Is Norquist's Influence Fading? Some GOP Split With Anti-Tax Activist **Over Budget Deal**

WASHINGTON (AP) — For decades, conservative lobbyist Grover Norquist vowed to drive Republicans out of office if they didn't pledge to oppose tax increases. Many lawmakers signed on.

But now, several senior Republicans are breaking ranks, willing to consider raising more money through taxes as part of a deal with Democrats to avoid a catastrophic budget meltdown.

Tennessee Sen. Bob Corker says the only pledge he will keep is his oath of office. House Majority Leader Eric Cantor says no one in his home state of Virginia is

talking about what leaders in Washington refer to simply as "The Pledge," a Norquist invention that dates to 1986. Georgia Sen. Saxby Chambliss says he cares more about his country than sticking to Norquist's

It's quite an about-face for senior members of a party that long has stood firmly against almost any notion of tax increases. And while GOP leaders insist they still don't want to see taxes go up, the reality of a nation in a debt crisis is forcing some to moderate their opposition to any movement on how much Americans

pay to fund their government. Republican legislators and Democratic President Barack Obama's White House are haggling vigorously as they look for ways to reach agreement on detailed tax adjustments and spending cuts before automatic, blunt-force changes occur at the new year.

'Oh, I signed it," Sen. Jeff Sessions said on Fox News about Norquist's pledge. "But we've got to deal with the crisis we face. We've got to deal with the political reality of the president's victory."



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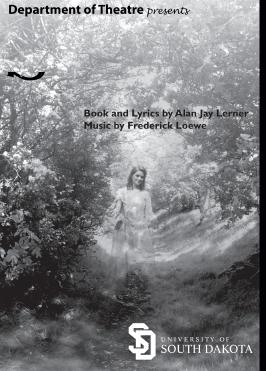
Coffee and cookies will be served while parents wait and a drawing for

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