

# CONVERSATIONS

WITH BILL KRISTOL

## Conversations with Bill Kristol

**Guest:** Kristen Soltis Anderson,  
Author and Pollster

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**I: Millennials and Generation Z (0:15 – 39:23)**

KRISTOL: Hi, I'm Bill Kristol, welcome to CONVERSATIONS. And I'm pleased to be joined again by Kristen Soltis Anderson, a leading Republican pollster, a co-founder of Echelon Strategies? Insights?

ANDERSON: Insights.

KRISTOL: Insights. I can never keep those polling and consulting firms names – Why Echelon?

ANDERSON: So Echelon because after sitting in a coffee shop for three hours trying to figure out what we wanted to name our company, my co-founder and I realized that there was a spy program from the 1980s. I was Googling combinations of things I liked, Margaret Thatcher, you know and what have you, and came up with Echelon was the name of a spy program or a rumored spy program from the 1980s Cold War era. We just thought it was fun. And we have Margaret Thatcher throw pillows on the couch at our office. So there you go.

KRISTOL: Excellent. So despite being focused on millennials you're also looking back. That's very nice, reassuring to people like me.

You're a leading student of younger voters and the issue of how Republicans are doing and can do with younger voters. You wrote that book, very good book in 2015 on the Selfie Vote, and happy to have you again today to talk about millennials and even about younger voters I guess, right?

ANDERSON: That's right. So the millennials, we're old now. Gen Z, that's the new generation.

KRISTOL: So there was just a poll out. So we're talking what, January 23<sup>rd</sup>, just to locate people, and a poll came out last week, which you wrote about. Let's begin with that. A Pew Poll I think on –

ANDERSON: That's right.

KRISTOL: What is Gen Z anyway?

ANDERSON: So the millennial generation is 1981 to 1996, which means that your 18 to 22-year-olds on college campuses today are not actually millennials. They are part of Generation Z. There are some other names that have been thrown around for it. IGen, MTV briefly tried to call them The Founders, but that name didn't stick. Gen Z is what Pew has called them, that's what I'll be calling them. And it's kind of the first big landmark study of what does this generation think?

A lot of them aren't 18 yet, so you've got to figure out how do you survey teenagers effectively and how do you really wrap your mind around what do these people think?

KRISTOL: Some of them are voters.

ANDERSON: Some of them are.

KRISTOL: The older ones are 23, right, if I've done the math.

ANDERSON: That's right. So you walk onto a college campus nowadays.

KRISTOL: That's Gen Z.

ANDERSON: The students there, they're mostly Gen Z. So for this generation, I've heard a lot of speculation, "Well, the millennials," you know, Kristen, "you've been saying for a long time, they're trending leftward, they like Democrats, but they'll get older and they'll become Republicans."

And the second thing I hear is, "Well, maybe we've lost the millennials, but I hear those Gen Z kids are conservative. They're coming of age in the Trump era, they're coming of age in a time that's a little bit different. I've been hearing that they're more conservative."

And the Pew study sort of puts to rest both of those theories. Both of them are false. The millennials have not gotten more conservative and Gen Z is even more progressive than the millennials.

KRISTOL: Great news. [Laughter]. So which should we begin with, the millennials or Gen Z?

ANDERSON: Let's start with millennials first, because that sort of from when we last spoke and I gave you all of that news about where millennials stood on issues like climate, etc. They have not moved further to the right, and, in fact, on some issues have moved further to the left. If you took a look at the –

KRISTOL: So millennials now are age – so they're like 38?

ANDERSON: That's right.

KRISTOL: Down to –

ANDERSON: 24-ish. 23, 24.

KRISTOL: So a lot of them are actually adults and [have] families, kids.

ANDERSON: Right. An awful lot of them are in their 30s. They pay taxes, have jobs, buying homes, having kids. Not becoming Republicans in the process.

And what's interesting is when I first began looking at this topic, I remember the first data point that I saw that made me really concerned was actually pre-Obama. It was the 2006 midterms. Republicans did terribly in that midterm. But that was also the first time that any political party had lost a generational cohort by as big a margin as Republicans lost young people in that election.

Now again many millennials were not eligible to vote in the 2006 midterm. So we're just looking at kind of that leading oldest edge of them. But they broke against Republicans by a 20-something point margin. Most of the time in past midterms where we had good data, there weren't big generation gaps quite like that.

If you fast forward to the 2018 midterms those folks who have now moved up, they're in their mid-30s, they broke against Republicans by 20-some points. They've gotten older, they've gotten a lot older, a lot's happened since 2006 in our world, but they are still voting pretty heavily Democratic. And at this point, I mean, for Republicans to win back some of those oldest millennials would take a miracle.

KRISTOL: So why? What do they care about? The normal Republican hope was they'll pay taxes, they'll have kids, they'll become more conservative, the way people do when they see how the real world works.

ANDERSON: Well, there are some issues where the numbers haven't changed at all, things like LGBT rights, things like climate, things like race, where their views sort of remain very much of the mind that the climate is changing and mankind is causing it and we ought to do something about it. That gays and lesbians ought to have the same rights as heterosexual Americans. That when it comes to race that racism is a real thing that needs to be addressed, that we have not moved past that in America. It's still a problem.

These are all still things that young people believe. They have not shed these beliefs as they have gotten older.

But you also have two other key things that I think have prevented millennials from gravitating toward the GOP. The first is around foreign policy. And I think we talked about this in our last conversation, that this new Pew data, they ask do you believe that America is the best country in the world? Do you believe that America's one of the best, but you know there are lots of countries that are great? Or America's not one of the best countries in the world.

And millennials overwhelmingly are unlikely to say that they think America is particularly great. Gen Z even more so. But the idea that America is a force for good in the world, that we ought to exert our influence around the world, that the world is better off when America has a strong amount of influence, uses its military and economic might to kind of shape world events, millennials don't believe that. And Gen Z even more so.

So from a foreign policy perspective, the kind of internationalist/interventionist Republican position, which is not necessarily the position of today's Republican Party, given President Trump, that's I guess a separate issue –

KRISTOL: We can get to that, right?

ANDERSON: That that piece of the GOP is out of step with where millennials are.

And then views on the role and scope and size of government. So we know that Republicans and young people on social issues: there's not a lot of alignment there. There's that issue on foreign policy. But surely, maybe on domestic economic policy we could win them. And yet, when you ask the question which do you agree with more, that the government ought to be doing more to solve problems or the government is doing too much that would be better left to individuals and businesses. Back in 2010 –

KRISTOL: Which is a standard classic –

ANDERSON: Classic question Pew's been asking it for a long time.

KRISTOL: It does distinguish Republicans from Democrats.

ANDERSON: Very much so.

KRISTOL: In a pretty simple way.

ANDERSON: And they asked it in 2010, and this was Pew's big, it was when they did their landmark report on millennials. "Ah, this new generation," they asked that question. And at the time about 53 percent of millennials, I think it was about 53 percent, said they wanted government to do more to solve problems. Where for other generations overwhelmingly they were saying no, no, no, government's doing too much.

Fast forward. *Every* generation has become more favorable to the government ought to do more to solve problems' position. So that's a problem for small government conservatives, number one. Number two is that millennials it's now about two-thirds say government should be doing more to solve problems, and for Gen Z it's all the way up to 70 percent.

So Republicans have lost young voters on social and cultural issues. They have lost them on foreign policy to an extent. There are pieces of what President Trump does in terms of foreign policy that do actually line up with where millennials are.

But then on domestic policy, role of government in society, that's a battle that maybe could have been won had the Right tried to speak to young voters ten years ago, but that time has passed. And now the idea that government should be more active has really taken more root with this generation.

So there's all the good news.

KRISTOL: So that's the millennials. And that is stunning. So the millennials have gotten more liberal just to use a simple –

ANDERSON: But everybody has.

KRISTOL: On government.

ANDERSON: Everybody has. The idea that government ought to take a step back has just become less attractive across generations. But it's particularly acute with the youngest.

KRISTOL: And do we know why that is? I guess it's hard to tell –

ANDERSON: If you think about it, I have become a very big believer in the kind of follow the leader theory of politics. There's a great book that a political scientist at Berkeley wrote, called *Follow the Leader?* Question mark. About how, when he took a look at public opinion trends, the conventional wisdom in political science was this kind of rational voter theory that you sit down and you say, well, here are my issue positions on all these things, let me match that up with the matrix of all of the – here's what candidates think and it's in my interest therefore to go vote for candidate x, y or z. And so I will take the action to go vote.

What his book finds is actually that it kind of goes the other way around, that people find leaders that they like and then adapt their own policy preferences to match that leader. And the Trump era has been a perfect example of this where Republicans who maybe they didn't love Trump but then they voted for him, suddenly took brand new positions on things like Russia, etc.

And Donald Trump is not a small government kind of guy. That's not been a big animating piece of his philosophy. And so I think as a result of that the Republican electorate has just become less of the mind

that “get government out of my business” and instead would like government to step in and solve their problems. Or problems of people who look and think like them or live where they live. And the small government philosophy has just fallen completely out of fashion.

KRISTOL: And I guess ten years of Presidents who were big government liberals basically, or big government conservatives if that’s what you want to call Trump, a big government populous, nationalist or something, that has an effect, right? I mean, that’s – and I guess the last two years of Bush – incidentally we have a financial crash which fairly or unfairly looks like the markets were out of control, and there weren’t enough checks on the banks. And then Bush says we can’t just, we have to save the economy and have to pass the bailout, which was probably right. But didn’t he make some comment at the time that “we can’t be dogmatic about markets.” Or we need to, you know, we can’t just – You need to step in some times and override the markets.

And I think if you, so probably if those 12 years of experience with three Presidents, not really making the case for markets, I think it’s fair to say would have an effect, I guess is what you’re saying, right?

ANDERSON: And really I mean, the sum total of all of that new Pew data – One thing that strikes me is that there had been this thought that you would have a kind of young libertarian movement, that young people might pull the GOP in a more libertarian direction.

It may be the case that young voters who remain in the GOP move them to a more libertarian place on both foreign policy and social issues. But on economic policy young voters are not free marketeers by and large. Or at least they are not of the mind that government is too big right now or ought to be doing less.

KRISTOL: Or that it should be limited in some principled way that would –

It is interesting because you wrote *The Selfie Vote* book. I mean, the conventional wisdom I’d say five, eight years ago was they see the iPhone, they see Google, they see all these amazing developments that are being brought to you basically by the private sector, a little bit of help obviously from the public sector, and therefore they’re going to be, you know – And they’re used to making their own decisions and being independent and Uber and –

ANDERSON: And I’m still a believer that that could work, but no one’s really making that argument in a strong sort of way. And then you also have, I mean, if you take something like Uber. I mean, Uber had big Me Too problems with their executive. Or you take a look at social medial platforms, tech companies. They’re all having public affairs, public relations crises.

And so on the other hand, while I do believe the way young people are living their lives and the way they use technology would lend itself more to a “hey, let’s decentralize power, let’s put power back in the hands of the individuals, let’s not have it centralized in Washington,” that that should be an effective message. But I don’t see anyone on the national scene right now who’s really even interested in trying to make that case.

KRISTOL: So you think it’s more the absence of leaders making the case than perhaps the intrinsic nature of the time somehow.

ANDERSON: I think it can be both, but I certainly think that there is an absence of leadership on this. I believe last time we talked, I talked about this kind of vicious cycle where young people think, “Well, no politicians are speaking to what I care about, and so I’m going to – you know, the politicians who talk to me I’ll listen to them. But politicians aren’t really talking to me, so I’m not going to participate in politics as much.”

And then political leaders go, “Oh well, see, look, they’re not participating, so they’re irrelevant.” And that’s particularly a problem on the Right. Of the Right just not speaking to young people.

KRISTOL: Because they’re not participating in Republican primaries.

ANDERSON: Exactly.

KRISTOL: Really a lot. Really much. So not really – not participating much.

ANDERSON: No, exactly.

KRISTOL: “I don’t need to appeal to them when I’m running in my primary race,” I suppose.

So that’s the – okay, so that’s the millennials. And then Generation Z? What did Pew discover?

ANDERSON: Yeah, so what they found is that Generation Z is in some ways even more progressive than millennials. Or actually I should say on most issues, they’re just right in line with where millennials are. So on things like climate change, on things like role of government in society, their answers are fairly close, on issues like immigration, etc.

The biggest differences between Gen Z and the millennials, one is on the issue of racism. Pew had a question where, it’s a question one of those ones, it’s standard, they’ve asked it over time. It’s basically asking do you think that Black Americans face different hurdles when it comes to – or do they have less opportunity?

And for Democrats of all ages 80 plus percent say yes to that question. They sort of overwhelmingly believe it.

For Republicans, for older Republicans only about one in five think that systemic racism is a thing. But for young Republicans, Gen Z Republicans it approaches, it heads closer to half. It’s still way below where Gen Z Democrats are, but it’s one of the few issues where you really do see a stark divide between Gen Z and older Republicans.

The other issue where there’s a big difference is on the way they think about gender. In terms of, about one in three says that they know someone who prefers to use different pronouns or gender neutral pronouns instead of he, she. That they believe that transgender individuals are not treated well in society or are not given enough rights.

So I think the biggest difference that we’re going to see between Gen Z and millennials are the way that they have been raised to think about gender: not was a binary, but rather as something that is on a spectrum, and is about your internal identity.

KRISTOL: And that’s broadly. That’s not a tiny minority view on a few college campuses, the way some conservatives might want to hope.

ANDERSON: No, no. Well, I mean, if you look at the data it’s one in three. And, of course, for even the Silent Generation, interestingly, seven percent of those in the Silent Generation said that they know someone who prefers different pronouns. But that could be grandchildren. That could be their grandchildren’s friends, things like that. So it’s just fascinating to watch how quickly public opinion has moved on that sort of an issue, which is what I think has led it to be one of the few issues where you see Gen Z in a different place than where millennials are.

KRISTOL: And so here are the poor Republicans. They're adjusting some, on some of these social issues, marriage is presumably not much of an issue anymore. Is that right? I think that was one of the ones you thought was a real obstacle to Republicans even getting a hearing from younger voters.

ANDERSON: Sure. And I think in a way it's been good for Republicans that the Supreme Court made a decision, the issue was dealt with. Marriage for all became the law of the land, and it sort of in a way took it away as a hot button. But we've now moved to bathroom bills and does the wedding cake baker have to make a cake. And so the debate over LGBT rights in a way it's moved past the same sex marriage debate because the Supreme Court spoke.

But now it's moved into new terrain where I still think Republicans find themselves on the wrong side of the issue, or unable to communicate effectively about what religious freedom means in a way that doesn't sound like you're just endorsing or condoning bigotry.

KRISTOL: Yeah, I'm curious about that because I mean religious liberty, some of us actually think it is, there's a genuine argument to be made there. But I have a lot of conservative friends who kind of think that's the magic wand that you can wave and find a more popular way of debating these issues. I mean, not just popular, it's authentic, it's real, but that's a way that if it gets onto religious liberty grounds, conservatives or Republicans win.

But I'm not so sure that's true. I mean, do you find – are they concerned much about religious liberty? They're a less religious generation, right?

ANDERSON: They're a less religious generation is what I was going to say. If you take a look, at least when it came to the millennials, there was a lot of data that suggested they considered themselves spiritual: that they would pray daily, that they considered themselves people of faith. But that they were much less likely to identify with a particular named religious tradition. Versus older people who were more likely to identify themselves as religious, not spiritual, religious, and to identify with a named religious tradition.

So I do think, not to say that – I think that freedom broadly is a winning message for the Right. But what happens when my freedom runs into your freedom? And that's where the religious liberty and who bakes whom a cake debate unfolds. And I think that's because we're talking about different, two different individuals' freedoms colliding, and a belief among young people in equal rights and LGBT rights. And I think that's why religious freedom is not the magic wand that conservatives wave and suddenly public opinion among young people changes in their favor on this issue.

KRISTOL: That's interesting. And climate change? I think when we last spoke – and you and I have discussed this in another context too, privately – I mean, the degree to which that for young people that's just a non-starter almost if you are not willing to acknowledge its existence and some human role in it and some need to do something about it.

ANDERSON: Yeah, and I've seen very little data suggesting that millennials have all coalesced around a particular policy that needs to be implemented in order to address climate change. I've not seen data suggesting there's a huge ground swell of millennial support for a cap and trade, carbon tax. There's still sort of a sense of well, we should do something about it, what does something look like?

Which is why I think conservatives ought to step in with a *something* or else that fill in the blank that someone else is going to fill that in with a policy that conservatives are going to like an awful lot less. One of the things that I think has been personally very disappointing for me coming out of the midterms was you had Congressman Ryan Costello in Pennsylvania who'd been a big advocate out front on this issue, simply choosing not to run again, sort of seeing the writing on the wall, that this was going to be an ugly midterm.

You had Carlos Curbelo who was one of the big advocates on this issue losing in his reelection. And so a lot of the Republican climate advocates got wiped out in the midterms. And not just on climate but all sorts of really good members. And some of them more solutions oriented, or willing to work across the aisle, those types of folks, they were the ones that got wiped out in the midterm.

So climate's just one issue where I think the voices in the party who wanted to come up with "what's a conservative climate policy," there are fewer of them now. And I think it just further entrenches the long term problem that the GOP has.

KRISTOL: I looked very, very quickly at the Pew poll, I looked at your article, which reproduced some of the results. It did just seem I guess if I'm able to summarize part of it, I guess they divided at 18, at one point 18 to 45, I think and then 45 to – 18, 34, 34, 45, I think it was something like that. And then 45, 55, and then older.

And it was striking how much the 18 to 45 all seemed to have one set of views to me. I mean, they were not that distinct from each other. Gen Z, millennials and even maybe younger whatever comes before millennials, Gen X, I guess. And then it sort of does flip a little bit and then you have kind of older American. Is that generally speaking right?

ANDERSON: Yeah. And I think that's – that sort of data is valuable because it really, it just goes to show that there's not this gradient that as people are getting older they're moving further to the right. I mean, I really think that for folks who came of age during, they remember 9/11 or they remember the financial crisis, but these were one of their first early formative political memories, versus those who'd had decades of political life before those events happened.

I mean, it really seems to me that that – capped off what the election of Barack Obama – it just created this whole new way of thinking about politics for the millennial and now Gen Z generations. And you see it in the Pew poll, you see it in the exit polls. If you looked at the exit polls from 2018, again the youngest voters, all the way up until those into their late 30s, they all kind of behaved the same.

An 18 year old and a 38 year old do not have a ton in common, but their likelihood to vote Republican or Democrat is actually pretty similar these days. And that ought to be terrifying to Republicans, because this is not just a couple of kids on college campuses, this is now two decades' worth of Americans.

KRISTOL: And this is a Republican problem, not just or even primarily a Trump problem?

ANDERSON: Well, I think that Trump has not improved the situation. In the Pew poll they asked, "Do you approve or disapprove of the job Trump is doing." There's a generation divide. I think it was 29 percent of millennials, 30 percent of Gen Zs said they approve of Trump. It's not zero.

KRISTOL: But two to one against Trump I would say among young voters.

ANDERSON: It's not a good place to be.

KRISTOL: And slightly negative among older voters, but closer.

ANDERSON: Right. And so the question I think facing the GOP in the Trump era is do you just say "we're not going to win those young people, but let's fix our numbers with senior citizens." Because you could also make the case that part of why Republicans did poorly in the 2018 midterms was not that they lost young voters, even though they did, but it was that they also failed to run up the numbers with senior citizens like they would have needed to.

And so does Trump double down and say, "I'm going to go after my base, I'm going to go after senior citizens, the voters who really liked me before, hang onto them, speak about the policies that I know



really fire them up and get them excited. And just sort of give up on trying to win a generation that's not going to warm to me?"

KRISTOL: I mean, he's only on the ballot one more time presumably. So he could try that. It still looks like he's going to, based on 2018, it's not producing quite enough voters. But that's not crazy that it could, I suppose, with an unattractive Democrat or something in 2020.

But don't you think for the Party as a whole this is something you've argued – I mean, how does that work over the longer term?

KRISTOL: It started before Obama and it will continue after Trump. Trump made it harder to turn the Titanic around. But he is not the only reason.

And, in fact, I think that Trump, he could have done things that could have actually fixed this. I do not believe that he personally holds views on certain social issues that are as conservative as sort of your median Republican. But he has sort of put that aside in order to, you know, build up his support among evangelical voters, etc. I mean, he could have been a very unorthodox person and really reshaped the way people think about Republicans in a way that it could have aligned with young voters.

I actually think you see, if you see Ivanka Trump, the message that she is always going with is very kind of, it's kind of a "selfie vote-ish" spin on things. It just ignores that her father is President. And he is the opposite of the selfie vote type President, I mean.

So there are some efforts around the margins. But I think Trump on balance has made it even harder for Republicans to fix a problem that existed before him and will exist after him.

KRISTOL: And I guess just the way our system works really with primaries, I guess is the main driver of this. Maybe that's one of the things I haven't thought of, just makes it hard to snap out of the cycle once you're in it, don't you think?

ANDERSON: Well, sure. And the political – the incentives in the political world are always short term. There is no one whose job is dependent upon a Republican's going to win the Presidential election in 2028. There's no one. So there's no one focused on that. Everyone's focused on what's going to happen two years from now. And understandably. That's the incentives in politics.

And so when I come in and I say, "Well, gosh, those 18-year-olds from the last Presidential election they're going to be voting until 2076," most of the people I'm talking to are like, "I'm not going to be around for the 2076 election, I'm not going to be working in politics then at a minimum."

And so the incentives to go after young voters: you're making a long-term case in an industry that is very understandably short-term focused. "Let's win the next election, let's bank as many judges, appointments, you know, policy wins as we can in the short term, because you never know when it's going to run out." So no one is sort of minding that longer term process.

The other problem is that where Republicans land on things like, for instance, the wall and the government shut down, you have polls that since the shutdown began in late December have trended ever so slowly and surely, in later January accelerated to become quite ugly for Republicans.

KRISTOL: And we're speaking to some people what four weeks after the shutdown?

ANDERSON: The government is still shutdown.

KRISTOL: It's January 23<sup>rd</sup>.

ANDERSON: It still may be shut down when this reaches the surface. But the polls have gotten uglier and uglier for the President. And yet when you ask voters do you think that the President should hold his ground and not reopen the government until he gets that wall funding, about two-thirds of Republicans say yeah, hold the line.

And I think he not incorrectly has assessed that if he takes an action that the majority of Americans might say they support, but his base doesn't like, he will lose part of his base. But he will also not win those swing voters who have a laundry list of reasons why they don't like him.

And so it's not completely irrational to double down on your base, do the things that you said you promised them that you would do. It is not a completely wrong headed strategy. I don't think it's a recipe for success in 2020, but I also think if he loses his base he's not wrong to wonder, well, then who do I have?

KRISTOL: Yeah, I think for him it's a closer – I still would argue he's depending an awful lot on a second inside straight or more difficult inside straight, if there is such a thing, than he pulled in 2016. But, yes, since he's not going to get those voters back anyway, he thinks, "I've got to just make sure my base is totally solid and totally motivated, and demonize whatever Democrat it is or minimize, or denigrate and hope they make a mistake in their nominating process and I'll keep Republicans on board." As he has for two years, much to my dismay sometimes, and surprise sometimes, honestly. But he's done it. There's been an awful, much more willingness to go along with him than I might have expected.

But for Republicans going along with him it's a somewhat different calculation, right? I mean, they don't get the – they're not really in Trump's situation where he can't win over – I would think if you're a Senator, a normal 50-year-old Senator, or 40-year-old House member, or a Governor, I mean, you're sort of being dragged along the Trump path. Which may be at this point the only path he really can plausibly, or it's plausible to say that he has to stay on that path.

But isn't he sort of taking a whole party onto a path that doesn't have a very attractive future? And is sort of preventing people from correcting or his dominance is preventing people from correcting it?

ANDERSON: I had thought that if the midterms went very badly for Republicans that you might begin to see more Republicans sort of speaking out, kind of defying. When they don't like what's going on in the White House being comfortable saying it. You actually haven't seen a ton of that. Even as the numbers have trended uglier and uglier on the shutdown, you've only seen a handful of members, you know, "I'm going to vote for a bill to reopen the government. I'm going to –" It's only about what, two dozen or so that have done things like that?

So really, I mean, Trump still has the "I am a winner, I'm the one who knows how to win, you all think you know how to win, but without me, you don't win, so you need to follow me." He still has that argument to make and no evidence thus far, at least he can make the case that there's no evidence thus far, that he's wrong. And he can point –

KRISTOL: But 40 House Republicans aren't there who were there three months ago.

ANDERSON: But remember, I mean, he came out, was it the day after the election and said, "Oh, all those people that lost, they were the ones – 'Mia Love gave me no love,'" right? I mean, I was horrified to see him calling out some of these members by name. But he also wasn't wrong to point out that correlation. A correlation is not causation.

KRISTOL: Yeah, they were in tougher districts.

ANDERSON: But he was not wrong to point out that correlation.

KRISTOL: And I think picking up the two Senate seats really, though it's only a net of one. If you count the loss of Alabama from the beginning of the cycle, is a huge, helped prevent a narrative that he's decimating the Republican Party. I think you could make such an argument, honestly analytically if you look at the state level. If you think about the future; if you think which voting blocks are growing and which are shrinking. If you look at your data and what you've been talking about on millennials and Generation Z.

But short term, as you say that's important, you know, if you're an actual Republican Senator, if you're in a Purple state, you're nervous. But if you're in a Red state you feel okay with sticking with Trump. The 200 Republican House members left are much more in Red districts than the 240 were, since a lot of the ones who lost weren't in Red districts. So they're okay with staying with Trump.

I feel, I always have thought, the federal officials would be the last to go, though, for that reason. I think partly because they're more dependent on – it's harder for them to break away. They can't just be different from Trump, they have to actually *oppose* Trump, because they're in federal office.

ANDERSON: Yeah, I mean –

KRISTOL: Governors have a different situation. Mayors. And then just citizens, businessmen. I've always thought the erosion would come. And you're seeing a little of this, a little on the polls from the bottom up almost: reluctant Trump supporters, businessmen in Ohio, you know, whatever, a rancher somewhere, saying "what's going on? It's getting a little crazy, you know." And, "Is this really sustainable? And my daughter tells me that, you know, she'll never vote Republican again. And, I mean, I voted for him in 2016, and I don't like the liberals for various reasons, but can I stick with this?"

Don't you think – I think there's more erosion going on *there*, than there is actually, at least publicly in the Capitol?

ANDERSON: Well, I think even to the extent that there are folks in the Capitol that feel like Trump creates problems for them, I think they also know that they have learned the lesson of the last two years not to be the person that says it aloud. I mean, I believe there's polling that came out earlier this week that found now Senator Mitt Romney with very poor numbers among Republicans. So there is just, there is no incentive if you are a Republican lawmaker to go out there and even if you really believe that Trump is doing damaging things to the Republic, there's no incentive to do that.

And I think part of it is because the people who don't like you because they're not Republican are not going to suddenly warm up to you because you are the Republican that spoke your truth about Trump. But then the Republicans who voted for Trump don't want to be scolded. And I think that's a big, you know, reason why when someone like now Senator Romney writes this op-ed that I think says very powerful things and tries to reclaim the Republican Party he gets that kind of reception because a lot of Republican voters – it's kind of like –

I think about it this way. People are fine criticizing their own families, but if someone from outside the family criticizes your brother, your sister, suddenly, you know, you defend them. "Well, hey, you can't criticize my brother, you can't criticize my sister, only I can do that." I kind of think it's the same way that when a Republican who is not so much a fan of what the President is doing, puts that in words, it feels like, "oh, well, someone from outside the family is scolding me. And I don't like that. So I'm going to tune you out. You're now on the outside."

And I think that inside/outside dynamic that we have in the Trump era has been very dispiriting. But I think that's why no matter how many times someone who is a Republican federal lawmaker feels that Trump has done something wrong, they don't feel that speaking out about it is changing things, and it hurts their political prospects in terms of a primary.

KRISTOL: And I suppose the evidence isn't as unambiguous as it might become that various policies are causing disastrous effects. The economy's been okay. Foreign policy has been messy, but then we're not in the middle of the Vietnam War. And so people are, we're getting the judges that people like and so people think, you know, better to keep quiet than to pick fights on everything I don't like.

ANDERSON: Yeah, but keep an eye on that economic job approval, because I believe the CBS polling that came out this week on the shutdown showed that Trump is finally underwater on that metric, on "do you approve or disapprove of the job Trump is doing handling the economy?" Typically that had been the bright spot, even in a sea of dark polling numbers, that had been the bright spot for him.

I think you had Kevin Hassett, Chief Economy Advisor, sort of saying, or Head of Counsel of Economic Advisors, saying because of the shutdown we may see very poor economic growth, if not no economic growth for this quarter.

And if you start seeing a real toll as these thousands of government workers miss their next pay period and that begins having ripple effects, where they can't pay their landlords who then can't pay their contract. As this stuff begins to ripple further and further out, do people begin really feeling it in their pocketbooks? And suddenly you hear these stories of folks in Trump country who are personally being affected by things like the shutdown. That's where I think, as you mentioned coming from the bottom up you begin to see that erosion of support.

KRISTOL: And beyond the shutdown, I'm just curious, I didn't intend to talk about Trump so much, but of course all discussions in the Trump era – But I think it's interesting. I mean, what would you, if you were advising Trump, what would you worry the most about? Economics – leaving aside the shutdown for a minute – but an economic slowdown that might just happen as a result of the business cycle, you know, in six, nine, 12 months? Mueller? Foreign policy? Ethics? I mean, what's sort of the –

ANDERSON: I think the economy is the thing I would be the most worried about, because I think Trump with the Mueller story – it has now become so viewed as just sort of a partisan political exercise. I mean, the fact that in the exit polls from the midterms you had a majority of voters in the midterms say they disapproved of the job Bob Mueller was doing. I think the President has successfully made the case to enough voters, this is political, even if they come out tomorrow with evidence of him, you know, talking to Vladimir Putin, saying, hey, let's go get Hillary, I think half of America would kind of shrug or say, "Well, that's bad. I wish he hadn't done that."

But I really think that the thing that's going to move voters is if they feel that they personally are being harmed by the Trump Presidency. Or at least that we are no longer winning in the way that he had promised, or that they felt he had been winning in the first two years.

I think the economy is going – economy and health care I think are the things that are going to be much more troublesome for him in his reelection than anything involving Russia or Mueller. I say this of course and by the time this reaches the surface Mueller could have dropped some report and polling could be totally different.

KRISTOL: Yeah. No, his claim was – the claim of his reluctant supporters, the ones who were movable within the Republican Party to a challenger or to a Democrat in the general election, is "we don't like him, I wish he's stop the tweeting. I don't approve of some of the personal stuff. I wish he were more stable in some of the foreign policy decisions. But, you know what, he knows what he's doing on the economy."

Don't you think that's a huge advantage he's had?

ANDERSON: Yeah, and I think –

KRISTOL: "Businessman", "dealmaker", and all that stuff.

ANDERSON: Right. And I think to the extent that he thinks, “well, I’ve got to do things like talk about the wall and the caravan to hold onto my base.” I think he is missing the enormous importance that the economy has in animating people who maybe did not care about a wall two years ago, but they did care an awful lot about what does their bank account look like.

KRISTOL: Yeah, I think he understands his base too narrowly in a way, right? I mean, that’s really – the wall is the base within the base, you know.

ANDERSON: Yeah, they’re sort of two different numbers that I find consistently pop in polls. One is it’s close to a quarter and that’s when you ask things like, do you think we should deport the 11 million people living in the U.S.? Which I believe over the weekend he tweeted that he did not want to deport the 11 million people.

KRISTOL: But he vaguely threatened that it might happen if Pelosi wasn’t more accommodating.

ANDERSON: You find about a quarter of folks who take that position, that let’s deport all 11 million. But that’s far below the 40-some percent that usually say they approve of the job he’s doing.

So there is, there’s a chunk of people that they’re not there for the stuff that gets talked about on Hannity. They’re there because he’s “doing things different,” maybe he’s annoying the other people in politics that they don’t like and they find that amusing or positive. Or, you know, “hey, he’s going to win. He’s going to cut good deals for us. Look, he’s getting our allies to pay more for their own defense. Look, he’s got North Korea coming to the table.”

But I do think if the economy slips, I mean, that’s – The core of his brand identity is “I’m this business guy who gets the economy.” If that begins to erode, that’s the five alarm fire.

## **II: Young Voters and the Left (39:23– 1:09:45)**

KRISTOL: Another thing that strikes me, you made this point maybe on the last Conversation publicly or maybe in conversations we’ve had privately, I mean, people want a disruption. They justify some of what he does, including some of the outrageous things he does in their minds as disruption: “that’s just the way he is. But it’s useful, it shakes things up.”

But they also, at some point, it’s too much. I mean, there’s a certain – you can have the one focus group that you found this and Sarah Longwell my colleague found this in a focus group she did with reluctant Trump supporters, upper middle class, suburbanites, you know, in Ohio, that they were sort of, “Yes, good, the disruption. And the liberal media is unfair. And I approve of Trump more or less.”

And then sort of ten minutes later it’s “gee, it’s a little out of control, you know.” And “if only we could have a little more bipartisanship, and a little less divisiveness from Washington.” And “I wish they would stop screaming at each other.”

And it’s not crazy to have both those views. I mean, they’re in a little tension with one another, but you can say I like some disruption, but not too much disruption. It does seem like looking forward to another four years of Trump, could that be too much disruption for those kinds of voters?

ANDERSON: I think exhaustion is the important word here. For a lot of voters they feel exhausted by what’s going on right now. And think about the way that politics has begun to permeate so many arenas in our lives. You cannot buy razors nowadays without it being a political statement about what do you think about toxic masculinity if you buy a certain type of razor? Or the athletic apparel you buy. Are you making a statement about police brutality and racial injustice, because you buy brand A versus brand B of sneakers?

The politics has seeped in everywhere. And some folks would argue, “well that’s good, we’re facing enormous issues about the battle for the soul of our country. I’m sorry you can’t buy sneakers without thinking about politics, but too bad, the stakes are too high.”

But I think a lot of your average Americans are going, “I want to be able to just log into social media and see pictures of my niece and not have screeds about goodness knows what from people I may have had a class with in high school.”

Or people who they would really just like to watch the news and learn what’s going on in the world instead of feel attacked for what they believe. Or who would like to be able to, you know, have a conversation with someone about current events without being worried that suddenly they’re going to no longer be able to be friends, because they view things so differently.

This sense of exhaustion with the state of our political climate is something that I hear from people across the political spectrum, including some of those who are the President’s biggest supporters. Now they don’t think Trump is responsible. They think, “this is the liberal media, always attacking us” and these corporate brands adopting liberal positions.

Everybody across the spectrum has a different person to blame for why we are in the state we are in. But there’s still a, “gosh, we’ve got to be able to get out of this.” And that eventually will people just become exhausted by another two years of now it’s going to be the President versus Nancy Pelosi and Chuck Schumer. And day-in and day-out of that. And they just go, “let’s just hit reset and try something totally different, because that was supposed to be disruptive but it was too toxic and just too much.”

KRISTOL: You started to say, I think, something about governors and then we got into a different conversation about federal office. Do you think governors and mayors and just non-federal politicians are better positioned to be the post-Trump Republicans because they’ve been out of the crossfire a little bit with Trump?

ANDERSON: 100 percent. And I think some interesting examples – So Larry Hogan who has been sort of making some pretty bold statements about what he views about –

KRISTOL: One of the fastest boomlets I would say, don’t you think?

ANDERSON: The Hogan boomlet. Coming from a Blue state and many of America’s most popular governors are Republican governors of Blue states. It’s a really fascinating phenomenon. You’ve also got, like take someone like Ron DeSantis who gave Trump a bear hug and ran for governor of Florida and won. And that was one of the defeats that most dispirited Democrats on an otherwise pretty good night for them was Andrew Gillam not winning the governorship in Florida.

But some of the first things that Ron DeSantis has done as governor in Florida has been, I believe, to try to take some moves to get medical marijuana more readily available in Florida, and a lot of stuff on water quality and the environment. So in a way, I mean, you think of him as a fairly, he’s a very Trumpy kind of guy. I mean, he was able to win the Republican primary by just being on Fox News and really winning over Florida Republicans, the Florida Republican base.

But now as governor, I mean, he’s doing things that are not what you’re seeing out of a Trump EPA necessarily, or not what you’re seeing out of a Trump Department of Justice on things like marijuana. I mean, he’s taking very different steps. And so should he have his sight set on higher political office, he would be able to make a case to Republicans who like Trump, “Hey, I was with Trump and I was loyal to Trump when it counted. But I was independent in the following ways. So, independent voters, you may not have liked Trump, but don’t you like what I did on marijuana? Don’t you like what I did on the water quality?”

That's just one example of why being a governor gives you the flexibility to be independent, without forcing you into a position where you're going to alienate and anger the Republican base you need. And who at the moment still likes President Trump.

KRISTOL: Yeah, I guess Governor Hogan is more positioned as an alternative to Trump, rather than a post-Trump figure, like DeSantis. But he also has had the advantage of not having to deal with Trump all the time. And so he can just say, "here's what I did as Governor. I think it's a better model going forward, I'm not going to re-litigate 2016."

I've always thought that the – and I'm curious if you agree with this – that the approval number on Trump is a little misleading. I mean, it has drifted down incidentally. I saw two polls this week at 77 and 80, among Republicans, not 85 and 88, which it was. Which doesn't sound like it's that low. But if you lose a point or two for the next six months and suddenly you're at 70 among Republicans I think that's kind of the cutoff where primary challengers usually get serious if the incumbent doesn't have above a 70 percent approval among his own voters.

But I've almost been struck by some of the polling. I see private polling. The approval isn't the real act. You know what I mean? You can be 85 percent "I approve of him." Which means basically, "I prefer him to Hillary, still. I prefer him retrospectively to Hillary. I like the tax cuts, I like the judges, I don't like the liberals. I don't like Pelosi. I don't like the media. I don't like never-Trumpers," like me or whatever.

But then when you say, "Do you want another four years, an additional four years of it?" people are a little nervous. I mean, there's a kind of – So the approval, I think the media, maybe I'm wrong about this though, is too quick to jump from 85 percent approval of Trump to, "he'll get 85 percent of the vote in a primary." It doesn't really quite work that way it seems to me. I mean, he has a solid 50 percent or something. There's no question. But some of that, 35 of that 85 or 80 now, 30 of that 80 is maybe more up for grabs.

ANDERSON: So I am very bearish on the prospects of a primary challenge to Trump because one, I think there's a zero-percent chance that he appears on a debate stage against anyone who wants to challenge him for the Republican nomination. He won't go. So sort of the normal machinations of a party primary are not going to be there. He's going to say, "I'm the President, this is my party, vote for me. I'm not going to participate in this circus. We're not going to have a primary. We don't need to." So that's piece number one that I think makes it harder for someone to gain traction against him.

But I also think that even for Republicans who do have all of the problems that you outlined where they think, "gosh, I feel exhausted and I wish the tweeting would stop. And I wish the economy was getting better." A value that Republicans hold a lot when it comes to Trump is this idea of loyalty.

And I think it goes back to the point I made earlier about you don't want someone from outside your family criticizing your family member. That if someone all of a sudden is running on a message of I don't think Trump should be President anymore, even if the message is not anti-Trump and it's, hey, I just want to offer you an alternative, I still think for enough Republican voters the idea will be, "well, you just want to make it harder for our guy to do what we need him to do or what he's been trying to do. And we don't like that."

KRISTOL: Or make it harder for him in the general election.

ANDERSON: Exactly. Make it harder for him in the general election.

KRISTOL: You're breaking my heart here.

ANDERSON: Sorry. I hate to be like the angel of death for your –

KRISTOL: That's okay. Ultimately it's out there, that's true. I'm sure it's terribly upsetting to you.  
[Laughter].

But, yeah, I mean, look at lot of it just depends empirically on the question of how badly off or not badly off the Trump Presidency is six or nine months from now, right? Have the wheels really come off? Is the economy okay? Are we at a foreign policy crisis? What has Mueller found? Who's in the cabinet? So there are practical – that will dominate everything.

ANDERSON: That's why I think the economy is so key. Because I think all of this other stuff, foreign policy craziness, news stories about the Russia investigation, Don Jr. tweeting out emails where he talks about "we're going to meet with these Russian folks to get dirt on Hillary Clinton," I mean, that stuff's all out there. And Trump's job approval has been almost bullet proof. Not entirely, as you mentioned, especially with Republicans now it's taken a little bit of a hit, but it has been remarkably stable.

In part because he started day one with poor job approval. It hasn't really gone up or down very much. But the one variable that hasn't changed is the economy hasn't gotten bad. And I think that's where –

KRISTOL: It's been good actually.

ANDERSON: It's been quite good. And I think all of the other variables have changed and it hasn't moved his job approvals. That's like the one variable left that he needs to be very worried about.

KRISTOL: I think that's a very good point. You can look at the job approval, it's pretty impressively steady, given all the things he's done that you would, someone like me might think, would challenge it.

On the other hand the economy's been awfully good. It's impressively *not* good, his job approval, given how good the economy is. He should be winning over people who were saying, "boy, I guess Trump" – like with Reagan – "I guess – I was skeptical, I didn't vote for him, or I very reluctantly voted for him but those policies seem to be working." You think Trump would be getting that after good economic growth, good stock market and so forth. And he's not getting any of that either.

ANDERSON: Maybe. Although you do find a lot these days, when you ask people "how do you think the economy is doing?" it is very closely tied to their political views.

KRISTOL: So it's just a proxy.

ANDERSON: I think it's actually comical. If you looked at views on "do you think the economy is headed on the right track or the wrong direction," right before the 2016 election, the first week in November 2016 Democrats felt things were going great, Republicans thought they were terrible. Trump gets elected, he's not even sworn into office yet, and all of a sudden those numbers flip! Democrats suddenly think the economy is a disaster and Republicans are upbeat.

KRISTOL: But that's making I think in a way the point I was trying to make, which is he's not winning people over. I mean, it's just a proxy now.

ANDERSON: Yeah.

KRISTOL: So it's just, you think it's fine, if you like Trump, and you could imagine so many ways it could be better if you don't like Trump. But a successful president who expands his initial electorate, which is the traditional thing a successful President does, whether it's Clinton or Reagan. Or the only one that didn't really was Obama; but even George W. Bush, is winning some people over, some grudging support from people who initially had been skeptics or not supporters.



And that, it seems to me Trump hasn't done. And if you start off with 46 percent and you're not winning everyone over, you're just running a very narrow, you know, inside straight, reelect at that point.

ANDERSON: The other thing to bear in mind is I think that President Trump does not take seriously at all the sorts of poll numbers that you and I are looking at to say that he's got some problems or he's got these weaknesses. In part because in 2016 he believed the polls were fake news and were all rigged wrong, and I think last time I was on I explained –

KRISTOL: They weren't that wrong.

ANDERSON: They weren't that wrong. But they were wrong at – America was misled by what they meant and therefore surprised when Trump won. But in 2018 the polls were pretty good. There were a couple of misses. But for the most part pretty good. But I think for President Trump I think if he thinks that the polls are all fake news, and that therefore none of this is real, and we're missing his base of support again, I think that's why he continues to run the "base only" strategy he does.

KRISTOL: And the Republicans who might know better, or think they know better, don't quite have enough incentive to break with him. And they just kind of suck it up and say well –

ANDERSON: "Let's just put our heads down and survive."

KRISTOL: It's a long shot, but, you know, their senator survived last time, and some of the House members survived, and we'll do it again. I can see that. It seems to me, I mean, just correct me if I'm wrong, I mean, why isn't the easiest projection for 2020 just to say it's 2018? I mean, that was a big electorate. It was a presidential, not quite, but closer to a presidential-size electorate than we've ever had in a midterm. It was plus, what?, eight, nine percent Democratic, basically, if you took the whole national vote. Up from plus three in the presidential vote in 2016. Up from plus one Republican, in the House vote in 2016. That's a pretty big swing. I'm like why is that going to change in 2020?

ANDERSON: No, so I think –

KRISTOL: I mean, right now if we had the 2020 election, wouldn't it look exactly like the 2018 election?

ANDERSON: You're going to see enormous turnout in 2020. Enormous turnout. I think midterms are bad at predicting the *outcome* of the next election. But the *turnout levels* – if all of a sudden you see a big surge in turnout –

KRISTOL: They have been bad because there's so much smaller an electorate and a skewed electorate. But the 2018 electorate looks more like a presidential electorate.

ANDERSON: That's right.

KRISTOL: It doesn't skew older. You know, all of the kind of problems that made people mispredict 2012, because they thought it would be like 2010, I think those hold less, don't you think from 2018 to 2020?

ANDERSON: Yeah, well –

KRISTOL: So that would mean Republicans start off behind.

ANDERSON: Yeah. And I think the other big variable here is to what extent do you believe Trump *was* on the ballot in 2018? His name wasn't on the ballot.

KRISTOL: So the Trump supporters can say he'll be better than –

ANDERSON: "He'll be back, and he'll be on the ballot and that will – "

KRISTOL: And the Democrats might have a –

ANDERSON: On the other hand you had polls right before the midterms showing record numbers of voters on both sides who said my vote is about supporting or opposing Trump. So his name wasn't on the ballot in actual letters on someone's physical ballot, but in spirit it was.

And one thing that you did not find was there was not depressed turnout in Trump country. His voters did not stay home. They didn't go, oh, he's not on the ballot so I'm not voting. It was just the Democrats suddenly all came out to show their vote. And if they do it again in 2020, if they nominate the right person, which we don't know who that is, and that's a whole other topic, but Democrats are quite formidable going into the midterms.

KRISTOL: Into 2020.

ANDERSON: Or into 2020, excuse me.

KRISTOL: But it's a long time [till 2020]. So I want to get back to the Republican Party, away from Trump for a minute, but say a word about the Democrats since you actually mentioned them, and said it's a whole different topic. Could you give us what your short version of who would be the, what type of candidate would be the better Democratic candidate, just electorally? I'm not talking about governing.

ANDERSON: I don't have a strong view on this yet. I want to see more of how this shakes out, but my sense is that it's one of two things. It's either you choose someone who is a fighter and brings the fight to Trump. In a debate with him they're not backing down, they're giving as good as they're getting. And this is again it's more about, it's more temperamental than it is about policy.

I mean, I think Democrats are going to be pulled way to the left on policy in their primary. However, as I mentioned at the very beginning, America has moved a bit to the left on the activist role of government in ways that are troubling to me, but suggest actually Democrats can probably get away with someone further to the left than they could have eight years ago or 12 years ago.

So setting aside policy positions and ideological positioning, temperamentally, do you go with someone "I'm going to be a fighter, I'm going to go into the ring, I'm going to hit back just as hard as I'm hit?" Or do you pick a no drama, make politics boring again, we've had enough of this circus, let's just pick someone who's going to be calm, level headed, "don't you want politics out of your life, don't you want to not have to think about this every day for the next four years? Vote for me. I promise I will make politics extremely boring. "

And I don't know which side Democrats –

KRISTOL: That's more of a Republican message than a Democratic message I would say, you know what I mean? The Democrats are into politics being important. No, seriously.

ANDERSON: Sure.

KRISTOL: It's just hard to see what a Democratic really delivering a version of, I mean, you're exaggerating it obviously, but it's an interesting choice.

ANDERSON: I don't know which – temperamentally, I don't know which would be the smarter way for them to go, which one actually stacks up better to Trump in the general election context. If you assume that things like policy and ideology are going to be secondary. I don't know what type of personality works best.

KRISTOL: No, I think boredom might stack up better, but you got to think fighting is going to be a more attractive pitch in the primaries. But maybe not. Maybe not. So much depends on the individual candidates.

What about the Republicans? So we're post-Trump, he's – whatever's happens happened. There is a whole new generation of people running. DeSantis and Haley and Cotton and Pompeo or whatever. Some who weren't with Trump. Some who were semi-Trump. In 2024, sort of Trump has receded. I'm not sure that's a reasonable assumption. What would you tell a younger – looking at this data on younger voters and the Republicans, and some 28-year-old comes to you, and says, "I'm not even running in the next cycle or two, but I would like to have a future perhaps in politics. How do I think about politics, six, eight, ten years from now, when I might run for Congress or state office?"

ANDERSON: I think that one, you need to figure out what's the case for limited government in the 21<sup>st</sup> century. So the 20<sup>th</sup> century, you know, you had expansive, Great Society, you know, top marginal tax rates, you know, in the stratosphere. And there was clear, "here is government coming to get you. And here is why it needs to be scaled back. And here's the way we need to unleash innovation."

And you had the prosperity of the '90s and things all went well when you rolled back government, when you had the Clinton moment where even he, you know, as sort of a moderate to centrist Democrat was sort of "let's do welfare reform" and things like that. But no one has made that –

KRISTOL: And socialism failed. I mean, that was –

ANDERSON: And socialism failed.

KRISTOL: People take that for granted now. But that was not obvious in the '60s and '70s.

ANDERSON: And now, so what's that case in the 21<sup>st</sup> century when people think of Sweden not the Soviet Union when they're thinking of "what does socialism look like?" What's the case for why markets – articulating what you mentioned at the beginning, that so many of the things that are good and help your quality of life have come from private sector innovations because government was out of the way.

How do you make that case, number one? Number two, how do you talk about things that are sort of core conservative values in a way that does not require someone to share your religious views in order to agree with them? Or be a deeply religious person in order to agree with them.

So I was thinking that there's that, the toxic masculinity Gillette ad that caused that firestorm a few weeks ago, right? Did you actually, have you watched the ad?

KRISTOL: No. I was just laughing because of course if you look at Twitter it's like, you know, one third of Twitter is about that ad. But I managed never to have seen it.

ANDERSON: I postponed watching it because I just saw the debacle unfolding in my Twitter feed. What? I don't even know what this is. But eventually I cracked and a few days ago I actually –

KRISTOL: This is why you're a serious student of politics and public opinion and I'm not.

ANDERSON: I said I've got to figure out what this is all about. What did they say in this ad? And it's fascinating. I actually think there is a conservative, like a pro-conservative reading of the Gillette ad. Basically, I did not view the ad as being anti-male. It was anti the bad behavior of like the Mad Man era and just saying, guys we should be better. We should treat women with respect.

If you see someone vulnerable being attacked, you should – the manly thing to do is to step in and protect the vulnerable. I mean, this to me – it was like an ad promoting chivalry. I mean, these are things, right, that like a conservative temperament should be like, “that’s good, yes, women should be respected and the vulnerable should be protected. And sons should have fathers who give them, who teach them good lessons about being a man of character.”

Like why would conservatives be upset about this? And I actually think like can you be, embrace conservative values in a way that doesn’t say, “oh, that Gillette ad is terrible.” But rather like, “here’s what there is to love about it.” Like, “here’s why, you know, respect, let’s protect the vulnerable and what being a good father means.” Let’s embrace some of that. With that being sort of a socially conservative world view, instead of something that seems very deeply religious, or kind of antithetical to the “let’s treat everyone with love and respect views” that a lot of millennials hold.

And then I think on foreign policy figuring out what do people think America’s role in the world really ought to be? Because there have been times when America has tried to exert her influence overseas and it has not gone very well. But there are times where if America didn’t exert her influence overseas things would have gone worse or been terrible.

And I think articulating this for a new generation that clearly has grown up with the idea that America’s not that great, and doesn’t have any business telling the world to be like us. What are the things that we value that it would be really good if the rest of the world was able to value them too? How do we fight for the rights of women in countries where they’re not allowed to drive cars? How do we fight for the rights of people to be able to work and lead prosperous lives in places where they don’t have freedom, and they don’t have fair elections, and they don’t have economic liberty?

And is there a way that we can use American influence to do this in a positive way, to be engaged internationally? I think that rearticulating the importance of being internationally engaged is going to be important for building a sort of future Republican foreign policy world view.

And I think folks like Mike Gallagher, Adam Kinzinger, I think like they are good models for what it will take to get Republicans, making the case to a younger generation for here’s what our foreign policy should look like.

KRISTOL: And events have a lot to do with things.

ANDERSON: That too. That’s like the understatement of the – [Laughter]

KRISTOL: It’s not people brilliantly made the case for American intervention, internationalism in 1935 to ’45. It’s just the world, certain things happened in the world, and people decided afterwards, okay, well –

And I guess it stands to reason that 70 years later there’d be some erosion of that commitment and understanding.

But I do think that the point you made at the beginning that having two Presidents in a row – I’d say this is true both of markets and of an American, strong American leadership in the world. Obviously Barack Obama and Donald Trump are very different versions of the critique of let’s call it Reagan, Bush, McCain, or Clinton even, foreign policy. But ten years of presidents *basically* saying “nation building begins at home.” And a lot of that stuff was either, you know, well-meaning but didn’t go well, or in Trump’s case even kind of seems to imply it was almost a conspiracy of the deep state or something. It has an effect, right? On public – But you don’t know how much public opinion – on some of these issues might be somewhat more malleable I think.

ANDERSON: I’m a big believer that foreign policy and national security is the most malleable.

KRISTOL: Yeah, if people don't have a strong –

ANDERSON: When it comes to something like let's say education or health care: people go to the doctor, people went to school. So there's a sense of I have views on education or views on health care that are rooted in my personal experiences with those systems. Or I have views on taxes because I pay taxes. Or I have views on x, y or z because I personally engage with that issue and feel invested in it.

But on something like foreign policy, I mean, it's very hard from a polling perspective to figure out what do Americans think about the Iran deal? Because on the one hand people think well, "it's good to have deals." On the other hand, "it's bad for Iran to have nuclear weapons." But, you know, polling on these sorts of issues is very hard, because they're so far removed from people's day-to-day lives.

And it's not that voters are dumb, it's that they're busy. They have a lot of things going on that they've got to worry about before figuring out do I think that the JCPOA was good or bad? So I think that as a result of that views on foreign policy are among the most malleable because they are in some ways more loosely held. And people are more likely to just put trust in a leader who they believe is looking out for their interests and go, "okay, well, I think, like you can say I think Trump is looking out for my interests, he believes we should be pulling troops out of Syria. I trust him on other things, so maybe we should be pulling troops out of Syria."

Or, "I dislike Donald Trump. I think that he tends to be wrong-headed. Maybe I wanted our troops out of Syria, but now that he's said it, I've changed my mind."

I think polling on foreign policy is particularly malleable. And I think polling on these sorts of issues is particularly susceptible to that "follow the leader" phenomenon I mentioned earlier, where it's, because people don't have strongly held views on it, or because they're focused on their day-to-day lives, they sort of look to leaders they trust and go, "well, you say that's a good idea, so I'll say that's a good idea too."

KRISTOL: So final point on the "follow the leader" question. And this is an honest question. I have my preference of what I'd like to think, but I mean I don't know –

ANDERSON: I'm here to crush all your dreams today, Bill.

KRISTOL: Apparently, yes. That's often the case. I mean, one might argue if some Republicans don't really stand up to Trump and offer a vigorous alternative to Trump, then it becomes a Trumpy Republican Party. Maybe less Trumpy, rather than more Trumpy, if it's a Ron DeSantis version or something. But ultimately given I would say, how bad the outcomes of some of Trump's policies will be, and also how difficult they are to persuade people, especially younger people of, it sort of just stamps the Republican Party, not having a vigorous alternative to Trump, stamps the Republican Party in a way that makes it very hard to recover.

The alternate point of view, which is also plausible is "no, that's not how it works. I mean, people need to kind of dodge and duck a little bit" – so let's say the DeSantis model – "get themselves elected, do things a little differently, Trump's going to go away, people aren't going to be obsessing about it, two, four, six years later."

And Republicans can say, well, that's sort of the – it would be sort of like having a Goldwater/Rockefeller fight: you know, six or eight years later, people weren't really obsessed about it; they wanted to know what you thought about the current issues of the day. I suppose, I mean –

Can the party sort of duck a confrontation with, or about, Trump or Trumpism?

ANDERSON: I don't think so, because I think that unlike past presidents who may have left office and sort of backed away from the spotlight, it is very hard for me to imagine a post-presidency Donald Trump retiring to a ranch somewhere and clearing brush, or sitting down to write a memoir quietly and not going on TV for two years. I mean, I think that's extraordinarily unlikely.

I think he's a public figure, and he's going to remain being a public figure. He will continue saying and doing things that Republicans will be asked, "do you agree or disagree with the following tweet from the President? What's your comment on the latest thing the ex-President Trump said?"

So I think that even once Trump is no longer president, his shadow will still be cast over the party. And I think there was a brief moment in time early in his presidency when a lot of voters went, "yeah, but he's different from a normal Republican." But I think two years of most Republicans basically being in line with him, and Republican voters mostly being in line with him, not just the leaders, but the voters, I think has changed it.

I mean, it is his party now for the most part. There is about a quarter of the party that does not love this state of affairs, and perhaps wishes it was different, but I don't think that there's a clean break from Trumpism for Republicans running in 2024.

KRISTOL: Unless someone takes him on and defeats him or comes close to defeating him in 2020, which is unlikely.

ANDERSON: Or let me throw this out. I'm going to give you a, I'll give you something to think about that might make you happy.

KRISTOL: That's very difficult, but thank you.

ANDERSON: I had a friend pose this idea to me that I was amused by. But tell me what you think. Imagine if you will Nancy Pelosi walks into Donald Trump's office, and goes, "Mr. President, you promised the American public a lot of things. You promised them conservative judges, and you've delivered. You promised them that you'd cut taxes, and you've delivered. You promised you'd roll back the regulatory state, you promised that you would reduce illegal border crossings, you promised that you would renegotiate our trade deals. You promised –" And just list all of the things he promised.

And say, he's done those things. Love him or hate him, he's done all those things. But the one thing he hasn't done is build the wall. That's the one big promise that he hasn't gotten done. "So Mr. President, I'll give you your five billion dollars for your wall, and you walk away a winner. Don't run. Don't run in 2020. Just say, 'I did what I came here to do. I'm not doing this again. Mikey, over to you.'" And hand the reins to Vice President Pence for 2020. And let that be that. Democratic voters would take that deal. They would take that deal.

KRISTOL: Yeah. I guess so. There would be a 15 person Republican primary in 2020. Since I don't think anybody is going to let Pence just have the nomination. Well, that's exciting.

ANDERSON: I don't think Nancy Pelosi's going to –

KRISTOL: I'll call her. I'll call the Speaker. As soon as we get off this set, I'll call the Speaker and suggest, "This is the magic way out:. She'd have the support of –

ANDERSON: Tell Trump: go out a winner.

KRISTOL: Yeah. The wall in return for – does he not run again? Or resign?

ANDERSON: I don't know the logistics of what this deal is that she would offer. But it was just, I had a friend mention it to me, and I figured that since I've been crushing your dreams this whole conversation –

KRISTOL: We should end on a high note.

ANDERSON: I'd give you that plan.

KRISTOL: We'll end on that high note.

Kristen Soltis Anderson, thanks very much for joining me today.

ANDERSON: Thank you.

KRISTOL: For really stimulating, apart from that last – in addition to that last point. And genuinely stimulating conversation. Not just about Trump, but about our parties and the possible futures of American politics. So thank you for joining me.

ANDERSON: Thank you.

KRISTOL: And thank you for joining us on CONVERSATIONS.

[END]