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



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TRANSCRIPT

BOB SCHIEFFER: Today on FACE THE NATION, the lame-duck walks. Congress passes the major tax cut and repeals Don't Ask, Don't Tell for the military. But what about the START treaty and where do we go from here in Afghanistan?

We've been in Afghanistan nine years now. Is there any end in sight?

And then there's the nuclear START treaty. Every living former secretary of state favors it. So what's the hold-up? We'll talk to the Chairman of the Senate Armed Services Committee, Carl Levin, and key Republican Senator Lindsey Graham.

Then we'll bring in Republican Senator Jeff Sessions and Democratic Senator Amy Klobuchar for a round table on what to expect from the new Congress.

I'll have a final word on the holidays and why they seem to get here faster and faster.

But first Congress and how it finally did something on FACE THE NATION.

ANNOUNCER: FACE THE NATION with CBS News Chief Washington Correspondent Bob Schieffer. And now from Washington, Bob Schieffer.

BOB SCHIEFFER: And good morning again. We start with Senator Levin and Senator Graham. They're both in the studio with us this morning. Gentlemen, welcome and just because I like to say this, let's start with START. Every living former secretary of state, Democrat and Republican, says this should be ratified. This morning on another channel, Senator Biden or Vice President Biden said he believes that they have the support to ratify this. That means sixty-seven votes. I'm going to start with you, Senator Graham. Do you think the vice president is right? Do you think this is going to pass?

SENATOR LINDSEY GRAHAM (R-South Carolina/Armed Services Committee): I don't think in the lame-duck he's right. Secretary of State Rice said that there's a caveat here. The Bush Administration tried to delink START from missile defense and we've got a real confusing situation. The Russians have viewed the preamble to the START treaty as a binding commitment by us not to develop four stages of strategic missile defense. The administration told our NATO allies in Lisbon that we're going to consider the fourth stage but not deploy it. So I'm not going to vote for START until I hear from the Russians that they understand we can develop four stages of missile defense and if we do, they won't withdraw from the treaty. That amendment that Senator McCain offered to take the controversial language out of the preamble was defeated, but forty senators support the idea that preamble has to be changed. Senator Levin says if you take that language out, it distorts the treaty. So in substance, we're a long way from there and we've had one vote on the START treaty in this lame-duck. You say the lame-duck walks, I think it's just been a hodgepodge of special interest politics. We still haven't funded the government. We've had six versions of the DREAM Act. To pass Don't Ask, Don't Tell we tried to do 1.2 trillion dollar omnibus bill that blew up. So there's been no real serious debate on START. With fifty amendments left, I don't think you can have a serious debate between now and January 4th, given the process and the substance, uh-- there's a real hurdle there.

BOB SCHIEFFER: Uh-- so I take it you're not going to vote for it--

SENATOR LINDSEY GRAHAM: I--

BOB SCHIEFFER: --if you're not going to vote for it, it takes sixty-seven votes. I think that's going to make--

SENATOR LINDSEY GRAHAM: Here's what I'm-- here's what I'm saying that if you really want to have a chance of passing START, you better start over and do it in the next Congress because this lame-duck has been poisoned. The idea that you can have a meaningful debate on the START treaty when you've had one amendment after weeks of special interest politics and you have unresolved the difference between the Russians' view of missile defense and ours makes it a-- a hurdle you can't overcome in the lame-duck. Maybe next year we can straighten things out and have a chance to do it.

BOB SCHIEFFER: Well, Senator Levin, I mean, I think there's some news here because I think a lot of people thought Senator Graham might be one of the Republicans who decided in the end to vote for this. Uh-- do you think he's right? Do you think the votes are not there now?

SENATOR CARL LEVIN (D-Michigan/Chairman, Armed Services Committee): Well, we-- we hope--

BOB SCHIEFFER: --especially after hearing what he just said.

SENATOR CARL LEVIN: Well, we hope the votes are there in-- including votes of many Republicans, the ranking Republican on the foreign relations committee. Senator Lugar is a strong supporter. He has many people, particularly on foreign relations who are Republicans, who are strong supporters. The most important thing here is that our top military leadership strongly support the START treaty and say there is no restrictions, no limitations whatsoever on missile defense. So to try to create this kind of a conflict where none exists, not only did none exists in reality but none exists in the minds and assessments of the peop-- of our commanders who run our missile defense system, our commanders who run our nuclear system. Our top military leader, Admiral Mullen, the chairman of the Joint Chiefs of Staff, says there is no limitation on missile defense. And so that it seems to me is a straw man argument. The Russians have on previous treaty said that things concern them. They've laid linkages which we don't accept in previous treaties. They have not stepped out of previous treaties. We have stepped out of previous treaties--

BOB SCHIEFFER: Well--

SENATOR CARL LEVIN: --that they haven't.

BOB SCHIEFFER: --but what about this argument that we need to do it now? I mean, Senator Graham said let's just do this next year. I mean, this thing has been lingering there for a long time. Maybe the senate should have voted on it or didn't vo-- or-- or not, but it's-- it's been there for a while. It's been a while since the President signed it. What does it hurt to let it go over to next year?

SENATOR CARL LEVIN: Well, previous treaties like START treaties have not had longer debates than the two weeks which we've devoted to this treaty. This is not an unusually small length of time. It's been in front of the Foreign Relations Committee for months. We've had I don't know how many hundreds of questions which have been fully answered. So this has been

on the senate calendar. People can study this and if there're serious amendments that are being offered--fine, we can dispose them. We've got many, many days between now and the end of the year. It's an important treaty and it should not be side tracked.

BOB SCHIEFFER: But is it going to damage national security (INDISTINCT).

SENATOR CARL LEVIN: It'll damage national security not just because I say so. I'm-- I maybe chairman of the Armed Services Committee but-- but my view is-- is not nearly as important as every single former secretary of state, every single national security advisor, Republican and Democratic, our current military leadership say it is essential to national security that we pass the START treaty.

BOB SCHIEFFER: All right. Senator Graham, do you want to respond--

SENATOR LINDSEY GRAHAM (overlapping): I think what damages--

BOB SCHIEFFER (overlapping): --in Afghanistan.

SENATOR LINDSEY GRAHAM (overlapping): --our national security is to sign a treaty where the parties have a different view of what you mean. The Russian foreign minister said if we build up our strategic missile defense systems in quality or in numbers that they will consider that a breach of the treaty. I'm going to write a letter to the Russians and ask them specifically, does the preamble language that Senator McCain tried to remove, do you consider that a limitation on the United States' ability to develop four stages of strategic missile defense because we're threatened by Iran, we're threatened by North Korea?

What good is it to sign a treaty and try to defend yourself and the party on the other side withdraws? You want to create chaos in the world, sign a treaty where everybody thinks the world is safer and down the road they withdraw because we intend to do something they don't want us to do. I need to know the answer to that. So it is, you know, our military leaders are not who I'm asking to give me the Russian view. I want the Russians to tell me their view of our ability to develop strategic missile defense. And we can wait until next year.

The last two weeks have been an absolutely excruciating exercise--Don't Ask, Don't Tell--a controversial topic. Some say the civil rights issue of our generation, others say battlefield effectiveness was passed in the lame-duck session without one amendment being offered. The DREAM Act we've had two votes on the DREAM Act. Controversial immigration, there was no efforts to find a common ground there, passed without the ability to amend to try to make Republicans look bad with Hispanics.

We tried to fund the government by clean CR but we took a 1.2 trillion dollar omnibus bill with six thousand earmarks and it failed yesterday. We still haven't funded the government. We haven't had a serious debate on START. We've been fighting a multiple front war to try to do every special interest group's bidding in the lame-duck session that's not a way to ratify a treaty that has importance to the country.

BOB SCHIEFFER: Let's-- let's talk about Afghanistan. The report came out, the President put out the report. They cited progress but, you know, it said, it's really fragile. Some people say this is just a sugarcoating of a policy that isn't working, Senator Levin. How did you view this assessment that the administration put out?

SENATOR CARL LEVIN: I think it was a very sober assessment. It's very objective assessment. It showed progress because we are making progress particularly militarily on the ground. Not only against the Taliban, with our Afghan-- with the Afghan troops now weighing in more and more but also against al Qaeda which has clearly gone underground. The real problem here is from Pakistan where we're trying to do a lot more. That assessment was made because Pakistan provides havens for the people who are coming--

BOB SCHIEFFER: But what are we going to do about Pakistan? I mean here this week reports that the Pakistan intelligence service ousted our top CIA guy in Pakistan. I mean are they with us or against us and why?

SENATOR CARL LEVIN: The answer is yes.

BOB SCHIEFFER: They're with us.

SENATOR CARL LEVIN (overlapping): No, you said with us or against us.

BOB SCHIEFFER (overlapping): Yeah.

SENATOR LINDSEY GRAHAM (overlapping): Yeah, he is right.

SENATOR CARL LEVIN: The answer is yes.

SENATOR LINDSEY GRAHAM (overlapping): He is right.

SENATOR CARL LEVIN: They're-- they're-- they're generally with us in a-- in a lot of ways and some of these terrorist groups are-- are the ones that are going to hurt them not just hurt us. But they are also buying what they consider to be peace with some of these terrorist groups who are not attacking them but crossing the border and attacking the Afghans and us. So we're going to continue to put pressure on the Pakistanis. They cannot have it both ways. They've had it both ways too long.

BOB SCHIEFFER: Polls show that people are getting very impatient about this. They don't think it's worth the effort, Senator Graham.

SENATOR LINDSEY GRAHAM: Well, to those who look at polls when it comes to war do so at your own peril. I want to compliment the administration. I think our-- the new policy in Afghanistan is bearing fruit on the security front. I want to compliment the President for focusing on 2014 as a transition date.

We can start removing troops next summer because of better security. But Carl is right. The two Achilles heels of Afghanistan are poor governance. On the corruption front, we're stalled. The safe havens in Pakistan still exist but the Pakistanis are doing better than they have in the past. So I do believe that we're on the right track to provide security and after security comes better governance and a better trained Afghan army and police force is within sight. It's going to take patience.

I will stand with the President, and the Pakistanis will stop double dealing when they know we're not going to let Afghanistan go back into the abyss. So I would like an enduring relationship with Afghanistan. We are to look at two air bases being there in perpetuity with a footprint of air

power and Special Forces to let the Afghans and the Pakistanis know the Taliban will never come back. That's what has got Pakistan worried and we're beginning to turn the tide.

BOB SCHIEFFER: All right. Well, I want to thank both of you for being with us this morning. We're going to broaden the round table with a couple of more Senators when we come back in one minute.

(ANNOUNCEMENTS)

BOB SCHIEFFER: And we're back now. We-- Senator Graham is sticking around. Senator Levin had to leave for a previous engagement.

SENATOR LINDSEY GRAHAM (overlapping): I ran him off.

BOB SCHIEFFER: --but we are joined by Senator Amy Klobuchar, Democrat from Minnesota; Republican Senator Jeff Sessions from Alabama. I want to move the-- the discussion now to next year and what-- Senator Klobuchar if you had to make a prediction it seems to me that the-- the partisan divide is going to be wider. A lot of moderates got beat so it-- I think Republicans are going to be more conservative in the next Congress and Democrats more liberal. Do you think there's anyway the two sides are going to be able to get together?

SENATOR AMY KLOBUCHAR (D-Minnesota): Well I think it's a fair assessment in terms of that there are a number of conservative Republicans that have been added particularly in the House. But let me say this, I have some disagreement with my friend Lindsey here about the last month or so. We were able to get some significant things done. A significant tax bill, both Lindsey and I supported that that was done on a bipartisan basis. We're able to get Don't Ask, Don't Tell repealed with the support of eight Republicans yesterday. That was a major step. We are working on the START Treaty. There's a lot of work still to be done on that, but I predict we will eventually get that START Treaty passed. As you go through what we've done, these things have been done on a bipartisan basis. So I think there is hope for the future. And when you look at this last election what the American people really want, they want a laser focus on the economy and jobs. They want to see some reduction in spending and bringing this deficit down. And they want to see us working together. So any party or any person who decides to spend the next two years just tearing things apart and trying not to move America forward I think they do it at their own peril.

BOB SCHIEFFER: Senator Sessions you're going to be the ranking Republican now on the budget committee. What do you think the next Congress is going to be about? Do you join Senator Klobuchar in thinking there are some things you can actually work together on?

SENATOR JEFF SESSIONS (R-Alabama): There is, for example, Senator Klobuchar worked and supported the-- assessing the McCaskill Bill that would put in statutory language the budget numbers that caps limits on spending that and we will require two-third vote to break the budget. So that was a good step procedurally but fundamentally this election meant something very historic, huge House change. People were elected on a promise to change the direction that we're on. People see where we're heading. We're heading to Greece. We're heading to Ireland. And we're heading to California. That's the future our children and grandchildren see. American people love it and (AUDIO CUT).

BOB SCHIEFFER: Oh, something just happened here. I think it's done.

SENATOR JEFF SESSIONS: So that is where I see the difficulty. I think the House is going to submit a very lean, tight, tough budget. And the Senate is going to have a real difficult time accommodating the challenges that we face. I just have to say--

BOB SCHIEFFER: You know, the thing is we-- we-- both sides agree that we're facing this fiscal abyss here. And yet you did have this bipartisan tax bill pass. It is going to just add to the deficit. So how does that-- how do you justify that? Or how does that work?

SENATOR AMY KLOBUCHAR: No Bob, one thing that did happen that I didn't mention was this Bipartisan Debt Commission. And number of us were talking about this, you have on that commission, people as diverse as Senator Dick Durbin and Senator Coburn agreeing that we have to move forward to do something about our debt. We're not going to all agree at this table right now but we will -- we'll have to do, but I will say I think that's got to be in the mix looking at, say, even if you said it people making over a million dollars, if you bring their taxes to the Clinton levels when we were amazingly prosperous, you save in ten years nearly four hundred billion dollars on the deficit. You add that in with some of the things that Senator Sessions just spoke about with some spending limits and a cap, you keep social security solid. I don't agree with everything in that report. But there are some very good ideas about tax reform and other things. If we could move forward together and there is some leverage for this and that would be the debt-ceiling vote that we'll be taking in a few months that is going to force people to have to come together.

BOB SCHIEFFER: Well -- well Senator Graham, you did not give the glowing report on the lame-duck Congress.

SENATOR LINDSEY GRAHAM: No I think --

BOB SCHIEFFER: So what do you think is going to happen?

SENATOR LINDSEY GRAHAM: Well I think there have been, you know, getting the tax cuts extended was a tough deal that was good for America, but look how hard that was. The House is in revolt. People are pissed off in the House at the estate tax. That's going to carry over a bit but big government and big spending is on the run and retreat. And that's the reality. The Tea Party will turn on the Republicans as well as the Democrats but it's going to be a test of the Tea Party. They come up here in large numbers and bring a new energy. I applaud what they did but they got to help us solve problems. If we just sit here and talk about what can be done in theory and not actually do it, the Debt Commission is a document we ought to look at closely. There's a tax reform proposal there that is a flatter tax with very few deductions. If we don't adjust the age- - retirement age on social security and Medicare, we're -- we're just all talk. People in our income level, we're going to have to give up some of our benefits that have been promised because we just don't have enough money to do it all. So I'm ready, willing and able to make the hard decisions about age and means testing on part-d. Why the hell should the federal government be buying my prescription drugs? We're so far in debt we're never going to get out of it unless we look at each other around this table and say, "It is time to sacrifice." Now I am hopeful that the Debt Commission is a bipartisan document that will give us a way to put together a package to ask for sacrifice.

BOB SCHIEFFER: Do you think Senator Klobuchar that Democrats will be ready to make those hard decisions on means testing for social security or age. Social security is the easiest --

SENATOR LINDSEY GRAHAM: Yes.

BOB SCHIEFFER: --of all our problems to solve, but do you think that the Congress has the political will to do what it takes to do that?

SENATOR AMY KLOBUCHAR: I think we have to have that will. And I pointed out there are a number of Democrats including Senator Conrad, fourteen of us signed a letter saying, "Let's move forward with this work that needs to be done on the debt." At the same time not everyone agrees with everything in that report. I would say with social security looking at one of the proposals is to take right now the income cap where you get taxes at hundred and six thousand. You could put a -- a -- area where you don't get taxed up to say two hundred and fifty thousand and then put that tax back in. As Senator Graham mentioned there were some discussion in the report about reducing benefits for some of the upper-income people. You have the fact that-- they also looked at people that have really hard labor jobs that may be you should treat them better and treat them differently in the system. I think it's really worth looking at some of the ideas in that report. And -- and you know, Democrats have made a lot of tough decisions, if you look at the last two years. When President came in he inherited this debt that had grown and grown and grown over the Bush years. When Bill Clinton left office the last time that we had a surplus it was a Democratic President. So you have to look at the fact that Democrats have made some tough decisions in the past. They got us into a balanced budget. And we can make the tough decisions this time.

SENATOR JEFF SESSIONS: Well, Bob, Lindsey was there when the last budget was balanced. He was there with Newt Gingrich.

BOB SCHIEFFER: Yeah.

SENATOR JEFF SESSIONS: And there was blood politically on the floor. People slept in their offices. The government was shut down. Bill Clinton then claims credit for balancing the budget, but people living there could see that was the Congress that made that happened in many ways. Entitlements are -- are throwing off basically surpluses. Every bit of our debt fundamentally is overspending in the discretionary accounts. Yes the entitlements are going into deficit in the future big time. Huge challenges. But we had -- we cannot go to our social security recipients, our Medicare recipients and demand big cuts in what they are going to receive so Congress can continue to spend its discretionary money. And we've got to set an example. We've got to start in the Senate. We've got to reduce our budget. The President needs to reduce his. And the President is going to have to help us. We can't just-- he runs the executive branch. He should be able to tell us what can be reduced without substantially damaging our economy. And we--we -- Greece is having troubles, but they're going to be better for this. For New Jersey is having protests and objections, but they're going to be better for the difficult choices they're making. And we're not going to sink into the abyss if we reduce spending in America.

BOB SCHIEFFER: Let me just ask you, Charles Krauthammer called President Obama this week the new comeback kid. And he said Republicans are underestimating him. Do you think that's right? I mean, let's just talk some politics here.

SENATOR JEFF SESSIONS: Yeah.

BOB SCHIEFFER: Is-- is President Obama stronger now or weaker--

SENATOR JEFF SESSIONS: I think he is--

BOB SCHIEFFER: --now that he passed this tax bill.

SENATOR JEFF SESSIONS: I'm hopeful that he will propose what I think my colleagues mentioned. We need a growth economy. We need simpler, lower rates as far as possible. Le-- so we focused on growth. There's some hint that he might offer a pretty bold program in the state of the union. I hope he does. But he's got to help us. We're on the wrong path. We don't need to go thirty miles an hour, instead of sixty. We need to get on the right path. And he's going to have to make some change.

BOB SCHIEFFER: Do you see him moving more to the center, Senator Klobuchar?

SENATOR AMY KLOBUCHAR: I don't care if you call it left, right, center. I think what you've seen is a major focus on private sector jobs. I think that focus has been there. But the truth is when you ask people when the last year when Democrats would talk about jobs whether it was fair or not, they thought it meant government jobs. We need to talk about private sector jobs. The fact that he's meeting with the business community is a start. I think it's very positive. The focus on exports is going to be very important as we move forward, ninety-five percent of our potential customers outside of our borders. And as I've said on your show before, a competitive agenda for this country. I think that's what will bring people together whether they're right, left, or center as we compete in this increasingly go-- global economy that we put America first, that we believe in America. And that means education reform. And that means competitive reform.

SENATOR LINDSAY GRAHAM: I like that.

BOB SCHIEFFER: I'll give Lindsay-- Senator Graham the last word here.

SENATOR LINDSAY GRAHAM: I think the President si-- signing the tax bill and changing his tone instead of whining about it and embracing it. If he would embrace a flatter tax and (INDISTINCT) reform, but in this with one thought. The President's more popular than the Congress in our country now. We're at thirteen percent in the eyes of the American people. We have to ask ourselves, how does that happen? And who are the thirteen percent and what do they like? If we don't recognize that about ourselves and get this body in better standing with the American people, nothing is possible. I'm an optimist. I think we can thing-- change things, but it's going to take sacrifice and political commitment I haven't seen in a long time.

BOB SCHIEFFER: All right. Well, I want to thank all of you on that note. And the best of the holiday season to all of you.

SENATOR AMY KLOBUCHAR: Well, thank you very much.

BOB SCHIEFFER: Back with some final thoughts in just a second.

(ANNOUNCEMENTS)

BOB SCHIEFFER: Finally today some years ago I visited the house where I grew up and the thing I remember most is how small the backyard was. When I was growing up, it didn't seem small at all. When we played baseball back there, no one ever managed to hit one over the fence. Then it dawned on me, when you're four feet tall everything seems bigger. The yard didn't shrink. I just grew up. I was thinking about that as I realized another Christmas was just days away. Remember when we were kids and we thought Christmas would never get here?

Back then things weren't just bigger. It took every good thing longer to get here. And here's the problem with growing up. I like saying that better than growing older. As the world around us gets smaller and events move faster, we slow down. Like old cars, the parts wear out. We need more maintenance just to keep moving at all. I was reminded of that yesterday when my wife interrupted the writing of this little piece three times to put in the eye drops I need for recent cataract surgery. It's always something. But the old car is still moving. Not at the same speed, but moving. And I'll take that, which brings me to my early beat the rush holiday wish for you. I hope all the good things that seem big to you now get even bigger. And remember the good news. The old car still has some miles on it, but only if you take it in for regular check-ups. Back in a minute.

(ANNOUNCEMENTS)

BOB SCHIEFFER: That's it for today. We'll see you next week right here on FACE THE NATION.