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2014 MIDTERM ELECTION PREVIEW: ONE YEAR OUT

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P R O C E E D I N G S

MS. PAGE: Good morning. I'm Susan Page, the Washington Bureau Chief of *USA Today* and we are here to talk about -- not about tonight's elections, although we'll talk about maybe what they'll tell us, but about the 2014 midterm elections, which will help determine what President Obama can hope to do in the final two years of his tenure, tell us something about, perhaps, the shape of the next presidential race, and about the future of the Republican Party.

And I am honored to be here to moderate a panel with such all stars who are prepared to answer any question you can ask without equivocation of any sort. After I ask some questions, we'll open it up to the audience, so if you have things you'd like to pose, keep that in mind and we'll do that later in this program.

You have full bios in your program here, so I won't repeat them, I'll just briefly introduce our panel today. First, Elaine Kamarck, founding director of the Center for Effective Public Management at Brookings. We're definitely in favor of that.

MS. KAMARCK: Thank you.

MS. PAGE: Charlie Cook, editor and publisher of *The Cook Political Report*, which will celebrate its 30th anniversary next year and has become an indispensable resource that we all use.

John Hudak, managing editor of TheFixGov blog. I don't think you're doing well enough; the government continues to be broken.

MR. HUDAK: That's true. We have a lot of work to do.

MS. PAGE: He has a new book coming out in January called *Presidential Pork*. You can probably guess what it's about from the title.

And Robert Boatright, he's a political scientist at Clark University in Massachusetts. His new book is titled, *Getting Primaried: The Changing Politics of Congressional Primary Challenges*. He would like to thank the tea party movement for doing a lot for sales.

Let me just start by posing a question to each of our panelists in turn. So, Charlie, I believe you and I are the only people on stage who do not have PhDs, is that right? You don't have one, right? Good. I'm not alone then. So, let me start with you. The elections that we have today, the 2013 elections, will they -- are there lessons to be learned from what the results are? Are there things that we should be looking for tonight that will tell us something about next year?

MR. COOK: A lot less than you would believe watching television the last 24 hours. You know, these patterns and these -- the foreshadowings, they're all really obvious if you just sort of glance at them, but the deeper you kind of bore down on them, it's a lot less, and, you

know, odd year elections, sometimes they're predictive and sometimes they're not, and for example, talking about, well, you know, this is -- Virginia is sort of this metaphor for what's going on in the Republican Party. Well, yeah, to a certain extent, but if you look at the point -- go back to like July, up until early July, roughly half the polls were showing Cuccinelli ahead and half the polling showed Terry McAuliffe ahead. And then starting mid-July, we've had 35 or 36 consecutive polls showing Terry McAuliffe ahead.

Now, Ken Cuccinelli has been an extremely conservative person for a really long time, but that also corresponds, roughly speaking, with Governor McDonnell getting under criminal investigation. So, what you had was two pretty weak candidates, neither one of them had any claim whatsoever on the voters between the two 40-yard lines, and then one of them was saddled with a 100-pound lead weight and it pulled him under the water.

And so, that kind of gets in the way of this sort of metaphor for the whole Republican Party. You know, a lot of these things, they don't really stand up once you really focus on them.

MS. PAGE: You know, if you would like to hear Charlie's answer again, I should have mentioned that Sirius Radio is going to broadcast this program at 5:00 o'clock tonight, so while you're driving

home maybe, and at 11:00 p.m. and that's a good chance to test whether anything we say today about tonight's results turn out to be true.

Also, if you're posting on Twitter, if you're going to Tweet today, our hashtag is #2014midterms.

So, John Hudak, we have a tea party darling that's going to lose in Virginia, most likely, and a tea party nemesis, Chris Christie, who is almost certainly going to win in New Jersey. So, do you see a message tonight for the tea party movement?

MR. HUDAK: So, I think there is one, and I agree that Charlie that a lot of times these messages about what can we take away, what can we apply forward are a bit overrated, but one of the refrains that the tea party has had, one of their common themes is that if we only had a more conservative candidate, we would have won that race.

And tonight in Virginia they, in a lot of ways, have that conservative candidate and they're not going to win that race, and in New Jersey, they don't have that conservative candidate and they're going to win that race. And there are state level dynamics for why this is the case, but it really hurts that claim, and you have another special election -- or a run-off election in the First District of Alabama tonight to replace a Congressman who resigned, and similarly, you have a tea party candidate against a more mainstream Republican, and there are lessons -- there are

a lot of lessons to be learned from any election, but I think understanding what dynamics are driving candidates to the top, driving candidates to the ballot for the general election, that's something that needs to come through and it's unclear that the tea party is truly understanding it and it's unclear that other wings of the Republican Party are understanding it as well.

MS. PAGE: Robert Boatright, we're going to see, I think, a lot of primary challenges in this next year for 2014. You've been studying this. The nature of primary challenges, are they different now than they used to be? What are you going to be looking for in 2014 in terms of primaries?

MR. BOATRRIGHT: Well, I'll be looking at a couple of things, first of all, the number of primary challenges, and second of all, as you've mentioned, whether they are different in some way.

So, just to speak briefly to each, I've done research on the last 40 years worth of primary challenges and what I've found is that they seem to wax and wane along with turnover in Congress. So, you get a particularly tumultuous election like 2010, 1994, even going all the way back to 1974, and you get a lot of ideological primary challengers. It is as if a number of conservative candidates think, oh, I'll run against a Democrat, and a number of other conservatives say, I'm going to run

against a Republican who's not conservative enough for me.

So, in that regard I think we should not be seeing all that much of that in 2014. It's not expected to be a year with particularly high turnover. We'll be four years back from the last election in which there was clearly a wave.

But in regards to whether they're different, I think the dynamics of primary challenges over the past decade have been such that outside groups, organizations like the Club for Growth on the right or MoveOn on the left, have been strategically picking out a couple primary challenges in order to send a message, races like the Arkansas Senate race against Blanche Lambert-Lincoln a couple of years ago, you could go back and look at races against Arlen Specter.

So, in order to do this, you can't run a ton of primary challenges, right, because there's not enough interested money to spread around, but if you can get your supporters around the country to target their money at two or three particular races, then you can scare everybody, right, you can say, ohh, watch out, you know, if you deviate from party orthodoxy, you just might be one of these two or three people.

MS. PAGE: So, Elaine, the last time we had a midterm election, it was really driven by opposition to Obamacare, quite catastrophically for Democrats. So, this time around, what kind of role do

you think the Affordable Care Act is going to play in the midterm elections, and are there big risks, once again, for Democrats on this issue?

MS. KAMARCK: Well, it kind of depends on what happens in the next, really, two months, because, you know, the Obama Administration has promised that they can fix this by the end of November, which may be a promise that they're in the process of walking back a little bit, but they say that they're going to get this fixed, and clearly it's a high priority for them to get it fixed.

So, it could be that if we're sitting here next year at this time on this day that Obamacare made very little difference at all in the election. The other thing that argues for that is that the program really is designed to affect 15 percent of Americans who aren't covered, it's a relatively small number.

So, that's the kind of optimistic scenario for the Democrats, which is that it really doesn't have much of an impact, it gets straightened out, it's yesterday's story.

I think there's a pessimistic story too, the pessimistic story is that Obamacare continues to have unanticipated effects on the insurance market, and I think that's an even bigger problem than just the computer problems, that the insurance market starts to change in ways because of aspects of the law like the essential health benefits that cause insurers to

start dropping coverage in larger numbers than anticipated.

That is a particularly damaging story if it continues throughout the year and a lot of people are actually feeling it.

MS. PAGE: We want to talk more about the healthcare issue, but first I want to ask the panel, anybody have an upset to predict for tonight? Because you could look really smart on Sirius Radio at 11:00 o'clock. Is there anything that we all think -- the conventional wisdom you think is going to be wrong tonight? No?

MS. KAMARCK: Well, I'll make one. Okay. It's entirely possible that Dean Young, the tea party candidate in the First District in Alabama that John referred to -- it's entirely possible that if turnout is extremely low and the evangelicals really come out, that he beats the business-backed candidate. And this, of course would be -- I'm sure, as Charlie points out, I mean, sure everyone will then massively over-interpret that as a resurgence of the tea party and the tea party winning the battle between the Republicans, a civil war between the tea party and the business interests.

But I think that could be an upset.

MS. PAGE: Anybody have anything else?

MR. COOK: Well, I'll just say on Alabama 1, this isn't the end of the fight. This is sort of Ft. Sumter of a long civil war in the

Republican Party and as I remember, you know, Ft. Sumter, the winner of that battle lost the war, and so we're going to see a lot of fights, particularly in Michigan involving Republican establishment figures sort of running against tea party incumbents, and there are going to be a lot of them and this thing's going to go on for a couple years and it's just a fight that has to happen where the Republican Party has to decide what kind of party they're going to be in the future.

So, this thing is not going to get resolved tonight.

MS. PAGE: Alabama 1 should savor this moment because never again will they get this kind of attention.

So, Charlie was dismissive of the idea of what, you know, we were hearing on cable TV this morning about how critical tonight's election, the lessons we could draw from it --

MR. COOK: For the future of mankind, actually, yeah.

MS. PAGE: That's right. Does anyone else see things you're going to watch for tonight that's going to tell us something important about the political landscape, about the state of the parties, or about something else? Anybody have any lessons for tonight to watch for?

SPEAKER: Well, I think in Virginia one of the important dynamics is what happens with all of the statewide races. So, Virginia elects, other than its Senators, all of its statewide elected officials today

and there's no lesson to be learned for some broader landscape for what's going to happen in Oregon or in Michigan because of what happens with the attorney general's race in Virginia. But it might matter a lot for the future of Virginia and most people see Virginia right now as a purple state. Most people see Virginia in four or eight years as a blue state, and I think if Democrats sweep all of these statewide offices, it's important not just about the composition of the electorate, that is, it's an off year election, Republican turnout should be higher than it is in a presidential year, but it also gives a bench, now, for people who are going to succeed soon-to-be Governor-Elect McAuliffe. There are going to be a bunch of candidates who have a claim for the governor's race, which of course the Virginia governor is one-term limited, so in four years we're going to have an open seat in that state.

And so, if Democrats can put people in the lieutenant governor's seat, in the attorney general's seat, that sets up more of a longer-term positive trend for Democrats who want to keep the governor's mansion in Richmond.

MS. PAGE: Lots of mayors' races tonight. Are you watching any of those?

MS. KAMARCK: No.

MR. COOK: And I don't do windows either.

MR. BOATRIGHT: I live in Massachusetts so I happen to be seeing this, like it or not, but the lesson I've taken from gubernatorial races there, the Massachusetts one in particular, is that even when the stakes are not very high in an election, it's good practice, right, groups that want to practice their get out the vote efforts, groups that want to go out there and get names of people who might wind up being consequential in an election down the road will use a mayoral election, will use a local election, will use whatever opportunity they have just to make sure that their political equipment doesn't get rusty, I guess you could say.

So, there will be interesting things going on in these races even if they don't show up in the actual results.

MS. PAGE: I'd like to apologize to America's mayors for Charlie Cook's comment and encourage any comments to be directed toward him and not --

MR. COOK: I'm just leaving that for someone else to become the nation's expert on mayoral races.

MS. PAGE: You know, if we had done this panel a month ago, we'd be talking about catastrophe for the Republicans because of the government shutdown and the repercussions of that. Is that like yesterday's news, Elaine? Will that still seem to be a big thing to watch for in 2014?

MS. KAMARCK: Well, you know, it's like -- trying to think about this next year is like whiplash, right, because, you know, by the middle of the month, right, it was Republican catastrophe, by the end of the month it's Democratic catastrophe. I mean, you just don't know how long this will go.

One of the things that I would bring up here and I take this term from my dear friend Bill Galston, who's back there standing in the back of the room, many years ago we were writing something together and Bill coined the term "the plate tectonics of politics", which is not the issues of the day, but the big demographic changes that are slowly moving where the country goes.

And of course we saw that in 2012 quite dramatically, with this emergence of a new generation overlapping a lot with the emergence of a non-white majority -- not majority, but a non-white group in America. So, we saw that in 2012 and I think the real interesting question is going to be, does this plate tectonics continue into 2014? Does it begin to change states like Virginia? I looked at voter registration in Virginia. It's up in every urban and suburban place in the country and it's not up in the rural parts of the country.

MR. COOK: Susan, you and somewhere back there is your husband, Carl Leubsdorf -- very experienced newspaper people, and

when you got your start there was a 24-hour news cycle and now there's sort of a 15-minute news cycle. And while, you know, for those that are political junkies it gives you -- you know, you're on a drip as opposed to getting a fix, but the thing is, the loss is the loss of perspective and sort of hyperbole runs amok so that, as Elaine said, at the time of the shutdown, this is the most horrific thing and Republicans are absolutely screwed, even though we are talking about an event that's 13 months down the way, and very few events have shelf lives that long.

I mean, issues, events have expiration dates, and that's why people are saying, well -- you know, I kept reading, well, the Republican majority is now gone or the House is in play. Now, did I hear Stu Rothenberg saying that? Not really. Did I hear Larry Sabato, whose team watches individual House races say that? Not really. Did our team say that? No, not really. But people that wouldn't know a CD if it bit them in the rear end were saying that the House is suddenly in play when, you know, the truth is what needed to happen? Oh, we probably needed to have another shutdown or two or debt default or two or near misses for either one, we probably need more Republican retirements in competitive districts, like Tim Griffin in Arkansas 2, we probably need more unexpectedly good Democratic recruiting, you know, like James Lee Witt in Arkansas 4. It required a lot of things that haven't happened yet.

And if they happen, then the House will be in play, but they hadn't happened yet, but it became a very fashionable thing to say a month ago, oh, it's now in play.

MS. PAGE: John, you're nodding.

MR. HUDAK: And there's two things that can't be underestimated, and that's the short-term memory of voters. People aren't going to remember the shutdown in as crystal of a way as they think about it now or they thought about it two weeks ago, unless as Charlie said, we have two or three more shutdowns. But we also can't underestimate the real glory that Democrats have in screwing up a negotiation, and so the next debt ceiling crisis or the next government shutdown crisis -- the Democrats did well in the last one -- that has no reflection on their ability to do well in the next one, and if they screw that up, then the Senate becomes in play, the House is completely off the table.

And so, these trends that everyone gets attached to are foolish because what's going to matter is what happens in August or what happens in September or what happens the last week in October of next year, not what happened October 1st of 2013.

MS. PAGE: Robert?

MR. BOATRIGHT: Well, I wouldn't say that the House is in

play. I mean, it's pretty clear, as Charlie has mentioned, that all of the people who study this for a living say that it probably is not. But I think one important consequence of the shutdown is that this is the time when people who might be quality candidates are making up their minds about whether they want to run for office. So, even if voters have completely forgotten that any of this happened. There could well be Democrats who decided, yes, I'm going to make that run based on what happens now or there could be Republicans who are thinking about the race, right now are about to go out there and raise money who've decided that it's not worth it.

So, you take a look at a state like New Hampshire, for instance, there has yet to be a credible Republican in New Hampshire who's emerged. If somebody was going to mount a campaign, this would be the time to start putting that infrastructure together, and if this doesn't look like a good moment for Republicans, then we may wind up seeing the consequences of this a year from now.

MR. COOK: That's an excellent point. I just want to underscore it, for people taking notes, that was a very good point.

MS. PAGE: Write that down. So, Elaine said the two scenarios for healthcare, it's effect would be that it's neutralized or that it's a disaster for Democrats. Is there any chance that the Affordable Care Act becomes a big positive for the White House and for Democrats?

Anybody think it could? Okay.

MS. KAMARCK: I think it's hard to see it being a big positive only because, remember, you're really talking about a very small piece of the electorate that is affected by it -- a small piece of the population. Now, a lot of that small piece of the population are young people. If they find themselves able to buy good healthcare and they like it and they think this is a great program, then I think that's going to bind them even more firmly to Obama, to the Democratic Party, and probably reinforce this trend we've seen in the under 30s to vote Democratic.

So, you know, it could have an impact, I think, there, but basically the program is supposed to not affect 85 percent of Americans.

MR. COOK: Which is total baloney. As an employer with -- you know --

MS. KAMARCK: Okay. Here we go.

MR. COOK: Yes, it is affecting people with good plans and with employers that pay 100 percent. It is affecting us.

MS. KAMARCK: Yeah, and that's what was unanticipated, right, that's what they didn't think was going to happen is that there would be this spillover into the 85 percent. And if that, in fact, keeps up and is large scale, then I think it's going to have some pretty disastrous consequences.

MS. PAGE: It gave us a wave election four years ago. Do you guys think it could give us a wave election this time around if there continue to be problems, if it can't get fixed?

MR. COOK: I doubt it. I quote Stan Greenberg, who's a terrific Democratic pollster. We were talking Thursday, I think it was, and he said, "You know, the thing is, voters want to punish Republicans, but they don't want to reward Democrats." And when people -- I mean, the Democratic party has negatives that in any other context they should really worry about, except that those negatives aren't as bad as Republicans.

And so, you know, you have to -- I mean, things aren't binary where if one side's down the other side's up. This isn't a zero-sum game. People are pretty mad at all of them and that, I think, undercuts the likelihood of a wave election in either direction.

MS. PAGE: John, do you agree?

MS. HUDAK: I think the perception of what independents -- how independents perceive the healthcare law is absolutely critical. We have some work from our colleagues on the FixGov blog, which I'm going to repeatedly encourage you all to read, Brookings new FixGov blog, that says that interpretations or perceptions of the Affordable Care Act are largely colored by partisanship. And so, Democrats have a higher opinion

of it because they're Democrats, Republicans have a lower opinion of it because they're Republicans, and I think that's going to be true in implementation.

A Democrat who's hurt by the Affordable Care Act might still think highly of it and a Republican who's helped by it might still think poorly of it. So, in the partisan wings, you're not going to have much of an effect, and so that's going to really prevent that kind of wave election.

But where it's going to matter are how independents perceive it and independents perceive it not well right now, and if the evidence keeps mounting that there are problems in the system, that hurts Democrats. If the benefits start to be real and recognizable and independents start to appreciate it, that starts to move the needle a little bit in the Democrats' direction and that, I think, is going to be the way that the Affordable Care Act plays into the election.

MS. PAGE: Well, Robert, I wonder if, in the broadest sense, if the Affordable Care Act doesn't end up working very well -- it's certainly not working very well now -- does it -- you know, we think of Republicans as the party of smaller government and Democrats as the party that thinks government can do big things and ought to help people -- does it hurt the Democratic Party in the broadest possible way in making it look like government cannot be trusted to handle a big program even when it's

designed to help people?

MR. BOATRRIGHT: I think in a policy sense it may affect Democratic efforts to do other things further down the road. I think in an electoral sense, a strong case can be made that wave elections are not about any individual policy, right. You can look at 2010 and say, well, the Democratic Party was overextended. They had won a lot of seats that they, quite honestly, had no business winning, and Republicans took them back in an election where we had a democratic president and a reaction to him.

You could say the same about 2012. There was a pushback against the Republicans. You can tell this whole story without it just being about healthcare. It's a convenient thing to talk about.

MS. PAGE: Charlie, you have some metrics you keep track of when looking at elections, one of them is presidential approval. How big a factor is President Obama not on the ballot in 2014, won't ever be on a ballot again, we don't believe -- how big a factor will he play in the midterms next year?

MR. COOK: Well, again, you could overstate it, but, you know, one of the axioms of politics in midterm elections is that they are referendum on the incumbent president, and that's particularly the case in second term midterm elections, which is why, you know, five times out of

the six and since the end of World War II, the party in the White House got absolutely hammered in either the House or the Senate or both, and, you know, it's a combination of the freshness and the novelty of a brand new president wearing off and the focus and the passion is gone, and year five, year six people start getting tired of them, they run out of new ideas, chickens coming home to roost from the first term, just sort of bad things typically happen to presidencies in their second terms.

So, there's a lot of that there, but it's not everything. But, you know, right now the President's approval rating is down around 40, 41, 42, so he's roughly where George W. Bush was at this point and the Republicans certainly had an unfortunate election in 2006 and not anywhere near where Reagan or Clinton were at this point in their presidencies.

Now, you know, the thing is that would suggest, well, Democrats are going to get hammered, except that the other side looks even worse. But the presidential approval is one thing, how the economy's doing, you know, it's also one of the axioms is people vote their pocketbooks and right now people feel better than they did a couple years ago, but reach back and look at consumer confidence compared to 10, 20, 30 years ago and, no, people aren't feeling that good.

So, you know, it's not exactly happy days are here again. I

mean, there are just sort of lots of metrics to look for and certainly the Affordable Care Act is one of those, approval is another, how the economy is doing, they all sort of go into that mix.

MS. PAGE: What can President Obama do to affect 2014? Is there very much he could do to have an impact?

MS. KAMARCK: Well, he can straighten out healthcare. I mean, the one thing he's just got to do is he's got to figure out how to put this issue behind him and they've got to -- I mean, I think that they've picked probably the best person they could find in Jeff Zients. Frankly, I think if they had put Jeff in charge of this to begin with, you wouldn't have had as many problems as you had. They have a classic command and control problem in the way they put this together.

So, he's clearly got to do that. Beyond that, I agree with Charlie, I'm not sure there's that much you can do. But one thing I would add to the conversation here is, you know, we talked a lot about the sort of civil war in the Republican Party and we're all watching that. I think it will be interesting to watch what happens within the Democratic Party in this year, particularly in preparation for 2016. You already have some Democrats sort of saying we ought to delay the mandate on healthcare, you have -- I mean, the Democrats have been remarkably unified, especially for --

MS. PAGE: The Democrats, yeah.

MS. KAMARCK: -- I mean, astonishingly for Democrats, and you already see some fissures in that and one of the interesting questions will be, as Obama begins his exit from the stage, right, what fissures emerge within the Democratic Party, both in the course of this election cycle and how then will they play into the big show, which is 2016.

MR. COOK: Yeah, let me hit two of those, one is that, you know, the obvious thing that you could do is push the mandate back six months, but then again that completely screws over the insurance companies who have made preparation for this thing to kick in right now and it sort of upsets the economics of the whole thing.

But I was talking a week or so ago with a friend of mine who's on the board of Louisiana BlueCross/BlueShield. They've spent \$60 million just to prepare for this transition, \$60 million. Now, that money came from someplace and -- which obviously came out of peoples' premiums. To the extent that you delay -- I mean, this is -- you know, it was a very big, complicated program developed and pushed through in a real hurry and now that hurry is showing on a whole lot of levels.

But to echo something Elaine said, you know, if we were to get let's say the budget conversation moving over into, say, entitlements and something like chain the CPI rate for Social Security, all the fissures,

all the fractures that you see in the Republican Party, you will start seeing on the Democratic Party as well. I mean, a liberal's hair will catch on fire at the first sign of putting -- you know, of messing with entitlements or (inaudible) in any way.

MS. PAGE: You know, it's interesting, President Obama has made an historic achievement. He's been elected twice as president with the majority, with more than 50 percent of the electorate, the first Democrat to do that since FDR, and yet his impact on the Democratic Party generally, other Democrats at other levels, has been not that great, I mean, he's actually -- it looks like he will leave the Democratic Party in worse shape than he found it. Why is that?

SPEAKER: Well, I think the Democratic Party has -- they've had to be unified around a number of his proposals, right, they've had to vote almost unanimously in order to get things done. After the Democrats lost the majority it was very easy to vote unanimously to block things, right, given the political environment right now. Democrats haven't had to emerge and take different positions.

So, part of the problem under Obama, I think, is that Congressional leaders have not really had the opportunity to distinguish themselves as being leaders or as being part of a faction, and I think, as you mentioned, as we start not paying attention to him, right, factions will

emerge, but we don't know what those factions are. The factions are about to form, but we don't have any idea how they're going to play out. So, in that sense, I think the party does look weaker.

SPEAKER: And I think one of the weaknesses that is mentioned that the President has is that he doesn't like the glad-handing and the backslapping of politics. Well, if he wants to promote the party, if he wants to prop the party up, if he wants to help down-ballot races in 2014 and then help those same races in 2016, he has to get into the weeds and start doing this, he has to start raising money, he has to start raising money like leader Pelosi did in the last election cycle and since he doesn't have to raise money for himself, he has that opening now.

But in addition to that, in addition to getting into Congress and starting to really be a politician, he has to start to lay out a vision of policy that doesn't just reflect the policy demands that he has, but a strategy.

George Bush was great at timing policy for electoral gain, making sure that things were coming up to vote right when he needed them to come up to vote. For a Democrat, for this President, for leader Reid, schedule the immigration bill in September, or schedule immigration legislation to come up in September, really start pushing that right before the election. If it fails, it's a benefit for Democrats, they have something to

run on, if it passes, it's a benefit for Democrats, it's the policy they want.

They have to start thinking in broad brushstrokes about policy and the electoral benefits from that policy.

MR. COOK: This week the President's doing a lot of fundraising for the Democratic campaign committees, a lot, devoting pretty much the week to it, but this stands out because there haven't been that many weeks in the last five years that that's happened, and you'll find a lot of sort of the Democratic operatives on the Hill, right now they're saying, okay, right now they're helping us, but there hadn't been a long history of it.

But the thing is, this aloofness from Capitol Hill -- here's an experiment for people -- take out the top five people on the House Democratic leadership. Talk to five House Democrats. Ask them the following question: Has any member of the Obama Congressional Liaison staff or White House staff ever stepped foot in your office? You'll get about four out of five saying no. Or ask a member of the House or Senate that's not in the leadership, have you ever been in a room with the President with fewer than ten people? This is not -- this is so far afield of the Bill Clinton calling members up at all hours and schmoozing with them, or even George W. Bush, to a certain extent, and just light years away from Ronald Reagan or Lyndon Johnson, that, you know, the fact that you

don't -- that he doesn't seem to enjoy talking to them, being around them, you know, he doesn't consider himself a politician and that, you know, politicians are lower than pond scum, and it'll rub off if you're anywhere near him.

I mean, that's a signal that members of Congress in his own party are getting. Forget tea party, forget Republicans. In his own party, they don't really know him and that's why, you know, he was going to get abandoned -- if the Syria issue had gone to a vote, he was going to get slaughtered. And right now you don't have a whole lot of Democrats stepping forward to defend him on the implementation of the Affordable Care Act because they don't feel -- you know, they don't feel like he's done a whole lot for them, and they don't know him, they don't feel invested in him because there's not much of a relationship.

MS. KAMARCK: I want to add something else into the conversation too, which is that, again, on our FixGov blog, which I want to draw everybody's attention to --

MS. PAGE: You know, if it fixed government people would be more like likely to read it, right?

MS. KAMARCK: We did a little piece on presidents who suffered management problems, big flops, okay, and the first one, of course, the most dramatic one, which some of us in this room can

remember, and some in our audiences can remember was, of course, the failure of the operation to rescue the Iranian hostages in April 1980.

Now, that was a rather gargantuan management failure complete with command and control problems and all sorts of problems, and it just doomed Jimmy Carter. I mean, he was in trouble, for sure, but if you look at his approval rating, it just goes straight down, he never comes back.

Fast forward to George Bush, okay, and to Hurricane Katrina. Again, now he was a little luckier because this happened in his second term, not his first term, but September of his second term, Katrina happens. Again, it's a management failure. There's nothing partisan about this, it's a gigantic management failure. His approval ratings go down, he never comes back.

So, one of the reasons that I think the problems with the Affordable Care Act are looming so large is that if they are not quickly fixed, this could be one of those inflection points in presidential approval where his approval goes down and simply doesn't recover for the rest of the term, meaning that, two things, one is that the rest of his agenda is doomed. Certainly for George Bush his Social Security reform, his immigration reform, which was very bipartisan, they were doomed after Katrina, and the second thing it means is that in midterms, people may not

really want the President around, okay. I mean, we've had lots of midterms. I mean, perhaps the most dramatic, 1946, Harry Truman was in such trouble that nobody invited him to campaign with them and when he returned to Washington -- in those days when Presidents returned to Washington, the whole cabinet came out to Union Station to greet them. When he returned to Washington after the '46 midterms, nobody came, nobody came to meet him.

So, you know, the question is, are we at an inflection point in the Obama presidency where it's just going to go downhill or are there things he can do, will we get past this and he'll have a relatively vigorous second half of his second term?

MR. COOK: Or as recently as 2006 where President George W. Bush wasn't exactly in a whole lot of demand in 2006 and you could always tell if a Republican was a slam dunk for reelection because those were the ones the districts and states that the President was going to see.

MS. PAGE: You know, given George W. Bush's history, though, it's interesting that in several ways, President Obama fares less well in the political discussion we're having than George W. Bush did despite two unpopular wars and Hurricane Katrina. And maybe healthcare is even more damaging because it's his signature issue.

I mean, hurricane control was not George W. Bush's signature issue, right, even though he didn't handle it very well. This is what President Obama ran on, it's his biggest legislative achievement.

MS. KAMARCK: Well, and I think the other thing about healthcare that makes it so important as an issue is that everybody gets it, everybody -- or most people have a healthcare program, they've been to doctors, they have medical bills, they understand this world in a way that they don't understand the Syrian civil war, in a way that they don't understand disaster relief processes that are taking place, you know, 1,000 miles away. This is something that everybody feels.

MR. COOK: Except I don't really remember in 2008 Senator Obama running heavily on healthcare. I don't think it was one of the top three or four things he talked about during that campaign. You know, it's sort of, given what happened at the agenda 2009, you'd think it was, but, you know, not so much really.

SPEAKER: And while he's had some successes policy-wise, management-wise, he managed the stimulus well, he's managed foreign policy with the exception of Syria quite well, the credit isn't there for him. He doesn't have other managerial accomplishments to really hang his hat on publicly.

So, if you're assessing a president managerially, healthcare

is what's going to be it, not the stimulus, not other areas where he's done well, all of that attention is going to be focused on this one failure, if it does end up a failure, that's a real cost for him for the next few years and for a legacy as well.

SPEAKER: Well, I think that to put the Obama/Bush comparison in perspective, it may be that everyone has healthcare and they can think about healthcare to a degree, but it lacks sort of a compelling visual image the way if we compare this to Bush, right, people were seeing horrible stuff happening in Iraq, people were watching what happened in Hurricane Katrina. That is, Bush got connected to things that people observed and could make their own conclusions about whether they were bad.

When people think about problems in the roll out, for the most part they are thinking about stuff that they have been told about healthcare but have not actually seen or experienced themselves. So, I think what that suggests is that, you know, Bush bottomed out somewhere around the upper 20s in terms of approval. I think Obama's floor is much, much higher, right, he's at 43 or 44 percent now. I don't know that he's going to drop a whole lot lower.

MR. COOK: I don't disagree, but if you watch the *New York Magazine* video on the President saying -- how many of you saw that this

morning? A few -- saying about 50 times in various venues that if you like your health insurance it won't change, it's a pretty devastating video that ran on a lot of the cable shows this morning.

MS. PAGE: You know, we're going to go to questions in just a couple minutes, so if you have a question you might have it in mind. You mentioned immigration and earlier we mentioned how it's hard to predict an election 12 months out. You know, if we knew one thing after the election one year ago, it was that immigration reform was going to pass, and fast and in a bipartisan way, right? That was the one big lesson from the 2012 election.

MR. COOK: Except that -- the thing is, the Republican leadership, House and Senate, they got the memo on Election Day. I mean, it was a night and day, they got it, but the memo seemed not to have been read once it got past a certain -- I mean, you could really kind of look at Republicans in the House, Republicans in the Senate and there's sort of a denier element that's out there and that is completely uncooperative, and whether it's immigration, whether it's government shutdown, they don't like any of this.

And I think we have to remember that you had a lot of Republicans running, particularly in 2010, they not only ran against President Obama and the Affordable Care Act and Nancy Pelosi and the

Democratic Party, but they ran against Washington, they ran against Congress, and to a certain extent, they ran against their own leadership.

And, you know, there's certainly 30, 35, and arguably 100 Republicans in the House that really could care less what John Boehner thinks about anything. And so, I would argue that Boehner doesn't have a leadership problem, there's more of a followership problem that when you have that many members of a conference that hold the establishment, in general, and you, in particular, in contempt, it makes it pretty hard to lead.

MS. PAGE: You know, I wonder how big an issue you think immigration will be next year. And it seems to me it's possible that Republicans get blamed for failure to pass it, but I wonder also if Democrats are blamed for failing once again to deliver on a promise they made to a group of voters that really supported them. Do you think immigration will be a big issue, Robert?

MR. BOATRRIGHT: I think at the moment Democrats get a lot of credit for trying, right, that this is something that comes up in campaign speeches. I think, you know, I think we'll see a lot of position taking by Democrats on immigration, but at least in the House, I can't see voters saying, oh, Democrats could have done differently. It's clear that the House is not going to allow Democrats a vote if they don't want it.

In the Senate, sure. I think the Senate -- you know, many in

the Senate would benefit from symbolic votes, but I'm not sure that the Democrats who are in jeopardy necessarily benefit from these things, so it's a difficult calculation there.

MS. PAGE: Anybody think immigration bill -- a comprehensive immigration bill pass and be signed into law before the 2014 midterms?

MS. KAMARCK: No.

SPEAKER: No.

MR. COOK: And when you saw the grief that Marco Rubio got after he came out for comprehensive reform and now he's had to walk it back because the pushback he got in the Republican Party was pretty profound and a lesson for Republicans that do want to step out and go for comprehensive that the party base is not ready to accept it.

But, you know, you look in the House, for the vast majority of Republicans in the House, it's not a problem that they haven't pushed. I mean, 93 percent of all the Republicans in the House are in Romney districts. In those districts, are they going to get hurt by the failure to pass? And then look at the half dozen seats that are most likely to determine who's going to be in control of the Senate. You know, they're all six states that Romney carried -- Alaska, Arkansas, Louisiana, North Carolina, Kentucky, Georgia, possible exception of North Carolina -- I

mean, I'm not sure -- I don't think any Republican candidates are going to be carrying across in those districts -- in those states that much because of a failure on immigration.

It's where the races are and that's not where the problems would be. The problems for Republicans are in the states -- the Senators for Republican incumbents that are up in 2016. You've got 24 Republican incumbents up, only 10 Democrats, and seven of the 24 Republicans up in 2016 in the Senate are in Obama states. Now, that's where there's a problem for Republicans.

MS. PAGE: Yeah.

MS. KAMARCK: Yeah, I was going to say, playing off this I was looking at the six Democratic -- sort of red state Democrats, and I think if you focus on those red state Democrats you can make two pretty easy predictions, one is that we won't have immigration reform, and two is that, if the healthcare problems do go into next year, you're going to have some division within Democrats over what happens to ACA and I think those two things -- and they're reinforced by the nature of who's up this time, as opposed to who may be up next time, and that, I think, is going to dictate a lot of the policy we see this year.

MS. PAGE: John Hudak, we've been talking -- one last question by me before we go to the audience. We've been talking mostly

about Congressional elections in 2014. Lots of governors are up in 2014 as well. What should we watch for in that set of races?

MR. HUDAK: So, the governor's races in 2014 are, frankly, though for a lot of Republicans. They were elected -- a lot of the governors were elected during the tea party wave in 2010 and so there's going to be a pushback against a lot of these governors that -- we're seeing it -- like I said, we're seeing it in governor's races in 2014 in the same way we're going to see it in Senate races in 2016 as that group, as that class goes up for reelection. And states where it's going to matter are places like Maine and Michigan, states like that that elected pretty conservative -- Florida is another one -- where not only did the state elect a conservative Republican probably outside of the mainstream of where the state is and certainly where it will be, but also Democrats are starting to recruit pretty good candidates for these governors races. You have Michael Michaud in Maine and now you have Charlie Crist in Florida, who are really going to challenge what are already weakened gubernatorial candidates running for reelection, and so that creates sort of the perfect storm for Republican's defeats in state houses and governor's mansions throughout the country.

MR. COOK: I would just add that 83 percent of all the state legislative seats will be on the ballot next year.

MS. KAMARCK: Wow.

MS. PAGE: So, let me go to the audience for your questions. Yes, sir. Please go ahead. I'm pointing at you.

MR. HARRIOT: Hi, Judd Harriot. My question concerns the leadership of the Republican Party, the stalwarts, the financial backers. How are they going to bring the tea party to heel? How are they going to control this insurgency?

MR. COOK: I've talked with several -- I think there's -- the plan right now is to pick out two, three, four, five tea party House incumbents and take them out in primaries this year. And just to try to sort of --

MS. PAGE: Somebody like -- who are you thinking of?

MR. COOK: Justin Amash in Michigan would be the first one. And go after him, try to take him out, so that there's some penalty for becoming too much of a problem, and the thing is, you know, this all comes -- and, you know, you know this as well as I do, that, you know, given the way that Congressional districts are drawn, given the population sorting that takes place, given everything that's happened, you know, the fact is, the vast majority of Republicans are in more danger from a more conservative primary challenger than losing to a Democrat, and by the same token, a Democrat is in more danger of losing to a Democrat -- a

more liberal Democrat than losing to a Republican.

And so what the leadership or the establishment has got to try to do is kind of equalize that pain so that there is a price if you move too far over to the right to try to kind of reach a political equilibrium that would punish those who go too far to the right.

SPEAKER: And the capacity of the business community to spend in these races is often understated. The tea party has enthusiasm, the tea party has grassroots. They don't have money or they don't have as much money as the Chamber of Commerce can put behind races and other business groups, and so that's going to really play a factor, that's how they get it done, just by spending. Forget the grassroots, they're going to buy a ton of TV time and just let the race make itself.

MR. COOK: And I would just add, it wasn't until the shutdown fight that the business establishment sort of was the call to arms and say, wait a minute, this has gone way too far. This is a dynamic that didn't really exist six months ago. There was a concern, but no action.

SPEAKER: I think one thing Charlie says I think is worth emphasizing. I think it's much more valuable to take out an incumbent who's there than it would be to try to prop up somebody who's facing a challenge. I think in the last couple elections groups like Main Street Partnership, other centrist Republican groups have tried to protect their

incumbents, but that doesn't look exciting for the national media. It's not exciting to read about a super PAC that's trying to help somebody who's already there.

So, I think the PR value of running a primary challenger is just more exciting.

At the same time, I don't know that it's exciting enough, that is, I don't know that you get the rank and file voters or that you get, you know, grassroots Republican donors around the country really excited about taking back the party from conservatives. For somebody to say, oh, I'm the candidate of business, you know, it may help them with business groups and getting money to spend for outside ads, but I don't know that that's a good tool for mobilizing voters.

MR. COOK: Sometimes a party has to crash and burn before they really learn a lesson, and Republicans '64, Democrats '72, and they each bounced back and won the White House four years later.

MS. PAGE: But that's what people said in 2012, that the Republicans had shown --

MR. COOK: That wasn't crash and burn enough. That was like a -- that was a bad landing, but it wasn't a crash. I mean, they could blame Romney for the loss as opposed to take it to heart.

SPEAKER: And they could hang their hat on the House,

they still won the House, so they could say that.

MS. PAGE: Let's go to the back of the room. Yes, sir?

MR. KELLER: Hi, Matt Keller (inaudible). I think your points are great about the shutdown being 13 months out before the November elections as well as this idea of sort of collective amnesia later on, that people would be forgetting about this, but my big question is, is that the budget talks will begin again next year, early next year, and will likely continue throughout the year, and will this sort of be a trickle -- you know, if there is a continued patten as there has been in the past that, you know, people will be reminded of the shutdown again and be like, here we go again, here are Republicans doing their same old thing, as well as very much related to the first question that's, you know, have they overcome -- have mainstream Republicans overcome the pressure from tea party?

MR. COOK: I thought that's what I said, was that it has -- it needs to happen, you know, either shutdown, near shutdown, default, near default, this needs to happen a couple more times to get it closer to the election for it to have the kind of impact that it would have had if we had the shutdown in October and election today.

MS. PAGE: Well, you've got some opportunities, you've got deadlines in January and February, for instance. Will Congress do again what it did this last time, do you think? Or do you think lesson learned by

Republicans?

MS. KAMARCK: I think on the debt ceiling lesson has been learned, okay. The question is on the shutdown, and the question is the ability to do a bargain or do they do another sort of sequester deal where they just step back from making the hard choices either on entitlements or on spending and just say, okay, we're going to settle for X amount of cuts across the board and that's it.

What you may be seeing is the gradual disappearance of the entire discretionary side of the U.S. budget because that seems to be the only way these two parties can come together is by taking a bite out of the discretionary side and nobody really has been able to cope with the entitlement side, which is already half of what we spend in America we spend on ourselves and our own benefits, and so the question is, you know, are we going to see the disappearance of sort of everything else in the government?

MR. COOK: That's really true, but the thing is, it's not have Republicans learned a lesson, because the leadership got the memo a year ago, it's have some of the more exotic Republicans learned a lesson.

MR. HUDAK: The other group that learned a lesson, as we said, were business groups and they weren't mobilized in the right way in advance of the shutdown and the debt ceiling crisis because they didn't

think either were credible, they didn't think the government was going to shut down, they didn't think we were going to default. They were right on one, but they were really wrong on the other.

Now they're ready, now they know, calling the Speaker's office or calling 40 members' offices three days into a shutdown is not the right strategy. You have to start making those calls weeks and months in advance to say, did you like my donation last time? You're not getting it if the government shuts down.

They're ready for that kind of fight in a way they weren't ready for five weeks ago.

MR. PAGE: Robert, do you agree?

MR. BOATRRIGHT: I suppose I'm skeptical that business groups will be able to wield more clout through that method. I just don't -- you know, if they weren't listening the first time, I think they were fairly clear in what they wanted, they just don't have the clout in these districts and I don't know what they can do to change it other than change Congress.

MS. KAMARCK: Yeah, I'll add a little bit to the skepticism here about business only because -- going back to Bob Boatright's excellent work on this -- Congressional primaries are so small and so obscure. First of all, they take place over the course of the entire year, so

they're never covered, okay, they're very, very rarely covered. You have turnout that varies from 3.5 percent of the voting age population to a big year, like 2010, which was 7.5 percent of the voting age population.

So, when you have such small electorates, intensely motivated people, people motivated by ideological concerns, can play a really outsized role in the Congressional primary and so, while, you know, yes, I think business groups are more mobilized, more interested than they have been, I'm not sure that they'll be able to actually have any impact on the Republicans.

MR. COOK: Let me clarify. I think the most likely manifestation of business getting involved in some of these Republican primaries will be, you know, seven digit spending by super PACs against some of these incumbents where it either is or isn't transparent of where the money came from, but it came from business.

MS. PAGE: So, there was agreement with the panel that immigration is not going to get passed in 2014. How about a grand bargain on the budget, something that actually tries to do something so you don't just stumble from one continuing resolution? Anybody think we'll get one of those?

So, no, so, kind of a pessimistic view up here. Let's come back to the front. Yes, sir.

MR. MITCHELL: Thanks. I'm Garrett Mitchell and I write *The Mitchell Report* and I want to pose the question this way: if we'd been having this session in November of 1993, thinking about the midterms of '94, we probably would not have anticipated the Contract with America, and the question I have is whether there is issue potential or other potential for one party or the other to figure out a way to nationalize the 2014 midterms? And the two things that I just would throw up in that regard, one is, if it so happened that the tea party forces us to play chicken again and maybe even again, or despite Elaine's observation that healthcare really only affects 15 percent of the population, it seems to me that the videos are telling us a different story, not only is it affecting more than 15 percent, it's affecting the wrong folks up there.

So, is there some potential to nationalize the 2014 elections, which could change the way we think about what might happen?

MR. COOK: Let me jump at that. First of all, each of these elections has its own unique characteristics and calendar and for example, 1994, the first signs that we saw that something was wrong was around April/May/June of '94. Conversely, for 2010, when Democrats lost their majority, oh, the signs go back to 4th of July 2009. I mean, basically, from starting around -- after stimulus and cap and trade and just really before we turned the corner into healthcare reform, I was hearing reports back

from Democratic members coming back from the 4th of July recess saying, my god, they beat the hell out of me. I've never had a trip home like that. And I had several from different parts of the country, different kind of districts, so the seeds of that was the summer before.

What I would argue with is that I don't think parties usually are able to nationalize elections. I think elections are nationalized. And I used to have at my fingertips the statistic, but very, very, very few Americans ever heard of the Contract with America by Election Day '94, it's sort of been attached to that, but it was an insert in *Reader's Digest* magazine, and most American households -- I grew up in one that got it, but not that many -- I mean, it wasn't that big a deal, but it's -- you know, that thing started getting nationalized over the summer of '94, the disaster, the crime bill on the House floor in August -- I think it was August of 1994, I mean, it got nationalized.

Now, did -- you know, to me, Newt didn't create the wave, but he sure taught his candidates how to skillfully ride and maximize that wave, but the wave was building sort of before that.

SPEAKER: And here's what you really need to nationalize a midterm like this. For the out party, the Republicans in this case, you need a really unified party. Republicans can't even agree with the things they agree on, so that's out. They're not going to come together. They're

against the Affordable Care Act as a united group, but what other issue are they really united as a House caucus or as House and Senate conferences for this? They don't have it.

For the in party, for the Democratic party in a midterm, you need a president to lead the way, you need the president to bring everyone together and have that policy vision. We don't have that either. We have a president whose detached politically and a president who you really don't see what his next step policy-wise is. He talks about immigration reform, but the other issues he talks about are gun control, which is a nonstarter, and other issue areas that are not going to matter.

So, what you need from either party to nationalize this absolutely is not there.

MS. KAMARCK: I'm going to, though, take your question and take it to a different place, which is, I agree with everything about nationalizing the general election, but I think what Professor Boatright's work shows us is that there may be a new phenomenon out there, which is nationalizing primaries.

Will we see, in 2014, nationalization of primaries by Club for Growth maybe against the Chamber of Commerce, or something like that? It's a much cheaper proposition, for sure, but on the other hand it's difficult to do, and the interest groups that comprise these big networks we call

political parties traditionally haven't played that much in them. Now labor unions have played a little bit on the Democratic side in primaries, but -- so, I would actually -- I think the more interesting question is, will we see a nationalization or an attempt at nationalization of primaries, certainly on the Republican side, but even potentially on the democratic side, because as Susan pointed out, if we move into grand bargain territory and the Democratic Party splits open over entitlement reform, you could see a similar fight for the soul of the party taking place in some Democratic primaries.

MR. COOK: But even in these primaries that have been sort of nationalized, whether it's tea party 2010/2012, it -- I mean, I'm not sure, I guess they did do it, but to me these things become nationalized and, you know, I don't think that there were Republicans sitting on First Street SE at the RNC headquarters saying, okay, let's flip the switch and nationalize it.

You know, events have to create the dynamics that create a nationalized election. And you could help it, you can kind of fuel it, but it's either there or it's not.

SPEAKER: Well, I think it's really about the media. The media wind up nationalizing things when it makes for a good story. So, take 2012, for instance. Seven members of Congress lost in the

primaries. Four of them were Democrats, but nobody made an effort to nationalize it and say, this is the Democratic Party cracking up because it wasn't a good story.

On the Republican side, you know, Richard Mourdock, that was an exciting thing, right, taking out Richard Lugar, some of the rhetoric that we hear from the groups that do this, right? Read an interview with Stephen Moore back when he was running the Club for Growth he had some tremendously entertaining things to say about -- I think he said, oh, you know, Republicans are wetting their pants when they see us coming, right, it's kind of this cartoonish way of talking that it resonates with people and it creates a story.

So, that's my -- I guess my thinking on business, right, I don't know if -- like, Steve LaTourette, for instance, is the person who's been most vocal in talking about taking back the Republican Party, but I don't know if Steve LaTourette is the kind of guy who can create this national cartoonish persona in talking about what he's doing.

MR. COOK: I think there are some other Steves that -- like there's a guy named Steven Law, for example, at American Crossroads. I think --

MS. PAGE: Is there any foreign policy issue that's likely to be very important next year in the midterm elections?

MS. KAMARCK: Oh, I don't think so. I mean --

SPEAKER: Not in a way that's going to change minds, no.

MS. KAMARCK: What?

SPEAKER: Not in a way that's going to change minds. So, you're going to have a bunch of Congressional districts where people are screaming about Benghazi, but they're in places that a Democrat doesn't stand a chance anyway, so --

MS. KAMARCK: Yeah, I mean, the Republicans are just desperately trying to revive Benghazi because they're looking to 2016, they're trying to weaken Hillary Clinton, so you do hear a lot of that, but it doesn't seem to get much traction.

MS. PAGE: Let's see, let's go to the back again. Yes, sir.

MR. WOLFSON: Thank you. My name is Tom Wolfson, I just have a detail question here. One heard for decades that polls and general opinion seem to think that regardless of how poorly people regarded Congress as a whole, they thought their own representative was a pretty good fellow and doing pretty well. Do you see any change in that, or is it that you think that seems to hold true still?

MR. COOK: I think it's still relatively true, but just a lot less than it used to be. I mean, yes, we're seeing poll questions like in the *NBC/Wall Street Journal* poll and other polls that, you know, would you

vote to defeat every member of Congress including the one in your district, and we're getting, you know, 60 percent or so -- over 60 percent saying yes.

Now, having said that, I think since the end of World War II, the lowest House incumbent reelection rate we ever had was 87 percent. I think that was the rock bottom. Generally it's around 90 -- low 90s, something like that, so voters talk a good game about throwing the bums out, but they -- and they do occasionally throw some bums out, but, you know, there's a lot of big talk going on.

But it has changed somewhat because in the old days you would not have gotten 61 or 63 percent or whatever saying, defeat even my own member. You wouldn't have heard that.

MR. HUDAK: And the way the question is worded -- Charlie is right -- is the key here, so it says, would you like to get rid of every member of Congress including your own? Well, that's a false construct. That's not what a voter faces in the poll. You can still want to throw every member out but you can still keep your own. And so, the reality is, if you're faced with this decision, boy, do I have to sacrifice Congressman Smith if I can get rid of the other 434 lunatics, it sounds pretty good, but then you get into the polling booth and it's a different story.

MS. PAGE: That's a deal you'd take. Robert, anything you

want to add?

MR. BOATRRIGHT: I agree fully with what John said. I think when you show up at the polls you think about the fact that if you throw your guy out, that's going to give the other 434 more power. It's not something people do.

MS. PAGE: What's your favorite race for 2014? What's an election for the Senate, for the House, for governorship that you think is going to be really important to watch and interesting? What would you pick? Elaine Kamarck, you go first.

MS. KAMARCK: I don't know, I think I might pick Kay Hagan in North Carolina and only because along with Virginia, that's one of those states where we're seeing the plate tectonics move, we're seeing some demographic changes, we're seeing a state that we always thought was a completely red state, now more in play at the presidential level, et cetera.

So, I guess if I were to pick one I would say, is there -- you know, what's happening in some of these states that used to be so clearly in the Republican column, are they, in fact, undergoing a kind of longer-term change?

MS. PAGE: Charlie, pick a favorite.

MR. COOK: To me -- well, important and interesting are generally two different things, because usually the interesting ones to me

usually aren't ones that necessarily tell you anything, but they're just a whole lot of fun.

I think Elaine's pick of North Carolina of the Senate is a good one because where are the Senate races that are really going to determine, it voted two points -- for Romney by two points, but it was the closest thing to the national numbers of any of the states that have hotly contested --

MS. PAGE: Pick something else -- she picked North Carolina, you have to pick something else.

MR. COOK: Oh, I think interesting would be Arkansas, Tom Cotton against Democratic incumbent Mark Pryor. I think that'll be a fun one. Louisiana will be interesting with Mary Landrieu, but, you know, the Republican Party is kind of cannibalizing itself right now, so it's interesting but it won't tell us anything because it's got so many weird aspects to it.

MS. PAGE: Okay, John Hudak, you can't pick any of those races, what do you --

MR. HUDAK: The Georgia Senate race is going to be neat. Georgia is seen as a conservative state. In presidential voting it's actually not as much anymore, it's tending more toward purple, a purplish hue of red, and what you have -- and my wife is in the audience and she's a graphic designer and I'm sure purplish hue of red is going to get me in hot

water later on -- but the Georgia Senate race is a neat dynamic.

You have a pretty qualified Democratic candidate running with a ton of name recognition against four tea party members ripping themselves apart over a seat that they should be able to keep. And so what's going to happen -- and Robert can speak to this a bit, I'm sure -- is an absolute nuclear war in the Republican primary where whoever comes out from the dust, whoever happened to have the bunker that day looks terrible and Michelle Nunn looks great by comparison because she's not that and she's a Nunn -- not a Catholic nun, but a Nunn as in --

MS. KAMARCK: A Nunn as in Sam Nunn.

MR. HUDAK: And so, she'll -- I think that's a neat race to see what happens there.

MS. PAGE: It's been interesting to see the number of women challengers in some of these races, kind of long-shot races, but where they actually have a credible chance of winning. Robert, take your pick.

MR. BOATRIGHT: Let's see, well, I think there will be some interesting primaries. I think it will be fascinating to see what happens if Mitch McConnell's challenger is serious, but I think the most -- the race that I find most intriguing right now -- I don't know if I'm allowed to mention something that's not Congress --

MS. PAGE: Yes, absolutely.

MR. BOATRRIGHT: -- but John Kasich will be up as governor of Ohio, and that's interesting because if you go all the way back to the early 1990s, right, the Republicans that came in in 1994, there was this talk about this new breed of conservative uncompromising Republicans, but many of the Republicans who won were actually veteran politicians who had kind of ridden the wave.

And so, if you look at Republicans who won in 2010, there aren't that many veterans politicians who had ridden the wave and kind of sought to bring their experience to bear (inaudible) some of the extremes, and I think Kasich is -- he seems to be taking steps to do that, right, to make the case that he can be a more responsible Republican governor, that he can work with the sorts of things that the Obama Administration has given him.

MS. PAGE: Okay. Let's go back to the audience for questions. Yes, ma'am.

SPEAKER: My name is (inaudible) from *The Washington Times*. I had a question for -- well, all of you, but John, you brought up the point that the tea party has a lot of enthusiasm and grassroots behind it but it doesn't have a lot of money right now, and we've seen kind of going on right now there's been a lot of campaign finance discussion, especially

with cases like McCutcheon and smaller cases going on in states like Arizona and Mississippi, and I'm wondering, if these cases kind of go through and these campaign finance restrictions are turned over, what kind of effect that could have on the tea party, if they're going to be able to gain a lot more monetary support and then hold more seats in office?

MR. HUDAK: Well, I don't think that those cases are going to affect the tea party in a way that disproportionately hurts other groups within the Republican Party. That's going to affect everyone in the same way and so whichever groups are going to benefit, my guess is, that's going to help a pro-business group more than it is going to help a tea party group, more so than the reverse, but depending on what kind of piecemeal set of cases -- set of decisions come out of this, god only knows what the courts are going to have us have a landscape for campaign finance.

MR. COOK: At the risk of getting an earful from political scientists, I don't pay a whole lot of attention to campaign finance decisions anymore because basically anybody with a lot of money that they want to help or hurt a candidate has no problem finding ways to spend it. You know, you may have to be creative in terms of where -- exactly how you channel it, but there's no problem -- you know, as long as it's not foreign money, there is no problem whatsoever, that until the Supreme Court changes the definition of spending as a form of speech or

a Constitutional Amendment, neither of which are going to happen anytime soon, there's not going to be any change.

And so, I stopped paying attention to campaign finance reform or decisions six, eight years ago. I mean, it's just --

MS. PAGE: Life is still full, you find?

MR. COOK: Yeah, I mean, it's just -- the thing is, there's just not -- there's -- why waste energy on something that is not going to get changed? I mean, to me, the way I look at campaign money is, it is a fuel, you know, like in a car, and cars run better with fuel than without, and campaigns do better with money than without, and so to me it's a commodity as opposed to looking at it as original sin or something.

MS. PAGE: Let's go back to the back here. Yes, sir. That's you. Yes. Fine. I wasn't actually pointing at you, but go ahead.

SPEAKER: During the shutdown we heard a lot of stories that were blaming redistricting and the way Congressional maps are drawn for the fact that there were people screaming on both sides, and then there was a pushback, a bunch of stories that said it had absolutely nothing to do with it and that it's way overblown.

Where do you guys see redistricting and gerrymandering and all that map drawing factoring into the 2014 elections and how much of an impact is it really having?

MR. COOK: Do one of you guys want to do it first?

MR. BOATRIGHT: Well, the official political scientist perspective is that roughly 10 to 15 percent of the polarization in Congress is caused by gerrymandering. You know, what that means is that you have a few candidates who are a little bit more conservative than they'd otherwise be, but it's kind of at the margins, right, you wouldn't change the bigger picture.

MR. HUDAK: And you're operating with the same district lines in 2014 as you were in 2012, and so, in the aggregate, I don't think it's going to matter.

The one area I do think it matters, though, is sort of the mentality that state parties have about what it means to win. So, you have these Congressional districts, and in some states you've drawn some pretty extreme Republican and extreme Democrat too, but extreme Republican districts and you're getting out of that an extreme Republican, of course, and they're doing really well, they're ringing up a lot of votes, they have enthusiasm, they have, in some cases, money behind them.

Some state parties are looking at that and saying, that's the model we need when we nominate a Senator, and that's a problem.

MR. COOK: I think too many people approach it in kind of a binary -- it's either all redistricting or it's not redistricting when, you know,

there's a mix of things. Is redistricting a factor? Sure and the fact that we had the first year -- first redistricting year where Republicans had the upper hand in a lot more places than Democrats for the first time since forever, well, that was unusual, but part of its redistricting.

Part of it is population patterns, population sorting. The fact is that most Democrats live in urban areas or college towns, and Republicans are sort of spread out over everything else. Well, Democratic voters are so concentrated that even if you didn't have a malicious gerrymanderer, it would happen -- you know, you would have this happen to a certain extent as well.

And third, and we've talked about this a lot already this morning, is primaries, is moderates getting bumped off in primaries. And then the final thing is general elections that, you know, when I came to Washington in 1972, there were a ton of conservative moderate Democrats, there were a ton of liberal moderate Republicans, and over the years, most of them that didn't retire or die, most of them lost and think of where we are right now. If you were a Republican in a district that even remotely leans Democrat, the chances are pretty darn good that you lost in 2006, 2008, or 2012 to a lesser extent, and if you are a Democrat that was sitting in a district that probably ought to go Republican and you were around and survived 1994, 2010, you know, when Republicans picked up

the most seats of any party since 1948, the most in any midterm election since 1938, chances are you probably lost then.

And so it's all these things together have created, you know, where the American people are sort of, roughly speaking, a bell curve, slightly asymmetric, a little more on the right than the left, and Congress is more like a camel with two humps, which would be bimodal distribution, right?

One day I was awake at statistics class in college.

MS. PAGE: You know, the polarization of our government has been of such concern and made things so hard to do and such dismay among a lot of American voters. Of course, we'll have the same district lines in 2014, but do you think the Congress that gets elected then, is it going to be as polarized as things have been now, or is it going to be more so, less so? What do you think, Elaine?

MS. KAMARCK: You know, I've been mystified by this, frankly, because, you know, for most of our history, we have had political parties that, you know, had some moderates in and had some extremes in, but there's always -- leaders have created what I call governing coalitions. It's a term you take from a parliamentary system, but it's equally applicable and you can go through legislation over the past 50 years and see that those coalitions changed from piece of legislation to

piece of legislation.

I'm astonished at two developments, and I'm not quite sure what to make of them. One is American political parties behaving a lot more like parliamentary democracy parties, where they vote lockstep with the party, and second is the -- which goes with that -- is the inability of party leadership to create a coalition across lines.

So, think of this last, you know, ridiculous two weeks we went through at the beginning of October where the government was shut down, we were on the point of default, and the votes were there. There were plenty of votes out of that 435, there were plenty of people willing to vote to stop this whole thing, and for some reason, Boehner didn't feel that he could simply put this on the floor, get the Democrats, get a handful of his Republicans, et cetera.

And, you know, there's all sorts of reasons, we've talked about them here -- fear of a primary challenge, et cetera, but it is, I think, something kind of new in American democracy that we don't have these coalitions being formed in Congress.

MR. COOK: I would say three points, number one, former speaker Dennis Hastert is a very, very nice man, but the so-called Hastert rule that basically takes a body, an institution that was designed to be representative and majority rule and make it plurality rule where it requires

a majority of the majority, which generally speaking is a plurality, right, to move something so you could have, you know, you could have 60 percent of the members of the House want something and it can't even get to the floor, that it really is a travesty.

But playing off of something Elaine -- if you were to say, who are the two -- what two groups are the most unhappy members of Congress, I'd say, number one, former governors, because they've had power before and they've been able to like have their fingers on the levers and the buttons. And then they find themselves in a debating society that accomplishes very little. And then the second thing is the moderates, the people that sort of like the process of legislation, the guys that like to do deals, you know, the Trent Lotts and John Breauxs, and over time, a lot of these moderates finally just say, you know what, this place isn't getting anything done at all, I've got better things to do with my life, and they leave, and a lot of times they're replaced by ideologues.

And so, it's a lot of these things are at play.

MR. HUDAK: And for the speaker, you know, the conversation for weeks was, well, John Boehner is weak and that's why we have the -- we're in the position we're in, that's why we have an inability to pass a bill that a majority of the House supports. But name me another member of Congress who's going to do a different job than John

Boehner with this current composition of the Republican Party. I don't see Eric Cantor being any more effective, I don't see Kevin McCarthy being any more effective, and those are the two talented ones.

Forget who's next on the list. It's just a matter of what this Republican conference looks like and there is no better alternative -- I mean, if I were a tea party member of Congress I might think otherwise, but there is no real better alternative to John Boehner who's going to be more effective or be able to pass this legislation.

MS. PAGE: Robert?

MR. BOATRRIGHT: Well, we've covered a ton of things in response to that last question. You know, I think Elaine is correct that, you know, historically we're kind of in uncharted territory, right, we don't have a good precedent for what's going on right now in American history. But I think this started out as a question about redistricting, about our current districts, and so, I guess, to inject a note of optimism, I'll say that, you know, the science of drawing districts has improved in just leaps and bounds in terms of legislator's abilities to draw districts that are going to be reliably partisan.

But our country also is changing very rapidly, right, and so districts that were going to be reliably partisan as of 2012, right, people move, people come to the U.S. people get born, so over the decade, you

know, some of those districts will become more liberal, some will become more conservative, you know, a number of them will become more moderate.

So, if you look towards the end of the decade, you may see districts just start to naturally sort themselves out a little bit and perhaps we'll get more moderates.

MS. PAGE: So, we're just about out of time. We're going to do a lightning round where you're only allowed to answer yes or no. The first question is, will Republicans hold the house in 2014? Robert?

MR. BOATRIGHT: Yes.

MR. HUDAK: Yes.

MR. COOK: Yes.

MS. KAMARCK: Yes.

AUDIENCE MEMBER: No!

(Laughter)

MS. PAGE: Will Democrats hold the Senate in 2014? We'll go the other way around.

MS. KAMARCK: Yes.

MR. COOK: Yes.

MR. HUDAK: Yes.

MR. BOATRIGHT: Yes.

MS. PAGE: And for our bonus point -- I'd call it a tiebreaker but none of you have disagreed with each other -- who will be elected as House Speaker in 2015?

SPEAKER: John Boehner.

SPEAKER: Kevin McCarthy.

MR. COOK: Eric Cantor.

MS. KAMARCK: Paul Ryan.

MS. PAGE: Thanks to our great panel, thanks to our great audience, and thanks to Brookings.

(Applause)

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