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TELEVISION PROGRAM TO "CBS NEWS' FACE THE NATION."



## **September 26, 2010 Transcript**

GUESTS: MARCO RUBIO  
R-Florida, Candidate for U.S. Senate

KEN BUCK  
R-Colorado, Candidate for U.S. Senate

SAL RUSSO  
Chief Strategist, Tea Party Express

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## TRANSCRIPT

BOB SCHIEFFER: Today on FACE THE NATION, reading the tea leaves. What's the Tea Party all about, and what do its members really want?

At first Democrats and Republicans brushed it off, but no more. Not after Tea Party candidates toppled establishment Republicans in Alaska, Delaware, Florida, Colorado, Nevada, Kentucky and Utah. But what exactly does this leaderless movement aim to do? What are its goals? Is it a greater threat to Republicans or Democrats? We'll talk to two of its surprise successes--Marco Rubio, who won the Republican Senate nomination in Florida and Ken Buck, the upset winner in Colorado's Republican Senate primary.

Then we'll talk with veteran political organizer and fundraiser Sal Russo, who some are calling the Karl Rove of Tea Party politics.

Then I'll have a final word on the awful cost of war.

But first, what's a Tea Party on FACE THE NATION.

ANNOUNCER: FACE THE NATION with CBS News chief Washington correspondent Bob Schieffer. And now from CBS News in Washington, Bob Schieffer.

BOB SCHIEFFER: Good morning again and welcome to FACE THE NATION. We're going straight to Miami and Marco Rubio, the Republican nominee for Senate in Florida. Mister Rubio, thanks for coming. Most people who fly-- follow politics know you took on Florida's popular incumbent Republican Governor Charlie Crist in the primary for the Republican Senate nomination. Before it was over he had left the party as you went up in the polls. He's now running as an independent. Let me just ask you first, do you think of yourself as a Tea Party candidate?

MARCO RUBIO (R-Florida/Candidate for U.S. Senate): Well, first, good morning and thank you for having me on your program. I don't think anybody can make that claim about themselves because to do that you'd have to-- you'd have a fundamental misunderstanding of what the Tea Party movement is. I think the biggest mistake being made by those who follow politics is they're trying to understand what's happening across our country through a traditional political lens, you know how you would view the Republican Party or the Democrat Party. The Tea Party movement is an expression of what I think is a mainstream widespread sentiment in America that Washington is broken, that both parties are to blame, and that people want to elect folks that are going to go to Washington, DC, number one and do what they say they're going to do primarily stand up for the agenda that's coming from there and offer some clear alternatives that embrace the things that make America exceptional. So for example, Americans believe in the free enterprise system. They understand that it makes us the most prosperous people in human history. And they don't want to want-- they don't want to walk away from it.

BOB SCHIEFFER (overlapping): All--

MARCO RUBIO: And so, I think the widespread sentiment is that we don't want to change America. We want to fix the things that are wrong in America. And the Tea Party movement is an expression of that sentiment.

BOB SCHIEFFER: All right. Well what is it? Because you have said, over and over, you're coming here to challenge Republicans and Democrats. What in your view have the Republicans done wrong?

MARCO RUBIO: Well, remember the Republicans had a majority in Washington for the better part of ten to twelve years. And they didn't fulfill some of the promises they had made in '94, when they were elected. You know things like a balance budget amendment, things like banning earmarks, things like term limits. These are fundamental things among others that people are looking for from Washington. If you say you're going to do that and you get elected then do it. There's got to be some level of accountability. And unfortunately, politics today are full of people that think they can say or do anything because once they get elected they think they'll raise so much money they can make you forget.

BOB SCHIEFFER: Well, you come from a state and are running in a state where a lot of folks are on social security. Do you believe that it's time to privatize social security? Has it outrun its usefulness?

MARCO RUBIO: No. I do not believe it should be privatized. And I don't believe it's outlived its usefulness. On the contrary, I think social security it's an extremely important program and it should be preserved and saved. I view full social security through the eyes of-- of two people-- my four children and my mom. My mom is a beneficiary of social security. She turns eighty this year. It is her primary source of income. Without its existence her life would be very hard and very difficult. I to think social security faces some long-term challenges that need to be confronted because I want to see three things happen. Number one, I don't want to see any benefit reductions or changes for current retirees or people close to retirement. And at number two, I want to see social security survive for me, my generation and my children's generation as well. And, number three, I want to ensure that the long-term problems in social security don't bankrupt our country.

BOB SCHIEFFER: Well, what do you do to keep it from bankrupting the country, because you're saying-- you seem-- seem like you want to keep it just like it is but-- but-- you want to fix it. What is it--

MARCO RUBIO (overlapping): Well--

BOB SCHIEFFER: --that you do?

MARCO RUBIO: No, Bob. I mean, I-- what I-- I say we want to keep it how it is for current beneficiaries because these are folks that have paid into the system given certain assurances of what the system is going to look like. Younger workers like myself, people thirty-nine years of age like I am, we're going to have to accept that there's going to be some changes to social security. And perhaps they're going to have to change the way the benefit is indexed. Perhaps we're going to have to continue to-- to allow the retirement age to fluctuate as it has been doing since the early 1980s. But again, that's for younger workers like myself, who have twenty or thirty years to prepare for this. People that are on the system now or let's say ten years from retirement or twelve years from retirement, these folks can't all of a sudden make a change to adjust for it. So I think we have to start talking honestly about the long-term challenges facing a very important program social security because we want to save it. It's important and we want to preserve it.

BOB SCHIEFFER: A lot of the Tea Party folk around the country talk about Arizona's new immigration law. And they'd like to see that modeled in-- in every state. This is the law, of course, that allows the police officers if they stop someone for another offense to check their citizenship.

MARCO RUBIO: Yeah.

BOB SCHIEFFER: I think when you first heard about this law passing, you said it would create a police state. What's your take on-- on the immigration laws? Should we have something like the Arizona law?

MARCO RUBIO: Well, three things. Number one, Arizona legislature actually has changed the law after it first passed and prohibited things like stopping people because of ethnic profiling. And I think that was a positive change. Number two, I think we need to recognize that states like Arizona, California, Texas and a few others-- New Mexico are in a very unique situation. Arizona has a huge open border basically with a country in Mexico that has an all-out drug war. And Arizona is not seeing the immigration challenges of that but the security challenges of that. The public safety challenges of that. So we have to understand why Arizona did this. And they have a Tenth Amendment right to have done it. I've continued to say that the Arizona law should not be a model for the rest of the country. It should be a wake-up call to the federal government to once and for all take the issue of immigration seriously, particularly things like border security and the need for E-Verify system.

BOB SCHIEFFER: O--

MARCO RUBIO: If the federal government had been doing its job on immigration there never would have been an Arizona law.

BOB SCHIEFFER: Let me ask you this finally. You preach fiscal responsibility but your opponents say you don't live it. They say you've been deeply in debt for much of your life. They say you have sometimes put your own personal expenses on your Republican Party credit card. How do you answer those critics?

MARCO RUBIO: They're false. The Republican Party of Florida has never paid for my personal expenses. And as far as in debt is concerned-- you know what they call debt--a mortgage. Yes, I bought a home using a mortgage. I bought two homes one here and one in Tallahassee using a mortgage. The vast majority of Americans watching this program would be shocked to learn that buying a home with a mortgage is somehow irresponsible. And the o-- and the other debt that I have is a student loan. My parents worked very hard but they couldn't save enough money to send me to law school. So I had borrowed money and I paid my student loans. But it provided me my education. I think my opponents say that because they're wrong on the ideas. They have absolutely no ideas on the critic issues facing our country, so they want to make personal attacks against me the centerpiece of their campaign. But this election is too important, because at stake is the very identity of our country. Are we going to remain exceptional or are we going to conti-- or are-- or we going to become like everybody else? Americans want to remain exceptional. And they're looking for candidates that will fight for that.

BOB SCHIEFFER: All right. Thank you very much, Mister Rubio, for those insights this morning.

MARCO RUBIO (overlapping): Thank you.

BOB SCHIEFFER: I hope we'll see you again. We're going to turn now to Ken Buck who is another Republican candidate for the Senate, who is backed by the Tea Party out in Colorado. He joins us from our studio in New York. Mister Buck, you just heard Marco Rubio. You-- your opponents say that you are an extremist. Are you?

KEN BUCK (R-Colorado/Candidate for U.S. Senate): No. Plain and simple, no.

BOB SCHIEFFER: Why?

KEN BUCK: Well, you know-- if-- if being thirteen trillion dollars in debt. If-- if having a hundred trillion dollars of unfunded liabilities, if-- if running a vehicle off the cliff is-- is extreme then they're the extremists. I'm-- I'm the person, I'm the candidate that wants to get away from that, and is working very hard with the citizens of Colorado to make sure we do get away from that.

BOB SCHIEFFER: What would you do if you are elected and you come to Washington? What's the first thing you would do to get out-of-control spending under control?

KEN BUCK: I-- I-- I think we need to look at some sort of constitutional balanced budget amendment or-- or spending limit in-- and some formula that keeps spending under control. We are-- we are clearly heading off a cliff. The Tea Party movement, the-- the grassroots movement in Colorado, recognizes that Republicans are every bit as much to blame for where we are right now as Democrats. But we have to find some discipline from outside of-- of Washington DC, and impose it on our Congress and-- and executive branch.

BOB SCHIEFFER: You heard last week when Republicans here in Washington proposed a series of tax cuts from the wealthiest Americans to some in the lowest-income brackets. Democrats say that if you put those wealthy Americans--add them on to the tax cuts that they too are proposing, which are going to increase the federal deficit, that it would just send it through the roof. How do you come down on those tax cuts? Are the tax cuts worth it for what-- for the-- the deficit spending it's going to cause?

KEN BUCK: Well, it's interesting language. I don't see it as tax cuts. They talk about extending the Bush tax cuts. We have a tax rate right now. Increasing that tax rate to me is a tax increase. Also, I think you have to look at where do families cut, if we don't maintain our tax rates where they are right now? What do families have to give up in order to pay for the-- the government spending, the-- the overspending that's going on in-- in the federal government? I come down on the side of-- of low taxes because I think it-- it's going to generate jobs in this economy.

BOB SCHIEFFER: So would you agree if there were no other alternative to extend the tax cuts for the lower-income Americans if the bill did not include tax cuts for the upper-income Americans?

KEN BUCK: I think we have to extend tax cuts for all. And I'm going to work towards that. And obviously, any tax cuts that we or any-- maintaining our current tax rates for any group is better than-- than nothing but I'm in favor of maintaining our-- our current tax rates for all Americans.

BOB SCHIEFFER: Mister Buck, you took some fairly absolutist positions in the primary on some social issues. On abortion, for example, you said you would never vote to confirm a pro-abortion candidate to any federal position. Do you still hold to that?

KEN BUCK: Well, what I said was that I wouldn't-- and I-- and I won't use abortion as a litmus test. But if someone is pro-abortion not just pro-choice not just believing that-- that abortion should be rare, limited, but if someone is promoting abortion, I think that goes beyond the pale, goes outside the boundaries of-- of normal politics. And-- and I will not support a candidate--

BOB SCHIEFFER (overlapping): But--

KEN BUCK: --that is pro-abortion.

BOB SCHIEFFER: I-- I don't understand that. You say you won't support a candidate who is pro-abortion but you won't use that as a litmus test. That is a lismus-- litmus test is it not.

KEN BUCK: I won't-- I won't use abortion as a litmus test with a pro-choice individual. Someone that is an activist on the abortion issue, I think goes outside the pale and I cannot support an activist on the abortion issue.

BOB SCHIEFFER: You also said at one point that you would support a proposed law out there in Colorado that would have banned some forms of birth control, some birth control pills. Do you still hold to that?

KEN BUCK: I have never said that, no. I have said that there is an amendment-- there is a state amendment on personhood. I have said that I am in favor of personhood as a concept. I am not taking a position on any of the state amendments. And I have said over and over again and that has been reported over and over again that I am not in favor of banning any common forms of birth control in-- in Colorado, or in the United States.

BOB SCHIEFFER: All right. So we've cleared that one up. Let me ask you about something else I read in the papers out there. That at one point you were in favor of turning veterans' hospitals over to people in the private sector to run. Is-- is that-- is that what you said?

KEN BUCK: You're-- you're getting the Democrat speaking points here.

BOB SCHIEFFER (overlapping): Well, these came--

KEN BUCK: I appreciate actually the opportunity--

BOB SCHIEFFER: --these cut-- these come from newspaper clippings, but I-- I want to hear your side of it. Obviously, that's why I asked.

KEN BUCK: Sure. What I said, I was asked a question about the Veterans Administration. I said if we could improve the quality and care for veterans by outsourcing some of the functions such as running a Veterans Administration hospital, I would be in favor of doing that. And I think that it is important. All-- also as part of that answer, I-- I said that I think that we'd have to look at the cost and the cost can't come out of the veterans' pockets. The cost would have to come out of-- of the government, if there was a cost involved in-- in that outsourcing. But I think that the private sector runs operations like hospitals and-- and other operations better than the government. If we can reduce the deficit and-- and provide better quality of care for our veterans, I'm in favor of doing things like that.

BOB SCHIEFFER: What do you have in common with these other Tea Party candidates across the country like Christine O'Donnell in Delaware, maybe the people running in some of these other races like Marco Rubio? Do you see yourself as part of a national party, the Tea Party?

KEN BUCK: I see myself as part of a-- a group of-- of candidates who have been elected in this country because of-- of frustration with what's happening in Washington, DC. I think there are similarities, there are some differences across the country. The-- the one thing that we have in common is a firm belief that the Constitution should govern our-- our role in Washington, DC. The-- we recognize the frustration for both what the Republican Party and the Democrat Party have been doing in Washington, DC. And we're going there not to be part of the establishment. Not to be part of the-- what we consider the-- the problem in Washington, DC. But to get there and to reduce spending and to promote ideas like a balanced budget amendment and-- and term limits and ideas that have been talked about for a while in DC. They have been sold to voters in-- in various states as positive ideas but they haven't really been worked on very hard in Washington, DC.

BOB SCHIEFFER: All right. Well, Mister Buck, thank you so much for joining us this morning. Very-- very enlightening to get your positions out there.

We'll be back in a minute to talk with one of the leadist-- the leading strategists in this movement.

(ANNOUNCEMENTS)

BOB SCHIEFFER: And we're back now with Sal Russo who is the chief strategist for a group called the Tea Party Express. He is in Sacramento this morning. Mister Russo, thank you so much. Your organization, it turns out, is the single biggest supporter of Tea Party candidates. You raised, by my figures here 5.2 million dollars. You have funneled a lot of that money to these various candidates around the country. Here's just a couple of examples, a million dollars, I believe to Sharron Angle who's running against Harry Read in Nevada; three hundred and fifty thousand to Scott Brown, who was elected to the Senate in Massachusetts; six hundred thousand dollars to Joe Miller who got the nomination in Alaska; and two hundred and fifty thousand to Christine O'Donnell, the woman who pulled that upset in Delaware. Let me just ask you first, where do you get this money?

SAL RUSSO (Chief Strategist, Tea Party Express): Well, the Tea Party Express is a federal political action committee. So we don't have a 501(c) (3), or a 527, or any of these other devices, so all of our money has to come from individuals. By a law, we can't take corporate donations and our contributions are limited to less than five thousand dollars. So we have about a half million members around the country and they contribute, I think, about an average of sixty-two dollars, sixty-three dollars per person. So we're the purest form of democracy, I think, in the Tea Party movement, in the sense that when we want to do something we don't have any money to start with. We have to send an e-mail out to our people and say, hey, we think Sharron Angle's going to be a great candidate in Nevada. Do you want to get behind her?

BOB SCHIEFFER: All right.

SAL RUSSO: And here's what we want to do to get on television. And then, they have to send us money to finance it. So we're very responsive to what our people want. And if we have good ideas, then they respond by contributing and we're able to go out and help these campaigns of these good Tea Party you know--

BOB SCHIEFFER (overlapping): All right.

SAL RUSSO: --type candidates that have been winning consistently throughout the primary season.

BOB SCHIEFFER: Last week on this broadcast, former President Clinton said that he understood the anger of the Tea Party, but he said the part that bothered him was that there were some very rich folks back there in the shadows who are bank-rolling this for their own partisan reasons. So are you telling me that you don't get any donation larger than five thousand dollars? It-- no way, no how somebody could give your organization more than that, one single person?

SAL RUSSO: That's a-- yeah, that's absolutely correct. I mean, you know, one of the things we've had to face from the beginning is, you know, people have tried to demonize the Tea Party movement with a lot of false accusations is-- as-- as you know, first it was we were all Astroturf, that somebody was paying everybody to turn out. Then we're a bunch of crackpots and nuts. Then we're a bunch of racists. And this movement keeps growing, because it grows on the fundamental principle that unites all the Tea Party Movements, and that is a belief that the-- that the federal government has become too big, too intrusive, with the accompanying higher taxes, onerous regulations, higher deficits and a skyrocketing national-- national debt. That is the only issue that we have at the Tea Party Express.

BOB SCHIEFFER (overlapping): Ah--

SAL RUSSO: Some of the other Tea Party groups have gotten off on to foreign policy issues or social issues or other things, but the Tea Party Express has been laser focused only on the one fundamental economic issue and that's the basis for which we choose our candidates.

BOB SCHIEFFER: Let me ask you this, some people in the Republican Party say that the Tea Party may actually be helping the Democrats, because it may be getting some people into the general election here that would be easier to beat than some of the establishment Republicans who were running against Democrats. And-- and, this race in Delaware is one they point to, Christine O'Donnell, she is now fifteen points down to the Democratic candidate in that race. Had Mike Castle, the former governor up there and congressman gotten that nomination, everybody thought he was an overwhelming favorite to win. How do you respond to that, because you gave money to Christine O'Donnell?

SAL RUSSO: Yes. We're quite proud to do that. I guess what I would say is if you look back to February of 2009, which is really the beginning of the Tea Party movement with Rick Santelli's rant. People were saying the Republican Party was going the way of the Whigs. The Democrats had a big generic advantage in the-- in the ballot. And they were saying that the Democrats were going to break the historic trend for-- for in-parties, and that Democrats were actually going to win House and Senate seats in 2010. Well, look what's happened, I mean, we've turned the political system on its head. And what's done that is that millions of Americans, who, many of them have been sitting out of the political process, have gotten involved in the campaigns. So we're now, winning Senate seats and the House seats that people didn't even think were possible eighteen months ago. So I think the Tea Party Movement has been a big boost for conservative candidates-- economically conservative candidates. And sometimes that may not help Republicans and sometimes it does. But, I think what people want to do is send a message



to Washington, that we have to get off this fiscal insanity merry-go-round that just keeps going round and round and round, whether Republicans or Democrats are in control.

BOB SCHIEFFER (overlapping): What--

SAL RUSSO: And so, in addition-- in addition to finding strong conservatives on the economic issues, the other trait we've looked for in all of our candidates is a little bit of independence, a willingness to stand up and say this emperor has no clothes. And so, if you look at our candidates, they're all pretty independent (INDISTINCT). And so-- and that's what we need. And it reminds me back of, you know, the 1980 campaign when, as you know, the Carter White House was rejoicing that they got Ronald Reagan who'd be so easy to-- to beat. That were-- the establishment of Republicans, many of them, even supported John Anderson as an independent Republican to run against Reagan. Not only did Reagan win a majority a-- a-- against Carter and Anderson, but we elected twelve new Republican senators and those twelve senators provided crucial votes for the Reagan economic policies for the next six years so--

BOB SCHIEFFER (overlapping): We-- we--

SAL RUSSO: --I see-- I think we're going to have a repeat of that which is going to be, actually it'll-- ill-- in-- inevitably benefit Republicans but hopefully because the Republicans will get the message that they've got to change the culture of Washington.

BOB SCHIEFFER: Fifteen seconds left. Do you think Republicans will take the House and the Senate, or just the House or neither?

SAL RUSSO: You know, we still have our ways to go but I think we're going to have tremendous gains, and more importantly, the kinds of people that elect, that we're electing are going to be willing to stand up for a-- for more responsible fiscal policy in Washington.

BOB SCHIEFFER: All right. Thank you, Mister Russo, very much for that.

SAL RUSSO: Yeah.

BOB SCHIEFFER: And we'll be back in a moment with some final thoughts.

(ANNOUNCEMENTS)

BOB SCHIEFFER: Finally today, I was in an airport lounge the other day when I saw a woman across the way. Why I kept staring at her, I don't know. Maybe it was just she seemed so sad. And then I understood. As I looked away then hoping she had not seen me stare because in her lap was an American Flag, neatly folded into a triangle and placed in a clear plastic case, a flag folded the way it always is when it is given to a soldier's family as the soldier's coffin is lowered into a grave. I couldn't help but wonder what memories that flag evoked as she held it there. Did it remind her of the first time she had seen her child in the delivery room, or was it the memory of seeing him go off to school that first day, or when he brought home the prize from the science fair, or maybe made the touchdown? Or gave her the first valentine when he wrote out, "Mommy, I love you." I kept thinking all the talk in Washington about the high cost of defense and how we have to cut the Pentagon budget before it bankrupts the country. But as I watched that woman, budget seemed to be such a small part of all of it. No, the real cost of war is not what we pay in dollars and cents. The real cost is what we take from a mother who is left with just a memory and a neatly-folded flag in a clear plastic case.

Back in a minute.

(ANNOUNCEMENTS)

BOB SCHIEFFER: And we'll see you next week, right here on FACE THE NATION.