

Marshall here. Welcome back to The Re-alignment.

My guest today is Dr. Megan Reese, founder and CEO of Solid Intel, a company helping businesses de-risk their supply chains, giving the increasingly fractious state of geopolitics.

Solid Intel achieves this by leveraging the power of AI and machine learning.

Before fronting your company, Megan worked in the Senate as Senator Mitt Romney's National Security Advisor and earned a PhD at UT Austin. In this conversation we covered everything from supply chains and the AI opportunity to what it's like to do business in China as a medium-sized business, all of course centered on Megan's expertise in the national security field. In the last third of the conversation I do something a little different, as you all know this show is very focused on policy and solutions. Rarely do I focus on guest background, but given the fact that Megan has gone from academia earning her PhD to working

on the Hill and now founding a tech company, she is just like the perfect person to talk to about her career and what people in this audience should really think about. She's learned so much over her career in the space. Now she's actually working to implement it. So we're going to go through those three job categories, founder, congressional staff, or an academic. Of course, a huge thank you to the Foundation for American Innovation supporting the work of this podcast. If you'll enjoy this conversation. Megan Reese, welcome to the realignment.

Thank you so much for having me. It's great to see you.

Yeah, it's great to see you too. I've known you for a couple of years and this is going to be a fun episode because it's a combination of my national security and geopolitics, domestic resiliency interest with the fact that you're also the founder of a company in the technology space. We can combine all my different podcasting interests into one. So folks have heard a little bit about your background in the introduction that I read before we started this conversation. So let's just set the table. Go really easy that way. Your main focus back when you're in DC and the experience you're bringing to the technology sector is your knowledge of geopolitics and risk. Can you just give us the status quo understanding of how we should understand the geopolitics and risk topic in the space we're describing today? I think that the very first thing that people who are thinking about this topic need to think about is that the world is fundamentally shifting. We've been in kind of the stasis position of the US as the global super power since the end of the Cold War and it was generally uncontested and there's been a movement over the last decade or so although the Chinese would actually argue that it started quite a bit sooner than that than the mid-2000s that China is becoming a global power that that means that there are going to be a lot of competitive efforts from the Chinese to compete with the Western world order and so all of those efforts are going to lead to contentious results. So does this mean that we're going to have a country that's trying to compete to overtake the dollar as the world currency? Are we going to have a country that's going to compete with the known boundaries of how we do for instance shipping lanes or expectations of how far out sea lanes go? Are we going to have competitions over known boundaries that for instance China is going through every single archive in their country to try to make claims that certain boundaries are actually in their favor historically and that all of the lines that are drawn now are wrong and then another thing that I just care about deeply are human rights going to be contested in every single sphere because the view of human rights is fundamentally different in China than it is in

Western liberal democracies and when it comes down to it we have to do or we have to be willing to compete in each of these spheres because at least in my view fundamentally humans are better off with the framing the Western liberal order that we have now and if we allow a contentious alternative superpower to come in and rewrite the world order, rewrite all of these rules it's actually going to be worse for people writ large. Yeah that's a great summary of kind of the state of play right now. My real question for you then given the fact that you're now working with businesses in the technology sector when you're describing everything you just said where does business stop and politics begin because across those different topics like so for example the human rights question that's obviously going to relate to like the Uyghur you know forced labor prevention act so if you're a Western corporation that uses goods that could be sourced via Uyghur slave labor that is obviously like a business perfect intersection with political dynamics it's a little more straightforward and harder just to like debate over quote-unquote where I see this is a little more complicated are things like okay competition is competition a potentially treacherous thing to do is that something that puts you on the road to conflict and obviously the business community doesn't want conflict how do you understand like the business slash politics separation? Yeah there are large differences depending on the sector that businesses are operating in but I think there's overall a growing understanding that this all of this stuff actually matters and it doesn't come from the competition per se it comes from COVID but if you look at say the defense sector there's there's obviously clear understanding that if you have problematic technological components in your widget that that could lead to a risk factor if it's coming from China or Russia or someplace problematic but there could be you know bad code there could be viruses all of that stuff but if you're looking at something like agriculture then maybe you don't have any concerns other than some of these forced labor issues if you're looking at solar panels you've you know just need to get your stuff to market but also you've dealt with you know IP theft so depending on the sector there's different recognition of the problems but when it comes down to it there there is going to be in in my view a growing and growing understanding of the overall risk if you see some of these shifts happening or if you see some sort of flashpoint where there where there's some economic separation so what I think is happening especially

in Europe the US is actually a little ahead of the curve compared to say Germany you're you're going to start seeing some hedging you're going to see some you know creating copy of supply chains

in less risky countries just in case stuff happens but for especially smaller companies that don't really have these like massive groups to to kind of seek out alternatives they're mostly hoping for the best while recognizing there are problems so what you know I'm spending a lot of time thinking about how to make sure that people understand risk in these areas and then also move on it when it becomes necessary to do so and ideally even ahead of time which is something the business community does not love doing something I'd love to understand because it kind of illustrates the risk dynamic hopefully is what do you see if you're speaking with a business you're working with as the opportunity when it comes to foreign markets especially those in Asia broadly because it's kind of funny we've spent so much time talking about the very obvious risks and that's everything from COVID to trade wars during the 2010s with the Trump administration many policies of which were carried over by the Biden administration but if we were to go back to you know what when you

and I were like in high school so much of the conversation around Asia was just purely opportunity based like the cliché the world is flat globalization is happening there's always opportunity there now we focus so much on the risk side of things what do you see as the opportunity circa 2023 I so so I should clarify most businesses still see the Chinese market as like the the best possible thing because there are so many people but as as businesses are becoming a little more cognizant of risk issues they're they're really trying to think about alternative markets or supply chains for instance and because the Chinese market is getting more expensive for production looking in Southeast Asia for instance you can actually find sometimes cheaper alternatives going to Mexico Mexico is you know sometimes hard to find like the right supplier they're sometimes behind the ball on you know making sure that you you know where to look but they may end up being cheaper than China is at the moment as China is going up in in what they're

paying employees for instance and so the cost actually may be flat it may be in some places lower it may be higher let's be honest so it's just balancing all of these things and I think that companies are trying to figure out how much time can we get in the Chinese market for supply chains before we have to shift but also recognizing there's a lot of movement toward shifting regardless

of risk or just other factors coming into play the way you set that up also leads to a useful follow-up question what is the difference when it comes to the opportunity of serving the Chinese market so like selling your goods in the Chinese market versus relying on the Chinese market for production of goods that will go out swear how would you differentiate those two opportunities I mean this is this is the big Trump para for right like can we sell into the Chinese market at the the right amount and make sure that the Chinese don't have so many restrictions that they keep our goods from coming in and everything that I'm seeing is saying that she is actually going to go like more opposing importation of goods so there's Matt Pottinger the former deputy national security advisor under Trump he wrote an article in foreign affairs not too long ago that kind of highlights the food issue for instance so China has you know tons of people they are not that great at producing agricultural goods compared to other parts of the world they're just not they don't have the Ukraine bread basket I'll say that and she is moving people towards needing self-sufficiency in agriculture so that's one of the goals of the CCP at the moment is how do we get to a point of self-sufficiency not just there but in all of these other sectors and in my view you only have these aspirations of self-sufficiency if you're planning on either doing something that causes the reduced importation of goods from the outside or kind of assuming there will be a lot of the goods will be sanctioned so at the moment is just to understand this yes the self-sufficiency is not economically ideal or efficient correct oh of course not yeah you know that's never because I'm just saying this is like you know that with when you're dealing with like mixed audiences of people yeah sometimes with these trade-sensitive conversations specific phrasings just sound ideal so why would we not be self-sufficient

with food so the point is that like there's a it's a balancing act and what you're arguing and what pottinger is arguing is they've crossed over between the balancing act of sufficiency relative to the outsiderism towards this is very economically inefficient and you'd be just doing this as a hedging risk thing as a hedging risk yes so so while they're not there on all of these

different sectors of the economy as far as import like banning imports or anything that the hedging on this stuff is very very interesting and I think they're they're huge indicators of where the Chinese market is going so it doesn't mean move away from it now but it means spend a lot of time thinking about what this looks like if this is not an open market going forward and so I think pretty much every company that relies on this market needs to be thinking about that really seriously yeah I think this is a good pivot to what you're actually doing with your company solid intel yeah just please introduce it take it wherever uh direction you want to go and then we'll of course get into the you know academia to the hill to the uh CEO company founding discussion but yeah just start with the company wonderful um yeah so I left the hill not too long ago and founded an AI company um that we are actually helping SMEs in particular understand and what's an SME uh small and mid-sized enterprises smaller mid-sized businesses you know heavy focus on the mid-sized let's be honest and helping them understand the risk in their supply chains and then de-risk so AI has been enormously helpful in helping disaggregate the components of the supply chain and then really understand where risk lies in each different node of the supply chain so the precursor for this is I spent you know a lot of time on the hill thinking about things like the weaker forced labor prevention act and getting an influx of companies telling us that we don't know our supply chains well enough to comply with the provisions of the law this law is actually very very strict and says that if you have any components in your supply chain that are made in this specific geographic region in China the presumption is they're made with forced labor and those goods can be seized as they're coming through our ports and the administration is actually really starting to ramp up enforcement of this law and so I started thinking you know that there's actually a real opportunity here there there's some great companies that exist right now that are really helping fortune 100s fortune 500s comply with these things under using also using AI some of them uh to understand supply chains but there's this entire sector of the economy that is very very important to the long-term economic health of the US like we can't let this entire sector of the economy stay exposed to potentially having their goods seized or that they haven't for instance de-risked from the Chinese market in the way that the larger corporations have so if you ever do have say a flashpoint over Taiwan and there's an economic shift that results from that we want to make sure this entire sector of the economy is healthy and so that's the precursor for me wanting to start this company and you know it goes well beyond the Chinese market I'm already thinking heavily about you know all of these other countries that rely on SMEs or have them as the majority of their economy is like Japan for instance and then thinking about alternative places that this works I care deeply about Ukraine for instance and geographic exclusions of any US dollars that end up going to Ukraine are very very important we don't want our money our money to be funneled to the you know

Chinese supply chains for instance yeah no and the reason why I'm glad I asked for the definition of SME is we all have specific very specific understandings of what like a fortune 100 is or fortune 500 but and I saw this crazy statistic like there are hundreds and it's it's obvious when you say it a lot but there are hundreds and hundreds of thousands of American companies that do some form of business investment production selling in China then and because it's fortune 100 and it's fortune 500 um that's barely a little dint of it so give us a picture of what your if you if you're you know if you're speaking to your founder size you're getting your

pitch deck together what is just sort of like the perfect way to understand like what one of these medium sized enterprises look like like where is it based in the country like what does it do and how prepared is it due to its lack of scale for some sort of geopolitical event happening like a Taiwan crisis etc etc etc yeah to be honest they they cross all the sectors so some of them that we're we're thinking about as early customers are in the the sectors that are particularly being the focus of us regulate like the us regulatory environment so in sheng shang that's that's textiles that's electronics tomatoes is one of them solar panels is big and then we have you know risky so e's that do a lot of the production so anything that goes through touches of military so e for instance is at risk um and so these are these are some of the basic clients that we're we're thinking through right now um you know there are these things called rollups there are private equity firms that actually have stakes in a lot of mid-sized businesses small businesses in particular and so there there are ways to get to these clients but if you go to an individual mom and pop um you know manufacturing they often will think that they are

not at risk and then the bigger the bigger the client the more they're recognizing the risk and then the more likely they are to touch on these very high risk sectors the more they recognize that they need to start changing what they're doing because the customers that they're selling to say a defense prime is starting to tell them you know the government is on our back we know that our supply chains are already hard to deal with we can't just give you products for you to deal with this on your own but maybe we can help you figure out um how to de-risk and make sure that we are not interrupted in fulfilling our contracts so there's there's this ecosystem where it's becoming more and more known COVID honestly helped what I'm trying to do a lot because even the mom and pop stores now understand that if something gets messed up overseas it's going to impact their bottom line um but it's just making sure that you know they move forward and in um de-risking themselves and I want to understand exactly in this SME category what is the risk right because it's it's not especially in the category that you're describing here that you know Disney builds um Shanghai Disneyland and there's a Taiwan crisis and the investment goes to

zero or it's you're a VC firm and this is obviously part of the broader issue that Sequoia is running into your VC firm and you're investing in all these like Chinese companies and like once again your investment goes to zero if you're an SME like what is the risk should something happen whether it's like another supply chain crunch or a Taiwan crisis like help me understand that yeah there are a couple different things that could happen there's there's the simple stuff the slowdowns um those risks are often not from regulatory burdens but from other things going on that in the world and you know if you're not running on this this huge surplus then you're you need to get things to market as quickly as possible and if you have a three week slowdown it can massively disrupt um what you're trying to do and what you're trying to sell in the market if you have a six month slowdown that can be a killer for a company um actually honestly three weeks can be a killer from for a company and then you're having good season ports um if they're not in compliance with sanctions regulations or with um legal forced labor prevention act regulations so those goods can just never come back to you because the assumption is that they were made with forced labor and they're not allowed in the market at all um and then so those those are some of like the easier things to wrap your head around um but you know there's

just there are a lot of different things that that touch on these categories um we're we're less focused on the force majeure risks the earthquakes the monsoons different things like that that can impact that but those those capabilities are those identifications are also pretty easily incorporated into an AI product so when you talk about the AI side of thing to what you just said because I kind of get why AI would be so important here obviously large data sets these like are very like opaque um if you were looking and obviously we're in the middle of like the AP the AI hype period if you were just sort of sitting in let's say 2018 and we were having this form of conversation what would have been so difficult about addressing the vulnerability of the lack of transparency that AI has now made much more feasible from your perspective yeah um I probably won't get too into what we've been able to do with our product that we're really excited about but on a really high level um there is it depends on the market you're in of course but china you you guys have read the stories your listeners have read the stories they're kicking out auditors they're passing all of these laws about espionage and all of these different things that they're actually didn't I'm actually not um you caught me I'm not reading these stories so yeah please tell me tell me more yeah so um basically some of the top auditing firms are are you know being told uh so SOEs are being told that if you share information with the top auditors so the state oh the Chinese like state-owned enterprises state-owned enterprises

yeah sorry tell me if I use an acronym that uh you've been pretty good we've we've caught the two great um so SOEs sharing information with auditors can be considered now sharing state secrets so that you know that's a jail term I worked on the hill I I we we had cases of business people in in jail in china that's not something you want to deal with um and are these American business people are these Chinese business people yes yes Americans and so you um but but this case is you know the Chinese are at risk themselves of um sharing state secrets it's unclear what counts is a state secret and so auditors are you know not able to do the job they were doing before and so you're starting to see like how are you going to be able to comply with US laws um and regulations on these things honestly you're gonna have to use tech tools to do it um other things that AI is actually great at that wasn't really wait quick pause what what just to just understand this right like why is it a given that you have to use so like let me think about this very right this is me speaking as a podcaster slash like think tanky person I imagine that if I'm building a widget there's just like an excel spreadsheet that lists all the components of the widget yeah and therefore like what tech do you need beyond like the ability to read Microsoft Excel I know it's obviously not that simple you wouldn't have an opportunity if it was but like explain like the that uninformed uh understanding I have and the actual problem yeah first of all you don't always know all the components in your widget but ideally you know all the components in your widget but you have to know where all the things come from and upstream supply chains usually companies especially in the SME category know their first supplier they sometimes know their secondary supplier they almost never know their tertiary supplier and so all the all the entire upstream beyond usually the primary is pretty opaque to them they never really tried to know what that is and now our laws and regulations they all we always had forced labor laws we always had some of these prohibitions but we didn't really enforce them and we didn't create these like massive regulatory um compliance uh structures that you know the forced labor prevention act has on place now and so you're telling people to know your entire upstream and yet they don't know it

so you have to either figure out you know do we send an auditor to each of these places to ensure compliance the entire upstream line or is there a way that we can identify the risk at least at the level of the US government can do so um through tech and honestly that is significantly cheaper and less burdensome on the company but it's happening at the same time that China is making it a lot more difficult for the on the ground people to do that upstream compliance and tracing so this this is the right time for this um there's there's some other stuff though that AI makes a lot easier so I come from the national security world um and China is one of those countries we have SOE state owned enterprises acronyms um and they you know a lot of them are

places that we don't want US investment in into these companies and that's that's actually a big movement on the hill is identifying kind of the risky SOE sectors um and like like anywhere else you're going to see subsidiaries and you're going to see companies that have you know the same name

or a slightly differentiated name um keeping they're going to be associated with a sanctioned person that may go by multiple different names or it doesn't translate easily into the English language you know first and last name switching or like different versions of first and last name and so AI is actually much better at identifying these subsidiaries they're much better at identifying you know different versions of the same name different versions of the same people and so we're we're able to see a lot more into this than we would have been able to like pre chat GBP and just zooming out and just asking you know the AI space is obviously the hot space right now and once again we're still in a bit of a tech downturn to the term like hot space means not quite the same thing it meant when it's mid 2021 you're a crypto founder but can you just talk about like the AI space in general but not in terms of like is it good is it bad and more just like what's it like to be in the middle of that at this moment I so I I understand why people are freaked out I do get it but working in this and working with you know my technical co-founders and other entrepreneurs I'm just spending a lot of time being really excited about what is feasible now that would have been much more difficult a couple years ago and you know spending a lot of time exploring what what can we build what can we build quickly how do we get things to market in a way that would have taken much much longer would have been honestly less interesting than it was before and I think that you know as all of these conversations about AI risk and you know all of the bad things happen my fear is that those become the focus of the conversations and of course it has to be part of it but we have to also seriously think about what the benefits are and make sure that we don't regulate ourselves out of receiving those benefits so I spend a lot of time thinking and talking to other founders about that and you know you know we're still in we're we're pre-go-to-market so we're still in this exploring building and being very excited stage of our company and AI as the reason that's possible so we are going to take a bit of a narrative pivot realignment listeners know that typically these episodes are very much like guests tell me your policy expertise and not really interested in the biographical thing but that said especially because I have known you since like 2016 you at a career level like you know Stanford you go to get your PhD at you know University of Texas you go work on the hand on your phone a technology company you're like the bow ideal of a realignment

listener I'm preparing like grant grant proposals and the question they always ask is like what's

your listener and like you actually are if I'm thinking of what I want like a 21 22 23 year old staff assistant on the hill to be like thinking they could do if they're career like it's actually you so now I give that compliment like I want to talk about like that background and how this all kind of came together I'm going to jump around a bunch of different places so forgive me if it's not perfectly narratively tight so number one you said something a minute ago where you referenced that you are not a you are not the technical co-founder and anyone who is jumping from DC world and then is entering into technology world like Silicon Valley venture capital etc etc etc will be introduced to this idea of like the technical co-founder someone who could code someone who could like build something and oftentimes if you are a non-technical co-founder you're going to want to find a technical co-founder not just to build the product even raise the money um do you regret it all especially because you were at Stanford in the 2000s not learning to code and becoming technical relative to the time you spent getting a PhD and working in a social science category not even a little bit I so the only reason my company exists is because this background you know getting a PhD being in this policy world the only reason this company exists in any real way is because I spent so many years so many years developing expertise to be able to understand the geopolitical environment and see where opportunity exists and Stanford's really unique in that you know I I did I did grow up in this world I grew up in the world of brilliant people using technical skills to try to change the world and so I I knew that was always feasible and I didn't have to be the person coding to be able to use that as part of my like career trajectory and so this this is just a thing that I I actually think that more non-technical people need to think seriously about is where can our skill set be used because we do have a skill set we like there's there's no way I spent that much time in DC without developing at least a little bit of knowledge about how the geopolitical winds were shifting and and using it to team up with the technical expertise is kind of the sweet spot yeah it's kind of interesting because we're in the middle of this narrative reset around the skills and the backgrounds of what a successful founder looks like because now we're discovering that hey like as the type of problems you're attempting to solve using technology the internet etc are changing that and the funding environment is like the zero interest rate phenomenon Zerp that's going to change it but I think of the line you would think of during the 2010s of like well guess what like Travis Kalanick didn't know how the taxi industry did work like a lot a lot of these founders and these these people built big companies and what's that where I know what the companies are became profitable but but a baseline level they were not the the the advantage of being able to be of being technical and of being able to like iterate quickly um obviated like deep experience in a category yeah um so I guess my question to you is to what degree do you think there could be a technical founder in your category who could do what you're doing without the policy history etc expertise yeah um listen I'm feel pretty confident that you could build something um but there has to be some knowledge based on what what is coming down the line that a pure technical capability can't get at and what we hope to be delivering to our clients is not just the risk where it lies now but the risk that we see to coming down the pipeline and unless you can figure out how to do that and as great as you know a chat gpt is it's not going to be able to do that particularly successfully um so unless you have that knowledge base I don't I just don't think you can deliver as great of a product but you know big fan of people going out

shooting their shot and seeing if they can make something work um you know the the most successful

companies we we look at the unicorns and a lot of them have these you know fresh out of school folks but a lot of them don't a lot of them come from like deep expertise in an industry and use that to build something big and magical and so while the narrative is great that a Mark Zuckerberg is coming down the line most people are not Mark Zuckerberg but can still build something big and maybe and expensive and difficult and really wonderful so I if any of the listeners are considering this themselves just because you didn't do it at 22 or 23 you still have time yeah and the other place to jump then is you went to get a phd after your time at stanford you're obviously in academia there's a lot of kind of uh let's say pessimism um around like academia and the phd construct I'm like happy that my podcasting has just helped me kind of like hack around that system so I'm able to work and think tank world but it's because I very specifically developed a skill set it wasn't like hey Hudson Institute hey ut you know I'm a policy expert like where's your phd it's like hey like I'm good at interviewing and talking to people at the skillset uni so that's my own personal piece of advice for folks like if you want to work in these systems be sure to develop like a critical skill set differentiated from just pure book learning but talk about phd's right now because I just see a lot of pessimism because a lot of listeners are once again in this category even people who are on the hill like what are your thoughts on phd's today it's it's really interesting um I both discourage most people from getting a phd and then every once in a while I see someone and I'm like you are the right person for this and key thing when you mean discourage most people you mean even within the category of interest like national security like even even so like obviously like if you're just a normal person don't do it but you're like even in the typical 20 30 years ago you would have done it space you recommend against it yes so I think the majority of people who are coming up through the policy world and are thinking about doing a phd my the way they presented it to me almost and like almost every person who's talked to me about it are wanting to do it for oh this is going to sound cynical slightly prestige reasons they want to be called doctor um there's some you know I'm mid career maybe if I get a phd then I'll be able to get that next boost in my career um different different things like that and then you'll see the person who just has this innate desire to learn to spend just a copious amount of time reading books writing developing knowledge um getting at these like smaller things that they think can then translate into the policy world in a much bigger way that they wouldn't be able to do through a hill job or through an agency job those are the people that I I suggest moving in that direction even if they don't want to become professors that's that's where I was I I just loved loved loved developing like very very strong expertise in something and I thought that's also a way I'd be able to differentiate myself in my career and but I did it at a pretty young age I didn't do it going back into academia and say my 30s or 40s um there is a huge opportunity cost to getting a phd you're you're losing out like first of all real quick to listeners if you are considering paying for your phd for the love of everything you're going to the wrong program you should be getting paid for your phd but you're getting paid at a very very very low number a barely above like poverty wages number um and so there's a huge opportunity cost because it's it's years of your life and so you're going to be making sacrifices during some of these very pivotal earning years so it it sure as heck better be worth it to you to do it and I'd recommend doing it at a younger age than later even though I think um you know people

more my age would probably get a tiny bit more out of it but the opportunity cost in your life is so high but it's probably not worth it so now you can talk about working on the hill right so you get your phd and then you like you you come to the hill like a little after which is once again this is not quite done you you've done these things like in a very interesting kind of like order and everything so yeah talk about you know so you're with senator sass you're senator ronnie just talk about the working on the hill yeah um I I had the opportunity to work on the hill coming straight out of my phd which was I I had a a mentor um in my office with senator sass named clon kitchen who was over at the at AEI until recently he may still be there as a visiting fellow um and he just told me spend your entire first year treating this like you're getting a master's degree in hill studies because you will have no idea what's going on for the entire first year you're there it's a an institution of archaic rules you never know what's happening you have you come with a plethora of like really interesting fun ideas that should turn into policy and would make the world better but you have no idea how to translate it in your first year there um by the time I got hired as senator met ronnie's national security um advisor I I knew enough about what I was doing I was there for almost four and a half years and I'd say there was not a single week that went by that I did not end up asking what does this mean in terms of senate rules and standards and different things like that um and I I got hired though by senator ronnie to be a I'd say a different type of hill staffer than is the norm um I came in with a phd I came in with you know this think tank and academia experience and one of the things my old chief and staff chief of staff and I talked about as I was getting hired was having the expectation that I am still reading roughly a book a week just to to continue increasing my knowledge level that I continue to engage with hill and academia to make sure that we were at the forefront of new academic information coming down the line and that is just a completely atypical experience for a hill staffer but they wanted someone who came in with this great like great politics background um who knew all of these different worlds and was able to draw from these networks in a way that I wouldn't say the typical hill staffer knows how to do so to really sum everything up like what would you say because we're in the career section of this episode and you're teaching for me what would you say the opportunity is for your prime 20 something realignment listener who probably works in dc or has worked in tech and kind of wants to like switch over and do something different you come from both angles like what would you kind of say is the opportunity um right now if you're interested in the type of stuff that we're discussing here well I'd say that there's actually this is a very unique time if you are interested in this tech and policy world this is the point where all of the members are starting to realize hey this is very important maybe we should maybe we should draw in people who know what they're talking about and the thing is you know when you're 25 26 keep a little bit of humility you have so much you still need to learn but you you do have value add to this world and so just jump jump in um like be willing to take a slightly lower paying job um ideally at a higher level so I know that's a weird thing but maybe start at a slightly higher level on the house side and jump over to the senate or um start on the senate side but with a very clear trajectory up so that you can get into this like meaty difficult interesting policy stuff as soon as possible um don't delay it you know get your master's degree often a lot of offices won't hire people without master's degrees which is dumb I don't I don't actually think they

fundamentally change the work product of people that I'm seeing with them or without them but it's often kind of a barrier to entry so have something like that but just jump in and and start start doing like all of your listeners are going to be smart interesting people and they're fully capable of doing all these different things also be willing to take unexpected um career trajectories don't don't set out your goal at 22 and say it has to look like this at every step if I had done that I would be a pediatric surgeon in Omaha right now because your your matrix biochem right undergrad uh human biology yeah I was I was on the pre-med track I was like interviewing at med schools when I decided to shift and being willing to shift when you're young is very I mean it it changed my life and it's so much better because of it so be willing to shift if you find yourself being interested in something that's unexpected it will create really interesting opportunities that's awesome so this is a great place to end the conversation um Megan where should uh folks go to learn more about your work and your your fellow at

the um Atlantic Council um you know where should you go learn about that learn about solid intel all that great stuff well we are still um in the developer stage so our website is maybe not at the place that we want it to be when we have a full influx of people coming but feel free to visit our [solidinfl.com](http://solidinfl.com) webpage um and then reach out to me on LinkedIn or Twitter and I'd be happy to try great Megan thank you for joining me on the realignment excellent thank you Marshall I hope you enjoyed this episode if you learned something like the sort of mission or want to access our subscriber exclusive q and a bonus episodes and more go to [realignment.supercast.com](http://realignment.supercast.com) and subscribe to our five dollar a month 50 dollar a year or 500 for a lifetime membership greats see you all next time