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Paul Ryan Says Conservative Attacks Are a 'Strange New Normal'

As outside groups pile on, the Republican budget negotiator says he is sticking to principles.

By: Shane Goldmacher - December 11, 2013

For years, Republican Rep. Paul Ryan has been hoisted on a pedestal by conservative think tanks and activist groups as the paragon of conservatism in Congress. But all the accolades bought him zero goodwill this week, as he crafted his first bipartisan budget pact.

The Cato Institute called the package a "huge Republican cave-in." The Club for Growth lamented it as "budgetary smoke and mirrors." Heritage Action said it was "a step backward." And FreedomWorks called it a "surrender."

It's quite the turnabout for a politician whose rapid rise was fueled, in part, by the backing of such groups.

"It's a strange new normal, isn't it," Ryan said with a laugh Wednesday, after he presented the package to his House GOP colleagues. "It is what it is. It's funny, isn't it?"

Ryan said he was confident, despite the outside rabble-rousing, that a majority of House Republicans will back the package.

"I don't let that stuff bother me anymore. Groups are going to do what they want to do," Ryan said. "What matters to me is: Am I doing what I think is right? Am I sticking to my principles? And am I listening to my colleagues who actually have a voting card?"

He said conservatives need to accept that their preferred agenda will not pass through so long as government is divided. "I think we need to win some elections before we can actually truly fix this problem," the 2012 losing vice presidential candidate said of the nation's debt.