

INTERVIEW WITH CONGRESSMAN JEFF FORTENBERRY
DRIVE-TIME LINCOLN, KLIN 1400 AM
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MACK: A pleasure to welcome to the program this evening United States
Congressman Jeff Fortenberry.

Congressman, welcome to the show. Nice to have you tonight.

FORTENBERRY: Thank you, Coby. A pleasure to be with you.

MACK: Congressman, we -- Earlier this week, we had Congressman Steve
King. He was in the capital city this week for a fundraiser. And I want to get to some of the
issues that we had a chance to talk with him about and, maybe, get your opinion as well. But,
before we do that, I'd like to talk a little bit about the upcoming election here. First of all,
nationally it seems like Democrats are not running on their success with health care. They're
not running on that as a platform with the elections coming up Tuesday.

FORTENBERRY: Well, a lot of people are running from those votes, not running
for and defending them. And it is a bit of an irony, because that wasn't very long ago in which
we had the most -- one of the most serious policy debates in American history as to the
direction of health care in this country. I think you heard me say many times -- I was very
interested in the right type of health care reform. Health care that would actually reduce costs
of all Americans, improve health care outcomes, while we protect vulnerable persons.
Instead, what happened was we got a health care bill that is a massive shift to more
unsustainable government spending and reduces health care liberties. I think we could have
done much better. And, unfortunately, the outcome is what it is. And it is a bit ironic that
many people are running away from their record if they supported this other perspective that
is now law.

It does beg the question as to how we move forward. There are some things that are being implement right now, some reasonable reforms, such as allowing children to

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stay on their parents' policies up to 26. That's a reform that I would support as it brings new people into the health insurance pool. Taking caps off existing policies is important to certain families who are afflicted by very high cost conditions, such as hemophilia. And, by having insurance caps, it doesn't save the system any money; it just forces families to move to (sic) job to job. So, those are some reasonable things there. But, overall, we could have done much better with a type of health care reform that actually improves the system, fills in the cracks, creates a more competitive environment for small businesses and individuals who could shop across state lines or ban together in new forms of association to have more affordable, competitive access to new insurance products. Instead, all of that was shut down in favor of more unsustainable government spending (indiscernible) reduction of health care --

MACK: Well, and, Congressman, I'd love to talk about health care here in just a minute.

FORTENBERRY: Sure.

MACK: I want to get to the political stuff here first. Do you think -- On Tuesday, do you think Republicans will win the House?

FORTENBERRY: I -- You know, I'm not one that has these optimistic scenarios of 80 to a hundred seats. Winning a congressional seat is a very, very tough business. It's as hard to get into Congress as it is in the NF- -- into the NFL, perhaps harder. And it takes the right combination of things. Yes, a national environment that is favorable to Republicans right now is very -- is a good sign. But, also, it takes the strength of an individual candidate. I do have to tell you, I've met a lot of people who are running from around the country. These are great Americans who have been doing other things in life but recognize that it's time for them

to step up and do their civic duty, and they want to serve in the high -- one of the highest offices in the land. So, I think it bodes very well for a change of leadership. The -- In order for

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there to be a leadership shift, there needs to be a 40-seat gain, 39 to be precise. I think 40 is very doable. It might be beyond 50.

MACK: Congressman, if you are re-elected on Tuesday, would -- this will be your, am I right, your fourth term?

FORTENBERRY: That's correct.

MACK: Will a Republican House cause you to move up in rank or move up in chairmanships if it does swing to a Republican House?

FORTENBERRY: Well, let's put it this way, it would certainly be beneficial to me. And it -- I think it would position us well in Nebraska, in -- generally, and there are a lot of discussions going on in the inside right now as to what could potentially happen with a shift of leadership and how that open up -- opens up new options. So, I don't like to measure the drapes prematurely, you know. I don't want to get in front of that too much. But, nonetheless, we've worked hard to try to serve the constituents of the 1st District well, but, also, have participated in every major policy debate facing this country. And so, hopefully, we'll be in a better position to effect even greater outcomes come November.

MACK: Congressman, let's turn back to Obamacare here for a couple of minutes. I had a great pleasure to visit with Congressman Steve King from Iowa. He was in capital city for a fundraiser earlier this week. And, during the conversation, we -- when we were talking about the new health care bill, and he referred to it as Obamacare, he felt as though there was a chance of actually overturning that if the Republicans can take the House and the Senate. And I told him, I said tha- -- I said, "Congressman, that's the first I've really heard someone say that it can be completely overturned." Because it appears that, you

know, others feel that there just wouldn't be enough majority to even override a veto by the President. What's your take on his comments?

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FORTENBERRY: I think that would be a high hurdle to cross. I think the more likely scenario is that you are going to have a continued aggressive debate in the House about funding or not funding certain aspects of the implementation of this new health care law. And I think the reality of simply saying, "Hey, we need to start over. Here's a better way to do it," would be cleaner and preferable, and that would be what I'd like to see. But, in reality, the numbers won't be there for that type of cleaner process. Instead, you're going to probably, again, have a major fight, gridlock, over how to implement the plan, and there will be funding source fights, and that will block certain aspects of it. Now, again, there's certain aspects of this reform that are already being implemented and that are helping fill some of the gaps -- the brokenness in the health care market, and that would be very difficult to reverse and, perhaps, inappropriate. But packaged in a new health care reform that achieved more affordable access and options for small business and individuals and opened up competition, rather than stifling competition, and further focused on health and wellness to reduce costs, would be my preferred scenario. But we'll have to see.

MACK: Congressman, do you think that Republicans and Democrats in Congress, do you think that they've gotten the message that people really are kind of tired of the politics as usual and are tired of, you know, government continuing to go into debt? Have they got the message?

FORTENBERRY: I think that to characterize the forthcoming election, if you -- if it happens this way, as some sort of Republican wave would be incorrect. I think that this is a wave of American sentiment against the system that needs to become more transparent, more accountable, and, frankly, there needs to be bold, authentic leadership that is willing to

make hard decisions as to how we get the fiscal house in order, return to some of our most cherished traditions, and have the federal government go back to its rightful place in the basic

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things that it can and must do very well. I think that's what the American people are very, very clearly saying. I think that message has come through loud and clear --

MACK: Yeah, 'cause --

FORTENBERRY: -- and I think you can see it reflected.

MACK: I don't think that, as we go through this cycle and probably change power from Democrat to Republicans, I think people don't want the Republicans, then, to go in and just continue to spend and spend and spend like the money grew -- grows on trees, right?

FORTENBERRY: Well, look, the fed- -- The size of federal government has, basically, doubled in the last 10 years. Now, it's accelerated exponentially in the last two, but it has been growing steadily. And I -- Most families in America are living with the same amount of income they've had for the last couple of years or less, and, yet, the government has grown enormously. And forty -- About forty cents on every dollar that's being spent is actually borrowed. Now, you can't do that in your family very long. A business can't do that in the fa- -- in their operations for very long. But the government can do it, because it has a very large credit card, and it can hide the consequences of pushing future taxes on the children or selling the assets of the country overseas to China and other places, or creating inflationary effects, which are all long-term problems for economic viability. So, now is the time were serious leadership is needed to call the American people forth and say, "We must tighten the belt. We must get the fiscal house in order." And we're going to have to have an authentic policy discussion as to how we do that and call for some shared sacrifice. If we do that --

MACK: If you're -- If you're re-elected, are you planning on trying to help lead

that charge and, if so, how?

FORTENBERRY: Well, I think we've been a part of that all along. There's

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been -- Budgets are one thing, but budgets are divided up into appropriations bills. Some of those I've supported. Some of them I haven't. Just a few short years ago, I voted for something called a deficit reduction bill, which was \$25 billion, and that's hardly anything now compared to the level of debt we have. But it was very difficult to vote on that, given the amount of push-back that came from persons concerned about the government funds that were being reduced. So, this is the message that we have to continue to put out there. Our long-term economic viability and, frankly, national security is at stake here. And, until we get the fiscal house in order, I don't think the economy is actually going to rebound as quickly as it should, because it's creating a great deal of uncertainty as to what government is doing, in terms of indebtedness and regulation. And that's going to be the first order of business.

MACK: Congressman, what about these Bush tax cuts? Are you going to fight to keep this? I've done some analysis on this and looked at what other people have done as far as analysis on this, and, you know, if these Bush tax cuts expire, then families, moms and dads, who are making 40, 50,000 dollars a year, they're going to be impacted just from one small portion of the Bush tax cuts that would go away, which is child credit.

FORTENBERRY: Well, these tax reductions from about a decade ago, I like to call them America's tax reductions, save the average Nebraska family about \$1600. Now, can you imagine a scenario next February where people are handed a bill from the government for \$1600? Say, "You gotta pay up, because Congress wouldn't get its act together."

MACK: No. No.

FORTENBERRY: I can't either. So, this is one of the first priorities as well, to

have a successful debate about what the appropriate tax levels are going to be and the appropriate level of services. You know, when I was on the City Council in Lincoln, we used

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to have to balance the budget. I mean, I know you look at those issues quite closely at our local level.

MACK: Uh-huh.

FORTENBERRY: We never had enough money for the number of police officers you ideally wanted, or fire-fighting apparatuses, or the amount of road re-surfacing you ideally wanted, but you had to make a decision about what were reasonable fees in taxes balanced with reasonable public services. And that needs to be the order of the day. Washington doesn't have as much of a revenue problem as it has a spending problem. So, to get the spending in order needs to be the first priority of public policy discussion.

MACK: Very good. He would like your vote on November 2nd.

Congressman Fortenberry, nice to have you tonight on Drive-time Lincoln.

FORTENBERRY: Thanks so much. Pleasure to talk to you.

MACK: Absolutely.