Budgets, crisis and the effect



SENATOR BRIAN BINGMANOklahoma Senate President Pro Tem

SL: Can the federal government reduce the deficit without shifting the burden to states? **Senate President Pro Tem Brian Bingman:** I'm concerned that as they shift those burdens to the states they don't realize the impact it's going to have as it's passed down to local communities, cities and towns. It is going to be a real shock.

SL: What's the biggest problem you face as the leader in your chamber?

Bingman: We must have a balanced budget at the end of the day. For the last two years we've cut the fat, and now we are down to the bone. But it is a reality, and we've got to learn to live within our means. We do it with our families and, in the same way we have to make tough choices at home, we are doing that on the state level.

SL: Why did you want this job?

Bingman: When I ran for the Senate, I had no idea that within four years I would be the Senate pro tem. It's just kind of evolved. I saw an opportunity, and I think my personality is very good for the times we're in. I understand the consequences that come with it and know I'm not going to please everybody. It's kind of like running a business. You try to hire the best people you can and provide all the information you can. But at the end of the day somebody has got to make a decision, and I try to make a well-informed decision with all the information that I've got.

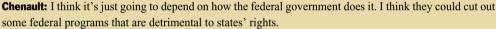
REPRESENTATIVE MIKE CHENAULT

Alaska House Speaker

SL: Why did you want this job?

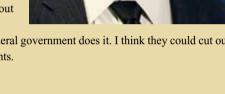
Alaska House Speaker Mike Chenault: I think it's good for my community to have me in the position I'm They've seen some benefits from that, and I think the state seen some benefits in education and in resource develop-Those are the two big areas that I'll push hard for. I think shown some forward momentum, not only in education, but trying to develop our resources.

SL: Can the federal government reduce the deficit without the burden to states.



SL: What keeps you up at night?

Chenault: My kids' futures. I have four kids, and I want them to be able to come back to Alaska. I want them to find good-paying jobs. So if anything keeps me awake, I would say it's them.



REPRESENTATIVE ROBERT "BOB" NUTTING

Maine House Speaker

SL: How do you lead during a time of crisis? **Maine House Speaker Robert "Bob" Nutting:** I think crisis is an opportunity. It gives us an opportunity to look at things we never would think of if we had lots of money: necessities as opposed to luxuries. We are at that point now. And that's an opportunity for us all in leadership to do something now so that when the money starts to flow better in the few years ahead, we will be well-positioned to have good state budgets.

SL: Can the federal government reduce the deficit without shifting the burden to states.

Nutting: If they reduce the federal money going to the states, they're going to have to reduce

some of the mandates so states are freer to control their own expenses. It is important that they do that. They could take back lots of money if they would just reduce the regulations they put on states and let us deal with it at the local level.

SL: Why did you want this job?

Nutting: My goal in life before November's election was to be the assistant minority leader of my party. After the election, for the first time since I was in high school, the Republicans control the House, the Senate and the governor's office. I thought I could do a good job. Being in leadership is less about the technical issues and not even so much about the policy issues. It's about getting all those people—in my case 151 representatives—to work together as much as they can to solve the problems we all have.



"If they reduce the federal money going to the states, they're going to have to reduce some of the mandates so states are freer to control their own expenses."

—REPRESENTATIVE ROBERT "BOB" NUTTING, MAINE HOUSE SPEAKER

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of federal spending

"I think they could cut out some federal programs that are detrimental to states' rights."

—REPRESENTATIVE MIKE CHENAULT, ALASKA HOUSE SPEAKER

SENATOR TERESA PAIVA-WEED

Rhode Island Senate President

SL: Can the federal government reduce the deficit without shifting the burden to states

Rhode Island Senate President Teresa Paiva-Weed:

Rhode Island is required to have a balanced budget, and we have made significant changes and cuts at the state level. Washington doesn't seem to have done that, in terms of reducing its work-



force or in terms of reducing the size of the bureaucracy. I also think there are ways to help states that don't cost money, such as the Main Street Fairness Act. It will help our small retailers survive if we can just level the playing field by being able to collect sales taxes from some of the Internet businesses.

SL: Is there anything that keeps you up at night?

Paiva-Weed: Knowing in my heart there is no silver bullet. Knowing

"I think there are ways to help states that don't cost money, such as the Main Street Fairness Act. It will help our small retailers survive if we can just level the playing field by being able to collect sales taxes from some of the Internet businesses."

—SENATOR TERESA PAIVA-WEED, RHODE ISLAND SENATE PRESIDENT

that there's no single answer to what we are going through. I've been a very strong advocate for the neediest in our population, and the past couple of years, because of the enhanced federal money, we haven't really had to make cuts in human services. I'm very, very concerned how we get through balancing this budget, which I know we need to do, and not hurt people.

SL: Why did you want this job?

Paiva-Weed: I love government. It is probably the very reason most people you ask—whether it is the city council, the state government or the federal level—give. I believe I can make a difference. I absolutely am committed to making those big policy changes. I wouldn't change that for anything.

SENATOR KEVIN RAYE

Maine Senate President

SL: How do you lead in a time of crisis?

Maine Senate President Kevin Raye: My approach is to work together across party lines. We have a requirement in Maine that our budget needs to pass with a two-thirds vote. And that necessitates a degree of bipartisanship—where we work our way through our differences and figure out those areas where we can come together on spending and taxing priorities. That fits with my leadership style because I believe we do our best work when we work together.

SL: What does less federal spending mean for states?

Raye: It certainly contributes to the challenges we face. Maine is looking at an \$800 million budget gap. We recognize that as one of the highest taxed states in the nation, we need to do something about our income tax rate. So we are looking to not only close an \$800 million budget gap, but also to lower the top income tax rate from 8.5 percent to 7.95 percent.

SL: What keeps you up at night?

Raye: Two things. Making sure we achieve a thoughtful, balanced budget that establishes rational priorities that preserve the safety net for our most vulnerable citizens but make the long-term systemic changes that can help us be more viable and more prosperous. And I feel a special responsibility to make sure we

get regulatory reform right in Maine because we are starting from the bottom. Forbes Magazine named Maine dead last in the nation in terms of our business climate and our



opportunity for careers. We need to send a strong clear message to job creators, within our borders and beyond, that Maine is serious about becoming business- friendly.

These interviews have been edited for length and clarity.

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