

# CONVERSATIONS

WITH BILL KRISTOL

## Conversations with Bill Kristol

**Guest:** Joe Trippi,  
Democratic Political Strategist

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**I: The Democratic Field (0:15 – 31:58)**

KRISTOL: Hi, I'm Bill Kristol, welcome to CONVERSATIONS. I'm joined today by Joe Trippi, veteran Democratic operative strategist. Famous for, I guess, the Howard Dean campaign, taking Dean from one percent to leading the field by the end of 2003, and then third in Iowa. And that was the beginning of the end there in 2004. And then Jerry Brown's excellent campaign for governor in 2010 when he – people thought that couldn't happen, a comeback for a guy like that.

TRIPPI: It was a tough one, but –

KRISTOL: He'd been governor what, 25 years before? And then Doug Jones' campaign in Alabama in the recent special election. So anyway, won some campaigns, lost some campaigns. But really for our purposes, a very shrewd analyst of the Democratic Party and of American politics.

TRIPPI: Great to be with you.

KRISTOL: Always enjoyed being with you on TV, and speeches, and now we're here. So, you're a Democrat, we're speaking just mid-March, March 15<sup>th</sup> I think it is. What's going to happen? Everyone wants to know, what's – who's the nominee going to be? Or what's the dynamic? How should one think about this next twelve months in the Democratic Party?

TRIPPI: I think the whole race changes if Joe Biden gets into the race. It's still kind of a question mark, at least today in mid-March it is. And if he does, I think it totally changes the dynamics in the race. Right now you see a lot of these candidates trying to sort of maneuver in position against each other. You know, who is the most progressive, or who's the youngest, or who's the new idea person? Maybe positioning against another progressive, but not necessarily the vice-president if he gets in. I think that all changes.

KRISTOL: You think he's a big enough figure that it just becomes a different race.

KRISTOL: Yeah. I think that it could be a very good thing for someone like Beto, for Joe Biden to get in and sort of position as the old/new kind of dynamic in the race. Whereas others, Bernie Sanders,

Elizabeth Warren, will be trying to position, and not against each other as progressives, but against him as sort of a centrist establishment Democrat. “I’m the progressive that can not only defeat him, but win against Trump.”

So I think what happens is right now there’s, we’re on our way to 18, 19 maybe over 20 candidacies. Three or four that I’m pretty sure are going to get in, but haven’t announced yet, who are more interested in sort of the positioning and contrasting with each other. The one person I think changes that is, and it’s only, it’s Joe Biden. If he gets in, that starts changing the way they position.

Reminds me a lot of how Gary Hart ended up positioning totally differently than the rest of the field against Walter Mondale in 1984. I know I’m dating myself, but –

KRISTOL: That’s okay, well, you were involved in the –

TRIPPI: Yeah. But I think that it starts to reposition a lot of these candidacies.

KRISTOL: I guess Biden is like Mondale in being a former Vice President who’s running four years after his presidency. Mondale had lost in ’80 as Vice President; Biden won twice with Obama. So it has that difference. But I guess that’s a pretty good comparison in a way.

TRIPPI: Yeah, well look, no vice president in my lifetime has ever sought – former or sitting – has ever sought the party’s nomination and not received it, not one. Which somehow it gets lost on the other people out there. You know, Herbert Walker Bush, won his nomination. Al Gore won the nomination. It doesn’t mean you win the presidency, but there hasn’t been, in the modern era, and I don’t know how far you’d have to go back, I’m not sure if there ever was one.

But you start off with real strength in the party. And Carter/Mondale, I mean Mondale arguably was trying to come back four years after a very unpopular president at the time not – the former president – not just writ large across the political spectrum but even in his own party. I mean Ted Kennedy and the progressives had primaried him.

KRISTOL: And he lost, pretty badly.

TRIPPI: Right. And so, Joe Biden’s the vice president of Barack Obama, who may be unpopular in certain quarters, but within the Democratic Party that’s night and day. His popularity and Biden’s ability to connect himself to that presidency, which is still very popular in the party – there are detractors, but.

So I just think in a lot of ways he may be stronger than people think. And I went back and checked. Right about now Mondale was at 38 percent of the vote. John Glenn, astronaut hero, was in second at 31. And no one was thinking about Gary Hart, the young kind of “get rid of these old guys; we need new ideas, new vision.” So when you start to – and Jesse Jackson was in that race, George McGovern was in that race, Alan Cranston. A bunch of senators, and for that time very progressive. Cranston was running on the nuclear freeze.

So I see a lot of – I know we’re supposed to be talking about 2020, but I do think there’s some lessons – not that it’s going to repeat itself, but I think there’s some lessons to be learned from some of these races where I think people looked at a vice president who was in the 30s in the national polling, and did they actually rise as we got closer and closer to election day?

Yeah, we got 49 percent of the vote in Iowa. Gary Hart got 16. Everybody went into, okay – much like by the way in 2008 – everybody went into, “Okay, we know Mondale’s going to be one of the two. Who’s going to be the other, and is it John Glenn or Alan Cranston or” – and it turned out to be Gary Hart. And once we knew who the other one was, bam.

In 2008 everybody assumed Hillary is going to be one of the two. The real question was, is it going to be Edwards or Obama? Who was going to challenge her for the nomination? Obama wins Iowa. That's how –

KRISTOL: So I guess the obvious contrast with – let's go back and forth there. The obvious contrary arguments are, "Well, it's a new era. This sort of narrowing to two after Iowa, New Hampshire is a function of an old media, old fundraising. And you couldn't have had more. Everything dries up for the other candidates in terms of attention and money. And now we're in a world of social media and online fundraising and these candidacies have different lanes so to speak and this analogy doesn't work."

But you seem to be more convinced that sort of being the former Vice President gives you more oomph than the conventional wisdom, I think.

TRIPPI: Well one, I think he's well-liked in Iowa. Has a lead now. Whether he can hold on to it, it's not a gimme; he's got to fight for it if he does get in. But more to your point, look, I think there's four or five candidates in this race right now who've already shown enough prowess in online fundraising and things that they'll have – they may have enough money to go the whole way before Iowa even gets here.

No one's ever gotten out of the race because they've lost and didn't think they could win the next state. It's they get out of the race because they don't have the money to continue. At least in my experience that's always been the case. So I think, yeah, there'll be four or five, maybe more candidates who can continue after Iowa. That's not the problem.

I think even though yes we're in a different era and social media means something, and the way that media covers things is different, but there's some other realities. We used to have every major mainstream media outlet having somebody embedded in every one of the campaigns. That's not going to happen.

First of all, in this new era they can't afford to do it. There's no way they're going to be 18. There's going to be – Joe Biden will have somebody following him around; Bernie probably will; Beto maybe. I mean but at some point six or seven of them are going to be out there in zone coverage, right? I mean who's in Iowa that can get over to cover Delaney's thing, right? So, that's one.

Two, the thing I'd really caution about, having been through this a lot, is there's always unintended consequences in those early states. I can give you a scenario. Okay, you're Kamala Harris, you're confident that you're going to do well in Iowa and you're spending the bulk of your time in South Carolina and California thinking, "yeah, even if I stumble I'll be able to pick it up there." Well, okay, tell –

KRISTOL: South Carolina presumably because of the African American vote there, and California because she's from there.

TRIPPI: Yeah. So she does that. Biden wins. Beto takes second in Iowa. Good luck. I mean, the Gary Hart rocket ship takes off. Al Gore –

KRISTOL: You think that old dynamic holds. I guess the key I see in your – which I tend to agree actually. But a lot of people would say "No, it used to be that way." The incredibly fast narrowing, and the guy who cleverly thinks, Rudi Giuliani famously, I'm going to wait until after the first four primaries to really find a state I'm good in. And by the time the first four primaries are gone, no one's interested in anyone who didn't win or place second in the first four primaries.

TRIPPI: Right. And first of all the other thing that we know about Democrats right now in all the polling is the number one thing that they're focused on is electability. So here are two or three people who took first, second and third in Iowa. They're rolling into New Hampshire, we're all focused on them. The person I was interested in took fifth.

It's not – there are some – and by the way that goes back to the Dean experience. So Dean had more money online than anybody on the planet. We'd set every record there was at the time. We had more money than any of the other candidates at the time going into Iowa. We take third in Iowa. And we get – we had some other problems. But –

KRISTOL: The famous scream.

TRIPPI: But watch how fast you fall and why. It wasn't because of the gaffs. It wasn't. It was, in my view, the one person – there's only one person that I've seen in modern politics that the party was just a little less terrified of having being reelected than Donald Trump, and that was George W. Bush. So, electability – they loved Howard Dean, and they loved us being against the war, and they loved the supporting civil unions, which back then was the thing.

KRISTOL: Yeah, that was funny when you think.

TRIPPI: But there were deep questions about whether we could actually – were we electable? And in fact all the rest of the field, that's what they were doing to Howard Dean. So, yeah, the gaff – leads, helps fuel that. But at the same time, no.

John Kerry, war hero, was for the war, the pragmatism starts to come in. Because of George Bush, not because of Howard Dean and John Kerry, but because of Bush and the fear that he – and he was reelected – but the fear of that made the party start to move towards a more centrist, more pragmatic, if you will, not necessarily centrist, but figure, but on the war, certainly. And a couple of the other really important issues that people were with us on.

So I just think that what's going to happen is that we're – I'd put it this way: I could be wrong, but I would do both things then. In other words, you've got to fight for a top-tier finish. I'm not talking necessarily a win, but a top-tier finish in Iowa and New Hampshire – to assure all the foundation that you're laying down in places like South Carolina or Super Tuesday or California are actually going.

I can tell you stories about the people who have evaporated by making that – Al Gore being another one of those. He thought Dukakis would win Iowa and New Hampshire, he'd be the Southerner waiting down in the Southern Super Tuesday.

KRISTOL: This is 1988.

TRIPPI: 1988, sorry.

KRISTOL: Oh, that's okay.

TRIPPI: But what happens is, no, Dick Gephardt wins Iowa. Dick Gephardt goes south and he's winning enough moderate centrist Democrats, white Democrats, away from Gore, that Dukakis and Jesse Jackson actually win most of the states, most of the delegates. And we never really would have heard from Al Gore again, had Bill Clinton not – in '92. So I just think there's certain dynamics –

KRISTOL: I guess it's true – is it true, am I right – no one has been nominated by either major party who didn't either win or place second in Iowa?

TRIPPI: Yeah.

KRISTOL: I think that's right in the modern era. Maybe Bush was third in '80, I can't remember. But – or New Hampshire.

TRIPPI: Yes.

KRISTOL: You certainly have to be one, two in at least one of those states, and often in both of those states, right? I mean, Trump was second in Iowa and first in New Hampshire. And that's been the pattern generally. Obama won Iowa in '08, famously.

TRIPPI: Yeah. I'm just saying that I think they're even more important in this era and in this calendar, with California moving up. I think they're much more important –

KRISTOL: So the slingshot effect is even more than it used to be, not less.

TRIPPI: Yes, because it's going to happen so fast.

KRISTOL: But that's a minority – I'm sort of tempted by that view, but I'd say that's a minority. I mean I think the conventional view, maybe not among the pros like you, but among the reporters following it, that therefore often they're wrong, I mean they get entranced by the 16 candidates. And "Beto's going to be strong in Texas, and so he doesn't have to do that well in the first two." But your basic line is, "no one in Texas wants to vote for you if you ran seventh in the Iowa and fifth in New Hampshire," right?

TRIPPI: Yeah. Well, this thing becomes Biden and Bernie out of Iowa and New Hampshire. I don't know what's going to happen in Texas, but I'm pretty sure, you know, maybe Beto can run as a favorite son there. Or maybe –

KRISTOL: The moderates are going for Biden and the radicals go to Bernie.

TRIPPI: Yeah. By the way, if Biden is not in the race, the one guy I think who has got real problems is Bernie. And it's because everybody else can take from him, even somebody like Beto who is sort of a more centrist character in the race, there are a lot of young people who probably were for Bernie in the last election that are going to look favorably on a guy like Beto.

So Warren, Elizabeth Warren, is going to try to crowd some of his progressive – I mean, everybody, there's something – if he turns out to be the frontrunner because Biden doesn't go and he's out there by himself, I think that doesn't mean he cannot win it. I'm not saying that. But I think he's got, I can see every candidate thinking okay, how do I get just a little piece of that. And if they all get a little piece of it, he starts having real trouble growing, which he already, I think, he showed real signs of exhibiting in 2016. He really had trouble getting traction in minority communities. Very tough to get our nomination without having some strength there. And he had trouble, again, maybe because of Hillary getting traction among women. And now he's up – there are women in this race, not just one. There are young people in this race, younger candidates who are going to argue that it's time for a new generation and new ideas and it's time for us to get rid of the people that got us into these problems. I mean, all of these things are going to be there. Even the people that you don't necessarily think are in his lane can take a piece of his support.

KRISTOL: I like the '84 analogy. '76 was another one that was, in my language, a very big field against a fairly weak incumbent president, in this case, Gerald Ford. Weak because he had never been elected, but objectively you might say an underdog in the way that Trump probably was, and we'll get back to that in a minute.

And in '76 you get the one time really in modern, I'd say really the only time in modern history, where a truly, someone who starts out at one percent in the year before wins the nomination. I mean, pretty amazing with Carter. Dean almost did it, and others have almost done it.

TRIPPI: And that's really –

KRISTOL: Sort of the argument there is you get a big enough field, you get a fractured vote. I guess the difference in '75, '76, that no one – there were Mondale, right?

TRIPPI: Yes.

KRISTOL: There were a bunch of senators. I think Humphrey ended up coming in late as a former vice president, but I think he comes in very late.

TRIPPI: I don't remember.

KRISTOL: Yeah, it's like Birch Bayh and whoever it is, Fred Harris and – they were sort of footnotes in history. At the time they were major figures, I mean, just the way certainly as major as Harris or Sanders or –

TRIPPI: John Glenn was not a slouch in '84. I mean, we're talking the movie, *The Right Stuff*, was out. Astronaut hero, senator.

KRISTOL: From a major state.

TRIPPI: From a major state at 31 today in the polls.

KRISTOL: Which is striking for someone who had never run.

TRIPPI: Yeah. So that's all I'm saying. I mean, I just think –

KRISTOL: But I think you're saying too, you're saying both the, don't underestimate the former vice president, but also I'm very, the reason I like the '84 thing is it does become Mondale/Hart, not Mondale/Glenn.

TRIPPI: Yes.

KRISTOL: That sort of feels right to me. That if Biden is out there as the frontrunner, the alternative is not another guy his age.

TRIPPI: Exactly, that's what I'm saying. It could be turned generational and not ideological. I'm not saying – that's what happened in '84. Alan Cranston, the senator from California, was running on the nuclear freeze.

KRISTOL: Right.

TRIPPI: And he moved into second over Glenn. And so you've got this, they were all fighting sort of an ideological fight. And there was one guy who was basically saying Mondale, Cranston, Glenn, these old guys.

KRISTOL: It's hard to disagree with Mondale.

TRIPPI: Right. It's time for new ideas, fresh thinking. You know, I was working for Mondale at the time, "where's the beef," as we started to go after him.

By the way, you see that with Beto – with sort of what, how people are going after Beto today. He's got plenty of time to put meat on the bones, but I'm just saying – but it's very fascinating to me. And maybe I'm overthinking it because I lived through that one and so too close to it. But I would not underestimate the early, those early states. I think they may be much more important than a lot of the punditry and people suspect.

KRISTOL: I'd say the punditry is often focused more on the progressive lane and the moderate lane and somehow everyone vaguely assumes it's got to be a progressive and a moderate.

TRIPPI: Because that may have been the last two wars. You know, it's all about who is in this fight. And I do think there's a feeling of generational change in the party. I mean, we saw that with sort of the, some of the newer members of wanting to see if they could replace the speaker. That didn't go very far. But, that inertia is definitely –

I mean, there's two different things going on in the party right now. I think one is the ideological divide. That always happens, by the way, in both parties when you don't have the presidency and you're going to have a bunch of candidates out there fighting over what the direction the party should go in.

And the other one I think is a generational divide or argument in the party we're also starting to see or have, you know, we're starting to see the first inklings of it. But I think that could really emerge in this election, in the primaries.

KRISTOL: And the ideological divide, how steep is it, how serious is it? People like me who would like to have a Democratic nominee that would be at least plausible for Republicans to consider voting for, are worried about the AOC / Omar side of the party. Are we overdoing how powerful that side is or –

TRIPPI: I think so, yeah. I mean, I think look, you've got that going on in both parties, too.

KRISTOL: Yeah, we don't want it to happen to your party.

TRIPPI: And it could. But what I'm saying is that's part of what the presidential nomination fight is going to be about. Look, there's no problem in either party having a representative from the Bronx, who feels differently about it than a representative in Texas does and represents that and fights for it.

What's unusual about today is that the Senate doesn't, under normal circumstances, exude the partisanship that it's been exuding the last two, three years and we very rarely had a president that polarized like Trump. Now there's two ways we can go as a country – further polarization by both sides which I do not think is going to serve us well, but hey, we could go that way. Both parties are capable of it.

On the other hand, it is a national campaign that's going to go through Iowa, New Hampshire, South Carolina, all of these places. And one of these 18 to 22, whatever it is, candidates is going to emerge and that is going to be the fight over the direction of the party. Barack Obama took the Democratic Party in a direction and we all signed on and went for it. We can argue, everybody can argue whether it was good or bad. I thought he was a good president, but I'm not going to argue with the people watching right now about that.

Trump took over the Republican Party and took it in a completely, in many ways, in a completely different place than it's been on a bunch of different things. And hey, when that happens, you got to decide, are you going to –

Right now, both parties, in a lot of ways, except for some very marginal districts or states, more afraid, the incumbents are more afraid of being primaried in their own party, particularly in the Republican Party, which is why he has such a strong hold on them.

So yeah, could that happen in the Democratic Party? Yeah. Are there, will there be people in different wings trying to garner enough support so we put our person in? Of course. I think what tends to happen with the Democratic Party through my long history in it, is in the early stages, purity is really exciting – Howard Dean, people I've worked for.

And as we get closer to actual votes in caucuses and primaries, there tends to be, particularly when it's somebody like Trump or Bush and even Reagan, Mondale/Hart fight, I think a lot of Democrats in the end started to move back to Mondale. They were worried about whether this young unknown Gary Hart could stand up and fight with Reagan. They weren't so sure if Mondale could. I think we get more pragmatic as this thing moves forward.

And so if it does turn into a Biden/Bernie, I'm not sure. I would argue the vice-president starts to benefit from that kind of a divide. Like I said, none of this means Joe Biden is a sure thing to win the nomination. I'm just saying hey, someone tell me when a sitting or former vice president went out and wasn't – not saying, even if you go to your equation about Humphrey getting in late in '76, not sure he really ran, but –

KRISTOL: No, I don't – very different.

TRIPPI: –he was still a player. He still impacted things. It's not going to be Biden is going to fall out of the sky. I just don't see that happening.

KRISTOL: That's interesting. And what about – so the other, I guess, conventional route, and this is analytical regardless of who we might prefer. I don't know who you would, quite honestly, and maybe you don't know who you would exactly.

But I guess the other rap on Biden is just he's running for president twice and it's sort of both of them were total fizzles. And so you think that sort of misses the point? I mean, that once you're been vice-president for eight years, it's a different situation?

TRIPPI: He's been vice-president to Barack Obama over eight years. He's going to have some support, he's going to have some – look. I think as I said, it's tough to win our nomination without some way into winning the votes of the minority community. Who are the candidates in this race who have proven that they – you see the path for them doing that? Well, I could see Joe Biden having a path to doing that. There are some – Elizabeth Warren, I'm not talking about their positions on civil rights or any of that, but can she do it? Bernie had real problems succeeding at that. And had he succeeded at it at all, he would have been the nominee in 2016.

The other thing about Iowa, just going back to that because I talked about it a bit before, it's not just the unintended stuff of you having a plan and doing your strategy right. I mean, in 2004 – let's move up from all my 1980s stuff – think about the John Edwards campaign. I'm not talking about John Edwards in 2008 and the various problems and misjudgment and insane stuff, but 2004 he does everything right.

KRISTOL: Comes from nowhere, a one-term senator to be a serious –

TRIPPI: Yeah, and take second in Iowa. Take second in Iowa to John Kerry. He's done everything right.

KRISTOL: It's a good field, a field with Lieberman and –

TRIPPI: Dick Gephardt who had won Iowa.

KRISTOL: That's a good point.

TRIPPI: Won Iowa, was beloved there. Howard Dean, who has taken over the lead, all these things. He takes second to John Kerry. Look, I don't know, ten times out of ten everybody goes into Kerry one, Edwards second. Kerry one, Edwards second. Let's go to New Hampshire.

KRISTOL: And that is then Mondale/Hart. Edwards is the exciting young guy, Kerry has been around a long time, and does the upstart have a chance to beat him?



TRIPPI: Right. Edwards takes second. No, one thing he didn't count on, I didn't count on, a whole lot of people didn't count on, Dean screams. Dean screams, the story isn't Kerry wins, Edwards takes second. It's Kerry wins, Dean screams. Kerry wins, Dean screams. All the way into New Hampshire, the press is following us all over, the Dean campaign, all over New Hampshire like hundreds. We had cameras from Japan on us doing the Kerry wins, Dean screams.

And John Edwards who had this brilliant plan, executed it, had a great caucus campaign in Iowa, comes out of nowhere to take second place, is just walking with nothing – nothing. The same thing happened to him in 2008. Obama wins –

KRISTOL: Iowa upset.

TRIPPI: Edwards takes second.

KRISTOL: Yeah, people forget that. Edwards was second and Clinton was third.

TRIPPI: Right, third. Beats Hillary Clinton – no, the world's decided. This is – she was going to be one, there's going to be another, and that's – so, now, he wouldn't have lasted long for other reasons, but I'm just saying, it's –

I would just – my experience has been repeatedly that those early states matter. Not necessarily in who ends up getting the nomination, but in how the rest of the – you know, how everything else plays out. How does South Carolina play out? How does California? How does Super Tuesday? Who are the people who are going to have the focus? Whose social media and online stuff goes to zip once people – like, frankly, Dean's did.

I mean it gave us a shot. If we had, I think, won New Hampshire, I think people would have stayed. I mean there were a lot of our supporters who would have stayed with us. But once we didn't come back from it there, it just really went away quickly.

Now, that same group – will today listen to Howard Dean. He can still communicate with them, get them to – I'm endorsing this candidate, it matters a lot. But in terms of starting to get pragmatic, we need to win this thing, I want to make sure we beat Trump, which is going to be like – on a scale of 0 to 10, if W was a 10 on that scale, Trump is going to have to be a 30. I think if you aren't performing early in those states, I think you're going to start losing support pretty quickly.

Now, look, Kamala Harris takes third in Iowa, she can go on and win South Carolina. But I don't think you can afford in this large a field. It's not just – it may not just be who takes first and second; it may just be I don't want to be fifth; I don't want to be fourth, you know.

KRISTOL: Well, history would again suggest top three is the narrative.

TRIPPI: Yeah, that's what I was saying.

## **II: Ideology or Electability? (31:58 – 1:14:18)**

KRISTOL: Winnows after that.

I mean you did the Jerry Brown campaign in 2010, and now one, of course takes for granted, "Well of course he was governor for an additional eight years and was a pretty successful governor by a lot of people would say." But that was also an older, you might say – not quite like Biden – but I mean sort of an older candidate coming back. And so what was the dynamics of that gubernatorial race?

TRIPPI: I was terrified, terrified that Jerry would call. Because Jerry doesn't ever – he's never called up and said, "Hey, I'm thinking about this, what do you think?" It's like, the night before, you get a call saying, "I'm announcing tomorrow." You know? It's like –

KRISTOL: So what was the situation in 2010? Schwarzenegger is finishing up.

TRIPPI: Yes. The celebrity governor, Schwarzenegger –

KRISTOL: That hadn't worked out so great.

TRIPPI: Yeah, lots of problems in the budget, in the state, in the second term.

KRISTOL: In the second term, right. And Brown is what then? He's –

TRIPPI: Attorney general.

KRISTOL: Attorney general.

TRIPPI: Attorney General; Gavin Newsome was the odds-on young, new, visionary front-runner. I mean, he was running for governor. And Meg Whitman, who was the CEO of Ebay, a multi-billion dollar, successful, beloved company. I mean it's got – it's not –

KRISTOL: Right. Not polluting the San Francisco Bay, right?

TRIPPI: Yeah, right. You know, really highly regarded CEO; is running as the Republican.

KRISTOL: She won the Republican primary pretty easily.

TRIPPI: Yeah. I'm sitting there going, okay, Jerry's going to run for governor. I'd done his races for A.G. And I'm thinking, governor in '75 for two terms; secretary of state for two terms; attorney general for two terms; mayor of Oakland for I think two or three terms, I can't remember.

So from 1975 to 2010, talk about – we've had a recall to throw the politician governor out, to get the celebrity governor Arnold. We've got the CEO; we've got this young, vibrant Gavin Newsome. And I really thought, when I went in the first research and focus groups and talking to voters, that I was going to get, "that guy's been around forever," you know.

KRISTOL: But at that point, Brown is 70-ish?

TRIPPI: Yeah, I think so. And, yeah, old news, been around forever, we don't need another career politician. Whatever the – which we see a lot of going into Trump's election. And I just remember we – all we did was we went in and said, let me read you Meg Whitman's bio and we didn't sugar-coat it. I mean we did not like diminish it. It was a glowing, stellar biography of a woman, leader, who had led a multi-billion dollar company from its founding. You know, created thousands of jobs, et cetera.

KRISTOL: This was a focus group that would read the bio.

TRIPPI: Yeah. And people were just like, you'd start reading it, and they'd go, no. "And what's wrong with it?" "Oh, we did that with Arnold Schwarzenegger. He was new, he had been outside of government. Didn't know anything about how to run a government. I don't want anybody we have to put training wheels on. Please, no, I'm not doing that."

Then you go, well, what about this young new Gavin Newsome guy, a lieutenant who's going to run for Governor? "No, no, no, I just want somebody who knows where the light switches are, and knows how government really works, and has a chance to solve these problems."

So then you go, like, we talked to them a little bit more, and I'd be getting ready to hear about Governor Moonbeam and all the stuff. It was instead us saying, but, when they'd say, "No, I love his experience, yes, he knows how everything in government works; look at all the jobs he's had." And you'd go, but what about Governor Moonbeam? "No, no, no, he'll know how to get things done."

It was like – so which is another reason, by the way, when I look at where we're at with the celebrity president, *Celebrity Apprentice* president who shows up, who, I think a lot of people would argue doesn't really understand how government works, even if they agree with some of his positions on things. There's – that's not how we should be doing it. I do wonder if, while everybody else – and by the way, the activists –

KRISTOL: Did Brown have a primary against Newsome, I can't remember.

TRIPPI: Oh, yeah.

KRISTOL: I thought maybe he yielded to –

TRIPPI: Yeah. No, he did. [Newsome yielded]. It was a fight for a while, and then he [Newsome] dropped down into the lieutenant governor's race, once he realized –

KRISTOL: There was a fight for a while, yeah.

TRIPPI: They probably went into the focus – they probably saw the same thing. I mean, I don't know because I haven't talked to Gavin about that. But his ascendancy to the Governorship was delayed by eight years because of this dynamic.

I think if the state had been hungry after Schwarzenegger for more newness, more outside the box thinking, Gavin was it. Or it would have been a – I think that would have been a real, could have been a real general election fight over those kind of ideas. But no, that was not what the state wanted. It turned out Jerry Brown was exactly what the state wanted. And, by the way, he's done a pretty – I'd argue he's done a pretty good job. They made the right decision.

But now looking at –

KRISTOL: Yeah, look at Trump.

TRIPPI: – the fix we're in nationally. Are we in a similar – this again goes back to the Biden thing. By the way, I'm not carrying any water for Biden. I'm just trying to like –

KRISTOL: But this is good, because it's contrary to the more conventional view that you'll want a contrast with Trump, you want the 45 year old –

TRIPPI: Yeah, well, the contrast is –

KRISTOL: But you're saying the contrast is the opposite.

TRIPPI: Contrast is dad who's going to like bring us together and knows how it works.

KRISTOL: Right.

TRIPPI: And I'm not doing the female/male – I'm not getting into the gender thing. But I mean, it could be mom. I'm just saying I think more, who knows how to make this stuff work? Who's going to actually try to bring normal back, in terms of how we talk to each other and lead the country and knows how government works?

Well, there may be others in the race, that reach that place. And by the way it could be Beto. It won't be dad, but I mean it could be somebody like that. But I think one of the natural fits, if that's what the country's legitimately looking for, which is the opposite of Trump – no one would accuse him of being any of those things. So is it the ideological opposite?

KRISTOL: Well, that's the question, yeah.

TRIPPI: Is it the youth opposite? Is it – ? And I'm just saying, so I wouldn't discount in any of this – and by the way I still wouldn't be amazed if Biden doesn't run. I would not be at all. So all this then goes to the rest of it – is there somebody in that field who can emerge to lead the country, who isn't just positioning against the field on – but actually can sort of – reflect off Trump in a way that, "Yeah there are some real new ideas and things necessarily. I'm not putting anything against those. But yeah, I can get them done. Here's how I would do it." I think is going to matter a lot to people.

KRISTOL: But I assume Biden's going to run because I assume Bloomberg wouldn't have gotten out unless he thought Biden was going to run.

TRIPPI: Well, I've talked to people around Biden who all think he's going to run and think he's 95 percent there. And every single one of them, many of them I consider great friends, tell me that the last time, the night before, they thought he was going to run.

KRISTOL: In 2016.

TRIPPI: And the next day they woke up, and he didn't.

KRISTOL: But I did think no one else –

TRIPPI: And so like, while they're sure, and they are, and they're putting things together, et cetera –

KRISTOL: We've all known people who have backed off at the end.

TRIPPI: Yeah, that's all I'm saying.

KRISTOL: But I mean don't you think – it doesn't seem to me that anyone else in the field right now or in the likely field over the next month or two – if Biden doesn't run, really fits that bill. And I wonder if Bloomberg at that point does rethink. Because he would also be the other one who would be the guy who actually knows how to govern, and has a pretty impressive record of it. Do you think Bloomberg is too tough a sell though in the Democratic primary? Do you think he has Biden's strengths? Or is he just too much of a –

TRIPPI: I mean, I think it's tougher, yeah. I don't think he naturally fits some of that. I mean it's certainly I think – Biden just starts off with a lot more. And I think, look, there's several candidates in the field that I think could – I don't mean in the Biden way, but who could really – exude that sort of –. Well, what I've loved so much about Doug Jones in Alabama was his real authentic ability to convey we've got to come together, find common ground with the other –

KRISTOL: Do you think that theme, even in the primary – I guess sort of I'm struck by this conversation, and I mean I think you may very well be right – but, it is contrary to a fair amount of Washington conventional wisdom. Which is, the "come-together, I can govern theme" could actually win a Democratic

primary, against the, you know, “I’m more progressive, and more woke, and hate Trump even more than everyone else.” Which sort of is where some of the debate over the last month has felt like it was going among the congressional types.

TRIPPI: I think that that’s definitely out there, and it may win. And if it does, then I think we’re going to end up being a much more polarized place than we are today. And that doesn’t mean the Democrat can’t win the presidency, and that there’ll be a whole bunch of people out there hoping that that was all just campaign rhetoric and that they’re going to moderate a little. Like a lot of us were hoping was true with Trump, and turned out not to be the case.

But I still believe – I mean from my – and that’s an interesting thing. Because Doug Jones, Connor Lamb, did not have primaries. I mean if you look at some of the places where we actually did bridge that, win a lot of the – Look, the three groups out there, to me, having been out there the last cycle: there’s a significant group of Republican women; a significant group of younger Republicans; and a significant group of college-educated Republicans. I mean, those three groups, who really do not agree with where the party’s going.

KRISTOL: So this is the general election dynamics, yeah.

TRIPPI: And they really want – I mean, I’ll tell you, where they literally say things, particularly the women, “I cannot believe I’m saying this. But I can’t say the word. I’m thinking that maybe for the first time in my life – Democrat – I’m going to vote for a Democrat.” Right? I mean, like literally, they can’t stand even to say it.

KRISTOL: Maybe that’s an Alabama thing more where if –

TRIPPI: Yeah, no, but they are.

KRISTOL: But they did vote for Doug Jones.

TRIPPI: Right, no, no, that’s my point. And so, look, I think there’s a real opportunity for the Democratic Party here and for the candidacies out there. Can you, can we appeal to that group? And I don’t think it’s going to be by being the – the other side of the spectrum on anger and my way or the highway on an issue. “Either you’re for me exactly the way I want to do healthcare or you’re not a real Democrat.” Okay, that could happen and I’m not saying it won’t. But if that’s what we produce after going through all of this, I think, you know, I worry much more for the country than I do today.

I would say that my other experience in all of this is that this process generally works pretty well. People will start talking about the Green New Deal. And I’ve said, hey, the person who wins on that may actually be the person who not only articulates what the Green New Deal is, but also how it’s going to be implemented, how he or she is going to pay for it, et cetera.

And what I’m saying is, like, okay, so everybody goes, ah, what is this Green New Deal? And the other side starts to pummel it. Well, it’s either going to – I mean it may not be the first three or four people who talk about it. If they can’t put something together, a real plan together that the average person out there gets and goes, oh, well, yeah, I’m for that. So we’ll see how some – we’re real early in the process.

And what I’d say is, same thing I’ve seen over and over again. Both parties sort of have this thing where they fall in love with purity. “Great, we finally have somebody who’s not going to play those games, or this, or compromise. “ Well, yeah. We all want our way. The reality is, our whole country was built on – it may be slow compromise, but compromise. We’re all somehow, none of us are going to quite get our way. We’re going to work on it together. And so I think that the – is there a way to sort of articulate, here’s the progressive vision? I mean if you’re progressive.

But I really want to listen and figure out – and Beto’s doing the listen, listen, listen. But is there a way to do this? I don’t know the answer to that. Like I said, I think Biden is almost –

KRISTOL: More naturally than Beto.

TRIPPI: Yeah, more naturally in that place where he might be able to –

KRISTOL: And Beto did a pretty good job, you’ve got to say, in the Texas race in 2016. He got 48 percent of the vote in Texas.

TRIPPI: Yeah, no, that’s what I’m saying. Klobuchar evidently has that kind of reputation in Minnesota. I’m not saying that any one of them will – and by the way you’re up against that same problem the Republicans have. The fire-breathers, that’s where a lot of the energy is. And, hey, we need them, I don’t mean that. But I’m just saying is that – who’s going to win that fight?

I think the more people hear it articulated, and having worked for one, Howard Dean, and we got pretty close to pulling it off – I would just say repeatedly, this party tends in this kind of situation to start out really excited by the more intense candidacies with sort of more bold ideas, and then as they examine those ideas and either like with Gary Hart, where’s the beef? Or whatever. I mean, sooner or later, they start to grind you down.

You’re going to be in those meetings in Iowa, in these counties, and they are going to ask you real tough questions. And if you just think you can say, Green New Deal, and that’s it – that will work for a while, but it won’t work over time. You’re going to have to have a real plan.

And that’s where I think that some of this will – some of them will rise to that occasion. This field has got some really, I think some really good people, and talented and they’ll rise to it. I just don’t know which one.

And like I said, I think Biden is sort of better-positioned to not have to rise as far. He’s going to have to rise, too. He’s got a lot of things he’s going to have to answer.

KRISTOL: You’ve been through this a few times, and most people just kind of, like me, watch it from the outside, and stuff happens. But from a sort of more analytic point of view in terms of the year before the voting, so this year, the odd-numbered year, 2019. What would you be looking for? I mean you took Dean from – or helped Dean get from .5 percent to 30 percent or something like that, before any voting happened. Which is sort of, when you step back and think about it, it’s a little weird. Like, well, what was happening? How come he goes up and John Glenn goes down? And it’s 1984, and it’s not a normal – like in a baseball season where one team looked promising and then they start off losing 18 of their first 27 games and you say, okay, they’re not as good. But there’s no actual games here, but somehow people do go up and down. Explain a little how that dynamic works. And is it fundraising, is it the media, is it candidate skills?

TRIPPI: And this is where the new – I mean social media and everything actually does play a really important thing. I mean like we did things, like I remember we – in the middle of what would be this summer in the cycle – maybe even this spring in the cycle, like a few weeks, you know. George Bush went on vacation in Crawford, Texas. We ran an ad, \$100,000 dollars in the Crawford media market. Basically just simply asking the President how he could be on vacation on his ranch while our men were in Iraq? And didn’t he think he should be back in the White House? And, hey, please, – and sent out emails saying, hey, please contribute so we can keep this ad against George Bush up.

Well, I think we raised like \$1 million – like \$100,000 raised a million dollars for us. It got a lot of press. All the networks, all the cable were running ads, “look at what Howard Dean is doing.” I’m not saying that

that's – but yeah, I think the tactics may be a lot different this, like more close to what we were doing in 2004 that you really haven't seen that much of since.

KRISTOL: Right.

TRIPPI: I mean, Obama didn't do that much of that. He had the Will I Am. There were good things, I mean, they took it in a different, in a different way and maybe more mainstream. And that may have been smarter. I'm not saying that.

But I do think you'll see candidates who are down at two or three thinking about how can we make a – and yeah, I told, in the Dean campaign, I would sit there and go – guys, we have to think of ideas. But like look, you can get attention by pouring gasoline all over yourself, too. That's not a strategy for winning the presidency – I mean, that will get you a lot of attention, you'll be on the news, but you're dead, you're not a candidate. So I think part of this is where's that line, how does it play out. But yeah, I think tactics will be more like, you could see tactics more like what we were doing. I mean, sort of –

KRISTOL: That's interesting. And for observers, I mean, what matters most? Fundraising? Debates? Are there moments you would look for where things were clarified? When will we sort of be able to say well, this looks like the four or five who have emerged from the 18 or 20 as the plausible, as the possible nominees?

TRIPPI: Not until Iowa or New Hampshire. I mean, I think we'll think we see it. We'll see it after the debate – oh, it's these four or these two.

KRISTOL: People can surge late, right? We've seen that in Iowa, people who can move 15 points in the last month.

TRIPPI: Dick Gephardt was in dead last with 18 days left to go. Paul Simon was in first place.

KRISTOL: In '88.

TRIPPI: Dukakis was in second. We were in dead last. I remember Mike Duffy of Time Magazine interviewing me the morning the Iowa poll came out saying we were dead last, asked me when we were going to get out of the race?

KRISTOL: Wow.

TRIPPI: And 18 days later we won Iowa which totally screwed up Gore's strategy. I mean, it was – Axelrod was with Simon that year. I mean, here 18 days earlier Paul Simon and those guys think they're going to win Iowa and they're going to be off to the races with Dukakis.

And it turned out to be totally different. And I guess we did probably mess up Simon's ascendancy, whether he had – whether he could have or not. But we also messed up Al Gore, who was supposed to be –

KRISTOL: Yeah, one forgets how much he was the –

TRIPPI: He was supposed to be it.

KRISTOL: The alternative to Dukakis.

TRIPPI: And be the Southerner. I mean, the whole reason Super Tuesday was created was to make sure that a Northeastern liberal did not get the Democratic Party nomination.

KRISTOL: Again.

TRIPPI: Yeah, and it turned out that Super Tuesday and those string of Southern states made Mike Dukakis the nominee. It was totally unintended consequences. That's why I'm saying, everybody is moving these states up thinking oh, this will really – oh man. I've been through it.

And that's why I'm saying it's not just – some of the best examples are in the '80s, but there are examples of how Edwards in 2004, 2008. Just the way that finish happens is really going to matter.

KRISTOL: I've been struck in this conversation how much you stressed, and I do this too, I think it's often the case, the kind of continuity in the system. Trump is obviously a break with the past, the first nominee in the Republican side since Goldwater, I'd say, who really ran against his own party and the recent presidents of that party. And the first non, former elected official or cabinet official or president or general to become president, so I mean, that's a pretty big break.

But what would you say to someone who said – well, all that's nice about the '70s, '80s, '90s, 2004 even, but we're in such a new world, such a new world. Social media, online fundraising, celebrity politics, Donald Trump is president – it's all the rules are thrown out. I mean –

TRIPPI: Well, they are. And I mean, chief among them just how so many Americans unwittingly spread bad information on each other's candidates. I mean, I see something that says something that Trump has done something and it looks like a real story and it's out there. And it comes from me, so Bill, you actually read it without really thinking too much about it, and both ways. And I think that is – that's the biggest change out there.

I mean, look, big change has been the money. Like I said, we've talked about this, there are six, seven, eight candidates in this race who are going to be able to raise millions and millions – I mean, more money than you need for Iowa, New Hampshire, South Carolina, maybe California – that's some of them. But the bulk of them, because of that empowerment online that we first started seeing in Dean in 2004, that's only grown and it's even more, it's going to fuel a lot more of these candidates. I do think that that same thing fuels the second place and third finisher in Iowa, right?

In other words, so I've got, I've built an 18 million or 12 million person digital army out there who has fueled me going into Iowa. And I came in second over 16 of these other people. Bernie won, but I came in second. Well, those 10 million people are going to be energized, send more money. So I do think, that's the only part that I don't think really has changed that much, that doesn't really change, the dynamic of those early states, I don't think.

After that, yeah. I mean, so now you've got three or four – maybe we don't go to the normal two. Maybe this does get to three or four people who go all the way down the wire. They have big followings, they can – one is the younger new generation, one's progressive. Which does open up the usual crazy punditry, ecstatic conversation every cycle about yes, we're going to finally have a brokered –

KRISTOL: Yeah, I like that guy, I like that conversation.

TRIPPI: No, no – and maybe we'll be having it. But still in the end –

KRISTOL: You're a skeptic about it.

TRIPPI: Yeah, I'm a skeptic about it. I think the biggest one is how the – one of the things that I think has happened is somewhere along the way the notion of citizenship, of us as a citizens. I have a responsibility to make sure when I send this thing on that I've actually thought about it, which is really hard with this president who is sort of signaling all the opposites of these things.



But that's, I think, the biggest – I mean, that's the thing that gives me the biggest fear about this cycle is how social media – the automation of bots, cyborgs the misinformation, and how – but it's not the bots and the cyborgs. It's us. And on both sides. This is where, there are very good people on both sides who do stupid things because they're not thinking about it.

KRISTOL: In the Jones campaign you experienced this some, right?

TRIPPI: Oh, yeah. We had literally, I think we were seeing 65,000 automated bot posts an hour. Interestingly, most of them were attacking Roy Moore's accusers as not credible. They did attack Jones. About 7 percent of what we were tracking, because we had, was positive for us, but 93 percent was just –

I mean, we're not talking like 10 bots or 10 people in a room somewhere. We're talking about 65,000 posts per hour. All negative. All in support of Roy Moore. Either by attacking his accusers or attacking us. We – the problem is, when somebody hires a bot farm somewhere, this is what I'm worried about, is you hire a bot farm, and what are we going to do? Hire a Turkish bot farm on the other side? We elected, or it never dawned on us, but we weren't going to do that.

KRISTOL: Well, the campaigns probably don't do it anyway. It's some Super PAC that you don't control.

TRIPPI: Right. What I'm saying though – right, so that could break out.

And then the other thing is, what we did was, it was a special election. We did have, we raised, I think \$22 million dollars online. And so we had the money to go back at people that were reading that, were getting, being delivered that stuff, and go back to them with paid online messages saying "Hey, here's the – did you know Doug Jones did this" or positive stuff about us.

I don't think it's very long though – this is my point – that sea change has happened. And it didn't happen in 2016. I mean, it happened, and no one really realized it until after. We started to see in 2017, 2018 real weaponization of it.

And everything I've ever seen in this world of politics in the United States, when the other side started running negative ads against you – and I don't know who did it, but whoever did it first, trust me, the other side did not say oh no. We talk a good game about oh, I don't like negative ads, but guess what, guess why all the ads are negative? Because it worked.

So the problem we have now, and this is the thing where I do think all of us, regardless of party, if we really want – it's one thing to chase down Facebook and Twitter and everybody and blame them for everything. And they deserve, they were slow to get to this. But it's all of us. And it's going to be operatives on both sides. Do we hold them accountable? I mean, do we somehow say no, we're not going to – I'm not – and I don't know if the citizens read there's enough of it there, with no leader.

I mean, I think if the President of the United States and members on both sides were building a narrative about this. But I actually think this could be the equivalent of going to the moon. I mean, how do we get our citizenry to understand that they have some responsibility? I don't necessarily, at least at this moment, see a candidate who is going to take time to explain that to people.

One of the things I think is going on is I don't think most people really realize what we're all talking about sometimes when we say hey, they were manipulated or misleading. It's like what, yeah, right – oh yeah, I didn't believe any of that. You're telling me that cost us votes in Mississippi or Wisconsin or something? No one has really explained what their – what each of our responsibility is. And that's the thing that would bother me the most or concern me.

KRISTOL: Interesting. One last question about the primary and then I want to ask about the general quickly. Any – something old-fashioned like endorsements matter at all, President Obama, Hillary Clinton, I don't know – ?

TRIPPI: Obama certainly would. I mean –

KRISTOL: Does one assume he stays out?

TRIPPI: When we were in Alabama the one that mattered the most was Biden. I mean, and believe me, but no, it's like who doesn't say – that's what I'm trying to say. So I think some of these candidates will get, they will be out there looking for endorsements.

I definitely think Obama in the Democratic Primary – I mean, I saw, I can't remember which poll it was, but it showed that more Democrats now identify themselves – the words that most Democrats identify themselves is I'm an "Obama Democrat."

KRISTOL: That's interesting.

TRIPPI: Then "moderate Democrat," then "liberal Democrat," then "progressive Democrat." I mean, in terms of how we label – I mean, in a poll where they ask how would you label yourself.

Now I'm sure there are a lot more progressive Democrats than the people who say "yeah, I proclaim myself a progressive Democrat." But what was fascinating to me wasn't even that moderate was second, but that it was an "Obama Democrat" was first.

KRISTOL: And if Joe Biden runs, does President Obama feel he should support him or stay out as a former president?

TRIPPI: I'm sure he's going to stay out as a former president. But that could get to your question of what happens if it does get down to two people and one is the fire – and yeah, he feels like hey, I can make a difference here and I really do want.

I think what I hope happens in this election is that somehow both parties grow up a bit, which is like also like yeah, right.

KRISTOL: And we're doing our best to get you a different Republican nominee than Donald Trump. I think if he's the nominee, I don't think there's much growing up on our side.

TRIPPI: Well, if we have two parties that go into that, I think it's, like I said, we may not be able to come out of it.

KRISTOL: What about the general election? So let's just assume Trump beats back, whatever, Larry Hogan and even if Hogan does reasonably well, Trump gets the nomination as incumbents usually do. And it's – how, just general, where are you on the odds of, on the one hand he's got a low, pretty low approval in real life for an incumbent president. On the other hand, the incumbents have won the last three cycles, and with all the caveats that obviously we don't know what the economy is going to be and everything else.

TRIPPI: No, but if Larry Hogan or someone like that gets into the primary, I don't think that's good for Trump. I don't mean that Larry Hogan can defeat Trump, or that Kasich could or whoever, the people who might do it. But the fact is no president who has ever been primaried – I mean, they all won their nomination, but none of them went on to win the presidency, to be reelected.

KRISTOL: LBJ didn't even win the nomination.

TRIPPI: I'm just saying I don't think that's good for –

KRISTOL: So that wounds Trump, maybe.

TRIPPI: It will wound him. I think he's already really wounded.

KRISTOL: Is that right?

TRIPPI: Yeah, not because – look, there's a reason in this economy that he's still at 42 or wherever he is on his favor or approval this week. It's him. And I've seen enough of these Republican women, these younger Republicans, these college educated Republicans. Are even starting to see non-college educated Republicans, not as much, but some of them starting to bleed off a little bit.

They're just – every president, including Obama, exhausts the country by the end of their second term. Everybody is just exhausted with them. Very few, in fact Reagan was the only one I can think of, who there was mild exhaustion; but not so much that his vice president couldn't both win the nomination and the presidency for one more term. This, I really think Donald Trump has gotten everybody, or the right components even of his own party close to that edge two years into his first term. I just – now, do we –

KRISTOL: And when you start off with 46.1 percent of the vote, you're kind of not exactly have a lot of margin of error here, right?

TRIPPI: Exactly. Now does Schultz get in and run as an Independent, and that takes the wrong group of people from Democrats? I mean, all kinds of that kind of stuff, but just sort of the – do we nominate the angry, or just as angry, left version of Trump? Which I don't see either. I mean, we have progressives that are running, but none of them are the mirror of that.

But that's what I'm saying, could things happen where you're sitting there after the convention going how the hell did the Democrats blow this? Yeah, I'm a member of my party and yes, there is a chance.

Like I said, we tend to become amazingly pragmatic in a way that Republicans don't when they – I mean, I just think there's a – Republicans, once they get a win, somebody is winning and that's who their party nominee is going to be, they tend to rally behind that instead of trying to stop it if it's the wrong thing.

KRISTOL: Right.

TRIPPI: I don't know enough about both parties.

KRISTOL: Well, that's probably just the mechanics of the primary system with the winner take all and stuff.

TRIPPI: Yeah, winner take all. You can't – it's hard. We have proportional or more proportional. And I just think, and we tend to be, like I said, you can have an anti-war candidate running and everybody loves that he's against the war, she's against the war. But are we going, can we really afford to have George Bush reelected? No. Okay, I'm going, I'll vote for John Kerry in the primaries. That happens a lot more in our, I think in our –

KRISTOL: And even when I was listening to, as you've been saying this, I'm thinking even in '08, which I guess is the contrary example to some degree, one forgets that a candidate Obama went pretty, worked pretty hard to be fairly centrist, and disavowed Jeremiah Wright when he had to and all that.

But secondly, Hillary Clinton actually almost beat him precisely with this argument. I mean, everyone – Obama having won election and reelection to the presidency, we all now think Barack Obama, super

candidate. But in fact, at the time, and I remember this as a McCain supporter, the conventional view was, not without some reason, Obama is to the left, the first African American. I mean, he'll be a tougher sell to swing voters. And I do think that's what helped Hillary to win all of those huge, big state primaries and she ended up with as many votes as Obama.

TRIPPI: Yeah, and here's the other ingredient. If that had been George Bush's reelection election, would the party have taken the chance on Barack Obama?

KRISTOL: That's interesting.

TRIPPI: This is what I'm saying.

KRISTOL: Different than a reelect.

TRIPPI: Right. People tend to think about like what happened last time. Yeah, but like no, what I'm talking about is go back and look. When George W. Bush was just so feared in our party and how we went from Howard Dean to John Kerry pretty quickly as we started to worry about his reelection.

Donald Trump is that. Reagan, there was fear of that, but not nearly like with W and not nearly. I mean, neither one of them are even close. You've had – that's what I'm saying. I mean, which may also be kind of like a little bit different when we talk about when a Republican won the presidency and why you guys go – because it may have been in years, I'm not thinking, in years where the threat wasn't as, oh, it's going to be Obama; we can afford to do that or whatever.

KRISTOL: But Romney was more centrist, they defaulted, the Republicans, against incumbent Democratic presidents to a more centrist candidate, Dole and Romney. I'd say the same – I mean, neither one, but it seemed like they were more plausible than –

TRIPPI: That's what I'm saying. Maybe you do have the same dynamic and the only time we see it is when there's somebody in office who we so fear that we're going to become more pragmatic. And in our, the thing is, at this stage, we're always enthralled with the guy who is against the war, for civil unions, the Green New Deal, et cetera.

And then they get asked a lot of tough questions. And the other candidates go like, are running around saying how are you going to pay for it? And all of this kind of stuff and whittle away. And by the time you get to Iowa and New Hampshire, there's a surprise.

And it may be, just like I said, the surprise is that no, they did vote for the Green New Deal, but it was the 8<sup>th</sup> person who talked about it and it was because they actually had a legitimate plan that made people go yeah, let's do this.

KRISTOL: Or some other issue entirely –

TRIPPI: Yeah, yeah, that's what I mean –

KRISTOL: – rises and someone else addresses it well, and suddenly somebody else becomes the Gary Hart type. I mean, I think that's a very shrewd insight of yours. That if you have a Mondale type, you sort of – the system kind of wants a Gary Hart like alternative. It wants the generational option, so to speak, and the outside option or some kind of option.

TRIPPI: Right, it wasn't like Mondale was some like centrist pro-business Democrat. But no, I just think that, like I say this now, I've been saying like look, I think the Green New Deal, it could be the candidate who actually figures out how to articulate a real plan.

So it's not about being for the new deal. The Green New Deal may be the thing that does do it. I'm just saying that it's going to get all of these ideas that everybody is going like you're going to get battle tested and some of them are going to emerge as – even Joe Biden's, if he gets the nominee, emerges as part of what he's running on.

I just don't know which – I think it's way too early. And I can tell you we tend to – and I think this is true of the Republican Party, tend to be enamored with hey, there's a real conservative, you know. And then you start – well, but Romney might have a better chance.

I'm just saying that I think that dynamic is going to be more powerful in this election than we all think, not because of this field, but because of Trump. Because of how terrifying it is for a Democrat in Iowa or New Hampshire or South Carolina, anywhere in the country. And by the way, a lot of Independents and hopefully enough Republicans, from my point of view anyway, that our –

KRISTOL: Some of them can vote and a few of them, I guess, could vote in the Democratic primaries if they're Independents, a least. So states where you don't – Virginia or something.

TRIPPI: Yeah.

KRISTOL: That's really been fascinating and a huge – will happen in the next year.

TRIPPI: Oh yeah.

KRISTOL: Unfortunately, this will be on, preserved online. So we'll be able to see what has – not unfortunately, I shouldn't say, but we'll be surprised by some things and some things won't quite – maybe it will be your, on the other hand, it will be great if this analysis turns out to be totally vindicated.

But I think the main thing we need to do is get back together in a year and explain what happened. It's a lot easier to explain what has happened than what is going to happen, right?

TRIPPI: Like right now, I still don't know if Biden is going to get in. Just that kind of stuff, it makes it even difficult to sort of talk –

KRISTOL: Let's get together in like in maybe late in '19 where we really could have a – where there will be some winnowing and some clarification, wouldn't you say? October, November we'll have a little more sense.

TRIPPI: I'd be happy to. I'll be back any time – enjoyed it.

KRISTOL: Joe Trippi, thank you very much and thank you for joining us on CONVERSATIONS.

[END]