think the media should do in terms of covering that issue. Thank you.

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**Sen. Simpson:** Well, I heard that question—that was the most amazing thing. Sometimes I get in an auditorium—I had an 81 millimeter mortar platoon and we never heard of an earplug, so I heard what you said. Not that I'll answer it! (Laughter)

Bill Bradley and I and Warren Rudman were part of Americans for Campaign Reform, with Bob Kerrey, wonderful guys, two Republicans, two Democrats, we've been working on it, John Rauh is the Executive

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**The First Amendment was for people. And now a corporation can give unlimited funds, even anonymously now. It is the worst possible situation.**

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Director, your neighbor to the north. That is a most critical thing and then along came the Supreme Court decision saying that there is such a thing as corporate personhood. There is no corporate personhood. The First Amendment was for people. And now a corporation can give unlimited funds, even anonymously now? It is the worst possible situation. We tried to work on it. Several states have tried what we suggest: New

Mexico, Arizona, Maine, states trying to do it themselves. States are trying to do a lot of things themselves because the feds are not moving. That's why you have the trouble with the impact of immigration on border states. If nobody understands the border state better than a border state, what are they going to do? Anyway, I just say it is very, very sad what is happening because people think that a guy is on the take and that they're owned. And one of the candidates last year had a person that gave them millions of bucks. And there's a case going on in the Supreme Court right now which is going to open it a little further. And at that point the people will just say, you know, what's my five bucks mean? But it's the most critical of issues. I wish I knew the answer, but as long as that Supreme Court decision is on the books and as they begin to develop it, I think that campaign finance reform is a long way away.

**From the Floor:** Hi, Senator Simpson. My name is Luke Gilroy. I'm a student here at the Kennedy School. My question to you is about what has changed in politics that has led to this polarization and lack of compromise and how do we as individuals fight against it to try to move back towards being able to compromise better?

**Sen. Simpson:** Well, first, what we saw quickly was a complete lack of trust. When I was in Congress, trust was the coin of the realm and that coin is severely tarnished, intra party as well as inter party. And you used to shake hands. I know that's corny too. Ted Kennedy and I worked together on immigration and many other things and I didn't always agree with him, obviously. But when he said, I'm with you, he was with you. If he

said, I'm not with you or I'm going to put in an amendment that's going to shoot you out of the water, here's what it is, that was great. That's what it's about. But this is sneaky stuff now.

And if there is a complete lack of trust, it is in the caucus, where they would try to figure out how can we do a bill that will embarrass Bill Clinton? How can we do a bill that will embarrass George W.? I finally said, well, look, why not do something for the country? It's a sick idea I know, so let's just kind of do something. We have people in our party who say that obstructionism is the key to patriotism and that compromise is a filthy word. Well, let me tell you, there are historians in this room that will tell you that without compromise we wouldn't have had a Declaration of Independence or a Constitution. It was a continual compromise among groups.

Jefferson wrote on the actual Declaration of Independence document in his own handwriting, finally it looked like, "Oh, whatever!" He just got tired of the amending. And now you have people who just won't compromise and if you can't learn to compromise on an issue without compromising yourself, you should never be in a legislative body, a council, a school board, Congress, anywhere, and you should never be married. (Laughter)

**From the Floor:** Hello. I thank you for speaking. I'm actually not an American. I'm from the United Kingdom. But I have a question about the future of the Republican Party. It seems to me that the kind of radical Tea Party wing has lost touch with the mainstream of American politics. There's a news article today about Sarah Palin's re-emergence and Rand Paul and all these big radical figures and I'd like to hear more specifics about what you think about the future of the party.

**Sen. Simpson:** The Tea Party is not a party, it's a movement. And they don't deserve the title of party, but they started up for two reasons. They were alarmed at spending and the size of the debt. And they were slowly

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captured in the social issues. And when you get into that, where we've had some truly brilliant candidates speaking of "legitimate rape," which is a dazzling statement in itself, and the woman in Delaware who was involved in witchcraft, she was a clever one. We could have beat Harry Reid like a

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**I thought our party was about government out of your life, the precious right of privacy and the right to be left alone. It's a glorious statement and the Tea Party liked that. And I say, well then, what the hell are you doing then on abortion?**

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drum in Nevada and we had two other wonderful women candidates, but then when Harry saw this one gal who could have a chance—and he could beat—he started to funnel money in there himself. I said, Harry, I don't blame you for that, it must have been worth it, worked.

So I would not be welcome and if I had to go through the Central Committee of Wyoming they wouldn't put me on the ballot, yet I could get elected because I'd get some good Democrat votes. But I thought our party was about government out of your life, the precious right of privacy and the right

to be left alone. It's a glorious statement and the Tea Party liked that. And I say, well then, what the hell are you doing then on abortion? Abortion has got to be the most hideous thing I can imagine. I practiced real law. I really know something about humans. And people are faced with birth and death and must make decisions like that. I don't want to ever be in it, but I tell you, abortion is a deeply intimate and personal decision—and I don't think men legislators should even vote on it.

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**...abortion is a deeply intimate and personal decision—and I don't think men legislators should even vote on it.**

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I had a gay cousin. We're all God's children. We're all human beings. What the hell is that all about? I've worked with the Republican Unity Coalition. Matthew Shepard was killed in Wyoming by a couple of drunken, drugged-out slobs and Wyoming people were stunned and offended. And then I also talk about mental health issues,

so I couldn't get to first base. But I still keep mumbling into the vapors. (Applause)

**From the Floor:** Hi, my name is Madeleine. I'm a freshman at the college. And I'm going to be asking a question on behalf of the Twitter community. Which journalists do you think have gotten it right in terms of uncovering how government budgets operate?

**Sen. Simpson:** Well, one is here [Jackie Calmes], she'll be part of the panel tomorrow, she follows it. And watches with bemusement. There she is. And there was also Lori Montgomery with *The Washington Post*. But there is no time now for any journalist to do anything but hang on by their thumbs with a 24/7 news cycle when they should be off, as Gloria Berger said today, they should be off asking the questions of people, but they don't have the time. So, I don't know. All I know is that I always like to talk to young journalists so that I can tell them that they'll have nothing in their future unless they get off their fanny and start talking about the real issues that are crowding them off the page by the senior citizens groups—and the AARP is Exhibit A.

Then there is the Committee for the Preservation of Social Security and Medicare. They really are something. And then there's the silver-haired legislators and the senior bombers and the pink panthers and the gray panthers and the young people have nobody, except [www.thecankicksback.org](http://www.thecankicksback.org). Tune that one up: [www.thecankicksback.org](http://www.thecankicksback.org). And it's young people, Democrats and Republicans saying, wait a minute, the can gets kicked down the road and we won't get a lick. And they won't. Some young folks say, well, I don't care, I don't care, I won't get anything anyway. I said, well, you put in 6.2 percent of your salary, you're going to be kind of wrinkled when you walk up to the window anyway.

So, it's awesome. It's power. The AARP the other day accused Erskine and me of fueling inter-generational warfare. I said, hell, it's over. That war ended. You were the winner. You now get the Nobel Peace Prize. Lay back in the weeds some more. Anyway, it's funny, but it ain't funny. It's tragic. And don't forget, disability insurance will be gone in two years, gone. Gone. Why? In a tough economy, a guy can't work, he's going to go to the doc again and again and again, finally they say, well, I think you do have a disability. And it's not ugly to do that, but that fund will be completely broke, and we can't even change the date of Medicare to match that of Social Security.

When I was a freshman at the University of Wyoming there were 16 people paying into Social Security and one taking out. Today there are three people paying in and one taking out and in 10 years, two people will be paying in and one taking out. Who the hell is going to be those two

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happy people kicking in 12,000 a year for some old coot dragging down 24,000? These are real figures. And I'm just goofy enough to keep throwing 'em out there. But you have to pay attention. And especially young journalists. You're critical.

**From the Floor:** Good evening. My name is Autumn Lawrence and I'm a sophomore at the college. Thinking about many of the issues about which you spoke, disagreements over entitlement reform, disagreements over healthcare and issues with our national debts, what advice would you give to a student who wants to give his or her life to public service and does believe that we are, as you said, citizens first?

**Sen. Simpson:** Well, I would go to see them—they still have town meetings. They don't like them, but they hold them, I mean the congresspersons. So the next time you go and the person gets up and says, I know this is one of the most critical times in our history and I want to tell you fine people that we can get it done. Yes, I'm going to help you get it done and we can do it without touching *precious* Medicare, *precious* Medicaid, *precious* Defense and *precious* Social Security and then you should rise and say, "You, sir or madam, are telling an interminable inexactitude." And that will dazzle them for a second. Then call it a lie! And then just say I could not support anyone who's not going to put their shoulder to the wheel. And for the congressmen, they're going to come to you and ask for a political contribution. Ask them, where are you on Bowles-Simpson? We don't use Bowles-Simpson because of the acronym. That's why we switched to Simpson-Bowles. (Laughter)

You know, just nail them. Nail them. Apathy, well, it's a tough one. When I was your age, I was drinking. (Laughter)

It was not a good thing. And then, as I told the people today who were talking about the public, who is going to run for public office? Where are the good people? They're not going to run. They've got to drag up an old photo of them sitting under a tree with their hair hanging to their navels with a roach clip, got any paper? (Laughter)

So, you're going to lose good people. I was on federal probation for shooting mailboxes. I was going with this beautiful woman. I hit a cop in the mouth, was in the clink and I needed \$300 bail and I called her, I said I'm in jail, I need \$300 bail. She said, look, I'm working my way through school, just sit there. (Laughter)

But when I ran for public office, I put that right out there first. And I got every vote in the room. But if you don't put it out, if you go in and think you're going to hide something, the media will find it. The media with the help from the girlfriend or the boyfriend that got slapped by you back in 2000 whatever, it ain't worth it. And so good people aren't in. So the only guys that are in there are less than lustrous. They're terrified, terri-

fied of losing elections. I think Ted Cruz has really been slapped around in his own caucus. They took him on. They said wait a minute, buster, you're running ads against me. I'm in your party. And that's your face in that ad, by God, I'm tired of it. And they took him on and Mike Lee, the other guy from Utah, and even *The Houston Chronicle*, which said about Cruz, we toasted this man to the high heavens—but we now withdraw all of our support and recommendations for him because he's not for the country, he's not for Texas, he's for himself.

And so things are changing, slowly, but don't forget, if you want to knock Boehner around and people love to do that, just remember, the next go round, when the Tea Party guys in his party say, wait a minute, we've got a new one here now, because the last time [repeal of Obamacare] it was a case of when your horse drops dead it's better to get off. (Laughter)

And so, Obamacare would never be repealed, but now Boehner can say to his Tea Party guys, look, I stopped the government for two weeks for you jerks and it's over. It ain't going to happen again. You can whine and snort and do anything you want, but the game is over. So either get in the game or keep standing over there in the corner, but I don't owe you anything more; I paid my dues to you guys.

**From the Floor:** Hi, my name is Jacob Morello and I'm a junior at the college. My question is about the budget process. I think a lot of people would argue that it's not working the way it was intended to work and the past five or so years we've ended up in these budget showdowns that ultimately end up in a continuing resolution at the 11th hour. So, what do you think can be done to reform the process, if anything, so that we have a functioning budget process?

**Sen. Simpson:** You, young man, are right on track. We haven't had a budget for five years. The biggest country on earth, with resources and no budget—they are now, because of the latest package, they're talking about a Conference Committee to balance the budget. They're in session. They come in tomorrow for their first or second gathering. They have the ability to do it. And if they don't do it, again the creditors are just going to keep on us. But you're absolutely right. And watch this. It's called a Conference Committee because the Senate has passed a bill, a budget bill, and the House, too. They're very different. But that's what a Conference Committee is for, to resolve the differences. And if that happens, you should be very cheered. But if it doesn't, the can gets kicked down the road and February we'll go through this again and again. But you're a perceptive rascal. (Laughter)

**Mr. Jones:** He's a Harvard student.

**Sen. Simpson:** Harvard, yes, I see that. They're good people.

**Mr. Jones:** Senator, thank you, so much. (Applause) (Standing ovation)

I want to remind you all that both Senator Simpson and Leonard Pitts Jr. will be taking part in a panel tomorrow as we discuss the issues raised tonight and others as well. They will be joined by Jackie Calmes, who covers the White House for *The New York Times*; Beth Myers, a senior advisor for Mitt Romney's 2012 presidential campaign; and Clarence Page, 1989 winner of the Pulitzer Prize for Commentary for a syndicated column. It should be a very lively conversation and we hope to see many of you there. Thank you, very much, for joining us tonight. To both, Mr. Pitts, Senator Simpson, we admire your work and thank you for being with us tonight and allowing us to honor you. (Applause)

# Theodore H. White Seminar on Press and Politics

November 13, 2013

**Mr. Jones:** Good morning, everyone. We're very glad to have you with us. This aspect of the Theodore White event is one that I particularly like because it gives us a chance to really chew over some of the ideas that the Theodore White Lecturer put on the table the night before. As you know, despite all of our encouragement, Senator Simpson was quite reticent about what he thought. But as frank as he was, honestly, he also said something that I think is at the heart of the way he looks at these kinds of issues, which is that the First Amendment belongs to everyone. And this morning, the idea of this panel is to have a conversation about ideas that were put forward last night by Senator Simpson, ideas that have a resonance in all kinds of ways and can be looked at from many different perspectives.

We have assembled a panel of distinguished people who have different perspectives but all superb credentials to express themselves this morning. I'm going to invite them one by one to make brief comments about what they heard last night that they agreed with and what they heard last night that they perhaps did not agree with. And then we'll have a conversation among ourselves for a bit and then we will open it up to you.

Let me begin with you, Leonard Pitts. Leonard, as you know, is a Pulitzer Prize-winning writer. He describes himself more comfortably as a writer than a columnist. And his writing is diverse. He was talking this morning, a few minutes ago, about how he spent much of his early career as a music critic. But his perspective on the world is very much his own. Last night, he received the Nyhan Prize because of his political commentary especially. And Leonard Pitts, I just wanted to know what your reaction last night was to what you heard from Senator Simpson.

**Mr. Pitts:** My immediate visceral reaction was Simpson for president in 2016, to tell you the God's honest truth. (Laughter)

And that wasn't frankly for any specific idea or policy that the Senator laid down, although some things he said resonated with me. But frankly the reason that I said that was because my heart is leaping for joy as I'm listening to him because I'm saying, oh, wow, he's talking to me as if I'm an adult with a working and functioning brain. He's speaking to me clearly. I don't know if that's just the function of being out of the political game, although I understand that the Senator was not exactly as you say reticent, even during his years of service. But that was just such a refreshing thing

to me to hear somebody speaking to me as an adult and speaking to me clearly about the problems that this country faces.

We have this situation in this country now where we say that we want straight talk, but what we really want is to be affirmed in our thinking. What we really want is sloganeering, what we really want is this pop culture, this very narrow knee-jerk response to some very complicated issues. We're in difficult times, and times don't promise to get any easier. And I think it is time frankly for some of the type of statesmanship that

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the Senator was speaking about last night and the kind of statesmanship that he embodies in the work that he did with his colleague, Mr. Bowles, and I just want to see more of that. I am frustrated beyond words at the notion that I have to, as a columnist, pretend to take Herman Cain seriously, or Michele Bachmann or Sarah Palin seriously, because there is some cohort of the electorate that pretends to take their sort of

knee-jerk ideology as something that truly represents a viable direction for this country.

I am also frankly very concerned about where we go from here. I believe that a democracy needs two functioning parties and I believe that the Republican Party as presently constituted, and that's very important, as presently constituted is essentially abdicating that responsibility by pretending that some of this stuff, the Ted Cruzes, the Sarah Palins, the Michele Bachmanns, etcetera, etcetera, represent a way forward for this country. So I was very heartened by what I heard.

**Mr. Jones:** Let me go next to Beth Myers. Beth has been involved with Republican politics since the Ronald Reagan campaign in 1980. Most recently she was an advisor to Mitt Romney in his campaign. She has credentials in the Republican Party that go, in other words, way back. Beth, one, how did you respond to what the Senator said and how do you respond to what Leonard said?

**Ms. Myers:** Well, first, I want to thank the Senator. I am a Kennedy School IOP Fellow this year and probably the best antidote to being in a presidential race for one year is to go to spend three months at the IOP, because all the lessons that you learn on a campaign about fighting the other side, to the end, are mellowed when you sit and work with people at the Kennedy School and my fellow Fellows, who come from the entire spectrum. So, thank you, Senator, for doing your part and carrying that torch for a few years.

I had a very similar reaction, as you did, to the Senator's speech last night. Alan Simpson, 2016. I wish it could happen. Perhaps for a slightly different set of reasons, but three things in particular really resonated with me. One was a frustration—you talked about changing CPI and I think I have almost a knee jerk reaction when I hear those words, because to me it's emblematic of something that I think everybody on both sides of the aisle agrees with—it would indeed lessen the dollars over time, that we're giving up with Social Security, but it is a way to really almost solve Social Security, that and raising the age. And I talk with both Democrats and Republican Congress people and they all agree that this would be a good thing. Why can we not do it?

And I got this crazy answer once, well, if you do the little things, then you don't have any bargaining chips for the big things. So it looks to me like none of the little things get done. And as you said, there's an accretion of little things over time that make huge differences. One of the bigger things on the Romney campaign that I took from my experience there—a lot of my views now are filtered through that experience—was how hard it is to talk about the big issues, taxes and debt and spending. And we pulled a lot of punches on those issues. I'm not saying I think we were a perfect vessel for putting forward the message that those issues were critical for our country.

But one of the things that Mitt didn't pull a punch on was his selection of Paul Ryan as VP, which counter to what *Double Down* says, was a very controversial matter inside our campaign. There were a lot of people inside the campaign saying that that was a real mistake and that how would we go forward when we owned Paul Ryan's Medicare Plan? And as it turned out, our plan was to take it on head on and Paul talked about it very directly all the time. Mitt did, too. And we ended up doing very well in the cohort of older voters. That didn't really affect us there. It was an encouraging thing that you can talk about those issues in an intelligent way.

And then the third thing that you talked about last night, Senator, that really touched me is a concern that this president might have a failed presidency. And as a Republican, that might seem something that wouldn't bother me, but it actually bothers me immensely. I think right now it's very important that this president's term in office turn around and become a success for a whole host of reasons, not the least of which is that our coun-

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try really needs that to happen now. We can't really afford to go through three years of gridlock with Congress and not get anything done. And I'm just hoping that discussions like this and the Senator continuing to, with Mr. Bowles, going out and talking about ways we can find common ground to do good things. It's very important. And thank you for taking the time, Senator.

**Mr. Jones:** Thank you, Beth. Jackie Calmes, the press was not the major target last night, but it was certainly near the bulls-eye and I wanted to get your response to what the Senator said, especially through the prism of being many years at *The Wall Street Journal* and now covering the White House for *The New York Times*.

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**...we now have almost institutionalized media camps for those who hate either from the right or the left, they can go to the media outlet that they favor and get validation as they see it for the hate that they feel.**

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**Ms. Calmes:** Well, I go back a long way with the Senator. In fact, in the years that I was at *The Wall Street Journal* covering Congress, he taught me that I need to read the editorial page because he would come at me—he won't remember this, but more than once, very angry about something that the editorial page had that day about him and so he would take it out on me and I hadn't even read the darn thing. So I quit making that mistake. Anyway, I've had the honor of covering the whole Bowles-Simpson plan since his re-emer-

gence as an ex-Senator in a big way. I mean, there's been very few senators who had a second act like this Senator has.

A couple of things he said, I wrote down because they struck me. He said last night that "hatred corrodes..."—this, in fairness, he attributes to his mother. "Hatred corrodes the container it is carried in. And in this country today there is much hatred. I didn't say dislike. I said hatred. And that is a very corrosive, corrosive force." And I think that's so true, but then, I've always taught myself through love of history to never think that something is the first, the worst, the best, the last. We've been through this before. I mean, talk about hatred, we've brought a civil war. Going back into the '80s and when we think of the hatred, the Bork fight that you were part of, the Gingrich revolution, there have been many times in my coverage where it felt corrosive.

I think the difference now, and you didn't get into this in your remarks, that we now have almost institutionalized media camps for those who hate either from the right or the left, they can go to the media outlet that they favor and get validation as they see it for the hate that they feel.

And I get these emails, I mean, you talked about your emails, I'm telling you, some of you it's the same way, I show them to my kids sometimes and they can't believe that their mother is getting email from people, you know, using the C word, these people that don't even know me. And sometimes, you know, people use that word I don't write back to, but when I'll write to people that are just borderline nasty and I'll say, you know, your criticism would be much more effective if you had delivered it in a civil way. This is the equivalent of email road rage.

I like to respond to people, but not when it comes to me in this fashion. It used to be that nine times out of 10 they would write back, I'm sorry, you're right, and then they would come back at me with a civil register of their point. Now, it's like they come back at me and double down. It's like C word plus. And so I really worry about the hatred, because it was always out there. I mean, we've been through or reliving now the 50th anniversary of Kennedy's assassination, a lot of the coverage of the Civil Rights era, talk about hatred on film. But I do think that I'm seeing something very different as my career gets older. You also said in politics, "there are no real answers, none, only a continuing flow of compromises among groups resulting in a changing, cloudy and ambiguous series of public decisions where appetite and ambition completely compete openly with knowledge and wisdom. That's all there is and nothing you can devise that's better than that."

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**You have to quit digging at the discretionary spending that is the seed corn of this country and get into the entitlement spending and revenues.**

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What's frustrating to me about covering things now is it used to be you would have very uncompromising attitudes from each camp, but there would come a day, usually it was when Bob Dole, Senate Majority Leader, would be saying it's this way, it's this way, it's this way and then suddenly one day there would be a little opening and I knew that something was up and the compromise was coming. And it always did. And now, I'm telling you, there is nothing more frustrating than spending 12 hours of your day, every week, covering issues that you know, I mean, this issue that he's got, being the most prominent. You can disagree with the details of Bowles-Simpson, BS, as we do call it, with affection. (Laughter)

But the formulation they came up with is the one that is the answer. There's not going to be any other way to go at it. You have to quit digging at the discretionary spending that is the seed corn of this country and get into the entitlement spending and revenues. Where I would disagree with you and Erskine both is that you had a lot of up-front stimulus in that plan. And you don't talk about that much. And the Domenici-Rivlin budget plan

had even more. And in a country that yet another year is at seven percent plus unemployment.

Never in my 23 years in Washington have we had those kinds of economic indicators and not been doing something to stimulate the economy. Instead we're in year three and four and people blame you for this, but the fact is your plan did have up-front stimulus and back-loaded deficit reduction, so I guess that I sort of wish that you and Erskine Bowles had promoted as much the up-front stimulus. But the president is also at fault for that.

And finally the thing you said, as you've said to me in the past, that the president took a walk because his re-election was looming, that he didn't outright embrace your plan. But you did acknowledge that if he had done that, it would have been dead on arrival among Republicans who are inclined to oppose everything he is for. And the best example of that and then I'll shut up is that even as you were being announced for this Fiscal Commission, the Fiscal Commission was announced because the legislation creating it had failed, Judd Gregg and Kent Conrad. And it had seven Republican co-sponsors until the day—more than that, but there were

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seven, who in the days after Barack Obama belatedly endorsed the legislation because Kent Conrad demanded he do so as a condition for supporting an increase in the debt limit, seven people, including Mitch McConnell, dropped off as supporters and voted against the legislation, which then failed.

**Sen. Simpson:** Don't miss that key, because we would never have this done by executive order, it was all set to go and seven, including McConnell, McCain—go look at the roll call vote, unbelievable.

**Ms. Calmes:** And the fact that they did that was seared in the president's memory, so when you talk about why didn't he embrace Bowles-Simpson, it's because he knew that, as with the legislation that would have created a similar commission, if he had embraced Bowles-Simpson, it would have immediately been opposed. It was opposed in the end anyway. But then the problem with the Commission was it became Barack Obama's Commission and there was no buy-in from the Republicans to speak of, especially since all the House Republicans voted against it and you had the bad timing that your report came out a month after those House Republicans had just won a majority. So there was no way that they were going to come right out of the box and compromise on the budget. They were going to try to do their plan, the Ryan plan, not some compromise that included tax increases.

I'll close by saying, I think three years later, we're farther than ever from coming out of a plan as the budget conference is ongoing right now. They said at the outset that they were going to aim small and they will. They'll be lucky to get small. When we take the long view on this, I agree, like you said last night, Obama should get his hands more dirty. But that said, he could get his hands as dirty as we could all want and there is no way it's going to have an impact on the House Republican Caucus. John Boehner can't even get his legislation out of the House Republican Caucus.

And I'd be interested in others' ideas as to really what Barack Obama could do, given the climate we're in, to actually bring the House Republicans around.

**Mr. Jones:** Clarence Page, you've been observing this process since, well, you won the Pulitzer Prize for Commentary in 1989. You've been at it a while.

**Mr. Page:** Yeah, since Thomas Jefferson. (Laughter)

The wonderful Jefferson Administration, I'll never forget it.

**Mr. Jones:** I just wonder how all this looks to you and how you respond to what the Senator said last night.

**Mr. Page:** Well, first of all, I want to join the Al Simpson for President camp, especially since I know we are in absolutely no danger of him actually running. I do have a better title for you, actually.

**Sen. Simpson:** I think it was Bork or Clarence Thomas, one of them. I mean, the heat that I got from those two. I mean, they burned my shorts. (Laughter)

**Mr. Page:** Yeah, I was thinking about that when, I guess Jackie mentioned the whole Bork controversy, I immediately thought of Thomas/Hill and other examples of how the process itself has become corroded. Stephen Carter wrote a good book about the confirmation process and how all of a sudden, ever since Bork, it's become corrupted by this same kind of polarization we're living with today. I was thinking of the title of *Explainer in Chief*, which was given to Bill Clinton when he gave a better speech in support of Barack Obama than Barack Obama did at the Democratic Convention.

I got a great column out of that later by accident, because Michael Witmore, the director of the Folger Shakespeare Library in D.C. noticed the effectiveness of Bill Clinton's speech came from his using lots of Anglo-Saxon words while Barack Obama used lots of romance, Latinate words. And this was a very effective lesson to me in trying to simplify issues.

I thought last night your address was so effective at describing the problem that I wish Barack Obama would go on TV for about 20 minutes and explain it that simply. Because people need to hear it. I cover Tea Party rallies and I'm always running into folks at Tea Party rallies, good-hearted

Americans who are really concerned and worried because they think 40 percent of our budget is going to foreign aid. I know you've talked to folks like this because the average American out there has no concept of what's in the budget and what the budget process is about and how language is used very effectively in favor of gridlock. I love my buddy, Grover Norquist, and he is a good friend.

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**There's a real confusion out there in the general public about the priorities involved here and I'm afraid we in the media aren't doing enough to help.**

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say shrink Social Security, shrink Medicare, shrink Medicaid. They'd say no, no, don't touch that, shrink foreign aid. There's a real confusion out there in the general public about the priorities involved here and I'm afraid we in the media aren't doing enough to help.

And you didn't mention last night the word redistricting. But there is a lot of talk about redistricting in Washington because what has changed since the days of Bork and Thomas? Well, it's become easier than ever for anybody to redistrict the maps in our states to further polarize the electorate. Back when I was a young pup reporter in Chicago, Mayor Daley had

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a guy, Tom Keane, a good buddy of his who was an Alderman in Chicago. We used to call him the Leonardo Da Vinci of the redistricting map because he could carve out a district for you that would focus in on fans of the Captain Kangaroo show, whatever.

This is a remarkable art in itself and it only afflicts the House these days because any kid can go to a computer store, excuse me, I'm back in the '90's. Any kid can go online and download a map redistricting program that will further target in on what's been called the big sort, the carving out of districts that are more and more designed to create not a problem for the opposing party, but a problem for incumbents, that they have to fight candidates to their right or to their

**Sen. Simpson:** He's a good egg.

**Mr. Page:** He is. He's a real good egg. And he'll tell you that he didn't force Congress to behave the way they do. All he did was just make a little pledge for them to sign and they didn't have to sign it, right? And blah, blah, blah, blah. But I love this phrase of his, you know, he wants to shrink government small enough so he can drown it in the bathtub. Shrink government. That sounds great. Folks hear that. But then

shrink Social Security, shrink Medicare, shrink Medicaid. They'd say no, no, don't touch that, shrink foreign aid. There's a real confusion out there in the general public about the priorities involved here and I'm afraid we in the media aren't doing enough to help.

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left in the primaries now. And as a result, our Congress is becoming more polarized and the result is that the Republicans will not go near anything that is stamped with Barack Obama's name. And that is something that I don't think enough Americans are aware of and if they are, they love it already because it guarantees that they and their neighbors are going to get their way.

I love to listen to C-SPAN and other call-in shows and inevitably I hear somebody call in and say, well, Barack Obama couldn't be winning, everyone I know is voting for Mitt Romney. Yeah, everyone you know in your neighborhood and in your district because your district has been carved out to favor whoever the Republican candidate is. And the same thing happens in the Democratic districts in the other direction. But Democrats have been through all this before back in the McGovern era. Republicans, I think, are going through it now. And I'm wondering in my anecdote now if there is any hope, other than the normal sausage-making processes of the United States democracy, that we have a way in this country of swinging the pendulum back and forth. It swung to the left back in the McGovern era, it's swung to the right now.

And when I look at the Tea Party, which, I agree with you, the Tea Party is a movement, not a party, but I'm reminded of H.L. Mencken's line about third parties, that they're like bees, they sting and then they die. And throughout our history in America we have seen populist movements rise up, last for one or two election cycles and then fade. Whether we are talking about the William Jennings Bryan or the Pat Buchanan movement or the Ralph Nader movement or the Ross Perot movement, each one does have an impact afterwards, a lasting impact, but I'm wondering, well, if the Tea Party is peaking out right now or not. They've peaked out before and they're peaking again.

And what's different now between this movement and prior movements? Well, new media. We are in the Twitter age now, hashtag ALSimpson. By the way, I'm @CPTIME if you want to tweet me there. I'm still working out the language. My son has to teach me. But in the Twitter age now movements can rise much faster. Look at the Tea Party movement, rose almost overnight when word starting getting around. Occupy Wall Street rose almost overnight. And it also faded fast. The Tea Party move-

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ment has got legs, they've got certain institutionalized structures here and there around the country, but it's still not a party.

In any case, why is that important? Because the dialogue right now is just nonexistent about doing something as simple as, like Social Security,

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**The Tea Party movement has got legs, they've got certain institutionalized structures here and there around the country, but it's still not a party.**

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raising the age—rather raising the income cap, which I think the polls show that that's the most popular movement. If you tell people various choices as to what to do about Social Security, that's the one that more people will go along with.

You're right, nobody likes raising taxes or cutting spending. Those are the things that people don't get elected to

do, but nevertheless, we're not even getting the simple remedies out there on the table right now because things are so polarized.

And finally, thank you for telling me about [thecankicksback.org](http://thecankicksback.org), which I did look up and it gives me a new ray of hope about the new generation, that young people out there are concerned about this. And the site is very realistic because they note that young people do not vote as much as us old folks do. And that they don't have the money that the lobbyists do, but what they do have is the possibility or the potential power of their numbers. The question is will [thecankicksback](http://thecankicksback.org) be the draft card issue of this generation? And it has that potential. And I'm waiting to see and I think, once again, the new media, those that I'm still figuring out, are going to have a big impact on that. So, thank you all, very much.

**Mr. Jones:** Thank you, Clarence. Senator Simpson, I want to give you now your First Amendment opportunity.

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**...waste, fraud and abuse, that old canard is still buffeted around and it's nothing. That's a sparrow belch in a typhoon.**

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**Sen. Simpson:** Well, I think about foreign aid, I've heard that baby before. I think foreign aid is less than one percent of the budget. It's .623 or something of a percent. And this babble is out there that it's 30 or 40 percent. And then of course there's Nancy Pelosi's airplane, that must cost \$80 billion, whatever it is and she doesn't even use it unless you're the Speaker. That's the kind of stuff that is out there. And it just

generates a lot of heat. Foreign aid, Nancy Pelosi's airplane, waste, fraud and abuse, that old canard is still buffeted around and it's nothing. That's a sparrow belch in a typhoon. (Laughter)

And these are terrible things.

**Mr. Jones:** Did you just say a “sparrow belch in a typhoon”?

**Sen. Simpson:** No, Kurt Vonnegut said it better: “A sparrow fart in a typhoon.” Now that was what he said. (Laughter)

I’m a great Vonnegut fan and also H.L. Mencken. Don’t forget H.L. Mencken, they had a whole library named for him in the National Press Club and they knew his writings would come out 50 years after his death. And when they came out, they were filled with the same stuff he was doing when he was doing it. He was anti-Semitic, he was racist, he was a bigot. And they said, my God, we can’t believe this. So now there’s an H.L. Mencken phone booth in the National Press Club. (Laughter)

Go look at that baby. Anyway, enough of that. Just a couple more. I want people to remember that I took on the AARP when I was in office. I was the only living Senator that ever had a hearing on them. They were furious. They’ve never gotten over it. I said, well, I just wanted to know what you do with your money. You’ve got 38 million members, 10 bucks dues, now it’s 12. What do you do with your bucks? Well, when I saw that they had misused the postal permit, that they were one and a half percent of all mailings under that special permit of the Post Office—one and a half percent. The minute you hit 50, it starts. And the Postal Service sued them for promoting their insurance and they settled for \$106 million, just wrote a check. That really piqued my interest.

Their building downtown is a temple of mahogany and marble. They don’t want people to come in there because people are so busy. They really don’t want them to see it. The lease rental is \$17 million a year. And then they sealed the records of the poor old teacher that started the operation, Andrus, because it was shot through and the co-founder of AARP was a felon. Well, other than that it was not a good thing. (Laughter)

I don’t want to be known as a benign curmudgeon. I just prefer to be known as a curmudgeon. But a couple of other things I wrote here. The media today is interested in three C’s, conflict, confusion and controversy. And forgetting the original C, which is clarity. And it isn’t your fault. Not hers. I’ve watched her write and there are people, I know these people, I’ve watched them through the years. You felt confident talking to Helen Dewar of *The Washington Post* or doing “MacNeil/Lehrer” because you had to bring your own brains for 20 minutes. A lot of staff people never let their people go on “MacNeil/Lehrer”

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because they run out of gas and lines after five minutes. And that's a sad thing to watch.

The stimulus, let me just mention, Erskine and I always felt that the stimulus was already in effect, it was called the deficit. And when you have a deficit of 1.3 trillion bucks, we said what the hell else do you call that but a stimulus? Now it's down to 6 or 700 billion, and we hope it goes away, but people keep missing the point. I think Larry Summers the other day talked about the deficit is really not material and Erskine and I would agree totally. But the debt is sure as hell material and if you can't get the difference between the debt and the deficit in a newspaper, this country can't possibly make it. It's the debt that's on automatic pilot.

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**Interest on the national debt today...is larger than the budget of Commerce, Education, Energy, Homeland Security, Justice, State and a total of nine departments of government combined.**

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The Folger Library, the very dear thing to me, I was on the advisory board. Interest on the national debt today—interest, I think it's 160 billion or something—but if we don't do something and it goes back to historic interest, which is five or six percent, it will be 600 billion a year. But whatever present interest is, it's larger than the budget of Commerce, Education, Energy, Homeland Security, Justice, State and a total of nine departments of government combined. Now try that one on. It's

larger than the budget of nine cabinet departments, the central nine, and I've only named six of them. So I don't know how you get it across, you can't. You can't use charts, can't use GDP, you can't use these things, but I have a comment about the president and I want you to hear it clearly.

Don't laugh. I've watched him. He bristles at conflict. Erskine has had notable times with him, all alone, before his re-election. Erskine said, "First, let me tell you why Al and I are pissed off at you and then you can tell us why you're pissed off at us." Nobody's in the room. And the president said, "I know what you're doing, and I concur with it and I'm going to get at it after I get re-elected." Well, it's November. And nothing is happening.

I have a view, it's childish and naive. I've been accused of that. But I believe this president is a very shy person. And I believe that he, like President Hoover, said the worst part of the job was the constant pneumatic hammer of human contact. And I don't think he likes that and I don't think he likes intimacy, not in the words of husband and wife, but intimacy of people. What he loves is adulation and there's a lot of difference between that and these other things. If you notice, any time the stuff is hitting him, and it's hitting harder now and it's tough to watch, his hair is getting

grayer, he looks like all presidents I've ever known. They just take it day in and day out—they age.

He just, it seems to be, is getting buffeted from all sides and his handlers are gone. Axelrod has gone home and Plouffe and Gibbs. He's left with Valerie Jarrett, who comes up to Erskine and me, and says, "Well, we're certainly pleased with what you're doing," and you know that's a fake. She isn't pleased at all with what we're doing and she's running the shop up there and he's taking it and getting the blame. But I hate to even say that I feel that there's a lot of pain in what he's going through and he's stuck with the phrase, like George the first was with "read my lips," which stuck George, because George was trying to say, well, if you must have revenue, I guess I'm going to go down in flames and thanks to Newt Gingrich, he did. That's another story.

So here he's stuck with, I promise you you won't have to give up your present plan, period. And they'll keep dragging that old thing through the traces and the ruts for a long time, I guess. But it's a tough thing to watch, because meanwhile, going unaddressed in all this pain is two-thirds of the American budget. Not even talked about.

**Mr. Jones:** Let me shift the focus of this a little bit and ask this panel to help me and the Shorenstein Center on something that we've been thinking a lot about, which is what could we, what could the Shorenstein Center on Media, Politics and Public Policy and the Kennedy School of Government and Harvard University, what could we do to help this deadlock and bitter partisanship, not to have solutions to problems that people are going to simply accept, but to find a way, such as we can, to change the conversation into one that is a genuine conversation, that values compromise, that looks at getting things done as a priority. We're the Kennedy School of Government. What could we do? Beth, do you have an opinion about that?

**Ms. Meyers:** Well, I was writing down things. The last time I was here in this room was for the post-mortem on the campaign, which I don't know if any of you were here, ended in pitch black. The lights went out and it was—

**Mr. Jones:** Symbolic, yes, I was in the room.

**Ms. Meyers:** But at that time I had my first meeting with David Axelrod and since then he and I have actually spent a lot of time together and I've joined the University of Chicago IOP Board. And one of the things that he and I talked about, my husband finds it a very unlikely friendship and sometimes when David and I are texting late at night, he says who are you texting? I said, David Axelrod and he's like, this is kind of too weird for me to even believe. (Laughter)

But David and I talk a lot about how do these institutions, how can we find some common ground? There is a lot of common ground. When I

talked with David about joining the board, we talked about words that you used yesterday, shared sacrifice, looking at ways to promote the middle class, protect the most vulnerable. These are values that every American shares and whether you're on the farthest left or the farthest right, you know, creating an environment, creating some sort of world where you could agree on basic principles and then find small steps.

I really do, I feel for this president. I don't know if anyone here saw the play *All the Way* at the ART, which put on in painful display the difficulties that LBJ had when he was doing the Civil Rights Act and the compromises that he found. It looked like an impossible situation. And I think if he was able to do that, then there is a way through the woods for this president. And institutions like the Kennedy School can perhaps bring people together to find just small pieces of common ground, small territories that

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you can grow from. The other thing the president really has going against him right now is distrust. And it springs from a couple of the things you talked about. And if we can find a way to work together on little things and build trust a piece at a time—it isn't a final answer, but it's a first step.

**Mr. Jones:** I was living in New York when Rudolph Giuliani became mayor. And he did something that had a profound impact on the character and the tone of the city. He made it a top

priority to remove graffiti. He made it something that the city of New York did not tolerate. And if it appeared, it disappeared immediately. All the subway cars were stripped of graffiti. All the walls were stripped of graffiti. It changed something about the way people thought about the city, I can tell you that.

And it strikes me that that may be part of the media role in this. To change that atmosphere of this bitter language that we use often in the media to characterize things. Clarence, what do you think of that? I mean, what do you think the role of the media is in this and trying to find our way? What you said a few moments ago was essentially, time is just going to have to take care of this and there's really not much we can do. Is there anything that you think we could do that would be comparable to removing the graffiti?

**Mr. Page:** Yeah, but the graffiti strategy is part of the Fixing Broken Windows approach to revitalizing cities, which worked very well in New York and Malcolm Gladwell has written about it, so it must be good. Chi-

cago had a similar situation with our high-rise public housing projects, which were a, well, everybody agreed that they were built to racially segregate people in Chicago. They needed to be torn down in order to stop the concentration of crime that had resulted. And everybody said that will never happen. It's just too mammoth of a process, just like the Civil Rights Bill, never happen. But once they did actually clean up one building and demolished it and relocated everybody, folks said, ah, change is possible. And then you began to see a larger change and they eventually demolished all the high-rise family public housing, which was the largest concentration in the country of low-income public housing. The down side is, you've all heard about Chicago's homicide rates skyrocketing the last couple of years, it's directly traceable back to people being relocated in new ghettos rather than being properly distributed, if you will, throughout the metropolitan area. That's called the law of unintended consequences. And this is kind of what's happened now to me in our politics.

I think we have had a swing over the last decade or so from the high point of, let's say the first Bush administration when Republicans had been riding on what, five presidential victories out of the six previous elections and then things turned in the early '90's and you had a series of scandals in Congress. You had of course the Lewinsky fiasco. You had all these same things that happened that shifted the ground to where, in 2008, when Barack Obama was elected, the Republican Party was largely in disarray, a lot like in the late '60's after Goldwater. And into that vacuum rushed the Tea Party.

And I think one thing that's great about having a chance to have a couple of egghead semesters at the Kennedy School, it's a chance to get beyond daily journalism and our natural reactive reflexes about politics. What's the story today? I think the longer view can begin to look at things like what is the impact of a Twitter age on our politics? What is the difference now from the 1960's? The Civil Rights Act. Well, LBJ, in his favor, had first of all a Democratic majority in Congress. The tragic assassination, of course, of JFK and the impact that had on the public in unifying the nation in a perverse way, but helpful, as it turned out, for legislation like that.

Also, Senator Everett Dirksen of Illinois was his ally in rallying northern Republicans to overwhelm southern segregationist Democrats. My kids are always fascinated when I tell them this story. Well, Grandpa, tell

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me about the day when Republicans were on black people's side. Oh, yeah, I remember. The fact is politics goes through changes. And I think that we, in the media, have a very important role here, not just reporting the daily news, but also stepping back and taking the larger view as to what's going on out there with things like the budget. And politicians, of course—what was it a Republican friend told me back in the '90's, gee, you can't cut taxes, you can't raise spending, what's the fun of being a legislator? That's kind of where we are now. And we in the media don't need to play that game as well. We need to talk about, hey, that's some hard choices that

need to be made out there.

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**I think that the Internet age has evolved a... sort of Internet courage, where people behind the screen of the Internet, behind the screen of anonymity, feel empowered to say all sorts of inane and crazy things.**

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**Mr. Jones:** Let me ask you, Leonard and Jackie, my guess is, Leonard, you get your own share of hate mail. I once got a letter that was such an over the top hate mail thing since when I was on television some fans of Bill O'Reilly sent me an email that was so over the top that I showed it to one of my colleagues here and he kind of blanched and said have you called the police, thinking that I would need personal body guards to keep from being gunned down. The thing is that a lot of it is not genuine threat. But it is a kind of vandalism or

even assault that sets a tone that I think is so very damaging to trying to genuinely find any solutions. Do you, again, let me ask it in the frame of what can we at the Kennedy School do? What could we do to improve the situation, do you think?

**Mr. Pitts:** Well, there's a number of things. I think one of the unintended by-products of new media has been to empower a sort of culture of what I call Internet bravery. And that term is something that I coined based on something that I heard an athlete once say. Athletes, you know, you've got these big chiseled guys on the field of play and in the stands there's some scrawny accountant calling him all kinds of names and calling their mother names and this, that and the other. And one athlete said they refer to that as beer muscles.

I think that the Internet age has evolved a counterpart, sort of Internet courage, where people behind the screen of the Internet, behind the screen of anonymity, feel empowered to say all sorts of inane and crazy things. I think that the news media are beginning to address that to whatever degree they can. I know that my paper has banned, on the message boards, anonymous commentaries. So that's a step in the right direction. But in

terms of the larger issue of what we do as regards to hate, because you're right, I have seen my share of hate mail. My absolute favorite email went in its totality, you are such a racist N word. (Laughter)

That's my favorite piece of email.

**Mr. Page:** That was written to me, too.

**Mr. Pitts:** You got that one too? And you mentioned the email that you got that your colleague blanched at. I actually lived under police protection for about a month and had death threats in 2007, I guess it was. So I feel it very acutely. But I think we've talked about hate and we've also talked about the sort of dearth of fact. I think it was Clarence and the Senator mentioned the fact that people have this impression that the foreign aid budget is 30 or 40 percent and it's actually less than one. I think that those two things are interrelated.

I think that we live in and have evolved a media culture where it is okay, perfectly okay to be facts optional. I knew that we had crossed the rubicon when Senator Kyl, I believe it was, of Arizona, said that 90 percent of what Planned Parenthood does is abortion and Planned Parenthood comes back and says it's three percent and my absolute favorite part, a written statement, and I emphasize that because it's written implies that you had time to think about it, the explanation that they gave to CNN in a written statement was, well, that statement was not intended to be factual. But you see that everywhere, from all angles, media, politics and whatever.

And the by-product of that is if the Senator and I want to discuss, argue about whatever, whatever the issue is

and we have a body of facts and that's the body of facts. And maybe the Senator thinks this is more important or maybe I think that's more important or maybe I think this should be spun this way or that should be, that's fine, we have the basis for a good faith discussion. But if I have facts here and the Senator has some facts there, and we don't have the same pool of facts, then all we have the basis for is an argument and screaming at each other. And that's where we stand now in America. That's what media, the fragmentation of media have done to this country. And I think it's an undiscussed, much undiscussed danger, but it's a clear and present danger.

I don't require anybody to agree with me on all things ideologically, politically, I think the world would be boring if they did, but I would like to know that we're all coming from the same pool of facts. I would like to know that if we're discussing whether or not, say, the foreign aid budget

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is too big, we both first understand where it as a matter of objective fact is. If we both understand where it as a matter of objective fact is, then we can have a good faith discussion on whether it's too large or too small. But if I am just convinced that it's 40 percent and if you know for a fact that it's less than one percent, what basis do we have to do anything except scream at each other, which is what we're doing very loudly and very well.

**Ms. Calmes:** I think the best thing the Center can do, which is something it does do, tries to do and just should do more of, which is bring people in to learn some facts. I mean, the hardest thing as a journalist is interviewing people (and it happens more in the last few years than it did early in my career) is to be interviewing a member of Congress and they're just saying things that I know for a fact are outright wrong. I do it sometimes, but you have to be careful to let them know that they're wrong or to confront them with what is really the fact. But more often than not, I just let it go and feel like in most situations it's not my place. I'll just quote them, but it's not my place to tell them they're wrong.

But again, it's a subjective thing. I remember back in the '90's, the Kennedy School was a place where new members of Congress did their orientation.

**Mr. Jones:** They still do.

**Ms. Calmes:** And then it became a partisan thing, where Republicans wouldn't come in the '90's, as I recall.

**From the Floor:** There are still more Democrats, but we had 20 Republicans last time. [The Institute of Politics has sponsored the New Members of Congress meeting every two years since 1972.]

**Ms. Calmes:** Which is a shame. Because I think you've done more outreach to Republicans to get them in. I just wish there was some way. These people come and if I can't say it here, I guess I can't say it anywhere.

I think one of the bravest things done in recent years is the book that Norm Ornstein and Tom Mann wrote, their second. The first book was good, but they have basically said, enough of this on the one hand, on the other hand. Currently in our history the Republicans are more to blame for what's going on in Washington.

It's harder for me now that I work at *The New York Times* to be saying something like that because I'm instantly labeled as just reflecting some innate liberal bias of *The New York Times*, but I worked 18 years at *The Wall Street Journal* and I base this on having covered Congress full time for more than 12 years and then subsequently covered both Congress and White Houses interchangeably. In my day this man [Sen. Simpson] was one of the most conservative members of Congress. Now he comes out in his post-Senate career and people like him and Pete Domenici, who were giants in

their time, know their stuff, are just disregarded by the people who are in there now because they're seen as has-beens.

And I think that just trying and trying and trying to get people in here to learn some facts. I just wish some of these people in the House Republican Caucus could just be put in a room and be forced to listen to the facts on the budget and what it means to be cutting discretionary spending this much. And they will say they're for cutting entitlements, but there's never anything that comes out. They disregard the president when he talks about Medicaid cuts that are in his budget. I mean, that's where I'll take issue. I could sit here and tell you all the ways this president frustrates me, but I'm not the columnist. I'm the only one here who is not a columnist.

But the fact is that you said he told you wait till after the election. After the election, he put out a budget that his own party hated because it included the Social Security CPI, it included more than 400 billion in additional Medicare cuts. This, three years after his party had taken a walloping in the 2010 mid-terms because the Republicans were criticizing them for having cut Medicare in the Affordable Care Act by \$500 billion over 10 years. So he's putting this stuff out and then he's getting hit and nobody is giving him credit for doing it. His fault is he doesn't promote it. He puts it out there and then he just lets it drop and doesn't pick it up.

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**...get more Republicans  
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So all this is a long way of just saying get more Republicans in here with Democrats and make them learn the facts and talk the facts. And our job somehow is to confront them. I just feel so constrained. My frustration as a journalist, that there is so much that's wrong. The facts are not out there or they're being misstated and I feel constrained in how much I can confront people and I feel more constrained now, as a *New York Times* reporter than I did as a *Wall Street Journal* reporter.

**Mr. Jones:** Let me open it up to this group.

**Andrew Glass:** I work for Politico in Washington and I'm a former Fellow. We all remember where the supposedly smart people in Washington, back in the fall, said there could never be a closure of government because it would lead to a self-immolation of Congress and we all know what happened. So, now, let's fast forward to January when we have one deadline and February where we have another deadline. My question is, what does the panel think can be done between now and then so we don't repeat what happened in October?

**Sen. Simpson:** Again, it's inside baseball and I think that Jackie's frustration is not frustration as a journalist, it's frustration as a citizen. That's

what it is. And there's nothing wrong with that. But it's got to be tough for you and you to just say, look, I'm not a journalist, I'm not a politician, what the hell are you doing? And today they're meeting. And the inside baseball is about the Conference Committee on the budget. I've received a call now that I should contact them—and they give me a list—and that Erskine should call these guys. We're not going to call them. What the hell, there's nothing to say except get a handle on the growth of Medicare and health care. You've heard about the outcomes versus the money. Get a handle on the solvency of Social Security.

And the reason we were able to do it in '83 is because Senator Moynihan said everyone is entitled to their own opinion, but nobody is entitled to their own facts. It's an old phrase, but it's so real. And Moynihan and

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**But the Conference Committee is meeting and that's a heartening thing because we haven't had a budget for five years.**

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Dole and Baker and all of them put together the package to raise the retirement age a shred and lower the benefit a shred and do other things which are now untouchable. But the Conference Committee is meeting and that's a heartening thing because we haven't had a budget for five years. The huge reserve currency of the world, a huge nation and no budget. Any of you with

a business would be thrown out of office in an instant. If you walked into the Congress and handed them a balance sheet and a profit and loss statement, 95 percent of them wouldn't know what the hell they were looking at. And there's certainly no one in the administration that can tell you what the hell that is.

There is no one there who is a business person. There's no one there that knows Congress better than Joe Biden and they've isolated him. He must be the most frustrated person in Washington. I've known him for 40 years. I love Joe Biden because he gets his foot in his mouth as much as I do and you've got to love people like that. And he's been isolated. And he's the only guy that can go up to Obama and say what the hell are you doing, grab him by the lapel and say I know this game. I've negotiated. I've been on Conference Committees, but no, no, they are not going to have any of that.

So, today they're meeting. And I don't know. They both have said, including Patty Murray and the Repubs, that they will not talk about taxes. But they will talk about tax reform and the tax expenditures. That's progress. They're going to do small ball, but if they did anything at all to come out of a Conference Committee and say we've agreed on a budget, small ball—what the hell do you care what you call it—that will brighten the

whole country. And they have that opportunity and it will come before February 7th and January, they have to come up with it by December 13th, I think.

So, watch that one. If that one falls right down where the Super Committee went and all the other stuff, then just hang on and we'll go cliff to cliff to cliff, crisis to crisis to crisis, until thecankicksback guys years down the road who have been kicked in the groin and have tried so hard to let them hear what's going on with them, they're going to get cremated.

**Mr. Jones:** Do you think the political realities have made the likelihood of a shutdown far less this time around though?

**Sen. Simpson:** Well, Erskine thought it would never come to pass and Erskine suddenly just shifted months ago. He says it's going to happen. It could happen. It could really happen. And then you saw guys, mostly Republicans, saying, well, this is just poppycock, it's not the end of the world, we're not going to lose all this, we'll just test it. We'll just let it happen for a few days. Well, we did it once for 24 hours and got a lot of flack. Remember way back down the line? You do it for a week and, boy, the markets will punish us. It's the tipping point. It's what Durbin kept asking about, where's the tipping point? And the tipping point is simply the people have loaned us what will soon be, by doing nothing, 20 trillion bucks at the end of the decade. And they're going to say I want more money for our money. I said all that last night. Interest rates kick up and inflation kicks in and the guy that gets screwed is the little guy, the guy who is trying to get a college loan for the community college at two percent and suddenly it's six and he can't do it and he can't keep his business open.

Because I'll tell you again, the money guys will always take care of themselves, always, without fail. And they know how to do it. They're highly skilled at it. So that was a cheerful note that I wanted to throw in there.

**Peter Hart:** Let me start out and just say you talked about the little guy, Senator Simpson. And it just seems to me there are only two things that count as I look at incumbents. One is reelection and the other is money. And when I take public opinion polls, I look and there are four things that come out in our most recent soundings. One, the approval of Congress is nine percent. Number two, 60 percent of the American public says if there were a lever on the ballot that could vote out every member of Congress, including their own, they would pull that lever. Three, that a plurality of

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Americans say I now consider my own member to be part of the problem rather than part of the solution. And number four, given a choice in 2014, in my own congressional district, if I had a Democrat, an Independent and a Republican, 35 percent say I would vote for a Democrat, 30 percent for an Independent, 25 percent for a Republican. Why can't we get a third party? Why can't we get something that is independent so that essentially the one thing that counts is votes?

And if the votes are there, you talked about the little people, then there is the possibility that instead of playing for the extremes, all of a sudden the members start to say, hold it, there's a block of voters out there. I can understand the difficulties in being able to win the presidency or "control" a majority in Congress, but I don't understand why it cannot become a block and a force that changes the dynamics.

**Sen. Simpson:** Well, you are a pro and you've proved that. You have a great reputation and deserve it. Third parties I don't think will work. Somebody mentioned a bunch of them, but I didn't hear anybody say John Anderson. Did somebody mention him? Well, he's living in Florida. He's 90 now and he's feeling pretty good about having done it, I think. But a bunch of us, Sam Nunn, Bennett Johnson, Democrats and Republicans put together a thing called Americans Elect. It was a dazzler. We were ready to go on the budget of 38 states. We had been approved by Secretaries of State and had the authorizations. It was very simple. We would select a Republican presidential candidate and a Democrat vice presidential and the cabinet would be equally split between parties. One problem—couldn't get anybody, anybody, to run, not one.

We'd say, Sam Nunn, Sam, you'd be great. And then we'll put somebody else, a Republican, up as V.P., Sam said no. Bill Cohen, you're an example. George Mitchell, you'd be a dandy. And they all said forget it. Who would want to go through that? Because of the money issue. Well, we can raise the money, we said. And it just silently died a very unknown death. But it was a try. And after Americans Elect then there's No Labels out there. All I know is that Ross Perot was a spoiler. Bill Clinton didn't get 50 percent of the vote either time, if I recall. And I was out in Orange County where all the rugged ones are, like John Wayne.

And the audience said, how did we get this draft dodging ornery guy as president of the United States? Well, I said, about half of you in this room voted for Ross Perot, so don't blame me. And you could see their wives jabbing them, like, you idiot, I told you about Ross Perot. (Laughter)

And 26 percent of the people in Maine voted for Ross Perot and 24 percent in Wyoming voted for Perot. Those two states were his biggest harvest. And that's because they're rugged, ornery, independent, irritable, opinionated, well read. They are the people who really don't give a damn

about polls, they just give a damn about getting something done and cutting this or cutting that—I don't know.

**Mr. Page:** But didn't Bush win those states anyway?

**Sen. Simpson:** Oh, yeah.

**Mr. Page:** I mean, that's the point. Well, Stan Greenberg said that Perot only really had an impact in Ohio. And even there it's arguable.

**Sen. Simpson:** I just don't think it would work. I really don't. I don't see any part of a third party ever working. You want something like London or Italy. Hell, that doesn't look like good stuff to me.

**Mr. Patterson:** I'm Tom Patterson, I'm on the faculty here at the Kennedy School. Senator Simpson, it's great to have you back. One line I liked in your talk last night was the "two sets of books" remark that you made. My sense is there are probably two sets of facts for many people in Washington, that they know a lot of the facts that you're talking about and there's a separate set of facts that they often deploy when they're out on the political trail. The factual bridge, I think, is an important one to get some agreement on the facts, but I think even if we get that, I wonder whether it's going to help all that much.

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To me, this strikes me as a deep values divide. There's a real difference in the way that many Republicans are coming at these issues, their vision of government compared to the Democrats, and that that divide is really the tough one to try to figure out how we can bridge that one.

**Sen. Simpson:** I don't know. I was at the talk the president gave at George Washington University. He had Erskine and me on the front row, Paul Ryan was on the front row. I tell you, the president was in full flower, in full flower just hammering the Republicans. He never mentioned Ryan's name, gleefully, but I can tell you, I was sitting next to Gene Sperling and at one line in the president's talk, to me, I felt it was absolutely contrived. He talked about the poor and the downtrodden. And don't forget, Erskine and I never did a thing with SSI or food stamps or anything, fully recognizing the vulnerable in society.

And we didn't put teeth in the shark either until down the road, recognizing a modest recovery and not hammering it. And the president after talking—it was almost with violin music—about what Republicans were about to do to the most vulnerable, said, "Not on my watch." And the crowd just erupted. The only time there was applause in the speech. So he asked Erskine and I to come in the next day and asked how it was. And Erskine said, I thought you were very harsh. Well, of course, Ryan had left the room and Sperling was like a jack-in-the-box. He shot out the door to calm him. And Ryan said, "You poisoned the well, because that's it."

So the next day when Erskine threw that in it, came around to me and I said, "I think it was like inviting a guy to his own hanging. There was nothing good about it." Joe comes up to me afterwards and he said I tried to tell them. Don't invite Ryan to sit there and take it on the chops. And that's what they did. And now the president is caught with something he did and he has savaged the insurance industry. The whole Affordable Care Act was how to stick it to these greedy bastards, and guess what,

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he's standing in front of them now and saying help me. Don't let me go down the tube. You're going to keep your policy, period. So don't cancel them.

I doubt that they'll be too receptive. And this is what's wrong out here now. Your enemy today will be your friend tomorrow. And if you can't figure that out in politics, get out. And

that's exactly the trap that comes from bragging in either party, or whether it's either president, or either congressperson is I'm going to stick it to this group, you can count on me, we're going to take him out. Well, a year later Obama needs the insurance industry and wants them to hold off and, will you please not send those notices until we iron this thing out? And they're likely to say, well, we might, if you'll shut up. But we're likely not to if you're going to keep hammering us like you did and making us look like the evil of all society. I don't know. You just can't go through political life sticking it to somebody else or some other person or some other party and not trying to make up. Although apologies last only so long and you should only try to make one per person.

**Mr. Kalb:** On an assumption that most of the very large points that we've been discussing this morning are not going to be resolved in the near future, I wanted to offer a suggestion in the form of a question, following Alex's question really earlier about what is it that the Center could do, IOP could do, the Kennedy School could do. And picking up a point that Jackie made earlier. I know from personal experience that this place has an enormous power to convene people and to deal and to focus on ideas.

Wouldn't it be wonderful if the school, in this case led by you, led by the IOP, I don't know, but I would imagine a collection and maybe the school itself, establish a regular exchange of views between different points of view, the bigger the name the better, on an absolutely regular basis. And try to work out a deal with one of the networks to try to carry those. But on a regular basis with the inclusion of some kind of television operation which is essential. Bringing together very top people representing key aspects and to try to get to the heart of what you're saying, which I think

is so important. What is it that you can do here? You have possibly a great opportunity now, because the large issues don't appear to be on the threshold of resolution.

**Mr. Jones:** I think you're quite right about that. One of the things that has been going through my mind though is do we want the people who are going to be repeating just exactly what they have said in other places in the kind of spirit of harsh partisanship or do we want to basically convene people who are willing to engage on a somewhat different basis who value the idea of bipartisanship and would engage the issues from that perspective rather than simply from the left, right. You know, let me give you my party line.

I think the thing is that what I would like to see, again, it's like the graffiti point, I would like to see what people say when they are genuinely trying to find some kind of consensus and what kind of an impact that has on the people who are then bearing witness to that. I think you're right about the television part. And the web lends itself to that very well, as well. I thank you for the thought. Are there any other questions?

**Lee Aitken:** I'm a Shorenstein Fellow. I think particularly for an organization that's focused on the media, Jackie raised such an essential point about reporting the he said/she said without stepping back and saying, but one of the things that was said wasn't true. And it became a big issue at *The New York Times* a couple of years ago when my friend, Art Brisbane was the Public Editor. There was a big kerfuffle over should a reporter be a fact checker. And should we fact-check our sources. And he got in all kinds of trouble for it. Like he was kind of talking out of school. But it seems to me that that is something again, maybe we could convene on or highlight in some way, take a stand on, the false equivalence of, you know, Michelle Bachmann says it's this and the other side says it's this and we can now go home because we've reported both sides of this issue.

I think that is so essential to how we're going to cover things going forward, to step out of that, the restraints Jackie is feeling have to be addressed. We have to be able to step away from them somehow in the best newspapers, the best broadcast journalism. I think that's kind of the key to everything.

**Mr. Jones:** I think you've got a good point. Senator, the last comment goes to you.

**Sen. Simpson:** There is nothing more, and Ann is here, she's back there, without that compass I'd be really north, south, east and west all day, which I can do. But the greatest four years of our lives were right here. And I'm talking about all of it. The Senate, the Iraq Study Group, anything, the Select Commission on Immigration, Ted Hesburgh, all the stuff I've ever done and I didn't realize I'd done quite so much until somebody intro-

duced me and they really had checked their facts and it was dazzling, I could have listened all day. (Laughter)

But this is a place where it can be done. And Alex has done a great job. My successor was David Pryor and now Trey Grayson. It won't get done anywhere else, except it has to get done in Congress—but if there are ancillary places for it to get done, it's here. I saw that when I was privileged to teach and privileged to direct the Institute of Politics. And Ann and I lived in Eliot House in L22 with no kitchen. It was like being on the GI bill again and it was the greatest four years of our lives. This is the place. This is it. And it can do it, but I don't know how exactly. I'm not an organizational guy, but I'm a guy with heart and this is the place it could happen.

**Mr. Jones:** Senator, it's been, as it always has been when you're here, an honor and a privilege to be with you and you're welcome back here at all times, at all times. Leonard, thank you and congratulations to you. Jackie, Clarence, Beth had to go a little bit early. I look over there, there's Mark McKinnon. Were you here when the Senator was talking about your third party effort?

**Mr. McKinnon:** Echoing down the hall.

**Mr. Jones:** Another Shorenstein Fellow we're proud to embrace. Thank you all for joining us this morning. It's been a great pleasure to have you with us. Thank you for being there last night and we hope that we're going to be able to take what we heard today and do something with it. Thank you very much.