

[Transcript] The Realignment / 338 | How to Fix America's "Underpants Gnomes" Problem with Frank DiStefano

Marshall here. Welcome back to the realignment.

Hey, everyone, welcome back to the show.

As you've probably noticed, the past two episodes this week have been excerpts of Saga and my realignment live event in D.C. last week.

So for today's episode, I want to close out the series with a conversation with realignment fan favorite and repeat guest, Frank DiStefano.

Frank is the author of the next realignment, and he was actually at the conference.

So it was great to catch up with him and get his thoughts on the broad themes and what it means for politics moving forward.

This is definitely a hyper unstructured conversation that goes a lot of places.

But a lot of these thoughts are ones that Frank and I are having for the first time and it's helpful to articulate them with a friend and someone who also is deeply invested in this topic as well.

Be sure to check the sub stack for expanded thoughts.

I should also note that tonight is the breaking points live show in Austin, Texas.

So I'm obviously going to be there because that's where home is now.

But I'd also love to shout out anyone is going to be there.

Definitely come up and say hi.

I would love to hear what you all think about everything we're talking about both tonight and, of course, on this episode.

If all that said, hope you enjoy the conversation and a huge thank you to Lincoln Network for sponsoring the podcast.

Frank DeStefano, welcome back to the realignment.

Thanks for for having me back, Marshall.

Yeah, it's always great to chat with you.

I was speaking with Representative Mike Gallagher to the episode a few weeks back.

He was stating that he's probably going to be the first realignment guest to come back for his fifth appearance.

I think you may end up beating him.

I think this is probably one, two.

I think this is number this is number four.

Yeah, this is I got to get one more in now before you get back.

Yeah, you're you're one ahead of Mike Gallagher.

So there's something to be said there.

So I just want to start by stating that this is an episode that's really going to be reflecting around the live conference that Socrates did in DC last week.

Frank, you were there.

It was great to chat with you real quick at the end about your thoughts, but we're going to reflect upon the discussions and the episodes we put out.

Most of them for listeners is only like three or four of it are missing.

That will come out in the next few weeks.

But there's plenty to discuss here.

Let's just start, though, for anyone who has not listened to an episode that

[Transcript] The Realignment / 338 | How to Fix America's "Underpants Gnomes" Problem with Frank DiStefano

you've done before with just getting a basic introduction to you, your realignment body of work, why this topic is interesting, all that great stuff.

Sure.

Sure. Yeah, I guess my expertise, if you will, has been on on the cycle of political realignments and how political party systems work.

And, you know, with an eye to not just, you know, historically, how and why they happen, why parties collapse, how new parties get born.

And by parties again, I don't mean just the institutional name of the Republicans or the Democrats.

I mean a unique collection of people around a unique collection of ideas.

And with an eye to what's going on right now, why are our parties collapsing?

How are we going to rebuild them?

What is going to come out of this?

And, you know, how can we help drive this to get a result that we want to get parties that are actually solving our problems and that are doing the things that we want them to do versus having a bad realignment that leads us with political parties that are maybe not really great for this moment in history and lead us down some bad roads.

No, that brings up a good place to start.

Were you there for Yvonne Levin's discussion?

I'm a big fan ahead, by the way.

We used to, we were both alumni of the Congressman Bob Franks network.

So he's a great guy.

Yeah, so his discussion is really focused around with Jason Wilk of the Washington Post is focused on democracy and how it performs.

And I'm noticing that when you're explaining realignment thought or, you know, your area of focus within it, you're really focused on the political parties and during the conversation with Yvonne, he was really focused on how individuals respond to the dynamics that we often discuss in the show.

So let's just kind of start there, get your reaction to his panel within the frame of you're really arguing on the political parties collapsing, that being the centerpiece.

Your false thoughts seem to indicate to me that he sent it around, like, why are individuals, individual senators, individual members of Congress, why are they not performing up to task?

What incentives have been built under the structure?

Because from my perspective, even if you increase the number of parties, if you change the exact parties as they exist today, you will still have those individual performance incentives.

So let's just get whatever reaction you want to that.

Sure.

I actually thought of all the panels.

Actually, I thought Yvonne was kind of one of the ones that really stuck

[Transcript] The Realignment / 338 | How to Fix America's "Underpants Gnomes" Problem with Frank DiStefano

with me because it I thought maybe just why you probably brought it up first. It anchored the whole day because everybody I thought all day was coming around to the theme that he took on directly, which is legitimacy, right? That we could get into the weeds of individual problems that we need to solve and things in policies.

But everybody I thought all day, when they would kind of step back and try to analyze what the big problem, the overarching problem was, it was a problem of institutions that don't work, leaders that don't lead, and sort of a driftlessness that nobody seemed to know what to do. And that's been the theme that he talked about and that he's been talking about for a while is this idea of institutions working, leadership, and legitimacy. And I think they're very much related because one of the things that I thought coming out of the conference was something that I've been sort of thinking about more and more over time is that we have this question of like, what is the great debate?

So one of the things that I, one of my theories of how all this works, if you will, is political parties are essentially not just coalitions of people. They are a great debate.

You have two parties at a time in history.

They are debating whatever is the great crisis of an era.

They have two, they build coalitions and combined ideas into a overarching philosophy which binds the party.

And then these two parties fight out over how to deal with the crisis.

All right. So what is the crisis?

And the obvious answer people, technology and the information age and the new global order and all of this.

But there's this big issue of legitimacy, of the lack of legitimacy, of people feel like institutions are broken and leaders don't lead.

And it's made me think that a big part of this great debate that we need to rebuild their parties around is restoring that.

It's not just about coming up with a group of policies that we like, but it's about restoring people's faith in America, in our institutions, in the systems and how they work.

And then coming up with policies and a party philosophy that's about, let's make stuff work again.

Let's make our leaders not treat their jobs just as spoils, but as duties.

Let's make sure that our institutions do what they're supposed to do.

So I actually thought that they're not two separate things.

I thought what he was saying, what I'm saying, were actually very complementary.

That's really interesting.

I, as I'm thinking about this legitimacy question, can our institutions function?

[Transcript] The Realignment / 338 | How to Fix America's "Underpants Gnomes" Problem with Frank DiStefano

Can they restore trust within themselves?

I wonder, and I'm starting to be concerned that policy probably comes before the legitimacy section, in the sense that my personal perspective of how you restore legitimacy to an institution like Congress, to the presidency, to the news media is purely one of performance.

And I think you gauge performance by policy, policy being how does policy address what's going on right now.

And then the other thing I want to get to with what you just said, because I want this to kind of go back and forth, is just like your idea of the great debate.

So to introduce people to your framework and the actual body of work you put out.

So in your book, *The Next Realignment*, which is somewhere behind me here, you're pointing out that there have been different party systems in different areas that had different big debates.

And the most recent era, basically the New Deal onwards 20th century, revolves around this debate over the size and scope of government.

And what you're kind of really putting forward here is that we need to be moving our debate forward to a new set of issues that could then offer a means of reorganizing the parties around actually addressing America's issues.

From my perspective, I still think we are in the middle of that debate in the sense that within two seconds of interest rates going up and the economy starting to perform less well,

we got into a conversation around debt and deficits and entitlement spending that in many ways was the same style of conversation we had in 2012, that in many ways was the style of conversation we had in the 1990s.

To me, those are still open.

And instead, what I would put forward as the great debate, quote unquote, per the show, but also per the conference is what exactly is the matter with America?

I think that's actually what we're debating.

We're not debating a specific set of policies.

We're not debating a big issue.

I think we're actually debating, and you saw this, if you're listening deeply to the conversation, what actually is the problem?

So, for example, if you listen to Kevin Roberts, the president of the Heritage Foundation, when he's articulating what's the matter with America and how he's saying that America is too DC-centric, he is arguing that America has abandoned, he's explicitly stating this, he's saying America has abandoned Judeo-Christian values.

He's saying the idea of the American nation has gone away, which is leading to this collapse in birth rates.

If we were to bring in some center left or even leftist person, they'd argue something entirely different.

They would say, actually, the issue in America right now is income inequality.

[Transcript] The Realignment / 338 | How to Fix America's "Underpants Gnomes" Problem with Frank DiStefano

And Kevin Roberts, you're talking about Judeo-Christian values and all those complicated birth rate issues, when the reason why young people aren't having children is because it costs too much, because economic gains have gone to one set of people, not the other. So they would have an entirely different assessment of what the problem in the country is right now. So I think what's interesting in giving your framework is we're kind of one step below where you would ideally have us be in the sense that this were a great debate. It could be like the 1880s, where we're debating whether civil service reform is the way forward. If this were similar to that period today, we'd be debating, okay, do we need to, do we need to, how do we address income inequality? It would be a way to have that debate, but we're not having that because the left and right in the center can't even agree with that as a framework. So how would you kind of respond to that framing up? Oh, I have a look. Okay. I fundamentally agree that that is what we're trying to figure out, which is what is the problem with America. That is the great debate, right? And I would say like with the 1880s, I think your example was perfect. All right. So civil service reform was the policy that people were fighting about, but what was that really part of? And it was part of the bigger fight, which was how do we adjust to the industrial revolution? Right. Because really what the problem was in the 1880s and all the progressive and populist policies, and there was huge fights about the details, but they were all essentially trying to come up with an answer to how do we have to adjust the country to deal with the fact that the industrial revolution just turned a farming country into a factory country, and it disrupted everything, right? And that was really what was wrong with America. I mean, it wasn't wrong with America, it was, but that was what was disrupting. It wasn't happening. It was the story of the era, right? Right. And so creating a professional civil service that wasn't a corrupt, crony apparatus was like part of that, as was public parks and ending child labor and all of the populist policies that the populist movement was coming up with. They were all just details about this bigger debate. And so I think that's kind of where we're at now too, but the other part is everyone's focused on the details without getting to the bigger problem, which is one of the things that I'm frustrated with is people are figuring out, like we're talking about this legitimacy thing. People are like, all right, there's a crisis of legitimacy, our institutions don't work. So how are we going to fix that? Well, here's the tax policy. Okay. Yeah, that might be something, one piece of what we're going to do, but it doesn't directly address shoring up legitimacy, but that gets to your point about like, how do you shore up legitimacy? And it is, you make things work. And so I've been coming around to this a lot too, is that like the message that I keep falling back on, but yet everyone's responsive to, but yet nobody really wants to run with it because it seems trivial, which is, let's make the institutions do what they're supposed to do. Just it's like a very basic thing.

[Transcript] The Realignment / 338 | How to Fix America's "Underpants Gnomes" Problem with Frank DiStefano

Let's make sure all of our institutions put their mission first.

Let's make sure our leaders lead. And part of that is, how do they show that they're leading?

As they actually start solving the problems they're supposed to solve, as opposed to just using them as sinicures and perks or using them as a platform to beat each other senseless,

just over jobs and spoils, or milking the institutions to help out subsidiary goals or whatever.

So anyway, I don't know if that's sort of my, I feel like you're right that the problem is

figuring out what's wrong with America, but everybody is at one level of abstraction

too low. And if we can raise the level of abstraction up one higher, then everything

under it will fall into place. But if we stay at the policy level without piecing it together into,

okay, really, what's fundamentally the problem? And it's a change global order.

Why are our institutions failing? I think it's in large part because they don't know what to do

and they don't have an agenda. And it's also a leadership class. There's this whole thing we

talked about the last time I was here about meritocracy and big change that happened in America

as we went from a sort of implicit aristocracy to the sort of the old Yankee families that ran

everything to a meritocracy, which is great. But one of the downsides of the meritocracy is

everybody who gets to go to Ivy League schools, all the people like me and you and whatever,

and all of our friends who went on to take these leadership jobs thought they won a contest. And

so the old aristocracy had this idea in their mind that they had been raised a leadership and so

they had to sacrifice and lead and it was a duty and a burden. And a lot of our leaders now I think

think, well, this job I got is because I was better and I earned it. And so I have no duty to

anybody other than myself except to enjoy the spoils of all my hard work. And I think that has

been a drag on leadership. You just set up a couple really important themes that came out

to me. And I think this is just a useful conversation. It may seem to folks who are

listening that we're spitballing, but like the actual take is we're trying to come up with

some degree of language and framework because this is actually good. So this builds on what you

just said here, which is that the more I've spoken and I've done spoken of people, I've recorded

over 350 episodes of this podcast right since 2019. So I've just spoken to a lot of people.

And the thing that comes through to me more and more and more the more I speak of people is this

is actually to push back against myself a little earlier, less about finding the exact perfect

policy to address this, this and that issue. So when I started the realignment,

I like your tax policy example. Tax policy is huge. Tax policy is incredibly

relevant at a million different levels. It's deeply felt by people at an interpersonal level.

I'm currently putting together my disastrous 1099 independent contractor taxes this year.

It's terrible. I hate it. W2 employers get at me. But obviously then it's also deep with the policy

DC level. This is like the first big thing that Trump did. This is what was big under

W Bush, etc, etc, etc. It's less about finding that exact specific policy framework.

Instead, I think what we should be doing during this 2020s period, which I think is a period where it's going to be less about big policy moves or storing accomplishments.

It's more of just finding a new model of public performance, which goes to your point about

politicians in their offices and less treating it like big signatures. So folks will notice there's

been a lot of harping on Pete Buttigieg, both at the conference and on the podcast of late.

And the reason why that harping has come there is that at a personal level, I have a lot of sympathy to the dynamics that drove like Pete Buttigieg and his generation of political leaders. So for

[Transcript] The Realignment / 338 | How to Fix America's "Underpants Gnomes" Problem with Frank DiStefano

example, I'm going to write about this in the substack soon. My problem with Pete Buttigieg is that Pete came up during an era where becoming a successful politician was really deeply about what narrative your personal experience drove. So if you look at him and his credentials, it's Rhodes Scholar, Navy reservist, young mayor, energetic, those are the traits. And those are the traits that he chose to emphasize. Those are the traits that made him jump into the, oh, and also the fact that he was from a red state. Those were identifiers that if you ever basically, and also the fact that he's well spoken and performs well on Fox News during like a hostile question session, if you were to sit down and talk to any specific person who's a huge Pete Buttigieg fan, they will identify some selection of those traits. And that's because Pete Buttigieg first runs for office in 2010. He comes up during the President Obama era, where once again, obviously Obama wins the nomination because of the fact that he opposed the Iraq war, which was a really, really helpful vulnerability that I spoke to Hillary Clinton's inability to coalesce the Democratic Party's base. He really came onto the scene in 2004 and served as a perfect kind of rebuttal or contrast with George W. Bush. There's not a red state. There's not blue states. This isn't Karl row trying to polarize everything. There's the United States. But those were deeply aside from the policy of opposing the Iraq war in 2003, when that wasn't the most popular thing to do, much of Obama's strengths came from his identity. So if you're a Pete Buttigieg-style politician, you're going to focus on developing those identity bits. The issue, though, is those identity traits don't at all prepare you, whether you're a senator, whether you're a governor, to perform publicly the way that you and I think are we're getting to. So if we're saying that the country is broken right now, but something's going wrong, well, the Department of Transportation is near the center of much of what most folks can agree is broken. Infrastructure, energy policy, transportation. This is also why it's annoying when people say that the Department of Transportation is a second third tier department of government where it's like, nope, actually right now, this is at the center of anything. So what I wish we got more of from Secretary Buttigieg, I'm going to stop calling him Pete because we're not even close to first name basis. This is always my DC's that I'm never just going to be comfortable doing that. He didn't spend the 2010s, I think, deeply learning about the set of issues that he faces. I don't think he has a particularly deep vision for these topics and these categories beyond abroad, like we want electric vehicle batteries, climate change, when what I think during this era is the opportunity for politicians is to actually deeply learn and engage and be able to implement. So to end this model in what you respond, I think, because once again, we're talking out loud here. So folks expect this to be more coherent during the actual subsec newsletter. I think there are basically two ways that a politician should think of themselves during this woman. Either one, you are a visionary who understands an issue and wants to go deep. So that's the example of Lena Kahn, the FTC chairwoman. She came out of Yale Law School. She wrote a very important antitrust piece in the Yale Legal Journal. She is a professor at Columbia. She now becomes the FTC chair at 33 and she's just been the most aggressive FTC chair in decades because, A, she has a theory of the case. She's deeply knowledgeable at the topic. That's what she does. She's not as great on the management side of things, apparently. There's been a lot of controversy about her running the department. This is her first big job. She's coming out of academia in the legal

[Transcript] The Realignment / 338 | How to Fix America's "Underpants Gnomes" Problem with Frank DiStefano

world. That's not enough for a shocker. So there's one model. This is the Lena Kahn model. The other model, and I don't quite have a politician to identify with this, would be though just like you were just like the implementer. It's kind of like FDR, right? Like FDR is not a policy genius. He's actually like he's very politically bright, but he's not what anyone would call it intellectual, but he's able to get his lieutenants, he's able to get a bunch of new dealers who then he will have their vision implemented. I think the problem people judge you, right? Exactly. The problem of Buttigieg is he's neither. He's not only not a policy visionary when it comes to the set of issues facing the Department of Transportation, but he's also not a, okay, holy crap. Look at our FAA, airlines, supply chains. I don't quite know how this works, but I am a manager. I'm a CEO type. We're going to get into this system and you all know you're going to come back in two months and be convinced that I fixed this. I think he's much more suited to the skills of a senator, which is where he's very eloquent and he's good at giving a speech, but those are different than those two models I kind of gave here. So please take as much time as you want because I just bottom-walked for a while. Oh no, that was great. And all I kept thinking about, so there's a distinction that I think about all the time about politicians, which is between salespeople and product people, right? So you think about it like in business terms, right? These are two completely different functions, right? Product people are knowledgeable people. They're engineers. They know how to create a great product and that's their job. And salespeople are also important, but they don't create products. They often don't even know how they work, right? The great salespeople of your company probably don't even fully understand what they just get a product sheet and they're great at selling it. And when things are stable, stable, you need salespeople, right? You already have a product. So we had conservatism and liberalism for the 20th century and they weren't going to change. So the best politicians were mostly salespeople, right? Particularly recently, you know, and there are people who could take the package that they were handed of, you know, the Democratic Party Inc. and go out and sell it to people. And that's what you're talking about versus, but now the problem is when the product starts with the 1990s to a T, Bill Clinton and Newt Gingrich. Yeah. And I feel like a lot of what you're talking about are all these people who are basically great. And, you know, and Congress is supposed to be a product development institution. This is what Yuval has been talking about is, you know, he's always focused on Congress because Congress in the Constitution is supposed to be the institution that creates the product and it's filled with salespeople. And they don't, and then they have to be in charge of making laws and knowing what to do. And that's not their expertise. That's not how we selected them. And there's very few people in that institution who are either capable of or inclined towards creating product. And they're not engineers. They're not product people. They're not political entrepreneurs and political engineers. They're political salespeople. And, you know, a product, and what you're talking about is right now, we need product. The people who should be running the show are product people. And you see companies go through this where, you know, when a company is at the top and doing great, a lot of times they're senior executives are mostly salespeople and or finance people, right? And when, but when you have an entrepreneurial company that has to create a new niche, the people who lead the company and who you need leading the company are product people. And I think that's the distinction that

[Transcript] The Realignment / 338 | How to Fix America's "Underpants Gnomes" Problem with Frank DiStefano

is lost because we have a whole political class that's made up of salespeople and their sales sheet doesn't work. And they don't have the the skill set or the inclination to build a new product. That's such a helpful distinction. So I'm going to keep building this out, basically. So to your point, salespeople and look like sales sales sales to your point, like this isn't even about disparaging any one category, because different eras in American politics where there's a different and this is actually if we're thinking about the core skill of being a politician like a politician, small P is the ability to suss out and understand what the moment and what the populace is basically asking for. So there are salespeople, they're going to succeed. And actually think about it too, like think of George HW Bush, George HW Bush was was not an effective salesperson. You know, he goes from a 90 plus or sort of 80 plus percent approval rating because of Desert Storm and of the Cold War hits some economic rough times and then loses reelection to a combination

of Bill Clinton, the greatest salesman of his the greatest salesman without a product of his generation. And then Ross Perot, who was also a great salesman, you know, bringing back to that, you know, doing his big presentations on national television talking about the national debt. So those are salesperson. So what I hope any politician or aspiring politicians like we've got a couple of them who are listening to this podcast and think about is Frank, I think you and I would agree that this is a moment and a period that is going to really necessitate product people. It's going to necessitate product people. So what you should be doing is behaving as a product person would learning something. Teddy Roosevelt, right? Yeah, FDR. I mean, you know, the whole thing with FDR being, you know, he's not the engineer himself, but he knows how to lead an engineering team. Yes, that's exactly it. And get them to actually do stuff or, you know, Teddy was absolutely all about the, you know, the ideas and implementing ideas and substance. And I think those are the people who, well, what are the people who the country needs? And ultimately, when we get somebody like that, we get a new crop of that, things will start turning around. But, you know, most people now, like, I mean, how do you get to Congress? You know, you're probably a local lawyer, a local car dealer or something, you know, people in the community and you're a great talker, and they hand you conservatism or liberalism as a product sheet, and you go out and sell it. And that's what they're great. And they're great at doing that. The people who we elect are really, really good at selling the idea of conservatism and liberalism. And then they get into Congress and then they're supposed to make laws. And they don't know anything about how to make laws. And not just that, they don't want to. That's not what they're interested in, right? They're not interested in getting into the details of tax policy or, you know, or energy policy or whatever it is they're supposed to be doing. They don't even, you know, it's, it's not their personality.

A couple, a couple of things, because I want to be very precise, what you're suggesting here, because I had this question, I'm sure a listener had this pushback to what you were saying, before your point developed a little, come on, Frank, politicians have always been like lawyers and like, you know, use car salesman, like, I mean, that at a literal level, who just happened to be kind of wealthy in their communities. Like there's never been this Congress of the housey on days of policymakers who are deliberating and doing always big things. So you could always argue that Congress, especially the house, has not been where we would necessarily

[Transcript] The Realignment / 338 | How to Fix America's "Underpants Gnomes" Problem with Frank DiStefano

like tie up the best and the brightest of policy. But it's that two different things have happened that you really write about. So one, the playbook that they are selling, or what they generically imbibe, doesn't offer direct solutions to the problem they're facing. So if it's, okay, actually, perfect example, if it's the 1990s, then the Clintonite playbook of center left, third way Democratic Party agenda is actually just like a pretty more than pretty good playbook. It wins you the presidency two times in the row. If we count Al Gore, Al Gore winning the popular vote, it wins the presidency three times in a row, because Democrats did terribly at the presidential level before that. It gets you a big budget deal with Newt Gingrich. It creates a degree of stability and peace. Like that's a good framework. The point is now a and any congressman or congresswoman who was elected as a standard Democrat could enter into that moment with that center left third way playbook and just like things go pretty well. Or at least we would, we thought they were going pretty well as kind of part of the 1990s. But like things seem to be operating as planned. If however, you take that same category of person and drop them into a Congress in the 2020s with a different set of issues, a different mood in the country, a different like literal world order on a couple of different levels, that sort of status quo is not going to work as well. And the second level that I think gets at your point about Congress not working is that literally Congress doesn't work. So that same member, it's not just like the, and this is what you've always talked about. It's not, it's literally like not just that the playbook and set of talking points they have isn't updated enough, or doesn't fit the times. It's that the incentives that would push someone to update the playbook or think a little deeper or kind of try to find things that are a little more nuanced, aka like maybe you're a blue dog Democrat in the 1990s, or you're like a country called Republican in the Northeast. So you could find different coalitions that can be formed. That doesn't work either. And look, this is really just sort of buttressed under the tail of, you know, Madison Cawthorne, who, you know, thank God is no longer a member of Congress. Madison Cawthorne, for those who don't know, or, you know, was a, you know, 25 years elected to Congress like the youngest member of Congress in the recent era. And immediately, he makes the statement that he's going to hire comms people and not policy people. Because the incentive for the institution is towards fame and notoriety and getting your own podcast and then going on the TPUSA tours, all those different bits. It's this really unconstructive culmination of the joke that DC is Hollywood for ugly people. Well, now it turns out that you actually can get pretty close to Hollywood. Because it used to be, oh, you go to DC, the joke about DC is, you know, Hollywood for ugly people was it's kind of insular, it's kind of small, okay, there's these restaurants you go to where all of the waiters recognize you and there's all these inside baseball parties. But that's all you get. Like that's the actual trade off as an ugly person. This is as good as it gets. But now, given media, decentralization, lack of trust in institutions, and the lack of the ability of a party to control someone, you can actually get as close to Hollywood as a talented, decently charismatic member could ever get. So that's a perfect combination of those two disasters. So then my last bit here, before I throw it back to you, Frank, and this is why I think it's important to say something positive. This is a positive takeaway from this conversation. Two positives I'll do one that I'll throw to you and I'll get to my other one later.

[Transcript] The Realignment / 338 | How to Fix America's "Underpants Gnomes" Problem with Frank DiStefano

My one positive is, because the country has so many identifiable problems that don't necessarily fit into a directly partisan box. So once again, let's look at the FAA and all the issues of people flying their flights, that doesn't fit into 20th century liberalism or 20th century conservatism. There's just no talking point. There's no big government or we need to socialize the airlines. Now there are those two, I mean, you obviously could chew on those two in, but they actually at a very literal level just aren't satisfying. I think that's probably two for most people react to it. So the existence of that problem and the existence of that space has created an incentive for new up and coming politicians and vicious people to say to themselves, Hey, wait a second, you know how I could really stand out in this moment very specifically and totally surpass or overshadow Pete Buttigieg is, Hey, I'm the guy who knows our airlines work and how it doesn't make any sense. I'm the guy who's going to drive to the Austin, Texas airport with a, you know, camera crew and just say like, Hey, I'm your member of Congress. Man, look at that thing. That thing is happening because of this. I'm working on this, this, this and that. You get booked on all the shows that be all this energy. I'm sure someone like Joe Rogan to be interested in that if you found a way to make it interesting and compelling seeing that space open. It's not quite one that someone has filled yet, but I know for a fact, given the fact that Pete Buttigieg is clearly an intelligent, an intelligent, ambitious person. I think the Pete Buttigieg is of today have the opportunity to notice that opportunity to notice how that space needs to be filled and notice what Lena Khan is doing for the FTC. They could do for their own categories of interests, but yeah, whatever you want to take this. Well, I guess what you just said is kind of where I started, which is I think that's, that's the message. I think that's how we build a new movement is let's make stuff work. Let's actually, you know, make the institutions do what they're supposed to do. Let's make, you know, maybe that sounds too abstract when you start talking about institutions and, you know, and the problem about make things work is it sounds trite. So I haven't figured out the terminology, but that idea, I think is the winning idea. And then you, and then all the policies will stream out under that about like, well, what is that going to mean and practice and how exactly are we going to do it? But, you know, there are two thoughts, something that came out of the conference and something I just saw. The thing I just saw that I think is relevant to this is, did you read that article in Wired about the decline of tech products and I don't want to use the Wired, Wired's paywall is a little too aggressive. There was an article that went semi viral about why so many tech products suck. And basically the idea is there is a cycle. Okay. So it starts out, you create a new product. All right. You need users. So you create something that's awesome, right? You create Uber and it's great. You create Amazon and it works great for customers. They can come, they can find exactly what they want. It's got a great price. And so everybody floods in and uses it. So then the next stage is, okay, now I've got all these users and I got to monetize. So now I switched to business and advertisers or whoever it is, it's going to, that I can get more money from. So Amazon starts, it's not so great for customers anymore, but it's really good for the sellers. It's, you know, the Uber, you know, they start trying to get more money for drivers or whatever, right? So the Facebook for advertisers. But then the third stage where it evidently goes is, once they have them locked in, now they just want to extract as much money for the companies they can. Okay. So now it's terrible for everybody that the product, it's too expensive. It doesn't work. It's annoying. And this cycle you see in every single tech product and it's why everything

[Transcript] The Realignment / 338 | How to Fix America's "Underpants Gnomes" Problem with Frank DiStefano

sucks. But it's also what you're talking about with the airlines. You know, why are the seats too small? Nobody's happy about it. But like, you know, as the sort of the rationale of business cycles is everything degrades until it just kind of, it's still good enough that everyone's going to use it. But it just kind of is annoying. There's too many ads. It's too loud. You know, you're trying to be fleeced and nickel and dime to take an advantage of. And this cycle is everywhere.

And it's supposed to be, I think, that, you know, under the theory of capitalism, and then a new competitor should be able to come in and eat your lunch. But if all these things have built up to impossible monopolies everywhere, there's, you know, five airlines or whatever, and, you know, if you can't start a new one, then it just means that everything is kind of degraded and everyone's miserable and unhappy all the time. And so there's been a lot of discussion of that because I think there's some truth to this. And what you're talking about is like, okay, well, I mean, there's things you can do. You can't just, you know, the classic idea is, well, I'm just going to trust the market to fix it. But the market doesn't fix it anymore. And there was a, so this is this thing somebody said at the conference that's been sticking with me, this idea that we've given too much power to what are essentially private governments, that when you have companies that get really, really large, what inevitably happens is everybody, they become the government, right? That, yeah, they can't, they're not technically the government, but unlike the government, you don't vote for them, you didn't elect them, but they have massive control over your lives. And I've been thinking about that a lot because you think about, okay, well, what makes a government?

What makes a government is one ubiquity, right? It's everywhere. You can't escape it, right? The reason the government is a big deal is because I can't just get, go to the next state over or something and be like, oh, I don't like your law. Okay, well, the government's everywhere. There's nowhere you can go. And then coercion, that the government has the ability to coerce you if you don't comply and don't do what it wants. Well, when you have private entities that have ubiquity and coercion, you know, theoretically, the government needs to do something about that or somebody, because there's no democratic control and there are people who are deciding your life and can affect your life and ruin your life. And it doesn't even matter if it's one company, then people look at, well, it's one individual company. But if there's networks of companies that are operating together or networks of people behind the companies, whether they be movements

or groups of people that can kind of control a bunch of companies and you get ubiquity plus coercion, you have these two ideas. Everything's kind of not working great. Nobody's doing anything about it. Everyone's unhappy. There's no way to escape it. There's nowhere to go. And it makes people discontent. And I feel like that's sort of trying to put my finger on why people are so miserable because it's fixable, but it's just our old political frameworks don't really have a fix to it because the problem isn't too much government or not enough government. It's like, well, what is government supposed to be doing? What is the role of government? What are the role of private institutions? Where are the limits? What are they allowed to do? What are they not allowed to do? And figuring out that, you know, everything, it's not like everything's at dystopia, but it feels like there's so much in life that people feel like it's just constantly annoying, they're being taken advantage of, and then it creates a low trust environment,

[Transcript] The Realignment / 338 | How to Fix America's "Underpants Gnomes" Problem with Frank DiStefano

and it makes everything just sort of miserable for no good reason. So that was when you were talking this thought that I had that had come out of the conference. And I'd be curious at what your take is on that. Yeah, I think there's also, I think this also rebounds well to the self-conscious way you said, let's fix it feels trite and obvious because on the one hand, and I think this is a quick sidebar. I was talking about this at one of the breaking points live shows and how when you're in this format, or when you're thinking about policy, you're incentivized to make things complicated and go long over a couple of times during this episode, I've gone a little too long. And because that feels smart, and that feels like you're adding nuance, but I think there's something to be served in pushing through our instinct that something short and trite is bad, and just just embrace it. Like I actually think just saying, let's fix it is actually the proper rallying cry on a couple of different levels, like on the level one, a, it's simple enough that you can actually build useful scaffolds around it. It's a foundation. And it actually better sets up the great debate that you were describing at the start of the episode. So if we could come to an accord in this country around the idea that things are broken, everyone knows they're broken. Let's fix it and then debate the way that we fix those issues. That provides something concrete, which also speaks to something Matt Stolar said during his panel of Julius Krein that really resonated when he was saying that there's a new center forming. And in the new center, there's a lot of opportunity. New center issues are really those supply chain ones. They're the infrastructure ones. There's once again, to your point, what you were just saying, like that reckoning with private power. And what do we do with it? Like what are the implications of it? China, foreign policy issues, like those, those are all very specific new center issues. So just saying, okay, like let's fix it is useful at an intellectual level. And if I were to be made secretary of transportation, I think something that I would want to be able to do is start, you know, you don't have like, let's assume you've got two weeks before you start the job, I would start by saying, look, diagnosis, things are broken. And our job here is to fix them. How do we fix them? Like, that's just useful. And I think so many, I think that just the lack of organizing principles becomes a big problem. But then the second part of why let's just fix it is actually deeply important. I think something we should adopt as like a movement rallying cry is it's something empirical, right? Think about it, like the big problem with once again, like the Pete Buttigieg era of political advancement. And by the way, it's not just Pete Buttigieg is in this category. Remember Colleen Castro? Colleen Castro was the mayor of San Antonio. He then gave the Obama speech at the DNC in 2012. And then he was promoted to be secretary of housing and urban development in the in the second part of the Obama administration, because obviously, because he was in Texas in 2014, if he was going to go national, there was no higher position he could have gotten in the state of Texas that would have made sense from that perspective. That was entirely like narrative based. Like, we have no idea. And then, and then, you know, who he and ran for ran for president in 2020 and dropped out very early, because at the end of the day, he had his like narrative. He had his like, I'm a young impressive Stanford educated, like Latino man who was mayor of a Hispanic city. Now it was a it was a weak city in the sense that like the actually there was one of those it's one of those cities San Antonio where there is a city manager that actually has a lot more power than the actual mayor. So he actually didn't have that much management control. But

[Transcript] The Realignment / 338 | How to Fix America's "Underpants Gnomes" Problem with Frank DiStefano

all he had a pure narrative. It was I gave the Obama speech. I'm young. I'm smart. I'm Hispanic. And the Democratic Party is a party of an increasingly, you know, shifting America, and I am the representation of those dreams. That's what I was that's what I'm talking about. I was saying, I think once people hear this framework, I'm giving it's just so easy to see the difference between these like narrative politicians. And I think what could be an alternate better model. So if the question is, let's fix it. It's easy to say, okay, Queen Castro, your Hispanic, Stanford mayor, Obama speech, I get it. What did you fix? And your department, you were there. There's a broad agreement talking about millennials, people can't afford houses, you've all these different problems, urban regions, chronic, what did you fix? What did you do? And guess what? Maybe you didn't fix something like that's okay, you're only there for two years. What were two or three problems you identified that you set up for your successor to handle properly? If you had stayed on your job in a Hillary Clinton administration, if she won, if she won in 2016, what would you have done then? See, this is kind of why I like I kind of grimace when you said, let's fix it is trite. Because if you actually think about it, right, such a useful framework. So much has to do with me, like, let's roll up our sleeves, do things, you know, and and and and judge people by their ability to do that. That's that's the key thing. It's like the question should be, okay, Mayor Pete, Secretary Buttigieg, I know for a fact, you can eloquently articulate for me why America needs to have 50% electric vehicle penetration by the year 2030. Climate change, own a new industry for America unionization, I know all those things, you could say it better than the smartest Brookings scholar we have, we get it, you're charismatic. But what did you actually do? And guess what, like, if he in fact did things, then he should be able to articulate those. But that's the standard we should be operating off of. And, you know, Secretary Buttigieg, everyone agrees the areas that you work with. And by the way, and this is also problematic too, because the defense you saw on center left Twitter about Buttigieg during the FAA issues, during the supply chain crunch was he did not create these issues. It's bad faith Republicans act like everything was hunky dory until 2021. And then Mayor Pete blew it up, which is totally fair, right? Like, you don't need to listen to Lauren Boebert as you know, Congressman Lauren Boebert, as you're like, totally like, quote unquote, good faith critic here. Okay, if you're identifying these systems of being broken beforehand, what did you start doing about that? Like, or to your point about working at a company, if your turnaround CEO comes into a broken company, where there's been all these previous mistakes of management, no one's going to say to you, we, you know, six months in, oh, man, you're really telling me that like this, this and that are happening, this is all your fault. That's not how you're addressed in a good faith way in a good faith way you're addressed like, okay, what is a what's your five year plan? What's your four year plan? And that's what someone's addressed. So I think that's why pivoting things towards fixing is deeply helpful. You know, so one of the things that I was thinking about writing something about this, I don't know, about underpants gnomes politics. So do you do you know that episode that South Park episode about the underpants gnomes? You're really pulling my mid 2000s out for me. But like, yeah, so the underpants, I have the perfect vision of the underpants gnomes, but I need you to explain. I will, I will give a brief explanation for everybody who doesn't have any idea what I'm talking about or how odd it is. All right. It's one of the most brilliant

[Transcript] The Realignment / 338 | How to Fix America's "Underpants Gnomes" Problem with Frank DiStefano

episodes of anything for putting their thumbnail or putting their thumb on a classic human problem. All right. So the idea is somebody's stealing the kids underwear, and they're going missing. And so they stay up late one night to see what's going on. And they catch through these gnomes that are coming out of their closets and stealing everybody's underpants. And so they file these gnomes down into their subterranean layer. And they just have piles and piles of them. And so the kids are like, what in the world are you possibly doing? And all the gnomes are really enthusiastic. And they're all they know, they're their business people. They're like, they have a plan. Step one, steal underpants. Step three, profits. Okay. And that's all any of them know. And they're all 100% confident. And oh, isn't there a question mark for step two? Nobody knew step two. And nobody seemed to focus on her care that nobody knew step two, because there was no conceivable step two, by which stealing mounds of underpants was ever going to lead to anybody's making any profits. But yet it didn't matter because the narrative was there. And so they were all totally invested in the narrative of if we engage in this behavior, this good thing is going to happen because they just repeated it. And yet there was no rational reason to think that that's what was going to happen. And it's a brilliant episode because you see this with businesses, with politics everywhere that people have this, I'm going to take this behavior and it's going to lead to this utopia. And if you actually know anything about it and think about it, you realize there's no possible way that action could possibly ever lead to that result. But nobody knows or cares about the details. And so everyone's like, what, you're not for making utopia? Of course, we should do this stupid thing because they said that it's going to lead to this wonderful result. And I feel like so much of politics right now, and particularly our parties are, all right, the other guys are bad. Put us in power. Put people like, I'm like you. I have all the identity markers you have. I have all the cultural markers you have. Put us in power and get rid of them and profits. And nobody knows step two because there is no step two. And this is exactly what you're talking about with all these politicians that just come in and be like, their solution is elect people like me and all our problems will be fixed. And yet they don't have step two and nobody knows what step two is or how this, there's just no plan there. And I think this is the fundamental problem with so much of our politics is, and so much of our elections now is this war between good and evil. But nobody realized it's all just underpants gnomes politics because nobody on either side really has a plan that they have to implement to lead to the results. So they're like, here are the problems I've identified in the world. And look and elect me because I'm your guy. And somehow I'm going to lead to a wonderful flourishing of the world. Well, how are you going to do that? Well, nobody seems to have any idea. And nobody seems to realize that nobody has an idea. And nobody seems to care that nobody has an idea. You know, in these last 10 minutes, I want to, this has been a, I think in the best sense of the term, this has been an all over the place conversation, which is like reacting to nine hours of straight talking. But I think we're kind of interesting for someone to listen to. No, it's true. And I think we're, I think we're coming to a useful takeaway and scaffolding because I'll also say this, like whenever I meet up with like fans of the show, I got drinks of like a couple groups of people, like when I was in DC, like this is what people wanted to talk about. And it was very interesting, like left, right and center, like the young listeners I spoke with wanted to talk about kind of like the process things, which has really changed. Like a few years ago, it used to really be here's this policy thing,

[Transcript] The Realignment / 338 | How to Fix America's "Underpants Gnomes" Problem with Frank DiStefano

or here's this like specific movement that I'm interested in. No, like of late, the conversation has been much more focused around the mechanics. They're like to your point about the underpants, gnomes. There's a merging interest in what's in step two. Yeah. Right. Like everyone, everyone gets the profit section. Everyone gets the equivalent of like underwear. Yeah. But they know, they know at a visceral level, when you're actually honest about it, you know, like off the record drinks, like you're not running for office right directly, they know that number two is missing. And that's, and that's, and that's, and that's, and that's the opportunity. Like I actually think the suggestion to like a young ambitious Pete Buttigieg type today is, hey, to really sum up the conversation, there are different periods in American history, different periods in American history, basically reward different skill sets, knowledge bases, behaviors. If the 2000s and 2010s and 1990s were about salesmanship, today, the set of problems facing the country, you can identify not everything, everything fits into that category. So for example, something in something in the broken category that I'm actually pretty skeptical as being something you could build around is like is immigration. In the sense that like it's just so that the interesting thing about realignment thought the really introduced me to is this idea that sometimes during realignment eras, one side just has to win the implemented. So like if Democrats could form a majority coalition with, you know, super majorities like in 2009, guess what, we're going to have immigration reform. You know, when Sorab Sharma or Kevin Roberts or, you know, John Birka are talking about how we have too many immigrants in the country, they're going to have to actually like win the super majority implement that too. In these new center issues, though, to quote Stolar again from the episode, there's actually a lot of space that doesn't require one side of the other to completely dominate because to your point, they don't fall into either specific ideology and provide a lot of space there. So listeners, if this is your area of focus, I would focus on a, like what's an issue that's deeply of interest to you and be like develop either either develop the expertise in the issue. So you could have something to say. So you have the vision to enact it. So for example, this is the Lena Khan example. She is an antitrust expert. She has a vision for it. She wanted to be FTC chairwoman and she's led the FTC in a way that's different than any of her predecessors. That's product leader number one. And then the other product leader example to your metaphor, Frank, is I am managing this department. I know that there are these vague, like antitrust issues that we have right now, but like I've been in the world for a while, my legal expertise isn't quite where it needs to be. So I'm going to hire the 10 best up and coming antitrust experts and I'm just going to manage them and make sure there aren't any blockers in their way. I'm going to make sure we get into the White House for their meetings. I'm going to make sure that there's good congressional legislation. I'm going to make that work. That's the second version of the product leader. It's really trying to avoid being a salesperson. And one last thing that I'll close on. Folks were asking whether we're going to do more politician interviews because I just did a really great episode of Mike Gallagher of Wisconsin. And you and this, I think there have been some useful metaphors that we've been focusing on today. The product person versus salesperson perfectly articulates who I want to talk to versus who I don't want to talk to. The reason why I don't really interview politicians anymore is that they're salespeople either of themselves or of

[Transcript] The Realignment / 338 | How to Fix America's "Underpants Gnomes" Problem with Frank DiStefano

their party or their specific ideology. And unless they're the product person who's like originating that ideology, they're not particularly interesting. So for example, talking, having an unfiltered conversation with Newt Gingrich in the 1990s would actually be very interesting because like he's the guy I was like, I think that Republicans can win back the house after 40 years of being in the minority. I'm the ideas guy. I've got some things. I'd actually love to hear his sales pitch in that category. Most politicians. There was a lot of substance in the contract. There was this myth that's grown up that it was all just sales. But you know, there was a whole, that was the whole point of it. There was a whole agenda. They passed a ton of stuff. Like that was substance there.

So that's the key thing, which is that I think that whether you like Michael Gallagher or not, it came through to a lot of folks to look like this guy is a product person. He thinks deeply about China. He has expertise. And I think it's important that he was able to lead the China community because once again, this is how politicians work. You're now seeing that, oh, wait a second, like there's actually an incentive to be smart about something because he was rewarded for that. Jacob Helberg. I don't think you know Jacob Frank, but Jacob has appeared on the podcast to talk about China issues. He was now just appointed. He's like 3233. He was just appointed to be a commissioner on the US-China Economic Commission that Congress puts.

Another example, he has a book called *The Wire is a War About Tech and Digital Sovereignty in US and China*. That's another example of him being rewarded for actually building a body of work that's of interest to him. And I hope folks are paying attention to that theme because it's that responsibility is going to be more important than giving a speech at a convention at parties that mean less and less to people. So what's your, so two last questions for you to turn this back into an actual interview. So one, what would be just like your takeaway from, just your real like, sum this up to something coherent, the conference, this conversation.

And then two, what would be your advice to like a young people to judge if you're a Democrat or a young, like Gallagher type, AKA like smart people, Ivy educated, you don't have to be Ivy educated, but there's an archetype here of ambitious person. What would you advise them that be in contrast to the advice they would have imbued by growing up in the 2000s?

Okay. Well, I think it is what we started with here and what we've been talking about the whole time, which is be a person of substance, fix things. And that the message, see, I'd like to see, you know, again, I want to break down the whole left, right spectrum to start with, which I think is outdated that, that so you need to find the other people of substance to actually get things done, be Teddy Roosevelt, right? I mean, Teddy Roosevelt's fascinating because he's sort of what you're talking about, right? He grew up in a time of, of corruption and drift and salesmanship and nothing being done. And, and was kind of one of the people who came in

and actually brought in this movement, but we need a bigger movement than just politicians. I think we also need a movement out there to support these people. We need, let's fix things, let's get things done. And then the other part that we didn't get to talk about, but that I did really come away with from the conference was the Gen Z people's attitudes, which was surprising to me is the extent to which they have a revolutionary burn it all down attitude. And I understand that where older people, millennials and Gen X are like, let's fix

[Transcript] The Realignment / 338 | How to Fix America's "Underpants Gnomes" Problem with Frank DiStefano

things to the way it used to be where Gen Z's look and say, no, everything is broken. Let's rebuild from scratch. And so I would double down on that because I think that's the future. I honestly think the message is let's fix things and let's take these institutions, gut them and replace them with something that works is I think could be very successful. But I think that's so interesting that that resonated with you as a model because I think it goes absolutely nowhere. Oh, really? Oh, yeah, because so, okay, this is great. Yeah, we can extend for a minute or two. My beef with that Gen Z, and this is born out in Poland. This isn't just, you know, Nate Sorob or Kristen Soto Sanderson. This is a general take. My problem with the Gen Z, burn it down attitude is that burning it down only works as a framework.

If you have the capacity to build something new, and I agree because Gen Z is solely raised on because Gen Z is only because Gen Z has only been raised in a world that they interpret. I think fairly in many ways is broken. And because in many ways they're infected by and trapped by social media dynamics that are unconstructive, I see little to no evidence that they're going to have the ability to do it. I think the kind of pitch for my generational cohort, the millennial cohort is. In mine. And yours. Yes. I'm Gen X. I'm actually a little underwung by Gen X, no offense. We'll have that debate some time. We're the best. I think it's entirely possible that Gen X ends up getting shut out of the presidential timber category. Oh, I think that's totally going to happen. And not merely because of the fact that as a generational cohort, you guys are actually decently small, but because sometimes your generation just gets caught between worlds. And I feel as if Gen X probably got caught between worlds. Boomers came into power too quickly. And then hog all the space, hog the space. As soon as we got ready to. So we had to wait too long. And then as soon as we were, you guys were there behind us. And then we looked like a bunch of fuddy duddies. Yeah. And the other problem too is that my other thesis is the longer you stay in the political system, the least, the least likely you're going to be to be successful. So obviously Joe Biden is Joe Biden is the ultimate counter example. Because he's literally been a senator since he was 29 years old. The difference. And yes, I know, I get to be 30, but he was elected when he was elected when he was 29. And then age into it properly. But the difference between Joe Biden is Joe Biden failed like four times to run for president. He was only able to work at the last time because the country very specifically was looking for his silent gist of what he was doing. For his silent gen returned to normalcy politics that hit with COVID. There's a reason why 2008 didn't work. Why 1988 didn't work. And 2016 didn't end up work beyond obviously just Bo dying of cancer that already that had already basically been nipped in the bud by team Clinton before that all happened. But my point is the longer you stay in the system, the weaker you are. So, you know, like Marco Rubio, it's been great that he's been, you know, it's been great. I think, I think, I think Senator Rubio is like a great senator. He's been a guest on the podcast before. I think especially because he's probably not going to run this cycle. He will have been a senator for 18 years. It just entirely changes the dynamic. Tom Cotton, Tom Cotton also been a guest on this podcast has decided not to run in 2024 props to him for not having an insane ego and being able to check himself properly and not just do an annoying Nikki Haley style presidential run for the heck of it. He will have been a senator for 1215. Also, like nearing 18 years, that is going to push anyone past their sell by date, which is

[Transcript] The Realignment / 338 | How to Fix America's "Underpants Gnomes" Problem with Frank DiStefano

why I think it's going to end up just ruining politics for the for the for the Gen X cohort. So yeah, so the last thing I'll actually say on this, I think millennials have the opportunity to remember a world that did kind of work and not just be unduly pushed into a burn it down approach which has never worked in American politics is basically kind of like my takeaway. Do you want to offer a defense of them please? I will. I will. And again, this is a new thought for me. So I will say that I when I said that it's with a little bit of doubt because obviously as a Gen Xer, you know, my inclination is not to burn everything down. Okay. But I'm thinking about like, okay, how to harness this. And I feel like it's about not substance but tone. The substance has to be we're going to make things work. We're going to fix it. We're going to rebuild. It has to be very positive. It has to be a positive gender about making things work. And then but it's just about we're going to make things work like they used to work, which was sort of my instinct versus is we're going to rebuild from scratch to make things that work. And I like that word make things that work. Yeah, that would resonate with the Gen Xer in a way what I said before the first time it resonates with me because I remember things working better. And so it resonates to say, let's make things work again. But I think a Gen Xer hears that and thinks, Oh, well, things never worked. America has always been terrible. Everything's always been broken. And it doesn't click with them. For them, they need to hear, let's, let's build a new exciting movement from scratch that makes things work. And and that I'm hoping that a Gen, a millennial or a Gen Xer would hear that and still be okay with it. That was just my instinct with that. I don't know if that again, I'm not wedded to that, but that was a new thought that I just had. No, I think I think you've actually hearing it in that sense. I mean, I'm 30. I'm young. I'm young enough that like, I grasped the difference between the two phrases you uttered. Yeah. And once again, like this is what we look like. This is why like MAGA is like a disaster for like even like, most millennials and just 100% of Gen Zers, like MAGA as a framework, like for, for example, like, let's put aside like the Trump presidency, as difficult as that could be sometimes, make America great again, just doesn't work unless you were alive for that period. But yeah, that's, I'm actually going to like think about what you just said, because I think noticing the difference is important. And it also gets that, and now it also, you know what it also does, it also kind of gets at the scale of the undertaking in the sense that actually, this is also good too, because there's something kind of, oh, okay, Frank, I'm just going to, this is how this is an organic episode. I enjoyed it. I'm actually totally convinced me, because the problem with like the millennial and Gen X, and then at its worst, Baby Boomer instinct is, it's just not true in the literal sense. I got in this debate with Kyle Kalinsky and Crystal Ball of breaking points that our lives show in Atlanta when we were debating student debt. And we were all talking past each other, but they kept talking about how, you know, in the 1960s, college was free. And just like, I could never sync up with them, because it's just like, I'm sorry, like at a baseline level, that's a different country, there are different assumptions, there are different cohorts, that is not coming back. And that's just like not true, saying we're going to make college like the 1960s again. On the face of it sounds nice, you say like back then, college was free, and you didn't have this, this, that happened. But it's also not what's on the table. What's actually on the table is, the 60s are over. But where things went from the 60s was clearly a disaster at a student debt level, at a price of college level, at a degree inflation and credentials problem, total disaster.

[Transcript] The Realignment / 338 | How to Fix America's "Underpants Gnomes" Problem with Frank DiStefano

Instead, again, I guess you've awoken the Gen Z area within me. Instead, we need to, fun and exciting too. We need to like, I hate the word, I hate the phrase like, burn it down, but like, and reboot is a cliché, I'm just gonna say reboot speaks more to like my 1990s, Windows 95 side, we need to like reboot the higher ed system, and build something new that's better. Build a new America? That sounds cliché too. I feel like there's gotta be eight foundations called the rebuild the new America foundation, probably, right? Yeah, no. Yeah, geez, I'm rewatching Veepe right now. And there's a Selena Meyers book is one of her speeches titled like red, white and you. So just like, just like really cliché, terrible things as an out there. But I think for the earlier conversation to actually end this episode, my other low stakes takeaway is that you and I should not be afraid to be cringe and the implications and wordings of things like maybe, maybe, you know, rebooting is cringe, but I always like renew. That's a word I use a lot is renew America, which is also a think tank. Well, it's been used by some evangelicals and stuff. So people might think it's like, you know, let's go back to 1990s Christian conservatism. There's a whole problem there with just branding, but I don't know the right word. But something that sounds like a revolution to rebuild something new is, I think, going to work better. And it's really just about how you sell what you're doing. Are you going backwards or you going forward? I think that's a great place to end. I know someone in the audience has a better set of choices. Definitely right into the sub stack and let us know. Frank, this has always been a pleasure. Thank you for joining me on the realignment. Thanks for having me. 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 five dollar a month, \$50 a year or 500 for a lifetime membership race. See you all next time.