

Jason Altmire (00:04):

Hi, and welcome to another edition of Career Education Report. I am Jason Altmire, and today we are going to be talking politics, elections, the House of Representatives, the Senate at the federal level. We have somebody who knows more about those topics really than anybody else. There's nobody, I can tell you, on Capitol Hill who is more in tune to what is happening in Congress than Chad Pergram.

Jason Altmire (00:31):

He is the congressional correspondent for Fox News and has been with Fox News since 2007. This is a treat for me, because I have been on the other side of interviews from Chad many times, so it's a treat for me to ask the questions this time.

Chad Pergram (00:48):

So you get revenge is what you're telling me, right? This is payback, right?

Jason Altmire (00:53):

Yeah. I don't recall anything that I would need revenge for. I always found you to be very fair, obviously very thorough and well-informed. But I'm really grateful for, Chad, for taking the time here. We're speaking in late July and there is a lot of time to go before the end of this congressional session, and I wanted to focus on how you see the lead-up to the midterms going with regard to what's happening on Capitol Hill and how both sides will position themselves for the upcoming elections.

Jason Altmire (01:25):

Then I won't speak for you, but I think most prognosticators believe there's a high likelihood of a change at least in the House, and maybe what you see coming down the road in the next session of Congress if the leadership of at least the House and potentially the Senate were to change.

Jason Altmire (01:42):

I just wanted to start with kind of your overall perspective here in late July of what the rest of the session looks like, especially on the House side, where there's been some high profile hearings, there's a lot of partisanship. Then on the Senate side you have Senator Manchin dominating the proceedings. How do you think the rest of the year is going to go?

Chad Pergram (02:03):

It's going to be interesting to see just how many trips to the well the Democrats continue to take with Joe Manchin, if there are any more trips. It's possible, as you know what they did is they created what we call here on Capitol Hill a reconciliation package. That is a special budget measure which allows you to go around to filibuster. You can basically do two of these per Congress, one for each fiscal year.

Chad Pergram (02:26):

There's some thought you have to do this by the end of September, because that's the end of the government's fiscal year. That's a little shaky on that point. But the idea that they created that, and Joe Manchin has fought them tooth and nail really since last summer about trying to pass some sort of a domestic spending bill using this filibuster exempt process, because they can't get 60 votes for this in a 50/50 senate so they have to go this route.

Chad Pergram ([02:50](#)):

It would be hard for me to believe that even if they do this in late December or even the first couple days of January, before the Congress ends, that they would burn this reconciliation package and not do something with it. Joe Manchin wants to deal with prescription drugs, he wants to deal with deficit reduction. You have a lot of Democrats who want to deal with something else, so climate policy, education policy, there's a litany of things there.

Chad Pergram ([03:15](#)):

Nobody quite knows what this would look like. It was a big package, more than \$4 trillion. Last summer they got it down to 2 trillion, then a little bit less than that. Then Joe Manchin blew it up on Fox News Sunday speaking to my colleague Bret Baier just before Christmastime. They've had a little bit of these conversations over the past few months and they thought they were getting close, but Joe Manchin did basically the same thing that he's done before, so that's why they don't have the deal.

Chad Pergram ([03:40](#)):

But it is only mid-July, so let's see. We would be hard pressed to see them not use that vehicle, that parliamentary vehicle to do something.

Chad Pergram ([03:50](#)):

The other thing you got to watch for here is whether or not they can keep the government open at the end of September. September 30, again, is that aforementioned deadline for the fiscal year, when they have to fund the government. They will inevitably do some sort of interim spending bill, probably pass the election at minimum if not into the next calendar year when we know what the contours of the Congress are, so probably February or March of next year. But how that comes together, that universe is not formed yet. Nobody really knows.

Chad Pergram ([04:22](#)):

Legislatively those are the biggest two things they have to do. Now something they're wrestling with right now is this Chips bill, something very important here, but those other two things I mentioned a moment ago, legislatively that's what they want to try to deal with before the end of this Congress.

Jason Altmire ([04:38](#)):

What do you think with regard to the House and some of these high profile hearings there seems to be just an unprecedented, nearly unprecedented amount of partisanship and bad feelings happening on the House side. How do you think all of that is going to play out?

Chad Pergram ([04:54](#)):

Well, obviously we're probably going to have some sort of a report from the 1/6 Committee and a final hearing probably some time in the fall to touch on these things. I was told early on and have reported this, this is dating back to last year when they created this committee, that this was really the third impeachment of former President Donald Trump, and it was also a pre-impeachment.

Chad Pergram ([05:15](#)):

If you listen to the language of Liz Cheney, the Republican representative from Wyoming, she always had said we need to make sure that Donald Trump does not get anywhere near the White House

again. Now they have presented a pretty damning case. Republicans and former loyalists to the former president say it's a hack job, it's a partisan thing, et cetera.

Chad Pergram ([05:36](#)):

Nancy Pelosi nixed Kevin McCarthy's fix for the committee so the Republicans pulled completely out and then Pelosi put Adam Kinzinger from Illinois and Cheney on the committee, so those are the two Republicans. They certainly have been able to create their own narrative in this, and there is some evidence that's sticking a little bit.

Chad Pergram ([05:52](#)):

Now does that present a problem for Democrats in these mid-term elections? Republicans can say look at inflation, look their gasoline prices, they're fooling around with this story and not actually, you know, pocketbook issues. Okay, fair point there.

Chad Pergram ([06:07](#)):

But this is not so much a debate about the mid-term elections. This is a debate about 2024. That is what they're looking at there, if the former president in fact makes another bid, which a lot of people are thinking. Republicans are very concerned, and this speaks to your question, that he might announce his bid before the mid-term elections, and then every candidate along the line, every Republican candidate has to entertain these questions about Donald Trump, and maybe some of the things that have come out of these hearings, and maybe some of the things he did or did not do on January 6th, and that becomes a certain issue, maybe not so much for the candidates who are in these rock ribbed Republican states or district, but maybe some seats at the margins.

Chad Pergram ([06:49](#)):

There's been some thoughts that Democrats have some weaknesses in some traditionally Democratic seats in Chicago and in some places in California and Florida, et cetera. So maybe that helps them. The other thing that helps Democrats, and this probably helps them more in Senate contests than House contests, is the abortion decision in the Dobbs case a couple weeks ago from the Supreme Court, because this gets Democrats to the polls, number one.

Chad Pergram ([07:13](#)):

Number two, it probably helps people like Maggie Hassan, the Democratic senator from New Hampshire. It certainly helps somebody like Catherine Cortez Masto in Nevada. You look at Democratic senators which were vulnerable, and Democrats can now go in and run on those types of things in getting their base to the polls, because mid-term elections are about the base.

Chad Pergram ([07:34](#)):

So when they talk about can Democrats hold the Senate, the chances there are certainly better, and probably even better after the Dobbs decision. The House, the abortion decision maybe diminishes their losses a little bit. We'll see how the public interprets these 1/6 Committee hearings.

Chad Pergram ([07:52](#)):

But holding onto the House, I mean they're down right now... Democrats right now, the way the margin is in the House, may only lose four votes on their side right now without help from the other

side, and pass a bill on their own. I mean it is pretty narrow. There is not a lot of turning radius, so holding onto the House remains to be pretty challenging for the Democrats regardless.

Chad Pergram ([08:12](#)):

Let me go back to a point I was making earlier about Joe Manchin. Chuck Schumer, the Democratic leader, is basically... And this happened before Manchin blew this up, and I reported this and said this on the air and had written about it as well. Joe Manchin was being played against himself by Chuck Schumer, because if they got a deal they could say great.

Chad Pergram ([08:30](#)):

If they didn't get a deal they didn't even really have to say anything about Joe Manchin, because then you can go to the polls and say give us two or three other Democratic senators, give us Fetterman in Pennsylvania, give us Tim Ryan in Ohio, you get the idea, Val Demings in Florida, and we don't know who's going to be successful here, but get us to 52-53 votes and then we can go around the filibuster potentially, we can go around Joe Manchin certainly using this special, I mentioned it earlier, budget reconciliation process.

Chad Pergram ([09:01](#)):

He can't stand in the way because we have Senator Fetterman, or we have Senator Ryan from Ohio, et cetera. That is a pretty compelling case for Democrats, and it might even be a more compelling case that they can make than even the abortion decision.

Jason Altmire ([09:15](#)):

I've heard you say that, and I think you're dead on with the way that was approached. There's a lot of frustration on the Democratic side with Senator Manchin, and I do think that Senator Schumer took exactly the line that you did, that he was setting Senator Manchin up to either comply and do what the Democrats wanted him to do, but I think that everyone understood the more likely outcome was that Senator Manchin would not do so, would draw the ire of the base of the Democratic party, which would fire them up for the election, because they don't want to see Senator Manchin play the same role in the next session of Congress that he's playing right now, which he decides whether or not any issue is able to proceed for a vote in the Senate.

Jason Altmire ([09:59](#)):

I think that has definitely shined the spotlight on some of these races that you mentioned for the Senate. Nobody would have ever thought that Ohio was going to be competitive. Very few thought that some of these other states that you mentioned were going to go the way of the Democrats.

Jason Altmire ([10:16](#)):

But it looks like right now, even though there's expected to be this tsunami of public sentiment related to the economy and issues that drive these wave elections that you see periodically, it looks like the Senate may be able to even remain 50/50 with the Democratic margin, but perhaps pick up Democratic seats. Do you think that there's enthusiasm on the Democratic side that they realistically have a chance to do that?

Chad Pergram ([10:49](#)):

Certainly. I would pay close attention to the remarks of the Senate Minority Leader Mitch McConnell, who has talked about we, meaning the Republican party when he's speaking here, we have a history of screwing these things up. He's talking about 2010, when Republicans did not flip the Senate because of bad candidates, did not flip the Senate again in 2012 because of questionable candidates, and 2010 was one of those tsunami elections, where Democrats lost the House, catastrophic loss, more than 60 seats in the House of Representatives, yet they held onto the Senate in the Democratic party.

Chad Pergram ([11:24](#)):

So Mitch McConnell has been willing to say those things because he knows what the gig is here, and this is where the Republicans did not get the candidate they wanted to run against Maggie Hassan in New Hampshire. Okay, that's a problem right there. We don't know about Ron Johnson in Wisconsin. You talked about Tim Ryan in Ohio. Mark Kelly is looking a little better right now in Arizona, and I think Catherine Cortez Masto, the abortion decision was really sort of a godsend for her in Nevada. At least people thought that that might put her on the ropes.

Chad Pergram ([11:57](#)):

There was even some polling at one point not that long ago that Patty Murray in Washington state was in trouble, but with the abortion decision, that probably helped her significantly.

Chad Pergram ([12:07](#)):

But, again, do Democratic voters sit on their hands because they're mad at the party, you have people who vote with their wallet who are upset about gas prices and inflation, and then the base says we had a Democratic House, a Democratic Senate, a Democratic president. We didn't get exactly what we wanted. The problem, as I said, right now it's a four vote margin in the House of Representatives, it's 50/50 in the Senate. It's always about the math. You've heard me say that a million times.

Chad Pergram ([12:36](#)):

The problem for the Democrats is that their legislative eyes were bigger than their parliamentary stomach, and you can't pass all these big things unless you have a bigger majority in both chambers. That's bedeviled them, and that might backfire on them this fall if they don't get their base to the polls.

Jason Altmire ([12:54](#)):

What's your perception... You've been on Capitol Hill for a long time. You started Fox News in 2007 and of course had a background before that. There's a lot of talk about the animosity that exists between the two parties and the lack of willingness to work together is at nearly unprecedented levels in American history. Maybe the Vietnam War, certainly the Civil War, but you have to go back to some very traumatic times in American history to approach what we're seeing on Capitol Hill today. Have you seen a difference over the years? Do you think it's worse today? If so, what do you think we could do about it?

Chad Pergram ([13:35](#)):

I was here when Republicans swept the House for the first time in 40 years in 1994. Newt Gingrich became speaker, and that was a very volatile time here on Capitol Hill, because Democrats were so used to being in the majority and could not believe that Republicans had the majority, and also

a Republican Senate, and were using to investigate Bill Clinton and put the kibosh on Democratic spending priorities. It was a pretty volatile time. That was my first dance with some of this.

Chad Pergram ([14:00](#)):

I was not around during the Civil War obviously, but the things I see today probably rival that. You mentioned Vietnam. It's funny, my first job in Washington in 1993 was at C-SPAN, and I had been around politics a little bit before that. I had worked in Ohio in college and graduate school, and covered John Boehner's first race for Congress in 1990, in fact, which is a whole other story, when I was in college. So I had covered politics extensively, so I kind of knew a little bit about Congress I think at that point.

Chad Pergram ([14:28](#)):

My first job was at C-SPAN, and Brian Lamb, who was the founder of C-SPAN, would have what he called Lamb lunches, where he would take all the new employees to lunch. So I started there in the fall of 1993, and somewhere around that period he took me, along with a bunch of others, to lunch. This was right when they were starting the Whitewater investigation with President Clinton, which paled in comparison to what we saw several years later with the Monica Lewinsky investigation.

Chad Pergram ([14:54](#)):

Brian Lamb, one of the reasons he kind of created C-SPAN was kind of in response to the Vietnam War and how the media behaved. Among other things, he was a public affairs officer at the Pentagon. One of the other new employees said to Brian at that time... He said, "I can't believe how toxic this is. Is it the worse you've ever seen?" He said, "You weren't here during Watergate." Again, you talk about Vietnam, we talk about Watergate, we have these inflection points here.

Chad Pergram ([15:22](#)):

But I will say this, this is the difference. It's one thing, and you're naturally going to have these clashes. I remember these clashes between Democrats and Republicans in 1995, when Republicans won control of the house, and there was all this about ag subsidies and education policies, and the Republicans were going to zero out the Corporation for Public Broadcasting, and all these big ideas, and it just drove the Democrats up the wall.

Chad Pergram ([15:46](#)):

It was very partisan and it was very nasty at time, but difference is this. It's one thing to be debating your colleague about agriculture policy and an amendment or something like that. It's another thing to look at that same colleague across the dais, and I see this every day up here, and you have somebody, at least from the Democrats' point of view, who has supported the violence here on 1/6 or tacitly ignored the violence from the president and what happened on January 6th, and just wants to get on with it and mollycoddle what happened on January 6th.

Chad Pergram ([16:19](#)):

That is a big difference, between disagreeing on social spending policy and these big fights, which should be big arguments, and that's very hard for a lot of members to get past, because they literally are looking at this from other planets, and you have certain Democrats who say how can I possible work with that person, because they voted to undermine the election. They're on record on that, late at night on January 6th, early in the morning on January 7th, voting against the certification of

the election. They have defended the former president, and I'm going to go work with them on an amendment about grain subsidies or something?

Chad Pergram ([16:56](#)):

That's the disconnect right there, and that's pretty serious. So, again, it's one thing maybe to have those discrepancies about agriculture policy and another environment, but not in this one, and that's what makes it more toxic. And it probably makes it more toxic, and I understand why the Republicans are doing this, saying if we get the gavel in January we're going to kick you know what and take names, and we're going to come after the members of the 1/6 Committee. Adam Kinzinger is retiring. Liz Cheney faces a competitive primary. They both might be private citizens next year. Will they subpoena them? Go after Hunter Biden?

Chad Pergram ([17:31](#)):

So in the near term that probably is not going to get any better if the House of Representative flips next year when it comes to policy. The other thing that's out there that's really looming, and this will come up next year, is the hiking of the debt ceiling, which as you know is a monster vote. And dealing how Kevin McCarthy, if he is in fact in the speaker's chair next year, how he's going to get members on his side to vote to raise the debt ceiling, and why would Democrats come and say we're going to salvage you, maybe just to help Joe Biden.

Chad Pergram ([18:01](#)):

When we get to that issue sometime next year that is going to be as bad as the debt ceiling fight in the summer of 2011, which was pretty epic frankly.

Jason Altmire ([18:10](#)):

In addition to all of the issues that you've mentioned and the personalities everybody points to, you have AOC and The Squad on the left, you have Marjorie Taylor Greene and Congresswoman Boebert and Matt Gaetz and those types on the right. The problem is if you look at the campaigns that are being waged in the country there are about half a dozen Democrats and Republicans, on both sides, candidates that have won their primaries, they're going to be member so of Congress, that fit the mold of those folks I was just talking about, that fit the mold of The Squad, very confrontational, taking on their own party.

Chad Pergram ([18:51](#)):

From the right. Yes. Exactly. Exactly.

Jason Altmire ([18:53](#)):

Yeah, both of that. So there's reinforcements on the way for the people who are driving this polarization, who are fostering this disenchantment with compromise, and discouraging members from working together. I don't see any way it gets better in the next session of Congress no matter who's in control, because there's going to be even more people from those political fringes that are now in the Congress, among the ranks of those who are carrying the message.

Jason Altmire ([19:24](#)):

So I guess my question to you is as a reporter you have to cover this. The people who probably give you the best quotes are the people who are driving that dissent and the people who are the most vocal about not compromising. How do you do your job when you know that those folks are not speaking for the leadership, they're not speaking for the people who are actually controlling the legislative agenda, but they have the loudest voice, and your viewers probably want to hear from them more than anybody else?

Chad Pergram ([19:57](#)):

You're always going to have those factions in Congress. You're right, that they're probably growing at the poles, P-O-L-E-S here, polar opposites in a sense in both parties. It does create a management problem for leadership. It might be a good thing in some respects if there's not a centralized, top down, heavy-fisted, Sam Rayburn style leadership. Sometimes there merit in that sometimes too, frankly.

Chad Pergram ([20:21](#)):

But in terms of operations, this is where people think if Kevin McCarthy is the Speaker of the House that he might not be... We'll put the if first. He might not get to be Speaker of the House even if they win because of those types of factions who view him A, as to consolatory to the other side, or B, if he doesn't try to impeach President Biden, if he doesn't try to impeach Alejandro Mayorkas, the HS Secretary, if they don't have robust hearings that go back and look into whatever the 1/6 Committee did, at what point does he want to govern and... Remember, his message is about inflation and the economy.

Chad Pergram ([20:55](#)):

Well, if you're talking about all those other things that make good copy and are great political revenge stories you're not actually governing. So there are some people who think that even if he gets the gavel maybe he's not around too long because he's putting up with those competing forces.

Chad Pergram ([21:08](#)):

And by the same token, we don't know that Nancy Pelosi is going to be around, and if it is the minority leader Hakeem Jeffries from New York, or Katherine Clark from Massachusetts or something, we don't know how that works out, how they deal with that.

Chad Pergram ([21:23](#)):

You're absolutely right, is you have these loud, shrill voices on both sides which command a lot of attention, and as a reporter, to answer your question, you have to be very careful and mindful of the fact am I reporting this now just because they said something outlandish or something that's going to get eyeballs or click bait or what have you, or is this a legitimate viewpoint here that's going to torpedo a bill or is going to cost them the votes or the debt ceiling or government shutdown?

Chad Pergram ([21:52](#)):

So you have to be very mindful about putting some of those things out there. I mean I'm willing to put anything out there because they're members of Congress. If a member of Congress says something or tweets something it's generally newsworthy. But, again, how do you balance that in your reporting, and then I have to... This is where I like to come back and say it is about the math. They need this coalition of people to get across the finish line. So regardless of their reasons this is the problem.

Chad Pergram ([22:17](#)):

Talk about political realities here. What are the rules? What are the Senate precedents to move something through? They can talk all day about these types of things. It was funny, I heard something just the other day about people were saying we got to balance the budget. Well, you know that balancing the budget is never going to happen. It's a great campaign slogan and both sides have used it over the years. There's no way to balance the budget.

Chad Pergram ([22:38](#)):

They say we need to cut spending. Well, if you go to your average constituent, they would say cut this type of education stuff or this type of subsidy somewhere, but they don't want to cut defense, and you know that that's a staggering portion of what we call here on Capitol Hill discretionary spending, the portion of federal spending that Congress controls.

Chad Pergram ([22:57](#)):

Nobody wants to touch entitlements, which is even bigger. That's two-thirds of all federal spending. So I try in my reporting when they say these things, and I'm just using that as an example, talking about budgetary matters, to say here is the reality. This is why this is impossible to do. These are the Newtonian laws of Congressional physics here, and it's not going to happen.

Chad Pergram ([23:18](#)):

So even if you have to report on some of those outlandish ideas from both sides, I try to always bring it back into the universe to say what is possible. It might make a great soundbite, but here in reality that's not going to happen, so as a reporter I think I have a responsibility to point those things out as much as I can in an objective, fair way.

Jason Altmire ([23:40](#)):

For the last question I want to stick with that exact point. The Congress is likely to flip on... At least the House is likely to flip. Anything more than four, the Republicans take control. We could argue is it going to be 15 or 20 or 50 seats, and depending on who you talk to you'll get a different answer. But in all likelihood the Republicans will probably be in control in the next session of Congress.

Chad Pergram ([24:04](#)):

In the House at least.

Jason Altmire ([24:05](#)):

Correct. So based upon your conversations with folks on the House side and the preparations that are being made, what do you think the legislative priorities are going to be for the leaders on the House side on the Republican party?

Chad Pergram ([24:20](#)):

They're going to have to deal with inflation, even if it's efforts to make President Biden going into the 2024 election. So that's the first thing, looking at economic issues. There's probably going to be a lot about the origins of COVID and the Wuhan lab and things like that. Again, I talk about going in and revisiting the 1/6 Committee hearings, looking into Hunter Biden, a lot of conversations about his laptop.

Chad Pergram ([24:45](#)):

Again, that's going to be the agenda, but at what point is the public, who says... Wait a minute, there was a case study in this. There was a lot of criticism here on Capitol Hill, where for the first time in more than 50 years the House Intelligence Committee, they held a hearing about UFOs. Everybody guffawed about it. It got a lot of attention. There's people in the Air Force and the Navy pilots who've seen it and they're like this is real.

Chad Pergram ([25:09](#)):

There was a lot of press interest in that story, just the fact that first time in 50 years that they had ever looked into it, and by the way the person who was most interested in this when they last dealt with this back in the late '60s was Minority Leader Ford, as in President Gerald Ford later, because there were a lot of sightings in his district and he wrote about this. So anyway, I tell you this because you have those types of things that get people's attention. Republicans were like can you believe that the Democrats are looking into UFOs?

Chad Pergram ([25:41](#)):

There was a hearing here about the Washington Commanders, the football team here in Washington, DC. Dan Snyder, the owner, is going to testify here before the end of the month. Roger Goodell, the NFL commissioner, testified about the workplace culture at the Commanders a couple weeks ago, and Republicans were saying why are we looking into a football team and their workplace culture? We should be focused on inflation.

Chad Pergram ([26:02](#)):

Okay. Fine. But as soon as Republicans in the House, if they are in the majority, start to look into all this Hunter Biden stuff or revisiting the 1/6 Committee or anything like that, Democrats, and frankly voters, will say what about the economy? They're not just going to throw a switch as soon as Republicans get the House of Representatives.

Chad Pergram ([26:23](#)):

Now they will argue if they don't get the Senate. They'll say give us the Senate next time and President Trump, or whoever we want, President DeSantis in the White House, or whoever, that will help us win in 2024. That's what we need to get this all worked out. But the more time they spend talking about things that don't deal with bread and butter issues probably subtracts from them because they have made so much noise about this, and this is the fine line that a potential McCarthy speaker has to walk, because at what point does he go off to satisfy the base, and we're going to impeach Biden or somebody else, than dealing with what's the price of eggs and milk.

Jason Altmire ([27:01](#)):

Well, this has been a treat, Chad. Chad Pergram is the congressional correspondent for Fox News. He is absolutely one of the best in the business. Nobody does it better. It's been a treat to have you on. Thank you, Chad, for being with us.

Chad Pergram ([27:14](#)):

The pleasure was all mine. Thank you.

Jason Altmire ([27:18](#)):

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