

NATIONAL PRESS CLUB LUNCHEON WITH DICK ARMEY

SUBJECT: THE FUTURE OF THE REPUBLICAN PARTY AND THE NEED TO RETURN TO ITS ROOTS IN FISCAL CONSERVATISM

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LOCATION: NATIONAL PRESS CLUB BALLROOM, WASHINGTON, D.C.

TIME: 12:30 P.M. EDT

DATE: MONDAY, MARCH 15, 2010

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**ALAN BJERGA:** (Sounds gavel.) Good afternoon, and welcome to the National Press Club. My name is Alan Bjerga. I'm a reporter for Bloomberg News and the President of the National Press Club. We're the world's leading professional organization for journalists and are committed to our profession's future through our programming and by fostering a free press worldwide. For more information about the Press Club, please visit our website at [www.press.org](http://www.press.org). To donate to our programs, please visit [www.press.org/library](http://www.press.org/library).

On behalf of our members worldwide, I'd like to welcome our speaker and attendees at today's event, which includes guests of our speaker, as well as working journalists. I'd also like to welcome our C-SPAN and Public Radio audiences. After the speech concludes, I will ask as many audience questions as time permits.

I would now like to introduce our head table guests. From your right, Kathy Kiely, of *USA Today*; Ralph Winnie of the Eurasian Business Coalition; Todd Gillman of the *Dallas Morning News*; Mark Heller of the *Watertown Daily Times*; Rick Dunham of the *Houston Chronicle*, and former President of the National Press Club, Matt Kibbe, President of FreedomWorks; Andrew Schneider, associate editor for Kiplinger Washington Editors, and the Chairman of the National Press Club Speakers Committee.

Skipping over our speaker for the moment, Andrea Stone, senior Washington correspondent for AOL News and the Speakers Committee member who organized today's event; Ambassador C. Boyden Gray, co-chairman of the FreedomWorks

Foundation and a guest of the speaker; Diana Marrero, of the *Milwaukee Journal Sentinel*; Jonathan Salant of Bloomberg News, also a former President of the National Press Club; and Adam Brandon, Vice President for Communications for FreedomWorks.

Our speaker today is someone many Republicans would love to have over for tea. (Laughter) Dick Armey is no stranger to Washington. After 18 years in Congress, during which time he became House Majority Leader, he now has a second career as the leader in the Tea Party Movement through his group Freedom Works.

When you saw citizens rally against taxes they considered too high last April, or packed town hall meetings last summer to protest Democratic plans for healthcare, or for perhaps storm congressional offices tomorrow, you are watching Dick Armey's organizing acumen come to life. Some polls show that the grassroots Tea Party Movement has become more popular among conservatives than the Republican Party itself, even as the organization grows into its identity.

Dick Armey, however, has always known his identity. The PhD economist taught at the University of North Texas before turning to politics, being elected to the House in 1984. He was a principal author of the 1994 Contract With America that helped Republicans end 40 years of Democratic majorities in Congress. The party he helped lead was not a party of "No." Armey and House Republicans worked with President Clinton to pass a balanced budget and welfare reform, even as the bitter impeachment battles of late that decade increased the party's intentions.

Armey left Congress in 2003 and was mostly out of the spotlight until last year. An outspoken critic of President Obama, he was quoted recently as saying it was very reasonable to expect Republicans to adhere to his new so-called "Ten Commandments," a list of party principles that some have dubbed a purity test.

Called the "outsider's insider" in a recent profile in *The New York Times Magazine*, please welcome former House Majority Leader, Dick Armey. (Applause)

Speaking initially, before Leader Armey's remarks, will be C. Boyden Gray. (Applause)

**C. BOYDEN GRAY:** Well, after that introduction, and all of you know Dick Armey anyway, so, I don't want to take up any of his time. I just want to say how fond I am of him, and how much I respect him. And, just one little anecdote about my relationship with him back in the Reagan-Bush years, he plotted-- he was really, really helpful-- we plotted to try to figure out a way to get the line-item veto back for the Executive Branch. Think of how different life would be if we had the line-item veto, and it involved possibly vetoing the congressional stamp authorization for congressional stamp in return for them giving the Executive Branch the veto back. It didn't work out, but it was a great idea. And, I think, to use that anecdote to describe what Dick does now, and what this Tea Party Movement is about now, is not that different than what Reagan stood for and pushed for, with Dick's help, back not so many years ago.

It's said the Tea Party Movement is some sort of radical fringe. And, I think it's pretty mainstream Reaganism, myself. And, remember that what Reagan said, he said the very heart and soul of conservatism is libertarianism. And, what he meant by that is, limited government is the basic anchor of the conservative way of thinking.

And, he once said, also Reagan, "Whether we believe issues, whether we believe in our capacity for self-government, whether we abandon the American Revolution and confess that an intelligent, intellectual elite in a far-distant capital can plan our lives for us better than we can plan them ourselves." Now, I'm not sure that doesn't capture pretty much about what Dick Armey is now working with.

So, I view this as a wonderful correction of the notion, somehow, that you can have a big government conservatism. I don't think you can. I think you have to have limited government conservatism. And so, to let Dick Armey explain this much better than I can, let me turn it over to Dick.

(Applause)

**DICK ARMEY:** Well, thank you. Thank you both for that nice introduction. Thank you Boyden. I always feel so privileged to be with Boyden Gray. Well mostly, Boyden, I always worry if I'm smart enough to be with you. Anyway, I so admire Boyden Gray, and so appreciate your invitation.

I wanted to talk about what is now known as the Tea Party Movement. I know there's a lot of confusion about that. And, I've studied on it quite intensely as my general tendency. I might just mention, I am an academic by profession. I'm a professional economist. And, my last years in the University were devoted to what was a new, emerging field within the discipline of economics out of Virginia, with people like James Buchanan and Public Choice Theory, which I always described as the study of the aberrant behavior of people in public office.

So, it is almost instinctive for me, when I see something happening out there that affects public policy, to study on it intently. And, as I see this, this is another way of grassroots conservatism. And, I think-- I forget the number-- but, four or five ways that I'd observed, intimately, in my adult lifetime. And, I would suggest to you that the wave is ordinary people expressing their concern for their country and their concerns and fear of what their government might do to their country, or, oftentimes, their hope for what government we might get that would honor the tradition in history of the country as they see it and hold it dear.

And, the first wave, I think, was born out of optimism. Notice, if you will, as the waves go through time, they get bigger and more impactive (sic), influential. First wave I call the Goldwater wave in '64. It gave birth to Dick Armey. Who am I in politics? I'm a Goldwater baby. And, it was born out of the optimism of what this person who loves the

Constitution, who believes that extremism in the cause of liberty is a virtue, what he might do for America to honor its great traditions.

The second wave is-- And, notice the waves ebb. And after Goldwater, many of us ebb in disappointment. I remember being asked in 1978, “Do you think Ronald Reagan will be elected President?” And my response was, “No,” bearing my burdens of my Goldwater heartbreak, “People like us don’t get elected to office.” And then, Reagan got elected, and there was a wave that was known, then, as the Reagan Coalition Citizen Activist Emergent, being involved through their optimism and their hope.

Now, we begin to get a better sense of identity of who are these people with the Reagan wave. First of all, they are far more likely, than most of us, to have read *The Federalist Papers*, to actually have read the Constitution, to have read the history of the thinking of our founding fathers, to think of our founding fathers as the most courageous geniuses in the history of the economy-- history of the country, to be aware of the fact that, by the virtues of private enterprise, America had a higher per capita income than all the rest of the world when it, in fact, was still a colony, to be aware that Jamestown Colony, when it was first founded as a socialist venture, dang near failed with everybody dead and dying in the snow, and later prospered by virtue of individual enterprise, and what Adam Smith called “man’s natural tendency to truck and barter.”

To agree with-- help me out-- the great Prime Minister, English Prime Minister Churchill, that the American Constitutional Congress was the greatest act of entrepreneurial genius and courage in the history of the world for liberty, and to cherish that Constitution, to believe that the framers of the Constitution were extremely intelligent, learned, disciplined men who, in fact, prayed over and weighed over absolutely every word.

No word got into the Constitution by accident. They meant exactly what they wrote. They knew what the meaning of the word “is” was, and wrote what they meant. They had not suffered the indignities of deconstructionism. And, they took the English language literally, with a great deal of discipline.

To believe that it is the purpose of the court to interpret the law to see if it is, in fact, reconciled to the literal translation of the Constitution, and to believe that your duty, your oath of office to protect and serve the Constitution should be taken with a religious sense of commitment.

These folks are, frankly, pretty much normal people. They're involved in their normal lives and would rather do so, would rather believe that the American government continuously understands that liberty is a gift given to mankind by the Lord God Almighty. And, it is the duty of governments to protect it and to be confident that our government will see that duty and do it without me being involved, and only involve themselves out of a sense of distress and concern, and would rather go home.

So, after the Reagan wave accomplished its purpose, there was a great rejoicing. But, it ebbed back again. We were confident, and we relaxed. Then, the next wave that came along after Reagan won his third election, and George W. Herbert Bush-- George H. W. Bush-- broke everybody's heart in the fall of 1990 and ensured that he would not have a second term because he hadn't been aware of the fact, simple things that eighth graders can understand, politicians oftentimes can't get, that you can't say the most memorable thing you will have said in your entire life and then go back on it and expect to be reelected.

And so, then, there was another wave that came out. And this time it came out-- This wave came out in its bitter disappointment over George Herbert Walker Bush, and it came out on behalf of Ross Perot. And, it was much noticed but resulted in virtually no results whatsoever, except, I believe, the only elected official that came out of it was Jesse Ventura, hardly a great contribution to the welfare of mankind.

And so, but that wave ebbed. And, some of us might even have looked back at that wave, which we often called the Perotistas and think it's a good thing it ebbed. I mean, I don't know. There's a great country-western song, *My Heart Just Cannot Take Another You*. And, I kind of feel that way about Jesse Ventura. But at any rate, that was Minnesota's problem, and they deserved him.

But, at any rate, that wave didn't do much. But again, these were regular, and then this one seemed very hard for people-- these are normal, ordinary, everyday, ready-day folks, it's like you and me. And, they're coming out of optimism, or they come out of disappointment.

Then, we had another wave I'll call the Contract wave. They looked at the Republican Party in 1994 and they said, "Oh my gracious, what do we have here? Republicans are-- We have a political party in America that really wants to stand on the principles of Constitutional limited government, of individual liberty, of freedom, of fiscal restraint, responsibility?" And they said, "Well, these guys are worth fighting for. They're worth working with."

And so, we had another happy wave of optimism born out of the Contract with America. And then, of course, what happened? The Republicans, doing what politicians do, which is drink backsliders' wine by the gallons, switched their vision in office from a policy vision for America to a parochial vision for themselves, and they broke everybody's heart.

So then, you had another third wave that started with-- and this is the wave we're looking at now. I give you the birth date to this wave as the day that George W. Bush endorsed Arlen Specter over Pat Toomey six years ago. And, it was a little birth, as births tend to be. But, it was expressed in this way. "What in the heck is the President doing endorsing the Democrat?" When he had Toomey, and he endorses Specter?

And, there was a prediction, “Well, Specter will double-cross him as soon as he gets reelected,” and that happened. And eventually, Specter the defector went back to his roots. And, they were validated. And, there’s a sense of validation. There was a sense among these folks, no matter what expectation that I have of disappointing behavior on behalf of those who are trusted with the great honor and privilege and duties of public office, they are going to rise to my expectations.

And then, George W. Bush went further with the great TARP fiasco, and this wave grew larger and more anxious. And actually, while it grew in its disappointment in the Republicans with their earmarks, and George Bush with his TARP, and this consistent behavior on the part of the Republicans trying to be like the Democrats, it never really, in fact, found its legs because it had a ray of hope. They believed, initially, that when George W. Bush was defeated and the Democrats came back, that things would get better.

And people say, “Well, why weren’t you guys out in the street marching?” Because many of our activists thought Barack Obama is going to save us from this crowd up there, this crowd of people that don’t understand the Bush Republicans. And then, when President Obama got in office, immediately we got more bailout, we got meddling in the automobile industry. We had the great insurance takeover scheme. We had cap and trade looming out there. We had mandatory unionization out there.

And, these folks started to say, “Oh my goodness, what have we got here? This guy really scares us. Nancy Pelosi, Speaker Pelosi scares us. We have people here who do not cherish America the way we do, and would do it destruction with their romantic egalitarianism.” They didn’t read Ayn Rand. They didn’t read Hayek. They didn’t read von Mises. They didn’t read the Constitution. They did not read *The Federalist Papers*. What did they read? I’m fearful they had a sociology course or, even worse, an English course at Duke University.

They don’t seem to understand anything that is important and precious to us and it’s scary. So look at this wave. The first thing you have to understand, these are ordinary Americans who are scared that these people will wreck America. That we won’t have a free market system by which we all prosper. We won’t have a government that knows its limitations and protections our liberty. That we will have government control; and the one thing history has shown us time after time, controlled economies are failed economies. And it is frightening to them.

Our children will be so deep in hock, they’ll never get out. And we’ll destroy the most creative, innovative healthcare system in the world, then the whole world will be made worse off because invention creativity will disappear in healthcare. And so they are aroused now. But make no mistake about it, these are not kooky birds. So right now, the greatest player, the big tent on the political scene in America is called the Tea Party Movement. I see it, I define it as small government, grass roots activism. The Tea Party activists are part of it, FreedomWorks is part of it. FreedomWorks is the longest standing, most active organization within this movement. Why did they find us? They found us

because they got concerned, they wanted to get organized. Let's do something. How do you do it? They went on the internet and they found us. And one of the reasons this wave is so much bigger and so much more effective is that it is the first internet wave. And that, by the way, is the reason why this wave is not likely to ebb.

There are two things. This web of grass roots activist conservatism, which is normal, ordinary, everyday Americans who are essentially the same as you and me who would rather be home with my kids little league team or my bridge club, but feel compared to be out there in defense of liberty, are not going to go away after the Republicans most likely win a majority in the House of Representatives and quite possibly win a majority in the Senate, if not this election cycle, certainly in the next election. And when there is a Republican, a reform Republican, in the White House because this wave is not going to allow some Republican who is soft on his commitment to our Constitutional limitations to big government to get the nomination.

So someone who is Reaganesque in his stature. In the past, was such a success, this great wave would have ebbed back. But now, they will ebb back because they have the internet by which to stay in touch with one another into what I think of as something akin to the National Guard. They will be involved in their daily life, be involved in their daily-- comforted by the fact that we now have good people at the helm. But they will have their activism at the ready. And when the Republicans, as they will in the majority in the White House start consuming backslider's wine, start becoming discomfort minimizers, start looking for "what's in it for me now?" Start getting parochial, shortsighted and simpleminded, and lax in the performance of their duties, they're going to see these guys are back. They won't just have gone away and disarmed and left it in their hands. So this is a big change, this is a big sea change in that.

Now, one final characterization of this wave that I want you to understand. These are folks who don't care about politics and don't like politics and don't like politicians. They're skeptical and cynical about all of them. But they are also realistic enough to know that 99 percent of all people who hold public office in America do so as Republicans or as Democrats. And they all have a sense that the Democratic Party has pretty much abandoned all the things they cherish as they've committed themselves to their romantic egalitarianism. And that the Republican Party has a chance of understanding.

So they have a tendency to look at the Republican Party and say to the Republican Party, "If you can rise to the occasion of liberty, if you can show us that you really understand and commit to our personal liberties and to the productivity and effectiveness of real free market economic activity, we want to be workful (sic)." And they've already found themselves making a difference within the Republican Party's primary process. Somebody asked me today, "Why don't they deal with the Democrats?" They see no hope. I'm from Texas, Texas is a party that for the last 200 years was dominated by the conservative Democrats. The last conservative Democrat to win a statewide primary in Texas was Lloyd Bentsen in 1972. You see the same thing in South Carolina, you were probably the last conservative Democrat to win South Carolina. Conservative Democrats

don't win primaries anymore anywhere, even places like the Carolinas or Texas or Tennessee.

So they despair over that party. And if we got any hope at all, we must put it, as unreliable as they are, with the Republicans and try to rehabilitate them, reform them, and demand them, and manage their behavior, punish them when they lapse and applaud them when they do well.

So they are in a great sense right now more than they have ever been before, that great, big swing vote out there. And right now, they have a clear understanding of who they're swinging against. They're swinging against the Democrats, because the Democrats are who are frightening them half to death. But they haven't yet found themselves comfortably able to say, "Yes, and I'm swinging for these guys." Because they're still waiting for the Republicans to show that they're not the Republicans that just broke our heart a few years ago. And the Republican Party has got to find a way to convince them that they're reliable adults. A rare thing indeed to be found holding public office. And they're cynical and doubtful, and while at the same time they're hopeful.

They're basically saying America is too precious a gift to the history of the world to not be saved, and we must look for its salvation wherever it is possible. And right now, as pathetic as it is, the Republicans is the only hope we got. So don't think of themselves as energetically some kind of an allied organization, the Republican Party. That is not the case at all. The Republican Party is, of course, politically inept. They do not have a good record of creating an auxiliary organization.

One final point, for those of you who wonder where our money comes from, it comes from real people in America. You want to worry about who gets what money for political activism on what party, look at ACORN. Ninety percent of their money comes from the federal government. There, go talk about that. Don't talk about the 15 percent of the money that we get that comes from corporations that just asks for the privilege of keeping their identity private so they don't have Arlen Specter going after them because he didn't get his goofy plan for insurance reform on asbestos.

And look at the vendettas that he would have taken against anybody he could have found that was instrumental in funding FreedomWorks as it destroyed his asbestos bill, and you'll understand why contributors might want a little privacy, because they need to protect themselves from vindictive office holders. And they have a right to that. The law allows that their privacy be honored. But ACORN, on the other hand, takes public money, so look into them.

All right, somebody's telling me I've said enough, and I'm sure I have. My guy Adam says he wants you to ask all the questions you want. He's the actual sadist on our staff.

**MR. BJERGA:** Well, thank you very much for your time this afternoon and for taking the time to answer questions, of which there are many. First one, just bringing up

your commentary on Independence Party candidate, Jesse Ventura and his election in 1998. That was an election that was very much attributed to grass roots mobilization over the internet. The Answer Group that opposed the Iraq War, MoveOn.org, the campaign of Howard Dean, and a lot of the activities of President Obama often have been attributed to the new politics of the internet and the ability to mobilize grass roots. How is your group different from those groups in terms of internet mobilization? And how are they not simply another wave crashing on the partisan shores?

**MR. ARMEY:** Well, first of all, I think I could say certainly there are others that got better use of the internet more quickly than the grass roots, small government grass roots activists did. So one, we are now seeing the small government activists. MoveOn.org is not a grass roots organization because you know the name of Soros and you know he provides the money. You're still trying to figure out who provides the money to us and who's in charge. You're going nuts. Who's in charge? And the reason you're going nuts is nobody's in charge. That what happens when you have grass roots. When there's grass roots, nobody's in charge. The Democrats' left wing outfit with Soros at the top writing all the checks is not grass roots. Their operatives are all paid. Whoever showed up for ACORN without a paycheck? Funded by federal money from the Democratic Party who needed an auxiliary organization out there.

That's not grass roots. Grass roots is real people getting out of their homes at their own expense, going to Washington on their own terms with their own something to say about leave me alone. That's real grass roots. And it's true, there was some use in that. I don't want to be too harsh on Jesse Ventura, but don't you think he's been acting a little bizarre lately? Maybe I'm wrong. It just seems strange to me, that's all.

**MR. BJERGA:** What are some of the distractions for which the Tea Party Movement must beware?

**MR. ARMEY:** Well, I think clearly you have to-- If you're going to mobilize the attention of the voters at large, and that's what you need because in the end, democracies are carried out by officeholders, you have to stay with the key issues. You stay focused on the big issues. The center stake of the largest tent in American politics today is fiscal responsibility, individual liberty, restraint of big government in defense liberty. Now, that doesn't mean you ignore other issues, but you also handle them in a responsible fashion.

And the other thing when you have a big tent like this and you have that much diversity, and in this tent if you walk among these folks, you have Christians and Libertarians walking hand to hand, evangelicals and Libertarians. We haven't seen that since Reagan. You have Republicans, you have Independents, you have Democrats. You have all kinds of philosophical stripes, and so forth. And you have some kooky birds.

When did the LaRouchers never show up? In 1985, my first town hall meeting, there were fruit cakes in the place. "Who are these people?" "They're LaRouchers." "Well, who are LaRouchers?" "They're Democrats." The first thing I like to remind you about LaRouchers, they're Democrats. But you're going to get some folks that are going

to come to your big tent and they're going to have their issues. You're not going to be all together comfortable with them. But in fact, if you're going to have a big tent of diversified tolerance, you just live with that. Some people are going to show up with that I'm not perfectly happy with. You know when that happens? At family reunions.

(Laughter)

**MR. BJERGA:** Much of your appeal has come from pocketbook issues such as taxes. At the same time as you noted issues such as immigration have generated passion in recent years. What role do individuals such as Tom Tancredo play in the Tea Party Movement?

**MR. ARMEY:** The Republicans frustrated me to tears on immigration. My line on that was who in the Republican Party was the genius that said that now that we have identified the fastest growing voting demographic in America, let's go out and alienate them? We have serious issues. By the way, virtually no emergency that the government responds to is, in fact, an emergency. Governments make the impression of emergency so they can prosper. Republicans are the only ones that create the impression of emergency by which they can die. The Republican Party is the most naturally talented party at losing its natural constituents in the history of the world. This party was born with the Emancipation Proclamation that can't get a black vote to save its life. How did they do that?

Well, same thing with the Hispanics. Fix the INS. The biggest problem in immigration in America today is a dysfunctional INS, a rude and a mean INS. The way they treat these folks is unbelievably rude and callous and cruel. Fix that agency, make it do its job and make it do its job in a humane and loving fashion. Then you can control your borders. The Republicans, when I was a majority leader, I saw to it that Tom Tancredo cannot get on a stage because I saw how destructive he was.

Now, that don't mean you ignore an important issue before the American people, but handle it with some sense and some compassion and some sensitivity. This is a nation of immigrants. We're just two days away from St. Paddy's Day. Two days from now, do you realize every person in this room is going to pretend they're Irish? Trent Lott said, "Why don't they do that for the Scots?" I said, "Because you never heard a Scot walk into a bar and say, 'Drinks are on me.'" So the fact of the matter is, the Hispanic American is the most natural born constituency for the Republican Party since the black American was in 1965. And these guys are out there trying to blow it. Just do it right. Understand the tradition and history and generosity of this great nation. There is room in America. If you love America, if you love freedom, if you love work, if you're willing to pay your way, pay your taxes and obey the law, you should be welcome in America. And we should have institutions of our government that make your presence here not only a convenient matter, but a pleasant matter.

So our problem is what? The biggest problem in immigration is a government that doesn't do its duty properly. Fix the government, then we can attend to the real problems of the real deserving people who'd like to come here. Republicans got to get this right

and get off this goofiness that they have. Ronald Reagan said, "Tear down that wall." Tom Tancredo said, "Build that wall." Who's right? America is not a nation that builds walls. America's a nation that opens doors, and we should be that.

**MR. BJERGA:** When the Republicans were in power, they tripled earmarks, turned a budget surplus into a deficit and enacted a prescription drug program without paying for it. Haven't the Republicans forfeited their credibility on budget and deficit matters?

**MR. ARMEY:** Man, yes, they did. And that's the point I'm making. I said to John Boehner, and by the way, John Boehner's a true believing conservative. A lot of people don't realize this, but in 1994 when we did the Contract with America, it was John Boehner that wanted to include a ban on earmarks. So he got it then, and he gets it now. But the fact of the matter is, they went bad in office and did a disservice to this country and they offended a lot of their natural voting constituency in doing that. That's why they can't do-- in my estimation, they can't come back with a second contract with America. You can't offer a contract if you don't have the standing to offer the contract.

I say I'm from Washington, I'm a Republican and I got a contract for you, you're going to say, "Oh, yeah? You want me to fall for that again?" That's why the grass roots activist movement has developed and through participation by grass roots activists all over the country, a contract from America, which will be unveiled on April 15<sup>th</sup> at our rally here, which most of you will underestimate the number of people there by tenfold and then report it, cut it in half and then report it, but at that rally, we will unveil the contract from America and we invite everybody. Come and accept the contract. We think they got the ability to stand on the legs to accept the contract while they don't have the ability to stand on legs and offer the contract. We think that there may be one or two Democratic officeholders or office seekers that will try to accept the contract, and they will, of course, suffer severe reprisals from their leadership and be bullied out of it. So we don't expect a lot of Democrats to actually show up and accept the contract. I'd love to see what happens.

I remember when, oh bless his heart, from Texas. Oh, help me out, our great wonderful dean of the Texas delegation. Help me out. [side remarks] No, no, a Republican. It'll come to me tomorrow. He voted against Tip O'Neill and the next day he found his office doors all locked. Ralph Hall. Ralph Hall voted against Tip O'Neill in leadership-- remember? Next day, Ralph went to his office, the doors were locked. He calls the number 2424, if you're locked out of your office call 2424. The guy says, "I'm sorry, Mr. Hall. But the Speaker said if you want to get in your office, you need to go visit with him."

So that Democrat that says, "Gee, I like that contract from America. I think I'm going to sign up," might just as well go to your office the next day, just go directly to Speaker Pelosi's office. Save yourself the time.

**MR. BJERGA:** NRSC Chair Conyers endorsed Senator Specter before the party switch, Crist over Rubio in Florida. Minority Leader Mitch McConnell held a fundraiser for Trey Grayson, who's running against Rand Paul in Kennedy. Do such Republican leaders get it?

**MR. ARMEY:** This is one of the things that I'm kind of tickled by. Our grass roots activists have a keen eye, they know what's going on in their communities. And when Crist announced that he was going to run for the Senate, all of Washington swooned, right? And all the real voters on the ground across the state of Florida said, "This guy's not going to be elected Senator from Florida. Look at this goofy insurance scheme he's got." And then all of a sudden, this guy Rubio shows up and says, "You know, I think I'm going to run." And I think, "Oh, Rubio. Wasn't he the guy that traveled all over the state and really talked to people and listened to them when he wanted to be Speaker?" I mean, he campaigns like us. So they said, "We're going to go with Rubio. He can win, he will win."

It was our grass roots activists that at first said, "You know, we got a guy named Brown that can win a Senate seat in Massachusetts." I said, "Oh, get out of here." The Republican Party said, "Oh, go on." And they said, "No, no, no, he campaigns the way we do. He's out there with an old Chevy pickup." I said, "Well, first of all, if it's not a Ford, he can't be too bright. But still, nevertheless, he's doing what we do. So we ought to go out and help him." All of a sudden-- remember the New York 23<sup>rd</sup>? Our guys called us up the day the nominee was handed over, said, "The Republicans just lost this congressional race. They nominated somebody who can't possibly win." Our real people on the real ground in the real districts and states who live with the real voters? This is a shocker for you. They know better what's going on than people in offices in Washington looking at superficial criteria like they can self fund their campaign, or they got large name idea.

Look, I got the largest name idea among farmers in all of America than probably anybody in this country. Do you think I'm going to win a primary in Iowa? You want to go where-- no, because peanut farmers and corn farmers hate me because I'm against ethanol and I'm against the peanut quota. So, a large name idea doesn't mean you're electable. It just means people know you, it doesn't say whether they like you, it just means they know you.

But politicians and politics is a very superficial business and the choice criteria is oftentimes not something that runs very deep, or is very well informed or insightful. Our grass roots activists know more quickly what's happening in terms of the predilections of the voting constituency than the party apparatus. Why? Because our people live in America. These folks live in Washington. There's a big difference.

**MR. BJERGA:** The most recent electoral test of the Tea Party Movement was in the Texas primaries. And in those elections, the candidate for governor fizzled after she failed to repudiate 9/11 conspiracy theories and most of the congressional candidates got few votes. Thoughts?

**MR. ARMEY:** What, you mean the Tea Party? Oh, yeah, this should surprise nobody. If you take a look at the infrastructure of the Republican Party and the Democrat Party, it is very real, very strong, very pervasive and been in place a long time. Third party efforts don't compete well with that. And an awful lot of these-- in Texas, we have a term that we got from Mel Tillis, Coca-Cola cowboy. You ever hear that term? We don't call you a cowboy until we seen you ride? You're all hat and no cattle? So some guy shows up and says, "Hey, this Tea Party thing's a big deal out there. Those folks are making a lot of noise, they're getting a lot of notice. I'm going to get in the campaign against Kevin Brady, and I'll be the Tea Party candidate. How'd I get to be that? I said I was."

The problem is, all the Tea Party folks say, "Who is this guy? I never saw him before." You can't just claim that "I'm the Tea Party candidate." First of all, understand. Most American people don't do very well with the English language. Tea Party does not mean a third political party called Tea. It means a bunch of people got together and threw a bunch of tea in the water to protest excessive, obtrusive, inefficient, ineffective government that was not respectful of your liberties. So we got a lot of people out there who just lack understanding. They say, "Oh, there's a third party in America called the Tea Party. I'm going to be the Tea candidate." So they don't do well.

The fact of the matter is, the Republican Party is going to-- Now, what we do is we're helping the Republican Party in Florida to pick the right candidate through its normal process. We're helping the Republican Party in Utah to pick the right candidate through its normal process so that our job is not to have our folks win the election against the Republican nominee, but to get the Republican Party to nominate somebody who believes in freedom, liberty, small government and all the things we cherish. And that party can be what it is and has been in the past, on occasions the party of Reagan.

**MR. BJERGA:** So how would one tell who the authentic Tea Party candidate is, other than the criteria of if it's successful, it's the Tea Party? If it's unsuccessful, it's an imposter?

**MR. ARMEY:** So the first thing, and I've talked to a lot of folks about this, if somebody shows up and says, "I'm the Tea Party candidate," then call somebody who is a known, identified Tea Party activist that you've actually seen before doing something. And say, "Do you know this guy?" If they know them, then he's got a beginning with you." But the fact of the matter is, the small government conservative movement, which includes people who call themselves Tea Party patriots and so forth, is about the principles of liberty as embodied in the Constitution, the understanding of which is fleshed out. If you read things like *The Federalist Papers*, your understanding of the way the world works if you read-- Read Hayek and Mises. I know it's hard, but it cuts a lot deeper than Keynes. I mean, any eighth grader can understand Keynes. I can show you the model in 15 minutes, and if you've got a sixth grade education, you can understand it.

Read things that run deep. Understand the equal marginal conditions of allocative (sic) efficiency and get deep into things and then all of a sudden you understand, "Gee, freedom works. Freedom of enterprise works. Freedom of individual right to hold your expressions, your First Amendment, Second Amendment rights." All these things are precious to us and they were given to us by great and courageous, brave people, all of whom responded-- I'm going to say something now that I want you to-- Tell you I believe with all my heart. Those people at the American Constitutional Congress were all smarter than any number of people in this town today that would equate to their number. You can't get any-- If there were a hundred people there, I don't know how many people were there, if there were a hundred people there, you can't find a hundred people in this town today that are as smart as they were.

And they were more courageous than any equal number of people you can find in this town. Who the heck do these people think they are, to try to sit in this town with their audacity and second guess the greatest genius, most courageous genius in the history of the world? Who the hell do they think they are? And our folks just get mad about that. We look at the Pointer Sisters. You guys got it right. Mr. Big Shot, who do you think you are? These people should be cherished. No nation state in the history of the world, the world, never got a gift so great as these wonderful geniuses who had enough decency to respect the language and use it with discipline.

How bizarre is that today? They understood the meaning of every word they used and they used it with precision. And they cared about what am I saying here? They didn't just babble, they didn't just be glib. They didn't think that talent was a substitute for ability. They thought you had to work hard and take a risk to create a nation unlike none ever before or since having been created. And they ought to be celebrated and respected. And quite frankly we, and I daresay now I speak for all of us in the small government movement, we are very short on patience with modern day smart alecks who think they know better than those wonderful, courageous, brave people that gave us the greatest nation in the history of the world. And we just simply ask them, have a little respect, will you? Have a little respect.

**MR. BJERGA:** Part of your job as majority leader was to hold together your majority with votes from many moderate Republicans. How did you do that, and what do you believe moderates bring to the GOP?

**MR. ARMEY:** Well, unlike this-- by the way, this current legislative leadership is quite inept. The first rule we had was as we take a bill through the committee process, fix the problems along the way. Don't try to fix the problems on the floor. Resolve the problems. I remember the banking bill that is now so badly cursed by people who think they could manage banking in America. We sent that bill back to committee four times before we let the chairman take it to the-- it was very painful of the chairman. He got very impatient with us. Our job was very simple. People have major problems with the bill, we put it on the floor. We won't be able to get the votes to pass it. Let's go back in the committee and fix the problems.

The legislative process requires rigorous, hard work, thorough and complete hard work. You don't just slap dash something over a weekend, put it together, stick it on the floor. We have been legislating by panic certainly since 9/11 of '01. Is that not right? I mean, you look at Congress, I see a bunch of lemmings. Somebody's going to jump and holler fire and they're going to rush right off the cliff. Can you imagine somebody coming to me-- if you'd have come to me and said, "Mr. Majority Leader, I need a bill that gives what is \$700 billion to the Secretary of the Treasury, no strings attached, no questions to be asked, let me do what he wants, and I need it by Monday?" I would have probably said, are you supposed to be able to stop and think about this for a minute?

So, one, look what they've done in healthcare. You talk about inept, no wonder Dennis Kucinich is mad. They started off saying, "We're going to have the government do single payer. The government's going to do the whole mish-muka." All right, they couldn't get that even from among themselves. So then they said, "Okay, we'll have a government option and we'll make enrollment in the private sector option so onerous and so punitive, so fraught with audits and other reprisals that people will just voluntarily come and be a part." They couldn't get that, even among themselves. Now, they got nothing other than a federal mandate, everybody must buy insurance as we define it. And a few other things to sabotage the private sector. And a last ditch effort to get something, and they have to go through extraordinary kinds of parliamentary practices to compel the thing through Congress, just so they can walk away having said, "We did something." Now, if that is not the definition of ineptness, I don't know what is.

The President's going up to Ohio today to try to get Kucinich. You know, is this-- First, do serious, rigorous, legislative work. Construct the bill. And it's helpful, if you really want to get the thing voted on and get the votes, have the thing somehow just remotely acceptable to the voting constituents of the poor slobs you're trying to throw under the bus. It's cracking me up. These guys crack me up. So the biggest problem you got right now is they are ineptly trying to do the wrong thing. If they'd have listened to Waylon Jennings, they would have gotten it to a point. Waylon Jennings said very clearly, "There no right way to do the wrong thing." And they can't. They can probably force this through because you can't discount the number of people who can be moved by a ruthless and powerful political leader or group of political leaders. The consequences of saying no to powerful and ruthless people who have a serious case of the bound-tos can be personally very painful. And then the average member of the House and Senate is first and foremost only a self-serving inconvenience minimizer who doesn't have a lot of principle they stand on in the first place, it doesn't take whole much to move a jellied spine. So they'll probably get their votes.

But just think of the pain that they will have put themselves and their own members through in order to only do in the most feeble way possible the wrong thing.

**MR. BJERGA:** Sausage making aside, do you think the Democrats could get a political bounce from passing healthcare? And could you please weigh in on Speaker Pelosi's skills in getting votes?

**MR. ARMEY:** No, they will get politically bounced. I can do a little play on words here. There is a pun intended. They say only bright people get puns, but anyway, they will get bounced. You have to understand, the American people don't want this in any iteration. And you have to understand, I like Nancy Pelosi personally. I like Harry Reid personally. I had more friends that were Democrats and more enemies that were Republicans. And Dick Gephardt, by the way, had the same experience. The reasons were-- and a Democrat never did office politics against me, and that's the mean stuff. But, the fact of the matter is, what has probably surprised me more than anything else about Speaker Pelosi is her ineptness. I didn't realize anybody could rise to the position of Speaker and be that inept.

And it's because they don't understand. You have to understand, the Democrats in office have practiced purposeful sloppy work for years in order to enfranchise two of their most important constituencies, trial lawyers and bureaucrats. So they're so accustomed to doing sloppy work that I don't think they have left within them the skills to do the disciplined, hard work that's such an adventure as it requires. So I don't really fault her, she wasn't trained in skilled, disciplined work. She was skilled in sloppy work. Harry Reid, too. It breaks my heart for Harry. He's going to lose his Senate seat, but he doesn't have the administrative skills to do this. This is hard work.

Now, one final point. I believe with all my-- as long as I'm kind of on a strafing mission here, I don't think Nancy Pelosi is that mean a person. I'm very surprised that a lot of the mean things she does. And I honestly believe that her meanness comes from George Miller. So I just wanted to say that. I don't think Nancy Pelosi is nearly so mean as people think she is. I think Svengali is back there saying, "I hated those blue dogs anyway. Let's throw them under the bus." Anyway, I'm surprised by that. I really am shocked by it. But I don't think-- She's more inept than I thought she was, but she's not as mean as people think she is.

**MR. BJERGA:** You have repeatedly cited *The Federalist Papers* as an intellectual inspiration for small government and conservatism of the Tea Party Movement. Yet, Alexander Hamilton, the author of the majority of *The Federalist Papers* was widely regarded then and now as an advocate of a strong central government. Thoughts?

**MR. ARMEY:** Well, I'd have to go back and review this. And the first thing you say if you tell me this about Hamilton is widely regarded by whom? Today's modern day, ill informed political science professors? I wouldn't take their word for much of anything. First of all, why do they call it science? Why don't they call it political opinion? Anyway, I just doubt that that was the case, in fact, about Hamilton. I'll go back and study on that with that question in mind. But there was so much warning against the travails, for example, of a legislative body that would cede its just and necessary authorities to the Executive Branch, and how much of that have we seen going on in this country? So again, I would first question your authority of that characterization of Hamilton.

**MR. BJERGA:** We are almost out of time. But before asking the last question, we have a couple of important matters to take care of. First, to remind us of our future speakers. On April 1<sup>st</sup>, we'll have Robert Groves, the Director of the U.S. Census Bureau; on April 5<sup>th</sup>, we'll have Douglas Shulman, the Commissioner of the Internal Revenue Service; on April 12<sup>th</sup>, Dennis Quaid will discuss the prevention of potentially deadly medical errors at a Press Club luncheon.

Second, and the moment we all have been waiting for, before the last question, we would like to present our speaker with the coveted National Press Club mug.

**MR. ARMEY:** Oh, thank you. Thank you, thank you. (Applause) All right, I'm going to really get myself in trouble with my press guy now. These things are great for target practice. (Laughter)

**MR. BJERGA:** Now for our final question, and this actually-- there is a final question. It actually relates to discussion we had in the moment before the events began themselves, which is the admiration of that cowboy hat that you have sitting there at the table. I'm wondering if you could just take a couple of moments to talk to the audience a little bit about your hat and explain to us whether there's any cattle behind it?

**MR. ARMEY:** Okay. All right, yes, I do have the cattle, and I can ride. And this is a 200X beaver made by Stetson. It's the only 200x beaver I've ever seen in my life. Bucky in the House from California--McKeon's family been in the western wear business for about a hundred years. He's never seen a 200x beaver. I could not afford a 200x beaver, but my wife could. Stetson, of course, is the most popular hat. But I have discovered-- this one's really going to break my heart. In upstate New York, there is the Sarah Tilley Hat Company. And they'll make you a 6X beaver that will be of the same quality as what Stetson gives you in a 10X. So let me just do this. So Sarah Tilley boys up there, in upstate New York, my hat's off to you. They make a great hat, the Sarah Tilley. I have two Sarah Tilleys, and they're a marvelous hat. But the western hat, you know, is a wonderful instrument, other than being downright stylish and manly, right? The cowboy uses it for a lot of things. We don't do that so much anymore.

Nancy Reagan gave me a copy of Ronald Reagan's Stetson, and I loved it, and I wore it. And my wife said, "You ain't going to wear that no more." She didn't say that, she said, "You are not going to wear that anymore." My wife, quite grammatical. And so she went out and bought me that. So the Reagan Stetson still hangs in my study properly, as it should. But that's how I came to wearing a Stetson because if Nancy Reagan gave you a copy of Ronald Reagan's hat, wouldn't you want to wear it? And I did. I hope you'll like the hat as much as I do. I just think it's-- Thank you. (Applause)

**MR. BJERGA:** And thank you for coming today. I would also like to thank the National Press Club staff, including its library and broadcast center for organizing today's event. For more information about joining the National Press Club and on how to acquire a copy of today's program--

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