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Federal Tax Changes

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- A new report from the non-partisan Institute on Taxation and Economic Policy says federal tax changes have made itemized deductions more unfair to low-income taxpayers and more costly for government. Dana Naimark of the Children's Action Alliance and Kevin McCarty of the Arizona Tax Research Association discuss the report.

Guests:

- Dana Naimark - Children's Action Alliance
- Kevin McCarty - Arizona Tax Research Association

View Transcript

Ted Simons: And a number of independent voters in Arizona is growing, but independents don't vote as reliably as those registered to political parties. Here to talk about that and other aspects of today's primary vote is Arizona state University pollster Dr. Bruce Merle. Always a pleasure.

Bruce Merle: Good to see you.

Ted Simons: Before we get to the vagaries of today's vote, let's talk about independents and the growing number of independents in Arizona. Why?

Bruce Merle: Well, I think first of all, people are really turned off by politics. If you look around the country, the states where you have these tremendous amounts of money being spent and negative campaigning, every one of those states is experiencing huge increases in independents in very low voter turnout. So I think a lot of people are just sick and tired of what's going on in politics.

Ted Simons: Are most of those sick and tired democrats, or Republicans?

Bruce Merle: Well, they're both. I mean, in more than that, what concerns me is -- if you look at the last registration figures, 35,000 roughly since may, 25,000 of those are independents. 10,000 are Republicans. The democrats lost 500. This tremendous increase in independents unfortunately many of those people are people that have left either the Republican or Democratic party, they're more moderate and it leaves the party with the more ideal logically pure voters, which I think is one reason we have so much conflict.

Ted Simons: Interesting. And talk about other aspects of this. Other impacts on the parties and the Arizona political climate. Because as you mentioned, these are folks who are disaffected with politics in general, these are folks if you're disaffected enough, you're not going to vote, are you?

Bruce Merle: That's what happens. One of the misconceptions about independents, we say they are so important in the state, and they are, except their turnout rate is very, very low. In fact, not much higher than the Hispanic turnout, which is traditionally very low.

Ted Simons: OK, so we've got affected Republicans and democrats, and they don't -- they're wandering the wilderness here, and not necessarily vote can as much as they should. Is there ever a chance that they could all get together and say, let's form a party?

Bruce Merle: You would be shocked how many calls I get in an average week people saying, can we start a new party? Historically you're right on. What has happened with party realignment since the history of this country is once every long generation, about 40 to 50 years, the number of independents builds up, and then it's like a dam breaking. They traditionally go in one direction. The last time we had that was about 1968, '64, with the Goldwater revolution. It's about time. That could happen. And I think frankly some people thought maybe Obama could bring that about, but he hasn't.

Ted Simons: So in general, it's often a passing fad, and the sustainability is not too strong.

Bruce Merle: Well, it's more what happens. You have this large group of disaffected people, and then some really charismatic candidate or some major thing happens. A depression in 1932. Completely restructures the political environment.

Ted Simons: But you mentioned Obama, and you also mentioned the fact that with these moderates all leaving and the two sides growing farther apart, and a charismatic figure comes and the moderates go, let's go over here, or let's go over there, shouldn't that buy its -- by its nature tell the other party that's being left out, hey, we've got to calm some of the folks down, we're losing out to those other guys?

Bruce Merle: Absolutely. If you look at the rise of George Wallace, the American independent party in the '60s, he got 23% of the vote. What was the impact of that? It caused the Republican party to become much more conservative during that election cycle. So the main impact of these independent third party movements is really to move one or the other parties in that direction.

Ted Simons: You mentioned other states are seeing an increase in independent voters as well. Are we very much different than others? Are we pretty much in line with others?

Bruce Merle: Pretty much the same. The trend across the nation is the same. What one of the things, Ted, that does concern me, we feel it about 60-65% of the young people coming into the political system for the first time are rejecting both political parties and becoming independents. So when you have a whole generation of young people that are so turned off, that's going to have consequences down the road.

Ted Simons: Morrison institute had a survey about primaries in Arizona, and the idea of maybe an open

primary finding 85% of folks thinking it's a good idea here in Arizona, 75% like the idea in the primary, the top two vote getters then go head-to-head and everybody else has to go home.

Bruce Merle: My feeling is it simply shows California is doing exactly that, so we're going to have the advantage of seeing what happens in California. I think there's going to be more and more of these proposals because people understand that about 80% of all electoral outcomes in America occur in the primary. The primary system, if you look at what's happening in Arizona, after this primary, we will probably have maybe three or four of the 30 legislative districts that are even competitive. So the races are pretty much over in many cases by the time the primary. So we are going to have to reform the primary system. This will be a good time to do it because we're going to have to have reapportionment and redistricting because of the 2010 census.

Ted Simons: And I'm sure some independents are that are watching right now will be saying, I went to the polling place today, I was told I got to go democrat or Republican, I can't pick and choose. Should they be able to pick and choose?

Bruce Merle: Well, every state is in charge of their own electoral laws as it relates to these kinds of races. That's just the system here. But I think that the point is we really do need to look at the primary system for future elections in Arizona.

Ted Simons: The -- before we let you go, the polls are closed now as we're airing, and we've had everything from tremendous heat, to thunderstorms rolling through the valley, all sorts of things. How does that play? Does that keep -- is that even do more to keep the moderates away from polling places?

Bruce Merle: Not really. The reason why is early voting. We've been voting for 30 days, and what our research shows us, about half the people vote the first 10 days that they get those ballots. And so in this particular case, having a thunderstorm come late isn't going to affect it much. I mean, it's disappointing that some people that want to vote won't be able to. But no, it makes my point. We expect only like a 22% turnout, Ted, and only -- 70% of the people, to put it the other way, 30% of the people that are eligible to register don't even register. You get a 50% turnout, I mean, you're getting in some cases like in the third district where you're going to have 10 candidates, somebody could elect to the U.S. Congress with 15,000 votes. And make policy for everybody living in that district, about 300,000 people there.

Ted Simons: Fascinating stuff. We'll see what happens as far as today's vote is concerned. One thing is for sure, independents will be a factor, just maybe not as much as they should be.

Bruce Merle: Absolutely.

Ted Simons: Good to see you again.

Bruce Merle: Good to see you, Ted.