

TRANSCRIPT: Elaine Donnelly: How to survive the Super Committee

Event: Providing for the Common Defense: The First Duty of the 'Super Committee'

Date: 10/5/11

Location: Capitol Visitors' Center, CVC 268

Actually, today, I want to talk about this super committee and how to survive the super committee. And I'm going to draw on the experience that I had as a member of a presidential commission on the assignment of women in the armed forces. In 1992, we worked for a full year. There were fifteen members. Kate O'Bern [PH] was also on the committee. When you're appointed to a presidential commission, there's no guidebook. There's really no one to tell you what to do and how to get from point a to point b. But I have to really credit Kate O'Bern for strategic thinking in a way that got us through some very difficult times. I'm concerned about this super committee because even though Leader Boehner, Speaker Boehner, did get at least a temporary victory, there was no increase in taxes in the process on the debt ceiling thing, however, the president may have outmaneuvered him on process. So I want to talk about this process these members have to deal with. It's an even number. Twelve. And the Republicans only have half. That means the quadrant that comes from the House, the members from the House, are reduced in the amount of influence they ought to have with the brand new Congress, the 112th Congress, they're only one quadrant, one part of four. Only one effector, [UNCLEAR] we'll call it. Somebody, if they vote for a deal that includes an increase in taxes, this would really put all the Republicans very much on the spot. This morning, Senator Kyl said in order to avoid a draconian doomsday threat we're all concerned about, it's important to define success. He said we want the committee to succeed, but he said, well, how do you define success? The media defines success as raising taxes. Okay? And this morning, Senator Kyl pretty much said, these Democrats are not very cooperative. They all want to raise taxes. And the media is on their side. So if they don't adopt a solid standard of review, which was one of the things we did on the presidential commission, we're going to see some tough—some very difficult times ahead. The principles that they need to adhere to, number one, they have to adhere to the US Constitution. They shouldn't recommend anything outside of that. And secondly, they need to affirm what all of us are gathered around a very simple statement. A strong military requires a strong economy. And economic prosperity depends on a strong national defense. You cannot—as Congressman Lamborn just said, you can't have one or the other. This is—we shouldn't create false choices. A prosperous economy that's first rate requires a military that's first rate. And you can't have one existing without the other. So if the other side, these other segments on this committee, balks at these basic principles, and they start saying, well, we've got to have tax increases that go contrary to—I'm not talking about adjustments in the tax code that are reasonable, it may be necessary to discredit this committee. We faced a choice similar to this on the presidential commission on which I served. This super committee—it should not be given the aura of the final authority. Of being so wise and so smart in everything they're going to do that everybody has to bow down.

If that happens, there are two bad results that would happen. Republicans would be

carrying water for bad policy. Either high taxes or drastic cuts to national defense. If either one of those happens and the Republicans have to be out there lobbying for it, it'll destroy the brand of the Republicans. So if the members go off on the wrong track and they define success in a way that is harmful to our economy, by raising taxes, or harmful to national defense—again, I think all of us here, we're all concerned about defense, but we also have to be concerned about taxes, the effect on the economy, cause we can't have a strong national defense if we don't have a strong economy. I think we have to consider that sometimes you have to pull the pillars down. And I said to Senator Kyl this morning, if things really get bad, if it really gets rough, you've done everything you can do, the opposition is not being reasonable, the media is on their side, they're cranking it out, they're issuing and leaking things to the media as we saw with another committee earlier last year, if all of these things start to happen, then you're going to have to bring the pillars down. You're going to have to discredit the committee before it hurts the Republicans. Before it has the Republicans doing the wrong things. Sometimes you have to blow something up. If the process is the problem, substance is important, process is important. We have got a very flawed process to deal with here. So when this happens, we all have to watch what Senator Kyl and the other Republicans do. And we need to lend support to them. So that we can somehow survive to the end of this year without doing harm to our economy or to our military. It's going to be a complicated process. It's not going to be easy. I gave him condolences for being appointed to this committee. But if we all work together and keep a strategic view in mind, I think we'll somehow all survive. Thank you.