

## Interview with John Borling

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Interviewer: Mark DePue

DePue: Well you mentioned the 2015, 2016 political season. That's obviously a reference to the presidential campaign, but we're also in the early stages of the 2014 campaign.

Borling: The midterms, yeah. I think one of the—and looking for fundamental adjustment in 2016 here, we basically just have the two parties. It's a shame that we don't have a more central choice in terms of political thinking than the identified parties, but both parties have entrenched their power structure and the process, so where it's very difficult to penetrate unless you're a member of one of those two parties, and then of course you're captured by the party. It was Kennedy, who at a point in time, and I forget the issue, but it was a big issue and he went against the Democratic Party and he said something to the effect that there are some things much more important than party.

I was reflecting today on the role of the presidency and how the presidents do things right and the presidents do things wrong, every president does that, but on balance, you balance the rights and the wrongs and then you try to make judgments as to how you want to go ahead. In my case, knowing at least a little bit, President Obama, and having debated him, and if he was here, we would greet each other warmly, give a hug probably. If the picture was taken, he would promise me to promise him not to use it on any of my websites because he views me a Hegelian? dialectic like, as an antithesis to his

thesis. And I am a small-government guy, I do think that—it goes back to the top heavy thing. The fault in America that is so vexing is the tribalism that comes. We call it racism but it's really just tribalism, and if you belong to the black tribes or the white tribes, or even the Latino or Hispanic tribes are much more variegated than we would believe from the outside looking in, with great levels of distrust and even hatred, between various groups. And even the black community not being homogeneous.

The election of a black president, that's interesting too. One drop of black blood, according to the old Jim Crow rules and things, was supposed to qualify you for being black. I mean who found that out, I mean what physiologies are we—why doesn't one drop of white blood qualify you for being white, or one drop of Latino blood qualify you to be Latino? At least you could be mixed blood or mixed race, with all of the benefits associated with that. In fact, I've heard it expressed that we really won't get there in terms of our tribalism or racism, until we're all brown or tan or something. Something to be said for that I guess.

We call ourselves Swedish Americans and Polish Americans and African Americans, and I suspect we'll never get away from that, notwithstanding the implications of Theodore Roosevelt and that wonderful speech he made, that there are no hyphenated Americans. In the end, it's how you act with respect to the greater, again, body politic. You can be a Swedish American or an African American I guess, as long as you would put America,

put the emphasis, Swedish American, you know, African American. And I'm perfectly content with that approach.

I am disappointed in the current president because he, above all chief executives in our history, especially since the Civil War, would have been able to take race and move it, as he promised in the 2004, was it, or 2008? Two-thousand eight, I guess, speech, no 2004.

DePue: Two-thousand four.

Borling: Speech about no red America, no blue America, no black America, no white America. I get so disappointed with him and his administration, where they are playing continually, the race card, when he had the power to take us to a whole new and much more healthy level.

DePue: I think you need to give us a little bit of background of how you happen to know Barack Obama personally.

Borling: Well, I ran for the Senate, the 2004 U. S. Senate, 2004 election, on the Republican side. Again, I really would have preferred to run as an Independent. I ran as a moderate Republican.

DePue: In the primary.

Borling: In the primary, and of course the primary, it was an open seat. Peter Fitzgerald had given up the seat, which is what impelled me to run, thinking that the military background, and I have a certain pride and the ability to speak on public platforms. I get paid, as you know, considerable sums of money from time to time. Other times, I don't get paid anything, to go out and trot the

public platform and offer observations on this subject or that subject, often what the client wants.

So I ran and there were six or seven or eight Republicans and there were a similar number of Democrats running, and we would have these joint sessions, debates and things of that nature. NAACP debates, League of Women Voters, we'd be off on the ??? and run into one another. We'd be at various convocations where both Republicans and Democrats would be present. We would be discussing, agreeing, disagreeing. I always found it great fun to go to the things that were heavy democratic. Dan Hynes was running on the Democrat side and the South Side Irish parade was going on, I remember going down there. I was the only Republican who showed up at the Irish parade. It was cold and I had to go to the bathroom, and I went into Danny Hynes's headquarters on whatever it was, out at Evergreen Park there, and I got a cup of coffee and a donut and some of his staffers recognized me and said, "What are you doing here?" And I said, "I had to go to bathroom, I needed a cup of coffee." One of his offer staffers came up and said, "Oh, General Borling, how are you?" I said, "Good to see you." Then Tommy Hynes, the father, came up, you know big power, and Tommy's got a place up in Sister Lakes, Michigan, where we've got a place, and Tommy came over and gave me a big hug. So we went outside and Dan was just coming in with his wife and he had some camera people with him, and they saw me and everybody kind of stopped. I said, "I want you to know, this is my favorite candidate for the senatorial election in 2004," and I said, "And I'm proud to

endorse him on the Democrat side.” Tom laughed and Dan came over and gave me a hug and his wife. You know, so I’ve never seen this thing where if you’re talking to or whatever.

So in the course of this thing, I had had a conversation with the president, then Barack, and I said look, I said—we’d finished up a debate or something. I said, “I’m impressed with you. I’m going to make a campaign donation, a token donation, to your campaign.” For whatever it was, five or ten bucks, I forget what it was, and I sent it in, and he said he’d do the same and I said okay, great. So we weren’t friendly but got to know each other in the course of this campaign. Oh, after the NAACP debate, however, which I think, according to independent sources, that I won, interesting notion.

DePue: Won in what respect?

Borling: Carried the day in terms of—there wasn’t a vote but the reporters who came up said boy, that really gave your campaign a pop or boy, you really came out, you know. They don’t have a vote at the end, like who won or who lost, but the reaction out of that was very positive. There’s an after thing, we were out on the microphones and I teed off Barack as we were talking because I challenged him in the course of the debate and I said you know, “You promised to send me a campaign donation and you never did.” This is on camera. I said, “I sent a campaign donation to your campaign.” Well, he reached into his wallet and pulled out a five-dollar-bill and gave me the five-dollar-bill on camera, and I said, “All right, we’re square.”

But the whole thing about you can't have relations, if you're a Republican, with the Democrats, and back and forth, what a crock. I vote the person and I really have a problem with what I'm going to call Republican fundamentalism, especially on the social issues. Again, I'm too much of a libertarian or independent, to want to tell you how to use your own body or who you want to marry or what your sexual orientation ought to be. I frankly do not give a shit, as long as you don't come and directly influence or try to hurt me and my family. I do care very much about national resiliency and I do care very much about the preamble to the Constitution and the fact that we ought to be able to practice our freedoms, as long as we don't infringe on like freedoms of others or endanger the public safety. I think we need to paint with a very broad brush and I think most people just want to be left alone with a racetrack in front of them that looks to be a fair racetrack, and then let them run their own race, understanding that we too, need to accept losses as a society. There are some people that are just going to cock it up beyond belief. For example, if you want to go out and throw yourself in the Rock River right now, I would urge you not to. I would even try modestly to restrain you, but if you're hell-bent on throwing yourself in the river, I may try to throw you—I don't have a life preserver down there but if I did, I'd throw it to you, but I would not jump in the Rock River and try to save you. I would not crawl out on a ledge. If somebody wants to take a dive, hopefully they won't hit anybody in the leap. Shit, why should somebody get out on the ledge with you, I mean what is the brother's keeper aspect of that? So I'm much more inclined if

people want to—I'll use the British term, it's quite proper by the way, to cock up their own lives, despite best efforts of society to have provided education and boundaries and assistance, as assistance is affordable, then I say let them cock up their own lives and we've got to be able to accept losses.

You asked me, how did I know Barack Obama, and I'm giving you part philosophy and part, this is where we met. He came to Rockford after he was elected senator. He had a town hall, I was there, and I went with several hundred other people, went to the town hall that he was holding forth, on health insurance. A far cry from what Obamacare has evolved into, but he was holding forth, and I happened to be a believer that there is an affordable opt-in system of healthcare, so I applauded the general thrust. He was going to go take questions and everyone had hands up, there were 500 hands up in the crowd. I happened to be up four or five rows, kind of looking down at the podium, and so I raised my hand along with everybody else, and he was kind of scanning the crowd and he sees that I'm there and he smiled and he said, "I've got to start with the General." And so he did and I stood up and made a respectful statement, a mini statement, and then a short question, which he responded to. Afterwards, he ducked behind the black curtain, I think this was Rock Valley College or someplace, and I ducked behind too, his guards knew me enough. And so we went back through and we had a photo op, you know, a couple of South Side guys with their arms around one another, over the shoulders. That's when he whispered again, "Don't put it on your website," and I said okay. So he knows I'm trustworthy in that regard. That was the last

time I had personal contact with President Obama, Senator then, and have, as a White House fellow, not been in the same room with him since. It may well be this year. I've put some policy things in to his administration that I thought would be helpful, basically in terms of some military positions, which are still classified, which I dealt with in an unclassified sense, but something that I thought he needed to be aware of, that was within his direct sphere of influence and understanding but which was easy to gloss over. And given his lack of experience on these things, I thought—and this is not being patronizing, because I would have said it to any president who had come in, that they need to ask these half a dozen questions of their staff and of the military, and get them satisfied according to their own sense of truth or not truth. They didn't get to him and I was disappointed with that, and I put them in at the right level.

So, at the end, I acknowledge that presidents make great mistakes and some make great strides for the future and often, the telling of that tale is years downstream, but a telling of the tale that doesn't tell well currently is the tribal thing or the race thing, which we need to wrestle with as a nation and we need to expect both wins and losses in that column.

DePue: I'm not sure, your comments about the tribalism, what's the bottom line, what's the point you're trying to make in that respect?

Borling: Well, that we have to, to the extent we can as human beings, get outside the bounds of tribalism or racism, and become the American people, put the emphasis on a unity. A mosaic certainly but overwhelmingly, the unifying

aspect, that if we aspire to be an exceptional nation, then we have to be exceptional people.

DePue: You mentioned before that you were disappointed. Is that the issue that you're really disappointed with, with Barack Obama?

Borling: That's the biggest single issue that I think he could have, at no additional cost to the government, tackled head on, and he would have had to have been castigatory, there's a word, of blacks, Latinos and whites. He would have had to rise us up. He would have to use all his considerable oratorical skills, teleprompted or not, to make us see, as Lincoln would say, the better angels of ourselves, and to not accept the circumstances where we pass it off on a host of societal or family or educational or other efforts. He would have to rise us up in spite of that. He would have to have us want to bootstrap ourselves. He would have to preach that extravagant hope that we could literally become aligned rather than divided, as a people. And if anything, he has, in the places that I go and the travels that I have seen, he has engendered a great white resentment. He has probably done just the exact opposite in his presidency, in my judgment, and he's not been helped by members of the administration, notably the attorney general, who is supposed to be above such things. And I think in part, this is read venally in the books that he has either had ghost written, he being the president, or written himself, where he talks about that the most important thing is winning elections. Well this is palpably the stuff of smallish minds and goes back to the, how do you get control of the political process and then keep it forever.

The great downfall of a democratic system is that you only have to lose one decisive election, where you never have another one or you don't have it for generations. You look at Venezuela, you look at the Soviet Union or Russia, and on and on. You look at North Korea, you look at all these places, all the big men, in Africa, where once you get into power, Mugabe in Zimbabwe. So, the democratic process is fraught with difficulty and peril and it takes an involved and enlightened citizenry and in some cases almost an oligarchy, to keep it going. One can make the case that we would be well advised as a nation, to put in some responsible voter measures. This harkens back to the days when you would be excluding voters, and the answer is yeah, you are going to be excluding voters, because you only want those who have a vested interest in the nation as a whole, rather than in some vested interest that is so narrow, so self-serving. People vote their pocketbooks and they vote their issues, of course.

DePue: What would qualify as a vested interest?

Borling: You know, does citizenship have a cost, I guess, is what I would say. So, if we were to do something as horrendously disruptive as say, that if you want to vote in an election, it costs you five bucks.

DePue: A poll tax?

Borling: No, just what the hell, a citizens tax. If you want to vote in the election. It costs us a lot of money to run these elections, so we're offsetting the cost of the election. So if you want to vote, it will cost you five bucks.

DePue: Well, in the early days of our republic, one of the measures was that you had property.

Borling: You had property.

DePue: Would you advocate that?

Borling: No. I'm advocating sitting here on the Rock River on the twenty-third of April, the spring of 2014, that I could support a fee. Hell, we charge fees for everything else; for a driver's license and fishing license and license on the cars and dog licenses and FOIA cards, or maybe I guess FOIA cards are free. Anyway, we've got enough fees out there to burden us down, so I'm saying maybe, just maybe, as a differentiator in terms of giving added importance to the electoral process. Maybe it would even increase participation, because people would see how important it is. So if you want to vote in the primary or you want to vote in the general election, you show up with a five-dollar-bill in your hand or a credit card or something and you say here it is.

DePue: Would you be surprised if party operatives were standing outside the polling places and handing out five-dollar-bills?

Borling: No.

DePue: That's certainly always part of the allegations about Chicago style of elections, that those things occurred. Or handing out, you know.

Borling: Ten-dollar-bills.

DePue: Or cans of beer or bottles of liquor.

Borling: Are they doing it now?

DePue: Well, if you listen to the lore about Chicago politics it's been going on forever.

Borling: You know, after having been in the political game and going through, and going statewide, what you find out is that the candidates are expected to give money to the central committees of the particular counties, and those particular county organizations then endorse you. Not based on whether they like you or not, based upon how much money you give them. Did you know that? Did you know that?

DePue: I hadn't heard that specific comment.

Borling: Boy, you should go to Sangamon County. I wonder where the hell that is. At least I was able to split those guys and had some people murmuring. I had almost caused revolt in the Sangamon County Republican thing, with all those people down there in those days. I've even forgotten their names, whatever those names were.

DePue: I think you're probably talking about Shelander and Cellini.

Borling: Yeah, those guys then. I talked to them and I liked them, but they were obviously at a different position. There were a couple of guys down there and it's probably good that I've forgotten their names, a couple lawyers, they sat behind me at the deal. I made the speech and I thought it was obviously the best speech and so did a lot of people. They cheered and they had me do the Pledge of Allegiance, and they were obviously looking, but they had already made their mind up before they walked in there because the dollars had already been paid by Jack Ryan.

DePue: So this was during the primary season.

Borling: This was during then primary, yeah.

DePue: And Jack Ryan was the guy who won the primary.

Borling: Jack won and then he had to bail because of the sex thing, with taking his wife to sex clubs, his wife, Jeri Ryan. And then he went through this long period of denial and then the *Tribune* finally officially outed him, although we all knew about it during the course of the parade. In fact, my campaign manager, who quit, actually I fired him, went public just a couple days before the election.

DePue: Went public on the information about Ryan?

Borling: Went public on Ryan, yeah, and I fired him.

DePue: Because of that?

Borling: Because of that. This was not that we didn't know this. In fact, a number of us had talked about it, should we ban together and do this thing, and I for one thought we should because it was being ducked. I didn't think Ryan was a good candidate because he had broken his word to me earlier in the campaign. In the end, even in politics, if you give your word, you're supposed to live up to it, even in politics.

DePue: What was the specific issue?

Borling: The issue was that we would have private debates, him and me, and he agreed to it publicly, and then I kept trying to schedule it and he wouldn't do it, and then he frankly denied it, again, to some great negative effect for me, at least in my perception, and I called him on it. We were also having this thing, he was holding forth about how to do away with NATO. I remember I called him on it and I said, "Do you even know how many nations are in NATO, I mean can you name them?" You want to do away with NATO as a fiscal gambit, having

no idea, and disengagement in Western Europe. So he couldn't. He didn't know the number and he didn't know the nations of NATO. Somebody said once, one of the pundits, said in the next debate, Ryan will probably not only know all the nations in NATO, he'll be able to draw the flags and sing the national anthems.

So anyway, so we had this big to-do, and I didn't think Ryan—I thought he was very shallow and flashed his new teeth and very concerned about his hair and things. Anyway, the death knell was when he—if he would have come clean on it himself, and said hey, I did some things back then, he would have ridden it out. But as it did, it just got wormier and wormier, and finally the central committee of the Republican Party douched(??) him and threw it back up in the air and put the people through a... Ty Fahner, at that time Mayer Brown, conducted a star chamber, and the only two guys who were willing to go through it were Jim Oberweis and me, of the guys who had run.

DePue: Who had come in second in the primary?

Borling: Well, I think yes, he had come in second.

DePue: Oberweis?

Borling: Yeah. I didn't hardly score. Rauschenberger scored well, McKenna scored—I think then, I was fifth or sixth, whatever. The reason I fared so badly in my view is that I was probably a really crummy candidate, if truth be known.

DePue: In what way?

Borling: Well, from a Republican standpoint, I was pro-choice, and that makes it pretty hard. I didn't raise enough money. I raised probably six, seven hundred

thousand dollars, all in. It sounds like a lot of money but not when you're looking at four and five million on the basis of Ryan. McKenna put a few million in and Rauschenberger got a big thing, although Steve at the end, and I would stand up and I would say and he would say look, if you don't vote for Rauschenberger, vote for Borling, and I would say yeah, if you don't vote for me, vote for Rauschenberger. He's king of the river with respect to understanding of Illinois politics, but I'm captain of the open sea with respect to international relations and national focus. So we would do that thing back and forth and we had good relations until again, when this Ryan thing hit and Rauschenberger pledged that he would stay neutral on the deal and he didn't. What happened, both Jim Oberweis and I got—and Jim is very right of center, and I don't agree with his policies.

DePue: That's interesting. I think he's running right now.

Borling: He's running right of center again. Durbin would have been a hard slug anyway, but I don't think Jim is going to make it, because I don't think the sensitivity about small government, Obamacare, all the rest of that stuff, is enough to carry.

DePue: In otherwise, what should be a very Republican year.

Borling: It should be, but anyway, as you recall in 2004, they imported then. I had, I thought, almost 50 percent of the central committee committed to me, I mean they had given me verbal commitments. And then a number of people on the committee, including some congressmen, including one from up here, said oh no, we've got to fight race with race, and they elected to import Alan Keyes,

the black guy from Maryland, who turned into a bloody disaster and again, shows you the wisdom of a committee. So that marked my foray into politics, although I did, because the congressman who ran against, who advanced and supported the Alan Keyes initiative, was Don Manzullo, who was the congressman from up here. I viewed that as geographical treason at the time. He had a responsibility to support me, as kind of the favorite son up here at that point, but he was fascinated by the race thing and he was fascinated also, by the fundamentalism, the fact that I was a social moderate or liberal even, I think did not suit well. So, I retired from the field, if you will, politically. I'm fond of saying, I'm a better fighter pilot than a politician, I would hope, although I did send my health plan to both John McCain and to Barack Obama. John at least acknowledged that he received it, which is an opt-in plan, frankly, rather than a you all will plan, and it's a single-payer plan, basically for those who choose to opt in. For those who don't choose to opt in, again I'm very big on individual choice, then they fend their own way.