

# CONVERSATIONS

WITH BILL KRISTOL

## Conversations with Bill Kristol

**Guest:** Mike Murphy, Republican Political Strategist

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### **I: The Democrats (0:15 – 25:30)**

KRISTOL: Hi, I'm Bill Kristol. Welcome to CONVERSATIONS. And welcome back to Mike Murphy.

MURPHY: Thank you.

KRISTOL: Previous converser on *Conversations*.

MURPHY: We're back at it!

KRISTOL: And we're back at it. About a couple weeks after the 2018 election.

MURPHY: Shocker, it went badly. Heard here. Was predicted.

KRISTOL: I think pretty much it went the way you predicted, right?

MURPHY: Yeah, I think anybody that knows anything about politics could have predicted this. Let's see: unpopular President, tone-deaf Congress, and Independents hate us. I saw the coverage with –

KRISTOL: And the normal off-year reaction.

MURPHY: Right, right, exactly. That's part of it. But all this coverage about, "Ooh, the intensity's crept up one percent," and it was all noise. It was pretty obvious. We were heading for this and we took the beating.

KRISTOL: Okay. "We," being the Republicans in this case.

MURPHY: Yeah, I'm still in it.

KRISTOL: You and I are still in it, despite our –

MURPHY: Fighting from within.

KRISTOL: I know.

MURPHY: Caucus of 11.

KRISTOL: Yeah. But it's a good 11, you know.

MURPHY: My problem is I would kind of – I can't, some people in my world, in my business, have switched over, but that means you have to be for the policy, you know –

KRISTOL: Of the Democrats.

MURPHY: Yes. If Bloomberg's the nominee that's a different story.

KRISTOL: Okay. So let's do that. We've been through a lot of midterms, and of course people often get midterms wrong, or they don't predict the next – what happens two years later or things reverse.

MURPHY: Well, the Obama example.

KRISTOL: Events happen.

MURPHY: He lost 63 seats in the House. Fewer than we did. And they had a worse time in the Senate, and he had the marvelous come back. So will it be the same for Trump or not?

KRISTOL: So what happens? Going forward what are the implications for 2020 broadly for both parties, for Trump, and then for each party? So let's go through it.

MURPHY: Well, having gotten the Trump election wrong, my crystal ball has a huge crack in it. But I'll try because I think it's not too hard to figure out under the rules of generally how politics have worked.

The folks who "got thumped," as President George W. Bush once said, in the midterm, they adjust. I don't think Trump's capable of adjusting. I think he's the atomic clock of being Trump. So in fact I think he'll double down on his Trumpness, and he has the pressure of the Mueller thing coming too. So I don't think Trump changes his course. So I don't see Independents swinging back at all, at least in the numbers he needs to win. I think he will erode a little in the Republican world, because increasingly it will be clear – though I'm not sure how clear, it ought to be very clear – that he's political anthrax, and if we go to the ballot with him again we're going to have trouble, because he won't change and improve.

Now maybe there's an intervening event, some foreign affairs crisis that he – reach for it – handles appropriately. The Democrats are drunk on identity politics, so they are capable of nominating a candidate that even Trump could beat. So there's a lot of loose stuff.

But I think it's kind of out of Trump's hands. I think he'll still be awful. His problems will compound; and the fact that now the Democrats have real power in Washington is a threat to him, and he'll handle that badly and I think make his problems worse.

And, finally, look at the electoral college map: the industrial Midwest, that he to his credit pulled the real rabbit out of the hat, winning states like Wisconsin, Michigan, Pennsylvania, which we have not carried in a presidential since the '80s. Add to that how Amendment Four works out in Florida with felons being able to vote – you know, you can make arguments on either side of that equation, conventional wisdom is it will be a thumb on the scale for the Democrats. Though I say the bright hope there is Eric can vote for his dad. [Laughter]. Cheap shot I know, but that will be the only one.

KRISTOL: Terrible.

MURPHY: And the demographic headwinds, the younger voters who became voters during the Trump era are not breaking for Trump. While the older voters who've liked Trump, it's narrowing in the data and some of them are moving on to the MAGA palace in the sky. You add all that up, I think he has more headwinds than he did the day he was elected.

KRISTOL: Right.

MURPHY: So I would say to the Party, "We're riding a very slow horse here."

KRISTOL: Okay. So what can change? Democrats are in charge of the House. That could affect a bunch of things over the next year. Plus they do have these primaries, and 30 candidates, and candidates still matter. As we saw with Hillary Clinton.

MURPHY: A lot. Yeah.

KRISTOL: And there are scenarios where Trump benefits a lot from that. So walk us through that.

MURPHY: I have a contrarian view and I don't know I'm right: but generally things that are disrupted, the people inside the disrupted system are among the last to do it. A lot of confirmation bias. So I think the Democratic nomination process will be different this time. And here's my pitch on why I think – and again I'm totally capable of being wrong.

The traditional model, we all know it: a million people run, when it's worth having, in an open seat, like they have. They all go to the early funnel states, Iowa, New Hampshire, and to some extent South Carolina, and the field is narrowed down.

And you want to win those early states not because you get any delegates, but because you get an amazing amount of coverage from the national media, which makes you famous in states down the line, because you don't have money to advertise in those places. It attracts excitement, which attracts more money, the horse race polls go up, more money. And you hope for a compounding thing and off you go to the nomination.

KRISTOL: And the race narrows to two or three –

MURPHY: Two or three.

KRISTOL: Quickly. In both parties, this is the scenario in the past, in both parties.

MURPHY: Right. In both parties it's been the scenario. If you win you keep winning, because winning attracts fame, fame drives votes later. Basically the media gives you a huge gift of 100 million dollars' worth of attention. And you attract more money. So that's the traditional one. With the key difference of we "mean social Darwin" Republicans are winner-take-all in our primaries. So we murder them quick.

KRISTOL: Some of them, yeah.

MURPHY: Yeah, the bulk, though. We are much more a winner-take-all process than the Dems who, you know, cried when Old Yeller died, so it's proportional, everybody gets a trophy. They can go on forever.

So this time on the Democratic thing you're going to have 35, maybe 40 million Americans who are deeply interested in the Democratic primary process and may participate. Last time I think about 31 million people voted. I think that market has grown. And they're deeply anti-Trump. And they're deeply interested in taking power back. So I'm not sure, in a time of streaming media and the social media, the internet, all the ways we have to get famous for free, they're going to say, "Alright the Iowa caucus is

over, I'm not for Beto/Jesus anymore." Because the most interesting thing he did, besides do quite well for a Democrat in Texas, was he created a TV show and a TV channel on streaming media that he didn't have to spend any money to buy, where people followed the interesting Beto content nearly every day.

So I have a feeling with the proportional representation, four or five candidates with a compelling message – which is always the hard part – might create a Beto-like daily TV show. And why cancel the show after Iowa? Keep going. As long as you're raising money, because you have this mass group and you create your own messaging platform where you don't need wall-to-wall cable TV coverage, even though you get that anyway, I don't think you have to collapse that quickly.

KRISTOL: Well, the voters you don't think necessarily run to the top two or three.

MURPHY: No, I think it will be the two to five with the best viral messaging that they can pump out on an extremely regular basis, and extract low-dollar internet donations to fund it. Kind of like Bernie did last time, though he didn't do the viral part. They could go a while. And with proportional, who really gets knocked out?

So I see the Democrat thing potentially as being much less reliant on, "Ooh, we're on CNN tomorrow night, because we just won the New Hampshire primary." Now if you finish 18<sup>th</sup>, yeah. But if you're in that top group they can keep going for a while, particularly if it's silos.

We're going to have the White liberal generational candidate, a Beto type, maybe Beto. You're going to have the traditional liberal candidate, it might be older and less adept at social media. You're probably going to have the great fighter, the winner, you know, a Mitch Landrieu type who I think has political talent, is Bill Clinton level. And then you're going to have identity politics candidates, you know.

If you put a gun to my head right now, I would try to run away. But if I couldn't, to make a prediction, Kamala Harris is holding a lot of cards. She can link generational, feminist, African-American together in an identity-crazed primary, there is a whole silo there. Maybe two candidates like that.

You've got Elizabeth Warren who's a fighter, White liberal. That's a segment. And then maybe someone famous, like Trump, "pre-aware title," you know, a Kardashian, I'm only half joking, runs.

KRISTOL: Right.

MURPHY: So there's room for a bunch to be self-perpetuating through the primaries. So I don't believe it will be a quick, sudden death after three or four primaries.

KRISTOL: Yeah, that's interesting. And you know in retrospect, I mean, Trump won in 2016 and knocked people out, a lot of them suddenly. And then one by one. So when that's the narrative one remembers – But, of course, in a certain way even 2016 had a little bit of that character.

MURPHY: It did.

KRISTOL: Trump, Rubio, Kasich, Cruz. They were all in for –

MURPHY: They had enough money, but our winner-take-all thing kind of quickly kills.

KRISTOL: Collapses in on March 15<sup>th</sup>.

MURPHY: It was the old money model. Nobody really raised low dollar, massive money in our primary last time.

KRISTOL: But you're right. If March 15 is a winner-take-all, not just Cruz and Kasich stay in – But maybe Rubio stays in, and maybe even one or two others who have sort of particular identities –

MURPHY: Our world is a little different. One, because there are probably – I'm still not sure Trump completes the term. But if he does, it's very hard to beat an incumbent President, even a flawed one with trouble. And while the data on Trump – and we don't really know since the election if it's declined, I think it will over the next 90 days. But it won't decline enough that he'll look vulnerable. And, you know, history's pretty full of people who tried and it's just hard to do. Now to do it I think you'd need a very different kind of campaign. The old –

KRISTOL: Now what are we on now? Now we're on –

MURPHY: Republicans. Yeah.

KRISTOL: Let's stay with the Democrats just for a minute, because I think that's interesting. So what about the Democrats? Ron Brownstein describes it as a kind of candidate – half the candidates are “reassurance” candidates, the other half are “mobilization” candidates or “anger” or “outreach” candidates, or something like “resistance” candidates. As opposed to “I understand why you voted for Trump, and there was some legitimate issues even there, but you need to now come back to us.” Joe Biden, let's say, would be that presumably, right?

MURPHY: Right.

KRISTOL: So what do you think the balance of power is in the Party and who fits in what category?

MURPHY: The top of the Party, it's always reasonable, sly, you know, schemers. At the bottom of the Party it's rage. Rage beats policy papers in the age of Trump. So if you ask of the Democrat operatives I know – and I know a bunch of 'em, but I don't know a lot of them – but if you were to take 10 or 20 national ones and put them in a room and shoot them full of truth serum, and ask what one voter group inside the Democratic primary would you like to dominate, they would say African American women.

The way I look at it, and this is all kind of dumb short hand, but look at it like three overlapping piles of vote in the Democrat presidential primary: White liberals, people who resonate with feminism as a message (first female President or gender identity), and voters of color. And if you can put two out of three together you're in pretty good shape.

I mean, Hillary was able to put the feminist urge and people of color together against Bernie who was cornered with White liberals. Going back, Obama was able to put people of color and White liberals together against Hillary who had that power, which is strong with feminism in the Party.

So looking at that analysis, who can put two things together. Well, Elizabeth Warren arguably could: White liberals and the feminists pile. Kamala Harris: color, feminism, maybe even White liberals, you know, a triple header. And then you can kind of – Biden looks to me like based on name ID now not a lot else. He's not generational. He's kind of a second banana by nature.

But he is a fighter, which may become the fourth dimension they want. I've said Mitch Landrieu. I think is a Bill Clinton-esque talent. He's generational. He's from the South. I think he could do well with voters of color. I think he could do well with White liberals who want a fighter, even though he's not that liberal himself. They'll have ideological wounds there.

And then to me Bloomberg's interesting because under the traditional rules of the Democratic nominating process he doesn't have much of a constituency. But the ability to last and the ability to say, “I'm the only grownup in the room, how'd you like to win?” There's some power there, I think.

It will be contrarian, but he owns a Seven Up, you know, in the world of all these colas, he's Seven Up, he's got a unique thing. So it will either blow up on the pad or it will work. If they're brave enough to run that campaign.

KRISTOL: Do you think he runs?

MURPHY: I think he's – you know, disclaimer I've worked for him in the past – I think he's probably thinking about it.

KRISTOL: Yeah, that's what I sense.

MURPHY: So the other thing will be opportunities and mishaps will be created over the next year by the Democrats in Congress now that they have the majority.

KRISTOL: Yeah, talk about that a little.

MURPHY: And maybe a young star will be created. Some crusading Congressman or something.

KRISTOL: With the impeachment hearings and someone who's incredibly Barbara Jordan like in the Nixon hearings.

MURPHY: Right, right, exactly. It will be a big platform.

KRISTOL: How dangerous is it for the Democrats that they control the House and how much of an opportunity is it?

MURPHY: Well, that's a very good question. It's kind of like a chainsaw. You can do great good or great damage with one. I think their leadership is pretty sane. They ran a disciplined campaign. They ran on preexisting conditions, which is now the slogan of the Democratic Party. They like to say they ran on Obamacare; I don't think any of them ever said it, there's like a thousand dollar penalty.

KRISTOL: Right.

MURPHY: But "they're going to take away the most popular thing in your health care." That was a good message and when people were out to punish Republicans anyway, particularly in the suburbs. So if they show the discipline, which may not be possible, but in governing that they showed in the campaign, I think they will do some good.

I think they knew in the campaign, not really at the Senate level where I think they made a bunch of mistakes, but at the House level they knew to keep it about the opponent too. So if they can use the Congress to grab a middle class economic agenda and help the President do damage to himself, which he seems to be gifted at politically, my guess is they will be quite happy they won the House when they roll into 2020.

I do believe nothing will get done because the incentives are for both parties to use the government dialogue in Washington to fuel their presidential campaigns. One of the great problems now of our democracy is it never ends. Nobody ever has any time to govern.

KRISTOL: Especially in this context, don't you think?

MURPHY: Yeah.

KRISTOL: Where Democrats, the single best thing they think – I think they think this honestly – they can do for governance is get rid of Trump. So I mean what's the point of passing something?

MURPHY: Yeah, and we have this politics now where, as we've said I think last time we spoke, "I'm right, you're evil." So all tactics are okay against you and everything you say is a lie. Trump does that and they're learning from him. And so the institutions are the ones that get wiped out.

So I don't know it's kind of grim stuff. I think it's going to be the Kavanaugh hearings for a year.

KRISTOL: Well what about them? What if Clarence Thomas, I was thinking this, resigns in the summer of '19 to give a Republican president, a Republican Senate a chance to confirm a younger conservative justice?

MURPHY: Then we'll have it again. I wouldn't be surprised if Gillibrand, one of the 20 possible candidates, somebody, decides to make impeach Kavanaugh or try to litigate the Supreme Court choice backwards as a presidential.

KRISTOL: Right.

MURPHY: I mean, she already wiped out Al Franken, so why not widen the scope a little bit.

KRISTOL: And also expand the size of the Supreme Court, don't you think? "Can't let McConnell and Trump shape the future for 25 years." I mean, I think people – don't you think people generally are underestimating how much of a market there will be for certain things that are outside the conventional wisdom? Right now at least.

MURPHY: Right.

KRISTOL: In liberal or Democratic circles.

MURPHY: Well, we've normally held the thing together not by like some law of how you operate in politics but by accepted norms of good, elite, behavior. And those are being torn apart by Trump because he's going to generate impersonators. And in the "I'm right, you're evil" equation you can give yourself a pass to do almost anything, because you're fighting evil.

KRISTOL: And the Mueller report? Do you think that really – Who knows what –

MURPHY: The problem is, and this gets, when we talk about the Republican potential primary, Trump is the first President in modern era that is shame proof. Even Nixon could be shamed. Shame has no impact on Trump. So things that would rock an administration to pieces in the past, Trump is just like "Oh, we need to come up with a new twist for the TV show."

KRISTOL: Right.

MURPHY: So things, the Mueller report in the past would be an atomic weapon. It would wipe somebody out. Hell, the *accusations* might have been enough. Now, you know, Clinton put a few of the seeds in this from his shamelessness, but Trump is taking it to a magnificently higher level.

I think if the family could be in real legal jeopardy and the business could be in any kind of jeopardy, and the party comes around to the reality, not the – A year ago folks like us were saying he's a political disaster and we were getting, "Tsk, tsk, you should see the rallies Mike." Or "He did really well in Macomb County, much better than we did. He's magic. He's Rasputin. He can't be killed."

Well, now we went out and got clobbered in an election that was clearly a referendum on Trump. But he's hung onto some of that still. But if that cloud evaporates, and Mueller is bad for the family, and the business is in jeopardy, and he thinks he's going to lose, and he feels Republican trouble, then maybe

he'll engineer some way where he's still in charge, "I'll pick the – I'm going to endorse the winner," you know.

KRISTOL: Yeah. But doesn't run.

MURPHY: Yeah, he doesn't. That's the doesn't run scenario. Though I think he's got one other trick up his sleeve, which is, because he's a reality game show TV producer at heart, he wants to dominate the media news. So what's the biggest thing the Trump show could do to get the attention off Mueller, off Democratic investigations that the media would of course fall for hook, line and sinker? The cliff hanger: New Vice President.

KRISTOL: Yeah.

MURPHY: A reality show. Will it be Nikki Haley? General somebody we haven't heard about? You know, flame throwing Congressman? And he puts that show on.

KRISTOL: Right.

MURPHY: Now Pence, you know, who has made the Faustian deal will probably be very unhappy. But it's in Trump's interest to shake it up and have his own huge narrative to clog up all the chattering on cable. And I think Trump probably thinks, with his 1950s Queens outlook, you know, apparently the ladies don't like me, get a broad, you know. I mean, in his mind. So if I were Nikki I would continue the hiding pattern and, you know, vanish for a while, because the worst thing you could do is I think would be pick her.

Anyway, so let's see. But more twists and turns. And the biggest question for me on the Democratic side is do they go for an identity politics candidate, a mobilization strategy? Because all I know is for all the excitement about Andrew Gillum – who did a great job by the way, he came very close as a candidate – if they had nominated Gwen Graham, she'd be Governor of Florida right now.

KRISTOL: So do you think it's kind of pretty unambiguously clear that the reassurance strategy is better than the mobilization strategy for the Democrats?

MURPHY: Yeah, but there's just no passion for it in the grassroots, which means it's probably dead.

KRISTOL: Right.

MURPHY: Smart political types spent a lot of time in D.C. explaining the smart move. But this is, you know – political primaries are armies without generals.

KRISTOL: Right.

MURPHY: They hear the pitch from everybody and they move. I mean, a lot of us had all kinds of smart ideas for the Republican party in '16. They wanted the guy from the reality show, fired Gilbert Godfrey because, damn it, he was going to shake things up, and he was going to build a wall, and he finally told the truth about those Mexicans, you know, like a wildfire, it spread.

And all the fancy polling and a hundred million – I'm the idiot who blew a hundred million on Jeb. All that stuff meant nothing. They didn't want what we were selling. They didn't want Kasich. They didn't want us. They didn't want Marco, you know. They wanted Trump and they got him. That's how it works.

KRISTOL: And the Democratic equivalent of that you think is more likely younger generation, maybe woman, maybe African American?



MURPHY: Yeah, it just seems to be pretty powerful to me.

KRISTOL: Not Joe Biden, or not in this –

MURPHY: Biden's a good war horse, but yesteryear, you know.

KRISTOL: Or some moderates, you know, Hickenlooper or Michael Bennett, you know?

MURPHY: I want to fall in love with the moderate scenario because I'm not a communist or socialist, or Democratic socialist. But what's Michael Bennett's pitch? "I can do well amongst suburban women"?

KRISTOL: Yeah.

MURPHY: Okay. "How about we make history with Kamala Harris?" Again, I think the energy will be in an exciting identity politics candidate. But Mitch Landrieu who's a winner, you know, if you ask the computer about this –

KRISTOL: Yeah, I agree.

MURPHY: It says generally when the Democrats nominate a Southern White Protestant – with all due respect to Obama who brilliantly won two campaigns – Carter, Clinton, they do really well.

KRISTOL: Right.

MURPHY: And he's one I think to play in the modern primary.

And then, you know, you've got others. Amy Klobuchar would be a dark horse. But she's kind of interesting. She doesn't have any of the Hillary edginess. She's right next door to Iowa. She could break through there, you know, they have some – But I think it's going to be more generational, maybe outside Washington. And the identity politics equation is going to be big.

KRISTOL: And I think your point about the – if you're right about the primaries, that it doesn't – part of it is proportional representation, part of it is the new media and so forth. And new fundraising opportunities. It doesn't narrow as quickly. I guess it's hard to know which side of the party that helps exactly. But it certainly lets lesser known candidates get better known.

MURPHY: It means message candidates who have a resonating message, which gives them one, the money comes in without bundlers who care about polls; and, two, it gives them the ability to use social media without needing to spend fortunes on advertising. It can last a long time. If Beto had won he'd be the front runner, I believe.

KRISTOL: Well, let's talk about Beto.

MURPHY: And I think he's still real in the primary.

KRISTOL: You think he's real. I kind of do too. Why not? He got more votes in Texas than Hillary Clinton got, you know.

MURPHY: He shows up with his streaming show, every day in Iowa, being Beto. They like him. They like what he sells. And he's got a national – his national campaign was more successful than his Texas campaign.

KRISTOL: Right.

MURPHY: So does he make it through the hard second look and everything that happens in Presidential politics? I don't know. But I think he – I saw his letter, and I was not a donor by the way, right wing conspiracy buffs, but I saw his thank you email to donors and it was brilliantly done.

KRISTOL: Is that right?

MURPHY: Yeah. It was all about putting the kids to bed. Not the political crap speech which normally they get, "Well, we tried, thank you." It was a heartfelt thing about the night in the house. And so his thing is – I used to tell a joke about the future campaign will be somebody saying, "My bumper sticker bill in these serious times is, 'no bumper stickers at all.'" You know, I'm super authentic and make kind of a gimmick out of that. He's the authentic guy. And that I think is powerful.

Of the moderate cluster, though to finish –

KRISTOL: And I think the counter argument, hey, he's been in Congress for whatever he has, one or two terms, and he's not, "you can't make someone like that President." That's kind of gone after –

MURPHY: He's the Barack Obama of the House.

KRISTOL: – after Obama and after Trump. Though, also even W –

MURPHY: It's never about the past. It's about the pitching the future. And my view is it should be about the past. I like politicians who know how to govern.

KRISTOL: But experience used to be a fairly good claim in American politics. I guess, Carter is the counter argument. But the last two or three, even W, you got to say honestly – But certainly Obama and Trump, it's not about experience.

MURPHY: Yeah, it ain't what it used to be.

On the Dems, the last point I should have made, on the moderate side, the interesting one to me is Bloomberg. Not because of ideology, but because of persona, as "daddy grownup." That could be an interesting space. If he puts on a dashiki and campaigns with everybody else and tries to take his edges off, I don't think he'll go anywhere. But if he says, "You know what? I'm the grownup. I'm going to spend five billion dollars to take this cancer out of the White House. And it's a tough country to run, and I'm a tough guy?" That's interesting. And nobody else in their world can say that.

KRISTOL: And "I respect you people who want something fresh and new and different and to make history. But you know what? You can do that four years from now." Right?

MURPHY: Right. "Take a look at the appointments in my administration. You're going to be happy with who I put on the court, blah, blah, blah. But right now, I'm the Trump killer and I'm the grownup. Time for daddy." Maybe that's rocket fuel. I still think tough in a Democratic primary, but I think that's his best move.

KRISTOL: So you're somewhat bullish on Bloomberg, Beto, Harris.

MURPHY: I think if Bloomberg runs that campaign, which takes a lot of guts, I think he might have a shot. Bloomberg's got to do the old trick of you define the job to fit you, because you can't change you.

KRISTOL: Right.

MURPHY: And then I like the – Kamala Harris under the traditional rules of gravity. And then Elizabeth Warren I don't count out either. She's feisty. She's famous. White liberals and feminism. Two out of three, you know. She's like a better version of Hillary in some ways.

KRISTOL: Right.

MURPHY: The Republicans all say, "Oh, never." And I'm like ha, ha, ha, ha, you know, "never" is a word that ought to be banned now in this business.

KRISTOL: Yeah.

MURPHY: So we'll see.

## **II: The Republicans (25:30– 57:49)**

KRISTOL: And the Republican side? I mean, I was in New Hampshire after the primary and there was a little, they had a bad election night, everyone except for the Governor lost and lost both Houses. And the state's in great shape economically. Been well governed by Republicans. So it was entirely I think a national erosion against Trump, especially in southern New Hampshire which is basically upscale –

MURPHY: A suburb.

KRISTOL: Upscale suburbs, you know. And then some of the polls of focus groups I've seen show more openness to replacing Trump in 2020 than one would think from the simple approval number.

MURPHY: Right.

KRISTOL: People approve of Trump against Hillary, they approve of some of the policies, some of the judges, but they're a little nervous about Trump going forward.

MURPHY: We've seen some of this in the USC polling too. Tribally, "Oh, yeah, I'm for the Yankees." But, you know, "Would you like a different pitcher to win the World Series for the Yankees?" Half of them. Which correlates to Trump, you know, only got, I don't remember the exact, like 52 percent of the total Republican primary voters.

KRISTOL: Less, 45.

MURPHY: It was under 50.

KRISTOL: He and Sanders each got around 45 each.

MURPHY: In the last half of it there's no competition.

KRISTOL: Right, it was like mid to high 30s when it was a real race.

MURPHY: So, yeah, the idea that the party loves him is wrong. The idea that, you know, 40 percent, maybe a little less now, maybe a little more, in combat now against Pelosi, loves him is true.

KRISTOL: Yeah.

MURPHY: So how do you beat that? Again, the shame thing is the problem. In the old days you're Gene McCarthy, you got to New Hampshire, you do better than expected and the President's shamed out of the race.

KRISTOL: Right.

MURPHY: Well, with Trump it would be like, “They stole the vote. They bussed in people.” You know. next. And on he goes. So you don’t trip the giant.

And the other problem I think, and somebody who’s sympathetic to the idea of primary-ing Trump let’s say you go have that, I mean, I’m sure Kasich is thinking, “I was second in New Hampshire. This time I can beat him, or I can come within one point and that will trip the giant.” Well, the giant’s not going to do anything other than say you stole it in some illegal election and go on to the next one. And the media will give you a huge push, which they will do anyway if you’re running against Trump. But in our primary now that means the enemy is for you.

KRISTOL: Right.

MURPHY: “You’re a Democratic plot. The New York Times candidate.” That doesn’t help. So the push ain’t what it used to be, I think now. Flake is more interesting to me in some ways because he can legitimately come at Trump from the right. But same problem. He’ll have all the wrong friends.

KRISTOL: Yeah.

MURPHY: People like us will be for him. That doesn’t win him a South Carolina primary.

KRISTOL: Yeah. Sasse? Corker?

MURPHY: Interesting.

KRISTOL: Nikki Haley. All these people.

MURPHY: Again I think Nikki, my theory was that she wrote the op-ed. I think she’s playing a long game. But we’ll see, you know, we’ll see. I think they all run if Trump doesn’t run.

KRISTOL: Right.

MURPHY: But taking out Trump would require the shame proof campaign, which means you’re in it for the first half. And the real tragedy in this, because winner-take-all, you come within four points doesn’t matter, the media is calling you dead based on the delegate count.

So basically you got to beat Trump early and often through Super Tuesday. You got to go win California. That’s the neck breaker. Texas probably. You know we have a pretty front-loaded thing. So you start big and you beat him everywhere or not everywhere, but you beat him a lot. And then it would tip and go because you look like a winner, which is I think the most important thing that anybody wishing Trump bad political health in the Republican party, is it has to permeate over the next four months that Trump is a disaster for the reelection.

KRISTOL: Yeah. And I’m struck –

MURPHY: He’s political death.

KRISTOL: Now are you struck, and we’re speaking two weeks after the election – maybe it will be different a month from now – I think actually voters that I talk to, which is not representative, but there’s some evidence in the polls, as you said, are a little nervous. The Yankee fans are thinking, “Yeah, but you maybe making a trade or two wouldn’t be such a good idea. I mean, we fell short his year and I don’t know, they won two years ago, but maybe –”

MURPHY: Yeah.

KRISTOL: But I am struck that the elected officials, certainly the federal elected, the Congressmen and women and Senators they don't seem to be rethinking much at all. Maybe we wouldn't know, because they're thinking privately.

MURPHY: I think in the Senate where they're looking at a map that is not impossible but has its challenges in 2020, and they're watching the House guys move into smaller offices, I think there's some calculation going on there, because Mitch wanted to run the hedge up even higher this year to be ready for whatever bad things could come in 2020.

I think part of the problem, both of the electives and the psyche of the party is –

KRISTOL: And the operatives and the donors. I'm just feeling –

MURPHY: Oh, the operatives are pretty hopeless right now. Yeah.

KRISTOL: Why is that? I mean –

MURPHY: I have one crank theory, which doesn't explain it all, but the network election night has become the Super Bowl. Buzzers, sirens, exploding canons, you know, it's ridiculous. And they're running against a broadcast clock, so they've got to say something important every three minutes.

And because the media is obsessed with identity politics, which is another amplifier on that Democratic struggle, the initial races they really paid attention to were the historic African American candidates. Abrams in Georgia: double header, female African American winning Georgia, an old Southern state like that? Andrew Gillum in Florida against DeSantos, who is kind of a stage villain in some ways.

KRISTOL: Right.

MURPHY: And then Beto /Jesus running in Texas. And then they all started losing.

KRISTOL: Right.

MURPHY: And so Trump won the TV show of election night.

KRISTOL: Right.

MURPHY: Which reinforced this brilliant Rasputin thing Trump has done to the media and the Democrats and some Republicans, that Nate Silver said he was going to lose, and he won. He's got magical powers. And so people, you know, I'm sure they were holding emergency meetings on the West Side of LA at movie star houses, "What do we do the next morning? This is a disaster. Fire the [inaudible]" And then as we actually counted the votes, it was pretty good. It was about an A minus I think for them. But our troops, which our polls feed off of, felt like Trump did it again.

KRISTOL: Yeah. Now do you think that's changing? It feels like it's sinking in gradually.

MURPHY: It's starting to, but what the "let's get rid of Trump" movement in the Republican Party really needed was a terrible TV show where Trump is on the floor. And it didn't have that. Somebody said they ought to do now, election week, do like four shows on cable to kind of catch up with reality.

But I think it is, we just won't know how deep that goes. But right now there's kind of a feeling that well, he held Florida, and once he's on the ballot against Kamala Harris he's going to be able to carry Wisconsin and Michigan again.

KRISTOL: And that does it.

MURPHY: And nothing else – he’s President, yeah, there’s kind of that calculation.

KRISTOL: Yeah.

MURPHY: And that’s not crazy by the way.

KRISTOL: Right. And the donor – I mean, it is – I can’t tell, I mean, obviously there are people I talk to who are really, think Trump is bad for the country and they’re going to be in there to fight Trump. But there are a lot of – and there are a lot of donors who were uncomfortable with Trump, made nervous by him, wish he weren’t there. But he’s there, it’s not going to change. He might win.

MURPHY: Right. And he’s going to have on his side Democratic policy, because if the House gets in the policy business, they’re going to start halting fracking companies up, they’re going to, you know, we will see, because that caucus is, there’s some new fresh faces, but it’s still pretty much a pretty lefty labor caucus.

So Trump will now have the threat of Democratic policy to plan the reelect which might slap some of those nose-holding but very happy about regulatory reform and other things, business groups and everything back into line.

The interesting one is pharma where Pelosi wants to give them a haircut and Trump’s rhetoric has wanted to give them a haircut. That could be an interesting alliance, make life a little difficult for Mitch if he has to try to stop that in the Senate.

KRISTOL: So far you don’t see a real hemorrhaging on the Republican side, either among business support, donors, activists?

MURPHY: What I see is “Ooh, 2020 could be awful. He’s going to get crazier. But nobody can beat him in the primary, so we’ve got to prop him up and survive.”

KRISTOL: So we got to –

MURPHY: What’s going to happen?

KRISTOL: Hold the Senate. I can see that coming.

MURPHY: Yeah, yeah, yeah.

KRISTOL: Huge. If only we can hold the Senate, at least we can prevent terrible things from happening. And then if Trump gets lucky again we have the bonus of some more Supreme Court picks I suppose.

MURPHY: I think the kindling is dry, but they’re all just watching. They’re all insurance adjusters, you know, “Let’s play it safe, see what happens the next few months. Maybe we’ll get a new Supreme Court battle and Trump can really score with that. We’ll really hold North Dakota, you know.”

But now the Midwestern pols who are sitting in the volcanic ash in Michigan –

KRISTOL: Well, let’s talk about those three states.

MURPHY: Yeah, a little different there.

KRISTOL: For a minute. You're from Michigan and you did a ton of work there. Wisconsin you did –

MURPHY: Right. Tommy Thompson days.

KRISTOL: And Pennsylvania you've done, right?

MURPHY: Regionally, it's his magic region. And so the question becomes –

KRISTOL: 80,000 votes in those three states, right?

MURPHY: Yeah, the old math of those states were you do well upstate but you got to do okay in the suburbs around Philadelphia, around Detroit, you know, etc. The suburbs were back in this election. So it looked like a revert to mean, but I know what a lot of Republican polls thought in Michigan having been wiped out there – how do I say it? Less excited about this, is that Trump will still drive his super margins everywhere else and the Democrats will nominate somebody scary enough that they can reverse the suburban thing a little bit, and enough.

You know, we will see. Keep in mind that in Michigan alone Hillary massively under performed in Detroit. And if you're working for Corey Booker or Deval Patrick or Kamala Harris you're going to pitch, you rerun this thing in Michigan. We beat Trump based on Detroit alone where Hillary ran 75,000 votes behind Obama. And you catch, remember it was a 10,000 vote election, so there is a mobilization argument in those Great Lakes states.

KRISTOL: Yeah. I think the effect of, you're right, the effect of election night looking better than it really turned out to be, the effect of the marquee candidates losing, which meant Republicans could tell themselves, "Yeah, we can hang on to these big states." And –

MURPHY: "Look at what Trump did."

KRISTOL: And Florida's the classic Trump swing state, so "We hold Florida, we hold North Carolina. And then we need to hold a little bit in the Midwest and Trump's got sort of magic powers there presumably with White working class voters."

MURPHY: "And get New Hampshire back, because they won't bus in all those voters this time."

KRISTOL: Right, and they don't –

MURPHY: The famous –

KRISTOL: I mean, that's what – I guess, yeah, you don't see the sense of alarm, I guess I don't see the sense of alarm that I'd say if I were a political scientist talking to Republicans, I would say, look, have you looked at where this is going?

MURPHY: Yeah.

KRISTOL: Young voters and minorities, and there are more of each coming into the electorate. This is untenable.

MURPHY: What the Dem consultants say – I say [to them], "Your guys are going to go identity politics and reelect Trump." And they're going to say, "No, the data is sliding so far against Trump, and it will only get worse, that we can actually even pull that off."

KRISTOL: Right.

MURPHY: And they might be right.

But nobody in the [Republican] party – again I always use the analogy of mathematicians versus priests. And we mathematicians were discredited in 2016. “No way Trump can win, he’s going to lose by four million votes.” Well, he lost by 2.9 million and he won. So the priests said “tomorrow there will be a miracle, you know, the water will rise, a golden bridge will be built and we’re going to do it.” And they did it. So now the priests have a lot of grip in the party.

KRISTOL: Yeah, that’s a good way of putting it.

MURPHY: And we mathematicians are out. “But don’t you understand, take a look at the math in Bucks County.” And they’re like, “Yeah, yeah, yeah. Take your computers and –”

KRISTOL: And 2018 was sort of –

MURPHY: It was a mathematician win.

KRISTOL: But Trump wasn’t on the ballot.

MURPHY: Yeah. And all you got to see is one miracle and you’re very sheepish about betting against the priests who pulled off the miracle.

KRISTOL: Yeah.

MURPHY: So it’s going to take another – it’s either going to take a very bad year to get the mathematicians back, or we get to go conduct the experiment this time with Trump and probably, not certainly, but, you know, I’d bet money, get clobbered.

KRISTOL: Yeah. I guess Mueller’s a big variable. I mean, if he really has stuff that leads to impeachment that’s a whole different feel of –, at least impeachment proceedings are a consideration that’s a different feel for – than if basically he comes up short on that. I mean, it just honestly doesn’t find real collusion.

MURPHY: I just worry about –

KRISTOL: Or real obstruction. If he doesn’t find it, doesn’t Trump just declare a total vindication?

MURPHY: Yeah. And he’ll get a comeback. The media will say “Rasputin’s done it again.”

KRISTOL: Right.

MURPHY: “He was right about Mueller, they didn’t have anything. Look at that. Eric Trump has to pay a fine,” you know.

KRISTOL: Right.

MURPHY: “Trump’s Superman, does it again.” And so it could work the opposite way. And if the Dems go impeachment crazy, that’s risky.

KRISTOL: Yes.

MURPHY: Because then “the Boston Red Sox are trying to put us Yankees in jail just for winning the game.” And that will lead to – I’m not of the theory that the Democratic impeachment thing is a smart move for them at all. But it will be hard for their grassroots not to be demanding it.



KRISTOL: If Mueller has some stuff.

MURPHY: If Mueller has something real.

KRISTOL: In between kind of where it's –

MURPHY: The Democratic grassroots energy – I can't go to a dinner party in LA without having some perfectly nice, sane, real-world-job Democrat grabbing a napkin and sketching an arrow diagram about how Putin mind control, you know, I mean, it's just – the conspiracy stuff is just as kooky on their side. And impeachment is, they think, the only answer for that. I think politically it's a trap for the Dems.

KRISTOL: You think that really does drive things over the next year and in the primaries.

MURPHY: Well –

KRISTOL: The combination of loathing and hatred of Trump –

MURPHY: Yeah.

KRISTOL: Whether it's reasonable or not, that's another question, and genuine fear of what he's doing to the country.

MURPHY: Yeah.

KRISTOL: And the natural pull on the Democratic side of identity politics.

MURPHY: Yeah.

KRISTOL: And just progressiveness on a lot of issues, all combines –

MURPHY: It's a herd. And if it runs it's hard to stop. Now somebody with super human communication skills, a Mitch Landrieu, could I think communicate something about "don't impeach, kick his ass."

KRISTOL: Right.

MURPHY: Then put him in jail later. Right now, win the election and get, put that energy into something else. What you can't do is deny the energy.

KRISTOL: Which they did pretty well in the House elections.

MURPHY: Yeah.

KRISTOL: I mean, they had big turnout for a lot of fairly moderate Democratic candidates, especially women in Virginia and elsewhere.

MURPHY: And they nominated some pretty good candidates in the House, the fifth district. And if you look at the total turnout, it's off the scale compared to a normal midterm election. It's going to be probably 20 million higher, we're still counting.

KRISTOL: Yeah. A little more actually, yeah. So mobilization can support candidates who aren't themselves, you know, wildly "out there," in terms of progressive –

MURPHY: I think Trump's the mobilizer. Anybody who told you it was Democratic turnout technology that did this. Turnout is – more money's been blown on turnout. People either vote or they don't, and they

make that decision based on the messaging of the race and how involved they are. And this was a race because of Trump, and the passion that brought people to vote and don't normally do it. And it wasn't they got an extra robo call, you know.

KRISTOL: Right.

MURPHY: That's why, I'll tell you, I got, I made a bet with my brother who lives in Atlanta, who's an Independent swing voter, when I saw Oprah – who's wonderful, you know, maybe she runs for President, she'd be extremely formidable. But when I saw Stacey Abrams close the race with Oprah and with President Obama, I made a bet with him that Kemp would win. And I'm not a Kemp fan, by the way.

KRISTOL: Pretty bad.

MURPHY: Bottom of the barrel in the Republican Party. I would have – I don't like her ideology, but I could have slept okay if we abandoned Georgia to socialism for a few years. But closing on mobilization in a state where every African American knew the stakes, instead of going for suburbanites who are a little nervous, was a massive mistake. And in an otherwise I thought very good Stacey Abrams campaign. But you don't close on that in the South.

And I talked to some Democrats afterward and they're like "they should have kept Oprah there for three days," you know.

KRISTOL: Yeah.

MURPHY: Learning exactly the wrong lesson.

KRISTOL: So that's the other question. I mean, whatever lesson Republicans have or haven't learned, you have the Democrats learn the lesson that, which I think would be correct and I think it's what you've been saying, you get the mobilization anyway.

MURPHY: Right.

KRISTOL: With Mitch Landrieu.

MURPHY: Right.

KRISTOL: And you don't have the downside of Kamala Harris or someone more left wing or someone more edgy.

MURPHY: The problem is this takes over – mobilization is bad messaging. It's very good organizational politics.

KRISTOL: Right.

MURPHY: And if you have a good Democratic message you can mobilize. Obama was a genius at it.

KRISTOL: Right.

MURPHY: He ran a mobilization campaign without ever needing to talk about mobilization, because the messaging was so powerful.

KRISTOL: Right.

MURPHY: And he let – Hillary made the same error I think. If I had seen another commercial – and I say this as somebody with a young daughter who would be very happy to see a woman President, particularly a conservative one in a Thatcher-esk way, but all our liberal friends in LA were giving my daughter when she was born gifts for her future library and it was all happy world and super girl stuff. And I was giving her the Thatcher biography, which I look forward to her reading.

KRISTOL: That's good.

MURPHY: But if I saw one more commercial of a young doe eyed 11-year-old girl staring up at Hillary, I would have blown my brains out, because they got all that for free. You know what I mean? That was built in.

KRISTOL: Yeah.

MURPHY: And the messaging is about creative stuff. But for some reason that –

KRISTOL: But also the actual voters may want to just make history, not win the election. I guess that is an interesting question.

MURPHY: And that's normal. I mean, I get it. I would be for making history. I mean, I am.

KRISTOL: Right.

MURPHY: But politics is a hard practical business. And the worst you can do is to run your campaign with people who look at you as historic because nobody in – you got to have somebody in the campaign with a strong voice who represents the voters you don't quite have that you can get. I think Hillary's clique around her was very much into the crusade and they forget about people who bend metal for a living in Macomb County, Michigan who had other concerns than the bathrooms of North Carolina.

While Trump just instinctually, he's never been out of his bubble forever, but he instinctually kind of got all that. She didn't.

KRISTOL: So on either side if they called you in, one of the top Democrats and said what do we have to do to win both the nomination and the presidency, any striking –

MURPHY: It's hard because I spent election night yelling at the TV, because as much as I hate Trump I'm not a liberal.

KRISTOL: Right.

MURPHY: I think about, okay, we get rid of Trump, so now we get to live in Britain in the '70s under Labour for a while. The policy is so awful and it hurts the people they want to help.

KRISTOL: Could they reassure people, I mean, on economics, could they –

MURPHY: Yeah, look, I think the formula is –

KRISTOL: Could one of them pull a kind of Bill Clinton Sister Souljah moment and sort of show that he or she is not simply trapped by the left? As anti-political correct.

MURPHY: That's Bloomberg's play if he's in that primary and decides to make it a two-way referendum on him, and grab 40 percent of the vote, which is smart but painful, you know. But, no, I think his middle class economics, and change –

I'm a cyclical guy. So if you believe in that, Trump is uncivil, loud, screaming, incompetence. Strong competence? And opposite of Trump? Not so much anti as opposite? I think there's going to be a market for that. That's why, again, the strongest Republican candidate, if there is a meltdown, is Romney.

KRISTOL: So let's talk about the Republicans then finally. So what about the Republicans? You could argue generational change, a young, fresh face could be effective against Trump in New Hampshire, in Iowa or New Hampshire. You could argue he has competent experience, which probably takes you a little bit to an older candidate.

MURPHY: Right.

KRISTOL: What's your view on that?

MURPHY: I think – and remember our electorate is a little older, you know, a lot older. One of our challenges is that when the Republican Party is on the march, you know, it's one step at a time. If they really wanted to screw us, the Democrats should outlaw used tennis balls, you know. We would be in real trouble.

But, yeah, if the Trump, if Trump is really wounded and there was room for a real primary, I think a couple people might jump in, which is a problem. But I think one could be a Romney-esque, "alright, time for a grownup, you know, enough of this, end the nightmare. Let's get back to worrying about the deficit, free trade, strong defense, the Atlantic alliance."

KRISTOL: Could that be Romney himself?

MURPHY: Yeah, I think Romney would be the strongest. I don't know if he'd do it or not. I've encouraged him to and he's very patient and smiles.

KRISTOL: Yeah.

MURPHY: But right now he's focused on what he ought to be focused on, being a Senator. And the other would be young, fresh, new and a movement guy. A Cruz type might try too. Say "this was a betrayal of conservatism, that's why I didn't really endorse him. We learn from his successes and we're not going to repeat his mistakes," you know, some shtick like that.

So all the wings of the party might go for the jump ball. But I just think on the cycles. You know if you look at it, it's kind of unfair to simplify it this way, but you had George H.W. Bush, the ultimate gentleman, war hero, expert on world politics, but the country saw him and he couldn't figure out a supermarket scanner allegedly, so "oh, he doesn't understand us" and we went to the trailer park and found Clinton who totally understands us. In fact, a little too well.

So then we had to clean it up again and we went back to the Bush dynasty for good people and honor and dignity back to the White House with George W. And then people started thinking he wasn't smart because he couldn't put an eloquent sentence together – look at me, I just did the same thing. I'm an idiot too, I guess. Couldn't put an eloquent sentence together, unfair, but perception is reality.

So we got the law professor, the genius from Chicago, the most eloquent guy ever. And then it turned out he was too weak. So we got the guy who taught Gary Bussey how to work a snow cone machine on *The Apprentice* who was mister-blow-it-all-up tough guy. But now maybe it would be time to go to the opposite of that, particularly in a general election, I think, but potentially in a primary, a grown up. And the best grown up we got is Romney.

But young, fresh is – there's power there too. I don't know if Marco's still young fresh, but he might try.

KRISTOL: No, maybe not. And you could have different – I was struck when I was in New Hampshire, of course everybody in New Hampshire is a total political expert.

MURPHY: Oh, yeah.

KRISTOL: So they all tell you, “Here, Bill – ”

MURPHY: You have to pay attention to them, though, because their vote –

KRISTOL: Totally. Here’s how it has to work. And then they give you the most complicated scenario for how to defeat Trump, which is not –

MURPHY: Professional voters.

KRISTOL: Yeah. So one of them was “You got to do it in two or three ways. The first guy in is going to get slaughtered so you send your Jeff Flake,” as if one could control this.

MURPHY: Right, right, right, exactly.

KRISTOL: “Jeff Flake, you’re the sacrificial lamb. You’re the first over the trenches to see exactly where the fire’s coming from. You’ll be wiped out – ”

MURPHY: But your corpse is going to give us the –

KRISTOL: Exactly. “It’s going to give us the coordinates for the next guy, you know.” There’s a lot of that kind of talk.

MURPHY: Or don’t miss the Portsmouth, Lincoln Day parade, that’s *the* dinner.

KRISTOL: New Hampshire.

But having said all that, there was a lot of interesting talk and a lot of actually differing views: you need to go early. So let’s say one of the Republicans, Kasich, Flake, whoever, Sasse, someone who’s not been in the news, so let’s just say Sasse, hasn’t talked that much about it. “Okay, I’m seriously thinking of doing it, Mike. What do I do? What do I do in January, February, March? What do I do in April, May, June? What is my 2019 look like if I want to take on Donald Trump?”

MURPHY: I would say first you should run an extremely liberated campaign without any fear, because you’re going to lose. So once you get your head around that, you’re truly dangerous, which is true in politics. Most people run trying not to lose and go nowhere.

Two, I’d say you’re not going to shame him out. But you got to break through with an early win to get a platform to go after him, with a message. And that means Iowa, New Hampshire, probably New Hampshire. It’s the most fertile ground. I think just complaining about Trump’s behavior, which is built in, is not the way to go, because I think you get all that for free. Instead you try to basically run as a “return to conservative normalcy” and as a winner.

If Trump – what breaks Trump’s back is not that he’s crazy, they bought into that. What breaks his back is that he is a suicide pact for the reelect: we’re going to lose the Senate, and we’re going to lose the Presidency, and we’re going to live under the worst liberal decade of American socialism in our history. And the only thing standing between us and that is Admiral X or Flake or Corker, whoever it is.

KRISTOL: Right.

MURPHY: And it's a hard sell because while they smell the weakness of Trump, they don't know that Jeff Flake's a winner because he says he is. He can talk about the principles, the Reagan-esque principles and the opposite of Trump and all this stuff. But the only way to prove that is to start beating Trump. So there's a chicken and the egg problem that's really, really hard.

KRISTOL: Yeah. I've been struck by that talking to people. But I guess you go to Iowa, you just have to go to Iowa. I think it's very, very –

MURPHY: You beat him, make him a loser.

KRISTOL: – lopsided in terms of the importance of the first two states. Sort of the opposite of what you're saying about the Democratic Party in a certain way.

MURPHY: Yeah.

KRISTOL: I mean, if you don't beat him in Iowa and New Hampshire–

MURPHY: No, there's no platform.

KRISTOL: Right.

MURPHY: And you don't have the resources to go forward anyway. You got to kind of look through, and you got to beat him in California. That's the back breaker. And California has moved up.

KRISTOL: Right. And Iowa, depending on – did some polling in Iowa and New Hampshire, Trump's more popular in Iowa than he is in New Hampshire among Republicans. But the actual “would you consider an alternative to Trump” number is about the same.

MURPHY: Yeah.

KRISTOL: Iowa's a little more of a primary than people realize now. It's not a real caucus, you know. I mean, the turnout in Iowa is still pretty high.

MURPHY: Yeah. It's a tough world and it's extremely expensive to play there. My view is – and this generally doesn't work, but we did it with McCain in 2000 and I was the big pusher of it – if you're the little guy and you beat the giant in New Hampshire nobody cares if you weren't in Iowa. And it gives you the time to actually do New Hampshire right.

KRISTOL: And the New Hampshire voters don't care that you weren't in Iowa.

MURPHY: No, one of the best secret New Hampshire slogans is “screw Iowa.”

KRISTOL: Right.

MURPHY: I'd much rather be second in Iowa, first in New Hampshire.

KRISTOL: They told me that eight times that day and a half I was there, “Iowa grows corn, we grow Presidents.”

MURPHY: Right, believe me. Yeah.

KRISTOL: Actually the person who's –

MURPHY: It's on the driver's license.

KRISTOL: The person who's won Iowa has more often won the presidency than the person who's won New Hampshire in recent – like Obama in '08, Bush in 2000, etc.

MURPHY: Ideologically Iowa is starting to align more with South Carolina, which has become a hugely important part of the process. The new wrinkle is California.

KRISTOL: They don't like hearing that that Iowa is a better predictor than New Hampshire.

MURPHY: Yeah.

KRISTOL: Which I believe is empirically now true.

MURPHY: But if you're a non-Trump candidate – because New Hampshire, the Independents can vote – you have a much better chance of beating Trump in New Hampshire than you do in Iowa.

KRISTOL: And you think California moving up means South Carolina doesn't then knock you out when you presumably lose South Carolina to Trump?

MURPHY: Yeah, but losing South Carolina is anthrax for you in California. Remember California's a closed primary. So the idea that this is squish land out here, it's not Iowa or South Carolina, but it's not New Hampshire either.

KRISTOL: Right.

MURPHY: And it only costs five million a week to be on television. So it's hard. It's hard. That's why you look at the people –

KRISTOL: But here if anywhere, since we're in California talking we should make clear, I mean, they should see how Trump has just destroyed the party. It was not in great shape anyway, God knows.

MURPHY: I would think you'd go around Orange County now, which is now wiped out, you do hear some grousing. But the problem is when you lose, you reduce down to your hard core and it's all priests. They're all like, "We're up in the mountains because those damn mathematicians never let us talk about you know land mines on the border instead of a wall. And we would have won," you know. It's not like a reality-based losing team at that point.

In fact, a couple of us were joking around, "why don't we go take over the California Republican Party and make it an anti-Trump fortress." And we all just said Christ, when we had Schwarzenegger as governor, you know I worked for him, we could barely bring him through there as the sitting governor of California. Aluminum foil hats, 80 percent of those delegates are super hard core. There are only a thousand of them or 1,200. But they're the 1,200 people, maybe, there are probably 200 that get it, maybe 250. But you got 900 who are the 900 least able to get it people in California, are entrenched there.

So it's hard. It's hard. You also need a star. You need somebody who's got it. When Ted Kennedy took on Jimmy Carter, ran a terrible campaign, he had the Kennedy name, the big machine, he lost. When McCain took on the front runner George W. Bush, he almost made it because he was a star. Reagan against Ford was a star. And right now I don't –

KRISTOL: And McCarthy in a weird way.

MURPHY: Yeah.

KRISTOL: In '67, '68 –

MURPHY: Get clean for Gene. Yeah.

KRISTOL: Was kind of a star in an odd way.

MURPHY: You need a star. And we're still looking.

KRISTOL: Okay. Well, I hope that person, I hope they all call you in the next two, three months. You give them this good advice, and one of them emerges as a star. But you don't have to be a star ahead of time.

MURPHY: No, the next three months are – it's not like time, like, "ooh, we have to get started in March" or something.

KRISTOL: So give me your sense finally on time?

MURPHY: The battle to be fought between now and this summer is that Trump is political death for the Party. Because when the bulk of opinion moves to that – which is the truth by the way, and we just proved it – so we're in a much stronger position on that argument than we were before the election, when it was total Rasputin. Once that tumbler clicks, then the market of ambition and ideological thing and the specter of the Democrats after we watch Pelosi operate for a while, the case becomes more persuasive.

But until you break that idea that Trump is invincible, and not only in the Party but especially in the general election, I don't think there's any space to operate.

KRISTOL: And you don't think it particularly, it's necessary for one of these candidates to show up in New Hampshire in March as opposed to May or –

MURPHY: The biggest joke about New Hampshire is you're not there for the Hopkinton Town Hall eight months before – The hardest thing about running in a New Hampshire Presidential primary, done a couple of them, is you really find yourself meeting the same 2000 people over and over and over again. And breaking that model is the key.

That's why McCain did all the town halls. You got to get into the retail business there. And it compiles. It all, it's like any primary, most of it happens in the last seven weeks, in some ways the last three weeks. So, no, no. No rush.

Right now the Rasputin thing has to go away. And people making calculations – and some of this in the Senate happens, that my goodness we're not going to win back the House with Trump. We could lose the Senate. President Elizabeth Warren? And we've got to break the thing among our grumpy old White guys, the bulk of the party leadership, that a Warren can't get elected.

KRISTOL: Yeah.

MURPHY: I remember around McCain in 2008 – I didn't work the campaign, but I stayed in touch with John, god bless him – and some of the leadership there would explain to me with scoffing, "No way an African American can win. I can't believe you work in politics, Mike Murphy." And I was like, "You idiots."

KRISTOL: Right.

MURPHY: And here we are. So Kamala Harris can win. I don't think it's their strongest play, but she can against Trump. Trump might be the one Republican she can beat. And she and a few others could be the Democrat he might be able to beat. It would be a contest. If I were the Dems I'd take the risk out and nominate somebody who's certain to win.



KRISTOL: Right.

MURPHY: But their grassroots doesn't think that way.

KRISTOL: And if they win it, and this would scare Republicans, if they win the presidency they probably tip the Senate, you know, which is only 52/48.

MURPHY: Yes.

KRISTOL: Or 53/47. And then you have Democratic governance, you know, expanding the size of the Supreme Court and God knows what all the economic policies, all the political correctness. Unified Democratic governance in 2021.

MURPHY: Yeah. Here's my pitch to you for the *Weekly Standard* with good cover art, you know: "Welcome to the 2020s," and it's a whole episode about America as Britain in the '70s under Labour. "Nationalized General Motors today to build the first Eco-Green, you know –" You can imagine.

KRISTOL: It's good. On that cheerful note we should –

MURPHY: Without a scary monster in the woods, without a hanging in the morning, how do you get minds clear?

KRISTOL: Yep. Sound point. That's a good – that's almost a bumper sticker. That's a bumper sticker.

MURPHY: Yeah, there you go. "They're coming."

KRISTOL: Mike Murphy, thank you very much.

KRISTOL: Bill, always fun to be on the "Bill Kristol Revolutionary Resistance Hour" here.

KRISTOL: It's huge, right?

MURPHY: Proud to be here in our secret location.

KRISTOL: They're all, the Senators and the Governors and possible other candidates –

MURPHY: Glued, glued.

KRISTOL: – they're all glued to the screen. Every tip they can pick up from Mike Murphy, they're eagerly –

MURPHY: Well, doubt that. I doubt it. They're like who? That clown? Wasn't he in the '90s? But the reality's the reality. And the question is how "woke" we can get the GOP on this. Or we get to repeat history. And the history of two weeks ago was not pretty.

KRISTOL: Mike Murphy, thank you so much for joining me.

And thank you for joining us on CONVERSATIONS.