The Undergraduate Journal of Social Sciences Presents:

Congressman Robert Laurence "Bob" Barr, Jr.

Member of the U.S. House of Representatives from Georgia's 7th District, 1995-2003

In an interview with the UJSS, Congressman Barr discussed the future of the Tea Party, public opinion of the Obama presidency, the constitutionality of healthcare legislation, and future issues confronting the Libertarian Party and the United States.

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***UJSS**: This is Cadet Samuel Wharton for the Undergraduate Journal of Social Sciences at the United States Military Academy at West Point with the interview series. Today we are interviewing Congressman Bob Barr. Sir, thank you again for sitting down with us today and doing this interview.*

Congressman Barr: It's a pleasure, glad to be here.

***UJSS**: Sir, the recent grassroots movement known as the "Tea Party" has gained much support in a wide array of the American public today. Where do you see this movement heading to in the next 5 years, and how do you see the Libertarian Party interacting with these new policies on a more visible platform?*

Congressman Barr: The Libertarian Party, of course, as America's oldest and largest third party has been very concerned, as have I, for many years with the seeming ability or lack of willingness on the part of a lot of America's citizens at the grassroots level to become fully engaged in our political system, particularly outside of partisan, party structure. If in fact, and it is too early to tell, but if in fact the so called "Tea Party movement" takes hold and becomes a long term movement that really involves people on a sustained basis, and follows what's going on in politics, particularly at the national level, and causes people to actually do something about it, then it will be something very positive. I'm not sure that that will happen. It may simply be that it will fizzle out after a few months or a year. There is also the risk that the movement might be taken over by particular groups that have a specific agenda, a particular issue, or particular person that they are going after, and the movement can become corrupted. I would like to see it turn into a consistent, long term, grassroots movement who are concerned about politics in this country, who are concerned about public policy, who want to do something about it positively. Now from a negative few, but a positive, non partisan, not party standpoint.

***UJSS**: After the hype that was generated by the candidacy and election of President Obama in 2008, why do you think the American public has so quickly changed its views on much of the domestic policy that his administration is now putting forward?*

Congressman Barr: The American people by and large are a people who do not like to see dramatic, sudden change in politics as much as many of us in public office and public life would like to see it. The American Public has historically has been more incremental in the approach to change in politics. They may talk a great deal about wanting dramatic change, but when push comes to shove, the American people by and large don't support that. We saw this for example with the Republican majority that took over Congress for the first time after the 1994 election. We tried very quickly to move forward, I was part of that movement, with very dramatic, substantive changes, doing away with certain government agencies and so forth. The public didn't support that. They do not support other-than-incremental changes, and parties need to learn that. The Republicans were part of that group we found that out and had to modify and backtrack on a lot of what we were trying to do very quickly. President Obama I don't think has learned that lesson. He tried, and continues to try to do too much, too fast, too dramatically, and the American people are not ready for that. You can't all of a sudden come into office and expect the American people to roll over and play dead while posing a dramatic overhaul of the way healthcare is delivered in this country and has been for many generations. On the other hand, certainly I understand what his administration is try to do, and that is take advantage of being elected to office, having majorities of the same party in both houses of the congress, and feeling that they have to do something now. Otherwise, they may lose the momentum and lose the ability. But the American people don't operate that way, and had the current administration recognized that earlier, and move a little more deliberatively, laid more of a groundwork for what they were proposing to do, I think they might've had a better chance for success.

UJSS*: Regarding the healthcare issue Sir, earlier you mentioned how the Constitution played into the President's healthcare plan, and I was wondering if you could elaborate a little more on that?*

Congressman Barr: Before the government's proposed legislation is put on the table, those public officials who advocate this legislative proposal, I think they have an obligation to lay before the American people, and explain to the American people, what is the proper basis in the constitution for what they are proposing to do. That simply doesn't happen in modern American politics. That doesn't mean that this administration should be able to get away with what other administrations have, by proposing legislation that has no basis in the constitution, and simply because it's been done before, be permitted to do that. There is no basis in the constitution, as far as I can tell, for the government essentially dictating, essentially controlling, the delivery of healthcare in this country. There is no constitutional basis for requiring that every American have health insurance. That's not a proper proposal for the government in our system. Now, maybe some socialist systems in Europe, but not here. We are a government, explicitly, of limited powers. You have to be able to fit what the government is proposing to do, whether in healthcare, transportation, or environmental law into one of those enumerated powers, something that is truly essential and reasonable related to those powers, and simply wanting Americans to

have healthcare, simply wanting healthcare to be delivered in a certain way, doesn't make the cut. That's not a proper basis for constitutionality in this country.

***UJSS**: What can the American Public expect from the Libertarian Party in terms of a candidacy in 2012, meaning, how much leverage do you a think a third party will be able to harness in the upcoming election as opposed to years past?*

Congressman Barr: It's hard to tell, but there are some positive sign on the horizon. According to some recent polls I've seen, much of the American electorate considers themselves "independent" as opposed to self identifying with one of the other two major parties, and that's a good sign if that trend continues. Unfortunately, what we see historically is in non-election years, people will say, "well, I'm independent." But then as they get closer to the election, they are pulled back to their prior allegiance to the Republican or Democratic Party, because of these notions that if you do not vote Republican or Democrat, you are throwing your vote away, or some nonsense. We'll just have to see if that holds true, but because of a lack of leadership and vision on the part of particularly the Republican Party right now, it's causing to look toward the Libertarian Party or independent right now. Now the Libertarian party, they have a lot of work to do. They are not going to be able to just sit back and wait for those folks that are increasingly identifying themselves as independent voters to fall into the lap of the Libertarian Party. But if the Libertarian Party does what I, and others, have urged them to do and that is to discuss issues that are relevant to a broad range of voters and American families and small businesses, to present those issues in a way that is understandable to the average voter, not to the intellectual elitist, then there is a real opportunity for the party. It has to do a better job of discussing issues that are relevant to the average family. The tax structure, education, freeing up small businesses in their communities from the heavy hand of overregulation by the government. If the Libertarian Party provides that vision and that leadership that is lacking in the Republican party, for example, right now then I think there is a significant opportunity for them. But whether or not they take advantage of that remains to be seen.

***UJSS**: You mentioned earlier the issue of government spending and the enormous debt that our government has accumulated. What is Libertarian Party's position on reducing the national debt, meaning what do you think is the best way for our country to go about reducing this deficit?*

Congressman Barr: The first thing to do is to stop making it larger. It's going to be extremely difficult to reduce the national debt, which I think right now is in excess of 12 trillion dollars, just an almost unimaginable sum of money, unheard of in peacetime. That last time we approached such a figure was in WWII if I'm not mistaken. You can't overnight, just pay down that debt or make it go away, but the first thing you do, is for heaven's sake, stop making it larger. The first thing, which the Libertarian part believes in, is stop deficit spending. Be sure that your current year budget, beginning with 2012, is balanced. It can be done. We did it back in the late 1990's for 2 and a half or three years running. We had a Republican congress and a

Democratic president in ‘98, ‘99, and 2000 if I’m not mistaken, and we actually balanced the federal budget. Now, that wasn’t easy. There were a lot of folks out there, a lot of special interest groups that were upset because they weren’t getting the same amount of money they had previously been entitled under government programs, but we did it. We balanced the federal budget. Unfortunately, it was a Republican, George W Bush, that started spending, in cahoots with a Republican congress that started shooting that deficit back up. But it’s simply a matter of disciplining oneself, of looking at those federal programs that are absolutely essential, and there are some absolutely essential programs, national defense being one of them, but even there, there are probably some cuts that we can make to stop the increase in spending that has given rise to the sustainable deficits.

UJSS*: The Libertarian Party places significance on the invasion of privacy for national security. In the post 9/11 world, how do you think the US can maintain hits high level of security while still fulfilling all the constitutional promises that have been made to the American people?*

Congressman Barr: To me, it’s not even a question that ought to be asked. The constitution is the constitution, and if it says that you don’t invade citizen’s privacy by searching them, and that includes electronic surveillance, without a good reason, then government cannot do that, period. Whether for national security or domestic law enforcement, if any administration feels it has to go beyond or ignore the 4th amendment, then the only way to do that is to amend it. Everyone talks about the second amendment, and the right to keep and bear arms, we have to limit this type of weapon or the number people can have. My challenge to them was “You cannot have it both ways”. You cannot seek to protect this amendment while undercutting and ignoring the 4th. You cannot say you understand and adhere to the 4th, and then say “But I can conduct surveillance people without a warrant” simply because of national security. We have very strong and robust laws that allow law enforcement agencies to conduct surveillance, and these laws should remain robust. We need that capability, but we should not, and cannot sustain, this notion that simply because the President is doing it in the name of national security, we should not take our citizens rights away, that is to be free from the government listening in to their phone calls or reading their e-mails simply because they choose to communicate with someone overseas. That is power that is contrary to the 4th amendment.

UJSS*: Sir, you focus on the constitution as the heart of many issues. Do you feel the state of American politics would be improved if politicians did as you suggest, and look at the constitution first, and see whether an issue can be addressed there, as opposed to trying to undercut the amendments?*

Congressman Barr: It would be immeasurably improved. Unfortunately, most members of congress aren’t interested in it. I can remember a few times when I was in the congress when one of my colleagues would introduce legislation that would require, that before a member of congress could introduce a piece of legislation for consideration by the house, the would be required to identify in the legislation, the specific constitutional provision that provided the

proper basis for that piece of legislation. You would think that would be pretty simple, that a piece of legislation would have to have a constitutional basis, and you would have to identify it, and enumerate it in the legislation. People in the congress are simply not interested in doing that because they know that a significant percentage of legislation that is introduced in the congress, including appropriations bills, do not have any constitutional basis. But, almost by definition, our situation would be dramatically improved were that the case.

UJSS*: One final question, Sir. Where do you see the status of the US in the year 2030, both in terms of domestic affairs and international ones if we continue on our current path?*

Congressman Barr: I think we will see and United States who's power is greatly diminished because of our economic irresponsibility. If we continue on the route we are going down now, just spending money without any consideration of paying it back and going further and further into debt, sooner or later, as we say in Georgia, or South Carolina, "its gonna come a cropper." And there is a heavy price that it going to have to be paid for that. I think we are already seeing this in diminished flexibility in the international arena. Historically we've seen other examples. The UK in the 1950's with the Suez crises. They were told by the US what to do. We told the UK what they could and couldn't do and they had to listen to us because they were a debtor nation of the United States. If you're a debtor nation, you lose flexibility and you lose power to your creditors. China, of all countries, is the major, single creditor to the United States of America, and that is embarrassing. Plus, it diminishes our ability to control events and our own destiny around the world. When you have a major creditor that is also an adversary of yours, with regards to policies in different parts of the world, you lose flexibility, and a loss of flexibility in the international arena means you have less power to control events and control your destiny. That's what worries me greatly and if we continue on the path we're going now, thirty years from now we will not have nearly the power or ability to influence events around the world that we enjoy now.

UJSS*: Those are all the questions we have, Sir. Thank you again.*

Congressman Barr: It's been my pleasure and my honor. Thank you.

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