



60 Minutes Takes a Closer Look at John Boehner

In a revealing interview on CBS's "60 Minutes," incoming Speaker of the House John Boehner presented both a tough and yet sensitive leader to host Lesley Stahl. In his discussion with Stahl, Boehner explicitly outlined how he intends to move forward in the 112th Congress, and proved unafraid to reveal a softer, teary-eyed side, joining the ranks of other leading politicians such as Bob Dole and Hillary Clinton who have shed a tear on camera.



Much of the interview focused on the contentious relationship between the President and the House Minority Leader.

[CBS News](#) reports:

The most powerful Democrat and the now most powerful Republican are sizing each other up. They may have exchanged more words via television than in person. And most of them have been, shall we say, unfriendly.

During President Obama's Tuesday [press conference](#), he challenged the newly elected House Speaker:

Once John Boehner's sworn in as speaker, he'll have a responsibility to govern. You can't just stand on the sidelines and be a bomb thrower.

Boehner addressed the President's challenge during his interview with Stahl, prompting an interesting debate over semantics, though the discussion reveals more:

Boehner: We have to govern. That's what we were elected to do.

Stahl: But governing means compromising.

Boehner: It means working together.

Stahl: It also means compromising.

Boehner: It means finding common ground.

Stahl: Okay, is that compromising?

Boehner: I made it clear I am not gonna compromise on my principles, nor am I gonna compromise...

Stahl: What are you saying?

Boehner: ...the will of the American people.

Stahl: You're saying, "I want common ground, but I'm not gonna compromise." I don't understand that. I really don't.

Boehner: When you say the word "compromise"...a lot of Americans look up and go, "Uh-oh, they're gonna sell me out." And so finding common ground, I think, makes more sense.

Stahl reminded him that his goal had been to get all the Bush tax cuts made permanent.

Stahl: So you did compromise.

Boehner: I've, we found common ground.



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Stahl: Why won't you say you're afraid of the word.

Boehner: I reject the word.

While the debate outwardly appeared to be nothing more than wordplay, what it reveals is Boehner's unwillingness to compromise on the issues the American people hold dear, an attribute likely cherished by his supporters.

The combative relationship between President Obama and John Boehner has been newsworthy. After all, Boehner was the Republican who urged his fellow GOPers to vote as a single bloc against all of the President's initiatives, including the health care law and stimulus.

While the plan may have irked the President and congressional Democrats, it certainly helped increase Boehner's popularity. Boehner's latest congressional midterm victory was the largest Republican landslide in the House of Representatives since 1938.

Despite their antagonistic relationship, however, Boehner was unafraid to attribute a number of positive characteristics to the President during the *60 Minutes* interview: "He's engaging. Certainly smart. Brilliant."

He added, however, that he did not appreciate the president labeling him and his fellow Republicans as "hostage-takers" during the president's press conference on the Bush era tax cuts.

"Excuse me, Mr. President. I thought the election was over," Boehner joked to Stahl. Fortunately, Boehner admits to having "thick skin," and ultimately forgives the president for his harsh assertions, chalking the remarks up to Obama having "a tough day."

When asked about the upcoming tax cut vote, Boehner held firm his stance on extending the tax cuts to all Americans. He also rejected Democratic assertions that extending the tax cuts would add to the federal deficit, explaining that instead, it is in fact spending that adds to the deficit:

Stahl: Was the tax deal, in your opinion, worth the \$900 billion added to the deficit, in your opinion?

Boehner: Washington does not have a revenue problem. Washington has a spending problem.

Stahl: I know. But I'm asking you a simple question. Was it worth what you got, was it worth it in light of the \$900 billion?

Boehner: I think it's worth it. I think it will create jobs. And help our economy.

Stahl: You've said you're going to bring up a spending cutting measure

Boehner: Every week.

Stahl: Every week?

Boehner: Every week.

Stahl: What's your first one gonna be?

Boehner: Well, how about we start with cutting Congress? I'm going to cut my budget, my leadership budget five percent. I'm going to cut all the leadership budgets by five percent. I'm gonna cut every committee's budget by five percent. And every member is gonna see a five percent reduction in their allowance. All together that's \$25-\$30 million and it likely would be one of the first votes we cast.

Stahl: Okay, but you admit that's not very much money.

Boehner: You've got to start somewhere. And we're going to start there.

A soft-spot for the incoming House Speaker is the pursuit of the American dream and the acknowledgement that he is a prime example of it, having transitioned from a man who once mopped



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floors to the most powerful Republican in the country.

CBS writes, “On election night, in his victory speech, the public saw something they probably never expected from Boehner: it was called ‘the sob heard around the world.’”

“I’ve spent my whole life chasing the American Dream,” said Boehner on election night, choking up.

A similar expressive scene took place during Boehner’s interview with Stahl when he discussed his humble beginnings. As one of 11 children, Boehner worked at his father’s bar in Reading, Ohio, mopping, cooking, cleaning dishes, and washing windows. As Boehner appeared visibly emotional while recalling his meek beginnings, Stahl saw the opportunity to question him on his victory speech, provoking another emotional response:

Stahl: On election night, what made you sad, what got to you that night?

Boehner: I was talking, trying to talk about the fact that I’ve been chasing the American Dream my whole career. There’s some things that are very difficult to talk about. Family. Kids. I can’t go to a school anymore. I used to go to a lot of schools. And you see all these little kids running around. Can’t talk about it.

Stahl: Why?

Boehner: Making sure that these kids have a shot at the American Dream, like I did. It’s important.

A variety of other interesting revelations surfaced during the interview. First, Boehner’s family was once “John Kennedy Democrats.” That all changed in the 1970s when they purchased a small business. They were shocked to discover the impact of heavy taxation on small businesses, and quickly transformed into Reagan Republicans.

Boehner also admitted that he was in fact a very close friend of late Democrat Ted Kennedy. “We were really good friends...He may have been this big liberal lion publicly, privately he was a regular guy. You could work with him. Work things out.”

Later, Lesley Stahl recalled her interview with editor Ann Silvio on “[60 Minutes Overtime](#).”

“I really liked him,” said Stahl. “He was so authentic. There was no artifice.”



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