Peter G. Peterson Fiscal Summit 2017:

Getting to Yes: Finding Consensus In a Divided Congress

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Interview with Representatives Charlie Dent (R-PA) and Jim HiMes (D-CT)

Interviewer: Lisa Desjardins

In a polarized, highly-partisan Congress, fierce ideological battles often prevent cooperation and compromise. However, bipartisan solutions are often the key to breaking legislative gridlock and achieving lasting reform. In this conversation, Rep. Charlie Dent (R-PA), co-chair of the Tuesday Group, and Rep. Jim Himes (D-CT), chair of the New Democrat Coalition, will assess the political and electoral forces shaping today’s policy environment, the vast “middle” of American politics, and the possibilities that exist to find consensus in a shifting landscape.

\* \* \*BEGIN INTERVIEW\* \* \*

ANNOUNCER: Ladies and gentlemen, please welcome Congressman Charlie Dent of Pennsylvania, Congressman Jim Himes of Connecticut, and our moderator from *PBS News Hour*, Lisa Desjardins. (APPLAUSE)

LISA DESJARDINS, PBS NEWS HOUR: Good morning. (MIC NOISE) I was so happy to moderate this panel, because I love the idea of getting to yes. Doesn't that sound so easy?

REP JIM HIMES (D-CT): It would be great.

DESJARDINS: (LAUGH) Gentlemen, I think we wanna start and talk about you. You represent-- there are m-- several reasons that you're here. You've both worked across the aisle. But you represent two, I would say, middle-of-the g-- road divisions of your various conferences and caucuses, right, the Tuesday Group for republicans and the New Democratic-- Caucus.

Tell me what your hopes are for those groups and how-- how you think they can help get to yes in an environment where we see, it seems, more and more lawmakers on either end of the spectrum than we do where you are, in the middle? Let's start with you, Representative Dent.

REP CHARLIE DENT (R-PA): Sure, thank you, Lisa. And thank you all for having me here this morning. Couple things. I guess I'd first say that-- I always felt that our Tuesday Group, it's a center-right coalition. And-- I've always felt that we're the governing wing of the Republican Party.

These are the people who have the capacity to get the yes, the ones who are usually part of whatever agreement is reached, whether it is on debt ceilings-- budget agreements-- appropriations bills, the Violence Against Women Act, hurricane relief, whatever it is. It always seems to be the same group.

So that's really, I think-- largely, our function. Our members are ideologically somewhat diverse. But they all have-- a practical, pragmatic sense about them, that they realize they have responsibilities to-- to move the agenda forward.

DESJARDINS: One difference being the healthcare bill, though. Obviously, you were in the headlines. Your group was in the headlines, as your conference tried to find a bill that could get enough republican votes. But in the end, it seemed more Tuesday Group members voted against the bill that came to the floor than for it.

DENT: Yeah, for a reason. There were procedural issues, obviously. But-- but there were substantive issues that many of our members had, particularly no the Medicaid piece-- that there wasn't a soft-enough landing. The tax credits weren't sufficient-- (THROAT CLEAR) to-- you know, to provide-- health coverage for a lotta people who would be cycling off Medicaid.

Some of us didn't want to have the Planned Parenthood (NOISE) issue in. So there were a variety of issues. But there was also a procedural issue that was not inconsequential. It was this. There are those who, I felt, that were being appeased just to get a bill outta the House, knowing darn well that this bill was going absolutely nowhere in the Senate.

And then if the Senate were actually to pass the bill and send it back to the House, it might be more to my liking. But the people who were appeased to get the bill outta the house would be nowhere to be found on the final vote. And the-- that dog doesn't hunt anymore for me.

DESJARDINS: Let's talk about the democratic side of the equation here. You don't-- do you consider yourself a blue dog? (THROAT CLEAR) Does anyone consider themselves a blue dog (LAUGH) anymore? And-- and-- because that's the group that was known as sorta the fiscal core, fiscal conservatives for the Democratic Party. Where-- where do you fit in? And what is that model like now?

HIMES: Yeah. You know, the blue dogs-- the blue dogs-- (LAUGH) the few that remain, you know, the blue dogs really were democrats who came out of-- it was almost a geographic designation. These were--

DESJARDINS: That's right.

HIMES: --southerners, westerners. You think of people like Ben Chandler in Kentucky, John Barrow of Georgia. These names sort of echo in the halls. We don't have a lotta seats now outside of urban areas in the south-- or-- or in the Midwest. And as a result-- you know, our party-- this happens.

When you get smaller, you tend to become-- and this happens to the republicans, as well. As you get smaller, you tend to become more-- ideologically orthodox. And one of the challenges for the New Democrats is to remind-- democrats, far and wide, and this-- th-- this is-- I'm talking about democrats, but this applies to both parties, that-- if you wanna govern, if you someday-- I remember a majority in '09, 2010. That was my first term.

You're going to have a lotta diversity in your caucus. And in the Democratic Caucus, you're gonna have some folks who are-- who are, you know, pretty strong Second Amendment types. You're gonna have some folks that are pro-life. And one of the challenges that we face today is-- is tryin' to tamp down this instinct that, "Oh, gosh. You know, if that-- if that's who you are, there's no-- no spot for you in the party." You can be-- you can be pure that way. But if you're pure that way, you're-- you're never gonna have a majority.

DESJARDINS: So when you say-- when I see this phrase, getting to yes, what are we trying to get to yes about? And I think the-- obviously, the folks here in this audience and me, myself, being a sort of debt geek, as I like to say, (LAUGH) really concerned about the long term.

And it-- it seems that it's been a long time since we had a significant long-term conversation on Capitol Hill. Maybe you could say Medicaid reform is part of the American Healthcare Act. But I-- I wanna see if I can hone down on where you all might be able to help drive some agreement or see if there is any agreement. I guess just follow me along this path. Do you think it's fair to say both-- members from both of your groups would say the national debt is a significant concern?

HIMES: Sure.

DESJARDINS: Obviously. And then that-- and would they say it's a concern that needs to be dealt with significantly in, say, the next five years? Or is that where we start seeing differences?

HIMES: Well, y-- yes. That's a pretty easy thing to say. The hard thing to say--Senator Warner actually put it out. The-- the harder thing to say is the truth thing. In other words, it's pretty-- it's-- it's free. I mean, there's elements of the Democratic Party that, you know, would s-- rather we not focus on debt and deficits.

And-- and by the way, that's been accelerated by the fact that, you know, starting eight years ago or seven years ago, we started using language like, "We're two weeks away from being Greece. We're--" you know, "This is the single-most catastrophic thing--" and for six years, you know, United States Treasuries have been-- have been low. There hasn't been a catastrophe.

But the hard thing to say-- I think Charlie would agree with me on this. The hard thing to say is not that the debt's a big deal. The hard thing to say, for the democrats, the hard things to say-- is, by the way, what the president's new budget doesn't say, which is, "The long-term, real fiscal challenge that, if we're serious about fiscal issues, we will talk about, it would be the need for reform in our mandatory programs, in Medicare and Social Security," very, very hard for a democrat to say that.

The hard thing, I'll let Charlie riff on this, but the hard thing for a republican to say is, "Gosh, if you do the math, you kinda need to look for some new revenue sources." That's pretty hard for the republicans to-- accept--

DENT: Well, I would think--

DESJARDINS: Is that hard for you to say, or just republicans?

DENT: Well, I think what's easy for me to say is that we already have-- a model to look at. It was the Simpson-Bowles Commission. And I-- in the-- in the House, a few years back, we had a vote. And 34 of us, I think, voted for it--

HIMES: 38, 38.

DENT: 38. Excuse me, 38. (THROAT CLEAR) Should've been 110. But nevertheless-- we-- that-- that’s what they thought they had, going in. But the point is--

DESJARDINS: Number of signers of the Constitution, by the way. (LAUGH) So it's a good number.

DENT: There you go. But bottom line is I'm-- I'm not saying that was ideal, that-- that-- that program. But it was a very good starting point. And that had a mix of, you know, mandatory savings. And there was also revenue. So I think we have-- a place to start.

Now, to me, this requires presidential leadership to tackle this. And we have to be willing to do it. So I don't think it's as h-- hard as people think. We kinda have an idea of what the policy discussion should be. It's a matter of political will, at this point.

DESJARDINS: And we have, today, the president's budget proposal being announced. However, he is proposing-- what he calls a large tax cut. And I went through the numbers. I need to sort of see how that shakes out exactly. Because in the end, if you look at his spreadsheets, the revenues for individual taxes and for corporate taxes, s-- are flat.

You don't actually see a decrease in-- in revenue. So it seems like he's moving revenues around somehow. But anyways, he-- he says he wants a tax cut. He has left Medicare and Social Security, the two issues that you all both say, obviously, needs to be dealt with in the debt. And he's left those untouched. So it seems almost like the president is not addressing either side of the equation here (UNINTEL) national debt. How do you, as folks c-- from Congress, try to motivate, tr-- try to change that?

DENT: On the budget? Well, first-- as an appropriator, I-- I've often felt the budget process in Washington is simply an exercise in confederate money. (LAUGH) It's not real. What-- what I mean by that is, you know, the-- when it comes to the budget, there are only, really, two things that matter, as far as I'm concerned.

One, it's a responsible top-line number, what we call the 302(a) number. That sets the-- the appropriations levels. And the second thing is the reconciliation instructions. And I suspect that will be on tax reform. The rest of it is a messaging document. It's aspirational.

It makes a whole bunch of assumptions, some of which are not good, some are. You know, if you-- if growth is at 3.5%, if Medicare is turned into a premium support program, if Medicaid is block granted, you know, if Obamacare is repealed, and on and on it goes, it makes all these policy assumptions that may or may not ever be realized, certainly, probably not in that-- th-- fiscal year.

So the point is, the president sends over a budget. He proposes we dispose. And-- and-- I think one of the challenges with this budget is, because the president's taken-- Medicare, Social Security off the table, you know, th-- and-- and-- and has also asked for-- a significant increase in defense spending, not only these-- the-- domestic discretionary spending available for cuts.

And that's 13% or 14% of all federal spending. I don't think it's particularly realistic. I mean, for example, in the skinny budget, we saw about a 20% reduction in NIH. Well, we just passed the FY-17 appropriations bill two weeks ago. And we-- we increased NIH by $2 billion.

State Department takes about a 29% cut. And there are some other things that we just don't think are particularly realistic. So-- bottom line is-- you know, at some point, we're gonna need another debt commission. And we're gonna have to get serious about it.

DESJARDINS: Where do you think that point is? I mean, I think we've-- we've been ta-- we've known this point was coming for probably a decade, that we've needed…

DENT: You know, I suspect when interest rates pop.

HIMES: Yeah. I mean, there's two forcing functions, right? And sadly, you know, again, look at the president's budget. It-- it's-- it's a how-to in what not to focus on, right? It's tax cuts. It's-- leaving-- Medicare and Social Security-- untouched.

F-- to-- to my democratic eyes, it's-- it's-- it's pretty regressive in a lotta ways. But there's really two forcing functions. And I kinda hope these forcing functions don't kick in. I hope we can figure out a way to beat them-- to the door.

But number one is, as Charlie says, interest rates. At some point, the market, and-- you know, sadly, some people thought that was six years ago. And you have a little bit of a boy who cried wolf thing going on with interest rates. But if interest rates pop-- first of all, you know, the amount of money we're gonna need to spend on interest is-- is-- is gonna-- accelerate. But the other issues that's gonna happen, and-- and you know, it'll-- it'll start happening in the next five to 10 years, is-- eventually, the mandatory spending in the budget, which is mandatory-- will begin to consume the-- the entire budget pie.

And that's not a function of anybody's irresponsibility. It's a function of an aging American population. And when that happens, you know, there's about three members of Congress, you know, who don't want any spending on anything. Everybody else has some element of spending that they really like. It may be defense. It may be, you know-- something else.

But the point is that all that goes away, as a mathematical function, because of the aging of the population. So eventually, we're all gonna wake up and say, "Wait a second. There's no money for anything." And-- sadly, if w-- on that morning-- that's a pretty tough time to address-- the growth of mandatory spending. If we did it now, we could have a ramp that would be, you know, much more kind to-- to-- to people who rely on those programs.

DESJARDINS: You know, you said to me a really interesting thing, when we were walking in, about how you think it needs to start with a bipartisan bill or a bipartisan idea rather than have to come back to, at the end-- as we've seen so many times, as you were saying-- republicans in the house, especially, having to acknowledge that they need democratic votes, which is what we've seen-- again and again, for the most part, as you were saying.

But how does that happen? Can you-- can we write a bill here today? How do-- how do you get these conversations to not only take place among thoughtful members of Congress? And then how do you take that conversation to leaders, who are thinking about the next election, rather than the-- I'm sure it's in the back of their mind.

But the next election is more in the front of their mind than the-- (NOISE) the debt curve. I guess that's the essential question. How does that start? What's the first-- are there conversations between republicans and democrats at this point? Or is it all relationships like this?

DENT: Well, in-- in-- in my view, in order to pass any kinda meaningful reform or meaningful, durable, sustainable reform, it always ends up bein' done on a bipartisan basis. So take infrastructure as an example. I mean, I think there's a genuine desire to move forward on an infrastructure bill.

That-- that issue lends itself to some kinda bipartisan collaboration. You may be able to even tie tax reform to-- you know, if we do tax reform right, we might be able to find a sustainable revenue source-- for-- for some infrastructure. And-- so I think there's-- there-- there's a way to move forward.

I think a lotta democrats wanna see more projects. A lotta republicans wanna see some process reform. How do we-- how do we go about building-- roads and bridges and highways and that sorta thing? So I think there's a great opportunity right there.

But-- but we have to start realistically. I mean, I always worry that the House will s-- try to load up the bill, make it as palatable to the hard right as possible, and sending it over to the Senate. And then the-- and a lotta my colleagues in the House, at times, pretend that-- the other body doesn't exist.

You know, they think it's a unicameral system. So we send it over to the Senate. And they're shocked, just shocked, when the Senate-- changes the bill and sends it back to us. And then we are often forced to eat it. I'd like to actually send a bill over to the Senate that they might have to eat once in a while, or that they would have to-- you know, h-- have a hard time rejecting out of hand and (LAUGH) make modest adjustments.

DESJARDINS: Do you see things the other way, then? Do you see bills leaving the House, and you're so happy that the Senate is going to change them with the current atmosphere--

HIMES: Yeah. Well, of course, you know, you-- you-- you love or hate the Senate, (LAUGH) depending on, you know, whether you want something to move or not. And so you know, again, as we watched that healthcare bill go through, we thought, "Well, at least it's not going anywhere in the Senate."

So no, but I-- I mean, you know, I remember, a million years ago, when we were in the majority, and you know, it's that old saying of that Washington congressman who, you know, the kid comes up to and says, "That republican is my enemy." And then he says, "No, son. The republicans are the opposition. The Senate is the enemy." And so yeah, really--

DESJARDINS: As long as the press is not the enemy, I'm happy, (LAUGH) you know? But yeah, that's right. But I think-- I think trying to get to this idea is, how, in an atmosphere, where it seems leaders are paying most attention to those closer to the ends of your party, as two in the middle--

DENT: On the first launch, always on the first launch, I've noticed. But at the end of the day, we have to come to an agreement. And to get anything through the United States Senate, outside of what we call reconciliation-- you need 60 votes. So last I checked, there were 52 republicans.

That means there'll be at least eight democrats for anything that's gonna get to the president's desk. We have to s-- start, I think, from there, recognizing what we get 60 votes for in the Senate. Try to write the bill as close to that agreement as possible in the House, then send it over. That's what I would do.

DESJARDINS: Let's talk about tax reform. As a democrat, w-- what-- what would-- what do you think you could bring to the table on tax reform that might have some bipartisan hope?

HIMES: Well, like infrastructure, and I think-- I think Charlie would agree with me--

DESJARDINS: Or infrastructure, right.

HIMES: --on this. Like-- like-- well, like, infrastructure-- I think there's-- there's ideas that are broadly accepted across both parties. I mean, most democrats will agree with you that a 35% corporate tax rate-- highest in the OECD, is too high. And it leads to stranded capital and that sorta thing.

No question, we would agree that the tax code is too complicated. It gets a little-- it get-- you know, everybody has their pet deduction and credit, you know? But even there, you've got-- look, you've got the President of the United States, when he was campaigning, saying that the-- capital gains treatment of carried interest. And I promise you, no district in the country has more carried interest than mine does. But-- but-- you know, you-- you--

DESJARDINS: Fairfield, Connecticut--

HIMES: Fair-- Fairfield, Connecticut. And so again, there's lots of areas in-- in tax reform, where-- where I do think there's strong bipartisan agreement. But that's just such a heavy lift. I mean, you know, there's a reason why tax reform last got done in '86, when the president, Reagan, had 60% approval ratings.

It's a huge and heavy lift within the Republican Party. And then once the Republican Party figures out whether they want a border adjustment (TAPE SKIPS) tax or not, and they come to us. And we'll have our things. And then, of course, you've got, you know, every credit and deduction out there has, you know, some organization in town that's gonna fight like hell to keep it in there. So it's not-- (TAPE SKIPS) there is a lotta bipartisan support for a lotta different ideas. But it-- it's-- boy, is it a heavy lift.

DESJARDINS: Is there something in particular that you think would make democrats feel more excited about tax reform, some particular aspect of it that could bring more democrats onboard?

HIMES: Well, I-- I this is-- this is an idea-- I mean, the-- the idea that I started with is not necessarily a democratic or republican idea. Look, you can't look at trillions of dollars stranded abroad and hear from CEOs that they would love to bring that money back.

But just the tax numbers don't work and say, you know, "How is that a good idea?" So again, I'm not sure that's a democratic or a republican thing. And-- and you'd have a lot of democrats supporting the idea of a concessionary rate to bring that money back and a permanent lowering of that rate, so it doesn't get stranded. I don't-- I don't know if that's democratic or republican. That's just kinda smart.

DESJARDINS: Republicans don't need democratic votes, technically, (LAUGH) on-- as it is. However, it looks like, potentially, practically, they may, if they go through reconciliation. Is there an advantage to try and bring-- you talk about you think you want those 60 votes. You want a bill that can be bipartisan. But what's the motivation for your leaders to try and be bipartisan? I understand your personal motivation. But why would Speaker Ryan want to reach out to democrats?

DENT: I-- I suspect we'll move forward on tax reform through the reconciliation process, although I don't know that we'll be able to pass tax reform through the reconciliation process. 'Cause as particularly in the Senate, you don't have much margin for error. You have 52.

So if we can't do it on-- we can't do tax reform through reconciliation, that might force us back-- to-- a more traditional route of tax reform. And I believe that's how they did tax reform back in the-- 80-- in '86. I don't think it was done on a reconciliation basis--

DESJARDINS: No, I don't think it was, either.

DENT: --if I'm-- my memory serves me correctly. So (COUGH) and again, like-- like Jim mentioned-- you know, there are issues where I think there is agreement. We all understand that we might need to move toward a territorial-- territorial tax system on the corporate side, as well as-- allow for repatriation.

That's a stimulus that we'd all like to see, bring, you know, trillions of dollars home to America. Let-- let that be invested. So I do think there's an opportunity-- still, to do this on a bipartisan basis. Because we may need to marry up tax reform to infrastructure.

And as we are lowering rates, we might have to find other revenue to help pay for the infrastructure package, you know, outside of repatriation. And-- and-- and I-- I suspect that might mean we might lose some republicans. And we might need to pick up some democrats for that.

DESJARDINS: If w-- is this like Jenga? If one of these things come out, if tax reform does not happen, is infrastructure possible? It's the one thing I keep hearing democrats and republicans say they feel that they can get to on.

HIMES: It's the threat--

DESJARDINS: Can-- is it possible without tax reform or a delay in tax reform--

HIMES: Well-- well, you know-- again, tax reform is such a heavy lift and p-- and could take so much time that, if-- if infrastructure's important to you, and it's really important in my district, in-- in-- in the northeast, you really say, "Oh, Jeez. Really, we're gonna have to wait for the-- the tax reform thing to-- to go by."

It's really-- it's really discouraging. I kinda wish, in an alternate universe, maybe we had started in January on infrastructure, which would've, again, drawn lots of bipartisan support, would have maybe healed some of the divisions that came up, you know, through November. But we didn't start that way.

DENT: Yeah, and I-- I--

DESJARDINS: Was that ever a consideration, as far as you know--

DENT: Well, I don't-- I don't think it was enough of a consideration. I thought we should've moved in that direction. But that was me. And I-- I just heard Senator Warner mention something, too, on-- tax reform, that to get the rate down, I think the president wants to take the corporate rate down to 15%, to do that, you know, I-- we'd h-- we'd have to find-- it's-- it's hard to do it by just eliminating deductions or credits, loopholes.

And so the debate on tax reform is, how much of it will be paid for? And I think that's-- you know, so it gets back to border adjustability. And is this gonna be s-- tax cut or a tax reform? And that creates, you know, challenges within the Republican Conference.

Because we have some who are more, you know, deficit hawks and others who-- are-- are-- are less so, at least when it comes to tax cuts. So I mean, that's-- that's another challenge that we have to face. And so-- that's why I think that reconciliation may not be as easy as some people think, just because of the internal dynamics-- for us as-- republicans.

DESJARDINS: I'm sorry to have to ask this question. But how much of this is politics? How much of this is policy? You know, I love talking to members, like the two of you, who are deep in policy, (THROAT CLEAR) who are thoughtful about it. There are many more members, I think, than the American public realizes, who are that way, who came here to do policy.

However, when I'm in the halls in Congress, the first thing out of many members' minds is-- is political. And I know that part of that is messaging. But I also feel that lead-- in the leadership's mind, there's-- this is a very political moment. And they're nervous for that reason (THROAT CLEAR) more than policy. How do you get past that? And how political-- are all these discussions right now? It's nice that we're having this great policy, get-to-yes discussion. But politics seems-- how much in the way is that?

DENT: Well, it's always in the way. I mean, you never-- you-- you can't really escape it. I mean, it's just there. But you know, on-- on the budget, I mean, I was, again, b-- back to the budget, I like to beat on the budget, 'cause it's fun. (LAUGH) But the-- but the budget--

DESJARDINS: Yes. I feel like everybody--

DENT: The budget process--

DESJARDINS: You're in-- you're in the right place.

DENT: --though, I mean, it's-- it's just-- I've often found that the budget is just an exercise. It's the most partisan exercise we've got. You know, there's always-- it's-- the budget is always-- it's all whoever's in charge passes it with their votes. There's never any bipartisanship on the budget. And-- and it-- again, it's all about messaging. It's aspirational.

DESJARDINS: Murray-Ryan was a m-- moment of bipartisanship.

DENT: But that wasn't the budget. That wasn't actually-- that was-- that was a budget agreement. It's a little different.

DESJARDINS: Right, right. No, I understand. I understand--

DENT: Which-- and all they really d-- all they really did--

DESJARDINS: But still, that's right.

DENT: --was establish what the budget is supposed to do, which establish that top-line appropriations number. That's all they're really sup-- that's all that budget agreement, largely, mostly, what it was. That's it. But that was done outside the-- the traditional-- budget process.

And-- and again, and that was done on a bipartisan basis, you know-- unlike the-- the budget, you know, is always partisan. But that was a bipartisan agreement. And-- and a lotta people took some grief for that. I voted for it. And I was happy to do it. But it gave us some-- some budgetary stability, at least, for two years, in terms of knowing what numbers we were going to be working with. And we-- the FY-17 bill was the second year of that-- budget agreement.

DESJARDINS: You have more members in the Tuesday Group than the Freedom Caucus does. Yet, you also have more vulnerable members, probably. Is that a factor, do you feel, in the weight that leaders give to the Freedom Caucus versus-- or is it how the two groups maneuver?

DENT: Well, I think what-- what-- what our-- our group, I always say, it's a big eclectic. You know, we have a bit more diversity. It's-- the group's not monolithic. So it's not so easy for our group to come to-- a consensus, maybe, on-- on-- on a given issue.

But our members-- do have-- a very-- like I said, a very pragmatic practical sense. And-- and-- and oftentimes, you know, we can get a good sense of the group about a way to proceed. I mean, the Freedom Caucus is more likely to take a position where they will-- you know, they-- they'll take their, whatever it is, 30 votes, and say, you know, "We are-- we are no." And they'll-- they'll stick.

And that's-- that's why they're effective. I mean, it doesn't mean you advance anything on your own. But it means you can block things. And so that's why they have some real impact. Because they have that ability to stick together on-- on a given issue.

DESJARDINS: What's the pressure like among democrats right now? Is it-- are the conversations such that you feel that you can, behind closed doors, really talk about talking to republicans? Or is this an atmosphere where democrats are happy for President Trump to be out front, happy to wait for what-- they hope will be a political disaster for republicans? What is it like behind closed doors--

HIMES: Yeah, yeah. It's a great-- it's a great question. It's very dynamic. There's-- there's no-- it sorta depends on the day and what, you know, tweet we've all woken up to or whatever that-- that determines the-- the atmosphere. Generally, and I-- I think the leadership has been-- constructive about this.

The leadership, Nancy Pelosi-- (UNINTEL) they have continued to reiterate that, "We will work with the president. We will work with republicans on issues like tax reform and the budget." Obviously, we'll have our progressive values. But we're-- I-- I think they've-- and you know, they've worked to tamp down.

I heard Nancy Pelosi do it the other day, to tamp down the impeachment talk. That's not constructive at this point in time. So there-- there-- there is-- there is, I think, a strong impulse to want to work. But the window on that has slowly been closing. And it becomes harder.

I mean, there is-- an element in the party, and just as there is in the Republican Party, of saying, "The way we're gonna govern is we're not-- we're gonna take them down," the way-- evidently, Mitch McConnell said on day three of the Obama administration, that that's the model to govern.

You know, we don't get anything done, until, once again, we have the House, the Senate, and the presidency. I've-- I've heard that articulated by very smart people. And it's a dark, dark vision, right? 'Cause it means that you're gonna get a shot, once every 10 years. And-- and-- and you're-- and you're probably not gonna succeed. I mean, the republicans, even though they own all three-- of those entities-- are havin' a hard time gettin' stuff done. And so--

DESJARDINS: And that's too late. That's too long of a time curve--

HIMES: Yeah, I know.

DESJARDINS: We seem-- we seem to keep missing it.

HIMES: Again, when you say, "politics," I-- I-- I kinda bristle at the idea, is it policy or politics? Look, politics is how we do things in this country--

DESJARDINS: I'm glad you-- I'm glad you busted me on that--

HIMES: You know, as-- as Rahm Emmanuel used to say, "Politics is the alternative to beating each other up on the streets." And that's a good thing. But politics only works, if you eschew the vision of, "You do it our way or no way." We compromise. And this is, I think, the message we're tryin' to convey, which is nobody gets celebrated for compromise. But that's the only way you govern the country.

DESJARDINS: That's a beautiful way to end this. (LAUGHTER)

HIMES: I'll be here all week--

DESJARDINS: But I think, hopefully, (LAUGHTER) the crowd here, this is the one place where I believe you may be celebrated for attempting to compromise.

HIMES: (LAUGH) That's right. It's--

DESJARDINS: So and trying to get--

HIMES: --a small crowd.

DESJARDINS: --things done. So Representative Jim Himes, the Fourth District of Connecticut, thank you very much. And Representative Charlie Dent, 15th District of Pennsylvania, thank you both very much--

DENT: Thank you. (APPLAUSE) Thank you.

HIMES: Thanks.

\* \* \*END OF INTERVIEW\* \* \*