

# CONVERSATIONS

WITH BILL KRISTOL

## Conversations with Bill Kristol

Guest: Newt Gingrich, former Speaker of the House

### Table of Contents

**I: America in a Dangerous World 0:15 – 25:29**

**II: Reforming our Feckless Bureaucracies 25:29 – 50:33**

**III. Barack Obama and After 50:33 – 1:06:40**

**IV: America's Past and its Future 1:06:40 – 1:19:31**

### **I: America in a Dangerous World (0:15 – 25:29)**

KRISTOL: Welcome to CONVERSATIONS. I'm Bill Kristol, and I'm very pleased to have back with me today Newt Gingrich, the former Speaker of the House, political leader and intellectual leader of American conservatism and more than American conservatism.

Let's talk about the world. It's this year 2015 – it's what 70 years after the end of World War II, 25 years after the fall of the Berlin Wall, and we're speaking just a couple of days before September 11th, 14 years after the attack on the U.S. You've thought a lot about this – what do you make of the world we're in?

GINGRICH: Well, I think, first of all, we underestimate how much the world affects us, and I think that you have forces on the move all across the planet that are going to make the next 10 or 15 years very complicated. I think actually we don't have the right language to describe what we're faced with. Our very words get us – make it very hard to do policy. The current Syrian refugee case is a good example. These are not refugees in the classic sense, this is a population on the move almost in the late Roman Empire sense of populations pouring out of central Asia.

Twenty percent of Syria is now on the move. Now, if that were happening in this country, that would be 60 million people. The idea that Europe is somehow going to absorb everybody in Africa who would have a better life, and everybody in the Middle East who would like to not be killed, you'll see the collapse of the European system over the next few years if they continue to have this kind of mindless openness – in the sense of being guilt-ridden, for reasons I don't understand. Nobody in Europe caused the chaos of Syria or the chaos of Libya, and I don't understand why they believe they should be browbeaten by the news media into undertaking policies that are unattainable.

KRISTOL: What about us?

GINGRICH: We have a similar problem although we've gotten steadily – despite Obama's rhetoric – we've gotten steadily tougher about the border, we're taking it step by step. I think there's a growing awareness in the U.S. If you look at the Gallup poll, where something like 120 million people said they would like to move to the U.S. Only 6 million, by the way, from Mexico so you can take care of the issue. But 120 million people, if you walked around and said, "Do you really think you could accept one-third the population of the U.S.?"

If they came, they'd all write home and say, "This is cool," so next you'll another 120 million who would now have a right to move because after all, "my sister is there." I think this is something we have to really think about at length. I'm for immigration. I think immigrants are key to our future but I think it has to be controlled, it has to be people who want to assimilate, people who want to learn English, people who want to get a job, and I think what is occurring is much worse in Europe than here because the European system is dramatically more oriented in welfare. If you arrive in Europe, you have a reasonable grasp to say, "I'm going to be taken care of."

KRISTOL: It sounds as if you don't think the 21st century will be, or should be, a century of decreased emphasis on national sovereignty, greater internationalization of everything. You're either analytically or normatively – ?

GINGRICH: A few years ago, I co-chaired a United Nations reform task force with former Democratic Majority Leader George Mitchell. And after several years of looking at the UN, I can report to you that it is sufficiently corrupt and sufficiently inefficient. That no reasonable person would put faith in it.

If somebody said the UN is going to come protect your neighborhood, it would be a really good argument for moving. Because they're incapable. Look at the United Nations involvement with rape in the Congo. Look at the times the United Nations has stood to one side while people have been slaughtered because the technical circumstances make it impossible to intervene. Then you have to say, why would you send the United Nations peacekeeping force that can't keep peace?

I think we have to confront – a lot of this internationalism is people like John Kerry who loved going from four-star hotel to four-star hotel to have gourmet dinners discussing big ideas with their peers who are also very sophisticated people. And they float in this fantasy world that has almost no resemblance to what's actually happening.

KRISTOL: And so the nation-state can be strong but also not xenophobic, I suppose, and not lead back to wars? That's the argument you always hear from the EU types and the UN types, you know?

GINGRICH: I think there's a real difference between nationalism and xenophobia. Nationalism says, "I want to protect people that are in the United States." We are the most diverse country in the world with ethnic groups. I think – once I spoke to an international forum and I said, "Look, I know many of you are frustrated that we seem to pay attention to your country." I said, "We have a firm ground rule, we only pay attention to countries that have people living in the U.S." Unfortunately, every country on the planet has people living in the U.S.

So we're very unique, we're very different. But I think we also have to recognize that there are boundaries. You can't have a borderless world in which everybody randomly gets to go to the nearest place that will raise their standard of living without having any skills, without having a work ethic, without having a commitment. And not necessarily willing to learn and become part of that particular country.

It's a growing problem, and you can see the reaction in Australia, you can see the reaction in Great Britain. In Denmark, where they've actually said, "Do not send us any refugees. We don't want any more people to come here because it's being so disruptive." Particularly if you have people come in who do not want to assimilate. Who want to live separately and create an enclave and behave in ways that violate the norms in the civilization that they're joining.

KRISTOL: Speaking of that, what about the threat of Islamic terrorism, radicalism, Islamism, whatever we call it? I mean – overrated, underrated? I guess I would have said 20 years ago, "Oh come on, that's not going to be really a fundamental threat in the 21st Century," but I think I would have been wrong.

GINGRICH: You just illustrated why we need new words to describe a new reality. We can't – we have an administration which will not describe any of the sources of terrorisms. So it's very hard to design a model.

When you realize that ISIS, for example, has a Twitter program and retweets about 60,000 items a day. I mean, they have an identity. They know what they're doing. Much of what they do in beheading people is either to raise money or to get recruits. "Come to the Middle East and have fun!"

And there is a percentage of young males in particular, but also a growing number of young females who are attracted to this kind of perverse romanticism. You too can come and slaughter people. So you have a willful growth of people who are dedicated to defeating our civilization. Who are very clear about what they're doing. And then you have Western elites who are terrified of telling the truth and keep looking for some way to rationalize it.

So finally you end up with a gun, with an AK47 on a train from Amsterdam to Paris, and people are confused about his motives. Even though he is a Moroccan who has been in Syria and clearly thinks of himself as an Islamist who is out to kill people to impose his way of life.

And there's this constant desire by the news media and by the political elites to hide from the reality. One, there's a worldwide movement. You have bombings in Thailand as well as you have bombings in Europe. Two, the gravest danger is that they will eventually get weapons of mass destruction. Whether that is cyberattacks – there's a Syrian cyber-army that routinely tries to penetrate the Pentagon.

So we shouldn't assume that knowledge is necessarily blocked from people who are radically different than us. There are, in fact, people from MIT who are part of ISIS. So you have very first-rate minds with very good technical educations. You have to assume sooner or later they'll get a nuclear weapon. They don't have the deliver it by ICB, just to have a truck drive up and set it off. And it doesn't have to be fancy, it can just be a dirty bomb which would do fairly large amount of damage.

I think you have to take all that really seriously, and you have to recognize, despite all the babbling about nuclear disarmament and living in a nuclear-free world. The North Koreans build more nukes every year. The Pakistanis build more nukes every year. Pakistan is a country deeply penetrated by Islamists. The Iranians probably already have a bomb, if not they will have a bomb in the very near future and it's very possible the Saudis will buy a bomb in order to compete with the Iranian bomb.

So when you start looking at how dangerous the world is getting you have to conclude that you are inevitably going to have spend more on national security. And focus more intentionally on very tough decisions about how we survive in the world.

KRISTOL: Let's talk about that. So what, I mean, what are the fundamental things that we have to do that we're not doing? Do you think we've done a decent job in the last 14 years since 9/11?

GINGRICH: In terms of strategy, we've done a terrible job because neither the Bush Administration nor the Obama Administration has been willing to tell the truth. The fact is this is a worldwide movement impelled by religion. Deeply dedicated to destroying our civilization and requires ultimately a response that matches it and overmatches it, and we keep, you know, bouncing from minor to minor crisis.

So in the process we have is the decay of Libya, the decay of Yemen, the decay of Somalia, the decay of Syria, and as waves of people go out – a very small minority, but a significant minority – turn out to be the radicals. So if Germany accepts 800,000 Syrian refugees – my guess, and this is purely a guess; I don't have any secret data – but my guess is at least one percent will be Islamists. Well, that's 8,000. So you say, cheerfully, "Let me open my borders, and at least 8,000 people show up who want to kill us." That's a fairly irrational strategy.

I think – and it’s compounded from this standpoint – the view of the United States. You have an Islamist challenge, you have a Chinese challenge. The Chinese are building artificial islands surrounding the South China Sea in a way that only makes sense if you assume you want to declare sovereignty over this enormous area. The Russians are still very dangerous. They’re a weak economy, but they’re a very nationalist state, and they have 5 or 6,000 nuclear weapons. I mean it’s – in some ways – so you have to design an American strategy that takes all of these kinds of things into reality. And frankly, our elites have no interest in trying to do that.

They’re very, very worried about global warming, and they’re very worried about helping refugees and about strengthening the UN as a multi-national center of getting away from nations. They have nobody in the Obama Administration that has any serious plans for Russia, China, or defeating the Islamists.

KRISTOL: Institutionally, it seems to be organizationally we’ve done almost nothing. I guess that’s what strikes me. If you think in the beginning of World War II this massive, obviously transformation of the military of the industrial base of the U.S. and sudden development of intelligence capabilities came into place. Same sort of at the beginning to the Cold War, a little delayed but then a big, big overhaul. Post-fall of the Berlin Wall or, more importantly, perhaps, post-9/11. It’s really striking to me that the government that I served in – which is what, 25 years ago now? – it looks kind of the same.

The State Department, the intelligence agencies. The military probably has done a better job, but I mean you can’t – don’t you think it really is a little startling? I guess that follows your point – the elites not being serious about the world we are living in.

GINGRICH: I think you see Congress very slowly beginning to move on this topic. Beginning to think about whether it’s cyber – there are two pretty good cyber-bills in the House that are going to make it step in the right direction. If the Senate moves the same kind of bill this Fall, that actually will be a step in the right direction.

But nobody, and this is probably because this is a conspiracy of bureaucracies. We’ve built these huge bureaucracies, which are used to doing what they want to do. You go to them – and this is something George Shultz talked to me about many years ago, because he used to try to close the smaller U.S. consulates in Europe in order to free up resources to do more things in the Third World. Well, you know, everybody in the State Department was used to the idea that they wanted to go to Strasbourg, not to Chad. The institutional resistance to that kind of change was very profound.

And I think you have the same thing here – in a bizarre way, it was probably an advantage that in 1938 and 1939, the military was as small as it was. Because they could actually grow very rapidly into the modern world with modern equipment and modern doctrine in a way that they might not been able to had they remained as big as they were in World War I.

KRISTOL: New leadership, right? Didn’t they famously by 1941, or ’42, the people running the Army would have been number 200 in the normal –?

GINGRICH: Marshall retired an amazing number of senior officers who couldn’t understand the modern world. And that’s even in a small Army. But if you had a huge Army and if they had a lot more institutional resisting, he couldn’t have done it.

KRISTOL: That is sort of our situation, it seems to me.

GINGRICH: It’s a little bit like there was a faction in the Army that really hated counterinsurgency. There was a real split with people like Petraeus saying, “Look, you got to learn to do this because this is the fight we’re in,” but people saying, “Yeah, but I really liked confronting the Soviets and the Germans, and I really need lot of heavy armor.” So you get into this kind of constant tension about what we’re going to do and how we’re going to do it.

And, I think you've got to rethink our national strategy almost from the ground up and you have to recognize from day one that it cannot be a singular strategy. You have to have a totally different style for China from the style you have for the Islamists, for the style you have for dealing with Russia, and that doesn't even get us in the Latin America and Africa and other places.

That's the requirement of being a world-power. That you got to learn how to cope with complexity, with a certain level of ease, and you can't play bunch ball, and everybody goes to this year's crisis.

KRISTOL: And you think the public is ready for this? Is the American public ready for accepting the responsibilities – whether they're financial, but also in terms of the turmoil that the reorganization would impose? It does seem to me you step back and look at the – go through airports and the TSA – the responses have been pretty –

On one hand, we've prevented a lot of terror attacks, I suppose, and that's good, and we took the fight to that, which, I think, helped under the Bush Administration. It doesn't seem like a response, anything like commensurate to the threats that are coming.

GINGRICH: It's not. But again you get into this very difficult, take the case in Mubarak. Mubarak was, in fact, clearly a dictator. And even an authoritarian and secret police and there were lots of things going on. But he also was really very pro-American. Didn't particularly want to fight with Israel and hated the Islamists because he understood that they hated him. So you have to make a decision at some point in World War II. For better or worse, we said, you know, we're going to survive with Stalin because Stalin helping us beat Hitler is better than isolating Stalin and having him end up as Hitler's ally.

That was very conscious. We tolerated Franco being a dictator in Spain because we had a limited ability to change the world and we decided where to spend it. This is when we were emerging as really a gigantic power. By 1945, we were about 50 percent of the world's economic activity, because everybody else had been bombed. We still have limits so you have to have strategies, and you have to decide what really matters to you. And you also have to think about why is the other guy doing what he's doing?

I think that we today have a State Department, which is incapable of being effective and really I think has to be overhauled from the ground up. I mean, you look at the negotiating with Iran, unless it was a willful desire to surrender and they actually didn't care – they were going to surrender no matter what. It is incomprehensible how bad the negotiation was. You'll have to ask something, did we actually hire adults to go and be this stupid? Because the Iranians just routinely ran over them, and they tolerated it. It was thought the Iranians were the super-power and we were the ones pleading for something. It was the opposite of the actual balance of power in the region.

So I think, in that sense, you've got to decide what we, your priorities, you've to stick to your priorities and you've got to reshape the institutions until they work. And that's going to require a president who is very aggressive and who's very willing to take on the Congress. Because the Congress in the end defends a great deal of pork, and a great deal of incompetence. You can't explain the decay of the American space program without looking at some members of Congress who have propped up inefficient and incompetent companies because they were in their district or their state.

If we tried to go to the moon that way, we still wouldn't have gotten there.

KRISTOL: We have this kind of discussion, then you look out at the presidential campaign and the Congressional discussions and the general public discourse. It's not at all – to use a term I used a minute ago – commensurate with the scale of the challenges or with the real ambitions to make big changes.

Space, you've been very involved in that, that seems to be an example. Occasionally, someone says, "Gee, isn't it kind of pathetic that we can't do it?" I think it's almost unprecedented in human history.

As I understand it, we can't do in space what we did 40 years ago. We literally couldn't. What else has a national, a modern technological nation that didn't suffer some massive defeat in war or the plague or something like that regressed or something like that? That's not supposed to happen.

GINGRICH: It's a remarkable failure, and Boeing recently announced they are now going to build the capsule we used in the 1960s. This is their next great contribution to getting to Mars, is they're going to rebuild the Apollo capsule. And you, okay, think, you know, "We did that 40 years ago. What are you doing? 50 years ago. What are you doing?"

But I think it's a combination of bureaucracy, pork-barrel politics and the Congress, the industrial complex that basically says, "We don't want any new players because we've got all the lobbyists, we know how to rig the game."

Which is how you get things like the F35, which in any reasonable country, would be an enormous scandal. Grossly overpriced, grossly overweight, very ineffective as a fighter plane, not going to meet any of its goals, and I think that that's sort of thing that you're faced with. And as part of why the public is so increasingly angry because you have this huge mound of bureaucracy in Washington, surrounded by a mound of lobbyists who then manipulate the Congress and the Executive Branch in order to sustain continuing the decay.

And I think people get that. People understand that you look at your smartphone and you look at the speed of change or you look at your ATM machine. I was asking an audience, "When's the last time you went and found a pay phone?" Well, if you're the federal government, none of these adaptations have led to the kind of changes that you expected. And I think people expect that but there are a couple of real inhibitions, having run for president once and discovered how dense the system is. How hard it is.

The first is, that the news media covers what the news media understands. You know? So the reporters are you know, if you give them a really good dissertation on a really interesting topic and then you – I'll give you a real story. When I was first Speaker, Hillary Clinton was involved with cattle futures. When she had made apparently 1,000/1 return on her investment as a sign of the brilliance of which she'd undertaken investment. I went to the Republican National Committee meeting, and of course, we were at our high point and people were giddy and we'd taken over the House –

KRISTOL: '95 right?

GINGRICH: '95. So I have this terrific policy speech, and at the very end, they were all excited and they were applauding, and I thought, "Oh, what the hell." I gave a 90-second riff on cattle futures. And said, "Basically, we're not going to back off on learning about cattle futures." And of course, the Republican crowd went crazy. And David Broder turned to Joe Gaylord, who was my sidekick and said, "Which do you think we're going to print?" And they were right. I had given them the excuse to avoid serious policy by printing something they understood.

And the danger you face is, and you see it right now with candidates going around. You can go around and make 23 great policy speeches and get zero coverage, or you have the right quip or the right Tweet or the right Instagram, and suddenly, bam, you get a fair amount of coverage. That's a challenge.

The second challenge is that the elites describe what's possible, and then say, well, that's not practical. You have to be practical. The fact is, I mean, George Shultz when he was Secretary of State, he was one of the people I most admired in government. He had been in the Department of Labor under Eisenhower, he had been Director of the Budget under Nixon, and he had been Secretary of State under Reagan. I mean, amazing background. And Shultz would always say, "You go into business and get X done, and somebody does it. You got into government and say, 'Let's get Y done,' and everybody studies it but nothing quite happens."

But what I think George misunderstood was that wasn't an argument for acceptance. That was not even for rethinking our whole approach to bureaucracy. And I am very encouraged Congressman Jeff Miller who's Chairman of the Veterans Committee just passed a bill out of the House on a bipartisan basis, that allows the Secretary of Veterans Affairs to fire any bureaucrat who in his judgement is not serving veterans. It's the first explicit, decisive break with the 1883 Civil Service Act. And begins to move you towards the idea of what would it be like if you decided you were going to have government that was manageable? What would that model be like?

I think the Veterans Administration, because it involves our moral feeling about veterans, maybe the breakpoint that is emotionally powerful enough that you're going to see real change down the road. But we need candidates – it would be fabulous to have a campaign next year, which our side said, "Look, you elect me, we are going to fundamentally change the bureaucracy." And Hillary's base was saying, "You'll elect me, and I'm going to stay with my good friends here in the bureaucracy," and let the country choose, and my guess is the country would overwhelmingly vote to change the bureaucracy.

## **II: Reforming our Feckless Bureaucracies (25:29 – 50:33)**

KRISTOL: You've opened up two very interesting lines. One is – what are the key things it would take to fundamentally change a very broken governmental system, I think, both at the executive and Congressional level and surrounding levels?

And the other is, since you ran for President and have observed this closely over the decades, how suited are election campaigns to framing those issues in the way that could lead to the changes that are necessary?

I don't know which one of those you want to take first? They're related, obviously.

GINGRICH: I think, first of all, we very badly need a doctrine – one of the great challenges to conservative think-tanks is we need a doctrine for the overhaul of the entire bureaucratic structure. I was with somebody just last night who's a real expert on managing systems and he said, "We really need to apply Schumpeter's creative destruction to government, and if you did that, what would it be like and how would you do it?"

And I would hope that the conservative movement over the next year or so will develop a set of initial, like the first 10 big things that the next President should do, and they should be as big as suspending the Civil Service Act. I mean, and saying, "We're going to set metrics, we're going to check performance, if you're not performing correctly, we'll give you the chance to get retrained. If you fail, you're gone."

I also think we have to look at the whole issue of how we hire people. You had today lifetime employment in the federal government when you have places like Facebook which review every quarter whether or not you're getting your job done. And if you look around the country, there are very few places left that have 30 or 40 employee contracts.

KRISTOL: Universities. Tenure. Which says it all.

GINGRICH: Which is frankly a major issue we can talk about later in terms of how you reduce the cost of college education? Which is – which is what the conservatives should say, "The real solution to the student loan is to make college so cheap you don't have to borrow money." You could do that.

Not by doing what Hillary and Barack Obama want to do, which is "Let's keep spending even more billions to prop up the bureaucracies of education" but rather if you simply listed –

KRISTOL: Let's stay on this just for 5 to 10 minutes. I'm interested in this too, and I think our viewers are. So let's talk higher education. It's obviously a crisis, both financially and intellectually.

GINGRICH: The first thing is, if you go through and say, "Tell us what it would take to get back to the same number of bureaucrats per student that we had in 1950."

KRISTOL: College bureaucrats.

GINGRICH: College bureaucrats. You got a place like the University of California system, which has been expanding the number of deans, associate deans, assistant deans, assistant to the assistant dean, etc. Intern deans, you know? Secretaries to the deans. You go back and look and say, "What would it take to get back to almost no bureaucracy?" Why has this happened in an age when, frankly, with iPads and smartphones you could reduce almost all the paperwork to self-administration?

KRISTOL: One of the reasons is the federal government probably.

GINGRICH: But then that becomes a really good thing to say, and therefore here's the bill we need to pass in Washington to strip out all of these bureaucratic requirements. Because right now we play this game where Washington says, "Gee, there are too many of them," and they say, "Gee, you're making us do it." And nothing ever happens. So I'd rather take both sides and say, "You're right; there are too many regulations from Washington so why don't we have a bill that eliminates the regulations and moves us to – ?"

Lamar Alexander said this the other day. He was saying he wanted to reduce – I'm not sure that this bill does this – but he was trying to get a bill written that would reduce the amount of information – we currently, I think, ask 100 questions for student aid. And he said, "You could get that down to a postcard with three questions. Who I am, my family's income, and what I'm wanting to borrow, and compute everything else from that." It's that kind of radical slashing on the paperwork, bureaucracy side.

I think, second, you have to recognize to what extent higher education costs mean – you know, the student fee for the football team. And for other things you want to do and people, to the degree, they want to pay it, I'm for them paying it. I'm against them borrowing money to pay it. Because I think it sets up a really bad long-term lifetime finance problem.

And then the third problem, of course, if you now have the number of universities that are teaching nonsense and where you can only get tenure if you agree to teach nonsense, is a very profound long-term challenge to the country. We're doing a piece on new words for a new reality, and one of the things we're starting with is Paul Ehrlich who in 1966, or 1968, wrote *The Population Bomb* in which he explains that Britain will probably cease to exist by 2000. That we have lost the effort to feed the human race. That at least 800 million people will die.

I mean, you go through all of his predictions. None of which came true. Well, Ehrlich today is a highly regarded, you know, person. The President's Science Advisor co-authored a book with Ehrlich in the 70s. They belong to this cult of the limits to growth and the limits to human population. The real problem is too many people. And the degree to which they're factually crazy has no impact. So if you went in and said, "I'd like to do a dissertation on why Paul Ehrlich is nuts," you'd be much less likely to get tenure at Stanford. Then, if you went in to say, "I want to write a dissertation on why Ehrlich in the long run will be right, even though for the first 50 years he's been crazy." That would prove you were a visionary with the appropriate ideological values.

KRISTOL: Don't you think the online possibilities, the possibilities of educating people online really are radically impressive and could really change the way colleges deliver education? They're resetting that. Some of them are doing a little bit of stuff but –

GINGRICH: The key to all of that is the business community. Somebody we study is Sebastian Thrun, who originally developed the Google self-driving car and did Google Street Scene and headed up running a company called Udacity. The word *audacity* without the “A”.

And he has invented what he calls “nano-courses.” It costs like \$100 month, and you can take, as rapidly as you want to, a whole series of courses. For example, you get nine courses in entrepreneurship. He’s doing courses in computer programming. He has now signed contracts with people like AT&T and Google that if you pass his courses, they will count them as certified. And what it does it allows him to sidestep the whole accreditation bureaucracy, which is designed to protect the old order.

Now, the other side of that that, I think, is going to be fascinating to watch. Harvard has put their entry-level computer course online. Yale apparently now uses the Harvard computer course. Because it’s powerful and so effective. And it’s available to anybody in the world for free. It hasn’t quite penetrated yet the – you know, you can really, an enormous amount at almost no cost. And I suspect once people begin to understand that better –

Now, in the Udacity case they have mentors. They think it’s very important – the mentor can be electronic, it can be somebody you call, it doesn’t have to be in your neighborhood. But they think it’s very important that you have somebody you can go to that can help you through the parts you don’t quite get. There’s still a human need for coaching but that’s not the same as the professor-centric, you know, lecture model of the past.

KRISTOL: And I think in liberal education too, there’s still no substitute for a great teacher sitting in a seminar room with 12 people. I mean, there’s an awful lot of stuff online now that enable an awful lot of people to get a pretty good education free or pretty cheap on their own and better than what they’re getting at 98 percent of colleges and universities in the U.S.

You just wonder how long they can make kids at some, you know, second- or third-rate school take a politically correct course on, I would say, Western Civilization but they don’t do Western Civilization anymore? So Non-western Civilization instead of listening to Don Kagan’s, which are free from Yale, where you would learn a ton more, especially if they set it up so that you could have a graduate student or a teaching assistant you could talk to electronically or, you know, every week to answer your questions and get your suggestions for further reading and you would have syllabuses online that would point people to, you know, further – I was going to say – further readings in these areas. It just seems like there’s huge opportunities there that would both save a ton of money and actually give a lot of people much better education.

GINGRICH: I think in particular there is an opportunity here to reach out to precisely the people who aren’t going to get into an elite school. And to reach out to them at every level. There’s a program now in Baltimore where if high school students pass a computer program, they’re guaranteed a \$40,000 a year job when they get out of high school. And it’s aimed right at kids that have no hope for the future, no sense, and all of the sudden, the kids going for that, “I’ll study,” because they can see a direct immediate opportunity.

I think you’ll see a lot more of that sort of thing. It’s been dramatically held back by three forces: the teachers unions, who just hate this concept of fluidity and change. The classic bureaucracies who are all really deeply threatened by this, and the professoriate. The people who are the Mandarins of our culture, who have historically bestowed status, are all panic-stricken that, in fact, we’ll all realize the emperor has no intellectual clothing. And people will start learning in chaotic and uncontrollable ways that might lead them to not automatically become cookie-cutter left-wingers in the way that they’re supposed to.

KRISTOL: I do think the next President could really be – it’s close to a tipping point, it strikes me, anyway, as you said – and if you had a Secretary of Education, backed up by a President who came in determined to see if he couldn’t really use really mostly the persuasive and illustrative powers of the

federal government, but also some regulatory issues with accreditations and so forth, to really jab the system. I really wonder whether you couldn't have a massive transformation.

GINGRICH: I think you could move – again, it depends on whether you think your job is to get a Secretary of Education who collaborates with the education complex and is acceptable to them, or who focuses on learning in America and is happy to work with anybody who's interested in learning in America. Those are radically different definitions of the system, and one of the things which has caught the Obama Secretary of Education, who I think in some ways would like to have been more daring, is he can't get outside the teachers unions. It is literally impossible to survive as a Democrat and be at war with the teachers unions.

KRISTOL: And the higher-ed complex, which is millions of people and mostly Democrats now and he's not going to take them on. I thought about this as I came to Washington to work for Bill Bennet, the Chief of Staff of the Education Department. I think we had the right instinct, which was to take on what Bill called the education blob and try to think about educating young people and helping them educate themselves and helping others educate them as opposed to serving the education complex.

The technology really went a funny way. I would say it wasn't there probably. 1986, '87 how did you really do that in a concrete way? Well, you really push school choice, you defended home-schooling, you did all kinds of things, you tried to empower parents. But you still were dealing with the basic institutions.

GINGRICH: I went as an undergraduate at Emory – I was sent by a Republican State Senator over to meet Pete Jensen at the Rich Computing Center at Georgia Tech. And I ended up basically as a volunteer studying computing with Jensen for many years.

And after I got to be a professor out of West Georgia College, I get this call one day, about 1972, and he says, "We have this new device, which we call an ALF for Audio-graphic Learning Facility. And it's going to be an online learning system. It's set up here at Tech, and we're looking for somebody who will volunteer, who will use it as a distance-learning device." 1972, you're using traditional telephone lines, you have almost no computing capacity, you are so – your theory is so far ahead of the technology that it takes at least 30 years to catch up. We played around with it for about eight months and said – and I loved the idea back then – but I said, "This is a great idea but none of my students can do this." And of course, the feeding pace of information coming out of Tech was so slow on the telephone lines that were available at Carrolton, Georgia at that time.

So I think you're right, and part of what's intriguing – and Bill Gates has a line about this. He says, "You can never go as far in one year as you think you can, and you can often go dramatically further in five years than you think you can."

I think what's happening is that the experiential technologies of our time, that is the ability where we play around right now, for example, with the Facebook investment in virtual reality, which is a device they're trying to bring on the market for about the price of a PlayStation. And you put on it, and I mean, you are really in a virtual-reality setting. And we are looking at doing some things like, we're working on a film on why George Washington matters and we're going to try to shoot a few minutes of it in virtual reality just because we think we'll get young people intrigued just to see George Washington in a virtual-reality setting.

But none of that existed when you and Bill were working, and the other big thing, which I think all of us participated in and, you know, I went around, on *Nation at Risk* with Ted Bell and talking about the need for change. But all of us thought you could change the current educational system. And so we spent about 30 years going down a road that was hopeless because there in Baltimore, for example, they spend something like \$137,000 a year per student who passes the eighth-grade exam. So many of them fail. So I was looking at how do you change all that? Because the Catholic schools spend \$12,000 a year or \$9,000 a year and the kid passes? And what hit me was – and I had never quantified it before – the

Baltimore school system is something like a \$4.2 billion-system. It's the third most expensive big city school system in America. So the reformers are over here with a million dollars of reform money, and they're faced with a multibillion-dollar machine that wants to protect itself.

And that's the sort of imbalance we've had. So my conclusion has been you've got to look at the Udacities of the world, and the Khan Academies, places like that and recognize that – and recognize what you've got to do is move around the fortress because you're not going to change it, and let it atrophy as more and more takes place outside it.

KRISTOL: The model I've always – and I think you and I discussed this once – conservatives spend a whole lot of time, and I remember as a kid reading the *National Review* complain bitterly about the United States Post Office, which was a massive institution at one point. Employees unionized, inefficient, it was kind of considered, quintessential kind of case study in liberal government bureaucracy.

And people took it on and go nowhere basically. And then Fred Smith invented Federal Express and then email happened, and basically the Post Office has shrunk and is not a huge problem in America – it's still actually taking up more resources than it should, I'm sure, but it's sort of – it was a total very good example of end-running. But that required thinking about how to get information to people, not how to fix the Post Office.

GINGRICH: And the same thing is happening, I think, with education. And if you ever get the businesses to decide that they will be directly committed to the kids and that any kid that meets a certain standard will get a job, you will break loose both a lot of poverty because people will not see a reason to learn and you will break through a lot of learning because now you're not going to say, "Go over here and try to fix this school system." You're going to say, "How can I deliver in the poorest neighborhood in Baltimore or the poorest neighborhood in Washington? How could I deliver learning in a way that enables them to qualify for a job?"

And then how can I make sure the job intersects with the student? And that will send a change signal through the entire neighborhood. Because now Freddy or Sally will actually have a job, and they'll bring home money. And that begins to change the whole signaling about the culture.

KRISTOL: Come back to the federal government for a minute. You mentioned sort of massive civil service reform. Are you thinking the basic way it's been structured for 140 years or something like that?

Other thing: if one of the current presidential candidates call you – like I'm sure they do – and say, "What are my two big process, structural, institutional reforms of the federal government?" Is there some obvious sort of thing – Congress seems to be broken as well. The Executive Branch. It's unbelievable. The budget. There's no real budget; they spend more money than they take in. The Fed prints the money so the system – you step back and it's kind of crazy.

GINGRICH: I would draw a couple distinctions. Let me stay with the Executive Branch for a second. I really believe we should go towards a lot of prizes and move away from this belief of an input-center model. We recently ran a project called Constellation, which was supposed to get us to Mars. It was badly designed, it didn't work, and when they cancelled it, we had invested \$9 billion. Now, if you had taken the same \$9 billion and said, "This is the prize for whoever gets to Mars," you'd have at least seven or eight billionaires who would, instead of buying a football team, decide they wanted to play.

And you'd have a level of creativity and you wouldn't be paying anything for the planning and the experimentation. People tend to forget that the first great trans-Atlantic flight in 1927 is based on the Orteig Prize, which was set up in 1919, that said whoever can fly non-stop from New York to Paris gets \$25,000. And lots of people were trying to solve it.

It took them eight years to finally win it but there was a momentum of experimentation and change – because here’s the challenge you got. McCullough has a great new book out on the Wright Brothers – Callista and I visited the Wright Brother’s home in Dayton a few years ago – the Wright Brothers over a five-year period tried to fly 500 times.

They were doing it on their own, and so they were very frugal, and it cost about a dollar per flight. On December 17th, 1903, a Saturday, they get up in the morning, they make coffee, and they go out and they fail four times. On the fifth flight, they fly. And they began to figure out the breakthrough, how to get – from that point on the curve was amazing. Well, imagine your Congressional hearing and these guys were the aviation bureaucracy and they had failed 200 times and you say, what are you doing?

But because they were being measured by endpoint, not by process and because they’re putting up their own money they could go out and keep floundering until they figured it out. I think there are a lot of spaces where we want to do that.

KRISTOL: Could the U.S. government function that way? It’s so used to being input-driven and Congressional hearings are so used to you know –

GINGRICH: Historically, the British, for example, discovered the keys to navigation as a prize. The French discovered canning as a prize. I mean, prizes were big in the aeronautics period. I mean, people would fly around the world, and they’d fly fastest aircraft. Lots of things were done, and the prizes were important a little bit financially, but they were really important psychologically. Which is why you want to engage, you know, and when you got people who are worth between say \$1 and \$80 billion their ability to do things where you don’t have to hire seven layers of bureaucracy.

The other part of that in terms of things like space – and I was just with Buzz Aldrin on Sunday talking about his experience on the Moon and he’s very big on going to Mars. And he makes the point, you know, you ought to have a ground rule that says it should be about as safe as climbing Mt. Everest but you can’t have a standard that says it’s going to be pristine. I mean, a lot of people were killed in the early years of flight. In fact, Churchill learned how to fly in 1913, and later that summer, the pilot that taught him died in a plane crash. So you have to have a waiver that says, “I understand what I’m about to do is very dangerous but I really want to go do it.” That really lowers the cost dramatically. That’s the space side.

One of the other things I’m really pushing very hard for is to create a brain-science approach, in what I describe as Alzheimer’s Bonds and take all of the brain research off budget. Challenge the neuroscience community to tell us what’s the optimum you can invest annually and as they get the breakthroughs pay offset bonds with the savings. Alzheimer’s alone is a \$20 trillion cost to now to 2050. Public and private combined. \$20 trillion. Bigger than the national debt. That doesn’t count Parkinson’s, that doesn’t count autism, that doesn’t count mental health.

So you have a really big interest in making strategic investments in cost centers in order to eliminate the cost – so we don’t pay anything for iron lungs anymore because Polio vaccine eliminated it. I think you have to think much more strategically about really shaking up the kind of humdrum everyday models we have. You know, we had peer research, small-grant projects and they really don’t get you the scale of breakthrough you need.

KRISTOL: You talk to physicians and researchers, I bet; they, of course, have to work with the system they’re working with and they do make some progress but the degree to which they’re making less progress than they could because of the way the FDA is setup, the agency is setup, the peer-review system – it turns out, this is a recent study – half of these peer-review studies aren’t really well-reviewed or dealt with work or they can’t be replicated. The whole thing is anti-entrepreneurial, it seems.

GINGRICH: And it’s a cultural style, which also means a lot of researchers spend an amazing amount of their time filling out applications and waiting. And you want to go to a very different model. The Apollo

project had no peer-review small ran component. It was “This is where we are going; this is how we’re going to get there.” It was very large-scale engineering. Much closer to the Manhattan Project and things we did in World War II than anything we do today.

KRISTOL: It’s amazing, isn’t it? We think we made progress but we actually couldn’t do the Manhattan Project or the Apollo project probably today.

GINGRICH: Not without changing the law radically. Which is what we should do. We should go back to what is it going to take for America, going to be successful and then ruthlessly cut through all the things that stop us.

### **III. Barack Obama and After (50:33 – 1:06:40)**

KRISTOL: You ran to defeat President Obama in 2012, and he got reelected. You weren’t the nominee, but maybe he wouldn’t have been elected, if you were the nominee. But let’s begin with President Obama, then talk more broadly about the political system and the crisis or not – but President Obama.

GINGRICH: Good people have to come to grips, especially with the conservative movement, is this is one of the most controversial presidents in modern history. He set out to radically change America; in many ways he has succeed. Whether we can turn that back after ’16, we’ll see but at least in the short run he is in many ways like Woodrow Wilson.

He has with great ruthlessness and determination moved in a particular direction with a particular set of values. He’s often been fairly dishonest while he was doing it, but nonetheless he kept grinding away and so he will leave the country more centralized, more bureaucratic, more influenced by regulation, more leftwing in its cultural values, weaker in the world and surrounded by a level of chaos that would have been unthinkable in 2008. And I think he’ll look back and think, “Yeah, that that’s what I wanted to do. I wanted a smaller, weaker America that couldn’t threaten the world. I wanted to find a way to work with people like the Iranians.”

None of this – it’s not because he’s stupid. He has a genuine knot on his brain that says, “I can work with the Iranians so they get nuclear weapons. Israel has nuclear weapons, Pakistan has nuclear weapons; why are we picking on the Iranians?” You can’t say that publicly. Part of this, very much like FDR and Woodrow Wilson, is when you want to radically change the country, you have to continuously lie about it because otherwise you’d be destroyed. All three of these presidents had a pattern of trying to move things they couldn’t explain while pretending they weren’t doing it.

So Obama says, “Well, you get to keep your doctor,” well, we knew that wasn’t true. Or “I’m really against gay marriage,” which it wasn’t true when he said it. You go down this whole line of things but conservatives have to at least respect an opponent, the reality of what he’s accomplished, and then you can then decide you dislike him deeply or want to repeal much of what he’s done but you have to learn and learning the trade you have to say, “Gee, what is it he did so well and how come he got away with all this?”

KRISTOL: And have conservatives in your view, the conservative movement learned that lesson?

GINGRICH: No, I think, first of all, there was so much anger – I think that right after he was elected, there was a real desire by probably half the Republican Party to find a way to work with him because I think there was a sense of feeling good about electing an African American president. His inaugural address was a very centrist, it was the third time he’d given a speech in Manassas the Friday before or the Saturday before the election. He gave the Grand Park Speech election night and then the inaugural Address.

All those sounded so terrific. And then he gets with Nancy Pelosi and Harry Reid and they basically say to him run over the Republicans. Think about this alternative. He has about a \$900 billion special spending package. They decide they will not allow the Republicans to have a single amendment, they will not allow them to be in the room writing the bill. It would have been so easy. Reagan and, you know, because you were there, Reagan would have said, "You know out of \$900 billion, we take \$7, let's give \$200 to the other party," and you would have bought in half the Republican Party and they would have said, "We're working together; this guy's reasonable." Instead you have this sudden state of shock that this guy that's talking like he's reasonable is functionally behaving like a dictator, eliminating the Republican Party from any consideration.

And that was the beginning of the depth of bitterness that has just been, you know, expanded ever since.

KRISTOL: Which has made it hard for people to maybe understand.

GINGRICH: Partly because people don't want to ultimately render judgment about a President. The President is so central to our cultural imagery. The Oval Office is so central. You don't want to say this is a guy who is deliberately, methodically manipulating us to achieve goals that are so radical he can't describe them.

I mean, that's a really tough judgment, and it takes a long time to get there. And I think even today when you wake up in the morning and you're a John Boehner or a Mitch McConnell, there's a part of you that thinks that the President calls, "Maybe this time we can get a deal." And the fact is as long as it's trivial, you can, and as long as it's important, you can't.

KRISTOL: And how reversible is it?

GINGRICH: I think if the American people want to reverse it, it's, you know, amazingly reversible. This is a country which prospers because it bankrupts easily. You know, the Japanese had this crisis after 1989, that they had a lot of companies that were dead, but under Japanese culture, you couldn't bankrupt them because that's the equivalent of committing suicide so they just carried them for 30 years and crippled the entire economy. In Europe, you don't allow anybody to grow up that's marginal, and they're all protected by state banks and state systems and what have you, so you can't get the dynamics.

The real dynamic in America, which Schumpeter described as creative destruction, the real dynamic in America is the willingness to let things that don't work disappear. You're football coach, you're 0 and 11, the odds are very high you won't be back next year, and you knew it at about 0 and 6. That's an American model.

I think if we win the Presidency and keep the Senate, a great deal of Obamism will disappear within two or three years.

KRISTOL: So the system isn't so corrupt – I don't mean in the literal sense of corrupt or in the narrow sense of corrupt – but in the broader sense of crony capitalism and sort of "the system is rigged," as people say, in a way that can't be fixed?

GINGRICH: There's a difference between Obama's policies and the system. I mean, whether or not you could get genuine military procurement reform past Boeing and McDonnell Douglas. In that sense, whether or not you could actually break the Department of Education loose from the teachers union – I mean, in that sense, the systems very much like the popular disbelief in it. I mean, I think there's a bipartisan system of all the lobbyists around the city, which is, in fact –

In the 18th-century Whig model of corruption, which is not bribery, but it's the notion that you place personal gain above the interest of the country. And it's something which Gordon Wood wrote about brilliantly in his books on the radicalism of the American Revolution and the origins of the American

Revolution. In that sense, I agree with the Gallup Poll, which asked the question, “Do you believe there is widespread corruption in government?”, and 75 percent of the American people said yes.

Well, let me give you a specific example. We wrote a book, oh, five or six years ago, Jim Frogue and I did, called *Stop Paying the Crooks*, which I thought was a title of sufficient clarity that would work even in the city. It didn’t, people just shrugged it off. And our estimate was that Medicare and Medicaid between them are \$120 billion a year of theft. Just straight theft.

Now, you would think that’s a big enough number that you know the Budget Committee ought to be figuring out how to get the money back. It’s more than a trillion dollars over a decade. I think you’d find similar patterns across the whole system where, you know, where people – the disabilities program, for example, is an invitation to theft. There are case studies of doctors who will put anybody over 55 who’s a high school graduate on the grounds that they cannot earn enough money and we should take care of them.

Well, that’s just violates the law. You know? Real depth of the system breaking down. Again, I think it’s part of the country’s anger, in the sense that you’ve got to somehow blow up the system. Because people have this instinctive sense, it isn’t working. They know people in their own neighborhood who are getting money they shouldn’t be getting. They know that the game is rigged. And if you’re a small business trying to do business with the Pentagon, you know the system is rigged. That’s the underlying patterns that are there.

KRISTOL: I think the connection in a way with Obama or liberalism is somehow it’s rigged in such a way that liberals can move their policies forward and conservatives can’t undo them because they’re embedded precisely in the system –

GINGRICH: And liberals are very tolerant of corruption. Say you end up – Solyndra, for example, turned out the tip of the iceberg. If you were to look at the total amount of fraud involved in Obama’s efforts of solar power or wind power or what have you – It’s breathtaking. But nobody’s ever put it together and said, “Look, these are patterns of fraud. This isn’t just an occasional they had a bad judgement; this is layer after layer of people who are thieves.”

KRISTOL: Obamacare is a good example of that. Buying off different parts of the medical health insurance and hospitals.

GINGRICH: The cynicism on both sides. The cynicism of the insurance companies, the pharmaceutical companies, the hospitals. All of whom would like to have, they fit perfectly, Adam Smith’s warning in *The Wealth of Nations* that any meeting of producers is a conspiracy against the consumer. And we will see this play out in the next couple years as the prices go out of control because if you take care of everybody you can’t possibly have the competition that keeps prices down. All of them are going to desperately try to avoid competition.

KRISTOL: The conservative task, I think – I mean, there are individual things you can do to unwind particular parts of the interlocking network of corruption, of interest-group backscratching, croynism capitalism, and all that, but in a way I think the conservative task is somehow to cut those Gordian knots, right? If that’s one metaphor or whatever the right one is to blow –

GINGRICH: I think it’s close to Alexander taking his sword out and saying, “You’re right, I’ll never untie this knot, but watch.” And I think in almost every case it means you want transparency, you want competition, you want to have a relentless sense of, frankly, prosecuting people who break the law. The number of people who’ve, when you read these things about people who filed false reports about millions of dollars in order to get, for example, government aid for solar power, and my view is you have to say, “How many of them went to jail?” Because if it is a risk-free theft then how do you explain the 17 year old

down the street who just got picked up for stealing a car and his neighbor who just got picked up for lying about \$40 million and the neighbor doesn't go to jail and the kid does?

That's why I think people have this deep sense that the system is out of whack and needs very dramatic reform.

KRISTOL: Is the political process responsive, I guess, to that?

GINGRICH: It hasn't been yet. It's fascinating to me. I've tried for about eight years to make the case that if you took the American Express, Visa, or MasterCard model, which is very good on fraud, and you applied it to Medicare and Medicaid, you'd probably save over \$100 billion a year. You get nowhere.

KRISTOL: And you don't hear presidential candidates promising to do that.

GINGRICH: It's amazing.

KRISTOL: And why is that actually?

GINGRICH: I think because – there used to be a *New Yorker* magazine cartoon that had a desk and it had "In" and "Out" and "Too Hard" – so I think all the consultants come in and go, "You're going to sound weird if you say that." You know. Now, I do see some baby steps. As I said earlier, Congressman Miller passing a bill that will allow the Secretary of Veterans Affairs to fire any bureaucrat that's not serving veterans. That's actually a pretty bold and pretty big change, and we'll see what happens in the Senate. Or I think Marco Rubio is the lead co-sponsor.

So you see the ice beginning to break. Part of what's happening is the system is breaking down so badly that reasonable people are beginning to realize they need unreasonable answers. Because no reasonable answer fits the scale of the problem. And I'm beginning to see more and more talk in both the House and Senate and among governors. People like John Kasich, who was doing it in Ohio, or Rick Perry who was doing it in Texas, or Mitch Daniel. These are guys who are really breaking loose and really beginning to make a difference.

KRISTOL: So you're not pessimistic that the system somehow – you do get into these death spirals – that may not be the right word – but self-reinforcing mechanisms. I'm sure the business school people have a word for this where a business can't fix itself because it's so, the bad habits are so self-reinforcing and the incentives are so messed up and the pressure coming from outside can't be deflected some way or another ultimately, because the system probably can't be, because they do have a bottom-line.

The government you could probably deflect it a long, long time it seems. And incumbents get themselves reelected by paying off individual groups so they don't ever have to be responsible for the overall performance of the government.

GINGRICH: I think that's true for a long time, but I think when you get to a certain critical mass of incompetence and a critical mass of corruption the customers begin to rebel against the whole pattern. I think that the Tea Party movement was an early indicator of that. I think you are seeing, and in some ways, our election in '94 was an indicator of that. I think you're beginning to see a momentum in the country at large that is nobody in Washington seems to understand but reflects this underlying judgment.

You know, there was a poll the other day in Florida and if you took Trump, Carson, and Fiorina and Cruz – and Cruz is an outsider who happens to be in the Senate but has no resemblance to an insider. Those four in Florida were 62 percent of the vote. I keep telling people, "Don't focus on the candidates, focus on the people" because if you have 62 percent saying, "If you're serving in elected office, you're not on my list." That is a breathtakingly big number. I mean, that number historically would have been for Ross

Perot or for Pat Buchanan, 15, 20 percent, and I think what you're seeing is a wrestling with how do we find somebody whose characteristics allow them to really dramatically change Washington?

We don't want somebody who's going to manage Washington better. This will be an interesting test question. Do you want somebody who can manage Washington better or somebody who can change Washington? My guess is change wins 70-30 or 80-20.

KRISTOL: Among conservatives or Republicans?

GINGRICH: Yeah. And of course, that's where having an incumbent Democratic President keeps most Democrats still stuck with, "This is okay." But it will be interesting to watch once he's gone. I suspect, if you went to the black community and said, "Are you satisfied with how things are going?" The answer would be staggeringly high. Probably in the high 80s or low 90s that they're not satisfied, but they're not going to say that if it sounds like it's anti-Obama.

#### **IV: America's Past and its Future (1:06:40 – 1:19:31)**

KRISTOL: My sense is people are a little daunted by just the scope of the challenge, the scope of the necessary change. You're a historian. What could they read about it from American history, or other nations' histories, about individuals or moments that would give them guidance on how to think about this and models, and sort of reassure them that it can happen? It's not the choice that it's sort of gradual decline and stasis or – I don't know – the French Revolution or something, you know?

GINGRICH: I think there are four great examples of the American willingness to undertake really big changes. The first is Washington in the Revolution. I mean, the fact is that the odds against the Americans in 1776 were so enormous that the British, I think, were probably astounded, and they had almost beaten Washington by Christmas of 1776. It was a very – I wrote a novel called *To Try Men's Souls* about crossing the Delaware and the important role that Thomas Paine played because Paine is writing the documents to explain to people what they're living through and giving them courage.

One, I would say, though, if you take the proximately 1772, Washington leaving in 1796, that cycle. And you said, you know, how far did these people come? It's pretty astonishing. And it wasn't, you know, large parts of it were really hard. You couldn't predict success.

The second is Lincoln. There's – it may surprise you to know one of the books that helps you best understand Lincoln is by Gore Vidal, called *Lincoln*. Here's this guy who is self-educated – back to our earlier conversation on learning – who in the 1850s takes up Euclidian geometry because he wants to understand how to think about patterns. And is literally riding around with his horse going on this circuit and the horse knew where he was going so Lincoln would be studying geometry as a very mature adult. And it really shapes his speaking style.

Well, I mean, here's a guy who endures and wills the killing of 630,000 Americans. Any morning, Lincoln could have stopped the war, and he wills it. We were down on Memorial Day looking at the Lincoln Memorial. I get tears in my eyes. The pain that he felt because he knew what he was doing. It wasn't because he was indifferent, it wasn't because he was callous, it's because he thought it was the price of freedom.

The third example is the Roosevelt cycle. Franklin Roosevelt takes a country that could have gone the way of Mussolini and Stalin and Hitler, and while we on the Right dislike the New Deal deeply, the fact is he recreated a sense of being American, a sense of optimism, and then he leads us through World War II and leaves us the most powerful nation in the history of the world. You look at the scale of the buildup. It is unbelievable.

And then finally Reagan, Reagan comes into a country, which is demoralized. There actually is a movie – I can't remember the title of it now – but there's a movie about the last car that has gasoline. It's a comedy but it fits Jimmy Carter.

We're a country that couldn't even launch a rescue mission in Iran. There was a sense of everything falling apart, as Theodore Wright said. By the time of the New Hampshire primary, you literally felt, between inflation and unemployment and everything else, that the wheels were coming off. Reagan turns that around psychologically in weeks. The day of his inaugural the whole thing starts to turn. By that summer, has communicated with the Soviets through two symbolic acts. Shooting down two Libyan aircraft and firing the PATCO strikers. That he's very tough and he's very willing to use American power. And the world has begun to change in ways you couldn't imagine.

I look at those, and I think, "I would bet on us." I think we have it still in our genetic pattern to go out and to change the world. And I fully expect the next few years are going to be sort of amazing.

KRISTOL: They all had a sense of the magnitude of the challenge, I guess, and told all the people that. Thomas Paine – there was not a kind of, they were not playing small ball.

GINGRICH: I think whoever wins the presidency will almost certainly will be someone who rallies us to a dramatically larger, better America. And will say to us, "We can't stay down here."

The one great failure of Obama is that he can't get the economy to work. He can't get the government to work. He's won his policy fights but he can't make Syria secure, he can't make Libya secure. I mean, there's this general underlying sense that at a performance level that none of this stuff is working, which will be an enormous burden for Hillary or whoever the Democratic nominee is to carry. They're ultimately going to have to spin that this is good enough.

KRISTOL: I sometimes say in speeches that it's hard to convey to younger people what it was like – and wasn't involved obviously in '79, '80 or '75 to '80, just watched that from grad school, I guess – the Kemp-Reagan revolution, which you were involved in as a junior Congressman, or what Giuliani did in New York in '93. I was closer to that.

But I didn't anticipate it, I got to say. And the extent to which people really, the radicalness of the change that they embraced and the willingness to break china, including conservative and Republican china, and getting there. That, I think, the current candidates don't feel like they quite have internalized that. They don't think they're Kemp and Reagan, willing to take on the establishment for their own party, as well as the liberal establishment, the media, and everyone else. They don't quite think they're Giuliani becoming the Mayor of New York and do something huge.

Most observers – and including conservatives, sophisticated conservatives, social scientists thought he really can't reduce – yeah, he can stop the growth in crime, and, you know, saves lives and situation. If you had said, "We're going to cut crime by 70 percent" or something in New York – people we respect a lot and rightfully so said, "Come on, that's much too ambitious." I guess I'm a little shocked and worried about that absence of ambition, it seems to me, among both thinkers and politicians on the right.

On the Left, they don't have much ambition because the ambition is to preside over decline, and you know make us more like Europe so we can be more cheerful in our decline.

GINGRICH: I guess I'm not sure that I'm watching the same candidates that you are. I think Trump was brilliant in taking the whole notion of "Make American great again."

KRISTOL: Reagan's slogan.

GINGRICH: That's working. Then, you end up with Brady having Trump's hat in his locker. All these little things.

I think Carson because he's so calm. People don't realize if you listen to what Carson says he may be the most radical candidate in race. But he says it in such a pleasant, calm, "I can do really great surgery, I can do really great presidency." But you don't realize what he's actually saying is very radical.

KRISTOL: What does it say that those two are not the ones that were in elected office before?

GINGRICH: I think that's one of the challenges to the candidates who are elected. I think Kasich is capable of doing that – what he's done in Ohio is astonishing. He's the incumbent governor running who has very high popularity back home, he's still above 60 percent approval. A state like Ohio is not easy. And he has been very methodical for change. I mean, but he tends to be an enthusiast approach to change, a little more like Theodore Roosevelt than like Ronald Reagan, but it's real.

I think one of the challenges that Rubio and Paul and even Cruz have had is if you have Washington as the backdrop, it's very hard to get people to accept the level of change you want to represent because they see all the noise around you. And Rubio's very, I think, extraordinarily smart. Has the potential to do that but I think that's where your point comes in. None of them – it's easy to forget that by 1980 Reagan had spent a very long time, from 1947 on communication about Communism, making speeches, doing television shows, being governor for eight years.

There was a sense of Reagan that none of these guys can possibly have because they haven't been out running around the country for 25 years. It's actually one of Trump's advantages that he's the one character in the field whose level of celebrity status is comparable to Reagan's. He's been around forever. And has been a background noise forever.

Although I must say I think Carson may be in many ways a more interesting and bigger challenge than Trump because Carson is so quiet and isn't – it's not that he has radical policies, it's that he has radical views. So if you listen to him talk about what happened in Baltimore with the riots, or you listen to him talk about Black Lives Matter or you listen to him talk about the tax code.

And he says very calmly, "God thinks 10 percent is enough, and God doesn't think if you have a good harvest you ought to have 30 percent so maybe if everybody paid 10 percent that would be ok." If that actually becomes his proposal it will drive the policy elites crazy. And he says it in a way so every Evangelical now is bonding with Carson because he's using a language that perfectly reflects their experience without particularly being religious. But a lot of what he says is very radical.

KRISTOL: So you think we could have a moment like the four you've mentioned beginning in 2016. You're going to end this conversation –

GINGRICH: First of all, as a historian, I'm always interested in when things change because it's so much more to think about. Second, as an American, you know, I mean, the British bet against us, the Confederacy bet against –

KRISTOL: The British bet against us again in 1816 because they were kind of, weren't they pro-Confederate?

GINGRICH: The Spanish fought us, and Kaiser Wilhelm thought we were irrelevant, and Hitler thought we were irrelevant, and then Khrushchev was going to bury us, and by 1985, there were books like "Japan is #1" And the emerging Japanese super-state.

So my guess is we will once again rely on the sheer energy of 315 million people who will turn out to be better than their politicians. And more engaged than their bureaucrats and better informed than their news media. I suspect that we are at the beginning of another American century.

KRISTOL: On that note, it's a good note to end on. Thanks a lot, Newt, for joining me today. Thank you for joining us on CONVERSATIONS.

[END]