

Marshall here. Welcome back to the realignment. Today, we are airing the second of three parts of soccer and my realignment live recordings that went on at our live event in DC last week. A lot of great episodes. This one is focused really on the future of the right. We're kicking it off with the Heritage Foundation's president, Kevin Roberts, along with the Intercollegiate Studies Institute's Johnny Berkha. We're talking about the future of the right in the context of institutions like think tanks and student programs. Then, I speak with Kirsten Sotis Anderson of Ashland Insights about the rights struggles with young voters. After that, we're following up on the Gen Z theme with American Moments Saurabh Sharma and Nate Huckman of National Review.

Finally, closing out with realignment favorite, American compasses Chris Griswold speaking about the future of conservative economics. Lots of great stuff here. Once again, trying to get the video up for now, you're going to have to deal with just the audio version. Hope you all enjoy that conversation and of course, a huge thank you to Lincoln Network for sponsoring this conference with us.

I'm joined by Kevin Roberts of the Heritage Foundation and, of course, Johnny Berkha of the Institute for Collegiate Studies. There are too many three-letter agencies in terms of government. There are too many three-letter think tanks. That's the really phoned in apology I'll make on that. I want to start at the broadest level because the show is called the realignment. We're focused on this idea of it. Everything is changing. Everything is different. That's almost become such a cliché of it. I now think it's actually helpful to ask the two of you starting with you, Kevin. What is conservatism? Conservatism is the belief in an enduring moral order that probably necessitates some form of organized religion but at least necessitates an understanding that there's a higher power. For me, I would say God. For others, they might say nature and nature's law that's imprinted either on our soul as I would say it or on our nature. What's imprinted on our soul, and this is what conservatives not only understand but try to conserve, is the natural spirit towards self-governance and governments of a few different kinds, republics, limited monarchies, maybe more organized democracies that work to do one thing, which is to protect our freedom. But by that, I don't mean that in a libertarian sense. I mean that in a conservative sense, which is the freedom to do what we ought. That there, once again, that confers a moral obligation to one another in spite of whatever differences we may have, political, ethnic, linguistic, religious, and so on. To sum up here, conservatism has really been at its peak in the United States, in the United Kingdom, in modern history. It may be at its peak in many different kinds of societies in the future. But always, conservatism is something that's focused on conserving that enduring moral order. And one quick follow up before I get too, Johnny. What does it mean to be conservative then in an increasingly secularizing society? Exactly the same because there's an enduring moral order. And so it doesn't mean that it's easy. I happen to know that it's not easy every day. But for those of us who believe that there is, whatever our religious tradition is, there are many that would speak to this, that we have to become more effective to the heart of your question. We have to be more savvy at explaining conservatism in a political sense. But because I happen to think that in most cases, politics is downstream from culture and society, there's certainly an interaction there, that a lot of what conservatives in this increasingly secular society, even hostile society have to do, is spend less time focused on politics, per se, and more time on building the institutions in

civil society, like churches, rotary clubs, Kiwanis clubs, and very much influenced in heritages by Robert Putnam's book, *Bowling Alone*. And that's something that is a failure, that is keeping civil institutions together. That's a failure of modern conservatism because we've spent far too much time waging political fights. Great, same two questions. Whichever direction you want to take it. I would largely agree with Kevin's definition of conservatism. I'd go back to Edmund Burke and CS Lewis, Burke viewing society as a partnership between the dead, the living, and the unborn. And CS Lewis talking about chronological snobbery, the belief that we came most recently, that doesn't necessarily make us right. We have to be in constant conversation with the great minds, the great ideas from throughout history. So I think of it more of as a posture towards reality than a particular political movement. But I think in our American context, it certainly is defending the American political order and the broader kind of Judeo-Christian

Western tradition that helped to shape that order. What do you think of Kevin's point that the right has been too focused on politics over civil society? I think I would say maybe have a slight difference of opinion. I think if by politics you mean sort of this hope or this fantasy that if only we win one more election, then everything's going to be okay. I think he's absolutely right. But I do think to some extent it's mutually reinforcing. Politics is downstream of culture, but also culture, innovation is downstream of politics. And I think of some of the, let's say a town like Pittsburgh, a town where you look, if you were to go back to the year 1900, you see these gorgeous architecture thriving manufacturing city. Now it has come back a little bit recently, but I do think that if you kill the economic drivers of these communities through bad policy choices, the institutions of civil society are totally going to shrivel up. And if you visit a lot of those churches in that whole Allegheny region, I'm Eastern Orthodox, so one Sunday on a drive back from Pittsburgh, I stopped in this parish and there were literally three people there in this mountain town. And there was this 70, 80-year-old priest, and he could barely walk. He needed people to support him on each shoulder. And I guarantee that the annual budget of that church is probably like a couple thousand dollars. And I really don't think it's the result of poor evangelism on behalf of the church. I think it's bad policy led to those industries dying, which resulted in all sorts of pathologies and despair that really helped kill the church. So I think it cuts both ways.

So I want to focus on this politics is downstream from culture point. I think it's really entered the lexicon. I'm curious how you think folks should operationalize that, because I think that now that we're, I think almost a decade into this becoming like a very, not conventional in the sense that you're boring me, but in the sense that this is something people talk about, what should folks do with that? Because some folks will hear that and say, hey, like, let's launch the daily wire and put out like conservative movies or, hey, like, let's just like exit the political space altogether. Like what should folks actually do with this phrase? Now what there's broad agreement, I think it'd be fair to say that there's that there's truth to it.

Well, thanks for that. They are mutually reinforcing that is culture and politics. And I grew up on the Gulf Coast. So I've seen the river that runs through my hometown Lafayette, Louisiana flow backwards during hurricane season, which is to say that if politics is downstream from culture, sometimes politics flows upstream and affects culture, or you can use Johnny's metaphor, the point is, they're mutually reinforcing. And I would never say, in fact,

I have argued vociferously against the following, which is not being engaged in politics. That's not what I'm saying. I'm saying that it's a matter we got a finite amount of time as individuals, as organizations, as a movement, that we have placed too much emphasis on politics, especially in Washington DC. It doesn't mean that we should disengage from Washington DC. It means that we need to be a lot more focused on what's happening at the state level. But I think in the last half decade, the conservative movement has done that. And we're seeing the fruit of that. Now, as we sit here, the latest universal school choice bill was signed into law, the ink is barely dry in Iowa. That's going to happen several more times this spring. So just bear with me for two more minutes, if you don't mind. Because the point is, that is a reflection of the conservative movement saying, there's not a darn thing that's really going to happen in good in DC politically the next few years, but we ought to have the supernatural hope that we can make it happen. But now the next thing

is for conservatives to be focused on local government. Think of, if we were sitting in this very spot, 12 hours or now, every one of us, when we left here, would be concerned about our safety. That is abhorrent in the nation's capital of the leading republic in the history of the world. And that is because conservatives have said, we're not going to deal with politics in a city that's 90% Democrat. We can't have that thinking. But in order for that to be successful in a political sense, we have to be very focused on rebuilding cultural institutions, starting with the family, which of course has been ravaged by federal policy. I would also add actually something Michael Gibson told me when we had lunch on Monday was that politics and culture are downstream of

excellence. And I'm still kind of unpacking the implications of that. But I do think of, I think of what Elon Musk has done at Twitter. I think of what someone like Chris Rufo, who obviously he's been supported by institutions. But in another sense, he's sort of an individual who had this vision, pursued it, and has brought about pretty significant change throughout the country in the realm of education, particularly in states like Florida. You think of Ron DeSantis in Florida. Obviously, that is politics. But you also have these individuals who are excellent, who end up leading institutions or forming or building new ones, and then producing in a really short period of time significant changes in both politics and culture. Something I'm curious about then is the degree to which, what would you identify as like what the national problems are? So two of you. So you could say the border, that's a national crisis in the sense that Colorado has to deal with that, New York, Texas, etc. What are local problems? So even if we're talking about crime, is there, you know, there's a center left Bill Clinton of the 1990s who says, hey, I'd spend more federal money

on cops. So how do we kind of disentangle these local federal state issues from one another? Well, the first part of that excellent question is public safety. I mean, all you have to do is ask the American people. They will tell you. It's an amazing concept, which we overcomplicate in policy and politics. Public safety, the disintegration of community, which means a lot. I mean, we could take two hours just to unpack that. But the second part, so top of mind in terms of local issues, but then they would also say education. And I think that's particularly tragic, the state of education in every major city. So the top 100 American cities in terms of population, they have all since the creation of the U.S. Department of Education. And since that time, we've spent nearly two trillion dollars on government funded schools. I've only attended public schools. I'm a big

proponent. The only thing that's happened in those 100 cities is that educational attainment has not just gone down. It is spiraled downward. And so if you go ask people in neighborhoods adjacent to where we're sitting, there's an 80, 90 percent chance that there's going to be some combination of those. And so is there a role, the second part of your question for federal policy in that? Sure. And in fact, one of the things that excites me as someone who's firmly ensconced on the political right is the opportunity on those issues in particular in local government for us to build a very broad coalition across the political spectrum. And so what you'll be hearing from me and from Heritage in the next year, the next two years, even with all of the important focus on 2024, because of the presidential campaign, is for conservatives. But even beyond that, just Americans to once again care about the American city, because as the American city goes, so goes our self-governance. I guess I would, I'll leave it to Kevin to maybe sort out the differences between the federal problems and the state problems. But I think the broader issue in the broader ecosystem is that almost every sort of vital kind of core area of public policy, whether it is both, maybe not public policy, but of the necessities of human life when you think of housing, education, health care, they're all exorbitantly expensive, and they're all mediocre or terrible. And I think it really does put young people in a very challenging position when I live in Chester County, Pennsylvania, and I think the median home price there, this is probably significantly less compared to areas around DC, but I think this past year, the median home sale was something like \$550,000, which is really expensive. And if you think of you're a 22-year-old graduating from college and you're trying to save up money for a down payment and make those monthly payments, it costs a lot. It's the same thing with health care, same thing with education, student loans. And so I think the conservative solution needs to somehow recognize the classic wisdom of federalism and the power of what can be done and what should be done at the state level. But I think the challenge is that you have had the federal government involved and they're fingers in all of these for basically a century. And it's probably, even with the most conservative president or Congress, never going to be totally decentralized in the way that the founding fathers intended it. So how do you both reinvigorate this sort of robust tradition of federalism, which we're seeing now in Florida and in Iowa and in other states like that, while at the same time figuring out what do we do at the national level from a public policy perspective to address some of these challenges? I want to pick up on what you just said with the limits of what even the most conservative president could accomplish. To the two of you, what actually are the limits? I think this is why, and not being partisan, I think this is an interesting thing that Governor DeSantis is doing. Let's look at the experimental college board curriculum for the African-American studies AP course. Not getting into the specific curriculum, but he just said no to it. And I think most folks, especially in DC and the traditional conservative media, would, going back to 2015, not think that that was an option on the table. The right needs to reach out to minority voters. The right needs to be open. Suburban voters get sketchy around those types of things in a couple of different contexts. So what actually do you think is the limit on what the right can do given its actual perspectives? Well, if we can overcome the greatest obstacle to good policy, which if Alexis de Tocqueville were sitting here, he would say, is the lack of political courage, then the sky is the limit. I don't mean the authority. The power is limitless. I mean that when conservatives have been in

power,
especially in this town, even when conservatives have occupied the White House and both chambers of Congress with comfortable majorities, that hasn't been often in our history to be clear. But when that has happened, we've not seized the moment. And to be polite, I would just say they were tentative. To be slightly impolite on purpose, I would say that they were cowards. Because they didn't even begin to scratch the surface in wielding the authority that they had constitutionally in the ways that Ron DeSantis is doing. We often refer to Governor DeSantis as being Reagan-esque. He's far better than Reagan. And I love Reagan. At Heritage, we love Ronald Reagan, right? But if you compare what DeSantis has done in one term and one month in Florida with what Reagan did as Governor of California, which was good, DeSantis understands what time it is in America. And your example of the African-American studies course is great. I happen to have a PhD in early American history with a focus on African-American history in spite of the fact that I'm obviously white. And so what DeSantis is saying is, truth will always persuade people. And so go to the truth. And what did the College Board do yesterday? They acquiesced. It's an amazing thing what happens when conservatives grow a spine. And I would add to that need for courage in growing a spine. Also sort of this competence, excellence, and even a sense of cunning, you know, because I do think DeSantis, I don't think he's just charging headlong into every controversial issue. That's stupidity. That's not bravery. I think he's kind of strategically approached things where he's picked fights that he knows that he can win. And once you start to rack up some victories, and also he's addressing, I think, very real problems that people, regardless of where you're at at the political spectrum, say, like, yeah, this is an issue. And he fixed it. He made it better. And so I think that then gets you the momentum. And then you can reach a little further, right? And maybe pick a fight. You're not necessarily sure that you're going to win, but your momentum is going to carry you to that. And I think that's what he's starting to do now with the College Board and with some other things. Okay, here's a follow-up for you, Kevin. No PhD, Johnny. So we're going to take you out of this for a second. But Johnny's smarter and more eloquent, so you may want to ask him first. So yeah, Johnny, I'd be curious as a white man without a PhD in the category of... He's saying you have less privilege. How should Florida teach African-American history? I thought you were asking Johnny. I was excluding him by nature of his background. Well, the way Florida has been teaching African-American history is great. I mean, it's a vital part of the curriculum. They don't whitewash history. It's accurate history. And so about 20, 25 years ago, the history profession was at its best. This is pre-wokeness. When it said, we've got to elevate the voices of the enslaved. We have to elevate the voices of people who certainly were oppressed. But you want to do that in a way that weaves a singular narrative about the American experiment. Because otherwise, what you do is end up defining people according to immutable characteristics, which is our skin color and other things, obviously. And Americans, as someone who actually wrote a dissertation and edited two books on enslaved people,

you can use historical records to bring them to life in a way that clearly historians weren't doing for most of our history. That's what Florida's curriculum does. It's what Texas's curriculum does. The problem with the College Board's AP African-American History course is that it is almost 100% identity politics. The purpose of it is to divide people. And you see, that's what DeSantis has put his thumb on, is that Americans are tired of being told that in spite of our very obvious differences, that we can't get along. The story of America as imperfect as it is, is that we do, in fact, get along. We do get along. And in fact, we do get it right. It sometimes takes us decades in a couple of centuries. But that's the rejection. Americans are rejecting that notion that whether it's really overwrought COVID lockdowns, whether it's what's going on with our curricula, whether it's going on with foreign policy, our political discourse, we want someone who doesn't say, I'm going to unite you, but someone who actually is making decisions that causes that. I would maybe jump in. I agree with everything Kevin said. I think, you know, one possible way to address this might also be sort of an emphasis on having students read primary source material instead of just the secondary literature as relates to some of the issues and questions about race. So if you actually, because I think it's important from just a civics perspective to teach a unifying history, like we have to have, we have to be educating people to be good citizens in our republic. But that doesn't mean there aren't people that have dissented from that tradition throughout. So if you're reading Malcolm X, like his actual speeches or James Baldwin, or if you're working in other voices, you know, Frederick Douglass, who have, you know, probably affirmed the American tradition more than some of the later people. But I think if you're engaging with the actual primary sources, they're going to have a much more holistic view than if they're just reading an Abram Kendi article from the Atlantic, for example, for their social studies classes. So I'd go back to those primary sources for African American voices. I think another follow up to you, Kevin, and obviously for you too, Johnny, that I think will get folks who are looking at from the outside in on the conservative movement, what, what time, you said, what time is, like, recognize what time it is in America, like, what time is it? It's a time to realize that marriage rates continue to decline. Fertility rates are at an all time low. And that demographic winter that is coming our way will completely obliterate American society. Just ask the Japanese who over the weekend made public their concerns at the governmental level about their population decreasing over the next half century from 125 million where it is today to 53 million. And so conservative, this sort of goes back to my point, there are a lot of causes for that, right? It goes back to my point about, yes, politics and obviously to heritage, we think policy are important. But just to speak with my heritage head on, heritage is always cared at least as much about civil society as we do about politics and policy per se. And so for conservatives to answer the question, I know what time it is that doesn't just mean that we're going to wield power in the way DeSantis has, maybe in some policy areas the way President Trump did, but also just as important as those things, that we're going to be engaged in local politics and revitalizing our community institutions and let us be comfortable to sum up here that at the local level, we're going to be working with people as conservatives who have a different political agenda at the federal level. Let's check that crap at the door and let's go take back our American cities. What time is it? I mean, I think it's, you know, to Kevin's point about, you know, crime in a city like DC, it does feel like especially after 2020, like sort of almost everything has just kind of

gotten crappy. You know, it's just not the same. You know, there's low confidence in institutions. We have \$30 trillion in debt. Cities aren't safe. You know, there's lots of, I mean, I think it's a very serious time. I think it's a time that'll make or break the future of our country. But and so I would, you know, I would just say that it requires both building local community and those, you know,

rethinking kind of big policy solutions. But I do think it is a time when, you know, I think we'll be looking for great leaders to emerge to take on the crises that America is facing today. And I think especially the domestic crises against the backdrop of the threat from China, against the backdrop of everything happening with Russia and Ukraine, I also think it's a very dangerous time for the nation generally. And we are awaiting and looking for great leaders to emerge.

I think your answers just kind of got at like the tension like around an issue like immigration. So for example, like the obvious center left Atlantic response to your point about Japan is, yeah, it's too bad the Japanese weren't willing to like reconceive of themselves and allow more immigrants in. So how should the right think of the immigration question, especially when you're bringing up the context of birth rates, population, those different things? Well, I think you portrayed with the Atlantic actually has said about Japan very accurately. And they're wrong, which I know is not coming

as a surprise for me. And it is because the nation state is more important than immigration. I'm very pro-immigrant. We're all immigrants by definition, heritage is pro-immigrant. But before that, we are pro-nation state, particularly those nation states that come out of the tradition Johnny not only today, but in his career has eloquently advocated for that emphasizes the rule of law. Why do immigrants want to come to a place like the United States? Why do immigrants want to go to a very different kind of society, but also very stable of Japan because of the rule of law? And what happens historically, I won't bore you with the details as a historian, but just thinking about the American context is that every time as we as we sit here today, we have such a high percentage of our population that has was born elsewhere, put off to the side, whether they got here legally or illegally, what that system was, America has felt a tension. And it isn't because of most Americans hate people. It isn't because most Americans hate immigrants. Quite the opposite. We know that even the Atlantic, which won't admit that knows that. It's because we have a civil society that can assimilate people only so quickly. And so the argument that immigration is going to solve Japan's problem is not correct. I would concede that it may help in with some labor shortage for a decade, but there are much more important things than labor shortages that actually affect labor and business and job creation down the future down the road. So this is, I think from a public policy point of view, perhaps the thorniest of a lot of thorny issues because it involves so many variables and because obviously politically, it's been practically impossible, not just for the left and right to agree, but for the right to agree with itself about the importance of merit based immigration that focuses on assimilation rather than identity politics. Yeah, it seems to me like like many systems in America today thinking of healthcare, like there's just really not any coherent goal towards which our current immigration system is working. And I think it's important that we define very clearly what are the national interests that we have economically, culturally, and then set those immigration standards based on those particular ends. I would favor a shift to merit based immigration. And I also think it's just a general conservative principle that change needs to be gradual and incremental. So there's

probably,

I don't know what the exact percentage is, but a healthy and natural level where you can welcome people into society where they can assimilate and kind of climb up the rung of success and pursue the American dream. And then there's also a level of immigration that sort of overwhelms the system and creates these pools of people that basically live in the shadows and are at risk of exploitation and never fully integrate into the opportunities that we have here. So I'm proud of the fact that the realignment has a genuinely, you know, left, right center audience. And I think the way you all have articulated, especially the local and like the, you know, birth rate related issues or ones that anyone could say, okay, I get that concern. I think what they are going to feel a degree of skepticism around is, okay, like what is to be done about that beyond just reciting Robert Putnamisms that I remember from back in high school in the 2000s. So what is actually to be done here in that context? Because like we can talk about culture, we can talk about local communities. I'm sure there's a Japanese version of this conversation happening right now. It's also talking about culture that isn't being addressed there. So how would we actually think about that from a public policy perspective? Thanks for that question. By the way, I should have said thanks for everything that realignment does. I'm really grateful. It's the kind of civil discourse that we need to be having more of. And that's a heartfelt compliment from all of us at Heritage. To get to the heart of your question succinctly, run for your city council. Run for school board. Be active in your neighborhood association. This is a very Berkian response. It's a very Aristotelian response. And the reason that that's important to do is because by virtue of doing those things, among others, you will be more invested in your local community. And then it will cause you, just because of the finite hours we have in each day, to turn off the national news. Turn off both NPR and Fox. There's your across the spectrum comment. Listen to better podcasts. They're very thoughtful. Like realignment. Like some of them we have at Heritage. If you're

on the left, believe it or not. And that's the kind of thing that has been missing in America since the 1950s and 60s. I went to a humanities program at one of the most liberal public universities in the country. And I get along with a lot of liberals. I don't get along with others. But I think one of the reasons that's the case is because I've always been willing to be invested with them on local issues when we've lived together. Now, some of those have gotten kind of nationalized with some of the cultural politics that divide us vehemently. But if we can put those off to the side and say local politics is about community, then I think there is a tremendous opportunity for all of us in spite of what I know is a variety of opinions in this room to go work together. And Johnny, a follow up on that to you then is you're working with students, you're working

if ambitious, you know, a bunch of people who I think very easily could come to DC, go to law school, etc., etc., etc., national ambitions, like what do they want to do? Right? Like, or do you have students who are talking about, yeah, like maybe city council, local races, how's that kind of working out for you? Yeah, I mean, that's a great question. My mind went to a different place than I think with Kevin's response. Yeah, answer both. So take it. Answer both. Yeah. So I mean, I he would

love for us to disagree. So I mean, my mind went initially to, to like all the problems that I think we have in the country and like how we should fix them, you know, and I think we work a lot in

higher education and, you know, we're sort of operating as a counter university. So we're identifying the best students, you know, at schools from Harvard and Yale to University of Michigan, Wisconsin, Stanford, Alabama, sort of all over the country. And, you know, we're connecting them with, with mentors, with friends, and we're introducing them to the great books, the great ideas and, and helping them to build a career network so they can pursue, you know, opportunities in Washington, D.C. But they can also start companies. They can also start publications. They can also build new institutions that might help to reinvigorate things from the bottom up. And, you know, we provide resources for them to do that. So that's how I think of it from a student perspective. But I do think we need to think more radically about like, how do we disrupt the higher educational, the higher education model generally, you know, could you promote trade schools, as, as Michael was saying on his panel, can you, can you divert people to meaningful employment, sort of away from higher ed, both, you know, both with the issue of sort of wokeness in mind, but also just more practically, like, what's good for their career, what's going to be good for their communities, what's good for their families, you know, on the, on the broader scale, how do you, you know, repatriate as much, you know, manufacturing and vital industries back to either the United States or to countries that are allies, you know, in a way from sort of the hand of the Chinese Communist Party. How do you invest the tens of millions of dollars that we're currently pouring into Ukraine? How do we take that money and invest it here in America instead to rebuild our own country? There are so many issues where I think you could actually problems that need to be fixed and need to be addressed and can be done politically. How do you restore, you know, free speech within the tech platforms? How do you restore free speech within the state, you know, education systems? Those are all challenges that I think can be tackled. So last question for the two of you, take it away and we'll wrap. What is it like to lead longstanding institutions during an anti-institutional age? It's glorious. It's the greatest privilege I've ever had. No, I mean that because the anti-institutionalism is very well founded. And as some people know, I'm an anti-institutionalist until institutions figure out what time it is, which is that they must adapt to the times, including heritage. And so it's glorious to be able to do that and also recognize that speaking for heritage, which my colleagues, our supporters have been extremely, not just supportive, but enthusiastic about recognizing that and realizing we have a republic to save. So let's be innovative, even though we've been doing certain things a certain way for a long time. Clearly that worked at a certain time, but it's not working as well now. And, you know, any spirit of America is let's always continue to strive to be better. So that's why it's glorious. Yeah, I would say, you know, having come from the American conservative, which operated much more, kind of like a scrappy startup where you literally, as some of my colleague, former colleagues in this room would know, you literally have to do sort of everything, you know, and it's fun and exhausting and you're trying to get it sort of, you know, in some sense, be as provocative as you can to get to establish, you know, this, this organization coming to ISI, as you said, it's a 70-year-old institution this year. And I think it's, you know, the difference is that you immediately,

you have, you know, people that have been on your board and have been involved with the organization for 50, 60 years, people who have vast amounts of wisdom and knowledge, who understand sort of where you're at as a 30-year-old leader of an organization, provide you the resources that you need, you know, the great, you know, the tradition of the conservative intellectual movement, sort of the great books from Russell Kirk, Robert Nisbet, that there's just so much wisdom and so many great minds have been part of the ISI community over the decades. Thinking back to one of our recent homecoming events where you literally, at an alumni luncheon, you know, you have someone who's in their 80s, who was a former secretary of the Navy, sitting with someone in their mid-40s, who's the president of a state-based think tank, sitting with someone who's 23, who's doing the exact same program, the Weaver Fellowship Program,

and you can bring together these generations. And there's something that's beautiful and inspiring about that pollination, and so cross-pollination between the generations. And so I think as, you know, thinking of ISI, both looking back to the past drawing from our resources, but also, you know, bringing the institution to bear upon the challenges that we have, you know, it seems like our students and our supporters have been responsive to that direction.

That is a great way to leave it. Thank you for joining us today. Thanks for having us. Thanks.

So for this next fireside, I'm with Kristin Soto-Sanderson. We are talking about the right, the GOP, and young voters. I'm kind of actually wondering, like, is it useful to treat the right, the conservative, the American conservative movement, and the GOP as the same, or should these really be separated out? So they should be separated out. And the research that I've done, and this isn't specific to young voters, but when you ask people, do they think of themselves as strong Republicans? Do they think of themselves as very conservative? And then the third variable is, do you think of yourself as very favorable to former President Trump? And you create this Venn diagram. A little under four out of 10 Americans fit into one of those buckets,

but a very small portion fit into all three of those buckets. So it is useful to think of them as as not identical. But when I think about younger voters, oftentimes I'm thinking about it through the lens of party in part because that's where we have the most concrete data on where young people are at is when you look at election and election results. So the other question then, too, then, is Yvonne Levin was doing his panel, and he was talking about how there's panic and then there's worry when it comes to like a question of America's democracy and those type of questions. If you're looking from the voter issue from the Republican party's perspective, are you worried or are you panicking? So I guess in some ways I've been panicking for 10 years, and so I've lost the ability to panic anymore. So for a little bit of background for those of you who aren't as familiar with my work and what I do, I am a pollster. I have been in the polling industry for over a decade and a half, and it was actually around the 2008 election when Barack Obama won over young voters by a two-to-one margin that I began going, okay, well, it's on the one hand very good that at the time young people were old millennials, that we were getting engaged in politics. This is great, but what's bad is all of a sudden my friends are getting involved in politics and they're saying, how can you be a Republican? You seem so nice and normal, and that's worrisome

to me. But I kept hearing, oh, well, it's normal. It's normal for young people to break so heavily for Democrats. Don't worry about it. And at the time I was in graduate school, and I looked back

at historical data around voting in presidential elections and in midterms, and it wasn't always the case that young voters broke so heavily for Democratic candidates. And what was even more worrisome is to the extent anybody was saying, well, this is just a one-off because Barack Obama is uniquely appealing to younger voters. Things will revert back to the mean eventually, is that there's a lot of data that how people think about politics when they are young echoes throughout the rest of their lives. Now, we all probably know someone who started off thinking one thing and then had an aha moment and changed their mind. But in the aggregate, people don't change their minds that much once they get kind of out of their 20s and 30s. And so if Republicans didn't kind of make efforts to win those young voters back, that could lead to this ripple effect that you would see for decades. And that's a little bit of what we're seeing. So if you're just thinking about the millennial generation, they still vote leaning Democratic, even though now we're old. We're about

having 40th birthday parties and buying homes, having kids, doing all the things that Republican strategists said, oh, that'll definitely make them lean right. And then when you see for Gen Z, they are, in many ways, their political views are relatively similar to their older millennial brothers and sisters. Still very skeptical of markets, relatively sort of socially and culturally more progressive. And so for a variety of reasons, they're just not anywhere close to looking like kind of the Republican Party, particularly the Republican Party of the sort of pre Donald Trump era. So when you're telling the 2008 millennial story through the lens of Barack Obama, I'm wondering how much is that about Obama and how much of that would have been the same if, like, let's say Hillary Clinton wins the Democratic primary and more likely than not, also beats John McCain. Like, would you see the millennial story? Because you still have had a 2008 financial crisis, you still have had the Iraq war, the generational event. So actually, the way to frame the question is how much of, like, generational voting choices are due to personalities versus, like, events in context? Sure. So some of it is, I think, from President Obama's election was an accelerant, but it was not the cause. And you can actually look back at the exit polls in the 2000 presidential election. Young people and their grandparents voted essentially identically. Young people split evenly between Al Gore and George W. Bush. Old people split evenly between Al Gore and George W.

Bush. And you get to the 2004 election. And at that point, you have the Iraq war that has begun to disillusion some young people. And there you see a little bit of a generation gap open up. But young people still break for, you know, John Kerry by only, I think it was like a roughly a 10 point margin, not that big a deal compared to what we see nowadays. But if you actually look at the 2006 midterms, so at that point, Barack Obama has just arrived in the United States Senate, has not announced he's running for president yet. And in that midterm, young voters broke for Democrats by a wider margin than any individual age group had, like, broken for a party. If you look back through, like, exit polls just going back and back and back. So you began to see the signs of this breakup between my generation and the GOP at the time pre Barack Obama. The signs are there. But the 2008 election certainly didn't help. And when you suddenly had a president who at least early in his presidency was very inspirational and appealing to very to young people, and Republicans did not have a great counter to that, you had the problem both of skepticism of markets stemming from the financial crisis, skepticism of American

engagement overseas as a result of the Iraq and Afghanistan Wars, skepticism of the right on social grounds because of the sort of culturally conservative positions of the George W. Bush era GOP clashing with young people who are moving the country in a different direction on LGBT issues. So you had the issues piece, you had the personality piece as well all coming together to create this perfect storm that made it very hard for Republicans to sort of hold serve. And I think, you know, speaking of millennials like aging, I just turned 30. So that's meant that I'm like more aware than ever that they're like generational differences, especially the younger like Gen Z. Gen Z folks. What would you say are the differences between millennials and Gen Z voters

and how much is like maybe confusing or like over conflating the two of those like lead to like a skewed perception? Oh, yeah. Well, and so being someone who studied millennials for a long time, now I often am reluctant when people ask me, tell me a little bit about young voters because a lot of my expertise on that topic 15 years ago had to do with the fact that I was a young voter 15 years ago. And now, you know, my generation is much older and I recognize that like I still wear skinny jeans. I get that that means that I have less credibility to speak about what Gen Z says, but I do look at the data. And what the data say is different between the two is that for millennials, we came of age in a moment where there was a lot of emphasis on bipartisanship. Let's reach across the aisle. Let's try to find common ground. Let's be pragmatic. Let's put our heads down and let's power through the challenges that we are facing. And Generation Z is a little bit different. So for my generation, the defining thing of our young adulthood was the internet. You know, for the oldest millennials, you might remember a time when the internet was not ubiquitous,

but the internet's basically been there. But for Gen Z, it's smartphones. And so for them, and social media. And so the ability to raise your voice, make your voice heard, speak your mind anytime, anyplace on any topic, and have that voice heard by an awful lot of people, people you might not even know, that's their normal. And so for Gen Z, they're much less interested in let's find common ground. Let's try to put our heads down and overcome this challenge that we've been handed. Let's blow things up because it seems like things are not running very well. And so that's also caused some friction in workplaces where Generation Z employees come in and they are not interested in trying to figure out how to adapt to or improve upon systems that are in place in their workplaces. They just want to come in and have revolution and transformation. And that causes a lot of that friction, even between Gen Z and millennials.

I'm curious, do you see that Gen Z like revolutionary energy, like playing out differently on the right and left? It's a good question. And in a way, I don't necessarily, I think there's more in common than is different in that the goals are, there is to an extent a goal of persuasion, but there is a really big focus on organizing and being loud and being the squeaky wheel rather than on let's go try to find people and convert them. Which I think there are pluses and minuses to that strategy, but I think that is something that unites left and right. Gen Z is total discussed with the systems and the way things are, which is something that millennials had too, but even more so, like turned all the way up to 11 and paired that with just, there's been such a decline in trust in institutions, even since the millennials first came on the scene, that there's no interest in like deference to what came before or, you know, those who were purportedly authorities or so on and so forth. That has just eroded even further.

So then I think the other question would be your 2015 book, Selfie Vote, bought it, read it, enjoyed it. The metaphor is like selfie, right? It's like the selfie is the way of like, you know, him kind of like it's like the millennials, they got a selfie. How would you kind of like define Gen Z if you wrote the book today? Because it seems like it probably be like, like not just like TikTok in terms of the company, but short form video attention, like it seems like that's like a very specific like technological dynamic that wouldn't have existed even when you're coming of age on like Facebook in 2008. Sure. And I'm always reluctant to, I mean, I was a little bit hesitant to even have the Selfie Vote as the title of the book because I thought, what if like three years from now no one's doing this anymore? They still are. So that held up. But there's a chapter in the book called like Snapchat's from Hillary. And the other day I was like, I wonder how many people are, you know, I haven't actually looked at the data recently on like usage of Snapchat versus TikTok versus versus what have you, but these things are always in flux. So I'm reluctant to ever define a generation or a group of people by a particular app or what have you, because that can always change. But I do think that the point in calling the book the Selfie Vote was that at the time back eight years ago, it was thought of as selfies were like a thing young people did. And my point was, this is not something that I think is just going to be associated with young people moving forward. Young people start the trends and then everyone else adopts them. And so that's why getting in on the ground floor and focusing on young people's political attitudes is important, because they tell us where everything is headed. If you want to know where the country is going, look at what young people think. And corporate America has this figured out, political America much less so. So when someone hasn't figured something out, it suggests that they have like an incentive like not to figure it out or they either or they don't want to figure out what is the political space like a frightened center, like not figuring out about where Gen Z is leading things. So I think the incentives in our political system are such that people are mostly focused on the next two to four years. There is no incentive in politics to think long term. So when someone like me comes around and in 2009 is panicking, Republicans, you're losing these young voters. It's very easy and frankly logical to say, it is much more important to me to turn out another 5% of voters who are senior citizens than it is for me to focus on trying to persuade young people where if I walk into a room of 100 young people, maybe 15 to 20 of them will go out to vote. Like that's, I understand if your frame of reference and your incentives are, I need to win in 18 months, why younger voters would fall off your radar. But I think the problem on the right is there really aren't institutions that are thinking, or at least back, you know, 15, 20 years ago, we're not thinking long term. It's just, I got to win the next election. And so that means if you have a problem that you don't need to solve it immediately, you'll be fine. You'll pass it to someone else to solve. The problem for Republicans now is like the bill is starting to come due as millennials have aged. They have held on in some way, shape and form to some of those more progressive views. And now they're voting more and more than ever. And it's harder to unwind that after someone has cast a ballot for a Democratic candidate in election after election after election than it is to try to reach someone when they first enter the political process. It's interesting because in your December national review piece on like Republicans and young people, you are pointing out that like the fake Churchill quote about how, you know, you get older and you become much more conservative just like,

A, like isn't a real quote, but also it's like not backed up in the social science. But I'm interested in like why we have that narrative in the first place. So for example, I think the big one would be like, look at the baby boomers, they protest the Vietnam War, but then they go all in for Ronald Reagan. So like, A, I would love to hear like, how like hear this through like the 20th century lens, and then hear how kind of like the right is responding to this kind of dynamic like now that like you can't resort to, okay, things are going to change. Sure. So there's a quote that people misattribute to Winston Churchill. He never said it, but the fake quote is, if you are young and conservative, you have no heart. And if you are old and liberal, you have no brain. And the reason why I hear that comment constantly is when people are trying to say, well, it doesn't matter that young people lean progressive because they'll grow up, they'll get married, they'll have kids, they'll buy homes, they'll pay taxes, they'll wonder what that FICA thing is on their pay stub and they'll all magically decide that they're conservatives. And this hasn't really been happening. The reason why it is so persistent is I think twofold. One, you can imagine how especially in terms of cultural issues, it's easy to understand why that would be the case, right? That somebody who is younger is going to be more open to society structuring itself in a new way, to changes in, you know, being less beholden to traditions. And so you can understand why someone who's younger might be more, you know, socially progressive or left leaning. The economic piece is a little bit more questionable, but, you know, there's an underlying thought process to it that's not crazy. But a lot of it is also to what you mentioned, that it is baby boomers assuming everyone is like them. And there's a ton of data that says that's not the case. Back in 20, I believe it was 13 or 14, there was a democratic data firm called Catalyst and they did a 200,000 person study where they looked at people's political views by birth year over the course of their lifetimes. And they show that pattern that you just described for baby boomers, right? That back in the 1960s, they, you know, 70s, they first begin getting interested in politics and involved and they're much more progressive and then Reagan comes along and they become more conservative and now they are watching lots of Fox News and what have you. And so they may assume, well, everyone will go on this same journey as me and that's not necessarily the case. Gen X, they came of age with Reagan being that first big memory. And actually, Gen X leans slightly more to the right these days than even in some cases, the boomers. In part, I believe because those memories that were shaped by them coming of age in the Reagan presidency and then sort of the early Clinton centrist Democrat moment have resonated with them. Meanwhile, for millennials coming of age during the Obama presidency, and then, you know, for Gen Z coming of age in the Trump presidency, those leave a lasting impact on how you view things. And that catalyst study said that events that happen to you in your political life when you are 18 have, I believe, three times as much of an effect on your lifetime political behavior as something that happens to you when you're 40. So things that happen when you're younger, they shape the way you look at the world and that resonates. In the selfie vote, the example I used of how this plays out in corporate America is there's a reason why McDonald's wants to sell happy meals. And it's not just because they make money off of

happy meals. It's because then you have a very young consumer that develops a very positive mental association with your brand. And so when they're no longer six years old, but they're 36 years old and they're going on a road trip and they see the golden arches, they have that warm feeling inside that developed from when they were younger. Politics isn't exactly the same, but it's not completely different either. So if we're talking about life events having a huge impact, like the obvious Gen Z answer, because like the millennium answer is a mix of like 9-11 to financial crisis, the Gen Z answer would obviously be COVID. How is COVID playing out? Because it seems like depending on where you live, that could go in either direction. Sure. So it's fascinating because the politics of COVID cut against what you might expect, given that for young people, they were not as at risk of the severe threat of COVID as someone who was older. And yet younger people have tended to have more progressive political views. So you would find in some cases, older voters being a little more resistant to COVID restrictions in some ways, but because they were personally more under threat from the virus, being maybe a little more accepting of it, where for young people initially feeling more, to the extent they're more progressive leaning, okay, well, I'm supposed to care for my fellow citizens and do this stuff, and then to later sort of push back very vigorously against it, look at what has happened to my generation. I still find I did a fellowship on a college campus a year ago, and we had to do a lot of things wearing masks, or unless you could go outside. And at the time, I thought this seems maybe like it's a little bit of overkill. And I was thinking that the students would be really mad, their college experience is being taken from them by them not being able to have as many events, by them not being able to have social face-to-face interactions as much. And I didn't see as much of that as I was expecting. Now it could be that it's a more progressive leaning campus, or I was speaking more with progressive leaning students, but I in some ways saw much less resistance to COVID, I saw much less resistance to the sort of COVID mandate, and et cetera regime than I would have expected, considering the cross currents of who's most affected by the disease. You know, hearing that, what I immediately kind of wonder is, is a generational event just something that happens, or is it something that you develop a reaction to over time? So for example, if we're telling the story of like US foreign policy, we'd say I quote like, millennials, Gen X, like Zoomers, they're responding to like the forever wars and how they were bad. But I'm sure the polling, especially towards the start was like much more in favor. So now like the generation has has a different reaction. So I'm wondering if is there a world where like, if you're 23, you're entering the workplace, okay, yeah, there's this year of like COVID, are you going to think differently about that when you're 32, 32, 34? And entirely possible. And so I think I'm so glad you brought up the example of the wars in Iraq and Afghanistan, because again, if you did polling on this in 2002, shortly in the aftermath of September 11th, you would find young people feeling very differently about things than they did 10 years later, or even five years later. So this is constantly evolving. And so that's why I am reluctant to say, well, here is firmly where Gen Z stands on COVID. And also, it's hard whenever we have these conversations about where does Gen Z stand on X, because generations are not a monolith, right? I find the same thing happens when people ask me about gender. Well, tell me, tell me, Christian, what do women voters want? I'm like, well, you're talking about 52% of the electorate. So we're going to need to get a little more specific than that. But I think that the

jury is still out on where young people will come down on something like COVID. And I think we'll begin to see hints of this in, do young people decide that things like remote work are very much how they like to live? Or do people begin going, I'm done with this, I want to go back into the office? Like those are the sorts of things that aren't related to politics. But I think we'll give us some clues about how they will, young people will think about the policies that were in place in response to COVID-19. And I just kind of realized, and we were talking about this before we started, like everything the past five minutes were incredibly biased towards people who go to college. So even like, I'm like, I'm explaining COVID through the context of like, Oh, yeah, like, remember, like when you're at U Chicago, I think that's where your fellowship was. And like, you couldn't go to your like top tier school class, like that's not on 15 different levels. That's not the average experience. Same thing is true of remote work and like white collar employees. So like to what degree is there just like an even corporate America, I'm guessing there'd be like a huge degree of like, almost like structural bias towards this point. So how does the college versus non college things skew things. So I'm so glad you brought this up. And we were talking about this a little bit before we came on stage that so many of our conversations about Generation Z, we found this with millennials as well, like this, we went through this, that the image that comes to mind of someone when you say the word millennial and now the word Gen Z is grossly unrepresentative. The millennial example I always used to give was the New York Times did this article, the headline was something like millennials are taking over the workplace and what it means for you. And I was like, Oh, here we go. And the, the, the lead of the story was all about a young man who goes to his boss and says, you know, I need the week off because I had a friend who just passed away and I'm really going to need some time for me to recover from this. And then a couple of days later, it turns out he's been at home building himself a tree house. And this is what the New York Times holds up as like the example of millennials in the workplace, right? Like vaguely duplicitous may have been making up a friend who died so you can get out of work so that you can go home and Instagram yourself doing like a fun crafts project. And I thought, well, this is extremely unrepresentative of what most, you know, millennials are like. And I think Gen Z, we wind up in the same situation, right? It's easy to look at like something insane that happens on a college campus and go like, Oh my gosh, the children these days, what's happening to them? And like the vast majority of, of young people are not going, certainly a four year residential college. And so you find that bias a little bit as well in the political space, I think because so often jobs in media and in politics are fed from those colleges and universities. But I think for the right, it's a huge missed opportunity if you think about fighting this battle for the hearts and minds of Gen Z as a battle primarily being fought on college campuses. There's plenty of effort and resources that go into that. And yet you have this huge number of young people who are not going to attend a four year college if they're going to go to college at all. And many of them may not be interested in the sort of ways in which the left has tried to push the conversation in our country, you know, so far away from, Hey, I just need to be able to make a good living, afford the things I need to afford to get by. You know, I don't have time to have fights over whether we use the word Latinx or not. Like those that's like a silly example, one that gets used probably too much. But I think there is this huge missed opportunity to reach young people who are not on college campuses,

because I think both parties, but Republicans in particular, even though the party's base increasingly is of non college educated voters, they have kind of missed that boat when it comes to young people. Another speaking of young people, I'm really curious how you feel or how you're seeing like the tech talk ban conversation go, especially red states college campuses, like how are young people like reacting to that? Like what's the mental framework you think about it around? So I don't have a good answer for you on this one yet. I'm always reluctant to answer a question where I don't have like concrete data yet. But this is something that I'm going to be studying over the next couple of weeks. So stay tuned. I do find that there is a generation, I'll take a step back and focus it on generations and their differing views of China itself.

So it's interesting when you ask older voters, what do they think of the United States in relation to China? They are much more likely to view the United States today as a superpower that is on the decline and China as on the rise and about to eat our lunch. And younger voters instead actually don't view the US as a big influential superpower now. But as a result, they also don't view America as having declining influence in relation to China. So for younger voters, they are in some ways a little bit less, and I say this very broadly, this is not young people on the right, but just young people broadly, a little less concerned about a rising China taking over for the US as a world leader. But that a lot of that is because for many young people, they don't think of the US as this big, you know, the world leader right now anyways. So that I think affects the way the conversation around China plays out for young people. So then I think the next question would really come down to unpacking the midterms real quick, right? Because there are a couple big exit polls differing conclusions to be reached. So how should we think about that?

Yeah, so the past election in the midterms, there were two big questions. One was would young people

turn out to vote? And two, if they did turn out to vote, which party would they break for more? And it does seem as though young people turned out in relatively big numbers. There are some analysts who believe that there was a huge sort of youth quake that happened. But I think some of that data is a little bit shaky. But young people definitely did not stay home. This was not a like 2014 style midterm. Where the bigger debate is, is did young people break for Democrats by a little or by a lot? And there are two different exit polls for reasons that would take me like eight hours to explain here. But one of them suggested that young voters broke really heavily for Democrats, like historic level broke for Democrats. And another one of the exit polls actually showed that the gap wasn't that big, wasn't that different from, you know, prior midterms, et cetera. So it is a little bit of a choose your own adventure environment out there at the moment. But what I think is most alarming to me as someone who leans right of center is that that Winston Churchill phony baloney quote I mentioned before, like we are now getting more and more proof that that is a bunch of nonsense, in that you used to have voters in their 40s and their 30s, 40s used to break relatively conservative ish. And that is no longer the case that as my generation has aged, we are still voting not by two to one margin type numbers, but are still leaning much more leftward than Gen X was at the same point in time in their generational cycle. And so you're beginning to see that challenge play out for Republicans where the damage that was done 15 years ago is still showing up in those exit polls. And it's going to make it so that Republicans have to do more and more to either try to win over young voters like the next batch of young voters that are coming up like basically declare

bankruptcy with millennials and start fresh with a new generation or really run up the numbers with older voters. But eventually the math is going to come for them. So the last few big ones, I'm always curious how much social media matters. So for example, I mean, at a political level, COC, the kind of phoned in think piece like AOC has so much political power, look at all her followers. And you kind of sort of wonder like, is that like just going to be commoditized away when like when everyone gets an Instagram and when eventually like more successful politicians do kind of have those skill sets. So to what degree does like social media, like the memes, like Twitter, do those space? How much do those matter in your analysis? I think it matters a lot because it's the primary way that most young people are getting information about what's going on in the world around them. I hesitate to use the word like this is how they're getting most of their news because we think of news as this like very formal, you know, I'm reading an article, etc. But the way they get information about what's going on in the world around them is overwhelmingly through social media channels. I do think that a problem that the right runs into and that Gen Z conservatives are getting better at, but is you have to be I think native to some of these platforms in order to do it right. If you just parachute in like I am not on TikTok, if I signed up for TikTok tomorrow and attempted to become a TikTok influencer, it would be, I'm sure it would be horrific and cringe worthy because I would be kind of like learning how does this platform work. I think you have to be sort of native to the platform and the problem on the right is that a lot of content that I think is created with an eye toward winning over young people on these platforms is ultimately being pushed or asked for by someone who is a donor somewhere up the chain who's really upset that their grandson is like leaning left and wants to know how to fix it. And so the incentives are ultimately, yes, you're trying to reach young people, but you're also trying to give this baby boomer something that they can then like share on Facebook. And how, you know, that they think is what the kids want, but may not actually be what the kids want. And so I think there's that tension, right? I think that there needs to be more of an effort on the right to actually put the microphone in the hands of young people and let them do stuff that isn't ultimately intended to be for young people, but it's really for the old people who want to win the young people, if that makes any sense. Yeah. So I think the last big question that can answer quickly is we've seen a lot of like narrative energy towards like, wow, like minority voters in certain contexts are like voting more for Republicans, Hispanics in Florida, like to what degree could we see these like generational stories like shift? How much do you, and because once again, like the racial narrative is different than it was five years ago, how can we expect big shifts? Or do you see things being pretty consistent? I am not in the business of saying anything is impossible in politics anymore. So it is entirely possible that you could have either the back end of Gen Z or whatever the generation is after them, you know, reacting to what they've seen come before them and say, well, you guys all pushed things this way and you wanted to blow up these big institutions and you wanted to read, you know, radically change it, change X, Y and Z. And that was a disaster. So now I'm going to pivot back this other way. I recall this, this will sound very off topic, but there was a fascinating article I read about very, very, very young people these days who decide to join the Catholic, not just the Catholic church, but decide to take up orders and become either a priest or a nun, because the average age of priests and nuns has been going up dramatically. Nobody has been

opting

into that life, but that for young women who are opting into that life, they are overwhelmingly more likely these days to choose orders that are like very strict, right? That like, that it's almost this backlash to like, oh, my culture, you know, everything's become more sort of loosey-goosey, and I'm going to, I'm going to reject that. So there's always a chance that the next generation will look at what millennials and Gen Z have done and said, that's ridiculous and stupid, and they'll swing another direction. But I don't think that stuff necessarily just happens without there being sort of institutions and individuals and resources behind trying to make sure that when a tipping point begins, that there's like resources there behind it to push that change. And so if there's suddenly going to be a generation that loves free markets or, you know, changes its views on any number of issues, it doesn't just happen on its own. Very well said. Thank you for joining us for this first session. And thank you all. Hey, everyone. Welcome to the most uncreatively titled Gen Z panel. It also needs to be a panel that's more than decently self-aware. Firstly, we have Saurabh Sharma who has a good taste in boots and a good taste in jackets. But no tie. No tie, which is also a statement of itself, a statement of disrespect. Nate, by contrast, has less nice shoe choice but respects with the tie. Nate is a writer with National Review, very, very prolific, and Saurabh is the leader of American Moment, which is basically the leading... How would you describe it? Because I don't want to make it sound like you're doing like the Gen Zs talking to the olds like... No, all my people are incidentally young. It's my job to make sure that people who believe the things that we talk about at conferences like this actually work in Congress and presidential

administrations and think tanks. Yeah, because this is... If I'm going to critique my millennial generation, there were one too many millennial leadership, blank non-profit X, Y, and Zs. So I think this could be a thing that hopefully Gen Z can work on. I don't write essays. He does. So here's the first question that I want to ask the two of you. When you come to D.C., it's obviously a choice. There's the joke that D.C. is Hollywood for ugly people, not a common anyone here's looks. But it's just the point that who are any of us? Who are you too specifically to show up here and build organizations and write perspectives on how the Gen Z right should approach politics? Well, if people on Twitter are to be believed, it's just controlled opposition. And really, this is the gathering of the controlled opposition. Saurabh's been looking forward to saying that all the time. Yeah, yeah, that's right. Look, I think that politics is a lot more interesting now than it was maybe 15 years ago. One of the rifts that I go back to quite a bit is that my job is actually relatively easy now because politics is a lot more appealing if you're someone young with interesting opinions on things now than it would have been in say 2006. Like if you were a young Republican in the latter years of the Bush era, just sort of reflexively pro-GOP, you have your Reagan Bush hat and your American flag tank top, that's fine. But it really didn't lend itself to doing anything innovative or interesting here. Whereas the Trump election, and we keep talking about the Trump election, we're like six years on from that now. So I'm starting to feel really old. That inspired an entire new generation of people who were interested in the chaos and the opportunity that chaos presented to come here. And so I got to take advantage of the fact that there was a ton of chaos and get to build something that I think is trying to fill and underappreciate a need, which is how the right needs to index better on the talent that actually exists behind the scenes.

But that's the reason why is because there's an opportunity with the generational shift that was happening in politics anyway. Eventually the boomers do have to die and some of them are starting to do so. And so there's natural turnover happening and making sure that that's an opportunity for not just taking all of their opinions and putting a fresh coat of paint on them, but actually having substantive and tactical alterations to the way the right goes about doing things. Yeah, to answer who am I, I'm nobody except people keep inviting me to speak on panels like this. That's the proper counter. It's like you put me here. But no, I mean, I'm a conservative, so I'm generally skeptical of young people. And I'm particularly skeptical of young people getting involved in politics. But I do think that young conservatives at the sort of politically engaged level, so not just in DC, but the sort of activists, writers, people like Sorob, I don't even know how you categorize him, you know, folks in who sort of came of age in the last 10 years or so and came of political consciousness do have a sort of specific insight into a lot of the kind of tumult and energy on the right right now. And there is clearly anyone who spends any time in conservative circles in DC knows this. There is clearly a particularly potent militant mood on the younger end of the conservative spectrum. And it's not unique to the younger end of the conservative spectrum. And it exists across sort of various different generational divides within conservatism, and certainly within the Republican base. But in that sense, I think, you know, once when Trump was elected in 2016, there was a whole lot of soul searching in DC conservatism. And I think some people reached the right conclusions about what 2016 in America first meant. And a lot of conservatives, partially because of motivated reasoning, partially because they weren't paying attention, didn't reach the right conclusions. And I think if you are a young sort of person who is conservative minded, and you spent time in left-wing institutions like a college campus over the past five or 10 years, the militant mood that I think Trump legitimately represented makes a lot of sense to you. And the kind of American carnage vision he was articulating makes a lot of sense to you. So in that sense, again, while I'm reiterating that I think young people are generally not people who should be in positions of political leadership, I do think that young conservatives have a particular insight into the state of the country and the urgency with a lot of the issues that Republicans have taken an interest in in recent years actually requires. Something I'm interested to hear from both of you is kind of the anti-institutionalism of the Gen Z right. So I'm 30 years old, 10 years ago. If you're a Republican and you're in college, you just joined the College Republicans. I don't even hear about the College Republicans anymore. Whoever was a College Republicans president at that time, that guy was a big deal. Like, you got to go spoke at the R&C. Six figure salary. Yeah, you got some salary. I mean, wasn't Carl Rowe, I think Carl Rowe was affiliated, right? At one point, like it was, it was the track of being made. At this point, I don't even know if those even exist on college campuses to the extent that they do. Does it even matter? Even TPUSA, that's probably a conversation we have had five years ago. Is that even relevant as it is right now? So my question to you guys is, is it so disorganized? I mean, sorry, your institution aside, but if you're just an average, normal, right-leaning guy or a girl on a college campus, you listen to some conservative podcasts. Where are you channeling this? Like, what does it look like? Nate, you can go first, and then sorry, I'm stuck. Well, one place you're channeling it is in group chats and on, as is, you know, an anonymous Twitter account. I mean, I'm not totally... Try not to be too biographical.

I'm not, yeah, right. I'm not totally, like, joking, though. I mean, I do think, obviously, the sort of digital technology now is a total game changer. And it has intersected perfectly with the fact that young conservatives obviously are increasingly ghettoized on college campuses. Obviously, college campuses were always notoriously left-wing. But the sort of the speed with which the Overton window has moved left, and the aggression with which sort of dissent is persecuted, this is not sort of unfamiliar to anyone. It's a very familiar conservative narrative, has left a lot of young conservatives, particularly those on college campuses, without an outlet. And as a result, you know, if they can't talk to their professors most of the time, they certainly can't sort of try out their ideas with their friends. They look to, yes, internet podcasts. Obviously, they all listen to the realignment. But also, you know, group chats, internet chats, et cetera. And there is this sort of network and almost sort of a class consciousness, for lack of a better word, forming for young conservatives. And there is, again, like this militant mood to that and this anti-institutionalism, because what originally brought them together and what gives them a common bond in the first place is the fact that they are marginalized from and not welcome in the mainstream institutions. That's why they're there in the first place. So that being kind of the basis of conservative youth politics, again, at least at the politically engaged level, leads to a lot of relatively radical and relatively anti-institutionalist conclusions. What do you think, Sarab? Yeah, I think the timeline here is really interesting, because if you think about what a young person's experience getting involved in politics would have looked like in the 90s and in the early 2000s, it necessarily had to go through institutions and it necessarily usually had to be in person. The advent of the internet did one of two things. One, because of time, the interests of young right-wing people became less and less attached to the interests of institutions in places like DC or other metropolitan areas that purported to champion conservative interests or right-wing interests. And then two, the internet made it so that there was this entire new place where people could organize and an entire new set of leaders often influenced or types that were untethered to any institution that they actually looked forward to. And so what was the next stage? The internet met real life and so for a period of about four to five years there, very famous internet YouTube-type figures, people like Milo Yiannopoulos, people like Ben Shapiro would come to college campuses, they'd be on fire, and it would be reported in Fox News. One of my favorite statistics is that for many years, I don't know if this is still the case, the single most cited news outlet on Fox was campus reform. This college outlet of the Leadership Institute, because golly gee, the boomers loved them, crazy college kids stories. That era is basically over and now I think you're in a position where why is it over? So it's over because it got boring, eventually like, you know, play puff part 15. Right. It's a great clip though, let's be honest. Right, you know, so-and-so destroys, libtard on campus. Eventually it just became one of these things that was gauche and passé because the trends just moved so quickly at this point. And it also got, I think, I think less transgressive in some ways. It became this sort of thing. I saw this during my own time on college. It went from the sort of thing where like literally every single leftist on campus would come and like ruin your day to like, you'd get like two weirdos complaining at you, like, you know, you're a bigot, whatever. And then the second reason is, is that if you're actually smart and you have some level of like time preference and the ability to resist the marshmallow, you realize that maybe it's not a great idea to create a giant paper trail for

yourself in college that'll follow you all throughout your professional career, especially when you can just have a pseudonymous Twitter account instead and say things in group chats, you probably shouldn't. And so I think that you are seeing a greater and greater trend towards people organizing in just small groups behind the scenes with people they trust. And we'll see if that eventually grows into them forming new institutions. I mean, mine literally formed out of a group chat with a bunch of people I trust. And so I think that that's naturally how these things wax and wane. But that's that's how I think about it is this like timeline of the internet destabilizing everything and the campus activism stuff getting boring. And we'll see what happens next. I want to be very exact with this point because it's interesting that this conversation is so college centric. And that's not to anywhere discredits because the nature, like you said, there was a literal like media industrial complex around like elevating what was happening on campus to the height of like the young right. But like, a, we all know like education, you know, polarization. So like it's, you know, more likely to be like a your average like college Democrats, probably much more representation of that coalition than like a college Republican is even like at a southern state school. So what do you guys think about like what's missing when we don't bring like non college graduating or attending like Gen Z conservatives in. But I also want to say like I'm not counting and this isn't like crap, but like I'm not counting a Charlie Kirk who is this type of person who knows there's like an institutional advantage and like not going to college. So basically just asking like the normal version. So how do you how do you think about that dynamic? Well, people who don't go to college have the internet too, right? So there's that aspect. But there's also there is actually like a real there's always obviously a sort of elite mass political base divide in any sort of political movement or or just any that's just how politics works. But there is if you look at the the the actual sort of polling for your average run of the mill kind of 25 year old Republican voter, insofar as they actually exist, every once in a while you find one out in the wild. They actually the trends among their views actually track with the trends among sort of Gen Z writ large and that they're actually to the left, particularly on cultural issues of older Republicans on stuff like immigration, diversity, obviously same sex marriage, LGBT issues, etc. They're less religious, all of the kind of stuff that you see. They're just the right wing of Gen Z, right? Now, obviously, there's there's a sort of classical trend in American politics where people get more conservatives, they get older, so that might happen. If it doesn't, the country might be screwed. But but the the sort of militant mood of I think young conservative elites that again, anyone who spend time in conservative circles in DC is aware of is very much a function of their institutional experience on campus. And I think it's starting to trickle out a little bit just because the internet is such a sort of universalizing force in terms of this stuff. But but we're not really going to know exactly what the the actual sort of mass political base of our generation for the GOP is going to look like for a very long time, because those people are only really coming of political consciousness right now. Yeah, I mean, I share Nate's skepticism of young people writ large. And so, you know, do young people have right wing views? Doesn't really matter strictly speaking. Because when I think about some of what the core aspects of being right wing in the United States typically mean, it's being very protective of the things you have, like the value of your house and the policing of your community, the quality of your schools. Well, if you are a renter, you move every

16 months and you have no children or wife, why would you have all the political priorities that would lead someone to vote Republican? And this is why I think the tail wagging the dog on the question of whether the Republican Party has a political future is if we get policy questions that make it easier to do those things right, like right now. Otherwise, like it's that they that generation will have no reason unprompted to become more right wing, they're just going to become more angry at the world around them. As far as the question of like, you know, non college participation in politics at the elite level, I think that that Nate's right, there's always a distinction between who gets involved in politics at this level, where there wonks and think tank people and politicians and stuff, and who is the constituent voting base of the party. I mean, there are similar divides inside the Democratic Party, you know, and they have fights about it. Like, for instance, you know, go look at the staffer so white account or whatever complaining about the lack of diversity on Capitol Hill, the vast majority of or a significant quantity of the Democratic Party's base is blacks. And so if there is a mismatch there, it's, you know, they analyze it internally, and we analyze the education polarization inside the Republican Party. I do think covid's going to pose an interesting opportunity where you have more and more young right wing men, especially, that looked at what school exactly was like higher education exactly was on offer during covid. It was going to be more debt to do zoom classes. And so I do think you are seeing a statistically significant but by no means huge amount of people opting out of that system entirely. And so the question will be, can the institutional forces in this town go about finding people like that who could have and would have in another era gone to college, which shows not to and elevate them to positions of influence here. I mean, I've hired people that fit this exact profile. I think they're great. And so hopefully we do a lot more of it, but it's going to require a cultural sea change on how people go about making these decisions here. Yeah, actually need to address your point. Just did an interesting segment on this. Millennials as we age getting 30 now, the typical like as you get conservative, you get older is not actually holding for millennial generation. A lot of that I believe is if you look at for one of the reasons why boomers became more conservative is because they own property. And it's like, well, if you don't own property, it's kind of downstream for a lot of effects. That's kind of interesting though about what you said is like in terms of if they don't become more conservative. On the other hand, what I'm getting from you guys too, is that Trump was just such a seminal moment. What if the meaning of conservative changes? Do you think it has changed for people who consider themselves right wing? Notice Sarab, used to keep saying right wing conservative as well. Those are actually not the same thing really at all. So how do you think that's going to play out with Gen Z and even younger? Right. I mean, well, in terms of how it's going to play out with Gen Z, again, people in our age demographic are just sort of coming of political age of political consciousness right now. I'm sure when you guys were looking for people to talk about Gen Z on stage here, it's a pretty small pool of which is how Sarab obviously ended up getting selected. So it remains to be seen and pretty much every young generation of conservatives when they come to DC thinks that they're going to totally change conservatism, Bruton Branch. I randomly came across this hilarious 2004 New York Times piece about Dan McCarthy was the one person who wasn't

cringe in that interview in that op-ed. But it was all about the young post-buckly right.

And it was interviewing all these young sort of conservatives in a hurry.

And a lot of what they were, the way that they were talking sounded extremely similar to the way young conservatives are talking today. And they were all saying that they had a new vision for conservatism. And they saw something that older conservatives didn't, etc, etc.

Don't skip that. I'm curious. What were they saying? What did they say?

Right. So this is, I think, the major distinction is that most of them, with the exception of Mr. McCarthy, were neo-conservatives. And what they were often, what the New York Times was very delighted to hear was that because they were neo-conservatives, what they were seeking was a sort of detente with liberalism and an accommodation with a lot of the basic premises of progressivism.

And that meant sort of cultural issues like diversity and multiculturalism.

It meant sort of waging peace on the federal bureaucracy. There's a bunch of different ways that they talk. And you obviously hear that as well today. But the kind of new conservatism that they were championing was a sort of softer, kinder, kind of Bush era, compassionate conservatism. That's not what you hear from young conservatives in DC today. And I think, again, a lot of it has to do with sort of institutional shifts in the actual experiential nature of how these people came of age in our generation, which we live in an extremely radicalizing moment across the board. Gen Z kids are on both the left and the right are much more radical than their older counterparts. So I think there's a bipartisan aspect to it, but it certainly is particularly potent on the young right. Just on the point of like, oh, you're just like the previous generations of conservatives that came to DC and were radical and thought they were upending the order then. Yeah, so what? Like that's actually normal. Like any institution, this happens in the business world, this happens in academic disciplines, this certainly happens in politics, has this period of like cyclical renewal where there's this new set of young Turks that come in, they make necessary reforms, they eventually become institutionalized themselves, then they become sort of corrupt and ossified, and then they get replaced too. That's just normal and fine. I've never understood why that's such a gotcha just because it's happened before. It doesn't mean it's not necessary now. In fact, it's probably a good sign that it is. And actually, the cause of a lot of dysfunction in our politics is that that generational change has been delayed for so long. You know, Bill Clinton, Donald Trump, and George W. Bush were all born in the same summer in like, what was it, the late 50s or whatever. In 1855. Yeah, that's right. So we're overdue for that generational change anyway. And so I'm more than happy to be part of that tradition. The thing that I'm curious about, and this kind of is a response to the Kirsten Soto-Sanderson panel and just like the point Sagra made about Gen Z just following the trend of like lean to the left, like, what are you guys, not personally, but at a movement level, going to do about it? Because I think this is where like the on-lineness becomes like problematic. You see like a kind of like radicalization going on, where it's like, I know it's based to say X, Y, and Z about like gay marriage, but like, at a pure empirical basis, that's a stronger case for like the Benedict option than for like actually dominating American politics. So like, how do you guys actually think about these dynamics?

Yeah, I mean, the thing that I always like to say to people about that is, you know, the distinction between what's politically popular and what you believe is right to do only matters as much as

you decide it needs to matter. If the story of the institutional left over the last five decades or so has been a highly polarized ideologically extreme set of very motivated, not that many people infiltrating every single institution and deciding to drag the country in their direction anyway. And I keep hearing that the backlash to it's coming any day now and it might well happen and it sometimes does happen, but by and large, they've gotten what they wanted. And so if you believe that a certain set of public policies are right and true and just and should be advocated for, and your cadre is motivated and organized and capable enough of implementing them, great, like that seems like untethered from the question of what like the rest of our like former college buddies actually want to see in politics. And once the center of gravity moves, the vast vast vast majority of voters change with that center of gravity the day after Obergefell, the opinion on gay marriage in the country changed, not before it was the new center of gravity. And so it's just a matter of motivated political actors deciding what their priorities are and acting on them. Yeah, to the point about the backlash, the backlash has come multiple times. The problem is that it just gets neutered when it comes to DC, right? There actually is a mass political constituency for a variety of the different things that that I think, you know, Sorb and I are interested in, and that a lot of conservatives are interested in. The problem is that the kind of dominant legacy institutions in conservatism and certainly within the GOP and a lot of sort of structural mechanisms about how donors work in the GOP, et cetera, et cetera, they're interested in sort of talking the right way when they need to go out and win votes. And then when they actually get to DC, they're interested in a very different agenda, right? This is again, not a totally unfamiliar talking point. But, you know, it's it's sort of John McCain going down to the Arizona border and saying build the dang fence when he's facing a primary challenge and then turning around voting for amnesty, right? So this has existed for a very long time in the GOP. It does exist in the Democratic Party, but not to the same extent for a variety of different reasons. So I am worried about what's politically popular just to the extent that it has you have to be prudential in the way that you go about having political goals. So you can have a sort of long term set of political and cultural goals, but you need to work within the constraints that exist to an extent to advance them. You can't be stupid. And there is a version of being very online that's that's extremely stupid. But the sort of the ethos, I think, of a lot of the young conservatives who are or aren't online is very much in touch with real world material dissatisfactions and sort of problems that Americans have. And no trope in politics, and this is particularly potent on the center, right? It bothers me more than this idea that the culture war is sort of beneath us, right? The serious issues are corporate tax cuts and occupational licensing reform. But anyone who cares about whether or not your nine year old daughter is going to get turned into your nine year old son, you know, this is sort of just catering throwing red meat to the base. Actually, that's something where the American people are with us, probably much more than corporate tax cuts. And I would like to see Republicans starting to to actually talk and act like that. And I actually think that that they would be politically rewarded for it and become a much more viable political party than they are right now. So my last question to you guys is, and sorry, we reference this, how do you avoid the pitfalls that befell the people who came before you? So you're reading the 2004 piece, Nate, you're looking back on that every new generation comes here, most of them get bought off or leave because they think that it's just not worth it. And it's just frankly more rewarding to go work in

a like private enterprise. So what do you think and the advice would be not like to yourselves, let's say in five years when a similar pivot point comes, how are you going to avoid those? So this is my opportunity to talk shop marketplace of ideas is basically fake. It was invented in the 1960s itself magazines. And what I mean by that is that the the political right in the United States for the past 60 years or so has been very, very focused on the marketplace of ideas. And the idea is if we have the best ideas and the most refined arguments that will win. And because academia is so closed off to people of a conservative temperament, a lot of them need something else

to do with their lives. And so they come here, and they become our think tank scholars, and then there's no jobs left for the think tank scholars. So they become like campaign consultants, and there's no jobs left for them. And so they become the Hill staffers. And so we have this complete misalignment across like every stratum of how an effective political movement would actually allocate resources and talent. And so I think that the core mistake of institutional conservatism for the longest time has been too much of a focus on sort of intellectual and historical study and sort of exegesis at all times, and much less focused on the actual practical work of either taking over existing institutions, building new ones, or destroying existing ones, the basic bureaucratic blocking and tackling that any political movement needs in order to succeed. So that's my biggest thing is actually a complete tactical shift that would require a changing of guard, because if you're someone of a very academic temperament, that means you really

care about having, you know, deep discussions over very minor points of difference in political philosophy and not in building the coalitions that will imperfectly move the ball forward on broad political interests that your movement and certainly the voters that subsidize your lifestyle in this town have. Yeah, I agree with that. And I'm also interested in a tactical shift. I think the one of the main other tactical problems with institutional conservatism as a sort of self-conscious movement that was led by activists and intellectuals and operatives, etc., is that it saw victory, its conception of victory was not just a détente with but membership within this sort of managerial bureaucratic apparatus, which was actually fundamentally and structurally opposed to all of the things that conservatives said that they actually cared about. And they did get that membership within that sort of managerial regime in a lot of ways. And what happened is exactly what we've been talking about, which is that it actually needed their capacity to channel the very real sort of political energy that exists, I think, for the conservative program, but that exists outside of the centers of power and is particularly potent in the people who are furthest away have the least proximity towards the centers of power. So I think there are obviously all the sort of young sort of youthful radical political energy on the right right now could end up becoming neutered again. It wouldn't be the first time that that happened. But the nature of I think the rights increasing sort of alienation from these power centers and the radicalization of the actual reigning ideology that governs those power centers themselves has made that kind of détente and membership within these institutions much more difficult. And a lot of young right wingers in particular have a particularly potent sort of consciousness in terms of their understanding

of themselves as being outside of and fundamentally opposed to those institutions. So that again is it's what's driving this kind of radicalism and militancy on the young right. But it's also one

of the reasons that I think that the when when our generation of conservatives sort of assume positions of more power in the movement that it won't look like kind of the young neo conservatives of the Bush era. So Rob Nate, thank you for joining us. Thanks guys. Nice job.

Hi everyone. We are joined by Chris Griswold of American Compass. We've had a long term relationship

with American Compass. We were serious. We were. Yeah, it's it's been fruitful, I think.

Orin was one of our first guests on the show. I got us our first Wall Street Journal reference with a columnist who is not happy with what Orin had to say about free market economics. So I think this is a good opportunity to serve and then who then refused a request to come on the podcast. So that's also our first podcast beef. They cut a segment of it. Ask him on didn't come on. So whole thing there. But today, though, we're of course here to like check in on this argument that there are parts of the right that are reassessing the way they see economics, that picture, we shape the narrative, get out what you guys are really working at. So aligning you might say rerunning towards something. So here's the first question. And I know, Sagar, you and I talk, you were both wondering this. What are you all trying to do? And by that, I mean, there are parts of a specific the breaking points audience who would see Orin come on, they'll say like, oh, my gosh, like American compass, they're trying to form this left, right populist alliance against that. And I was like, that's definitely not it. Sorry, what's going on? So what, how would you define what you're trying to do? That's a great question. I would say that we are working towards a rejection of dogmatic libertarian economics on by on and by the right of center in favor of an economics that understands, properly understands that workers, families, communities and industry are the foundation of a nation's of our nation's liberty and prosperity. And so right out of the gate, what is that? What is a rejection of dogmatic libertarianism mean or free market fundamentalism means? Well, it means that a tired playbook of tax cuts, unfettered free trade, deregulation, rinse and repeat, is just simply not sufficient to meet the needs of the nation. And frankly, what the public is demanding. So that's what we're working towards is a realignment of the rights conception of what conservative economics really really means. So to what extent, is this a phenomenon discussed at conferences on Twitter? And to what extent is it real? Because we're sitting here, we're talking about this right now as the animating economic discussion on the broader political stage right now is debt ceiling confrontation to cut domestic spending, essentially a copy and paste. There are a couple of people saying, well, let's not touch social security and Medicare. I would say the mean Republican Senator probably doesn't care or does agree with that statement. So to what extent is this a real phenomenon? That's a it's a fair question. I think I would turn the question around and remind everyone that one of the people who said he wouldn't touch Medicare and Social Security was former President Trump and he won. It wasn't even close in the 2016 primaries, he steamrolled everyone by, I think, correctly, intuiting that the public and especially the Republican base was very ready for something different. I mean, we just just let's just cast our minds back to how he was talking, right? Let's get the hedge fund bastards. Let's maybe rethink this free trade regime that actually hasn't worked out that great for workers and their families and communities. Let's not touch entitlements. And he won. And I think you see a whole bunch of especially the more attuned and adept Republican politicians recognizing that. And now you have a whole community of real intellectual policy leaders on the right. I'm thinking of people like

Marco Rubio, now Senator JD Vance, Holly, someone like Mike Gallagher in the house. I mean, there's

a whole movement. And frankly, I also think that some of President Biden's more economically populist and trade skeptical postures are in large part due to him also seeing the success of that. So I think it's very real. So even if we, you know, we're talking about it in conferences, we're catching up to what the public has known for a long time and has been hungry for for a long time. DC's last to the party, not first in my view. So I know that American Compass isn't like an entitlement reform organization that's like not like the category of policy you're kind of working on. But if you're just imagining being just like a average, like GOP, like member right now, you're thinking about that, like those set of issues, debt ceiling, debt entitlement, social security, like that's the point the saga is bringing up. How does the American Compass mindset inform how a member should think about those sets of issues at a level deeper and just kind of directionally agreeing with whatever Trump says, because there's also a direction because like there's definitely something going on there too. That's right.

I think it's useful. If I was talking to a member of Congress, I would ask them to slow down and take a breath, take a beat and ask themselves what they really think their constituents care about. DC cares about the debt limit. And if we screw it up, then everyone will pay the price.

But that's a manufactured DC crisis. That's the archetypical manufactured DC crisis.

What a member of Congress's constituents care about are we have a public education system that is radically misaligned with what the labor force needs. A college for all is broken. We have communities that have been deindustrialized now for decades and have not recovered.

There are very basic fundamental questions about how the American economy functions and how we conceptualize what capitalism is and is meant to be. That's where I think the public is. And you see that. You see that again on both sides of the aisles. The elected officials or aspiring elected officials who speak most effectively to that tend to win.

And so is the debt ceiling important? Yeah, of course it is. But that's a short-term thing for the next couple of months. When that is resolved, one way or the other, we are still going to have to look in the mirror and ask, what kind of economy do we want in the United States?

How do you think that the discussion around inflation has changed some of the work that you guys do? And I would say an impetus amongst the typical right-leaning voter is going to say, this is because of spending. I'm not entirely wrong. But that validates some of the most,

I would say, normy Republican talking points around the role of government, around what you should do, about how you should even respond to a crisis. There's no, like in the mind of a person in Washington hearing that. They're not going to split that apart from the PPP program versus the second round of stimulus checks. So how does this new economic moment that we are in, how does it change some of the work that you guys are doing and thinking about? Spending is an interesting way to frame a question, because spending and policy are not the same thing. And spending is a question about, should we be redistributing or not, and how much and to whom, which again is a second-order question.

A more fundamental question is, what are the policy parameters that make for a healthy capitalist society? Get that right. Some of those questions become less urgent in my mind. And we can talk about some of the kind of principles that we use to think through that, what we think that means.

And that's how I would answer that question.

Another thing I'd like to really get to is, this is kind of related to Kevin Roberts, like what time it is a question about, kind of modified a bit. It's basically just like, what's the broad diagnosis of America that you think to a certain degree most folks on the right, whether or not they're economically libertarian or not, could basically agree. If you could get your most Cato scholar here, and they will say, oh yeah, I think the education system isn't optimized for the current set of conditions. Because it seems like if there's a baseline foundation of agreement, that's how things can productively move towards something. So what would you, how would you, yes, two-part events. So one, what's the baseline, and where do the actual disagreements come about? Yeah. Well, so if you're asking me to kind of assess the political landscape, both on the right and then in general, on these kinds of economic questions, I guess I see three buckets. You've got things that both the left and the right increasingly agree on, and getting tough on China, for example, is one of them. I think one of the things, despite the kind of chaos in the house, by the way, in my opinion, speaker's race is better, that shit's better than Game of Thrones. That was amazing. You need to get out of DC more if that's true. It's very much not true. That's right. I got a problem. The first step is admitting you have a problem. But you've got, I think one of the policy areas that I'm hopeful about in terms of progress, even in divided government, and with a slim majority, some of the stuff that'll come out of, for example, the Select Committee on China, outbound investment. Got a great episode yesterday, if you want to check it out. Nice. Outbound investment review. Maybe we shouldn't just be sending all of our capital all the time to China without having to say about it. That is an emerging area of bipartisan consensus that we might be able to see some movement on, even despite the tenuous situation we're in in Congress. Then you've got, and this is, I think, what you're talking about, policy areas that the right broadly agrees on, that it can outflank the left on. And I think you're absolutely right that education is first on that list. So I would imagine, I would hope, that most folks on the right understand that college for all is a failed system. It does not work for the majority of American students. Less than one in five go smoothly from high school graduate on time to a four-year degree graduate on time to a job that required that degree in the first place. That's less than, everyone in D.C. followed that pipeline, but it doesn't work for most Americans. And I think most folks on the right understand that. The left is deeply beholden to the college, I'll say the college cartel, called the higher education sector, if you want. And even if some of them, I think, understand this, they're politically limited in what they can do about it. So I think if Republicans are smart, they will hammer that. One of the things we've worked on, for example, is workforce, on-the-job workforce training grants that make it easier for employers to offer training to people as an alternative to going to college. Senator Tom Cotton introduced a bill modeled on our idea of the American Workforce Act. That's, I think, exactly what the right should be doing. And then you've got this third bucket of policy areas where the right hasn't decided what it thinks yet. And I might put something like family policy in that bucket. It's like, should we be sending cash support to working families? We would argue yes. There are more and more

Republicans

saying yes, but that is not yet a resolved question. And so then I think you'll see that kind of internal debate unfold on the right over the course of this Congress. I don't know if that answers your question, but that's kind of my landscape analysis. I think it's always important to also think and dig deeper into some of probably the most contentious fights. So you're referencing the cash payments to working families. As you said, I mean, even the idea of spending cash. But one I also think about all the time is taxes. I mean, what do you think? For example, I don't think, I think any Republican president, Ron DeSantis, Donald Trump, what replacement level would roughly

pass the same tax bill that passed in 2017, and pass the second version of it and come 2024 or 2028. Is that the right move? How should people be thinking about it? And what about taxes in general? I think it's useful to reflect on how far we've come since 2017 and that tax bill.

I used to work for Senator Rubio, and at the time, this was before my time with him, but in 2017, the outrage from the business community that he would dare suggest that you should take just a little bit of this corporate rate reduction and direct it towards an increased child tax credit, it was intense. It was insane. And this is this kind of typical libertarian free market fundamentalism to which the right has been beholden for too long. And to challenge it was a very serious thing. And I think he and Senator Lee and the others who helped them deserve enormous credit for succeeding in that fight. That wasn't that long ago, but we have covered a lot of ground since then where I think if you asked all of the Senate Republicans whether they think that's good, like none of them are interested in undoing that. And several of them and an increasing number of them are interested in doing more than that. So when it comes to taxes, I think what I would like to see, what we would like to see, and I think what more and more Republicans are understanding is that tax policy needs to be directed to the concerns of workers and families directly, not through a kind of trickle down model that frankly hasn't worked that well in reality. I think another thing about American Compass that is always interested, the two of us, is the fact that not just like the policy or like the political specific angles, but just the fact that the organization in and of itself was a critique of DC, basically the Asseli corridor, because Orrin was at the Manhattan Institute. So basically a critique of like how think tanks, organizations are structured or made. I'd love to hear your assessment of how responsive this broad space has been to the set of issues that you're raising, where there are gaps that still need to be filled, where maybe there's a circumstance where we're thinking like, man, we're trying to

do this China work, but this part is still missing, or maybe something that's been surprising to you. Maybe there's been some organization or some interaction that's been helpful. Like how do you just think of that ecosystem critique and how it's evolved? Yeah, I mean, we resisted for a long time calling ourselves a think tank at all, partly for that reason. Is that correct, calling you to think tank now? Well, no, we've given up that we've resigned ourselves to the fact that there's got to be the useful term. But yeah, I mean, part, yeah, you're right, but the kind of logic of the organization's existence is that no one was systematically talking about this and doing the deep intellectual work to put meat on the bones of this political intuition that we should care about workers, that we should embrace the fact that policy and governance is not only possible, but can be good. And it's not just the government's job to get out of the way in every instance.

That's this again, this intuition that I think broke into the mainstream as a result of the Trump campaign, but hadn't really cohere intellectually. And that's what we try and do is to think systematically and carefully about these issues, do the analysis, do the research, put forward policy proposals, and then do the advocacy to work with the Hill and others to forward those ideas. And it is a critique, but I think it's an increasingly successful one. I mean, we're, and this is the realignment audience here, right? I think most of y'all in the room are pretty read into this dynamic. And we'll know that, is that a resolved fight? No. But is it a fight that I think we're winning? Increasingly, yeah, I'm hopeful. To what extent do coalitions play a role here? Because you reference Republican voters, I tend to agree with you, they can mean Republican voter either probably doesn't care either way, or is more sympathetic towards the Trump position. But there's an incredibly dug in constituency among small business owners. And others, by the way, you know, until I became a small business owner, I finally started, I was like, Oh, this is a pain in the ass. We have to deal with taxes and accounting and all this other bullshit that the government makes you do. That said, these people are a very strong constituency economically libertarian within the Republican Party. And I have yet to see any evidence that the mean Republican legislator is not deeply responsive to them as opposed to, let's say the unorganized massive voters who may show up to vote for Trump, but they don't have a lobbying organization for them in DC. Well, I mean, yeah, that's the problem. That's the problem we're trying to fix, right, is that you've got these legacy institutions that have been around for a long time. And having worked in the house, for example, where you, you know, average member gets there is just trying to figure out what the hell is going on. You turn to the people that you think you can trust. And for a long time, that was these libertarian organizations and nothing else. So to some extent, I think that dynamic is just like for lack of an alternative. And our job is to present an alternative. And simply the act of doing that of showing people, there is an alternative conservative way of thinking. It's valid. It's legitimate. There's a lot of people who are responsive to it. All of our polling shows that working class conservatives want this kind of stuff. There's a big response to that. It's just you got to show them that there's something else. And I think you also see that internally, right, you guys had had Kevin on earlier, internal to some, you know, of those legacy organizations, I think they themselves are also understanding the value of providing other options and expanding their mindset on economics. Sager, when you reference the possibility of like a lobbying organization for like Trump voters, that would be the greatest gift of all time, because like, you've had like five to 10 different like Trumpist, like think tanks and like, who knows what's happening there. But all you'd have to do if like the Trump working class lobby, you wouldn't even register lobbyists, you would just call it that and then you just print money. So if I was looking for, you know, suggestions, you need to get away from that. Scam pack ideas. And this might divide the crowd a little bit. But to be very clear, I think it's important to distinguish between the intellectual and political space that Trump opened, for which he is due credit, and distinguish that between Trumpism. I don't know that Trump himself is the right vehicle to forward this particular economic agenda. That's a separate question. And I think that's an important point to make, because it's a much broader question than, what do we think about this individual? It's, was he intuiting something correctly about what went wrong economically? And the answer is yes.

And now what are we going to do about it? Does an economic movement need a candidate, then basically, right? Because I think it needs a bunch of candidates. I think it needs all kinds of candidates. And increasingly, it's, I mean, advanced is a good example of someone who I think thinks along these lines, broadly speaking, and dominated. And my old boss is another, right, who was an absolute blowout in Florida. So there, I mean, there are, there are people thinking this way and winning. Are they a majority yet? No. But you know, let's start somewhere.

A couple of things are coming to mind as you're describing this. So like, I've been doing lots of, there's a lot of like good books out on like Ronald Reagan and that kind of like Aaron, and I think it's good to get beyond even like, I think realignment category groups went a little too far. And just like the critiques of Reagan became almost as cliched as like the supporters of Reagan. So I think there's some nuance in exploring the difference there. But like what's interesting about like that era, like how the California tax revolts were a real like presaging of like Reagan, like economic domination during like the 1980s, like moving onwards. I'm curious if there's any, if you guys have ever come across any like localized, here's this like random thing that just happened about initiative, a candidate who you guys had never heard of, who just kind of validated what you're talking because like obviously the big one is China, like that's been the that's been the big whenever people write like the big 2020s history, they're going to talk about the bipartisan China thing. But I'm just curious in the economic space, has there been like a like maybe like a apprenticeship grant program that just came out of nowhere that could mean something? Yeah, I'm not sure anything comes out of nowhere. But a really interesting example at the state level is governors, originally Republican governors, now there's a Democrat as well, following the Trump administration's example of banning the use of college degree requirements for in the case of the Trump executive order, federal workers, and on the case of Governor Hogan in Maryland. Shapiro and Governor Cox in Utah are the three that I'm aware of doing the same

for state workforces. That is kind of emergent from the bottom up on the state level. But I think they're also noticing the federal trends and taking some cues rightly so from this, I mean, so that's it, that's a, I think, an example of what you're talking about. And not to step on the prior conversation,

but I think big tech is another one where parents are talking to their local elected representatives because they're deeply worried about what big tech is doing to their kids socially and psychologically and emotionally. And governors and state governments are being really responsive. And in some cases, leading, they are farther down the path than the federal government is. So yeah, I think there are all kinds of examples. I think one other follow up here, like there's been a lot of crap talked about free market fundamentalists. But I think something that I've picked up just doing this show for the past three years, which is a long time, breaking points, all those things is that any political group is a coalition of different people. And look, like on the more hawkish one, you're the more like restraint is one of the podcasts, but like restraint is impulses could be actually really helpful when thinking through things. I think there are times like I could be more hawkish that you could find that more useful. So like, what is something that you've come to more appreciate about more like economically, libertarian minded? That like part of the broad conservative GOP coalition, because I think it's both unfair, but also kind of like clouding. And I'm not saying you're doing this, but I think it

would be just too easy to just kind of dismiss the instinct, you could dismiss an institution and individuals who are in bad faith. I think it's bad to dismiss an instinct entirely. Is there some way that you would think about that? Yeah, I think I think it's, I think most revolutions happen for reasons, usually understandable reasons. And I think the kind of neoliberal turn happened for reasons. And it is still this, it's a popular ideology. There are reasons why it happened. I think the ideology is now maladaptive and is ceased to adequately address what it was intended to address at the beginning, which is usually what happens with with revolutions, social, cultural, economic, whatever, where the unintended consequences become obvious and need to be addressed.

But yeah, I don't think it's a question of bad faith. I just think it's a question of your, your analysis is wrong. And it is guided by ideology. And it no longer suits the purpose particularly well in most cases, in my opinion. What are some future fights that people should look to as to whether this view is winning or losing over the next couple of years?

That is a great question. I want to have so many fights that I don't know how to answer that. It's hard of winning. So in terms of our work, I could put it into a couple policy categories of globalization, or maybe more specifically decoupling with China, industrial policy and the need to directly support critical industries. Financialization, dealing with the fact that our economy now kind of prioritizes financial engineering versus investment in actual things. And then some of the stuff we already talked about, like education and workforce development, we haven't talked about labor policy at all, which is a hugely important question.

Please add anything on that too.

I mean, it's like joining a union, man.

The podcaster's union was off-putting of the unions.

No, in seriousness, and maybe I know we're coming up on time, it's an important point, I think, to understand that worker voice and power, collective worker voice and power, does not need and traditionally has not been a partisan issue. It is now because big labor is in bed with the Democratic Party, which serves the leadership in both of those institutions and does not serve current labor unions, constituents very well. And Senators Rubio and others, Congressman Jim Banks, we've worked with on creative ideas for how else workers might have voice in the workplace or a seat on a corporate board in a way that doesn't require them to co-sign a political agenda that they don't agree with. That is a huge question.

So those are kind of all the categories, and we mentioned family policy, those are the categories in which we work in terms of policy, and I'm watching all of them. So I'm going to politely ignore your question and not answer it and say there's, you know, I want to see victories on all of those levels, and there are active discussions and debates on all of those levels that I think merit attention. So the last actual question then separate from like fights to follow, what do you need to have happen for the next two years that make you consider this to be a win?

I mean there's like a short-term long-term question, right? I mean things are, you know, paradigm shifts to use that cliché word, they don't always happen like through kind of this gradual change, the incumbents who have a stake in how things are currently done hold on for as long as possible, and then eventually that's no longer tenable and things change really fast, and you don't know when that will happen. So as far as I'm concerned we are working towards that inflection point, and we'll keep doing that, and that looks again like the intellectual

work we've been talking about. Also like, you know, next week we're going to have a training on Capitol Hill on conservative family policy and what that means. Got a bunch of people who want to show up because I think young Hill staff are eager to engage these questions, and so we'll continue doing that work as well to try and arm the interested until that until that moment comes when when that that flip happens.

Well said, Chris. Thank you for joining this session. Thanks, Chris.

Hope you enjoyed this episode. If you learned something like this sort of mission or want to access our subscriber exclusive Q&A bonus episodes and more, go to realignment.supercast.com and subscribe to our \$5 a month, \$50 a year, or \$500 for a lifetime membership. Great. See you all next time.