FACE THE NATION

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GUESTS: Rep. CHARLES RANGEL (D-NY)
        Chairman, Ways and Means Committee

        NEWT GINGRICH (R-GA)
        Former Speaker of the House

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BOB SCHIEFFER, host:

Today on FACE THE NATION, from right to left, two voices, Newt Gingrich and Charlie Rangel. Where do we go from here in Iraq? Will Democrats continue their drive to bring the troops home? And what if they are successful? And then there are taxes, abortion and President Bush. Has he become an albatross too heavy for Republican candidates to carry? We'll talk about all of that with former House Speaker Newt Gingrich, who is weighing a run for the Republican presidential nomination. And then we'll talk to the Democratic chairman of the House Ways and Means Committee, Charlie Rangel of New York. Finally, can we find the worst way to select a president? I'll have some thoughts on that. But first, Gingrich and Rangel on FACE THE NATION.


SCHIEFFER: Good morning again. And joining us this morning, the former speaker of the House, Newt Gingrich.

Mr. Gingrich, welcome. As I understand it...

Mr. NEWT GINGRICH (Republican, Georgia; Former Speaker of the House): Good to be with you.

SCHIEFFER: ...you are now in the process of putting together a task force to come up with some solutions to what you see as some of the nation's problems. You're going to reveal that this fall, and then, after that, you're going to decide whether or not you want to get into the race. So we'll talk about all of that in a minute.

But let's start with the news of the day. The Democrats' opposition to the war, as you know, took a new turn last week when Senator Clinton called for repealing the authorization that the Congress gave the president to go to Iraq. What is going to be the impact of that?

Mr. GINGRICH: Well, I think, frankly, it made her look foolish, and I agree with Senator Edwards' critique of that. If she honestly believes that we should get out of Iraq, vote no on the funding. And the Congress has every authority, under the Constitution, to force the president out of Iraq. But this idea of going through a political game, which will be totally misinterpreted overseas, undermine the morale of the American forces and accomplish nothing, I think is essentially an effort by Senator Clinton to appease her left, who are very angry at her for not--you know, for not having gone back on her vote on the war. She was the last Democrat running for president who had both voted for the war and supported it. And I think this is almost a desperation effort to say, `Oh, gee, I'm with you guys, too.' If she's serious about it, then move to cut off the funds. If they can't cut off the funds, then let's get on with trying to win the war. But I think this middle zone of politics while young Americans die is very bad for the country.

SCHIEFFER: Let's talk about where you think this should go. The president
has vetoed the Democratic bill that went to the Congress--I mean, went to the White House because it had a timetable for withdrawing the troops. There is talk now of putting binding conditions on the Iraqi government, some sort of benchmarks that they have to meet before they can get more funding. Is that a good idea?

Mr. GINGRICH: Look, I think the Congress can advise the president in this area, but that it is--it is irrational to think that 535 legislators can write a contract which has to be met by a foreign government on a date certain. You're just going to tie the United States up and make it look pathetic. The president, I think, would veto any binding provision. They've gone through this dance now for over 75 days. It undermines the morale of our forces, it weakens us around the world. If we, tragically, have to be in the middle of a war, then let's get the money to the troops.

Interestingly, in 1848, Abraham Lincoln, who was a Whig opposed to the war, always distinguished the policy debate and the money and always said, `We have to vote the money because American troops have to be supported. But I want to disagree with President Polk about the Mexican war.' We're in a similar point. I think any Democrat who wants to can argue about the war, but don't undermine the military in the middle of our taking casualties while we're trying to do a job.

SCHIEFFER: Well, now you, yourself, have been a critic of the war strategy. I was looking up some things here, and it says in 2003, I think, you said we went over a cliff...

Mr. GINGRICH: Yes.

SCHIEFFER: …when Mr. Bremer, who was then running things, changed the strategy. He did not put in an Iraqi governing council. You said then we were on a disastrous path. So why can you be so critical of Democrats who're now saying the same thing?

Mr. GINGRICH: Look, I've consistently been critical of how we execute things. In fact, there's an article this morning where I say flatly the machinery of executing American foreign policy and American national security policy does not work. That's why I favored appointing a very senior military person, in effect, as deputy commander in chief directly under the president. The system doesn't work. But I want to find a way to make it work so we can win in the world, not find a way to use that as an excuse to run and hide. I mean, the missing debate in America today is, after we're defeated--look, let's say that the liberal Democrats succeed, which is their constitutional right--after we are defeated, how do we manage the Middle East? How do we manage the Persian Gulf? What lessons do we learn the next time? And more importantly, what lessons do our allies and our enemies learn from the political defeat of the American system? Now, I think this is one of the most serious historic moments we've ever had because, unlike Vietnam, we have an active enemy worldwide--the British just this last week sentenced five terrorists to life in prison in Britain. We have an active enemy worldwide, and this defeat is part of a much longer war that we will still be in. The
Democrats don’t have the ability to lead the world.

SCHIEFFER: What do we do now to manage the current situation? I mean, you give--OK, you say fund the troops, but how long does that go on? Do we wait till this summer to see whether it’s worked or not?

Mr. GINGRICH: Look, we--I want to say something which is very politically unpopular. We are caught up in a worldwide war against an irreconcilable enemy who seeks to destroy us and will use nuclear or biological weapons if they can get them. And they mean literally destroy us. We had a 12-year-old boy on videotape two weeks ago in Pakistan beheading a man. We had a couple in Britain in July who were prepared to use their eight-month-old baby to get a bomb on an airplane disguised as baby food. We’re up against a savagery and a ferocity worldwide that we don’t understand. And all I am suggesting is, whether it’s Afghanistan, it’s Iraq, it’s Iran, it is the problems in Syria, it’s the 300 people who were killed in Algeria a week ago, the 200 people killed in India a month ago, we had better have a national debate as we did over the Cold War. We didn’t debate over the Cold War about Berlin--the Berlin blockade. We debated the larger question: What’s the nature of the world? What would it be take for the United States to survive and its allies to survive? And I see no evidence this commit--I want to make a--one specific proposal.

SCHIEFFER: OK.

Mr. GINGRICH: The president should extend to all of the members of the House and Senate, and to all of the candidates for president, the maximum opportunity to get briefed on a regular weekly basis, to understand what the president worries about. I think that it’s very important to understand that--the American people made a choice last fall, a totally legitimate choice on their part. We now have a Democratic speaker, a Democratic majority leader. Somehow they have to be brought in to a combined American decision process. We have a whole bunch of candidates for the next year running around making speeches. They have to be informed about the nature of the world. They don’t have to be with George W. Bush, but they at least have to understand the threats...(unintelligible).

SCHIEFFER: Let’s talk a little bit about politics.

Mr. GINGRICH: All right.

SCHIEFFER: Let’s turn to politics here.

Mr. GINGRICH: I’m shocked that you’d bring…

SCHIEFFER: Yes. The president, in the new Newsweek poll that’s out today, has the lowest approval rating of any president since Jimmy Carter. He’s down now to 28 percent. We all remember that Richard Nixon had an approval rating of 23 percent at the lowest part of his presidency. How do Republican candidates deal with that? Do they separate themselves from the president? Do they ignore him, as they did during the recent debate, where he was
mentioned one time and Ronald Reagan was mentioned 18 times? How do Republicans handle that?

Mr. GINGRICH: Well, if the French elections go as it--they look like they're going to go today, I'm going to write in my newsletter tomorrow on a French lesson to the Republicans, which is pretty ironic considering some of the jokes we make in this country about France. Nicolas Sarkozy is in the Chirac government. Chirac is at the end of 10 years, two terms. People are totally fed up with him, they're very tired. And yet Sarkozy has managed to become the candidate of change while Segolene Royal, the socialist opposition, has become the candidate of status quo. No Republican will win in 2008 on keeping Washington as it is. If we--if the Republicans are going to win next year, they will win by offering a choice of greater solutions with dramatically more change than we've seen in American life, I think, since the New Deal. And unless they're prepared to offer that change, I think the country will almost certainly elect a Democrat because I think the 2006 election was a performance election, and I think the country is sending a signal. They might vote for a center-right change candidate, which is what Sarkozy is, even though he's in the Chirac Cabinet.

SCHIEFFER: Well, is President Bush just an albatross that's too heavy for Republicans to carry now?

Mr. GINGRICH: Well, President Bush is not the future. He's not a solution. He doesn't solve--he doesn't solve Social Security, he doesn't solve Medicare, he doesn't solve the economy, he doesn't solve the environment, he doesn't solve education. He's a current fact. It would be like saying that if the Democrats decided to run on the grounds of that they can be as effective as Senator Reid is in the Senate. Well, you'd never elect somebody--the Senate's an impossible place to be effective in. It's designed not to be effective.

The Democrats have got--have an easier job, because all they have to do is say, "Not this.' That's exactly what the 2006 campaign was, "Not this.' The Republicans have a harder job. The Republicans have to say this is not what we want to debate, it's not in Baghdad, it's not in Katrina, it's not at Walter Reed, it's not with the US attorneys. But I have a better plan for a better solution that fits your values more than a Senator Clinton or a Senator Edwards or a Senator Obama.

SCHIEFFER: Or what you seem to be saying, or President Bush.

Mr. GINGRICH: Well, I think that's clear. I mean, again, you don't have to be hostile to President Bush to say that the country clearly wants more aggressive solutions that are more powerful, whether it's controlling the border or it is fixing Social Security for the next generation or it's having a health system we can afford that covers 300 million Americans or it's having what I've described as a green conservatism that offers an aggressive solution on issues like global warming but does so using markets and incentives.

SCHIEFFER: You say it's absurd to start the campaign so early. In fact, your quote that I want to ask you about, you said the other day, "If the American
people want an absurdity, they should pick one of the current candidates. If they're still interested come October, maybe I'll think about running." What did you mean by that?

Mr. GINGRICH: Well, the point is this, and I’m not—I’m not arguing with any of the people who are running. There’s a lot of smart people who are running very hard. But they have allowed themselves to be talked into a consultant-driven model, which is the equivalent—it's a mixture of "American Idol," "The Bachelor" and "Survivor." The debates recently were ludicrous. I mean, first of all, it’s ludicrous to say—in the debate the other night, the Republicans averaged seven minutes and 20 seconds apiece, split up into 25 to 30 second answers. The television celebrities are the kings, the television celebrities dominate these things. They cut people off, they treat them with disrespect. The potential president of the United States, the most powerful governing office in the world, shrinks with each appearance in these—in these shows, and we don't have a national discussion.

Mario Cuomo, Governor Cuomo and I, did a 90 minute discussion at Cooper Union recently, and Governor Cuomo has written a recent article, and so has Marvin Kalb, proposing that next year, whoever the two nominees are, they should agree in advance to a 90 minute dialogue, time keeper but no moderator. Ninety-minutes a week for nine weeks from Labor Day to the election. Let the American people have in your living room a chance to see two adults talk—by the way, the French election, the other night they had a very tough debate that ran 30 minutes over.

SCHIEFFER: Let me just ask you one final question. You're going to put out these ideas from this task force toward the end of the summer or September.

Mr. GINGRICH: Right.

SCHIEFFER: Then you will decide whether or not you're going to get into this. Are you really serious about that, or are you just more into getting these ideas out?

Mr. GINGRICH: We have—no, look, look. We have a solutions day workshop on September 27th, the anniversary of the contract. It’ll be on the Internet, available nationwide. We already have over 1400 people signed up, and over 600 sites, people have signed up for it at americansolutions.com. I’m going to spend all summer developing a new generation of solutions that are different than the current dialogue in Washington. We’re going to give them to all the Democrats and all the Republicans. If people adopt them and people campaign on them, I probably won’t run. If, however, the ideas require an advocate and citizenship requires me to run, then in October, you know, starting on September 30th, we’ll look very seriously at whether or not that’s necessary.

SCHIEFFER: All right. Mr. Speaker, you always make it interesting.

Mr. GINGRICH: Good to be with you. Thank you.
SCHIEFFER: Thank you very much. We’ll be back in a minute to talk with Congressman Charlie Rangel.

(Announcements)

SCHIEFFER: And joining us now from New York, the chairman of the House, Ways and Means Committee, Democrat, Charles Rangel.

Mr. Rangel, you heard Mr. Gingrich. He says that Hillary Clinton is simply making herself look foolish when she calls for repealing the congressional authorization to go into Iraq. Now, I know you happen to be supporting Senator Clinton, or at least that’s what I’ve heard. What’s your reaction to that?

Representative CHARLES RANGEL (Democrat, New York; Chairman, Ways and Means Committee): That’s true. I think that the American people have spoken, the lack of popularity of the president has everything to do with the war. And we must follow the people’s mandate and do everything that we can to send a message to President Bush that we want to stop the war and we want to bring the troops home. So, if you want to talk about repealing his authority or cutting the funds or setting a timetable, whatever has to be done, he has to stop listening to Dick Cheney.

SCHIEFFER: Well, let me ask you about the message that that would send to the American forces and also to the rest of the world. Mr. Gingrich says it’s a recipe for defeat and it’s just awful and that we should never put the troops in that kind of situation.

Rep. RANGEL: We should not. We should always make certain that those dedicated, brave people are protected no matter what, and if you don’t believe this country is strong enough to make certain that they can safely return home, then we’re not being realistic.

The truth is that Mr. Gingrich and the president are battling a demon in a dark room and they have no clue as to who it is. Gingrich says they’re all over the world. Well, they very well may be, but if they wanted to surrender tomorrow, where would we go? Who would we ask to sign the papers? It’s ridiculous. We shouldn’t have been there in the first place. We got the CIA guy who said that he didn’t con the president in saying it was a slam dunk in order to win. But we could con the American people that it was a slam dunk that we would swallow what he said, and that is true. Now the American people have seen what is happening, and we want to remove our people from harm’s way. What about our friends in Saudi Arabia? In Egypt? In Jordan? It’s their problem, it’s their region, it’s their religious dispute and it’s not American soldiers.

SCHIEFFER: Well, let me ask you this question, Mr. Rangel, because we hear the Democrats say over and over again that we should begin a withdrawal. But we really never hear their idea of what will happen after those American troops come out of there. Do you think, as some Republicans charge and as some others charge, that they’ll come over here to get us? What do you think
is going to happen after the American troops leave?

Rep. RANGEL: Yes, as soon as we leave, they’re going to get their passports and come over here. It's absolute ridiculous. If they've all over the world, what makes you think they're going to leave there. That’s where the dispute is. It would seem to me, Bob, that we would go to those people. We give billions of dollars to the Egyptians, we have the best relationship with Saudi Arabia--at least they’re in an out of the Crawford ranch. The king of Jordan is on TV more than I am. Why can’t we ask our so-called friends to help us alleviate the violence that’s taking place there? These people have been fighting each other for centuries. Who in the devil thinks that we know enough or we’re sophisticated enough to stop the civil war that exists there? And it could be--it could be, if we reached out to some of our European and other worldly friends, that they might assist us in bringing peace to the area. But it’s not going to be resolved at the end of a rifle.

SCHIEFFER: Well, I have to say, Mr. Chairman, what leads you to believe that some of our European friends, as you say, would jump in and want to help us? They've been willing to hold our coat up until this point in this conflict, but they don’t seem very interested in getting involved here. And they are some of the ones that are saying we should get out of there.

Rep. RANGEL: Well, I didn’t say that they would jump in. I would think that most peace-loving people would want peace in this particular area. But the arrogance that was had and the fact that we’ve cut off all of our friends around the world--you know, when we were first hit with 911, everybody from all over wanted to be of assistance, and we tried to pull off that this is an extension of 911. And this isn’t just an American or Jewish problem, this is a problem for the whole world, and we should have enough credibility left, I hope, to bring in world leaders and see what we can come up with. But it’s not going to be resolved by surges.

SCHIEFFER: Let's talk about what's going to happen next on Capitol Hill. The president vetoed the bill that the Congress sent to him, a bill that called for a timetable for withdrawal. What kind of bill are you going to send back to the president, Mr. Chairman? Will it be a bill that just authorizes funding? Will it have some sort of conditions attached to it? What, in your judgment, is a realistic idea of what the--what the next bill is going to look like?

Rep. RANGEL: Well, our leadership had hoped that, meeting with the president, that we could see some compromise. But as long as the president refuses to do anything except stay the course, then we, in the House, representing the people of the United States of America, which is reflected at the polls and it’s also reflected in the last election, would constantly send a message to the president that we want him to come up with some idea to withdraw the troops. We hope that he would be sophisticated enough to come up with an international solution, but the people that elected us said, 'Bring our troops home. Enough is enough.' There is no plan. There is no victory in sight. It’s a civil war, and we don’t have the wherewithal to resolve that major problem.
SCHIEFFER: Well, do you think that the Congress will send back to the president a bill that has some conditions on it? What about that the Iraqis have to meet these benchmarks that are being talked about if they’re to get the aid? Will you have something like that in the bill or will it just be a bill that calls for to continue funding the war.

Rep. RANGEL: It would be ridiculous to think that we’re going to just drop this fight. This is not our fight. This is the American people’s fight. They asked us to send a message to the president. So he has the authority, he is the commander in chief. But we have the oversight responsibility, and we’ve got to tell the president, we’ve got to shake that White House until the people of the United States are heard.

SCHIEFFER: So you’re going to have some kind of….

Rep. RANGEL: The troops are going over there three and four times–sure, we’re going to have some restrictions on the money.

SCHIEFFER: You’re going to have some kind of restrictions on the money, some kind of conditions. Do you think they will be aimed at the Iraqis, or will it just be to continue to put another timetable for withdrawal in there?

Rep. RANGEL: We have no authority over the Iraqis. We have all of the authority over the president of the United States, and it’s going to restrict the United States’ participation. Whatever the Iraqis want to do with their Middle Eastern friends, we should there be there to help them. But we should not be involved and be in harm’s way for a mission that we have no clue as how it’s going to end.

SCHIEFFER: Let me switch to George Tenet, the former CIA director whose book came out this week. Back–some time back, he got the Medal of Freedom. I believe you were quoted somewhere along the way as saying that rather than the Medal of Freedom, he should be looked at by the Justice Department. What do you think about these allegations that he’s making now that he was misunderstood when he said it was a slam dunk, that the administration had already made up its mind to go to war? Does he have credibility with you, Mr. Chairman?

Rep. RANGEL: No, I don’t think he has credibility with anyone in the United States. For him to have had the information that he had and to tell the president that it was a slam dunk for the president to mislead the people in the United States in believing that there was weapons of mass destruction, that Saddam Hussein was involved in the attack in 9/11, that he was part of al-Qaeda, and for him to have done what he did to my friend Colin Powell, to have him sitting there in the United Nations, proclaiming the connection between the two, knowing in his heart that the evidence did not go in that direction, and to accept a medal and then to put out a book–God knows what he got in terms of an advance–to me, this warrants an investigation.

SCHIEFFER: All right.
Rep. RANGEL: It is unfair to do something like that to the American people.

SCHIEFFER: Mr. Chairman, we have to stop there, but thank you so much, and I certainly got your point.

Rep. RANGEL: Thank you, Bob.

SCHIEFFER: Back in a minute.

(Announcements)

SCHIEFFER: Finally today, what did we learn from these recent Democratic and Republican debates? Not much, that I could tell, except that you can’t hold a debate among nine or 10 people. What we saw were more like movie trailers than debates, previews of coming attractions, and clearly, these are coming attractions that will need a lot of editing.

There is worse to come, though. With more and more states moving their primaries to late January and early February--25 or so, including Florida, Texas and California at last count--we are now heading toward what will amount to a national primary, in which the nominees of both parties could be decided eight months before Election Day. And what is wrong with that? Well, since candidates can’t travel to all those states at once, they’ll have to campaign almost exclusively with TV commercials, which will drive the costs even higher and give the big money contributors more influence than ever. And if the nominees are decided early, what will they do with eight months on their hands? Well, I’ll go out on a limb here and predict they’ll spend every waking moment raising money to buy more commercials.

Here is an alternative thought. Once we know who the nominees are, why don’t the parties just certify them immediately and let them begin a series of debates with each other? Real debates. Forget the nominating conventions. And then, as Election Day nears, take the suggestion that was once made to John Kennedy by Barry Goldwater. The nominees get on the same airplane and tour the country making joint appearances. Is that farfetched? No question. But wouldn’t we all be better served? And I mean all of us and the candidates.

That’s it for me. We’ll see you next week right here on FACE THE NATION.