

The Axe Files - Ep. 201: Rick Santorum

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David Axelrod: [00:00:00] Rick Santorum so good to be with you it seems like just hours ago that we were sitting on a set talking about the election in Alabama. We'll get we'll get to that. We had this election.

Rick Santorum: [00:00:13] Yeah.

David Axelrod: [00:00:14] You know, Alabama followed an election in Virginia. There's something going on in the country and there's something there was something going on in 2016. I want you because you were sort of ahead of the curve in terms of cultural politics from the right. Yeah and also economic politics you very much...

Rick Santorum: [00:00:38] Yeah I wrote a book four years ago called "Blue Collar Conservative".

David Axelrod: [00:00:41] Right, and you were very very critical of create trade deals and so on. So in some ways you were a forerunner of of the presidents on this although probably not stylistically a forerunner. Well probably gave a little more thought to these positions. But so tell me what's going what you see as the political moment here, what does Alabama mean and what is the state of the Republican Party.

Rick Santorum: [00:01:11] Not to be repetitive on things that I say on the air, but my general focus on the air has been and I repeated because here's why I truly believe which is I believe the policies of this president are very are good policies and can be broadly supported. I don't think anything that he's pushing forward are problematic from an electoral point of view. I think this tax bill is something that I think is going to be overblown as you know this is a giveaway but if you want to help blue collar people particularly I mean it.

David Axelrod: [00:01:47] Well it's mostly skewed to corporate...

Rick Santorum: [00:01:49] Yeah, but as you know I mean President Obama even said we have to cut the corporate rate in this country so.

David Axelrod: [00:01:54] A lot of people would argue I would argue we've got a ridiculous tax code and reform would be blowing out all of these preferences in order to lower rates.

Rick Santorum: [00:02:03] I think they did blow out.

David Axelrod: [00:02:05] Some preferences a lot of them on the individual side.

Rick Santorum: [00:02:07] Well they did both. I mean I think they tried to reform the code to make it less bells and whistles and all the different preferences that you talk about and get to a lower rate with you know a simpler code and income that's actually tax. You don't have a 40 percent rate. We're... after all the deductions it's really comes down to a 25 percent rate.

David Axelrod: [00:02:29] Yeah, and we have a disparate rate. We all talk about the 35 percent rate. The fact is some corporations pay that, others pay nothing.

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Rick Santorum: [00:02:36] And that's wrong. And that's why getting that's why getting these all these bells and whistles that we talked about getting them out of the code. I haven't seen the final details, but they did get some out. So, to get back to the larger point, I think the president's approach on trade I think the president's approach on on on economics and are actually very popular among middle America. And I think he could do very very well. But his personal antics have just overwhelmed the accomplishments of this administration and the efforts that he's trying to put forward. And if that continues if the president continues to try to to bring out his personal peeves with whoever happens to insult him the day before.

[00:03:25] You're, you're going to have an exhaustion factor. Many of my friends who are you know you focus last night I think wisely on suburban moderate Republicans and and suburban moderate Republicans are less and less voting for Republicans. Right? But they still strongly vote for Republicans.

David Axelrod: [00:03:50] That is this, and Jones for example carried counties in Alabama that were or did very well in them that used to be hard core Republican strongholds, that were.

Rick Santorum: [00:04:01] But they were more suburban. Yeah, and so Trump's personal problems with whether it's Twitter or whether it's his speeches and the way he talks about people and talks to people create a fatigue factor in a and erosion of support for him whether they support his policies or not they're just they're just tired of the continual controversy the noise.

[00:04:30] And the thing that's actually helping him right now oddly enough is the blowback of this investigation. And and it's drag on for a while and there's still you know he still doesn't there still isn't any smoking gun out there.

[00:04:47] And so he's he's getting the benefit of now some bad hires. Bye bye bye Mueller. And he had to fire some people and let some people go. It calls into question the investigation. So all of this has created more noise but probably favorable noise to Trump at this point. That's all going to go away at some point probably within the next month or two, Mueller is going to probably come back with something and you know we'll be on to the next phase. But if he continues the personal stuff that noise is going to continue to hurt him.

David Axelrod: [00:05:19] Just on the issue of Trump you're a guy who placed morality kind of at the center of your politics. You got the president who's under siege for his you know all of these women who have stepped forward and and for his general language I mean in front of cameras using language that one wouldn't want to use in front of your kids. I'm sure you wouldn't want to use this in front of your kids.

Rick Santorum: [00:05:50] Yeah, I mentioned I think off, off air that you know as you grow a little long in the tooth and your hair gets a little gray or you think about you know what your impact is on the lives that you touch. Right? And you, whether it's your children or or their friends or the people that you work with are you are you imparting just by who you are and what you do and what you talk about are you imparting, you know, life lessons are you providing some sort of. I know people who say, 'I'm not a role model.' Well, you know, I think you are. And I think I think I am, whether we want to be or not.

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David Axelrod: [00:06:28] Certainly you want the President of the United States to be.

Rick Santorum: [00:06:29] And that's my point. And so when I see a president who I don't see as a role model for the lessons of life that I want to impart on my my children and the people that I care for in this world, that that's that's bothersome to me. It's one of the reasons that I constantly harp him on the air to stop behaving this way because in general I think it's harm. It's not just harmful to him and it is harmful to him. It's not just harmful for the things he believes in. And it is, but it's it's harmful to, to have a generation of Americans see that this is the way you know people of responsibility and power and influence behave.

David Axelrod: [00:07:14] But generally what I say when you say that, and I agree with you completely because, you know... I have great reverence for our democracy. I felt every day when I walked into the White House that it was an incredible honor to be there.

Rick Santorum: [00:07:29] I felt the same thing, every time I'd walk to the Capitol I say 'I can't believe I work here.'

David Axelrod: [00:07:34] And and I have great respect for anybody who's sat in that office. I'll never forget the kindness of George W. Bush extended to me and to us in the transition, not because he loved what we had done in the campaign or because he agreed with us but because he was a trustee of our democracy and, and I think comported himself as such. But the thing is people people are who they are. Donald Trump is who he is. And that's at some point... I disagree with you on a lot of the policy stuff. I don't I think a lot of his policy has been disastrous. But I accept that in a democracy he wins.

Rick Santorum: [00:08:19] The winner gets to push... yeah exactly.

David Axelrod: [00:08:21] But at what point do you say this behavior, this sort of absence of ... I don't want to say morality, but absence of understanding of that role.

Rick Santorum: [00:08:38] Decorum.

David Axelrod: [00:08:38] Decorum, absence of decorum is just unacceptable. I mean Republicans...

Rick Santorum: [00:08:44] I would say it right now. I mean, I think it's unacceptable, I think it's unacceptable on very many levels... And it's doing real damage to him, to the country, and and to the things that he and I jointly believe would be best for the country. And that's why I'm not shy about saying it on a repeated basis and will continue to say it. I'm not sure he's going to listen.

David Axelrod: [00:09:04] And think more people will walk away as some of the Republicans did in Virginia and Alabama?

Rick Santorum: [00:09:10] I don't have any doubt that this will have electoral consequences. And it can be overcome in part by success. Obviously they passed his tax bill and it does what you know the Republicans hope to do.

David Axelrod: [00:09:23] If it does.

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Rick Santorum: [00:09:25] And you know the economy which is chugging away pretty well right now thanks in part to some of the regulatory relief that the president has put in place. So it could be overcome by that. But if people are not feeling good about their president and about the country it is going to have as we saw it. Roy Jones got more.

David Axelrod: [00:09:50] Doug Jones.

Rick Santorum: [00:09:50] Doug Jones, I mean. Doug Jones got almost as many votes as Hillary Clinton got.

David Axelrod: [00:09:56] In a presidential year.

Rick Santorum: [00:09:57] In a presidential year and Roy Moore got half of what Donald Trump got. That means a lot of folks stayed home on the Republican side. And and that's that's going to happen. It's absolutely going to happen. Moderate Republicans and even you know he did well among evangelical conservatives. But how many showed up? So the ones that showed up voted. But how many didn't show up? And if you look at some of those counties a lot of folks didn't show up. And I think part of it was because of Moore's personal issues. But it just goes to show you that character issues matter to a lot of people and they mattered about Roy Moore and they will matter about Donald Trump.

David Axelrod: [00:10:36] I noticed in just reading about you that we have this thing in common in that we're both the sons of immigrants from Italy I'm from Eastern Europe and my dad was a psychologist at the VA.

Rick Santorum: [00:10:55] No way. And so and I saw that you started. My dad was a psychologist at a VA actually worked 12 years in Chicago.

David Axelrod: [00:11:04] Yeah I saw yes I saw that. You know I'm from New York originally so.

Rick Santorum: [00:11:11] Oh I thought Chicago.

David Axelrod: [00:11:13] No, I've been there so long that everybody assumes that and I welcome that. But tell me a little bit about that, was your dad in the service?

Rick Santorum: [00:11:23] He was. Yeah he came over when he was seven years old and he spent the first seven years of his life in Mussolini's Italy. And didn't have very fond memories from that but came over.

[00:11:37] My grandfather was a coal miner and came over to the hills the coal fields of western Pennsylvania and lived there grew up there and then when the war came around he was 18 he was born in nineteen thirty so gives you an idea. You know 22 or whatever it was no excuse me. 1930... 1923. Excuse me. He came over in 1930 was born in 1923 so you know he was 18 when the war when the war started. And so he he enlisted and then was in the Army Air Corps was moved from one assignment to another. And he basically worked on airplanes. After trying two or three other things that they are training for and then they realized he didn't need anybody. Are they training for something else and he has he tells a pretty funny story about all

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the different things he was trained for that he never had to do because they find out they didn't need that so they turned for something else. But the efficiency of the Defense Depart was no better in the 1940s. It was here today fascism. They give now. Now they did a heck of a job that you know he his his big stories he was put in the Pacific. Now whether that was because you know he was Italian and was from Italy and they put him in the Pacific theater. I don't know but they did. And he actually worked on the Enola Gay.

David Axelrod: [00:12:50] Really?

Rick Santorum: [00:12:50] Yeah, so he was he was there during that time that was playing that delivered the bomb that delivered the bomb in Japan. So yeah. And you know he came back and really would not have gone to college but for the G.I. Bill and for having fought in the war and went to a local college St. Francis College in the hills of western Pennsylvania and ended up going into into psychology and went to work immediately for the visit to the VA. Met my mom at the V.A. as she was working at the VA and so she was a nurse. She was a nurse and it was an unusual situation. They were both late in life. They got married later in life you know they were my dad was in his late 30s and my mom was a couple of years older than my dad. And in her late 30s and it was always an odd situation that my mom worked at the same hospital. And my mom was always the senior person she was she had she made more money and had a higher title now in the 1950s. That is very unusual thing. And and so I always get a kick out of the fact that people you know look at me and say Oh you don't know what is. You know you have these traditional views of of family and. And women in the workplace and I said well you don't know what of what you speak. Because I grew up in a home where neither my parents I mean.

David Axelrod: [00:14:08] Well it's interesting... You know, you're a font of controversial quotes. And you know one of them was about radical feminism and socially, this culture of socially affirming women who work outside the home.

Rick Santorum: [00:14:31] Yeah, my point there was that we need a culture that doesn't doesn't pick one side or the other and say would just affirm you if you're this and I said that because you know my wife who we've been married for 27 years Karen was a neonatal intensive care nurse for nine years. She saw all sorts of medical ethics issues and so she got interested in the law and decided to go to law school and would put herself through law school. And and she always commented because she decided to stay home and raise children.

[00:15:04] That she always felt when she was in the circles that I traveled in politics and you know you'd go to the fund raising events or everything else and of course she would be there and they say well you know what do you do and. And you know she said well I'm home raising kids and all of a sudden there was this deathly silence and it was like you know well let's move on and talk to somebody else who's interesting.

[00:15:25] Right. And so she's I won't say she has a chip on his shoulder but she always felt like she was not given the same kind of respect that she would have and it's been and you know it's it's been an issue for her. You know I gave this up. I gave up the affirmation of my you know of the world of my colleagues from now. She wouldn't trade it for the world.

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[00:15:48] But it doesn't make it any easier than when you're out in the cocktail party or you're out even at a baseball game and someone asks you what you do and and you know I'm a broker for this or I'm a lawyer at this and I'm a mom.

[00:16:00] And then you don't get, 'Oh, that great. You know what do you do?'

[00:16:04] Yeah.

[00:16:04] And so that's why.

David Axelrod: [00:16:05] You know, I'm really, listen I'm really sensitive to this because my you know as you know and we'll talk about this. The other thing we share is children who deal with special special needs kids who have special needs and the way our lives evolved. Our daughter arrived she had seizures from the time she was months old and then my son came 19 months later and they needed you know they needed her and they probably needed me more than I gave. To be honest with you and discharged she made but she filled that for both of us and in many ways and experienced the same thing. I mean she had a master's degree in business. But but she stayed home to hold our family together and minister to my daughters many needs. And the other kids. And and you know it's an uncomfortable thing to do. And so I always you know I learned to ask people if they worked outside the home because she worked harder than anybody I know.

[00:17:22] And so I'm sympathetic to that but that's the kind of discussion that.

Rick Santorum: [00:17:31] Yeah, you take a quote like that. And it looks like we know Santorum once women to be barefoot.

David Axelrod: [00:17:36] Well when you add the phrase radical feminism that's a little provocative.

Rick Santorum: [00:17:41] Of course, well I made that in my provocative years. But it was to drive home the point that there needs to be and there needs to be room for both there needs to be room for really giving women choice real choices and affirming the choice affirming the decision when or what the decision is and not to not to bias it one way or the other and that that that I don't think that's, in my mind, that's why I called it radical feminism, not just feminism.

[00:18:11] I wasn't I wasn't critiquing feminism I was saying those who who only see feminism as you have to do this to be to be a real woman as opposed to you have to honor women and their choices.

David Axelrod: [00:18:25] And you know I think the the the the reason that that culture evolved in part was because you know when I was growing up I'm a few years older than you.

Rick Santorum: [00:18:36] Not many I bet.

David Axelrod: [00:18:37] But we got a full head of hair so that probably could come with age sometimes but different thing. But. But you know. I mean then and now. I mean there have been barriers to entry for women that are significant and and a and a real loss you know. So I think back to the 60s and almost all my teachers were women brilliant capable people who frankly

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made a huge difference in my lives in my life. But were teaching in part because that was what was was available. So in any case so yeah. So you you grew up mostly in Pennsylvania, you spent a year in Illinois.

Rick Santorum: [00:19:25] I did.

David Axelrod: [00:19:27] Went to Mount Carmel, is that right?

Rick Santorum: [00:19:28] I went to Carmel, very different.

David Axelrod: [00:19:31] Yeah yeah yeah.

Rick Santorum: [00:19:33] Up north of Chicago.

David Axelrod: [00:19:34] And then you went to Penn State.

Rick Santorum: [00:19:36] I did.

David Axelrod: [00:19:37] And you weren't particularly. You're now known for your faith and your advocacy around it and so on but that wasn't you were much more secular.

Rick Santorum: [00:19:51] Yeah, well look I always I never I can't say I ever walked away from my Catholic faith but I certainly was not actively practicing it and it was not an important part of my life when I was in college.

David Axelrod: [00:20:04] But your family, was it stressed by your parents and so on?

Rick Santorum: [00:20:07] Yeah I mean we went to church every Sunday. I mean that was that was just you went to church and I was an altar boy. Know I participated and as a kid but you know when I got out of high school and went to college you know I just got full of all the things you get full of when you go to college and that's... a lot of beer a lot of beer a lot of other things, and you know and sort of drifted away I didn't really find a circle of friends who were who were engaged and involved in the faith and any faith to that matter. And so you just sort of ran with the back and sort of my life went like that for probably.

[00:20:49] I went to grad school right after that went to University of Pittsburgh and got a master's degree in business and then went to work for a chief of staff for a Democratic staffer for Republican state senator and in Harrisburg.

David Axelrod: [00:21:01] Let me let me stop you there. How did this political... I want to get back to the faith journey. But how did the political the political orientation begin? Because it wasn't a big thing in your home?

Rick Santorum: [00:21:16] Yeah. My dad never voted until the 1980s. My mom voted, she was a Republican but we never ever ever talk politics.

[00:21:27] And... But I was always interested, I liked elections. I found them to be exciting.

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David Axelrod: [00:21:32] You also like to debate, I saw somewhere that your friends called you rooster.

Rick Santorum: [00:21:37] Rooster yeah.

David Axelrod: [00:21:37] Because you always were up for a fight.

Rick Santorum: [00:21:41] I was a feisty kind of guy I guess. And so I went to college and you know I liked elections and so I thought I'd take a science course not knowing anything as freshmen colleges took an entry level that. And one of the things that required was that you had to work in a campaign. And so I went down to the Republican headquarters notionally because they gave me a list of all the candidates that were up for election in 1976 and I didn't like you. The presidential candidates that year and the two Senate candidates the one guy was from my hometown was from Pittsburgh and I knew his name. And so I thought I'll go work for him.

David Axelrod: [00:22:20] I should stop and note that the two presidential campaign the candidates that were Ronald Reagan and Gerald Ford, 76.

Rick Santorum: [00:22:24] No no no. Carter and Ford.

David Axelrod: [00:22:27] Oh you're talking about the general election. I thought you were talking about the the primary.

Rick Santorum: [00:22:30] No no no, this was the fall of 76. So was Reagan, excuse me, Carter versus Ford and I just. Neither of them motivated me to get involved. And Heinz was a local Pittsburgh guy and I'd known him and seen as seen his face for years and so that.

David Axelrod: [00:22:47] And probably used his ketchup and mustard too.

Rick Santorum: [00:22:48] I used his ketchup, I'm big Heinz Ketchup fan. And so I went and showed up and here's what I learned in politics. Politics is all about showing up. It's all about being there and doing the work. And I would show you know there are lots of people signed up to help different campaigns that the Republican Party. But I was only what showed up every day and looked up the phone numbers literally the phone numbers and you know put them on the street list and know matched all the basic things that you did it back then you know 40 years ago. And and one day the guy who ran the Heinz... Students for Heinz campaigned across the state showed up at the headquarters I happened to be there and they say we're looking for someone that could you know run the effort here and so the county chairman walked out and said 'this guy shows, up bring him in.'

[00:23:37] And so all of a sudden I'm president the students rise at the present day.

David Axelrod: [00:23:40] Do you have any contact with the senator himself?

Rick Santorum: [00:23:43] None.

David Axelrod: [00:23:43] So you know it's interesting. Just on that point, he died tragically in a helicopter crash.

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Rick Santorum: [00:23:51] The interesting thing is I ended up getting elected to his house seat because he was a House member.

[00:23:57] And then I took his seat in the Senate after he died not immediately but subsequently to that.

David Axelrod: [00:24:04] He was a kind of your quintessential sort of moderate Pennsylvania moderate Republican. I mean and there was a whole there were a slew of those guys in the Senate and most of them from the Northeast upper Midwest upper Midwest could he could Heinz have been elected in the Republican Party of today. Could he have been nominated in the Republican Party.

Rick Santorum: [00:24:29] Probably not although I mean you look at someone for example like Tom Ridge, and Tom Ridge probably fit the mold of John Heinz.

David Axelrod: [00:24:38] Former Governor, yeah, but that's ... and governors races are a little bit less ideological.

Rick Santorum: [00:24:45] A little less ideological.

David Axelrod: [00:24:46] You look at a guy like Rick Snyder in Michigan, not really an ideologue.

Rick Santorum: [00:24:50] No no you're right. I mean the governors are you know more of a manager as it moves post to a vote where that rallies people. Now I would say that's probably true of Republicans in the north and Democrats in the south. They know that up until the 1980s the parties were yes they were ideological. Democratic Party was was was a Liberal Party. But it was tempered. I mean it was tempered by a whole bunch of Democrats who were in the party who weren't liberals and so party was true. The party was constrained and the same was true with Republicans or Republicans certainly became a much more conservative party but they were constrained also by the fact that you had a third of the United States Senate were moderate Republicans you know with...

David Axelrod: [00:25:37] So tell me if you think that that was good or bad. I mean we're in a situation now where there really you have two parties and there's not a whole lot of kind of cross pollination.

David Axelrod: [00:25:51] Well the Republican and Democratic Party were regional parties based upon the civil war. And so you had you had moderate and conservative Republicans and liberal Republicans and yet the same thing within the Democratic Party. The realignment came and when the realignment came things got harder in Washington because people didn't talk to each other anymore. You know some of the best Republican friends that that moderate Republicans had were Democrats and vice versa with best you know some of the Democrats best. And because you had friends who were of a different policy stripe than you within your own party and you built relationships with them because they were your colleagues and in the same party there was more dialogue there was more cooperation now. And it was when a bill came up if it was an ideological divide in the bill it didn't clearly benefit one party or the other. There was always there was always the politics you had to consider within your own party if you went out and just scorched earth the left because your scorched earth in some of your own

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people that's gone. Now there is hegemony frankly in both parties and that has meant isolation. Members are not as friendly to each other on the other side of the aisle because there's there's no party commonality and there's no policy commonality.

David Axelrod: [00:27:13] There's no sort of community either because you know you lived and, it was controversial in your state. But but understandable from a family standpoint your family lived here and increasingly that's not the case. It used to be that most members of particularly the Senate...

Rick Santorum: [00:27:37] Because of transportation, I mean you just couldn't get back and forth that easily right and when you came to Washington you had to stay because you didn't have can hop on a plane when you wanted to and you didn't have the frequency and the ease of air travel.

David Axelrod: [00:27:48] And it's also good for families.

Rick Santorum: [00:27:50] It is. Look we, I didn't move my family to Washington when I was in the house because because the schedule was a lot lighter. You know there and really a couple nights a week and the Senate I mean it's a slog. I mean you're in you know three four or five sometimes the whole week and the weekend and and. And unlike a House district which is my was fairly compact around the city of Pittsburgh I go home and I could be at home and gotten to my district.

[00:28:15] I went home I had to cover the entire state of Pennsylvania which is a big state hard to cover so when I went to see my family I wouldn't see my family even when I was home.

[00:28:23] So to me this was it was a tough decision because I didn't want to leave my my my hometown. But at the same time it wasn't because I wanted to be a father and a husband and I couldn't be and and the other issue is I mean you see all these you know sexual harassment sex scandals I mean if you're not around.

[00:28:41] If you're if you're out every night with the guys you know.

David Axelrod: [00:28:44] Stuff happens.

Rick Santorum: [00:28:45] Stuff happens and stuff that...

David Axelrod: [00:28:47] We should both say, not acceptable stuff.

Rick Santorum: [00:28:50] Not acceptable stuff happens, and so I just I never got into that. I mean I you know I I schedule myself to 5:00 or 6:00 o'clock and if I had a fundraiser or party dinner or something to go to I'd do that but I'd go home and happy to do it too.

David Axelrod: [00:29:03] But the you do this ancillary benefit of that when when there were a large number of people who lived here was that you weren't just you weren't just colleagues on the floor of the House or Senate but you also were neighbors. You also had activities which your kids participated in.

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Rick Santorum: [00:29:19] The other thing was travel. I mean there was there was. Now we have such onerous restrictions in the sense that you know people said oh he's jet setting around the world on the taxpayer dollars. Well a lot of that just said he was you know you got you went with a whole group of other college get to know them you got to be in Iraq. So a lot of the ethics reforms well-intentioned as they are do limit the ability for members to interact and develop that personal relationship so in a sense you can look at that you can look at television on the floor of the House and Senate has you know created show show dogs and playing to the crowd instead of having serious debate. I mean there's no serious debate that goes on on the floor of the House or Senate. It's just everybody looking up at the camera speaking to the folks back home and so there's just a whole variety of things that just made it harder for people to get along.

David Axelrod: [00:30:11] Yeah. You know I I really appreciate what you're saying as I appreciate sharing a panel from time to time with you on TV because you have a the perspective of experience.

[00:30:27] I'd be remiss if I didn't say you were a pretty scorched earth guy when you absolutely the Congress, you came, in 94. I mean the the... well, let me just take a short break because this will be a longer conversation. And Lucy, my engineer over here is signaling me that it's time to take a break, and we'll be right back with Rick Santorum.

David Axelrod: [00:31:02] When you came to that, did you come in 94?

Rick Santorum: [00:31:06] To the Senate.

David Axelrod: [00:31:07] Oh to the Senate.

Rick Santorum: [00:31:08] The House of 90.

David Axelrod: [00:31:09] Right. But you know Newt Gingrich who with whom you worked closely one of these sort of for better and worse one of his insights was to in fact I think I did a podcast the other day with Ed Gillespie and he was recalling this. Was this the notion that these one minute statements would get on C-SPAN that you can actually you could you could make news even if you weren't making progress or making legislation you could make the 6 o'clock news back home and score some points and that became a seductive thing and a kind of a weapon for partisan-ization and so on. And my guess is you availed yourself of that.

Rick Santorum: [00:31:53] Yeah I would do 1 minutes and I did a whole bunch of different things.

[00:31:57] I mean when when I came to the house and back in 1991 I mean I saw the Republican Party as sort of a beaten minority and in the Congress and that everything was focused on we got to win the presidency. And whatever the president will get whatever he can done.

David Axelrod: [00:32:23] George H.W. Bush was president.

Rick Santorum: [00:32:25] He was president at the time, we have the president. But as far as any any kind of innovation or any kind of ideas or are just any kind of activity was just foreign to

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that group. They were they were a very dominated minority they'd been in the minority for over almost 40 years.

[00:32:46] By the time I got there and there was just no hope that they would ever have any responsibility to govern. And so what I saw was you know I was on the Budget Committee. I thought well you know budgets are a big problem. So we've got to but you know are the head of the Budget Committee said no we're not going to propose a budget while we do that. All of those criticize. Well don't you want to talk about what your point is. Why would I do that. Let's just criticize them. And so I just saw as you know that's not what I came here frightened him or just say no I came here to try to do something. And so I I guess I was you know I was 32 years old. I mean you know too many guys who get into the United States Congress at the age of 30 to have never been in office before. And so it was sort of a miracle race to win. And I went there figuring I was probably only going to have one term and that was get me out of politics because when I decided to run for the Congress the head of the State House who was a Republican in Pennsylvania's again 1990 two years before redistricting came to me and said you know look there's an open House seat now in your district in your area. We want you to run for that.

[00:33:52] And I said, 'Well I've been running for Congress,' 'no, no you've been doing a good job. We've really we've seen you. We've been impressed by you and we'd like. But you're not going to win that because you're up against a 14 year incumbent and there's no way you're going to win.'

David Axelrod: [00:34:02] Remind me who you were running against?

Rick Santorum: [00:34:02] A guy named Doug Walgren, who was you know sort of your run of the mill Democrat. I mean it wasn't anything better. You know or good about him as far as I could see.

[00:34:13] He's just sort of a decent guy and so it wasn't anything bad or good about him so far as you can see but probably emphasize the bad. Oh absolutely. Of course as long as this is a campaign. Right.

[00:34:25] And so you know we talked about him voting for a tax increase and voting for a pay raise and all the things that you would run a campaign on. Right. And but not necessarily things that would be winning in fact they voted for pay raises and a tax increase.

[00:34:38] The George Bush tax increase and Democrats picked up seats that year. And so but it happened to be effective. But the bottom line is that the the leader of the House came to me and basically said look you either run for the State House or even if you win the seat which you're not you'll lose. I said what Sam and he said while I'll take you out redistricting. So we're going to lose two seats. I guarantee you if you don't run for this House seat statehouse seat I'll take I'll take your seat away from you. I said OK fine. Go for it. And so I said I'm not going to run for Congress. I got elected. They took my seat away. And so I knew very early on that I was going to be running and probably as it turned out I guess almost close to 70 percent Democratic registered district in Pittsburgh. And you know the chances of me getting reelected were probably not very high so I went in there with the idea that maybe established my persona a little bit that I had two years can try to make an impact.

[00:35:32] And and so you know...

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David Axelrod: [00:35:34] Which is hard for a freshman.

David Axelrod: [00:35:35] It is, but I had some pretty sharp elbows. I don't doubt it.

[00:35:39] We went after something that was not ideological and come back to that point which is I mean I was a conservative but again not I wouldn't have considered myself and no one knew me would have considered myself really ideological wasn't driven by faith very much at that point in time in my life. And so you know I went in there and went after what I it was a problem which was corruption and the House banking scandal.

[00:36:06] And and so I joined with John Boehner fairly familiar to your listeners, a guy named Jim Nussle who you know became the director of OMB. And and if a handful of other congressmen and we decided we saw this check bouncing scandal it's just you know people writing checks they didn't have money in their accounts to cover it. And it was not just that it was not a democratic. It was Republicans and Democrats were doing it. And I remember reading hearing about this and deciding well you know what's this all about. Investigate and said Oh yeah they get this report every couple of years and people will scream about it and it goes away. And I said well it's not going away under my watch and just doesn't seem like the right thing to do. And so we pursued it and it probably doesn't. If you're a great yourself know among anybody the way business was done that's the way business was done and Republicans and Democrats both threatened me and said you know who is this again it was not a partisan attack but in the end we not only uncovered that scandal but we uncovered a post office scandal which is we lost saw represented from Chicago in which ensnared the chairman of the ways and means committee, who was who was from Chicago, Dan Rostenkowski who was maybe the most powerful man on Capitol Hill at the time. And if I can tell a Rosty story?

David Axelrod: [00:37:31] Yeah.

Rick Santorum: [00:37:31] OK. So I got I've got a point of the ways and means committee when I got reelected and so we're in the midst of this investigation.

[00:37:40] And John Boehner and I and really are driving it and I get on his committee and I'm going after him. And so I seeing you know way down at the end of the Dias and everything and when it came to my turn you know there is always this pause and you know I was sending a message even and just you know bringing me on and I pursued it for a period of months and to cut to the chase I get it I get a report from CNN actually saying that that indictment is going to be handed down tonight. And they'd like me on TV. And so I went on TV on CNN and was asked all these questions about the indictment and what's going to happen and what went wrong. I did the whole thing and finished the interview we get called for a vote. So I hurry back to the Hill you know get on an elevator come up the elevator. And as that elevator door opens to the hallway leading into the house opposite elevator opens and who walks out is Dan Rostenkowski an imposing figure. He is what 6 4. He's my big man. Two hundred eighty pounds a big guy. Much bigger than me and I'm not a small guy and and so I walk right into him and we turn and walk in and I'm walking shoulder to shoulder with him and he looks over me he says, 'I just saw you on TV.' I said, 'Yes sir Mr. Chairman. I said I just want you know I said it's not personal.' And he just said, we got up the steps are now on the floor of the house and he said we're standing there in the middle of the aisle. And he says 'I just want you to know he said I want to thank you.' And I said how's that. He said 'I've watched you through this whole process,'

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he said, 'and you've always treated me fairly.' And I said 'Well Mr. Chairman I said I have absolutely nothing against you as a person. I think you've always treated me well I said but I just felt like I was doing what I thought was the right thing to do.' He said 'Yeah I understand that.' And that was that.

David Axelrod: [00:39:56] Yeah you know I believe that because he also said there was a reporter in Chicago who did a lot of work on this Chuck Neubauer really superb investigative reporter and Rostenkowski said the same thing to him. And I can attest to the fact having been a reporter in Chicago that you know you didn't always he didn't always deal with these things quite that in quite that way. Do you look back at your tenure. I mean I look at the quotes and I want to go back. I really do want to get back to the sort of the rest of your journey. But you know from Alan Simpson it called you a lot tougher than Gingrich to deal with Bob Kerry. Santorum... famous quote 'Is that Latin for asshole'...

Rick Santorum: [00:40:48] Yeah, Kerry apologized to me for that but it still sticks out there. But it's funny because Kerry and I actually had a pretty good relationship.

David Axelrod: [00:40:55] But I mean the point is that you were a very you know when people think about the sort of polarity of our politics you're very much yeah into that.

Rick Santorum: [00:41:05] Here's what I would say. Yes I was I had no doubt I had very sharp elbows I use that term and I mean.

David Axelrod: [00:41:15] Do you have any regrets about how you dealt with stuff?

Rick Santorum: [00:41:20] Absolutely. I mean there are certain comments I made that were flippant that were off the cuff in a way that was maybe tried to be cute or tried to be tried. Whatever whatever I was whatever that I wish I had not said the way I said them because I know that people were hurt by them. And I think it gave people an impression of me that you know hurt me in their eyes because I don't think the most common comment I get from people after I get a chance to spend time is superior. Nothing like I thought it would be.

[00:41:59] And that's my fault. I mean I take blame I take complete responsibility for that. And and you know you when you're dealing with the media that is generally hostile to people who think like I do you're not good. They're not going to give you the benefit of the doubt that they're going to give Joe Biden if he happens to say something that maybe isn't the best thing to say. And and they're going to report it and they're not going to report it in a way that's going to be very nice. And and I knew that I should have known better to do those things.

[00:42:27] I can blame it on the fact that I was 32 when I came to the House and 36 and I came to the Senate. But you know what. You weren't 22. I mean so.

David Axelrod: [00:42:35] And it's also true that there was political currency in being a galvanizing figure.

Rick Santorum: [00:42:42] Yeah, probably probably less so then than now.

[00:42:46] I think now there's a lot more currency and in doing that I was I was a little bit. I was in some respects you can say I may may lead led the charge.

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[00:42:59] I remember you know Robert Byrd would always excoriate me for being you know for being you know talking like I was in a bar.

[00:43:06] And and so I again I I take full responsibility for all that and and some of the things I don't regret having said but a lot of them I do and not what I said but how I said it. And that matters. And I get that.

[00:43:22] And so you know it for me part of part of what arc to me in a different direction was the faith journey and the second thing is even through all those times. One of the things that I felt was that you have a responsibility to be there not to just advance whatever cause you want to actually get something done. And so while people will say you know I was bombastic or controversial I think if you look at the record of things that I actually accomplished in a bipartisan way it's actually a fairly long and impressive list. And and part of that was in spite of the bombast I take the example of Barbara Boxer and me. I mean Barbara Boxer and I are probably former senator from California is far away politically as you can. That's very good. And we had some truly epic confrontations on the floor of the Senate on the issue of abortion. More than one literally dozens and some are legion on both sides for one reason or the other. But I I actually worked on three or four different bills that we sponsored together and got passed while we were having these very very strident debates. We were working on other subject areas where we found common ground. And to me that that is that's that's what's missing. In my opinion is that you can have good strong principle even you know fiery debates but it's not personal. And you have to understand that we're both there to try to do something we think is in the best interest of the country.

[00:45:12] And you've got to look for those things you've got to find those opportunities because it's your responsibility to try to move the ball forward. And he can't get it done in this town. Ninety five percent of the time without doing it with someone on the other side.

David Axelrod: [00:45:26] Yeah I mean what you find now though is that there's a penalty to be paid within the base of the party ...

Rick Santorum: [00:45:34] That's the difference. Yeah that's that's the difference that that that has happened over the past 25 years when I was doing compromise bills with Barbara Boxer on you know, dolphin safe tuna for example. Today that would be seen as you know well maybe not that but there will be other things that we would work on that that would be seen.

[00:45:58] You know I worked with Hillary Clinton on on on pornography and the fact that you would work with someone.

David Axelrod: [00:46:06] I presume you were opposed.

Rick Santorum: [00:46:07] Yeah, we were both opposed to that. And so but it was you know in the public library system. So there were opportunities to work together.

David Axelrod: [00:46:16] If you look for them. A.

Rick Santorum: [00:46:17] But today if you do that then you know you're a sellout. And that's just wrong it's just wrong. It's it's it's counterproductive to making our institutions work. And

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people are so concerned about the failure of our institutions to function correctly. And part of it is driven by the demand for purity on both sides of the aisle.

David Axelrod: [00:46:43] So talk about this faith journey. Because you and your wife have taken that journey.

Rick Santorum: [00:46:50] Yeah we have together.

David Axelrod: [00:46:51] Together.

Rick Santorum: [00:46:52] It really was when I got married we sort of started on that journey we got married and you know neither of us were you know I would say you know particularly strong Catholics at the time she probably was in better shape than I was in many respects but we got married and you know you get married and you sort of sit back and particularly we got pregnant within like three or four months after after we got married and all of a sudden now you got hey you got a kid coming. And sort of time to grow up. Now I was running for Congress this time. But still it was from a from a standpoint of your own personal behavior and your personal morals and ethics. It's just time to now you. Now you've got to set an example. You know now you've got to form the next generation and you've got to have that responsibility. That to me was very heavy for both for both of Karen and me. And so we decided you know to get more engaged and involved in our faith community. And and and you know just not just the church itself but outside the church and reading and. And so we sort of went on this journey for a little bit but it really wasn't until I came to the United States Senate because my first four years in Congress I mean I was just I mean running and then I got elected and I knew I was going to be in this new district that was a horrible district that no one gave me a chance. So I just I was just a maniac.

[00:48:15] I mean I just went everywhere did everything and we had two little babies at the time and then so I won re-election decided shortly after that that I probably wouldn't survive in that district for very long. Would take one bad year and no matter what my faith. And by the way I got 63 percent 70 percent registered Democratic district. But I knew that over time no votes would catch up with you and because I was pretty conservative and I thought I could move the district. And as you see now western Pennsylvania has moved dramatically and a lot of those voters now vote continually Republican and I was probably the first one they voted for. But now I'm probably you know the norm for what they vote for. But I decided to take a crack at a Senate race. And you know that you run for the Senate and you're in the house. I mean I was a maniac. And it really wasn't after that intense period of time that I got intellect to his six year term and moved my family down and life began to have a rhythm to it again where I was a normal person. And I think part of the the things that I did and you know it's just if you're running at that pace and you're intensely involved and engaged in the battle every day of your life it's going to come out and the things that you say and do. And so I think the fact that I did have a six year term and you know about it several months into my term.

[00:49:44] We went to a church in Northern Virginia where Pastor was just the priest was just amazing and really spoke to me for the first time as a best homily I'd ever heard. And you know we got engaged with him and with that church just started me on a journey I started to go into Bible studies and the Senate started a men's group of four of us would get together twice twice a week to sort of be accountable to each other on a personal basis with our faith and for our

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family and for our you know just doing being good not talking about legislation is talking about how we're handling ourselves and are we are we accountable to each other.

[00:50:21] So I'd sort of put things in place to sort of help. And I think that's that certainly that arc has changed who I am. And then you know personal things happen. I mean we lost a son. And that was which was 1990. Yes. That was devastating. And you know.

David Axelrod: [00:50:41] You were already deeply... Well let's take a break here and come back because this is important too discuss and to to bifurcate.

David Axelrod: [00:51:02] You... your son Gabriel.

Rick Santorum: [00:51:06] Yes.

David Axelrod: [00:51:08] You had known when your wife was pregnant that your son had.

Rick Santorum: [00:51:14] We found out about halfway through pregnancy and and it was.

David Axelrod: [00:51:19] Had a genetic genetic defect.

Rick Santorum: [00:51:23] Yeah. And we we it was during the you know we were debating this bill on the floor of the Senate the partial birth abortion bill and the debate was all about well we have to keep abortion procedure legal because women find out late in pregnancy that their child has a defect and they may want to terminate the pregnancy.

David Axelrod: [00:51:43] Defect being something that could be life threatening.

Rick Santorum: [00:51:46] That could be life threatening.

David Axelrod: [00:51:47] But the prognosis for your child was very grim.

Rick Santorum: [00:51:51] Yeah. We were told when we had a routine sonogram halfway through the pregnancy at 20 weeks and the sonography just kept going over this one area. And you know and we said so what's going on. She said well I can't tell you that I have to get to a doctor and doctor comes in.

David Axelrod: [00:52:06] And your wife had a medical background.

Rick Santorum: [00:52:08] Yeah, and we were all sort of panicked, and we had our three kids in the room because we thought oh we're going to see the baby and everything and and doctor walked in and didn't have the greatest bedside manner.

[00:52:19] He just basically looked at it and turned to us and said quote Your son has a fatal defect and is going to die. And that was like. He talked about rocking your world and. And so it was that battle to try to save his life which we tried to do and.

David Axelrod: [00:52:36] At some risk to your wife's health.

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Rick Santorum: [00:52:38] Well. The surgery the surgery itself was not well I guess ultimately it did have a risk to her. But they had interviewed her in surgery at up in Philadelphia and at the University of Pennsylvania Hospital and the surgery actually worked it was experimental but it worked but she got an infection because of the surgery opens the womb up to infection and and she the way the body deals with an infection in the in the in the amniotic sac which is where the baby is is to expel the infection. And so she went into labor and we knew when she had a high temperature. Three days later we were very happy for three days and she got a high temperature started to go into labor and the threat to her life at that point had she not delivered that baby she. She and the baby both would have died. And so she ended up delivering the baby and he was born alive and lived two hours with us and we held him and loved him as long as we could.

David Axelrod: [00:53:37] So this if I want to talk about this issue of abortion with which you're and I mean you're this to me is such a this is an issue that is hard to have a kind of reasonable discussion about. You're. You believe deeply your faith teaches you that from the moment of conception a fetus is alive and therefore any any any not just abortion but you don't believe in birth control either.

Rick Santorum: [00:54:14] Well it is a separate issue. The issue with with with contraception you know is taught by the Catholic Church is that you know that we should be open to life and and that whatever God calls you know whatever God wants to give us we should be open to that and if we don't want to have children.

[00:54:37] There are ways other than through contraception to not have cial unless you're raped. Well obviously that's that's a different situation if there's an assault that's that's clearly the case.

[00:54:46] But but contraception and contraception is not use.

David Axelrod: [00:54:50] I'm not. This is no way trying to be contentious but I want clarity on this. But you believe also in cases of rape that.

Rick Santorum: [00:54:59] Well that's about abortion not contraception.

David Axelrod: [00:55:00] Right that's true that's true. Yes.

Rick Santorum: [00:55:05] We're talking about contraception. So on the contraception side I mean you know the position I've that my wife and I don't do that and because we wanted to be open for whatever God has has planned for us. And you know we'll accept that and we'll accept the responsibility and make faces the burden that comes with that and we just feel like that that they know the church's teaching is right on this that that that that that contraception separates the act the act of love to the the end of that which is for for having children.

[00:55:39] Not to say that you can't have sexual relations without having children but that's the church's teaching is that there that they should always be combined. And that's that's the best way to do it. It's not just pleasure for pleasure sake. And so we've you know we we accept that teaching. And so we've lived by it. And the thing is that at no point in time in my political career I've ever tried to impose that on any piece of legislation or any any public policy at all.

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[00:56:09] But I was criticized fairly heavily for having that point of view from a personal point of view on birth control. Yeah and contraception and you know I find that you know I find this sort of disturbing to be honest with you that you'd be criticized for having a position that has been the position for the church for a couple of thousand years. And and one that is not trying to impose that on to anybody else and so now the fact that we speak about I would recommend it. Does that threaten you potentially. Maybe you don't want to have this discussion but. But to me it was it was always sort of to me a ruse to say oh 'you know Santorum he's you know trying to impose...' And I'm actually not.

[00:56:54] But but I do believe it's something that if you look at what's happened since contraception has been there have been some benefits clearly and they've been documented but I think there also has been a to me a degradation of of sex relationships in this country and I think you're seeing that through a lot of different things that are going on of how how people treat you know treat each other in when it comes to sexual sexual activity you're seeing that played out here with the sexual sex, sex scandals.

David Axelrod: [00:57:31] We could talk longer on the issue of birth control contraception but but on the issue of abortion I raised this issue before one of the things that strikes struck struck me was that your view is absolute. So like even in cases of rape you'd think.

Rick Santorum: [00:57:52] Yeah. So here's here's sort of the follow the logic of my position because I actually approach this not from a religious point of view at all in fact when I decided to become pro-life I know I'd never run for office and never really taken a position. I actually work for a state senator who was pro-choice when I was when I was out of graduate school. And so I sort of I presume Hines was too. Yes he was. And so to me it wasn't wasn't an important issue for me. I mean I was a young single guy. I never really thought much about it. And but I was told as I decided to run for office that this was an important issue and I needed to get so I went and I talked to some physicians and they gave me some articles. I had a long dinner and walked through it. And to me to me this was science and scientifically.

[00:58:43] Life begins at conception don't know. It's not a moral decision it's a scientific fact. I mean you have a unique DNA and that and that unique DNA is fully human and fully alive. So the question is when do you want to give that human being. Because it's human life. When do you want to give that human life rights. And and you know there's all sorts of gradations some people say never. Up until the moment the child was born.

[00:59:11] Some say well you know after this number of weeks or after that number weeks. But to me from just using reason and logic I said Well you know I don't think it's proper for the government to draw lines and I certainly respect the liberty of a woman to have the right to do what she wants with her body but nobody has the right of liberty to use that right of liberty to take another life. And so I put the right to life which in our Declaration of Independence, comes before the right to liberty life liberty and the pursuit of happiness. I put that as a higher right. So that's that's how I came down. And so I know people say well you know it's a religious belief. Actually it wasn't actually it was just sort of this makes sense to me and society is probably a just society that puts life above liberty.

David Axelrod: [01:00:03] Well the counterargument which is that is about a woman's right to make these decisions about their own pies and about at what stage that that fetus is viable and

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so on. And we can get into the scientific debate about this but I'm in this on this issue of rape that seems so that seems like a harsh position.

Rick Santorum: [01:00:31] Yeah, I got this question at a debate in 2012. I don't know if you remember.

David Axelrod: [01:00:35] When you were running for president.

Rick Santorum: [01:00:36] Yeah, I was running for president in 2012 and I got the question about rape, it was actually a Fox News debate, I think Megyn Kelly asked me this one, and my answer was maybe it's because false and I remember but my answer was this that recently at the time recently the Supreme Court decided that someone who commits a rape you know violent rape obviously rapes are inherently violent. Is not subject to the death penalty because it's cruel and unusual punishment. So the rapist is protected by the Constitution but the child who is the product of the rape is not and that a rapist can't be put to death but a child who did nothing wrong is eligible put to death. And and I just I just find a inherent inconsistency that the rapist did one of the most horrible things you can ever do and the Justice said 'we'll protect you.' But this little child who again did nothing wrong. That child suffers the death penalty if someone decides that they don't want to have that child.

[01:01:49] And and I understand that that is how difficult I understand all the all the issues of of of a mother. But I think we I think we have to be bigger than that. I think we have to look at the other person involved.

David Axelrod: [01:02:03] The question is it goes back to the fundamental question which is first of all what what the what the rights of the mother are but also what is the status of that fetus. And and that we can... but these are fraught questions, I think anybody who thinks these are easy questions.

Rick Santorum: [01:02:23] No, they're very difficult questions. Look I understand how people can come down differently on these things. And it's it's you know when does that life becomes a person that we have to.

David Axelrod: [01:02:36] Getting back to our previous discussion, because it is a difficult discussion, doesn't it deserve that discussion that we took to take you know almost there are sort of violent extremist positions some you know people who are pro-choice labelled as murderers sometimes murdered as a result of it and there are, you know vocal positions taken on the other side. It seems like it cheats the debate out of it's...

Rick Santorum: [01:03:07] Yeah, you know, one of the things I'm most excited about is over the past 20 years since I've really been involved in the pro-life debate the pro-life community has has really put its energies into these centers called prices crisis pregnancy centers where they said look you know we will take that pregnant woman who we know is is you know isolated in so many cases.

[01:03:32] And feeling abandoned and feeling misused and and and feeling vulnerable and alone will bring that person and we will care for her. We will provide support for her.

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[01:03:44] And if she decides to move forward the pregnancy we will support that pregnancy and care for her and her child not just through the pregnancy but afterwards in parenting and nurturing and all those things.

[01:03:58] And to me that's that's the positive approach instead of you know look I don't think we should stop trying to change the law which I believe is unjust.

[01:04:09] But you can't just sit there and run your protests.

[01:04:13] And as you said scream at the other side and call them murderers or whatever the case may be you have to go out and meet the women in society who are abandoned by a by men, parents, friends.

[01:04:29] In this very very tragic unwanted pregnancy situation. So I think it's underreported. But I can tell you there are hundreds of these centers around the country hundreds and hundreds I've spoken to probably close to 100 myself and a very very passionate about being there to serve women and their children. And by the way fathers trying to help with father and parenting so to me yes it's a very contentious debate.

David Axelrod: [01:04:57] And a very difficult decision for women, right? I mean I don't think most women who make that decision make it casually, the decision to have an abortion.

Rick Santorum: [01:05:05] I would agree that I would agree that most women do not. And again one of the benefits of these crisis pregnancy centers is if the woman decides having abortion they're there for possible counseling if there is any issues that come up and arise of that. So to me it's about caring for the woman caring for the child caring for the family. And if that's what the pro-life movement I'd like it to be known for.

David Axelrod: [01:05:29] Let me ask you just quickly about the Pope and tis particular Pope.

Rick Santorum: [01:05:34] Yeah.

David Axelrod: [01:05:35] And, because it seems to me that the the social gospel that he preaches isn't necessarily consistent with some of your political views. And he's a very controversial figure within the church because of it. What is your evaluation?

Rick Santorum: [01:05:54] Yeah, I would say that you know first off Pope Francis held my little girl I haven't talked to my daughter Bella since special needs little girl and she's 9 years old but a couple of years ago when he came to the United States and was in Philadelphia. He my my wife and I and my daughter Bella got a chance to meet him and he actually held my daughter and so.

David Axelrod: [01:06:17] How old is Bella now?

Rick Santorum: [01:06:17] Bella's 9, she was 7 at the time and she can't she can't walk or talk and she's not you know she's. You know people would say profoundly disabled. But to me she's very able, she's she's a font of love and happiness in our family and so we we are we just feel so so blessed to have her but he so he so he has a special place in my heart for for the way he dealt with my daughter. But look he comes from a very different perspective. And on and on

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some issues. And I know I find troubling to be very honest with you. It's not that I disagree with him on the overall arc which is you know we need to care for our environment. Of course we need to care for our environment but that doesn't necessarily see the way that the church attaches to a particular solution. I don't think that's the role of the church and the role is to say we need to be good stewards of God's creation.

[01:07:11] Absolutely and we need to and we need to to look at every decision we make in light of our stewardship of that creation and same thing with care about the children.

[01:07:22] Yeah the immigrant the children and again very important thing...

David Axelrod: [01:07:26] There's a compelling case before about how you say how children are treated in utero. But what about who through no fault of their own are the product of a rape. What about children who are brought to the country through, like your father was, through legal immigration, but who were brought through no fault of their own.

Rick Santorum: [01:07:50] He had to wait seven years without his father.

David Axelrod: [01:07:52] Understood.

Rick Santorum: [01:07:54] So, look, I'm not opposed to legal immigration. I'm for immigration. Immigration is an important part of and future of the country.

David Axelrod: [01:08:03] But these kids are not the ones who make these decisions.

Rick Santorum: [01:08:05] And again I would say it's confusing in my mind, conflating what is according to church teaching an absolute wrong which is the taking of an innocent human life an abortion to a prudential judgment as to how a country deals with its borders. That's a judgment that the country under church teaching is free to make as long as they're doing it in concert with their not doing anything malicious. They're not doing anything that's that's deliberately harmful.

David Axelrod: [01:08:36] But let's leave the analogy aside. The principal of kids not being responsible for decisions that their parents made and not being punished for. Doesn't that seem like one we should be able to agree on?

Rick Santorum: [01:08:52] And I would say this, that hopefully we can we can get some agreement. But but the larger point here is those decisions are judgment decisions. Are complex. They have a lot of you know certain people we should probably should treat this way other people we wouldn't treat this way and it is up for the government official and the church has to give leeway to that government official. As long as they're doing it consistent with the teachings of the church which is you know that we welcome the stranger and that we we try to care for people but at the same time we can't welcome everybody. And I don't think any church teaches that you have to have an open border and everybody can come in and nations have borders and they have boundaries and it's a judgment call. Yeah we do. And I don't think anywhere in the church's teaching saying the countries can't have borders and protect those borders. So there's the problem I have with the pope is that he takes issues that are of judgment and turns them into the same order of absolutes. And I just think that's that's just not correct

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teaching. And I don't blame him. And in fact I admire him for his concern about immigrants. I admire him for his concern about the environment. I think those are important issues.

[01:10:11] And I think those are issues the church has the right to express and the poor you know look you're talking to someone who when I when I when I ran in 2006 for re-election David Brooks wrote an article and said you know that every major poverty issue that has been advanced in the last 16 years was led by me. And that's true. I mean I took the responsibility of caring. I hired nine people off the welfare rolls. I took the responsibility of caring for the poor not just my own life and personally but also as in public and in public policy. And so I I take all of the teachings of the church seriously and I take my responsibility as a public servant to care for to be concerned about all you know everybody in society also very seriously but that doesn't mean that I have to agree necessarily with a particular prescription of how to do that.

David Axelrod: [01:11:09] On the area of health care, you know, we both have children who have significant health needs. And you know, everything I think about, well a lot of what I think about life but everything I think about health care very much flows from that experience when I almost went bankrupt trying to take care of my kid.

Rick Santorum: [01:11:29] I know the feeling.

David Axelrod: [01:11:30] So shouldn't people be able to get health care when they need it?

Rick Santorum: [01:11:39] Yes. And you know you may not remember but way back when back in the mid 90s I actually offered a piece of legislation which was condemned by some of them like Cato and some of the more conservative groups as you know big government.

[01:11:56] You know, Rick Santorum, I believe or not I've known by some conservatives these days is a big government conservative. That shows you how far we've gone. Yeah really. Because what I proposed is that we should provide the same tax treatment for those who don't have employer provided insurance that those who do. In other words that we're going to give people support if you want to call premium support or whatever the case may be but give them a tax credit that they could use to go out and buy insurance to help underwrite the cost of private insurance. That was 20 years ago. And it costs too much money. And oh you're going to blow a hole in the budget. I said we're learnable even for the working poor. I don't know whether it was refundable or not. But but I certainly never went into the Senate. I mean I certainly would have no problem with it being refundable but the idea would be to make sure that everybody is treated the same and people who have employer provided insurance get a huge tax benefit and those who don't don't. And that to me just was indefensible yet I couldn't get my colleagues on the conservative side. The interesting that the guy in the House that authored it was Dick Armey, who again, back then was considered you know there is nobody tougher than Dick Armey as a conservative. But here's two iconic conservatives, if you will, who offered this and you know we couldn't get the attention of the Republican Party to move forward.

David Axelrod: [01:13:13] The reason I asked you is because you know you were just recently involved in an effort to repeal the Affordable Healthcare Act, which you know, obviously I was on the other side of that discussion but by most by almost all accounts it would have left a lot of people who have insurance without insurance.

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Rick Santorum: [01:13:34] Yeah I would say that I just fundamentally disagree with what the Congressional Budget Office analysis was. And I think they always have overestimated quote guaranteed insurance through a government program versus a support for you know a open and private sector marketplace.

David Axelrod: [01:13:52] But if health care is not like another market.

Rick Santorum: [01:13:55] Agreed but, .

David Axelrod: [01:13:56] Everybody needs health care. You can't say, 'well I'm not going to have it.

Rick Santorum: [01:14:00] I don't I don't disagree with you. And so the question is you know how are we going to provide it. Is it going to be through a government oriented type program like Medicaid or Medicare or are we going to provide it through people having choices with a variety of different private sector products with to buy affordable insurance.

[01:14:18] And I think you could say and I'm sure you might agree at least in part that for many Americans the insurance products on the exchanges are not affordable right now if you get to the city they are but if you don't get a subsidy I can tell you I'm on one and I pay roughly 30000 thousand dollars a year in premiums. Now for most Americans that is not an affordable policy. And I and I have a probably a I think it's either ten or twelve thousand dollar deductible so you know I do it why we were just talking about because I have a child with a disability and I can't not have insurance with someone who who has those kinds of medical conditions so I'm willing to put a big chunk of my income toward that because I have to. But if you're a 27 year old with four kids at home and that's what I have on my insurance right now you're not going to pay 30 thousand dollars for that means you're just not going to you're going to go out and either...

David Axelrod: [01:15:15] We should point out that you're in a advantaged position now, now that you're out of government...

Rick Santorum: [01:15:21] I'm out of government and I'm making ... CNN is paying me a fortune, right? You and me, right?

David Axelrod: [01:15:23] Well, if they are, I'm going to have to renegotiate.

David Axelrod: [01:15:28] Rick Santorum, it's been it's been a pleasure to have.

Rick Santorum: [01:15:30] It's been long.

David Axelrod: [01:15:31] Yeah, we'll take care of that. We'll take care of that. But, pleasure to chat here as it is on that panel and the great thing about being senior commentators is that means that you don't have the jobs you used to have so you can be a little more relaxed and a little bit more, maybe even more candid.

Rick Santorum: [01:15:50] More candid, and a little bit more introspective and thoughtful, hopefully.

David Axelrod: [01:15:54] Yeah, good to be with you.

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Rick Santorum: [01:15:54] Thank you David. You too.