

NEW YORK CITY AND THE NEW DEAL

Session Five | How to Make a New New Deal Happen

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First of all, I won't be able to stay and therefore I really, truly want to apologize if I offend anybody with my remarks, because I won't be here to answer the questions about them. If, on the other hand, if what I do somehow touches a chord, then attribute it to those great ideals that caused me to become a Democrat.

I read the book and I felt that Mike may have made a mistake in inviting me because I could not think that I could add anything else to this discussion. The New Deal, to me, touches just about every one of the issues that I care for as a Democrat – I really do. The transfer of wealth and tax incentives given to businesses to retain them in New York City.

And then I came to this forum and I heard the discussion and I realized how much I really have to say. And I think that first what we should do is, rather than calling it the New Deal, why don't we change the name and call it the Real Deal?

That may not get people's attention, so I'll move one step further. Why don't we call it – The Coming of the Second American Revolution? We haven't had one since 1776. Whether you believe in the Jeffersonian view of the world, or the Hamiltonian view of the world, maybe the time has come for us to really ask the basic fundamental question – how much or how little government do we need in our lives today?

I think that anything short of that won't do. Because there is a certain mindset, a philosophical view that we have of our government and our people that have gotten us to this place, that we seem not to be able to talk about the New Deal in any way but in an apologetic way, and I don't know how to do that.

And then we have to ask the fundamental question – Number 1: What is the role of government today? Number 2 (and this is where I get into trouble): What do both political parties believe in? What does it mean to be a Democrat today? What does it mean to be a Republican?

And as far as I can tell, it goes this way. If you're a Republican you're pro-war. If you're a Democrat, you're pro-war and you really feel bad about it.

If you're a Republican, you do away with affirmative action. And if you're a Democrat, you do away with affirmative action and you really feel bad about it. If you're a Republican, you grant 60 percent of tax cuts to the top wealthy one percent of the population. If you're a Democrat, you grant 60 percent of the tax cuts to the top two percent of the population.

I suspect that the reason why elections contests today are so close – one percent or two percent one way or the other – the Congress of the United States and the Senate, one day, you don't know whether they're going to get a Democratic majority or a Democratic minority is because there is so little difference between both parties, and the voters get it.

They know that there isn't a damn bit of difference between the two of them, so you may vote for either one.

And if you're a Democrat like me, because if a person wants Republican, they're going to go for the real deal, they're not going to vote for me. The economic decisions that we are facing today will never succeed to help those in greatest need unless we educate a work force.

I heard earlier today, and I heard it and I wrote it because I thought it was so significant – that the future of our country today will require a knowledge base, and it will require a highly-educated and trained work force. Unless we do that, particularly in the city and the state, we will not be able to attract and keep those businesses. It doesn't matter how much tax relief you give them.

Number 2: we must address the growing gap between income levels because poverty is the other side of wealth. And we want to challenge the role of government in shaping today's society.

And this is just a follow up. I sat in the state legislature for ten years and left of my own free will, so I'm free to say what I'm about to say. I was the Democratic Bronx chairman for eleven years and I left on my own, therefore I'm equipped to challenge my own party.

In New York, the debate was and continues to be – tax cuts versus service cuts. We have an educational system in New York where you have 1000 schools in our public school system that are crumbling at the same time we cut taxes. We live in a time when the overcrowding in our classrooms is between 25 and 40 students, depending where you vote. And yet we cut taxes.

We're doing it at a time when educational funding for the state of New York was found to be unconstitutional and we say, as a matter of policy, as a matter of judicial policy, that an eighth grade education is enough for our work force.

But also remember, we were cutting taxes at the time when we said that it was okay to have uncertified teachers teaching in our classrooms, particularly in minority communities.

We sit back and cut taxes when we continue to increase tuition for our city universities. We cut taxes when the Medicaid cost of the city of New York is 25 percent – \$4 billion. This at a time when New York City is not in a position to carry out its mandate from the federal government, and the state would not do anything about that.

We cut taxes when we decided that it was okay to have 40 percent of our communities uninsured. By the way, mostly minimum wage and the working poor. The greatest cost for small businesses is uninsured. Yet we cut taxes. Why not use those taxes to address any of those issues.

We have the biggest housing crisis that this city has ever seen. The greatest increase in homelessness – 36,000 every single day. Yet we cut taxes. And they even praised Mayor Bloomberg for saying that the homeless must be removed from our streets when there was no appropriation from the federal, state or city government for housing.

I ask you the question – I want to also be talking about the Latino community today. I figured that that is a concern, and the issues facing the Latino community. Let me touch on the last point, which really goes to this issue.

Latinos. In the year 1980: 14 million nationally. In the year 1990: 22 million nationally. In the year 2000: 35 million nationally. It is expected that in the year 2010 there will be 45 million Latinos in this country. It is expected that in the year 2020, there will be 60 million Latinos.

And by the year 2050, 90 million Latinos. Therefore, I tell you that if we are going to have a new second revolution Latinos must be a part of that debate, and that's primarily why I came today.

You ask the question, Are Latinos becoming Republicans? If you look at the Bloomberg numbers in the past election, and you look at the Pataki numbers and you look at the Bush numbers, the question now becomes: When did Latinos, who were historically Democrats, become Republicans?

And I'm here to tell you that's not so. I feel that Republicans are becoming Latinos.

Governor Pataki speaks Spanish. George Bush speaks Spanish. I came to this country in 1968, at age 19, not speaking a word of English. Learned it, and in 1977 I went to college; I finally got to master the English language, and now they're all speaking Spanish!

Republicans are for immigration. Republicans are pro-family values. Pataki opposes the bombing of Vieques by the United States Navy. Pataki supports home health care workers by the tune of \$2 billion.

I don't think Latinos are becoming Republicans. I think Republicans are becoming Latinos. My God, they're behaving more like Democrats than Democrats. So the answer to me becomes very simple and straightforward – the problem is not that Latinos are becoming Republicans, it's the other way around.

The problem is that Democrats at the national level are so concerned about moving to the center in an attempt to attract voters that wouldn't have been with them anyway. The problem is that eight years ago we Democrats, as a matter of policy, said that it was okay to do away with a federal guarantee based on need.

We took the Constitution, we took a mandate by the courts that said that if you're poor, you should be eligible, and the Democrats said that that it was not necessary anymore. The problem is that those who are fighting issues like racial profiling, that we shy away from those things that are right, that are certainly correct and that ought to make us morally indignant.

What made the Democratic Party great was not that they wanted to be republican. What made the Democratic Party great was that there was a moral center that existed in us and said, "We need to take care of the people who cannot take care of themselves." And it's that tradition that today has been lost. And Democrats have become psuedo-Republicans,

So for me, I don't want a New Deal. I want a new revolution. Thank you.