

leaders now the way there were, even 35 years ago, as an influence. Members of Congress have become much more individual entrepreneurs. Secondly — and this is by far the most important change — when I got to Congress in 1981, we still had the situation where the South, was A) Conservative and B) Democratic, although it was shifting. By 1981 the majority of the members of the House of Representatives and the Senate from the South were Democrats, even though they voted significantly with the Republicans. There were also a smaller number of Republicans,

Who: Barney Frank
What: Book reading followed by question and answer session
When: 4 p.m., Saturday, March 28.
Where: Powell's City of Books, 1005 W Burnside St.

mostly on the East and some on the West Coast, who were more on the liberal side. That is while the Democrats were more liberal and Republicans were more conservative, there were 10 or 15, even 20 percent, split between the two parties.

But now that is simply not the case. I don't think there is a single Republican member who is to the

left of any Democratic member; the parties have become much more ideologically coherent.

The next big change was — and this started in the 80s, but was given an enormous boost by this right-wing Supreme Court majority — is the role of money. Money plays a much greater role now in elections to the detriment of democracy.

Democrats have become more on the liberal side and Republicans on the conservative side. The Republicans have taken that a step further and moved even further to the right. So the most important change that affects the current situation is that, beginning in 2009, the Republicans moved to a more unified, conservative position, which really changed. Speed up to warp speed and now you have a Republican party that is an angry, antigovernment, very extreme conservative party.

E.G.: While you say money has played a role in changing politics, you wrote in your book that the widely held belief that campaign finances have more

power over Congress than constituents do is simply not true. Can you explain this and also how constituents can most effectively wield the power they have?

B.F.: Constituents can wield the power by talking to their members of Congress. On the day-to-day affairs, it is true that big money influence is greater because the people with a lot of money are monitoring things on a regular basis, and the voters are not paying a lot of attention. But in those cases when the voters care, and they get engaged, for example, they helped us get more in financial reform than we thought we were going to get. The big banks really lost badly in that one.

The whole effort to make it harder for people to access music and other things on the Internet, there was an effort to largely end the intellectual property laws. That got defeated. Net neutrality clearly is opposed by the most important financial interests, but it's going to happen.

It's true that members of Congress, out of human nature, will listen to the money. But members of Congress, most of us, didn't get elected without having a pretty good sense of what people in our district want, and knowing in particular what it is that's important to them. It would get you into political difficulty if you denied them. I wish constituents would speak out more, but even when they don't speak out, there is an ongoing understanding by members of Congress of what the constituents will accept. There is an ongoing understanding of the need to keep the constituents happy, and even more importantly, the need to not anger them, that is a factor.

Money is more influential? There's more truth to that than there used to be. I don't think money has as much an influence on the decisions that are made once members are elected. The real negative power of money is in who gets elected. The people with all the money, they know who to support. In many cases, they don't have to lobby these people once they've helped them get elected.

E.G.: You also wrote that working on affordable housing took up more of your time

than anything else in your public life. As income inequality continues to grow in the United States, why do you think there is push by some presidential candidates to abolish The Department of Housing and Urban Development, and what do you think the next president should do for affordable housing?

B.F.: When we talk about affordable housing or subsidized housing, generally, we're talking about rental housing. I have always believed, for a variety of reasons, most very low-income people are going to be renters, not homeowners. And we have neglected rental. And the problem is, when you talk about rental housing, people still conjure up in their heads these terrible, anti-social, large towers that we built. We don't do that anymore. We haven't for a long time. We know how to build and how to fund decent affordable housing, and that's what I have most worked on.

The objection we've had, is there's still this picture in people's heads, this cultural lag, that rental housing built with public assistance somehow is going to be this terrible drab and dangerous tower — but the poor didn't build those, society built those because they thought it was the cheapest way to house people, and we've learned that does more harm than good.

Part of the problem is a continuation of what I said earlier: the Republican Party is more far to the right. When I was in the Massachusetts Legislature working on housing, one of the people I worked most closely with was a Republican senator, Edward Brooke. He was a great supporter of affordable rental housing. When I got to Congress, when Republicans took over in the mid-90s, they tried to undo legislation called the Brooke Amendment, to help low-income tenants, and then Brooke even supported it. I called him and said, "Can you help on this?" And he said, "Barney, I wish I could, it's not my party anymore. These people have just moved away from me."

The problem is you have these ideologues who run the Republican Party today, and who are very attuned to that group of regulatory foes and the extremists of the Fox network and elsewhere, who really don't think the government has a positive role in our society. And there's very little they let the government do besides defense and law enforcement: This is a manifestation of their ideology.

E.G.: You are one of few members of Congress to speak out against our country's

consumers from fraud and installed oversight of financial derivatives.

2011: Don't Ask Don't Tell is repealed.

2012: Frank marries longtime partner Jim Ready, becoming the first member of Congress to be in a same-sex marriage.

2013: Leaves office, becoming a private citizen, but then seeks temporary appointment to U.S. Senate. He is not selected

2013-present: Frank continues to speak, write and campaign for personal freedoms, support for social-service programs and reducing defense spending.

defense spending. What cuts can be made, without compromising national security, that would equal the amount of money needed to properly fund social programs like affordable rental housing?

B.F.: Oh that's the best question of all, because that's my major goal going forward. I think a lot of the programs individually are popular, and the fact people are angry with the government is not because we've been doing too much in these areas, but too little. And then people blame the government for not doing enough, and then they get angry and vote for people who make the government worse.

First of all, we do not need to have three ways to destroy the Soviet Union in a thermonuclear war. There is no more Soviet Union, there is Russia, a very unpleasant place, you may agree. Putin is one of the great threats to democracy, but he does not remotely have the kind of capacity that we have. When the Soviet Union collapsed, George H. W. Bush began to cut things back. We have three ways of dropping thermonuclear weapons on the Soviet Union, by missiles, by airplanes and by submarines. Keep two. Give up one. Save billions of dollars.

We don't need to have troops in Western Europe. The Western European nations and the European Union collectively have a larger gross domestic product and they have a larger population. Now, I get it. Putin is a problem for Ukraine, but the answer to that is not the American army, no one thinks it is, and they should be doing more there themselves.

Most importantly in the near term, the president was right to withdraw from combat in Iraq and Afghanistan. Unfortunately he's committed a little too much to the pressure to go back.

I believe it's good that we've engaged in the bombing of those murderous fanatics that call themselves the Islamic State, and it's had some impact, but the notion that America has to go back in and bring about stability in Iraq, in Afghanistan and maybe even in Syria, which is what you hear from many of the Republicans, is just wrong. We cannot do that. Our military is a great military. Militaries are very good at stopping bad things from happening. They cannot make good things happen. We're spending

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Congressmen Christopher Dodd and Barney Frank walk to speak to the press outside the West Wing of the White House to discuss financial reform legislation later known as the Dodd-Frank Act.

2010: President Barack Obama signs a bill written by Frank and Christopher Dodd. The Dodd-Frank Wall Street Reform and Consumer Protection Act created a bureau to protect



Frank wipes away tears as he arrives to watch House Speaker Nancy Pelosi sign the bill repealing Don't Ask Don't Tell, Dec. 21, 2010.

1995: President Bill Clinton revokes the 40-year-old prohibition on security clearances for LGBT people after urging from Frank.

1998: Frank leads the fight against GOP efforts to impeach President Bill Clinton.

2007: Frank begins dating Jim Ready. Frank writes, "By that summer, I was deeply in love, experiencing at 67 more profound feelings than ever before."