

# Conservatism Under Threat

Judy Woodruff: Uh, I'm delighted to be here and I'm especially delighted to be here with this man. I've been reading and watching as long as I've been in Washington, uh, which is just a couple of years, actually. 40. Uh, uh, but this is George Will's the book that is sitting on the table in front of us and I hope you all will get a chance to, to look at it, get a copy and get George to sign it. It is George's 16th book, is that right? 15th Book. George will arguably the most prolific public intellectual of our time, uh, since Daniel Patrick Moynihan, William F. Buckley. Uh, somebody who has looked at thought about, uh, conservatism, public policy, um, how Americans think, how we approach public life for his entire adult life. So we're here to talk about conservatism under threat. George, that was the title they gave, um, uh, the session. And as Katie just said, I think Katie just said, uh, you know, what's going to happen to conservatism? And you said, uh, in a, in a low voice, will there even be a conservatism in the future? Are you that worried?

George Will: Amada, this book, which is the most important publishing events since Gutenberg, it was going to go into guarantee its future.

Judy Woodruff: Why? Why did you, why at this moment are you writing a book called the conservative sensibility?

George Will: Well, I would have written the book even if the 2016 election had turned out differently. Uh, I was on Bill Maher show and Marsha George, the name Donald Trump doesn't appear in there. And I said also the name of Doris Day doesn't appear there because it's a book about ideas I want to

Speaker 3: want, I want to

George Will: do, I want to do establish that the intellectual pedigree of conservatism and to refute the most common misperception about conservatism, which is, and it's understandable given the word conservatism, people think conservatives only want to conserve and they want to conserve the past sort of free society, like a fly in amber. In fact, American conservatism, and in that phrase, the adjective American does a lot of work is distinguished from European conservatism, which was evolved largely in the defense of established orders on hierarchies. American conservatism is precisely the reverse. It is to preserve a society open to perpetual dynamic change. To do that, you have to go back to the past. We have to conserve the founder's vision, which was natural rights, limited government and separation of powers to give society in enormous social space in which the forces, the creative forces of the spontaneous order of society can flourish. Virginia Postrel, the, you may know, Washington writer, clarity, prolific. So the story of the Bible, in one sentence, it was God created man and woman in loss, control of events. They're conservative. The conservative sensibility relishes the absence of control. It's the openness of the future. It's High Eq,

spontaneous order of society that conservatism exist to conserve. It's a paradox. We're trying to conserve perpetual change.

Judy Woodruff: And I want to ask you about that because a lot of people think, okay, you want to take us back to a time. You know, we, we have some idea from reading of what this country was like in the 16 and 17 at the end of the 17 hundreds, but people have a sense that it was, you know, we know who the founding fathers were and they were all fathers. Um, what, what was it about them that, that, that has that enduring quality because so many people say, why do you want to take us back to the original idea of America? I think many, many, if not most Americans don't understand this being open to perpetual change piece of it. Yeah.

George Will: No, I don't want to take the country back to a time before I wanted to take us back to premises. Before Woodrow Wilson, who really created the vocabulary of dissatisfaction with the founders, was the first founder to criticize the American founding. It was the first president to criticize the American founding, which is all of our political argument today. I think it'd be understood as an argument between two Princetonians James Madison or the class of 1771 and Woodrow Wilson of the class of 1879. Wilson did not criticize the American founding peripherally. He criticized it, root and branch. She said, first of all, the natural rights doctrine isn't too limiting because it postulates a fixed human nature and a fixed human nature limits the, the hope for progressive change that government can engineer because if human beings have no fixed nature but are only creatures that acquire the culture in which they're situated government by manipulating the culture can change human beings.

George Will: Second, he said, uh, the separation of powers was fine once he said when we were 4 million people along the fringe of the continent, 80% of us living with 20 miles of Atlantic tidewater. Then he said that was fine, but now we're great continental nation, United by copper wires and steel rails and therefore we need a more nimble government. One of his favorite adjectives and nimble government at the beckon call of a strong precedent with a marginalized congress so that the government can act as expeditiously as a complex society. That this is the basic progressive nonsequitor, which is that the more complex society becomes the more government most intervene in that society to organize and directed high Eq and others noting the law of unintended consequences that the devil's most government work says, the more complex society gets, the more information that is generated by markets, which is all markets are information generating mechanisms. The less government knows relative to what needs to be known. And therefore the more modest is required by government. What higher calls, epistemic humility, humility about what we can. In fact, no. Okay.

Judy Woodruff: And so, you know, as we think back though, to the founders and you come back again and again to Madison, to Jefferson, um, why, why do you believe they, they had the idea then what gave them the sense that it was important to be

open in the future? What, what gave them that belief? Where did that come from?

George Will: But the, the, they didn't all embrace that equally. Uh, Jefferson, one of the reasons Jefferson leapt at the Louisiana purchase was so that he could have ample land for rural America's republic people, stable society on the land rooted. There are no cities. Keep your factories in Europe and all that so that people would more or less be like Thomas Jefferson arrival founder Hamilton's starve reason musical said no. He wanted a s a an urban churning, entrepreneurial industrial investing, restless society full of people rather like Alexander Hamilton. So there were, there was a rival vision of what kind of people we should be when they argued about things like the national bank and the rest, they were actually arguing about what kind of people we would be there. I once wrote a book read by dozens, cold, cold statecraft as Soulcraft it was. I gave the Godkin lectures at Harvard in 1981 and the subtitle of the book was what government does not what government ought to do, but what government can help but do government by the economic regime. It sets up in the law legal system. It has necessarily shapes the character of people and Jefferson and Hamilton understood this perfectly. They have two different sociology's of two different kinds of virtue.

George Will: Mike contention is that capitalism doesn't just make us better off, which it manifestly does. It makes us better by enforcing certain virtues is a wonderful scene in and it took roles, democracy in America where he's going down Ohio River with slave holding Kentucky to his left and industrial free soils, Ohio to his right and he says on the left all was torpid and languid, no crackling energy, Ohio on his right. It was all crackly and energy, sense of dynamism and hope in future. That's the A in a small, rich small was the kind of soul craft that I think is involved in our arguments about economies, which I now have a chapter in here called political economy, which is what we called the study of economics. When Adam Smith invented the subject in the wealth of nations published in the resonant year of 1776 okay.

Judy Woodruff: What, what, what should the role of government, they, I mean, you, you argue throughout and you've argued this for for a long time. Minimal role. Government should have a small a profile as possible. And yet, I mean, everybody knows there are some things that have happened since the founders, uh, that have made a huge difference. Okay.

George Will: Conservatives are not against a Amelie rose of government. Conservatives do think we need to calve a constant argument about the proper scope and actual competence of government. 1964 I cast my first presidential vote for Barry Goldwater. 27 million of us couldn't be wrong.

Speaker 3: Uh,

George Will: he carried 44. He lost 44 states. But I've, I've always said he actually won. It just took 16 years to count the votes. But Goldwater too and not, this book is dedicated to the memory of Goldwater. In 1964, 77% of the American people said they trusted the federal government to do the right thing all the time. Or almost all the time. Today, the figure is 17% 60 point collapse in the prestige of government as governments activism has wrote rhythm. Well, I would think my progressive friends would be intensely interested in this because everything they want to do depends on strong government and strong government at the end of the day. Depends upon confidence in government. With that gone. I mean Poor Elizabeth Warren with with her, I have a plan for that. All of her plans require energetic government. She's about to learn, I'm afraid the old Jewish lane that if you want to make God laugh, tell him your plans. Right.

Speaker 3: But,

Judy Woodruff: but let see. But it calls to mind a number of things that I won't, I won't, I won't bring up,

George Will: well let me give you an example I did to your question. The Conservatives have no problem with social security if we bothered a funded, but that's another question. If you watch bothered a funded provide proper funding, government identifies an eligible cohort, the elderly and writes them checks and mails them. It's good at that. Where government is not so good at is what it began to undertake in the 1960s model cities, we don't know how to build models. Cities. There's a sense in which that's his few tile and enterprises, nation building, which is futile and enterprise as orchid building cities like nations, like orchids are organic things and they are not built by governance.

Judy Woodruff: Medicare, you started with social security. How, how has the government done running medicare?

George Will: Well it's been constantly surprised because everything had predicted all of its predictions for costs and eligibility. We're much too conservative. What we did in 1965 was attach the most rapidly growing portion of our population. The elderly do our most dynamic science, which is medicine as an entitlement. Probably half the medical treatments now and use diagnostic therapeutic and pharmacological did not exist in 1965 when we passed medicare. Indeed a pharmacology had been at all as developed them as it is now. We would have medicare part D, the prescription drug entitlement in 65.

Judy Woodruff: So was that, um, so are you saying Medicare was a mistake? No, I don't think state

George Will: can. I do not think provision for the elderly is a mistake. I do think we're in danger of having a gerontocracy that is a government run by and for the elderly. Um, the most rapidly growing in percentage terms, age, cohort, cohort in this country is Americans 85 years old or older. That matters because the average

healthcare cost for a 55 year old, our five times, sorry for an 85 year old or five times higher than the average costs for a 55 year old. So longevity is a great social achievement. It's also ruinously expensive. You do not die when the office of management and budgets as we should.

Judy Woodruff: So before we, before we give up or not give up on government, but set it aside, what else do you give government credit for? I mean you, you mentioned social security, Medicare, uh, uh, I don't know. Medicaid is, the states are more involved. The national highway, the federal highway system, a Republican president put that forward. Um, the defense department, I mean the, the national defense

George Will: that is the first duty of government is protect the nation. Yes. All for that.

Judy Woodruff: Uh, homeland security, which is a piece of the federal government work. But look what look at her.

George Will: We're actually governed today for all the talk about discord in the United States. What's most frightening to me is consensus. It's as broad as the republic. It extends from Elizabeth Warren to Ted Cruz and it's as deep as the Grand Canyon and this is this. We should have a large, well armed, generous entitlement state and not pay for it. Everyone's agreed on that. I'm serious. Like the political class is more United by class. Interest in it is divided by ideology and the class interest is to give the American people a dollar's worth of government and charge them 80 cents for it. The public likes it. We'll fobbed off the extra 20 cents on the unconsenting because unborn future generation that will get the bill. What's changed is this, we used to borrow money for the future. We Flock Boris for the future, built roads, dams, highways, and we'd borrow and because the future was going to benefit from it, it was ethical to have them pay part of the burden. Today we're borrowing to finance our own consumption of government goods and services, which is decadent.

Judy Woodruff: Beyond that. I can't say. Well, it'd been, so let's talk about taking care of those who are having a hard time taking care of themselves. What's the responsibility that government,

George Will: the government is to help those who can't take care of themselves, but first of all to help people help themselves. To take just one example. In medicine, health savings accounts you get and you get a substantial tax preference for money. When you buy high deductible health insurance and you pay for your everyday expenses out of the tax preferred savings in your health savings account. No American expect while some probably do, but no, most Americans don't expect auto insurance to pay for their windshield wipers or oil changes. Similarly, there are regular every day predictable small health expenses that people should pay out of their own savings to give them a sense of having skin in the game. There are things the government can do that help people provide for themselves rather than providing it for them.

Judy Woodruff: Have your views on what what true conservatism is? Have they changed over the years? George since you started writing and you wrote your first book in the 1970s yeah.

George Will: How mostly it's in the chapter called the judicial supervision of democracy for many years. I believe Bob Bork was a good friend of mine, and Bork was, uh, w w was a judicial restraint man. I believed as many conservatives did in response to some of the more freewheeling decisions of the Warren Court. That majority rule required judges to be deferential to majority Darien institutions. Bob Bork and his friend at Yale law school, Alexander Bickel, made much of what they called the counter majority Marian dilemma. That judicial review is inherently anomalous in our society and should be used very sparingly. And I believe that for many years, the majority Tarion's believed as Oliver Wendell Holmes said, if the American people want to go to hell, I will help them. It's my job. So he would just step out of the way of majority attarian institutions. Uh, for a long time I believed that. And then I began to think more clearly and I begin to think backward.

George Will: I wrote my doctoral dissertation at Princeton is titled Beyond the reach of Majority's. It's a phrase from Justice Jackson's opinion in the second of the flag salute cases where the supreme court reversing itself in just three years said, we were wrong to say that it is permissible to require Jehovah's Witnesses children to salute the flag in contravention of their deeply held religious beliefs. He said the very purpose of a bill of rights is to play certain things beyond the reach of majorities to rescue them from the vicissitudes of politics. Now, when I began, I began thinking about this in other words many years ago, and we only got it right recently, but I suppose I began thinking about it growing up in Champagne, Urbana, Illinois, where my father was a professor of philosophy at the University of Illinois. Local lore has it that it was in the Champagne county courthouse, that Abraham Lincoln, a very prosperous circuit riding railroad lawyer.

George Will: It was in the Champagne county courthouse that he learned that Steven Aid Douglas, the Illinois senator, had successfully passed the Kansas Nebraska Act, which said, we will answer the question about the expansion of slavery in the territories by submitting it to a vote. Popular sovereignty in the territories would be the solutions that Dovid lose votes slavery up, vote it down. It's a matter of moral indifference. I believe that the greatest political career in the history of world politics, I say this with great deference to my friend Andrew Robertson, his man Churchill, but that Lincoln's the greatest career in the history of world politics was ignited by his saying that America is not about a process. Majority Rule America is about a condition. It liberty and majority's should rule where the government rules. But the government should not always rule by majorities and give people space again to other values besides majority rule.

Judy Woodruff: So you're talking about a more activist, judicial, much more activist judiciary. Exactly. Which, you know, we think of originalism the Scalia Antonin Scalia is, I'm not an originalist. You're not in a written either, was he?

George Will: He, uh, this can be a famously called himself a fainthearted originalists because among other reasons, he came up against the eighth amendment, which forbids cruel and unusual punishments. If as originalist say, we should construe the text by the common public meaning of the words at the time, that would mean if we were to say things are cruel, uh, are not cruel if they were accepted in 1787 in Philadelphia, you're cropping, branding, flogging, pillaring, all of those were used at the time that the founders put the words cruel and unusual punishments into the bill of rights.

Judy Woodruff: You, you, um, uh, dedicate the book to Barry Goldwater, one of your separately, one of your, your major, your favorite political figures was Daniel Patrick Moynihan. These are two very different people. Why are they, why do you admire both of them?

George Will: Well, Damn, Daniel Patrick Moynihan was find a social scientist, surely ever to serve in a national legislature. I rather mischievously once said that while he was in the Senate, he wrote more books on his colleagues read.

George Will: Pat Famously said, everyone is entitled to their own opinion, but not their own facts. He was a great respecter of data. He was all his life and unreconstructed new deal Democrat. But he understood the role of evidence. He said the role of social science, social science can't tell us what to do. It can tell us the results of what we've done. And Pat was part of with Daniel Bell and Nat Glazer and Irving Kristol and the others. James Q. Wilson, his good friend at Harvard, uh, they were the founders and the organizers of that enormously influential small circulation journal of public interest that began to talk about skepticism about governments competence in intervening in a complex society, but he never stopped being a new deal Democrat.

Judy Woodruff: Ronald Reagan, you and have been an admirer of Ronald Reagan. Has Your view of him changed? Oh, no, no. I mean, how does he fit into the, the conservative, um, uh, you know, I'd system theology. Yeah.

George Will: I constantly hear people saying Ronald Reagan's assault on government. Ronald Wilson, Reagan, I don't know if he was named after Woodrow Wilson. I certainly hope not. Uh, Ronald Reagan formative years. Politically we're during the new deal and he never turned on the basic social safety net of the society. That is again, social security, something government knew how to do. His great criticism of the domestic policies were from the great society era when government undertook to apply social science with an unmerited confidence.

Judy Woodruff: You [inaudible] I asked you about Ronald Reagan in order to bring up two words that do not appear in the book and that's Donald Trump. Um, why did you leave where you suggested this? Why did you leave his name out? Well, you met, you mentioned Doris Day. I know

George Will: first, first of all this, I don't, didn't want to write another Washington book. I do not have a feeling that Americans think insufficient attention is being paid to him. Yeah.

Speaker 3: Huh.

George Will: Second. Second. It is a book of ideas and he doesn't do ideas.

Speaker 3: Okay.

George Will: I like to say that the second time, third I would like to have this book read. Uh, I was going to say 10 years from now and he'll be gone three years from now and he'll be gone. Um, so it, it just a distraction. It's a distraction because again, the very reversed, the odd verse of everything conservatism stands for is populism. Populism means the direct translation of majority passion, but just ideas, majority passion into governance. The ultimate populace moment was Donald Trump. I said it, you see Voldemort?

Speaker 3: Uh, the, the, the

George Will: ultimate direct translation of passion into politics is Trump at the Cleveland convention. Only I can fix it. Now, conservatism says majority's are going to rule majority's [inaudible], but said Madison in what a wonderful phrase. He says, we want mitigated democracy. We want public opinion slowed and filtered and refined to representative institutions so that by the time it gets to the actually being applied in laws, it has been filtered and refined. When the founding fathers went to Philadelphia that's sweltering summer of 1787, they did not go to create an efficient government. The idea would have horrified them. They wanted a safe government. Most important word in the declaration of independence as an adjunct is the verb to secure. Governments are instituted, secure preexisting rights. We don't get our rights from government. Government exists for the primary purpose of secure in those rights. To which end, the framers created this complicated government.

George Will: Three branches of government, two branches of the legislative branch, each branch or the legislative branch with different electoral rhythms and different constituencies. Supermajorities judicial review, vetos veto overrides a whole raft of blocking mechanisms in order to slow things down. There's a sense in which gridlock is not an American problem. It's an American achievement. There are an enormous number of people in this world or live under governments. They wish could be gridlocked, but the idea that the American government is gridlocked is preposterous. People said, well, we had red locked her in the Obama years. Well, somewhat, but we passed the biggest financial regulation reforms since the 1930s and the Dodd frank, we passed the biggest enlargement of the entitlement state. So it's Medicare with Obamacare, the affordable care act, the government moves, it just moves slowly and they designed it that way. They wanted it to be difficult.

Judy Woodruff: So that's where you put Donald Trump. But as we know today, he is the most it republicans view him far and away as their most is the most popular. You have. What more Republicans today admiring Donald Trump probably than, than, than admired Ronald Reagan Republican party more homogenous today than ever before in its history. So what does that say about the Republican Party and conservatism?

George Will: Good party leave and I left. But uh, the Republican party ceased being a vessel of conservatism. It did not damage conservatism at damaged itself. Look who is happy today with a presidency unconstrained by an anemic congress. Now this is a long time in the making. It didn't begin on January 20th at noon on 2017 began a long time ago as Congress began divesting itself of powers that it has no right to divest itself of the first substantive words of the constitution. The first words after the preamble are all legislative power shall be vested in a congress of the United States bested and it cannot be divested. Last week in a supreme court opinion, there was the beginning of a revival of the supreme court enforcing the non delegation doctrine, that there are certain delegations of power to the federal bureaucracy by Congress that are not permissible. Who is happy that a president of either party can impose taxes on the American people, which is what tariffs are unilaterally because the president has been given this fast discretion by Congress, who is happy that the president can take appropriations for purpose a and repurpose them to be spent on B, in this case, a wall because he gets given the power by Congress to declare an emergency and do that.

George Will: We have this enormous unfettered presidency, this anemic congress and no one, it seems to me can or should be happy with this disequilibrium in the wonderful constitutional architecture that Madison gave us. So what has, what's happened to conservatism mean? What happened to all the arguments that George will and other conservatives had made over all those years? I mean, how did it get shoved aside, uh, in your view and taken over that space taken over by Donald Trump and what most republicans say they support? Well, we've known for a long time that the American people in many ways are ideologically conservative, but operationally liberal. They talk like Jeffersonians that government is best that governs least, but they act like Hamiltonians and want to be governed by Hamiltonians. So there's an element of this cognitive dissonance in all of our politics, but I don't want to let progressive's off the hook here.

George Will: You're right. Conservatives have done much to disgrace themselves, but it is progressivism that discredited the separation of powers. It is progressivism that celebrated executive leadership that celebrated charismatic executive leaders, not give you one small sample here. When Franklin Roosevelt, who of course came to Washington first to be assistant secretary of the Navy under Woodrow Wilson. When Franklin Roosevelt began his first fireside chat to the country over radio, which was exciting to the country in its day as the Internet is an hours. He began his remarks with two words that do not appear on the transcript in the

library at Hyde Park. He began his speech, his address. He said, my friends today, that seems normal. We've had presidents who feel our pain. We've had presidents who were in our living room all the time, but it was a novel moment for Americans to think presidents ought to be their friends. I don't want the president to be my friends.

George Will: I want them to take care of that. The laws be faithfully executed. I want them to be the head of one of the three branches of one of our mini governance. This idea that we ought to have a charismatic president who was the moral auditor of the country, who speaks whenever a rock star dies to express our national grief. I it's quite seriously. It is. It is not. To have a political figure this central to our consciousness. Ronald Reagan wasn't a charismatic president. He was in, he was, he, he, here's what happened. Conservatives for many years because they saw progressivism mostly advanced by President Teddy Roosevelt, Woodrow Wilson, uh, Franklin Roosevelt, Mandarin Johnson conservatives for many years at a healthy suspicion of executive power. And they expressed this by advocating congressional supremacy. There text was James Burnham, one of the founding editors of national review. What a wonderful book called Congress and the American tradition. Them beginning at noon, January 20th, 1981, conservatives begin to have the heady experience of Ronald Reagan and executive power. And they fell in love with it and they begin to lose. There had been a wholesome suspicion of executive power, which by the way, came from the founders whose original grievance with government of Westminster was a grievance against, uh, the arbitrary power known as the royal prerogative

Judy Woodruff: come back to it just quickly, just to the judiciary and, and to, in a number of two things. Yeah. A number of Republicans can serve as like, no, Donald Trump isn't perfect. There are a lot of things I don't like about him, but the economy's going great and he's appointing conservatives to the, to the federal judiciary, but one after another after another,

George Will: but Gorsuch, that's their argument. Yes, he does this, that now they but Gorsuch. Yeah.

Judy Woodruff: What about that argument that that's a reason to support him because he's appointing judges.

George Will: That's the reason to support a republican president. Like any Republican president would have cut corporate taxes. Barack Obama was in favor of cutting the corporate tax rate. Any Republican president would have had a deregulatory agenda. Any Republican president would have appointed judges, largely called from lists provided by people like the Federalist Society of which I am a card carrying member. That's not what Donald Trump brings. It's an orthodox. Any, as I say, any Republican president would have given voters that what he brings is the manner, the line, the name calling all of this, which I think we'll do more lasting damage to the country. You can't unring these bells. The Nixon's surreptitious burglaries did. They were surreptitious. They were exposed, they

were punished and we moved on. It's going to be extremely difficult to restore the tone of American life that prevails from Washington through Barack Obama.

Judy Woodruff: You're saying Trump ism lasts how much longer than yeah,

George Will: the Trump presidency? No, because one of the things, again, my, my uh, obsession with the elephant in presidency we have, he has shown how fast a president using all the modern mass media, including the social media, can change the tone of our public life. Maybe I'm not confident with this. I'm not used to looking on the bright side of things. Maybe you took away my last question.

George Will: All right. We'll just save it. Maybe someone with a different manner. Someone who says, calm down, who repeats the next to last paragraph of Lincoln's first inaugural. We not are not enemies. We must not be enemies. Who appeals as Lincoln did in that inaugural to the better angels of our nature. Maybe someone like that can affect as abrupt a change as Mr. Trump is. Rod Say, I do not think the American people are angry. The Fox viewers are angry at MSNBC. Viewers are angry. The cable audience together as a small slice of this country. I think normal walking around Americans are sad and embarrassed and exhausted and they're sad because of that

Speaker 3: [inaudible]

George Will: am I think they will, I think, I think Democrats and make a huge mistake if they think the country is, wants transformation. I think the country wants restoration.

Speaker 3: So,

Judy Woodruff: so when you wrote about this, I think a week or so ago, you wrote about what one of one of your thoughts about what Democrats need to do, uh, in this election today, you mentioned be more modest. What were you talking about?

George Will: Um, I noticed in the paper this morning, Elizabeth Warren, who I have a warm spot in my heart for her because she brings gravity and weight to politics with her ideas. There's a thing in the New York Times this morning comparing the candidates on health care and she says no more half measures. Oh my goodness. Well, this is a woman who had her first right after she announces her candidacy. She goes on a town hall with CNM and says, uh, yeah, single payer is fine. And now hundred and 77 million Americans get their healthcare from their employers. And rather like it another 40 or so million Americans have other private health insurance and rather like it, they're not gonna listen again. When you say if you like your healthcare plan, you can keep it because they don't trust that anymore. It seems to be to tell the American, again, this is a complicated society.

George Will: She says in this morning's paper, we shouldn't have half measures. We're talking about 18% of the American economy. We're talking about rural hospitals. We're talking about this astonishingly complex system applying to an elderly population. Three or four years, probably 40% of all medicare patients have chronic ailments that would any one of which would have killed them before. Modern Pharmacology, this complicated, worrisome, frightened, dangerous world. We're living in with healthcare and all the rest. And they're gonna. She says, no half measures are going to remake it. No, you're not. But not all the Democrats are for Medicare for all. Not all the demos. Joe Biden isn't. Joe Biden isn't. But the other six leading ones are,

Judy Woodruff: uh, so what? I mean, what, what are, what are, what are, okay, first of all, Democrats, what should Democrats do if they have a hope of defeating president Trump?

George Will: Oh, she began by talking about what people talk about around the kitchen table. And I guarantee you it's not abolishing the electoral college, which wasn't gonna happen. Uh, I mean, just not, that's as close to a certainty as you can say in a democracy. Uh, I, I really don't think reparations for slavery. That's an interesting argument there, but that's not what people are talking about. They're talking about healthcare costs. They're talking about prescription drug costs. By the time we have the selection, next time they're going to be talking about the business cycle, perhaps, uh, they're going to be noticing that it is, I think I've said when the next recession starts with a budget deficit of trillion dollars. That's going to be really interesting. Um, there are wholesome worries people have about their infrastructure. I mean, they said, we promise this trillion dollar infrastructure, all these bright shiny things. What happened? Talk about things that people care about.

Judy Woodruff: Just quickly, you mentioned reparations. Just as a side question. Do you think there's some solution when it comes to reparations?

George Will: Don't say reparation, any form of reparation? I do. I think reparations of various sorts have been made over the years through affirmative action and before that and other social programs that were not targeted explicitly at people because of race but but covered people because of race. I think if you really want to ratchet up the discord in America, which is a perverse aim, but if you wanted to ratchet up the discourse, discord, begin allocating guilt over eight generations since the under slavery. It's a, it's a hopeless task. You've got all kinds of, I mean a majority of Americans today are descended from people who were not here when the 13th amendment.

Judy Woodruff: That is the idea. Is there any worth in the idea of it? If it could,

George Will: there is worth in the idea of ameliorative measures to help those who don't have enough and those who have trouble taking advantage of the opportunities that society has regardless of race, color, or creed. There is nothing that seems

to me to be said for taking a slice of the American population and saying that we shall now have a kind of special reparations for you because of injuries done to you. It who's going to administer it? How do you calibrate it? Elizabeth Warren it picking on her, but jeppers, she, she said this morning there should be repre or I think I read this, correct me if I'm wrong, there should be reparations for gay people because before the Obergefell decision, uh, making, uh, uh, establishing a right to same sex marriage, a gay people could not file joint tax returns the enough, I mean, again, talk about things that don't make your sound strange to normal Americans.

Judy Woodruff: What, what are conservatives to do in this next election? It is, say if it's Joe Biden hypothetical, if Joe Biden is the nominee running against Donald Trump, what do you do if you're a, if you're a conservative, you're George will. What do you do?

George Will: The most important thing for conservatives is to remove from the head of the Republican party, someone who's anti-conservative. So the most important thing for conservatives is to change the presidency. I ideally, from this conservative point of view, a Democrat would no doubt when am the Republicans would keep the Senate and not much would happen legislatively unless there was serious compromise, which is what the system was designed to do in the first place.

Judy Woodruff: But does that mean, does that mean conservatives should vote for the Democrat if that's the way to remove president Trump?

George Will: Well, there are a couple of Democrats out there that would test even my desire to see the president. Uh, but basically if the choices between a central stem socrat and the current president, of course you get to do it to clear the ground and start over first declare the ground the logic of that. I don't need to draw a picture.

Judy Woodruff: Okay. Uh, so who, who's central stammer? I mean, who are the centrist Democrats in this, in this group?

George Will: Biden, Klobuchar Hickenlooper. Uh, there, John Delaney did a lot of them

Judy Woodruff: and, and it does one of them, you think stand a better chance, make a better, stronger case than the others.

George Will: Well getting John Delaney isn't Hickenlooper's and all through this nominating processes a difficult, uh, nominating Biden is difficult because of Biden.

Speaker 3: [inaudible]

George Will: just breathtaking.

Speaker 3: [inaudible]

George Will: yeah. Tell your Biden story. 19 2008 September, he was on the ticket with Obama running for vice president Lehmann brothers melts down countries and panic, um, by Jim says, thanks to George W. Bush was president is not given the kind of robust presidential leadership he should be given. And he says, well, in my October, 1929, when the stock market crashed, President Roosevelt, he said, President Roosevelt went on television.

Speaker 3: [inaudible]

George Will: no, I don't think that disqualifies him. Those are, you still vote for him? No one's kind of an adventure.

Judy Woodruff: So, all right, we're, we're wrapping up. Who Your definition of conservatism, your definition of say the ideal who, who out there on the political landscape fits the definition of a

George Will: pat Toomey senator from Pennsylvania. Ben Sasse of I think been here will be here soon. Oh, there are a lot of good people out there. Bill Weld for Pete's sake is running in the primaries against him. Bill Weld is red. Hayak mot the road to serfdom. He's read the big button, the Constitution of liberty. He's experienced, he's intelligent. He's very funny. He comes from a very old, very rich family. And he was asked one day, a governor weld, uh, did your family come over on the Mayflower? He said, no. Uh, my family came later. We sent the help on the baby.

Speaker 3: What we're good to go to get the cottage. Right.

Judy Woodruff: So, so does one of those folks you mentioned or somebody else fit the definition of who should run?

George Will: Yes, I've, I've voted

Judy Woodruff: for Ben Sasse in 2016 I wrote him in. So I'm going to come back to the question. Are you, you actually raised earlier? Is some of this is, is kind of a dark outlook. George, um, leave us with something positive to take away from this, from this session.

George Will: Well, I say on here that this book is a summons to pessimism, not fatalism, fatalism, not despair, not acquiescence to vast impersonal forces, but pessimism in the sense that there's so much that can go wrong in a free society, that you have to be wary at all times of the ways it can go wrong. Here's the bright side. No one ever got rich. Betting against the United States are against the American people. They are more sensible and less passionate and inflamed than some of their representatives would have us believe they are, or some of the people in my business would have you believe they are. The American institutions have

been enormously durable. People rather cavalierly say, we're in a constitutional crisis. We've had one constitutional crisis that is one crisis the Madisonian institutions could not handle. That was a civil war. Watergate. All the rest of the institutions took care of them just fine. So the architecture's fine if we reestablish the equilibrium, but most important reason for prosperity and for happiness is this great new book. Yeah.

Speaker 3: Oh,

George Will: the story is told, Andrew May correct me on this story, was told that when Margaret Thatcher, after she was elected head of the parliamentary conservative party, but before she was prime minister, she was at a meeting of some of her members and some guy was up nattering on about the beauties of centrism and about transcending ideology and all the rest. And Mrs Thatcher reached into her capacious and justly famous handbag and pulled out a copy of high x, the Constitution of liberty slammed it on the desk and said, this is what we believe. And a few years, a president will take the conservative sensibility, slam it on the desk and said, this is what we believe.

Speaker 3: [inaudible] you are signing books and Andy is

Judy Woodruff: signing books afterwards. Thank you all.