

12 Gibson interview

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From front page

Americans.”

I set out to ask the hardest questions I could.

Mark Frost: How can you be against extending health care coverage for 31 million Americans who didn't have it? Are you that heartless?

Mr. Gibson: “I think what we have to do is focus on costs. We have a safety net available right now. It is far from optimal, to be sure, but I think what we should do is focus on something that really everyone agrees that we should do, and with that foundation of driving down costs, then we can begin to look at other aspects of the health-care system that is suboptimal and in some cases failing.

“I am certain this 2,700-page bill is going to raise health-care costs and I'd imagine the media is going to take to task what some have called gimmicks in that bill, not the least of which is the impact on New York in terms of how much federal funding for Medicaid. Losing \$300-million. That's significant.

“We're grappling with a \$9.5-billion deficit and we're trying to get our arms around it. Next year we're looking at \$13-billion. And the third year, it could be higher. I'm concerned. Let's work on costs first. I acknowledge the point that access has got to be a central issue, and there has to be a smarter way than just going to the emergency room.

“I think any objective person is going to say, wow, even 36 Democrats voted against it, including some in this state, and we really kind of exacerbated the partisan divide over it. And I really don't think we took a broad step forward on health reform. In fact, I would maintain from a broad perspective, including the economy, we took a step backward.”

On the Republican approach

Frost: Is the Republican Party just the party of “no”?

Gibson: “No, not at all. I have said all along that we needed to have a plan, and that plan needed to address three points. Increased competition, tort reform, and the control against fraud, waste and abuse. That's a positive plan. And that's only one aspect of it. Other aspects of the positive plan for growth is the levels of taxation are too high. We know this. In New York State, on top of local, state and federal taxes, we have energy costs. We pay more for energy in a year than places in the south, and that makes it harder for our businesses to compete. We've got to find a way to put our firms, our small businesses, on a footing where they can compete.

“Two is the onerous and duplicative regulations. I'm getting a series of excellent points that we need to examine in a thorough way so we can get the onerous and duplicative regulations off the books, or at least debate it. If they are particularly controversial, I'm willing to say, 'Well, let's look at it for five years.' For the sake of growing the economy, let's decide to reassess that wetlands definition in some cases so we can get growth and move forward.”

Frost: So you're for gutting environmental regulations?

Gibson: “No, I'm not for gutting environmental — boy, you're good! He's throwing high and inside.

“Example — design engines for contractors. Kicking in this year was a requirement to retrofit at \$20,000 a device. Small businesses are really hit hard by that, and when you compound that with the health-care premium costs that went up this year, small businesses are making some really tough choices. Do they lay more people off? Do they change their health-care? This is reality. This is what I'm hearing going all around the 20th District.

“What we have is an environment that is not conducive to growth. So, when you

Ziegler exit gave Gibson uncontested GOP nod

Patrick Ziegler's decision to pull out of the 20th District Congressional race left Kinderhook's Chris Gibson as the sole candidate for the Republican nomination. Mr. Ziegler, a “tea party” activist who was backed by the Warren County GOP committee, threw his support to Mr. Gibson. All 10 Republican county chairmen in the District endorsed Mr. Gibson on March 31 after Mr. Ziegler withdrew.

talk about the stimulus, where we're going to spend a trillion dollars, well, first of all, it's our money. The government has no money. It's our money. And they moved a trillion dollars of our money around and it did not work.

“Not to say that there may have been a project here or a project there that may have worked, had an impact. Largely public sector stuff, not private sector growth. That method is failing us, and we're another trillion dollars in debt.

“One thing we can all agree on, regardless of political party, is that we want a prosperous and free America. And what we ought to be doing is finding policies that move us in that direction there and I think we have to take a serious look at the method we are using to stimulate the economy.”

Frost: Are you concerned that the rich are getting richer and the poor are getting poorer in America?

Gibson: “What I'm concerned about is friends of mine who I went to high school with who are out of work. That's what concerns me. I'm concerned that the middle class is paying more for health care. There are things that we can do to drive health-care costs down. There are things that we can do to grow small businesses, and when we do, that is how America grows.

Iraq, Afghanistan, Iran, China

Frost: You do give the Obama administration credit for the war in Iraq and Afghanistan and what we're doing in the Middle East, I take it.

Gibson: “Where we're fighting our enemy regionally, I think we're doing pretty well. We're on plan now in Iraq. We went through some tough times. I was over there for a good portion of the tough times. I was there four times, if you count the Persian Gulf war, but then I was there two times as a battalion commander in the 82nd Airborne Division, and I was the operations officer of multi-national division north.

“So I was there for part of the surge. 12 months from the period of 2004 to 2007. So I've seen that country come through some tough times. And I'm very happy to say that it's going to work out. Now, it's not going to be Jeffersonian democracy. But I think it will stabilize, and when it does, I think it will be an ally.

“And I also think it's going to fare pretty well, compared to the competition in the Middle East. I think Iraq will be better than Saudi Arabia in terms of being a player on the world scene. I think they will do very well.

“Afghanistan — I think we've made some good investments there. I think it's going to be a tough 12-15 months. It's going to be difficult. But I do believe we have the right strategy in place, which is #1, we're focused on killing or capturing Al Qaeda, which is primarily not inside Afghanistan, but in the Af-Pak area.

“Defeating or convincing the insurgents to lay down their arms and come and join the new Afghanistan, while we are working with the Afghan government to help to have viability and efficacy in their institutions and freedom from corruption. We're training their security forces...so they are responsible for their own security, and when that happens, we're going to be in a

better position. And we're going to be able to pull some of the troops out.

Frost: What do we do with Iran?

Gibson: “I think that the greatest promise in Iran is the democratic movement. And to the extent that the idea of freedom continues to proliferate in Iran is probably our best bet. I think the civilized world can agree that a nuclear Iran is unacceptable, so what needs to happen is we need to continue to work with the international community with pressure.”

Frost: So, essentially what the Obama administration is doing.

Gibson: “At this point, I'm not in a position to offer something significantly different than what they are doing now other than to say that we need to stay engaged with the democratic movement. I'm not convinced that is happening at a level that it should. I think we missed an opportunity last summer when the uprising occurred, that we were not at least more supportive in our discourse.

“Tricky situation, to be sure. But I think our best hope there lies with the people of Iran, who I believe really want a peaceful country and really want to be a part of the international community.”

Frost: Any changes with China and what our policy should be?

Gibson: “Well, the thing that concerns me the most is the amount of debt that they hold from us. In terms of our security posture, my belief is that China holds a long view. Their view is they already have Taiwan. They aren't physically there, but they've never believed that Taiwan is not a part of China. I think that they are patient on that score. I don't believe that they will move in any kind of radical way in a military sense because right now, the economic structures favor them, and they know any kind of major move on that score could put that at risk.

“What I would like to see us do is get our deficit squared away. Even though this administration says that has not impacted foreign policy, we are in a tougher position in relation to China because of how much of our debt they are buying. And we've got to stop that. We've got to reverse that situation. We need to move very quickly towards a balanced budget, and then once we do, we need to start to pay down the debt. We don't need to do it all at once, but we need to begin to start showing progress on the debt.”

Calls Congressman Murphy 'out of step with our district'

Frost: On a scale of 1 to 10, with 10 being the highest, what kind of a job has Scott Murphy done?

Gibson: “Oh, I'm not going to get into that. You're going to want to get me into some sort of inflammatory discussion on that score.”

Frost: Do you think he's done a good job or a bad job?

Gibson: “Well, let me say this. I have not met him, but he seems like an honorable man. From everything I've heard, he's a good husband and father, and I appreciate his service. I'm glad he went over to visit our servicemen in Afghanistan. That's important to do, and I appreciate that he did that.

“I think he's out of step with our district. I think he's taken a couple of votes that really reveal that he is not in line with the philosophy of the 20th district. At a time when we are struggling to grow our economy, he voted yes on cap and trade and he voted yes for the health-care bill, and I believe in both cases, those bills are moving us in the wrong direction.

“As this campaign unfolds, I believe the #1 issue that is going to come to the fore is what is the best method to grow the economy and create jobs. And when that is fully recognized and seen throughout the district, I believe that the voters throughout the district will see that my philosophy is in line with what they want represented in Washington, D.C., with all due respect to

Mr. Murphy.”

On homosexuality & abortion

Even after the tape recorder was turned off, I asked Mr. Gibson more questions, starting with controversial social issues — gay rights and abortion rights.

Mr. Gibson said that he views homosexuality as a characteristic a person is born with and that he believes gays have served in America's military for as long as there has been a military.

Asked about the military's “Don't Ask, Don't Tell” approach to homosexual members of the service, which President Obama vowed to eliminate, Mr. Gibson said, “I think Secretary [of Defense] Gates has got it right.” (A few days later Reuters quoted Army Secretary John McHugh as saying that “the secretary [of defense] has placed a moratorium...going forward on discharges” of members of the military who privately state their homosexuality.)

Mr. Gibson says the challenge is to strike a balance between “equality” and “freedom,” and between the rights of gay members of the military and those who have concerns about unity and morale.

On gay marriage, Mr. Gibson endorsed civil unions as a formal means of codifying a homosexual couple's status, but he said he doesn't accept its being deemed a marriage because he sees that as having a religious component.

On abortion rights, Mr. Gibson affirmed a woman's right to decide whether to have an abortion, mentioning specifically the pregnancy's “first trimester,” thus accepting Roe v. Wade, the U.S. Supreme Court ruling that the right-to-life movement has pushed to reverse.

On unions, individuals, Reagan

We asked Mr. Gibson what American public figure he most admires. “Abraham Lincoln,” he said almost immediately.

How about what 20th century public figure? “Ronald Reagan,” he said just as quickly.

Asked why, he replied, “His vision was responsible for renewing the country. People thought our best days were behind us. He showed that our best days are still in front of us, so long as we make wise choices.”

Mr. Gibson elaborated. He said that “the 1970's were a tough time in our household.” He said that his father was a union member working for Otis Elevator and “spent a lot of time out of work,” either laid off or on strike.

He said he comes from a family of “conservative Irish Catholics — always Democrats,” and that when he chose to be a Republican, it caused shock waves.

We asked his view of the union “Free Choice Act” that Rep. Murphy sponsored as one of his first actions as a congressman. It would allow unions to represent workers on the basis of their signing petitions, instead of requiring a secret ballot.

“I'm not for this,” Mr. Gibson said. “In America you should have a right to a private vote.”

Mr. Gibson's politics is not down-the-line GOP. He faults the Bush Administration's institutional response to the 9/11 terrorist attacks. He says, “Our response was typical; we grew government. We didn't need a Department of Homeland Security; we needed a joint inter-agency task force” within the Department of Defense, which Mr. Gibson said would be more effective and also save money.

He noted that this past Dec. 26, when a Nigerian terrorist was thwarted in his attempt to detonate a bomb on a jet nearing Detroit, “our system did not save us. It was an individual” who intervened.

Mr. Gibson put the onus on individuals in America to rise to the challenge overall. “If we don't right this ship,” he said, “we run the risk of being the first generation to leave this country worse off than we found it. We could go bankrupt.”