

Mike Allen: Welcome to Aspen ideas. I'm Mike Allen from Axios, and we're going to be talking the future of conservatism from Reagan to Trump. And the part that a couple of our panelists are waiting for and beyond. Uh, before I introduce our guests, uh, Charlie Sykes, you know, doesn't need an introduction, set a record today, a at an earlier taping Charlie go ahead and drop your record.

Charles Sykes: Um, should I do it as a safe for work version of all of this? We did a poll, we did a podcast bowl work podcast with Rick Wilson, uh, with a reaction to how the Democrats performed with the debate last night. And I think we did set a record for the number of f bombs that were dropped during this. Those of you that know, Rick, know that he can be a little bit salty, but this was so much that even here, but two thirds of the way through said, wow, I'm dropping a lot of f bombs. So it gives, it gives you an idea,

Mike Allen: oh, we always start with the news two momentous Supreme Court cases today. Once you could take two seconds with each one. The first one, the Mona and has one thought about a high court, keeps citizenship questioned on hold. In the census case, the president standby, the president has tweeted about the supreme court ruling and he's going to ask the Supreme Court to delay the census as long as it takes. So it is the 2020 census he's asked them to do, delay it as long as it will take Mona, you have one thought about whether or not the census form should ask for a citizen.

Mona Charen: Right? So it's the legal questions, especially supreme court opinions take a long time to analyze in detail, but I will just say that it is a bit refreshing that the supreme court slapped down this completely pretextual case that the administration made for why they wanted to include a question about citizenship on the census. The reason that they gave, which was reasonable was that they needed it to better enforce the voting rights act.

Mike Allen: Okay. And the second a case, and you know, it's momentous because the New York Times, uh, says it is in its lead at the Supreme Court Bar's challenges to partisan gerrymandering five to four vote, uh, the courts more conservative members in the majority of the court closed the door to claims of gerrymandering. And Charlie, I know you have one thought about that.

Charles Sykes: Actually. I have two thoughts about it. One, one is that, uh, I understand the, the concern about gerrymandering. I think it is a real threat to the future of our democracy, uh, in, in terms of the way that the system has been rigged. Um, on the other hand, I was impressed by the judicial restraint in this decision where the courts decided that, okay, it is a Wong, but we cannot wait into that particular thicket. And I think that as conservatives, it is kind of refreshing to see judges exercise that kind of restraint. Although I understand why people are going to be disappointed when the court essentially saying, let's let politicians

Charles Sykes: who have created this problem solid, but the courts are not going to rescue us from everything.

Mike Allen: Amen. All right. Uh, Bret Stephens, uh, to set the tone here, set the table here for our conversation about the future of conservatism. When your boss, James Bennett editorial page, editor of The New York Times announced, uh, your appointment at the New York Times columnist as an appointment when you were appointed. He said that you were honest. Now, being honest as a conservative at the New York Times isn't always easy.

Bret Stephens: Okay? First of all, that's not true. Your premise is mistaken. Um, and, uh, the evidence for that is, um, the, um, joy with which so many readers of the New York Times have received my, my, my, uh, twice weekly pearls of wisdom. Um, which was to say that, um, there, the times has never stood in the way of my, uh, offering of you. Uh, my first column, uh, led to a petition, an online petition signed by last I checked 40,000 people demanding that I'd be fired. Um, so it was a refreshing feeling. You should all try it one day. Um, and the great thing is, um, there was never a question of that happening and the soul's Burgers, uh, the salsburger family, uh, stood by me because they understand that you cannot have a newspaper that is simply going to be bullied by the, by the furious of Twitter, uh, and succumb to that sort of pressure, which by the way has not been true, uh, across, um, across much of the rest of, of, uh, the media.

Bret Stephens: So I've, I've tried to be honest, um, as a conservative, I've tried to be honest, most of all is as an individual and call things as I see them, which is occasionally meant that I have, um, agreed with things that the president has said or done. I don't, uh, I don't think of myself as a sort of mindless, reflexive, uh, never Trumper. Um, but it's also allowed me to articulate a vision of what conservative principles ought to be. Uh, that is very different from what the Trump une wing of the party, which is now 85% of it or so, um, believes it ought to be. I think at the end of the day, in order to have a healthy republic, in order to have a healthy democracy, we need, uh, a morally sound and intellectually honest, conservative movement. And quite frankly, at the moment, I don't think we really have one except for a handful of voices who have stood by the principles of classical conservatism, which is another way of saying classical liberalism, uh, that I found inspiring when I was coming of age in the 1980s. And I think that's true for my fellow panelists as well.

Mike Allen: And what do you think needs to happen for those voices to be the dominant voices of conservatism? Once again,

Bret Stephens: this is depressing because I wish I could say that, you know, the simply by the force of my argument and the winning nature of my charm, people would come over, but clearly that that isn't working. Look, uh, Trump is, um, the beneficiary of, um, the fact that we have not had, uh, any great setback, uh, or catastrophe. Um, uh, at the s, you know, during his presidency there have been aspects of his

presidency, which to me are revolting. Uh, most of all our treatment of, of immigrants at the border. Um, but that hasn't been a kind of essential crisis in the way that the great recession, uh, or the Iraq war were crises for the George W. Bush administration or in its own way, the Iran hostage crisis was for the Carter Administration. So effectively in order, I think in order for us to be heard again, Trumpism has to visibly fail.

Bret Stephens: And when you have an unemployment rate that's 3.6 or 3.7%, and we are broadly speaking at peace, uh, with, with the rest of the world, that isn't going to happen. I would just say that I remember when Air Dhawan was seen as a successful leader of Turkey because you had benign economic currents. And when Google Chavez was seen as a successful leader of, of Venezuela for the same reason, I think we are storing trouble and that trouble at some point will haunt us. And very quickly what would have to happen then for Trumpism to fail? Well, the effectively, the results of a shambolic style of administration, of the perpetual incompetence and failures of a simple execution of policy and the consequences of the policy themselves have to certain some manifest way a failed that that hasn't quite happened yet, but we are like characters in some Minnesota Lake skating over very thin ice and by some miracle it hasn't broken yet.

Robert Doar: At some point the, the ground beneath our feet, I suspect is becoming very brittle and very thin. And what lies below is cold in deep [inaudible] Robert Doar, when you were named the 12th president of AI, Bob Costa did a piece in the Washington Post and the headline says, AAI names Robert Doar's new president as conservative movement tries to find its way in Trump era. Exactly on point for us. How are conservatives doing? Well, I, first of all, I want to say it's not entirely unusual that the conservative movement are people that hold conservative principles, um, are out of whack with either the mainstream republican party or the Republican president, Eisenhower, Nixon, George H, w Bush. To some extent. I take kind of a longer view of this and I think that, um, uh, what I want at AI and what I want our scholars to do is to focus on specific issues and, and rents column as we see them and call them strongly and called them aggressively. And I think with that kind of work and, and uh, effort will

Robert Doar: regain the momentum or will, will, will contribute to the public debate in a positive way. I think it's, it's important to stay out of the, of the, of the name calling and the kind of vitriolic behavior that, that happens in this country. And that's what AI is going to be about. And, uh, Robert Door ar is all about free people and free markets. Which are those at this moment do you think is more threatened? Ooh, that's a good one. I would say a free markets in the extent that the thing that we're most concerned about is the, the free trade issues that, that, that is the, the area where the conservatives at AI are, um, troubled the, in the most extreme way. Um, you know, I'm, I'm, you know, I also need to just say that in the area that I focus on, which is, uh, sort of welfare policy in

public assistance programs and moving people to work and personal responsibility down below the radar screen.

Robert Doar: This administration has made taken actions that are controversial and difficult, but they are consistent with a kind of more right of center or conservative approach to those programs. And that's a, as I've watched it unfold, uh, Ben gratifying to me because I believe in employment and personal responsibility and emphasis on family. And I also should say, while I do not want to talk about the specific decisions, um, the members of the court on the, on the right side of the, of the balance I think are acquitting themselves very well. And it's a, it's a very vibrant, uh, compelling, not in, not in sync with each other, uh, world. And they're in some ways setting an example for how to, uh, uh, uh, preserve a, a limited government conservative separation of powers. And the last thing I would say is federalism. I think that so much that's happening that I'm most familiar with is that the state and city level, and there are conservatives and Republicans and people that, that think the way we do who are doing good work in that terrain, um, and are in the battle in an unencumbered way, uh, from all the turmoil that's at this level.

Robert Doar: And that's another area that we will focus on at AI. I'm going to share on the bows all around campus today has been about the debate. And I'd love your thoughts about how Republicans and Conservatives respond to the Democratic primary, like how it's gonna Affect the future of the party and at the movement. And, uh, to tee that up, uh, you gotta call him last month that said, should Democrats avoid female candidates? So how do you see the Democratic race playing into the fates of Republicans and conservatives?

Mona Charen: Well, um, somewhat to my dismay, um, I've seen, uh, from the Democrats real encouragement for the Trump and republicans. Uh, Charlie had a good piece about this in politico. Um, the Democrats are presenting themselves a radical left wing party from the point of view of middle of the road voters, even voters who are, um, open to the idea of voting for Democrat. They're not going to be so tempted if they think it means, um, what p Buddha judge says, which is he wants to pack the Supreme Court what Harris Harris's, which is that she's going and Bayer O'Rourke. They want to rule by executive order just unconstitutional, um, or what, uh, the Ella eliminating the electoral college and so on and so forth. They have responded to Trump's rule breaking and norm breaking by norm, breaking up their own. And I think that loses them one of their main appeals to the American people. That, that this is unacceptable and that we do need a return to the respect for the rule of law. Biden has, we'll see what happens tonight. But Biden has so far resisted that urge and he's been successful with the voters, at least in terms of polling. Um, I think that that, that most of the Democratic Party though is playing right into the hands of the Trumpians.

Mike Allen: And Mona, what is your elevator answer to the question? Should Democrats avoid female candidates?

Mona Charen: No. The, the notion that they have to avoid female candidates because what 2016 proved is that Americans aren't ready for a female president is ridiculous. Hillary Clinton lost her own popularity all on her own because I mean her, her standing when she left the position of secretary of state was you, she had something like a 66% approval rating and over the next several months and years it proceeded to, to fall and fall and fall into the basement because she lied about her server. She was, she was a high handed and imperious about it. And, uh, she, she sacrificed people's confidence.

Charles Sykes: Try, I'd love for you to pick up where Brett left off. You gotta call them the Guardian conservatism in eclipse in the age of Trump. What has to happen for the eclipse to turn into sunrise? What's the understanding eclipse. Yep. With the sun it, the problem with that is what does conservatism mean right now? I mean, it's been drained of a lot of the meaning that we thought that it had. It's obviously not about limited government. It's not about free market. It's not about fiscal responsibility. It's not about an emphasis on personal character and integrity and it war or the rule of law. Um, five minutes ago you had a conservatives who cared about things like the deficits, who really did think that free markets were one of the great engines of economic development and where are we at right now? So the conservative movement at the end of the day, um, there's a big, you know, the question is whether or not it's going to be, um, the conservative movement will be populist nativist, um, uh, reactionary and illiberal or whether it will be, it will be reformist, inclusive, reactionary and liberal.

Charles Sykes: Now it's going to be reactionary. Either way, it's going to be reactionary because the really the beating heart of conservatism is, is going to be opposition to leftism. And this is what Mona was, I think getting at right now. The one thing that we'll read will unite conservatives is if Democrats basically say, yes, we do want a total government takeover of healthcare and we will ban private health insurance. We will openly consider confiscating guns. We're not only for a woman's right to choose. We won't want a taxpayer funding for abortion at any time whatsoever. We want to pack the courts. Um, we really do think that we are going to give away lots of free stuff. We're gonna give away free college education, free daycare, and somebody else is going to pay for all of that. So that is going to unite the conservative movement.

Charles Sykes: But, um, and so what is it actually going to take? I, I share breaths. You know, who knows when the, when the fever breaks, there are a lot of ideas that are in turmoil right now, but I think one, just tick those off ideas that excite you. Well, there may be the ideas that I think used to animate conservatives, which were these classical liberal views, you know, the, the, uh, the, the views of the, of the founders, free markets, free people, all of those things. Um, there's a lot of

turmoil about what conservatives are going to come up with. And there's a really healthy debate, I think. But the real shock I think, of the era of Trump has been the extent to which it turned out that the conservative movement and with the conservative movement related, you know, separated from conservative city, the conservative movement was not driven by ideas or by principles.

Charles Sykes: Um, but by tribalism and by what has become a cultural personality. Um, right now, what is conservatism other than what Donald Trump says it is when he leaves the stage. I do think there will be a moment where some of the issues that we'll, we'll, we'll still have to little gate. We'll still have to talk about whether, you know, populist versus, you know, liberal versus a liberal. But I do think we'll get back to the business of actually debating these, these, these ideas. Because I, this is one thing that I think a lot of us have a hard time understanding, is that watching conservatives abandon their principles because Donald Trump abandoned those principles that the party that used to be defined by William F. Buckley and Edmund Burke and Ronald Reagan now is taking its cue from people like Sean Hannity and Dan Bongino, Gino and Steve Bannon. I think that there's a little bit on us, I mean, on three issues at least. Um, president Trump carried the day with people that we had counted on to support our view of the world free trade. You us

Robert Doar: on America's role in the world. Um, I think, and on entitlements and I think that it's not, so I think what part of what's got to happen is that we have to refashion arguments for those, the principles related to those public policy issues and make them compelling and attractive to voters in the United States.

Bret Stephens: I know, I agree with it. I mean, I, I can see that up to a point, but it's not like Donald Trump came as an ideological innovator. All the ideology was like whatever was from the rune stones of his mind communicated through the kind of, yeah, I hope I didn't, you know, but yes. What did he, what Trump succeeded because he communicated, he did two things. A, he was a, he funneled a great deal of in Kuwait anxiety into a style of politics, which was a take no prisoners style of politics. I got one thing really wrong in 2016 which is I thought the only Republican who definitely couldn't win was Trump. It turned out I would, I w in hindsight, I think he was the only Republican who could because he had the quality of anger and a certain kind of, um, shamelessness that, or at least a kind of willingness to go there, so to speak, that the Republican party needed in order to defeat a candidate like Hillary Clinton who seemed to have everything, at least on paper going for her.

Bret Stephens: And there were aspects of that which were genuinely refreshing. I mean, I really think that we need a politically incorrect president. Okay. There are all kinds of orthodoxies that have sort of silently taken hold of campuses and institutions that would have been radical five years ago and now are treated as a species of, of, of common morality. And all of that is, I think to many of us kind of, you

know, weird and dislocating and in some ways sort of, um, upsetting. But the problem with Trump isn't that he's politically incorrect. The problem is he's, he's a seven letter word that begins with the letter a. Um,

Speaker 6: okay. And moving on Charlie's record, you got a long way to go anyway. Yeah.

Mike Allen: Mona. There's somethings true of you that's not true of anyone else in this room and it's unique to you in this room. Okay. You got booed at Cpac. The conservative Woodstock do tell

Mona Charen: that's true. Well, it's not that I love being booed by audiences, so bear that in mind here today. Um, one of the things that is, um, that is distressing about this moment, um, and it goes beyond Trump himself and his personality and his flaws and his, uh, that you're apt description, but it is that so rapidly the leading lights of the conservative world have fallen into line. They have abandoned their principles, they've abandoned things that they have stood for for decades. You have the editors of the, uh, of the Wall Street Journal early second most prestigious newspaper in the country. Would you say Brett

Charles Sykes: at the moment,

Mona Charen: um, where, um, they, they can barely be stir themselves to say a single word of criticism of Trump and they are thought leaders and they used to be considered serious conservative, uh, idealized opinion makers. And, um, now c pack is a different story. C Pack is, uh, has always had a slightly clownish task to it. Um, it's been a mix, you know, some very serious people and some, um, freak show types. Yeah. But, um, but still a lot of conservatives pay attention to it. And a couple of years ago, they invited me to speak, even though the rest of the roster of the whole conference was nothing but people who were Trump enthusiasts. And I thought, well, they must not be paying attention to what I'd been writing, but they invited me. So I'll say what I think. And uh, there were two things that I wanted to talk about.

Mona Charen: One was that the president had just endorsed and that therefore the Republican Party had just endorsed Roy Moore for Senate in Alabama. And the second thing was that the Seapak organizers had invited Marine Le Pen, niece of a Marine Le Pen, a as one of their keynote speakers. And, um, so I will confess that I came loaded for bear and uh, and told them what I thought and I knew it might not go over so well. What I did not know was that I would need an armed escort to leave the building. Uh, it was a, it was quite, quite an experience, but, uh, but I'm still very glad that I did it. It inspired people. I got tremendous response from liberals and conservatives around the country. So, um, sometimes it's, uh, just liberating to be able to speak the truth.

Charles Sykes: So one of the little footnotes here is [inaudible] is absolutely right that she inspired people. It's one of those just reminders that even one lone voice can

actually have a ripple effect. And one of the people who was inspired by Mona taking that, that lonely stand was George Conway who decided that maybe he ought to start speaking up. Um, but the SUBPAC story is so representative of what's happened to the conservative movement. I spoke there in 2016 and it was overwhelmingly actually conservative. It was, and Donald Trump didn't even show up. He wouldn't come. It wasn't a safe enough space for him. Um, and yet you fast forward 2017 and beyond and it is basically just uniformly a Trump festival as well as French Neil Fascist. Um, but it has been the process, uh, the Jonah Goldberg, I don't want to make sure I give him credit here. Do you want to? Goldberg is described as way as, as Jay has aeis Jonah Goldberg, um, as watching invasion of the body snatchers as one conservative African, another who had no illusions about who Donald Trump was. No illusions about his character or his fitness for office suddenly decides, Oh no, I need to become part of all of this. Resistance is futile. And I think that has been really a disorienting experience. I think watching them

Bret Stephens: conservative, you know, so, um, years ago I was interested just in a kind of academic way on the literature of a totalitarianism like the Hannah rns and Mila ashes and Orwell's of the world. And in the 1990s, when I was reading this, it seemed like a sort of an antiquarian interest because totalitarianism was, uh, seem to be a phenomenon of the past. One of the books that I read that, that I remember finding interesting was Czeslaw Milosz is the captive mind, which I really, if you guys go home and read one big book this year, make that you're reading. And what it describes is the way in which a generation of Polish intellectuals, militias, intellectuals came of age in the 30s and then live through the war, became convinced Stalinists in the 1940s. And mulish his insight is they didn't sort of turn from the Catholic Church to the Church of Stalin, uh, out of fear that they were going to be executed.

Bret Stephens: They found sort of odd psychological pathways to, um, give themselves over to a Stalinist dispensation that at some level they understood was, was revolting and despotic. But nonetheless, they believe that it represented the future. That as Charlie said, resistance is futile. That, um, life is just a big joke anyway. So why not get in on it? That, uh, the duty of the intellectual is to sort of, uh, turn lemons into lemonade one thing or another. And it's, you know, it's, it's a, it's, uh, it's a great mind sort of offering a profound psychological analysis of what happened. And I have to say, looking at my fellow conservatives, including so many who were so outspoken against Trump all the way up until the second that he won, that a similar process seem to take hold there. I think what the never Trumpers, what so-called never Trumpers do now. And one of the reasons why I always find myself weirdly reading articles about Bret Stephens and Charlie Sykes four totally irrelevant people, but we're nonetheless gonna devote 2000 words of about them and you know, American greatness or one of these weird journals. Um, uh, I think the reason we have this effect is that we serve as a kind of bad conscience for people who understand that there was an element of dishonesty in, in their conversion to the new faith.

Charles Sykes: Well Brett, unpack that fourth cause cause this phenomenon, I've watched this, there were people that they didn't one, then they became, that was their safe

Bret Stephens: space. Then they became anti anti Trump and now they're just pro Trump. How does that happen in the same way that you go from it? From, yeah. Cigarettes, alcohol. And the next thing you know, you're shooting up in your eyeballs, you know, and look, look here. Here's a let, let me concede one point. Okay. Which is that opponents of Trump have not helped themselves by painting the Trump administration in the darkest possible terms by the obsessive, um, comparisons to fascism and, and, and totalitarianism by the prediction that a Trump presidency was going to guarantee catastrophe. And a lot of them say, what's, where's your catastrophe? The economy is roaring. And basically we're, you know, the world is fine and the Gestapo has not yet knocked, uh, knocked upon your, your door because the, the real problem with Trumpism isn't it? It has led to a catastrophe.

Bret Stephens: Actually, when you look at, you know, the policy level, it's, most of it is sort of standard issue, republican points plus crazy Twitter plus the unpredictability of, you know, Trump's Trump's inflation, this world. The real problem is that what we've had is a kind of a corrosion of manners and ethics and institutions. The effects of which I don't think will be felt for another decade. In fact, I can predict when they're going to be felt. They will be felt when the Democratic party nominates. And then aleks its own version of a Donald Trump. And Republicans will say, how did this happen? Just as Democrats, some of them in this room are wondering how did we elect this philandering disgusting alleged rapist Scoundrel to the presidency? Maybe it had something to do with what happened in 1998. I would have to follow up on that.

Charles Sykes: And by, by the way, I also recommend the book in late 2016 I think you gave a speech where you quoted that. And this was when I was still trying to think like what the f just happened to us. I mean, what, what is going on? And reading that was kind of a, I'm sorry, kind of an Oh shit moment. Okay. It is happening and you know, reading hint or rent is in fact kind of, uh, is, uh, is eyeopening. But I think part of it is also the way our politics and our culture have have evolved that people like us thought that politics was about ideas and about policies. And it's really not. It's about ideas. It's about identity, it's about attitude. And it's about belonging. And if you're a conservative, you are part of this family, this group. And you know, a lot of us think that we use our minds to determine what is true or what is false.

Charles Sykes: And social psychologists will say, no, actually the way the human mind is wired, um, we use our minds in order to strengthen our bonds to our tribe. We use it for motivated reasoning, um, to confirm our bias. We look for somebody that confirms it. And so here we are in the era of Trump. And to break with Trump is to break with the family, to break with the tribe. Obviously you have the gigantic grifter class in the conservative movement who will go wherever the

politics and the money might happen to be. Um, but I also think that there is this, that sort of mentality that we have seen in other societies. And this is, this is my concern as a classical liberal and I, and I actually pardon me and I debated this with George will, um, and maybe it's time to stop calling ourselves conservatives and go back to classical liberals, but he points out there's a branding problem there.

Charles Sykes: I'll try my bicycle and he's, and he's wrong. Yeah, exactly. Um, well that there's branding problem with both words. Um, because, but what I mean concerns though is that, you know, we take a lot of things for granted in our culture. I think what we've discovered is that a lot of the ideas that Robert and I thought were the center of Conservatives and conservatism was really to very like a thin pie crust of the conservative movement that they said it, but it wasn't there. The other thing we learned is that we are not immune from history and this debate that's broken out about David French's, I'm not to get too much in, I mean there is now a wing of the Trumpist, right? That is basically saying the real problem is in fact a liberal democracy, liberal, pluralistic democracy. When I say liberal, I mean small I they are openly embracing European style. Illiberalism this is an extraordinary moment for the right. Um, and I, and I do think that for people who just simply assume that we go on and we either we, there's a reset and then we go back to normal think Brett's right. You know, when, when one of the major political parties becomes dumber, meaner and more disconnected with reality, that is going to have consequences for an entire year. Your

Mona Charen: generation. Can I say something? I'll, uh, that is a little unusual for me may be very unusual for me, which is a critique of capitalism in this, because I think we, we've been talking a lot about the intellectuals and about the elites and about politicians and their role, but we haven't talked about the people. And in a sense, this is a failure of all of us as citizens. And you have to ask, you know, how did things become, it gets so off the rails. And one possible explanation is that we are so used to being catered to as customers and we've come to take and the, and the capitalist system has certainly fulfilled our needs to an unbelievable degree, but we don't see it as our responsibility, as our burden, as our honor to fulfill the, the dreams of the founders and to build a good society and to be solid citizens and take a role in public life. Instead we say we're going to sit back and, you know, shoot, pick channels and uh, and be catered to. And frankly, the Democrats last night were a perfect example of this. You know, they, they're the, the pander fest was a, you know, w w was off

Mona Charen: the charts and, and that kind of treatment of the voters as consumers, um, is, is I think infantilizing and it's one of the ways that you got our, this deformation of our politics that we [inaudible]

Speaker 7: yeah. [inaudible] was this, isn't it? This is now

Mona Charen: called Hispandering,

Speaker 7: yeah.

Bret Stephens: Pick up on something that Charlie said, which is I think really so important. I think the real divide in American politics today is not between, as it was during the Cold War, liberal and conservative. It's between liberal and illiberal. Um, and unfortunately I think Trump ism represents the capture of the Republican Party by its illiberal, by an liberal instinct and a liberal elements. It liberal in its opposition to immigration and the tenants of the open society to, uh, to free trade to an engaged concept of America leading a free world and so forth and so on. But that contest is also taking place inside the Democratic Party. And there is a great deal of illiberalism, in my opinion, masquerading is progressivism in the Democratic Party. And it's, it's a kind of, it's, it's like watching, I feel like I'm watching the other version of what happened to the Republican Party taking place among the Democrats themselves. I'll often make the case in all defend Joe Biden because, you know, some of the accusations against some are, are sort of absurd and preposterous and people, I, you know, I look at Twitter sort of for morbid reasons of self-loathing and Morbid Fascination, right?

Speaker 7: Okay.

Bret Stephens: And people say, you know, who is this Bret Stephens to give advice to the Democratic Party? Well, I'm doing it because I really would love to vote for a reasonable Democratic candidate who can make America seen again. Right. Um, and it's, and the party is making it hard for me to do so, but I'm sort of on hands and knees begging Democrats don't give in to the same illiberalism the quality that the cancel culture phenomenon that took over Republicans.

Charles Sykes: You know, basically what I think we're trying to say to the Democrats right now and they're that leap. We're used to not being listened to by politicians. So this is, this is not a new thing. It's like good, go ahead and light a candle in the darkness. But that doesn't mean point kerosene over your head and setting yourself on fire. Speaking of setting ourselves on fire, I, I again, I want to come back to the long view and the constitution and the underpinnings of our society. I have some faith in those being able to carry us through. I think the, um, you know, we've lived through 1968 and 1932 and 1862. And what we're having now is not anywhere really in some ways as bad as those years. And, um, so I, I, you know, will we, we have a messy democracy. We have, we have unpleasantness, we have a turmoil. Um, uh, but I think the constitution and the rule of law will prevail.

Mike Allen: Robert picking up on Brett's point about the roaring economy. So you're a fellow in poverty studies and in January 16, so well before Trump was nominated, you had an op Ed in the second was prestigious paper in America. It was very present. The headline was the big but hidden us jobs problem. Labor force participation remains alarmingly low. And that brings us up to date.

Robert Doar: It's gotten a little better. Uh, hot economy is a great thing and uh, people are, as they say, coming off the sidelines in a way they weren't even then. Um, it's not back to the, the peak in 2000. And that's where I'd like it to be or think our country is stronger when Americans are working at rates, uh, closer to that. Um, but the, the other sort of that is one of the other elements of what's happening in the country is the strength of the economy is quite remarkable in the area that I cover, even with a slightly down labor force participation, child poverty, no matter how you measure it. And it's a low threshold. So I recognize that is at its lowest point ever. Um, and for African Americans, for Spanish, for everybody and that, um, blunts some of the, you know, upset or anger that could occur when we have a, what's going on in, in Washington take place.

Robert Doar: And so we've gotten a little better. I happen to still believe that there is an element of our public assistance world that is only focused on providing assistance and not focused on helping people get a job. And, uh, that was one of the things that the Trump administration appointees had been trying to do. But going into something back to swing with Brett said, didn't kind of connect the dots here. You know, given how strong the economy is, our politics are so ugly and so divided. What are they gonna look like? How ugly will it get if in fact the ice does break? Can you imagine having these debates with seven, eight, 9% unemployment rate? You know, especially when both sides have decided that they hate the other side, that the other side wants to destroy America and all the counselors hashtag winning. Okay, so on Hashtags, Charlie, you told Republicans, don't just tweet about it.

Charles Sykes: Do something. Do what the Republicans, well, I think Republicans at some point, I still, this is, this is how irrelevant I am. I still am hoping that there's going to be a primary challenge to Donald Trump's so that there is a voice for Republicans to say, we are not all onboard with all of this. Now do I think it will succeed? No, I don't think it's going to succeed, but every once in a while it's worthwhile to put your hand up and say, I'm not going along with this. I'm not willing to abandon everything. I'm not willing to embrace every hypocritical flip flop that the Trump Ian Wright demands of me. So, and again, that that requires,

Charles Sykes: that requires a willingness to be a little bit contrarian. And I think we've seen from the polls how vanishingly rare that has become. It's like you've mentioned

Mike Allen: French just briefly, it's like France. The resistance wasn't much, but the myth of the resistance created the new France, right?

Mona Charen: And there's a great line from Alexander Social Yeltsin who said, let the lie come into the world, let it even triumph, but not through me. So we're about to get the hook and sowing the what Bret Stephens a leap is on an uplifting point. Got a recent home.

Bret Stephens: It's, it's a quote woody Allen. It's always, it's always darkest before it goes. Absolutely.

Speaker 7: That was now,

Mike Allen: so you had a recent column with the headline how Trump wins next year.

Bret Stephens: Oh, you really want a depressing, oh sir. Look, there is a phenomenon Trump has to be seen in a global context. And that is the context of a Brexit. It's the context of Marine Le Pen being the number two finisher. It's the context of a neofascist party now being the third largest in Germany. The context of both scenario in Brazil, and this is a, the context of the resurgent populism throughout the world. And I think the resurgence of populism has to do at some deep level with a failure of the political center, both center left and center, uh, center, right. That failure, I tried to sum it up in this way, which was that too often our political parties were focused on the interests of them instead of us and the them was what about the migrants coming in, you know, desperate migrants from Syria. Okay. That was the them before us type of, uh, type of approach.

Bret Stephens: Um, or, uh, what about, you know, the rights of say transgender people? I'm not, I'm not making a point. I'm not, I'm the pro immigration pro LGBTQ person, but, but I'm just saying this was the nature of the politics and ultimately democratic politics end up being about, well, what about us? Like the US, however you define it, um, how, you know, what are you doing for us? You listened to the Democrats last sided apart from that one congressman from Ohio, right? None of them seem to be really speaking, uh, about the, the US, uh, the US question. So that's why I think that's one of the reasons why I think Trump had this appeal that insisted this, the central part of Trump's appeal, apart from the anger and anxiety was I'm about us. I'm about America first. I'm about the citizens before the undocumented workers first and so forth. And so on. The, the good news will come when we are able to get that politician who represents a charismatic voice of the center, whether it's the center left or the center, right? The problem with the center is it tends to be dull and conciliatory and mushy. The center tends to look like Mitt Romney and Mike Dukakis. But there is a history in which the center can also look like Winston Churchill and Franklin Roosevelt and Ronald Reagan. And eventually that leader is going to emerge and save us from our own worst instincts

Speaker 6: ending.

Mike Allen: And they, I'm a perfect note in just a moment. We're going to hear from Carl Rove, the architect is going to lead a conversation of for now would like to thank aspen ideas. Thank you. And thank our band.

Speaker 6: Okay,

Karl Rove: so here's what I like to do. I had them each draw number because I want, since we're talking about the future, I'd like each one of them to address sort of what their concept of conservatism for the future is. And so I wanted to, you know, figure out some way to get this and again, relied upon chance. And uh, uh, Reihan is the first, um, you have written widely about how conservatives should speak to the middleclass. Interestingly enough, city dwellers, first and second generation Americans and college educated professionals. And you've talked about having the necessity for a unifying alternative to identity politics, which you warn is effecting both broad political movements and philosophical movements in America. And you've said, we need a conservative agenda speaking to all Americans regardless of origin, region or class. And you see this as a question of reconciling egalitarian populism and market conservatism. Can you tell us what that means?

Reihan Salam: Holy Cow. You've done such a beautiful job of a, of laying it out, Carl, uh, I'm not sick you, Mr President. So, uh, I, uh, have been in the conservative world for a pretty long time now. A friend of mine was joke that there's your chronological age and then there's your movement age and movement. Age is kind of like dog years and, and movement years. I'm practically dead, literally hundreds of years old. And uh, for me a big turning point came uh, early in the Bush years. Uh, when I saw the campaign that you ran, it was an incredibly successful innovative campaign. It was a campaign that really tried to bring republicanism to new audiences. The idea was, look, we have a lot of first and second generation folks. We have these, this rising sunbelt middle-class. We want to connect with this population. We want to build a durable, lasting majority.

Reihan Salam: That majority has to be a cross class majority. It has to be a majority that speaks to upper middle income, college educated professionals as well as working class folks who are aspirational, who want to climb the economic ladder and want a party that speaks to them not as victims of circumstance, but as people want to be the masters of their own fate. Now one of the ideas here is also this kind of Hamiltonian idea, this idea that yes, we want a limited government, but we also want an effective government that is capable of creating a platform for people. Because when you think about economic change, you know a lot of the time you need the public sector to kind of carve things out. Think about the homestead act when Abraham Lincoln was president, the idea that you sometimes need some kind of organizing principle so as to allow market competition so as to allow entrepreneurship to flourish.

Reihan Salam: And if you're looking at the two thousands, that was a time when you have new digital technology, a lot of big picture changes that we're going to have a big change, big impact on the labor market and a lot of opportunity to kind of reframe some of how we've been doing things. So that appealed to me enormously at the time. Uh, but what happened is circumstances intervened. You have the nine 11 terror attacks and you basically had this movement away from that domestic focus, a focus on domestic renewal, a focus on the idea of

saying that we want a safety net, but we want a safety net that has some fiscal discipline that's going to be sustainable and what have you. Uh, and I think that that in a way was kind of knocking the movement off course. And what's happened since then is that you had this group of voters and I think of this stretching all the way back to Ross Perot, a group of voters who were always floating between the two parties.

Reihan Salam: What you attempted to do is solidify the connection between those blue collar aspirational voters, cement them into the center, right coalition. That didn't quite happen. Donald Trump represented another attempt at doing that. He did it in a very different way. He did it with style rather than with some kind of substantive agenda, but he did it in a way that really forced other Republicans to respond. Conservative intellectuals always like to talk in abstractions and in terms of principle, but the truth is that when you're looking at coalition politics, a lot of it's built around which groups are organized, disciplined, well-defined, and in a position to influence the outcome of primaries. That's one reason why a populous like Donald Trump was never able to break through. You had Rick Santorum, you had Mike Huckabee, you had folks who were populous candidates, but they could never break through because unlike the NRA, unlike the pro life movement, there wasn't a disciplined, organized group.

Reihan Salam: Donald Trump did this through TV. He does through reaching people directly. Now, the challenge is that I think that some of those ideas of a blue collar conservatism are important, worthwhile, but there's still no organized, disciplined group within the party. You don't have the equivalent of organized labor, for example, to say that we want a seat at the table, we want a bargain and we want certain policy outcomes as part of being into this coalition. So instead you have a huge amount of confusion. Republican politicians are terrified. They do not know what to say from day to day, from moment to moment. And a lot of what seems like a lack of principle is frankly more like a level of panic and indecision in the face of the fact that a lot of these folks feel like they don't know their own voters. Well, what do you want that to look like? You, you want it working class coalition in your right.

Karl Rove: The war disrupted it. Um, we did do some reform things like Medicare part D, which is an enormously important model for the free form of the social safety net. And, and we did have some success in the Latino community. Uh, but you're right, the war absorbed at all. And by 2006, seven and eight, it was impossible, but what needs to be done? What do you, when you talked about reconciling egalitarian populism and market conservatives, give us a sense of what that might practically look like.

Reihan Salam: Boris Johnson, a leading contender for the next leader of the Conservative Party in the UK recently made a, a really, uh, to me very appealing observation. The idea was that if you want a flourishing economy, you have to have a flourishing, high-growth, private investment, private jobs driven economy, and you also

need to have decent public services. When I look to American politics right now, what I see as a big urban rural divide, you have about 25% of Americans, about a quarter living in the 10 largest metro areas. Those metro areas generate about 40% of GDP. They are home to most folks who are first or second generation. Uh, if you're looking at Dallas fort worth, if you're living in Houston, if you're looking at Austin, these are places that are blue islands in a red state. Uh, Beta Rourke almost won the senate seat of us MRL. We refer to them as Robert Francis Award and of course Morris Oh one can refer to them otherwise.

Reihan Salam: So what I see is a failure to come down from the level of abstraction and principal roll up your shirt sleeves and actually talk about these bread and butter issues in cities. Now what you see in my hometown in New York City is a situation where there's no column B anymore. There is no Republican party anymore. And the result of that is that the only thing local politicians care about are left-wing primary challengers. Now I actually believe that there's room for a column B and that you need a column B because there are a huge number of people who were embrace pro market growth oriented policies. Many of them by the way are working class immigrants and second generation folks who don't vote, they don't take part in primaries, they're not engaged in this process. And I think you need a conservatism that speaks to those folks and addresses them, not necessarily in ideological terms.

Reihan Salam: Mitch Daniels, the former governor of Indiana, one of my favorite governors was very much Daniel [inaudible] of course, very much a rock, ribbed conservative, very much a kind of consistent, thoughtful, conservative. But he never talked about conservatism when he was giving addresses. He actually always talked about practical, particular problems. He engaged with people. He didn't expect to agree with them. He wanted folks who might agree with them on 40% of the issues and he did a brilliant job of it. He actually had arguments with people in diners up and down the state of Indiana because he actually wanted to treat people as equals, as serious, thoughtful people. And again, he always was coming back to those bread and butter practical issues. And I think that works. Yeah. Yeah.

Karl Rove: He also had a heavy dose of values. What he talked about, things would be had be examples of values. Let's turn to Ben. Ben, uh, implicit in what, uh, what we're talking about here today is a belief that conservatism is not in a good place. And you've written pretty brutally about this, about the what you see as the breakdown of the post war cold war left, right? Politics of America. You see it expressed in immigration trade foreign policy. You've talked about the power of the corporate elite wielding without check or balance in an increasing technology driven economy being a driver of this, of this disruption. You've talked about this being part of a broader global trend where there's declining trust in institutions and you see this as an inevitable result of perceived disempowerment and disenfranchisement and you've called for a form of reactionary nationalism. Will, I don't know if you called for it, but you say that a

form of foot reactionary nationalism is what happens when no one trusts anybody anymore. How do we get out of it and where do we go?

Ben Domenech: Well, that's a small question to start with Carl. Um, first off, I just want to say thank you for, for doing so much work to, to be in this role of, uh, interviewer. I, I've certainly appreciated your interest in all our writings beforehand. Let me just say from the get go. Uh, I've, I w I am here kind of as an observer of conservatism more than I am a conservative. My own views are quite radical and I am, I have become a lot more libertarian. I left the Republican Party over the Iraq war and, uh, I have no illusions however, as opposed to some of my libertarian brethren about the popularity of those ideas. So while I might say my answer to healthcare policy is that I don't believe the federal government has any business doing anything as it relates to it. We should understand the world as it is and not as we would like it to be.

Ben Domenech: Unfortunately. I think that a lot of the conservative reaction and the reaction among sort of the leap commentary it to the election of president Trump has been to wish for the world as they would like it to be. Or it they would like it to be again, perhaps as they thought it once was and I think that that's really mistaken. We cannot and Brechtian Vashon dissolve the people that elect another. We have to deal with what they actually want and the role of a statesman is to try to figure out and lead in those circumstances. I think that when it comes to the broad breakdowns that you were talking about that I've written a great deal about, we need to understand that they're not just about to go away. These are things that are bigger than politics. They are bigger than any one leader coming along and offering a solution and agenda that can reach out to everybody in in this regard.

Ben Domenech: I think that's particularly true as we've become a more atomized people and a more cultural war driven politics, something that's not going to be changed. I think after looking at the debates last night going forward, and so I think that the bigger question is sort of what does conservatism look like in this new reality that grapples with it as it is and the theory that I would advance about that is in, in the past we had a couple of different factors that sort of patched over the different differences that were already there. If you draw a through line from Pat Buchanan's 1992 convention speech through the Ross Perot experience in the 90s into the 2000 experience, you then had the force of this, of this war on terror as essentially taking the place of what the Soviet Union once was in holding the fusion, just grouping together of fiscal conservatives, social traditionalist and national security hawks and that sort of papered over a lot of the different economic problems and frustrations from social traditionalist and others that were existing right underneath the surface.

Ben Domenech: Things that all percolated up over the course of the next couple of cycles. My own view is that the ability of the Republican Party to wrestle with these realities was very limited. And that particularly if you look back to the 2012

autopsy, the only thing that it was really right about is that they were writing about a party and a coalition that was dead. Uh, that doesn't exist anymore. And we have to wrestle with the fact that the priorities of the new coalition I think are very different and they care a lot more about some of these cultural issues in ways that aren't just typically the sort of, oh, this is, this is the pro-lifers. This is the evangelicals and these are the priorities that they have. They often now have very different priorities because they feel like they're under assault, not just from, uh, a, uh, a government that they view as being, having animus toward them.

Ben Domenech: They all understand that if Elizabeth Warren or any of these other people you saw last night is elected, that they'll all be paying for taxpayer funded abortions. But they also view themselves as under assault from increasingly a group of, of major corporations and uh, and tech corporations in particular who have accepted the full spectrum woke agenda as being what they believe and believe in a, in a way that is having an increasing impact on the lives of Americans. This is why some of the most interesting people and in politics today to me are not necessarily the people I agree with. I mean, I happen to agree with Ron Paul on most issues. He votes against the president 40% of the time. Somehow he still has a good relationship with him despite that, which I find to be interesting. Uh, but the, but when I look at the people who are most interesting in terms of charting the path for the Republican coalition and Conservatives and going forward, it's someone like Josh Holly, the youngest member of the u s senate, a newly elected from Missouri who has been going at silicon valley hammer and tongs, proposing all sorts of methods of going after them on a number of different fronts, particularly when it comes to protecting kids on youtube.

Ben Domenech: And doing a number of other, uh, privacy related things. Uh, and also I, I happened to interview him just on Monday and on for my podcast, the federalist Radio Hour. And in it he said he views this as a contest between a coalition that is about the priorities of middle class Americans working class Americans in the middle of the country and their traditional values and a contest against elites within both right and left, who have not had their priorities in mind, who have not, you know, sought to meet their actual needs and instead basically told them to, you know, just go along with it.

Karl Rove: Can you give a quick answer, cause I do want to move on to David. Um, you're a libertarian and yet you've just endorsed probably one of the Holly who's got called for one of the most comprehensive programs of government regulation of the Internet. Isn't there a little bit of a disconnect between course materials and markets and,

Ben Domenech: well, but my, that's, that's my biggest concern. My concern is that if markets don't speak up, and so the assumption on the part of Libertarians, uh, most of them has always been that the market force will always lead you into a path that is actually going to be more open and more consideration of peoples, the

old Apocryphal Michael Jordan line about Republicans buying sneakers too. But what happens when that sort of profit incentive is overcome by something else, by a different priority that is anti-competitive in the context of ideology? I think that the ultimate answer here ought to be a market based one and not a regulatory one, but I think it will be regulatory if things don't change.

Karl Rove: Sure. Yeah. Um, David is, I think at drew the number three, but he's, he should have drawn the number three because he's going to, I think, build on some of what you said. David wrote a review and Claremont Review. They had, one of my favorite George Nash quotes is actually one of my favorite quotes about conservatism from the historian George Nash. American conservatives have had no such agreed upon definition of what it is they're trying to conserve. So, uh, you've written about, uh, the, what you call it, a spiritual and civilization fatigue and the advocacy of our way of life by the elitist tasked with defending it. You've talked about the reform minded conservatives, which I don't get the sense you identify yourself as one of the sort of reform minded conservatives with the reef. If the label is reform a con, but you do identify yourself, someone who wants to reform conservatism and modernize it, make it applicable to today, and you suggest that they need to quote, regroup their policy agenda to align it more closely with Trumpism and that, that you need to look at policy, this new agenda through a populous land that pits and corrupted lead against ordinary Americans equity.

Karl Rove: And a lot of what Ben said, tell us more about that. Last year

David Azerrad: I think I was the only person at the Aspen ideas festival who defended Donald Trump. And also, uh, said that I was not a fan of Tennessee coats. His writings, I was pretty sure they would not reinvoke me, but here I am again. Um, you are so exotic. They wanted you back. Yeah. Um, I don't want to talk about Trump. I want to talk about the nostalgia. Icy and conservatism. Conservatism to me is anchored in gratitude, but that's different than a [inaudible]. I heard in the previous panel a lot of nostalgia for a definition of conservatism that was forged under duress during the cold war to the feed Soviet communism, and that has not really been reexamined in the 30 plus years since communism collapsed. There may have been a reason to define communism as you called it, fiscal conservatism, Ben, I disagree. It's libertarian free market fundamentalism that thinks that the private sector can do no wrong and the government is the root of all evil.

David Azerrad: A kind of unrepentant aggressive intervention is utopian foreign policy that culminated in Bush the second inaugural address in which she said the aim of American foreign policy is to quote and tyranny the world over. Now, some of you may agree with that sentiment, but it is most emphatically not a conservative one. Conservatives, you democracy as a rare and fragile flat flower that takes centuries to blossom, not something that happens when you topple the bad guy. And then the third element is this kind of timid, feckless, social

conservatism that makes the principled argument and loses and loses and loses. And I want to conservatism that is anchored in the realities of the 21st century. By which I mean, first of all, a conservatism that understands what's wrong with itself. That some of these decisions were made to deal with realities that are no longer present. The conservatism that understands that this is no longer our country.

David Azerrad: We lost all of the elite institutions in America are dominated by leftists. There are not everyone necessarily agrees with them, but no one, no sensible liberals and conservatives seem to have the courage to challenge the fanatics who run the universities, the fortune 500 companies, big tech, the media, Hollywood, increasingly, uh, the mainline Protestant churches. I want a conservatism that understands that ours today in 2019 is a counterrevolutionary project. That the reason I don't despair is that I think that large majorities of Americans still agree with the things we believe in, but we have no cultural power. We have very little institutional power. And then lastly, I want a conservatism that just looks at the country as it is today and sees, for example, that we need to deal with this greater Wilkening with this radicalization and deep, deep intolerance of the left. I'm not seeing liberals, I'm not seeing Democratic voters.

David Azerrad: I'm saying a segment of fanatics on the left who no one seems to be willing to stand up to who believe in identity politics and open borders. I want a conservatism that understands that the Mitt Romney approach of dismissing 47% of our fellow Americans because they supposedly don't pay taxes and waxing lyrical in a Randian way about entrepreneurs is not connecting with the concerns of sensible middle class and working class Americans. I want a conservatism that deals with big tech and does not fetishize markets and the private sector. I want a conservatism that understands that the rise of China is the central foreign policy threat that we are dealing with today. I thought we were supposed to be worried about tyranny. How so? What

Karl Rove: you said earlier that we should not go abroad and you you're the alternative was tyranny or democracy. I did not say I want to topple the Chinese government and that magically have a Tocqueville Ian Society to flourish. That you, you do want to work to a point where you constrain tyranny in, in the Cha. The Chinese actions rather than tyrannize since much longer than Reihan was a conservative. I mean, Tina has been a tyranny. They're not gonna say,

David Azerrad: stop being tyrannical. I don't want to live in a China centric world. Yeah. I want to continue to live in America, central girl. So I don't accept the dichotomy. Are you an isolationist or an interventionist? That's silly. You intervene on behalf of something.

Karl Rove: Sure. It's how you define the national interest. Well, I agree. I agree, but I've recognized it. But I also don't agree that the dichotomy is you can only be tier, you can be tyranny or democracy. There are lots of shades in between. There

are lots of things. There are illiberal regimes or monarchical regimes, things that are not truly democratic. Whether it is, you know, uh, for most, uh, Taiwan or Singapore that are nonetheless not tyranny, tyrannical,

David Azerrad: I don't want an abdication of American responsibility. In the world. I want it refocused away from nation building in countries that have no democratic traditions to deal with the country that has made very clear that they want to displace and overtake us as the top

Karl Rove: dog in the world. Okay. So we know what you got in the way of a policy agenda is the policy agenda. We're anti China. We're anti interventionist. No, not necessarily. We are, we're, we are declaring war on the culture. No, no, no, no. We may not. We've lost all these institutions. We may need to interest the first institution that would, what's the number one thing that you would do if, if your view of conservatism came about, what is the one thing that you would strive to win?

David Azerrad: I want to break the universities. I want to, uh, they have become seminaries for left wing indoctrination. They are not fulfilling their purpose of promoting.

David Azerrad: freedom of inquiry. Um, I am, I am

David Azerrad: a classical liberal. I do not want to coercively uh, close them. This is a free country. I would like them to be humiliated. I would like the president to do to them what he has done to the media. I would like him to expose the charlatans I want to do away with this. Oh my God, we have the best universities in the world. We may have the best physics departments in the world. I don't think we have overall the best universities in the world. And then we should defund them. Why is it that we are subsidizing these institutions that are promoting anti-americanism?

Karl Rove: So,

Speaker 7: and he has his next,

Karl Rove: once again, the luck of the draw because her focus has been primarily on education, uh, effective school choice. But it starts with a desire and a concern about the effect of, uh, education, shaping the moral and virtuous character of students and people. You've talked about a crisis of citizenship and patriotism, you've talked about in apropos of David's slow burn and cultural institutions, and you've called for a positive that focuses on shaping for our politics to prioritize the cultural battles that matter most and coming up with new solutions to hit the left where it's strong. Besides joining David and defunding the University of Texas at Austin, what else are you, what other, what other solutions to hit the left where it's strong? Do you have,

Inez Stepman: um, well I think, I think the most important one is, um, a lot of the radicalization that happens in the university is actually starts in K12. Um, we have a lot of good sociological research that shows that actually what colleges do is they radicalize people and they polarize people. So if you go into university and you're kind of a, a big conservative, you come out of rabid conservative, um, probably from contact with the rest of the university. Um, if you are coming in with a sort of vague left of center view of the world, then you come out basically a trained activist for the far left and um, where people acquire that, that vague left of center view of the world is increasingly in our, Our k 12 education system. And we've totally forgotten why America is a very, especially the founding, a very limited government.

Inez Stepman: Um, uh, society actually did invest in public education on the state level. Um, and there was a debate about this with the founding. It wasn't, you know, a universally accepted thing that we should open public schools. And Thomas Jefferson was one of the biggest proponents for it. And he reminded his fellows that if in fact we are going to have a republic, we need educational institutions that are open to all and that inculcate the knowledge that is necessary for people to become self-governing citizens of a republic. If we look at how our public institutions of education have fared today on that fundamental basic, um, charge that they were initially created to do, right, they weren't actually initially created to have kids pass. I mean, reading and mathematics is fundamental, but that's not the original purpose of our public schools. It was to teach us how to be citizens.

Inez Stepman: If you look at public schooling today, first of all, everyone has heard the horror stories of the fact that for example, only 19% of people under the age of 45 can pass the very basic citizenship citizenship tests that, for example, my father and mother took to become citizens of this country. It's a pretty basic test. I mean, a third of Americans can name the three branches of the federal government. I mean, basic civil civic knowledge is in free fall. And that's no surprise. When you look at, for example, the top 100 districts in the United States, the largest public school districts in the United States, and you look at their mission statements, what they put on their websites, what they put on all of their letterhead. Um, you see that college and career come up in the vast majority of those statements. Um, citizenship comes up in a small minority and patriotism comes up exactly zero, zero times or the America.

Inez Stepman: So this is not no longer the mission of our public school system. I actually think the solution, I mean we can argue about, um, sort of the, the 30,000 foot framework for what conservatism should become, whether it should be more liberal, whether we, we need more, um, me to be more flexible in terms of accepting government solutions. Um, but I actually don't think that to these very fundamental institutional questions. I have a whole series of, of proposals that are in fact not new and simply require that Republicans and conservatives have the courage of their convictions and actually act them out in policy and

they're perfectly compatible with liberalism for the start. You know, we, we shouldn't be underwriting these, um, these universities to the tune of billions and direct subsidies and one point \$6 trillion in underwritten student loans. That's, that is a liberal solution that is not an authoritarian solution.

Inez Stepman: It's not a Josh, you know, sort of Josh Holly Wing Regulate Tech Solution. That's a basic liberal solution. Conservatives should stop voting to fund their ideological opponents. Um, and, and on the K12 level, the solution is even more liberal. It is give the power back to the families. As David said, our country is not yet in this camp of the far left that is still a small minority of the country. But what we need to do is grant parents that the power over the billions that we spend in K-12 K12 education in the United States is not underfunded. I know that we have heard this over and over and over again, but we fund k 12 education. We are one of the top a per pupil spenders in the world in K in K12 education. It is not a problem of underfunding. It is who controls the dollars and who makes the decisions with those dollars. And it just ends exceedingly liberal solution to give that power back to parents so that they can give their children the education, um, that they actually believe comports with their values around the dinner table. And I think that's where, if we're talking about where conservatism needs to go on a practical level, so have to wage guerrilla war against some of these things.

Karl Rove: So David says, defund. Do you fund colleges and universities? You'd make no distinction between the physics department and the sociology department. You'd make know between gender studies and military science?

David Azerrad: No, of course I would. Okay. I'm just asking for clarity. Yeah. It's not as, it's defund the bad parts of the university. Yeah. It's take a long, hard look at how they're operating, where the money's going. You know, we spend \$40 billion a year subsidizing research and our universities, there's no way of knowing where the money goes. We were working with a member of Congress and the last, uh, house who lost the seat to get the, uh, government to create a website that just allows you to track where this money goes.

Karl Rove: Let, let me ask Inez your, you're talking about what is the practical way for conservatives to get patriotism, a sense of history, a sense of civic responsibility and citizenship back in the schools?

Inez Stepman: Um, so I'd note that for example, we've been talking about sort of the death of Reaganism or the, the Cold War coalition. Um, Reagan in his farewell address said exactly this, this is the thing that is left undone by the Reagan Revolution, right? We have failed. We have, um, created a resurgence of patriotism, but we have failed to institutionalize it. We have failed to create an informed patriotism that can actually march forward into the future if you do that. And, and so I think the two proposals that I, I threw out are critical and I think they need to rise higher on the Republican priorities list. Um, it's a

shocking fact that I, I worked for Awhile for Alec, the American Legislative Exchange Council. So I worked with state legislators and it is a shocking fact that there are multiple Republican controlled states in this country where leadership has to go hat in hand begging to find a Republican to chair the education committee. It is not a republican priority and that is foolish. Um, and I think that's something that desperately needs to change.

Ben Domenech: But even when they get there, we need to recognize how legislatures across the country and particularly at the federal level have seated their power over the course of decades in a way that is very unhealthy to our political discourse. We have a reality now where the vast bureaucracy that is, that is, that has a titular head in the presidency is far more powerful than anything when it comes to legislative activity. The congress has given all of that power away. And so essentially we end up in this environment where all that matters is the presidency in the courts and those are connected to the David Davis.

Karl Rove: The one priority is universities. Your number one priority is public education, particularly this sense of patriotism. What's been, what's your number one priority? You're now in charge of the conservative movement and you can, you can focus its energy and efforts on one thing. What is it?

Ben Domenech: I basically, I think, I think domestically they need to understand that they can no longer be the party that defends big business and big banks. And I just think that that's something that needed to change in the wake of, I think the financial bailout under, you know, is something that changed the attitudes of a lot of Americans. I think it's the seed for the populist, uh, upprize on both the right and the left. And I think that there needed to be a real, real evaluation of whether the priorities of the party were about what the big institute, what those big institutions wanted or what was actually good for you. How would you create, sorry. How would you crimp the banks? Well, I think there's a number of different ways to do that. I just think that if, if you look at the different proposals that you've, all of it has put forward and others in national affairs, there's a lot of different options, but I think that a lot of this too has to be attitudinal. [inaudible]

Karl Rove: [inaudible] they're there. They're not among the 315th

Ben Domenech: floor. Let's see, it's the right 350,000 so let me, let me just, let me just simply, let me just put it this way. So much of this is attitude. All the, the attitude of the president as it relates to a lot of these institutions goes off a much further away than actual policies

Ben Domenech: that he's arguing for. So he makes claims about tax policy for instance, and then you end up with a tax plan that looks pretty much what the Paul Ryan, you know, Mitt Romney plan might've looked like before and yet attitudinally his supporters like it because they trust him on that subject. I think that one thing

that people should ought to take away from the experience of the law, and I think this is something that Brett Stevens actually had, right, which is that there was this attitude about that the elites had about themselves, that we know what's best, we know what's right. And these institutions are continued that runs through. I've made that same argument. I mean, look, we've, we've gotten to a point where our trust in our institutions is because between the, uh, Western Bank of Manhattan all the way to the eastern side of Palo Alto, people who live in that part of the country think that the elites look down on them.

Reihan Salam: But it is not enough to, resentment in grievance is not enough to build an optimistic and positive movement. Movements that are built around a grievement and resentment only or substantially are movement that's an ultimately fail. Look at it. Look at Huey Long. Look at, look at William Jennings Bryan, look at the Europeans. You know, it only goes so far and in particularly in a two party system like we have the party that becomes the angry party is the party that over time tends to begin to lose. Let me, let me turn to, I'm afraid you've cued me up because this is something I think about pretty deeply. So if you look at some corners of the country, the way that our politics works now, as I mentioned before, there is this incredibly intense rural urban polarization. What that means is that California right now, uh, you know, if it were a sovereign country, would be the fifth or sixth largest economy in the world and extraordinary place, extraordinarily creative, entrepreneurial dynamic.

Reihan Salam: If you measure poverty by taking into account something like the cost of housing, California has a higher poverty rate than Alabama or Mississippi. California is a place that has the most extraordinary climate in the world. This is an incredible dynamic. Again, all of these wonderful things, and yet it's failing a huge number of Americans. Now, some of those Americans might be black and Brown. Some of them are first and second generation. They're Americans. And this is an extraordinary failure right now you have cities up and down the coast that have created so much private wealth that are overwhelmed by a homelessness crisis, a the likes of which the state hasn't seen it. When you look at New York City, this is another place where there are all sorts of people who want solutions to practical problems around public education and what have you. Now, the thing is that if you are in a primary and you're in a jurisdiction where you have 70% of the vote, whether you're in rural Texas or you're in the most urban of urban districts in New York City, you are not worried about those people in the broad middle who want real practical solutions.

Reihan Salam: You just want to outflank the other guy actually seeming more exciting, sexy and dangerous. Framing yourself as a dissenter, as bold, as exciting that's going to work in those contexts, but that's not a recipe for a majority politics and the way that our system works is that we need broad overlapping majorities. This is why we have a US Senate. And I understand there are a lot of folks on the left who don't like it, but that's the way the system was worked. It was meant to be something. That means you have broad overlapping majorities. The reason you

have such an intense backlash, I would argue after those first years of the Obama presidency, 2009, 2010, I don't really think it was racial resentment driving it. I think it was the sense that basically the president was pursuing a kind of parliamentary politics in a system that's meant to achieve broad overlapping majorities.

Reihan Salam: Uh, and I think that when you look to Republicans, there's this belief what we're going to do every now and again, one time, we're going to get a trifecta. We're going to get every branch of government. Then we're going to ram through our agenda, come hell or high water, no matter what those squishy centers say. But here's the thing. The nature of our system is such that then you're going to have an administrative state that's not necessarily gonna play along. You're going to have a huge backlash to that right? At the next election, you're going to get chaos. What William McKinley figured out, what a few visionary politicians figured out, uh, in the course of American history is that when you want those broad majorities, you cannot do it by being purely sexy and exciting to the folks in the fringe. You do it by actually frankly, seeming pretty banal.

Reihan Salam: I'm sorry. Oh, did you say, you know, if you're talking about China for example, there are a lot of people will say that, you know, we've got a wage war on China who will say, well, wait a second, I'm going to inch away from that. But there are people who say that, hey, we need public investment. We need to see to it that we have an innovation industrial base, and that's going to mean that we want market competition, but we also want to think strategically the way that our rivals are thinking strategically. That's just common sense.

Karl Rove: Yeah. We're running out of time. We could go several different ways, but I want to play off of something you said and ask the other three to talk about it. You've made it clear, you think that they're the people who are the people who are not conservatives today that we need to make into conservatively. And so you said people live in cities, people live in blue areas, people are first and second generation. And in your books you've talked about college educated professionals. For each one of you, sort of a two questions together and try to answer it, cause we only got about three or four minutes left. Who should be a conservative today that isn't, or, or maybe do we need to worry about having more conservatives in order to effect the kind of changes that you're talking about?

David Azerrad: Everyone who loves America and Americans. So you, you, you asked for the positive that it not be anger failed. I love this country and I love its people and I sympathize with the Americans who don't look like me, who don't worship the same God that I do that are not as cosmopolitan as I am. I would wish, and this is perhaps a message for the people at Aspen, you are the ruling class. You are the most credentialed, accomplished people who are running this country. Try to have a little bit more sympathy for people who don't look like you who cling to their guns and their religion. You don't need to

David Azerrad: spend all of your weekends with them, but there is such content amongst the elites for ordinary Americans, there are not all racist watch out. Most of these. Some of these people were here to watch the exotics, but a lot of these people were fellow travelers with us.

Ben Domenech: Just

Bret Stephens: you'll find that out after the third drink. The gray, the gray haired guy, the gray haired guy out there in the middle of the crowd is the guy who gave me my first opportunity in politics, so he doesn't want to be called one of the elite core Logan.

Inez Stepman: I, I agree with David that I think patriotism is a core of what built Trump's success, that kind of positive patriotism that is becoming increasingly difficult to articulate both because of the education system, not informing people. And then because it is also has become impossible to praise our common history, uh, without, you know, it seems that to appraise our common history has become synonymous with, with papering over any black marks in our past that it's impossible to be a happy patriot, to be proud of our common history, to be proud of our common culture, um, without sort of, uh, endorsing every evil thing that's ever happened in America since the founding. And I do think that's been a core part of, of Trump's message, but I actually kind of want to push back against a little bit, a bit about the idea that, um, that it's, it's, it's sort of, uh, the majority in the middle is, it has not been catered to to some extent that that's true.

Inez Stepman: But I think what we're seeing now is a backlash to 30 years of politics where the Republican Party and the Democratic Party bound bounded a very actually small range of actual policy movement. And um, actually if you go back and look at, for example, the Jacksonian era where you had turnout of, you know, 80% in every election, um, these are, these were times of a big, big changes, right? You elected one guy and uh, you know, things would change overnight. There'll be massive policy change and I think right now actually there's a lot of that pent up energy democratic energy that isn't finding an outlet in our PR or our previous

Bret Stephens: it is, I want to have bad, have a few seconds to told to wrap it up. I just, I just would say Aye. I'm

Ben Domenech: actually very, I'm very hopeful about the future for a lot of different reasons, but particularly because I think people are being forced in this current climate to wrestle with a lot of things that they ignored. Kristen Soltis Anderson is here this week and one of the things that she always tries to remind the donor class in particular of the Republican Party is that while you might think that ditching sort of the social conservative economic leftism, if you had in that quadrant system the fiscal conservatives who were socially liberal, that things would be great. That's actually the smallest portion of the American electorate when you look at

who's there, and I think that this is prompting a discussion that moves more into that quadrant where you have perhaps more moderation on economic issues. You look potentially at the social conservatives not as someone stupid ditched or to die off. And that's something that I think will ultimately

Karl Rove:

lead to a more healthy and honest political debate. I happened to be in wheeling West Virginia recently given a talk and again, ask a weird question and it started giving a weird answer and at the end of it I found myself talking about how I was sick and tired of people beating up on our country. And you talked about this in there is an inherent belief among Americans, whether they call themselves moderate liberal, conservative, that there is something special and exceptional about this country and then no country in no country are the people better able to meet any challenge that comes our way than this country. You spoke of gratitude. We ought to be grateful that we're in this country and that we've been given both the opportunity and the responsibility of making it better and, uh, making the lives of our future generation better, hopefully through a positive and optimistic conservative agenda. Thanks for having us here.