

CONVERSATIONS

WITH BILL KRISTOL

Conversations with Bill Kristol

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I. The Democratic Race (0:15 – 49:48)

KRISTOL: Welcome to CONVERSATIONS, I'm Bill Kristol. Very pleased to be joined again today by my old friend Mike Murphy. I think we did this about a year –

MURPHY: We did.

KRISTOL: I haven't bothered to look at it to see how it stands up. We'll forget about that.

MURPHY: I'm even afraid to – Yeah.

KRISTOL: Going forward we'll discuss the state of politics. Mike, a veteran, ran presidential campaigns, senate, gubernatorial campaigns, congratulations, everything.

MURPHY: I started with Hoover, I'm that old. I've been at it a while.

KRISTOL: Yeah, you are. No, you're one of the best. And the fantastic McCain campaign of 2000, I still have such fond memories of.

MURPHY: A different era.

KRISTOL: It was. Isn't it amazing?

MURPHY: Yeah, honor, country first.

KRISTOL: You now teach at USC a little bit and still do corporate and political stuff, and – ?

MURPHY: I don't teach. I might, but right now I just help a little at the USC Center for the Political Future which has a lot of cool programming online you can check out. And I'm of course now – I'm reaching out to the kids on the inter web, Bill, with this whole pod talking thing.

KRISTOL: Really? Yeah, I hear they like that, whatever that pod thing is. How does that work?

MURPHY: Yeah, yeah. I would imagine –

KRISTOL: Is that like radio? I don't know.

MURPHY: It's like radio but there's no antenna, it's complicated.

KRISTOL: Anyway, you have an excellent podcast with our friend David Axelrod – who has also been a guest on CONVERSATIONS – appropriately and correctly called “Hacks on Tap.”

MURPHY: The theory was, I'll give you the one minute plug.

KRISTOL: Why not, sure, you know.

MURPHY: Then you don't have the pay me the usual hundred dollars for this, but happy to be here as always. Axe and I have been friends for a long, long time, good personal friends, even though we're – we disagree on everything. We used to even run a lot of campaigns against each other. We had the Iowa couple, the governorship, back and forth, among other places. And we would always get on the phone and talk politics.

And Axe had the idea, I give him full credit, he said, why don't we turn this into a podcast? So it's basically like a conversation of two grumpy, old, white guys who have done a lot in campaigns and have opinions about what's going on now. So, it's been a good success, we've grown an audience, and people seem to like it.

KRISTOL: No, it's excellent. And you guys know a lot about actually – about running campaigns, which distinguishes you from 95% of the people who talk about running campaigns on cable television, you know?

MURPHY: Well, part of it is when you're in the cable – what should I say? – the racket that we both are, it's a little frustrating because you have 30 seconds then you know Miss Utah or some guy you've never heard of wants to interrupt with “the college of electricity.”

KRISTOL: Right.

MURPHY: And you can't really – So, the podcast, for good or bad, and some of our viewer mail argues each way, we get to bloviate on with our opinions. And we do about 45, 50 minutes a week going through it, and viewer questions, so, it's fun.

KRISTOL: You have always been, I think, I will say this, honestly, much more imaginative and seeing around corners in terms of where campaigns could go, less conventional.

So let's talk about the current state of things, it's December, what is it? December 11th, I think we're talking here, 2019.

MURPHY: Day one of the impeachment articles, having been passed down.

KRISTOL: But the Democratic campaign, I mean, what's surprised you? You know, in some ways I'd say, don't you think, it's been a little less, fewer surprises than normal in these kinds of cases?

MURPHY: I would say no lightning bolts. My scorecard – It was easy to see Biden would get in trouble, he was a very weak frontrunner, so that wasn't a surprise, we'll see how it ends.

KRISTOL: Are you surprised that he remains a pretty, a real frontrunner though?

MURPHY: Well, I think – Yeah, maybe, we'll work through them all.

Biden has been, the term of art right now is “durable.” But part of the problem is a lot of the punditocracy make their – create their opinions about what's going to happen based on the daily poll, which is a snapshot of what was on cable TV news last week, the national poll. And Biden has been robust in the national polling because he has that name ID advantage, he also has a good connection with African American voters, and a lot of name ID, which kind of held things together so far for him in South Carolina.

I think the threat to Biden's campaign is he perceived as the Trump beater, the winner, and if he comes in second or third in the Iowa Caucus and loses the New Hampshire Primary, both of which are by no means certain, but most of the polling for Biden has been a story of decline then plateau, in the first tier but never quite leading it, there's been a little life lately.

But if he starts losing, and Superman can't lift up a locomotive, I think whoever beats him could roll the table into South Carolina. So, a lot of the talk about Biden's power has been based on polling of places where it's not that competitive yet. If you look at Iowa and New Hampshire he has declined.

KRISTOL: You still buy the argument, we've discussed this for years and you've always been on this side of the – Do national polls matter? Or is it a sequential process where what happens in Iowa and New Hampshire is just close to decisive?

MURPHY: They matter because they tell you kind of who's winning the chatter among people who are paying attention now. A lot of primary voters out there have real lives. But I believe in the old Milt Wordsman rule. He's an old McGovern delegate counter out of the Kennedy world who said, “Be extremely wary of national polls until after the first voting contest.” So I believe that is fundamentally true.

You know, there's just a psychological need to look at the polls and relax because you think you know what's going to happen, and in primary politics, in particular, that is dangerous because numbers can move fast. There has been polling –

KRISTOL: And the sequence matters a huge amount –

MURPHY: A lot, a lot because you win an Iowa Caucus you get a couple hundred million dollars of media attention, that is a big deal. So I would say the state polls have been indicative and they've had a pretty simple story. Biden started with a lot of name ID and affection, because keep in mind the voters in the Democratic Party don't have to hate Joe Biden, they just have to decide are they going to give him the job or a gold watch, you know?

And, so, that is being litigated now. But if you look at Iowa and the caucus, again, with another huge caveat that a caucus is trickier to poll because of the way the multiple ballots work and how open it is and the organizational part, but taking that aside, we do know who a lot of caucus goers are, it is possible to poll them to kind of know who they like. And if you look at it from the beginning, two things have really happened in Iowa which is Biden has declined, he hasn't collapsed, but he's declined as competition shows up, and Elizabeth Warren has risen, and Pete Buttigieg has risen which tells us they both have a pitch that's resonating.

Now, we're going to have a tough January where that is sorted out. You saw we had the classic Democratic slappy fight between Warren and Buttigieg where they each kind of like flailed away and then they both surrendered. It was sort of a defining Democrat. “Okay, I'll tell you my McKinsey clients.” “Oh I'll tell you my law clients.” Oh, real brutal, brutal exchange there. [Laughter].

KRISTOL: Could those issues possibly matter to anyone?

MURPHY: No, it's process, nobody cares. But they both look at the other as the problem, so they're trying to find a way to wound them without being called, in the Democrat Tea Party as being called mean. It's amusing to watch.

But the fact is those two have had energy. Warren a little earlier, then she plateaued on the second look, but she has an organization, she's a pretty strong candidate of the left, I don't really count her out yet at all.

And Buttigieg has done a great job of getting everybody in the Democratic Party who had over 1,100 on their SATs together to give him a \$1,000 bucks. You know, so he's built something among college educated voters.

Then you got Joe kind of hanging on, but busted down a little bit. And then you got Bernie who is still showing 1 out of 5 voters most of the time, 1 out of 6. I think he might have a ceiling, but he's got money, he's got a shtick. So those are kind of – What has happened over time is the ones that have grown, which is Buttigieg and Warren, are in the race now at the top tier. And the ones that started with assets, Bernie with his base, his money, and his niche of the party, which is not small; and Biden with his goodwill and his name ID and his connection to African Americans in South Carolina, they've stayed in, so you got kind of a final four with one, maybe two loose ends.

Loose end one is will Amy Klobuchar get anything going in Iowa? And there's some evidence, finally when it counts now, there's some life there. And that, you know – Then you've got Bloomberg, if there's a train wreck.

KRISTOL: And you could have an outside run. There's history that suggests that you can come from where Klobuchar is, or I suppose conceivably even Booker or someone else, but she seems like the one who has the best chance to be the sort of 5th, you know, first tier candidate.

MURPHY: Yeah, her challenges are – She's, in my view, now, I like her more than the liberals because she's a moderate.

KRISTOL: Right.

MURPHY: And I think she can be competitive in a general election, more than the others, some of the others. But she's been timid in the first half of the campaign, wasted a lot of time and resources. Now up against a wall, she's come to life, and you're right, the history is, if she has a good January and a good little season right now.

Two obstacles for her, I think. One, my guess is she's broke. These campaigns all blow all of their money at the beginning and then starve to death at the end when they need it because the voters are logarithmic in a caucus and a primary.

And two, she's going to be sitting, most likely, in the Senate as a juror in the impeachment trial when she'd really rather be barnstorming Iowa in January while Pete and Biden are going to be running the table there while her and Warren are caught.

KRISTOL: Yeah, she, Warren, and Sanders – Klobuchar, Warren, Sanders, Booker.

MURPHY: Yeah, they could be chained to a table somewhere in the Senate.

KRISTOL: And they really are supposed to show up there. They're not supposed to like just takeoff the way you do when there's normal Senate voting. They're jurors, they're supposed to be there just the way a jury is supposed to be there for a trial.

MURPHY: I think they're going to be holding iPads with animated campaign slogans going by or something.

KRISTOL: Right, right.

MURPHY: "Dear Iowa, I'm thinking of you." Like thought bubbles in real time because it's going to drive them crazy. One last point and then I'll stop bloviating about –

KRISTOL: No, no, it's good.

MURPHY: What's surprised me. Here's something that mostly didn't surprise me but I'm enjoying, and we're going to get into the dangerous world of identity here, so hopefully I'll still have a career when I'm done. The media and the punditocracy feel the pull of identity politics in their thinking. So there was a presumption at the beginning of the campaign that one of the African American candidates would catch fire because African American voters in South Carolina would fly to them, that has not happened.

We do a poll at USC, which is kind of interesting, it's a massive sample nationally. It's an internet poll, but we actually provide people who can't afford it an iPad so we can kind of police the sample. You can see it on our website USC –

KRISTOL: So it's a panel, it's the same people?

MURPHY: Yeah, a massive panel of thousands of people.

KRISTOL: Yeah, yeah.

MURPHY: It was the one that got it kind of right last time, although it got right by getting it wrong because everyone was polling the national vote, but it saw Trump kind of coming, it's a tracking thing. Hopefully we'll have it this year.

But looking at Kamala Harris, her worst group, worse than whites in the national poll, was black women, at least early. Now, if she had had early wins the momentum factor, and we've seen it in history, African American voters are attracted to African American candidates who win at the beginning, they're pragmatic. And this kind of identity theory that people have to vote their gene code, that women have to vote for women, white men have to vote for white men has been totally disproven by actual voter behavior, but that was very en vogue.

So this has been kind of a mark to market event, at least so far, maybe there will be some magic. Deval Patrick, maybe some lightning bolt will come out of New Hampshire. But a lot of the presumption the media made, which shaped the coverage of the race, has been proven by the voters to be off, wrong.

KRISTOL: So we have –

MURPHY: They want to beat Trump, all voters, doesn't matter about race or sex, which is why Biden started – that, and his affection – pretty well. And Elizabeth's message has been resonated with a bunch, men and women. You know, she – the gender cut in her numbers is not huge, and same thing with Buttigieg.

KRISTOL: So we got the – So you think Buttigieg is a real first tier, you consider those four the first tier, you don't consider it three plus one?

MURPHY: I think if the caucus were held tomorrow there's a good chance he'd come in first.

KRISTOL: Wow.

MURPHY: He's got a genuine boom happening there, but he's got a debate coming up where he's going to be on the menu. He got very lucky last time because, you know, these debates are always the same, they all agreed somebody is the problem, and they try to find a slappy fight way to get at him without looking like they're being mean, it's a Democratic primary. But he's got that, and then Christmas will slow things down a little, and then he's got January. So it feels almost a little early, but it's pretty good for him.

KRISTOL: And I guess we should mention Bloomberg.

MURPHY: Yeah, look, you know, disclosure, I've worked for Independence PAC in the past, they're good friends of mine, I like Bloomberg. I think he'd be a good president. If I had a magic wand either he or Michael Bennett would be the Democrat I'd pick, but I don't, and the very fact that I like him so much might be a bad sign.

KRISTOL: And you probably just damaged him further if anyone is watching this.

MURPHY: I was going to say, yeah, yeah, yeah. I now have the power in my minute level of influence to hurt any candidate in either party I endorse.

KRISTOL: That's good.

MURPHY: Because, my poor Democrat, "Oh, evil Republican." If I'm for a Republican, "Oh, Trump hating evil Republican". I'm like you, we're down here –

KRISTOL: Yeah, we're very influential here, right. [Laughter].

MURPHY: Can we get on Kickstarter and raise a hundred bucks to get a pair of ferns? Because we're doing "Between Two Ferns," we don't even have a fern here in the bunker, underground.

KRISTOL: Yeah.

MURPHY: And our noble army against Trump, but point being –

KRISTOL: We're too distinguished for ferns here, that's more of a "Hacks on Tap" thing, the ferns.

MURPHY: Yeah, the pop culture reference for the kids. You ought to have Zach Galifianakis, that would be fun, it would be like a parody.

So, to wrap-up on Bloomberg. I'm rooting for him, it is tough to enter late, it is really tough, nobody has ever done it, and I'm not sure parades are breaking out in the Democratic electorate that we need an old white billionaire. But he is interesting because if he runs as the cranky old can-do guy that's a niche nobody else has. I like that.

KRISTOL: But he needs Biden, right, to somehow collapse.

MURPHY: Yeah, I think part of it is – which we don't know, Biden – right now – Well, we'll talk about Biden in a minute. But yeah, if Biden collapses, Bloomberg picks it up late. He does have the resources to make a pitch.

The other thing he does, and I was watching the news cycle, I think there was a Shane Goldmacher article in *The New York Times* or somewhere that was about Warren adjusting her thing, now that she's clearly plateaued and dropped in the polls from all the momentum she had, and her events she, of course you know, champion of class warfare, beats on Bloomberg every time she can. I'd be a little careful because the Mayor has a couple hundred million dollars and he likes TV ads. And so he could, he could pay that favor back in about 20 media markets in the March 3rd states and talk all about Medicare for all, which even in the Democratic primary is an anchor for at least half the voters, and he could pay that favor back. So it could be time for a lump of coal in the old stocking for her if she keeps it up.

So, Bloomberg, even if he doesn't win, could be a catalyst if he decides to stop somebody, and if there's anybody he'd want to stop – I don't speak for him, but just ideologically it would be her.

KRISTOL: I want to come back to that Iowa-New Hampshire-South Carolina sequence and help people see how that might go.

MURPHY: Yeah.

KRISTOL: But aren't you struck, I'm a little struck, if you just do the math, if you just say how many voters now in national polls are for Biden plus Buttigieg plus Bloomberg, who's getting a few with all this money he's spending, plus Klobuchar, on the one hand, and then Sanders and Warren on the other, you can throw in some of the people who are for Harris and some of the other minor candidates. For all the talk about how far left the party is, the Biden plus Buttigieg is consistently in the national polls, and I would say actually in most of the state polls, too, higher, certainly as high as, and probably a little higher actually, a little bigger number, than Sanders plus Warren.

MURPHY: Yeah.

KRISTOL: I'm not sure people really expected quite that.

MURPHY: Well, again, I don't want to be a total media – I'm not even really a media, I'm a punditocracy basher because it's an unlicensed profession, increasingly lately on television.

KRISTOL: Right.

MURPHY: But I think for 2017 the people who interpret what's going on in Washington TV studios thought AOC was the Democratic Party because she was the thing of the moment there. And therefore any Warren-esque thing will argue.

I think Warren had a lot of the components to win the nomination. Identity – She's not an old white guy. You know, there's a big constituency for that argument. Progressive economics – Make those corporations pay. A big, big lump of voters in the polling for that. And fighter – Every third word she says is fighter. She orders breakfast, "I'll have ham, eggs, I'm a fighter." So, those three things are kind of three out of four.

The last one, the biggest one is winning, but if she starts to win, she has 'winner.' So I kind of saw her path and formula, but you're right, her signature thing – this is why policy is both important and dangerous in a campaign – has never tested that well anywhere including in the Democratic primary.

So, on the second look, "wait a minute, Medicare for what?" Union healthcare endangered, people who work for corporations that have pretty good healthcare. Nobody loves their healthcare, but people hate the idea of big, scary change in healthcare. Both parties have learned that lesson.

KRISTOL: Yeah.

MURPHY: So, the second look is hurting her a lot based on that issue. Her anti-corporate stuff, her “we’re going to make the wealthy pay their share” that stuff works great across the board. Ugly little secret, because we step out of the bunker here and put on our disguises and slip out into Washington, we bump into the Republican bubble, they will all say, “Oh, Elizabeth Warren, you can beat her in an hour. It’s easy.”

And I do think she’s a risky candidate for the Democrats because Trump could use Medicare for all and other things to change the subject of the election, or try, but you get a bunch of disaffected Trump voters in a focus group and you run her anti-corporate stuff, run’em, they love it. Her populism could cut into Trump if she can shed the issue of “I’m going to take away your union health insurance” and she’s trying, she’s been slipping away.

KRISTOL: Yeah, if she picks back up it looks like – I’ve seen some focus groups. It looks if she picks up some of that, what is that, the 9%, the Obama Trump voters?

MURPHY: Yeah, yeah, yeah.

KRISTOL: If she picks up some of them, she does lose, probably some of the upper middleclass.

MURPHY: Suburban’s, yeah.

KRISTOL: Defectors, the 2018 Democratic voters, and the suburban’s, and how that tradeoff works. I do think it is Medicare For All more than anything else, right?

MURPHY: Yeah.

KRISTOL: The rest of it is all –

MURPHY: Look, remember we’re old to enough to remember 1982, Reagan midterm, recession-ish economy, Dems had a brilliant ad that we old Republican hacks are still pissed about where the voiceover, you know, “The Republicans and Newt Gingrich – you know, they’re horrible.” And the Social Security card close-up and a big pair of chrome scissors, snip, cut the Social – Well, we went crazy, “Outrageous! Scaring old people.” It worked.

KRISTOL: Yeah, yeah.

MURPHY: So now we get to clip Blue Cross cards in half with her, so she is risky. I’m against her on a lot of levels, ideological and risk to beat Trump, but people who are smug about it and think, “Oh, we’ll beat her in a walk.” Trump’s – Big mistake. She could beat Trump, just risky.

KRISTOL: Yeah. And she’s, I think, a formidable actual candidate, which matters.

MURPHY: Yes, they’re running a smart –

KRISTOL: She’s not going to get flustered on stage or anything.

MURPHY: – savvy campaign. Yeah, she is a performer.

KRISTOL: She peaked there. But there’s room for one more run, right, this is often how –

MURPHY: Total room.

KRISTOL: – insurgents go. Obama had a little of it too. Get a big run-up, then you sort of plateau, and people say, well, that was over, that was an interesting run-up. And then of course you get a second –

MURPHY: That's the danger for Pete. That the second look at him, post-Christmas, you know starting now and post-Christmas is like "yeah, okay." In some ways it wants to be Warren versus Pete.

KRISTOL: Right.

MURPHY: You know, the technocrat, the guy doing the unifying message, partially borrowed from Yang, veteran, identity in his own sphere, first gay president, versus her: woman, the left wing economics, fighter, and all that.

And then you got Biden who, if Biden could operate, could kind of be the safe choice. I mean, Biden could be the port in the storm, but the problem is Biden, because of his nature, there's some charm in it I think, but is a gaffe machine, and his campaign is wrecking him by hiding him, which is a mistake because everybody knows he's a gaffe machine. So when in doubt bottle that, put it out there, Mr. Authenticity, the one and only Biden, and every day he'd own the news cycle because one day he'd be great, he's empathy, he's Biden. The other day he'd fall into the orchestra pit and then he'd climb out.

And, so, I think the Biden guys need the courage to just bet it all on what they've got because there's no changing him. And maybe then Biden is set up for a little comeback now after being beat down for eight months. But it'll be down to "can Biden operate? Can he perform as a candidate?" And that's very mixed; some days, yeah, some days, no.

KRISTOL: And where are you on the kind of, if looks like Iowa – which it could it seems to me – 23%, 21%, 18%, 14%, you know that kind of very indecisive result. Are you in the old school first is first, second is second, the gaps don't matter that much? That was kind of the lesson of '76 with Carter where he won some primaries by 1% and he was the winner. Or is that kind of an old media thing? You were the winner because *The New York Times* said you were the winner, now people are a little more sophisticated, and really you get a cluster, and you don't get a real result out of Iowa.

MURPHY: I think the truth is "close is close." But the coverage is winners and losers. So somebody is going to win and partially it's expectations. Amy comes in third now, a point away from Biden either way, it would be perceived as a win for her, although I don't know she has the money to run the table and that's the problem. And in this era of internet fundraising you can amass cash quickly, but it's still a hard turnaround, I mean, you've got seven days there, February 2 to February 9th from Iowa to New Hampshire.

And if it's really close, and the Iowa reporting is tricky, you know –

KRISTOL: Right, because –

MURPHY: Yeah, yeah, because of the delegate formula and all of that. So a winner is not related to Santorum and Romney again.

That said, I think the biggest thing out of Iowa will be does somebody beat the frontrunner Joe Biden? And second, does Mayor Pete live up to the hype, or Elizabeth Warren, and come in first? Biden's third, which is possible, that's bad for Biden. Biden's a close second then it's durable.

KRISTOL: You don't think he can just survive, third's fine because –

MURPHY: Well, a week later if he wins New Hampshire he's fine.

KRISTOL: But third, third, does he still go to South Carolina with a big lead or does that start to evaporate?

MURPHY: No, it melts. I think it melts.

KRISTOL: You think it melts.

MURPHY: Yeah.

KRISTOL: You're still of the view that –

MURPHY: Yeah, there's a conventional wisdom that Pete Buttigieg can't get the rest of African American voters. Well one, he's doing exactly the right thing. They had a good little web video they put out where he went down and he's campaigning.

KRISTOL: Right.

MURPHY: And some people are saying go away and he comes back the next day.

KRISTOL: Yeah.

MURPHY: He's out there looking like RFK, he's in the neighborhoods, he's working it, paying attention, and if he can combine that with winning New Hampshire and beating Joe Biden, um, will he sweep the vote in South Carolina? No he won't, but he'll sweep all the yuppie vote on the coast in Charleston and in some of the other cities, and he'll do enough with the African American vote to be top two and maybe win.

Top two totally gets – I mean, then he keeps going, because remember, March is coming. Nobody, except maybe Bloomberg, can afford March. You get California, Texas, it is enormous. So it's going to be a media wave that fuels that. So, you know, nothing succeeds in this business like winning, even if you lose, if you come back to win, that momentum that is important. And how good you are at surfing in the national media when all of a sudden you have a hundred cameras.

KRISTOL: Yeah, it does become a national race after the first three or four.

MURPHY: Oh, it totally does. The truth is Iowa and New Hampshire, and to a lesser extent the Nevada caucus and South Carolina, are the TV set for the national race. And what happens nationally moves the numbers there. You know, it's all interconnected.

In the old days there might have been kind of a dome around Iowa, nobody knew what was going on, some unknown governor. Now with the ability for information to go everywhere for free on the internet and three cable TV stations that have an economic incentive to make every day the Hindenburg, every day is the most important day of the campaign, every day is sirens going off, "We found out today that Pete Buttigieg is left handed. What does it mean? Go to our panel!"

KRISTOL: Right.

MURPHY: "Dr. Frank Luntz, what does the word 'left' mean to people, Frank?" You know, it's crazy but it means information, too much goes everywhere all the time.

The last thing would be, there is a little secret to the New Hampshire primary traditionally which is it's not bad to come in second in Iowa, unless you have huge expectations you've not met, because one of the great slogans in New Hampshire is 'screw Iowa.'

KRISTOL: Right.

MURPHY: Now it doesn't mean you go from sixth to first, but you can come in second in Iowa and have New Hampshire decide, and then you run the table through. And you know we don't talk much about the Nevada caucus, but that's going to be a beat and that's another caucus.

KRISTOL: Right.

MURPHY: And SEIU and some of the culinary union world there has a lot of power in that –

KRISTOL: And Sanders has –

MURPHY: It's also heavily Latino.

KRISTOL: Sanders has good numbers there.

MURPHY: Sanders is in that hunt. That's a good terrain for him.

KRISTOL: Is Sanders generally underrated? It feels that way to me.

MURPHY: A little bit, a little bit.

KRISTOL: If you just subjectively step back and sort of look at the numbers, that guy is hanging in there pretty well.

MURPHY: And he has cash. He can keep going.

KRISTOL: Right.

MURPHY: Money gives you longevity in this race, you can take a punch. That'll be Amy's problem. Nothing happens in Iowa, she's out of gas, it's over.

KRISTOL: She needs Iowa.

MURPHY: That's all she's got.

KRISTOL: Right.

MURPHY: As a matter of fact, I was at this party in Los Angeles, my wife, and there were a bunch of partners at big law firms there, mostly women, they invited us to a dinner party, and of course politics – And they liked Amy a lot. And so I said to them, and I tweeted this, and I think I said it on the "Hacks on Tap" podcast, I believe on iTunes. If you like Amy, you know if I had a wand it would be Bloomberg or Michael Bennett, so I'm not rooting for a horse here, but if you like Amy today, tomorrow, send money *now* because it's all about Iowa TV. What she needs now, to move her numbers, to get more money, to cover for while she's out of town for the impeachment thing.

KRISTOL: So what about the impeachment thing? You're going to have presumably, unless things go very differently than we expect at this moment, the House impeaches next week and the Senate sits for some stretch, maybe all of January, and Senator Sanders, Senator Klobuchar, Senator Warren –

MURPHY: Right.

KRISTOL: – are all there, presumably, and they're supposed to be there.

MURPHY: Well, presumably.

KRISTOL: It's a little unclear, the rules are a little, eh.

MURPHY: We're now in the crazy world –

KRISTOL: Right.

MURPHY: – of politics. So, you know, who knows ultimately what could happen. On one hand, putting aside the tragedy of impeachment and the tragedy of Trump that we're even in this mess, there is great comedy in this because I think you will see an arms race between those Democrats to who can mime the best for the TV cameras trying to – [Murphy makes gestures of paying attention, showing disapproval and outrage]

KRISTOL: Right. [chuckles] Yes, right.

MURPHY: You know.

KRISTOL: And certainly walking out at every break to have press avails.

MURPHY: Oh, racing out, people will be trampled because you'll have these pent up candidates in a desperate fight to be president, which they wanted to be since 5th grade, you know, trying to somehow turn a jury function into a television show.

KRISTOL: Right.

MURPHY: Second, who says they won't skip once in a while?

KRISTOL: Right.

MURPHY: Say "this is all a sham, Mitch McConnell has rigged this thing.

KRISTOL: Right.

MURPHY: The Republicans are corrupt, I'm not even going to be here for the day that they bring in whoever the Republican witness is," and they go stomp out to Iowa and give a fiery speech. So I, you know, who knows with this thing –

KRISTOL: Also, I sort of have a slightly contrarian view, everyone is like well, Buttigieg and Biden will be living in Iowa and it's such a disadvantage for the senators to be in Washington, but maybe it also looks a little bit the opposite, they're doing speeches to 82 people or even 282 people at some nice place in Iowa. It's very nice, they can say the same thing everyone has heard them say a million times anyway, so it is really a chance to do much?

Whereas in a funny way, the whole country is watching an impeachment trial, and if you have a clever line, if Klobuchar or Sanders has a clever line they're going to get a heck of a lot more attention, I should think, with 30 seconds in Washington than seven hours in Iowa, no?

MURPHY: I think there's some truth, but if you're Klobuchar, and you're coming on, and there's interest in you –

KRISTOL: So she's the one who really –

MURPHY: – the ability to go work gyms of three to four hundred people multiple times, you know, two a day, eight days it has an impact.

KRISTOL: Yeah.

MURPHY: And there is kind of a political tourism factor, god bless the lowans because they do show up to hear you.

KRISTOL: Right.

MURPHY: Same with New Hampshire. And so near the end, being there, especially if you've got momentum, is important. Now, she'll probably have a moment or two, but she's got 47 other ego maniacs in the Democratic Senate Caucus and same on the Republican who want moments too.

KRISTOL: Yeah.

MURPHY: So I think it is a disadvantage. The other thing you're not doing when you're sitting there on the thing is you're not dialing for dollars to fuel the machine, because if she starts working in Iowa she needs cash to be able to play the table into New Hampshire, Boston TV. So, you know, time is the biggest resource in a campaign and being bolted to a chair forever, even on television, is I think pretty tricky.

KRISTOL: Yeah, probably doesn't hurt Sanders in a way, maybe it doesn't matter quite as much, I suppose, he's already got the vote he's got.

MURPHY: Yeah, my guess is he has a ceiling, but as you say, he's in it, you know? And, again, Sanders has cash so he can flood the airwaves.

KRISTOL: Right.

MURPHY: Amy is hand to mouth, I'm almost certain. I don't know what her checking account is, but I've been looking at the reports pretty carefully. So, anyway, it's tricky for her.

It is tricky for Warren who right now needs a comeback because she has atrophied a bit there, but she has a great organization that she's built during all those early months where she was ahead. Now, organization only amplifies message. If they decide your message is too scary, the best organization in the world can't save you, but you know, if Warren can operate.

And the last thing is if you're a Pete, a lesser extent a Biden, um, I don't mean to sound like I'm schilling for Pete, I just see the road for him, you can run against Washington a little bit while they're all throwing water balloons in –

KRISTOL: Yeah.

MURPHY: – in DC.

KRISTOL: We can't just be involved. We need to think about how to govern over the next four or eight years.

MURPHY: I'll tell you, the one thing I was surprised with, if I were Biden, or the Biden people, I would have had him show up during those hearings, particularly the Intelligence Committee hearings, not in person, but I would have put him on TV in a big flashy press conference. "I've been watching it. Here's what I think –"

KRISTOL: Yeah, he's the former vice president, I've dealt with all of these –

MURPHY: He could have dominated the news cycle for three days and made it Trump and Trump dregs versus Joe Biden, and now the general election has started and he's our guy.

KRISTOL: No, and he could do a lot. Well, I guess the question is, on the one hand he has real credibility, knows a lot about these places, he's been there, he's dealt with ambassadors, he could really explain in a way how what Trump is doing, how inappropriate it is, how unusual it is, how damaging it is to our foreign policy. On the other hand he's Biden and Trump is claiming that he wants the Ukrainians to look at Hunter Biden. So what about that? Is that a problem for him or an advantage or nothing?

MURPHY: Hunter Biden?

KRISTOL: Yeah.

MURPHY: Both. Look, in the world of voter politics, where when in doubt go to old George Lakoff, the political science professor of the great book *Don't Think of an Elephant*, well now we're all thinking of elephants.

KRISTOL: Right.

MURPHY: The Hunter Biden thing is confusing, even if it's wrong.

KRISTOL: Right.

MURPHY: You know, just the fact it's out there, and of course our Republican world will repeat anything. So we're winning in the east.

KRISTOL: Right.

MURPHY: Hey, I hear we're winning in the east. No, we're getting slaughtered in the east. No, no – [crosstalk]

KRISTOL: No, Stalingrad, it's going great, right.

MURPHY: No, no, no, we got them on the run. Stalin is hiding from the almighty armies of the leader.

So it hurts on that level. On the other level, it's an opportunity for Biden to pivot and punch, get into Eric and Donald, you know, junior, there's a lot Biden could do.

The problem is on the topic of his kids, for an incredibly human and understandable – at least to me – reasons, Biden doesn't perform so well. We can see it when that farmer, he got in that thing at the Iowa Caucus. And, by the way, I would rather have raving, pissed off Biden on the offense than timid Biden curled up in a ball getting pummeled. So I thought it was a step forward, even though it was far from perfect, it was overkill, but we're all talking about Biden, that's a good change for Biden.

So, there's an opportunity in the Hunter thing, but I don't he's psychological capable of taking it, which is a problem.

KRISTOL: And generally, it sounds like you're skeptical of the campaign. Campaigns do matter when you have – Sometimes they don't matter if someone has just so much bodyweight they sort of end up winning no matter what.

MURPHY: That's his thing, Mondale, you know.

KRISTOL: But in this case, you have four genuine – you have people in the twenties and teens, you don't have someone at forty four, or whatever. So it feels to me like the actual quality of candidate and campaign matter a lot. It sounds to me like you think pretty well of Warren and Buttigieg as both candidates and campaigns, and are skeptical of Biden?

MURPHY: I mean, as president I could live with Biden, of course, because I think he'd be well staffed, and then I wouldn't worry too much about him. So, but as far as –

KRISTOL: But as an analytical, as a pro looking at it –

MURPHY: Just as a horse race thing –

KRISTOL: Yeah.

MURPHY: – like a bloodless insurance adjuster here or actuary, I have been short Biden from the beginning because I don't think it's his time. And I thought if he operated really well maybe he could overcome that with that bodyweight because that's an asset, but I never thought he'd operate well. He reminds me a lot of somebody I really loved and admire, Bob Dole, which is the things that made him a giant in the Senate, that small room ability.

I mean, what the Democrats don't understand is there's one person with a track record of sitting one on one in a room alone with Mitch McConnell and getting something and it's Joe Biden. In that arena he's great, in the monkey show of modern politics he's just not that equipped, it's a bit of a John Brown and the steam engine thing. And so I think it's kind of sad because there's things about Biden I admire, but I've always been short him as the nominee.

That said, he has some durability. Warren has a flaw, this Medicare for all thing, it's hurting her badly now. He's been on the offense on that, to his credit. He has a reservoir of goodwill. So if he can make something happen here in the next fifty days in Iowa and ten days to New Hampshire, or whatever it is, seven days to New Hampshire.

KRISTOL: Eight days, yeah.

MURPHY: And then South Carolina is there for him, but he has to survive an early gauntlet that's tough. He's showing some life now, though, so maybe I'm wrong. I'd be happy to be wrong on this, but I think he's short.

KRISTOL: There's something a little crazy, isn't there, about three people in their 70s, and then Buttigieg – I mean, I suppose that's why Buttigieg has come up in part because everyone is looking, really, this is the alternative to Trump, who himself is in his 70s? I don't know, isn't like what about the next generation and all that? It's not like things were going so – That generation has done okay at times, but maybe it's time for us to move on.

MURPHY: Well, Biden and Warren are 70s and they play 60s because they're kind of vigorous people. Bernie is plays late 70s.

KRISTOL: You think? Yeah.

MURPHY: Yeah, and Amy plays younger, and Buttigieg –

Now the one guy we haven't mentioned, who I actually admire because I don't agree with him on a lot of ideological stuff, but at the last debate he gave a pro-growth speech against the kooky economics, I admire it, I felt my hand wanting to send him a check, and he's been totally brave on an issue we both care about, charter schools, which is Cory Booker.

KRISTOL: Yeah. I've sort of been surprised that he hasn't done better.

MURPHY: Me too.

KRISTOL: He's a pretty capable candidate, it seems like.

MURPHY: Me too. We had him on the "Hacks on Tap" podcast and I pitched him something, I said look, I think you've got a message in your Iowa events, because he was doing what candidates do, but it was true, I get 300 people and they come out, standing ovation, and they love it.

And I go, yeah, they love your show, but your show isn't about you for president, it's about uniting the country. And you've got this communitarian message which is great in a general election, and in many ways what the country needs to hear, but it isn't "you're our champion, go follow me into the breach." We know what Elizabeth Warren is going to do. We know that she's going to go after the rich and she's going to take over healthcare, she's a fighter. We know what Bernie's going to do, he's going to go to that pharmaceutical company that saved his life with the stent, and arrest of all the executives.

KRISTOL: Yeah, right.

MURPHY: We know what his plan is. We know what Mayor Pete is going to do, he's going to get a flowchart and a computer and figure it all out, beep, beep, beep. And we know what Joe's going to do – sing a sad Irish song, cry, and take care of business.

Cory is like an observer on the campaign, I think that's what hasn't clicked, but something hasn't clicked. Now, he has a moment now because we're in this awkward situation where the PBS debate, the next big one that's coming, will not have an African American candidate on the stage who is a serious person, apologies to Tulsi Gabbard.

KRISTOL: And she won't be there either.

MURPHY: Yeah, I guess that's being – I haven't seen the polling this morning.

KRISTOL: I think so, whatever.

MURPHY: But, anyway, point is, and this is a party where 25%, you know, the vote, and increasing actually, is African American, and that does seem weird to me. In fact, I'm surprised that Pete and Biden and Klobuchar didn't get together and send Perez a letter saying bring in him.

KRISTOL: Yeah.

MURPHY: And Perez would have said well, the DNC rules, good luck with that, Perez, but they didn't. So, that'll give Cory, I believe, a legitimate moment, which he started to do, to make a stand on it. I doubt it's enough to ignite his campaign. I doubt he's got the cash to do much more. But it has been – That has been a surprise, I guess.

I made a bet early that I knew Cory would do better than Kamala in Iowa, but I didn't expect he'd be fifth and she'd dropout, I thought he'd beat her there, so I was wrong about him being right on that.

KRISTOL: You mentioned cash a few times. You still think, some people might say that's old school, pay TV, with the most social media, modern world, blah, blah, blah. Does old fashioned TV ads or digital even matter as much?

MURPHY: Well, it's funny you get the salty old consultants together and we all bitch and moan about the digital thing because there's now a group of young consultants with extremely stylish eyeglasses that the sales pitch in both parties is "these old guys only know TV, they're dinosaurs, and they don't get it, you know, we've got digital and analytics," and a magic white box –

KRISTOL: Targeting perfectly.

MURPHY: – that nobody can understand. And the campaign all people all nod because they don't want to look like idiots and gobbly gook. Hillary had a lot of that, she turned off her polling, what happened in Michigan?

KRISTOL: Yeah.

MURPHY: So, I built my first computer with a soldering iron, I'm a tech nerd, I get the tech stuff. The fact that I'm old is not a problem, but there is this bias now against traditional stuff, and the truth is it all works. What works is message, the rest of it is plumbing and wiring to get the message to the people. But trying to do it for free without paid TV and paid digital, without money in your campaign account, just based on social media, you have to be really, really famous. If you're a Kardashian running for president, if you're George Clooney running for president, if you're Oprah, yeah you can do that.

KRISTOL: Trump, a little bit.

MURPHY: If you're Donald Trump. Well, he was the role model.

KRISTOL: Yeah.

MURPHY: You know, people thought he was a can-do guy because he fired Gilbert Gottfried on television on a fake set designed to look like a boardroom and Gilbert was paid to pretend there, like all the celebrities he hires for that show, it's a product placement, the shows the commercial. Works for a 'pre-aware title' like Trump.

But if you're Amy Klobuchar or Cory Booker or Pete Buttigieg, no, no, money. Look, the reason Pete took off in Iowa and New Hampshire, where he's also done well, has been a mix of a message that's resonated with a chunk of the voters, and the money to go up first on television for real in both states. He's been up for three months in Iowa, advertising works. One of my favorite jokes is an old marketing joke that ad, you know, old dinosaur ad people like me tell, which goes back to the '60s, which is the market researcher goes to the supermarket with a clipboard and starts interviewing consumers, and walks up to a consumer by the toothpaste counter at the supermarket. Says, "Excuse me, ma'am, do you buy Crest toothpaste because of our advertising? You've probably seen our catchy new jingle."

And the consumer becomes irate and says, "I don't buy your stupid toothpaste because of your stupid ads. I'm not Pavlov's dog, you don't manipulate me with advertising. I hate your jingle. I happen to decide to buy Crest toothpaste because I get 23% fewer cavities with MM3 fluoride." You know, so, yeah, ads don't work, money doesn't work.

KRISTOL: Yeah, so ads still matter.

MURPHY: Message matters and ads are an expensive but highly effective way –

KRISTOL: Money matters.

MURPHY: – and so are digital, they're both.

KRISTOL: Yeah, yeah.

MURPHY: But the idea you can use digital only. Here's the problem with digital. Digital is very good at targeting. Digital is very good at what we call, uh, basically, it's like catalog sales, where you know all your consumers and you have a dialogue with them because of free stamps, digital.

KRISTOL: Right.

MURPHY: Obama did that very well, the CRM model. All that is true. But if there's not a message. I mean, you get my buddy Axelrod drunk, and we've done this, Obama would have won without the internet. The press always covers process. The best thing to be in 2009, after Obama won, was a computer salesman hanging around the RNC.

KRISTOL: Right.

MURPHY: Because the donors read the process press, "Hey, they had this internet and they had guys who don't shower in a room, and they had magic. Get some fucking magic." Oops, sorry.

KRISTOL: It's quite okay.

MURPHY: I'm going blue.

KRISTOL: That's okay.

MURPHY: And so the magic salesman – A quick funny story, do we have time?

KRISTOL: Yeah, sure.

MURPHY: So, before my current job working at Quiznos, I was the idiot who blew \$100 million dollars on the Jeb Bush Super Pac, you may remember.

KRISTOL: I recall that, yeah.

MURPHY: Yeah, yeah. And I still get fan mail.

KRISTOL: Jeb exclamation point. Yeah.

MURPHY: Yeah, well, no, that goes way back. That's where we – Lamar exclamation point was stolen from Jeb exclamation point in '94.

KRISTOL: I didn't realize that, so Lamar in '96 –

MURPHY: I'm going to write a book the History of the Stupid Exclamation Point.

KRISTOL: The exclamation point I remember from Lamar in '96, but that was Jeb losing race in '94?

MURPHY: Yeah, the explanation point snark is the currency of the DC experts who are wondering why it's not President Biden, who clearly was going to – President Jeb Bush, all that.

KRISTOL: Right.

MURPHY: Anyway, back then, so of course, Washington all thought you got to suck up to the Jeb world, they're going to win. Now inside we actually knew he wasn't quite what they were looking for. He knew that, but he was going to give it the old college try because he didn't want to see the party go exactly where it's went, to his credit.

Anyway, so I go to the RNC building, we have a nice meeting with some of those guys, we're setting everything up at the beginning, all very nice. And I remember when I was a million years ago Chairman of the Georgetown College Republicans, one of our jobs was to provide bodies to the RNC to work in the phone bank, because one of the big purposes of the RNC is to raise small dollar contributions. So they had a big phone bank, they pay you whatever the \$2 bucks an hour was in the early '80s, in the Reagan era. And you have a computer printout and college kids and others would, "Hello Mr. Kristol, hi, how are things in Kansas? You know, Ronald Reagan really needs \$20 dollars now that Ted Kennedy and Fidel Castro are trying to takeover in Nebraska. Please send –" You know, it was a fundraising phone bank. [makes printing sound briefly] Thank you, letters going out, a hundred phones.

So I walk into the RNC and I see where the phone bank used to be.

KRISTOL: Yeah.

MURPHY: And one of the RNC staffers, with an honest heart and full of pride, said, "Mike, we've gone digital. It's the future, you know?" And there were three guys with extremely complicated and important eyewear, like nodding a lot, 28. See if the old dinosaur gets the – And they have 200 computer screens lined up and there were college kids typing emails, asking for money.

It was exactly the same.

KRISTOL: Yeah, it's funny.

MURPHY: Form follows function. And, so, it's all message, whether it's a finance message. "Dear Turnip, send blood." Or whether it's a voter messages, sometimes the two interlock.

Like, the Democrats were panicking because Trump's spending a lot on Facebook. Most of the Trump Facebook advertising is "Dear Retired Army Captain, the Mexicans have already made it to Laredo. Send money, build a wall." It's fundraising. Now it has a political impact, because he'll call up his brother-in-law and say, "The damn Mexicans are running into Laredo and only Trump is going to stop him."

You know, but, form follows function, and so all this stuff is plumbing and wiring for a good message and a finance pitch. That is eternal, it doesn't change.

So, if you're a candidate who's not famous, you're not on a reality TV show, you don't fire Gary Busey for not selling enough snow cones to launch the new perfume line, you need dollars to put your message in front of people, which is why Bloomberg now, on just money alone, has gone from 3 to 6 in national polls.

KRISTOL: People are underreporting that. It's sort of like, well, Bloomberg is so rich, of course he's going to go there, but it's not – If you think about it for a minute, going from 1 really to 6, I'd say at this point, in a couple of weeks, he's spending a huge amount of money to do that, but he has a huge amount of money –

MURPHY: Yeah, do what you got.

KRISTOL: – why can't he go from 6 to 8, why can't go from 8 to 11? It does make me wonder that if – I still think he would need the opening of people deciding that Biden's not going to make it. He needs to be the insurance against Biden, plus not having a Klobuchar rise, plus somehow Buttigieg not being quite acceptable.

MURPHY: He's getting on deck.

KRISTOL: It's a little tricky for him.

MURPHY: Yeah, he's getting on deck. But the problem is when the real show starts at the end of January there's going to be a daily drama with a hundred million eyeballs and he's not part of it.

KRISTOL: With Iowa and New Hampshire? Yeah, that is a real problem.

MURPHY: Yeah, no, and that's what wiped out the other folks who have tried to join late, the big show starts, and you join the movie in the third act it's hard to be the star.

KRISTOL: Yeah.

MURPHY: Now maybe this will be the perfect storm, it's the best shot he's got. Now if I were them I would have tried New Hampshire. They were afraid to enter late and Biden is kind of in their way, a campaign without Biden has more room for him, but I think he – New Hampshire was a doable move for Bloomberg.

KRISTOL: Yeah.

MURPHY: But they made their decision and now they're spending what they've got. They've got two things. They've got money to make a pitch. He's got a story, unlike Tom Steyer, Bloomberg has done stuff. The other thing he has, which is a hard thing to commit to but they have no choice, is the grumpy old pro from Dover.

Basically, "I'm not going to take your stupid questions, I'm too busy running the world here, moron. I got a Trump to beat." You know, to be the grumpiest guy but smart, now, will that get him 50% of the Democratic primary? Long shot but he's the only – the un-cola, he's the only guy with that. If I were them I wouldn't be shy about it. He'll do the Rumsfeld thing with the press, be that guy, and build a little cult.

KRISTOL: And do they understand that? I agree with that, but they seem a little bit torn between just embracing who they are and running a more conventional –

MURPHY: You know, I worked for him in the past, I got friends there, I think they see it both ways. But they know that Bloomberg ain't going to charm the electorate.

KRISTOL: Right, right.

MURPHY: But he is – He is such a bigger Godzilla in real life than Trump is. He's a real billionaire, he's a real billionaire, excuse me, he's a much bigger – Trump's kind of a fake accounting trick billionaire. Bloomberg is the real deal, he's very smart, very tough.

KRISTOL: He ran a huge city for 12 years.

MURPHY: No, no, no, this is – You know, Trump is Gerry Cooney and Bloomberg is Ali in the millionaire, billionaire sweepstakes. So, yeah, but they might as well bottle what they got, not unlike Biden.

KRISTOL: Final thing, just about the current field.

MURPHY: Yeah.

KRISTOL: I think you're right, the gender gap is not actually what people thought it was, and the race gap is helping Biden right now, who is not African American, so that wasn't quite what they expected, but what about age? It does seem to me that I've never quite seen numbers, I think I just saw a New Hampshire poll that had – I think Biden, who was leading, near the top or tied for the top of the poll, was at like 3% among voters under 35, and 43% voters 65 and up. I've never quite seen that kind of gap and

Sanders has the reverse. What do you make – What is that about? Are young people in the Democratic Party, maybe in the country as a whole, that far to the left of their parents? I mean.

MURPHY: It can work on a couple axis. It could be left and there is a lot of progressive energy of the young. You know, the progressives have kind of a romantic pitch they make and that can appeal when you're young. I was – I'm a conservative, and I'm fairly right wing, when I was young I was crazy ass right wing.

KRISTOL: Right.

MURPHY: So, you know, we're all out getting arrested in front of the Soviet Embassy having a great time.

KRISTOL: Right.

MURPHY: So, the, um – I think there's some of that.

But I think what people have missed on one hand, Biden is not doing as well with younger voters, Bernie is old and he does well with younger voters. So it seems to be more ideological. But what people miss, especially focused on AOC equals all the Democrats last year, is there are a ton of old Democratic primary voters. So, the idea that the median age of the Democratic primary voter is Twitter is wrong. So, it – A lot of the real forks are, you know, income, college education, too, not just age.

KRISTOL: Yeah.

MURPHY: But, again, the misnomer has been this presumption that people vote their DNA, which is wrong. You know, we have free choice, that's the great – That's why this identity thing drives me crazy. People choose who they're for based on their own set of instructions. And so far what African Americans are doing in the electorate of the early states is they're choosing to beat Trump with the seasoned old pro, who they saw working with Barack Obama, and they like him.

And, you know, that's a very rational smart decision, and they have the right to change it if something changes when they're some winning and losing in February, which I think they probably will, but you know, this reverse engineering of who you're supposed to be for I think is an insult.

KRISTOL: Yeah, that's interesting. No, I agree it is. It's terrible.

Republicans, let's take two minutes on that and then get to the general election.

MURPHY: Yeah. Are there any?

KRISTOL: Yeah. There are a lot of them, they're all for Trump.

MURPHY: My friend Mark Sanford was in for an hour.

KRISTOL: Yeah, he was in.

MURPHY: I was telling Mark –

KRISTOL: Walsh and Weld are doing their best.

MURPHY: I've known Mark since he was a freshman. I like him, he's kind of a quirky dude, but he was always principled in his fiscal conservatism. He had other, you know, setbacks along the way. But he had a million five in his campaign account, I kept telling him, Mark, put it all on New Hampshire, and some

digital, too, and basically make “a fiscal conservative, Trump’s bankrupting the country,” because, you know, we used to carp about Obama, Trump is the king of this.

KRISTOL: Right.

MURPHY: And I think you get 25% of primary, get a little attention, and then lose the nomination. But, you know, Trump has the party.

KRISTOL: Yeah, are you surprised – I’m surprised in the last three, four months by the degree and the totality of the capitulation to Trump, aren’t you a little bit? I expected more resistance both in Congress and among the electorate, actually, among the Republican electorate.

MURPHY: Yeah, we ought to change the logo. We ought to get rid of the Jack Frost elephant and the new logo is a terrified white guy, duct taped to a chair in congress because I had no doubt that he’d have a grip, but I thought the Republican resistance would be more than about twelve of us.

KRISTOL: Yeah.

MURPHY: And it’s, it’s heartbreaking. I joined this thing to be for conservative stuff and fight the Soviets. Now Putin is running foreign policy, we’re blowing up the deficit, and the rule of law doesn’t matter. So, you know, you look back, Stewart Stevens is actually writing this book, which is basically the argument, “it was all a lie.”

KRISTOL: Yeah.

MURPHY: He’s even farther out on it than I am on it, but it is pretty heartbreaking if you’ve spent 30 years in politics.

KRISTOL: I don’t know if it was a lie, but it certainly went away quickly the limited – I mean, pretty serious and well developed intellectual arguments, limited government, you really don’t want a situation where the government just can do everything because then you’re on a slippery slope and also it’s just chaotic. And now it’s just taken for granted that, of course, the Republicans will ask for the government to do whatever.

II: The 2020 Elections (49:48 – 1:21:53)

KRISTOL: So let’s talk about the election. What is 2020 going to look like? I mean –

MURPHY: It’s a real powder keg, I think.

KRISTOL: I mean A, just talk about the actual balance of power between Trump and whoever the Democratic nominee is, just from what you can tell now in terms of the polls and 2018 and stuff.

And then, B, what is the actual year going to look like? That I’m sort of interested in, I don’t think people have focused enough on that –

MURPHY: Yeah, could be ’68, yeah.

KRISTOL: They sort of assume it’s going to be like a normal election, even though it’s not really, it doesn’t feel like a normal time, so.

MURPHY: Yeah, I would say assume nothing. You know, a lot of the rules have been bent now that we’re in a reality TV show with nuclear weapons, which is an interesting way to, you know, look at America now.

I would say on the polling, on Trump's numbers, if you x-rayed Trump, so there is a – I don't know. I would say this, the greatest accomplishment Trump has done is convince kind of elite America, particularly in the Democratic Party and reinforced the Republican Party with this kind of Rasputin mind twist he's done.

KRISTOL: Right.

MURPHY: Which basically was, wait a minute, election day 2016, Nate Silver says Hillary's going to win easy, we can all relax, because everybody is watching their *New York Times*, everybody in that cohort. And that idiot Mike Murphy blabbermouth he say it, you know, Bill Kristol, all the experts, and then Trump wins.

And, so, it's funny I live in Los Angeles, so I'll be minding my own business, pumping gas, and somebody will whirr up to me in a Tesla, or whatever, and start saying, "Don't you know, I've seen you on TV saying Trump is in political trouble. He's got a secret horn he blows and the hillbillies in Kansas all vote for him." You know, it's all this contemptuous flyover country. He's got some magic hillbilly potion. So they think he can't lose because there's magic.

Now, like everything else, politics is full of noise and bullshit. The punditry, we talked about that, the polls, half of which are incompetently done because the publishers don't want to spend any money. Polling has become more expensive and harder to do. So there's so much noise, but if you're running a cable TV network your P&L is every day is the Hindenburg, so a new poll, we made news, and we covered it. Anyway, I mean, they try.

KRISTOL: The degree to which the polling, incidentally, because it is more expensive to do now because of cell phones and stuff.

MURPHY: Yeah, people don't answer the phone, you have to do a lot more stuff.

KRISTOL: And since it's more difficult to do and the people doing it have less discretionary money than they used to, when newspapers used to make money and so forth.

MURPHY: Right, right, yeah.

KRISTOL: But they're treated even more seriously than they used to and then you look at them, and I'm no expert, but I've done many campaigns, and you look at the poll for literally 40 seconds, and you see well this is really, maybe it shows you a tiny bit in terms of directionally, but you can't take these numbers seriously down to sort of 2, 3, 4%, and people are earnestly saying "Well, so and so is up two." And that's literally –

MURPHY: Yeah, and they forgot the margin of error which drives half the coverage.

KRISTOL: Yeah, that's literally noise. That is meaning – literally, you know that is -

MURPHY: But again, because we are –

KRISTOL: That is 37 people instead of 34 people saying they're for X. It's just random.

MURPHY: Right, right, and it's last week, and it's the cable noise meter, and the world – but because we're in this reality show politics where we need scorecards all the time, it's good business.

So, anyway, putting all that aside, we not unlike Wall Street, there's a great term of art, "mark to market." You know, we had to sell this studio tomorrow, what could we get? Now we should wait a year because

the studio market will go up or make more, but if we had to sell tomorrow, what's the bottom line value? In politics that's election day.

And if you look since the day Trump took the oath of office, you know heavens shuttered, the Republican Party has performed poorly in essentially every election. Some disasters, some just bad, the Wisconsin Supreme Court low turnout race was a rare sparkle of light, but there are 300 other terrible races. We've lost control of ten governorships. We have lost the House. It has been pretty much a trail of tears under Trump. So when you mark us to market, the country tends to want to fire Trump in about nine and a half out of ten cases. That's a bad sign.

His polling is bad. He's in this cul-de-sac, you know, 40, 42, 43% of the vote, that's a tough place to be. 38 would be better, but it's not good. Demography is bad for Trump. If you adjust the election just for mortality, a lot of old Trump voters have died, and new 19, 20 year old voters have been created, a group Trump loses by double digits. So, on almost every empirical measurement Trump is in huge trouble. The country wants to fire him.

The question is two-fold. Going forward can Trump, like prior presidents, say, "Holy crap, I'm going to lose. I got to change it up here. Let's have a plan, chop, chop." Speeches, the campaign, all the massive muscle of an incumbent presidency. I don't think Trump is capable of that. I think Trump watches cable TV and tweets about it, and that's fundamentally the presidency. And it's all emotional, and it's reacting, and I think he's declining a bit under all this pressure of impeachment. So, I don't think we're going to see brilliant tactical campaign to change. The other question is –

KRISTOL: We will see a willingness, like Nixon I would say in '71, to use government resources and policies –

MURPHY: Oh, totally.

KRISTOL: – to try to win over voting blocs, and Nixon was very good at it, and went from a fairly tight – what looked like could be a tight race in '71 to a sort of artificial economic boom, and to other things, and of course Vietnam peace negotiations in '72.

MURPHY: And McGovern, which would be my second point.

KRISTOL: And McGovern, okay, so –

MURPHY: Who they nominate.

KRISTOL: But Trump doesn't – I mean, has a little bit of the instincts, in some of his people, to be like Nixon, in that sense.

MURPHY: Oh yeah.

KRISTOL: Sort of ruthless in using the government –

MURPHY: Well, they're immoral, it's like, hey, we can sell the Department of Education and give the money –

KRISTOL: I'm not sure they're good enough, it's going to be so obvious. You know, "I'm opening a plant, this is a new Apple plant," but then it turns out an Apple plant from seven years ago and it's not new. I don't know if they really –

MURPHY: But don't think of an elephant, "hey, I hear there's a new Apple plant."

KRISTOL: Yeah.

MURPHY: The second point, the biggest one is will the Democrats nominate a candidate that Trump can work with to change the topic from firing him, which is where the weight and balance and center of gravity of the election is, and historically it is about the incumbent president. But will they give him a Medicare for All that he can go work with, which is a heavy weapon?

Because the fulcrum vote for Trump is can he hold his outlier votes, the Pasco County, Florida's where he massively over performed even Ronald Reagan, which are a small number of places, but he super performed there, can he hang on to that? Polling says, right now, probably not, it will be down a little, but we will see in a culture war, in the general.

And, two, can he recover some of the vote in the Republican suburbs? College educated white people who we got murdered with in the midterms. Does he have an economic issue? They're going to raise your taxes or they're too liberal. Again, a Warren type thing. That's the big question, and we don't know yet.

We don't know who they're going to nominate and we don't know how their candidates are going to perform. We have an inkling now, we've had the first act, the Democratic primary, but my friend Axelrod, I'm going to murder his phrase, but he calls running for president like an electron microscope of the soul. My analogy is like it's being strapped to the roof of a station wagon and going through a hundred car washes.

And, so, we're going to see what kind of Dem we have and can Trump use it to move the election a bit? Which he will do, he will be shameless. And those are the open questions. But the gravity, I mean – I'm flogging the podcast too much, but we did our predictions this week, and Axe had 50-50, I said 35% for Trump to be reelected.

KRISTOL: Yeah, that feels right to me. I think it's closer to 2 to 1 than 50-50 just on the numbers.

MURPHY: I feel better now that Warren stalled.

KRISTOL: Just on the numbers, I mean, but the McGovern question is an interesting one. But the economy is not going to get better presumably, the world is not going to be obviously safer. Now Trump is capable of having some fake deals, I suppose, and maybe some authoritarian regimes that want to help Trump will have some fake deals with him, and you can imagine a sort of mini, mini version of Nixon '72, you know China, Russia, whoa, look what he's doing.

MURPHY: The biggest problem is going to run out of white people. And the white people he's got are not as happy with him as they used to be. Now the country is going to be 1% more Democratic, just generically based on demography than it was four years ago, maybe a point and a half. And, so, is Trump gaining anything? Dubious, *unless* there's a Democratic ogre that can move Republican suburbs back to holding their nose –

KRISTOL: Who are willing – And there were some people who voted for Hillary, or stayed home, who are now after three years of a pretty good economy, and no war, and discounting people like us who are complaining about all kinds of esoteric like the rule of law.

MURPHY: Well, we're in with that fancy pants president of France, Bill, you know, who needs that jerk?

KRISTOL: And then there are some upper middle class semi-Republicans you can imagine coming back to Trump. That would be the – That's what he would need, but he would also need to halt what I think is underreported – Stanley Greenberg makes this point, and it seems right to me just looking at the numbers – there was pretty big erosion in 2018, not just in the upper middle class suburbs –

MURPHY: Everywhere, yeah, yeah, yeah.

KRISTOL: Everywhere including rural working class whites, especially on women, the gender gap, and the working class –

MURPHY: Yep, yep, yep.

KRISTOL: – is really massive. Working class men are all onboard, working class women they look at the immigration stuff, and the meanness, and the craziness, and it's like I'm not really on board for this.

MURPHY: And the noise, you know, that's why I think it's 35%. I think he's going to get [inaudible]. And Carville is doing the one, I think, smart Democratic Super PAC, which is raise a few million and laser shot at about 300,000 voters in Wisconsin, Pennsylvania, and Michigan to grind into that group, because remember revert to mean, Trump loses.

KRISTOL: Yeah.

MURPHY: And the other thing is do we want four more years of a show that's getting a little long in the tooth?

KRISTOL: Yeah.

MURPHY: It's exhausting. Here's my last – Here's a crazy theory of the election, completely crazy, don't write it down, don't tweet it, but –

KRISTOL: We'll just say it off the record here on this show, you know what I mean?

MURPHY: Yeah, right, we'll say it off the record on streaming television, but I kind of believe that after 30 years of doing this – You know, it's funny, you talk to like airline pilots in the old days who were flying transcontinental or trans-ocean a lot, before all the electronics, and they were all like crew cut astronaut type guys.

KRISTOL: Yeah, right.

MURPHY: They would say, "We don't talk about this because we don't want anybody to say we're cuckoo, but we've seen some weird stuff up in the sky. Eh, you know, just saying." And then they'd stop, you know?

Or you'd talk to physicists, and all of a sudden it doesn't make sense, God is left-handed.

KRISTOL: Right.

MURPHY: Well, in campaigns sometimes life does imitate art. And there is a life imitate art question to the universe. If Trump is to be beaten, who beats him in the great American novel version of this? Well, Trump is an old man, who still thinks it's Queens in 1958, neo-racist, ethnic bigot, D's and no's, kind of insecure guy, bit of a blowhard. Cares about how many steel mills we have.

KRISTOL: Right.

MURPHY: One candidate is secular, highly educated, service economy, and gay. The opposite of Trump, total modernity. The path we're on, Trump is yesterday. So if there is to be a turn, if it was literature it would be Mayor Pete.

KRISTOL: Yeah, I agree with that.

MURPHY: Now, I'm not sure he'll ever get there, but in terms of the ordered universe and life imitating art. And he's also had the most improbable rise, from nobody mayor of South Bend with no money to probably the strongest financed candidate, which you do by getting tens of thousands of people who give you a lot of money, and currently the guy whose tickets are selling the most in the all important Iowa caucus. Can it all go to shit? Absolutely. But in the ordered universe, a little bit, um, it's interesting.

You know, it's funny, I have this app, which I'm obsessed with. I'm not going to plug an app on your podcast, I'm that shameless. So this thing is like the old Magic 8 Ball.

KRISTOL: How much do you get for this? Do you get commission on the commission here?

MURPHY: I get absolutely no money.

KRISTOL: Yeah, that's what they always say, right, you know.

MURPHY: But this thing has been uncannily right. I'm about –

KRISTOL: Like, Paul Manafort and others, Mike Murphy has no interest in this. No financial –

MURPHY: It's called Universe Splitter, it's like a buck on iTunes, and what this thing does is they like split an atom at CERN in Geneva, and it's basically a yes, no, Magic 8 Ball. You type in two things and you – Well, hang on, we'll even do it here. We're really going to screw up your podcast.

So, let's see what the universe says, shall we?

KRISTOL: So, what's the name of this app? Universe?

MURPHY: It's called Universe, Universe Splitter. In one universe I will now, let's see, vote Democratic – No, how about in one universe Pete wins and in the other universe Trump wins, and this thing has an animated deal, so it's worth the time we're wasting as Andy starts to wonder, what the hell, what the hell we're doing.

KRISTOL: We're renting this studio by, you know, by the minute. That's okay, though.

MURPHY: We're well funded by the Deep State.

KRISTOL: Totally, yeah, if only, if only. Where is the Deep State when you need it?

MURPHY: So in one universe I will now – Pete wins and the other Trump. So we split the universe and it input, it goes over the computer, it talks to Geneva, the device is ready, photons emitted, because they're doing it all time, so they just tag one.

There's a quantum event, two universes are created. You are in the universe in which Trump wins, so there you go, Bill. Life will not, life will not –

KRISTOL: This is telling us that they think –

MURPHY: Life will not imitate art.

KRISTOL: They think that – Yeah.

MURPHY: Yep, we asked the universe and he said, "No, thanks."

KRISTOL: That's worrisome, that's worrisome.

MURPHY: So, yeah, it'll be in Breitbart in an hour.

KRISTOL: Yeah, that's right, that'll be huge.

MURPHY: They love science.

KRISTOL: Good point. Speaking of magic, I'm always struck when I talk to people about the Electoral –

MURPHY: [laughs] Good, good transition.

KRISTOL: It was good, right?

MURPHY: Speaking of astrology and bullshit, go ahead.

KRISTOL: What about the Electoral College? I'm struck talking to people that they also think that's part of the Trump magic, you know, the magic sauce. They've sort of lost track of the fact you still do need to win the state by popular vote even if, of course, you can lose the national popular vote by 2 or 3 million, maybe 4 or 5, I guess.

And there is this kind of thing where you say everything you just said, but Mike there's an Electoral College. And at some point, aren't people overdoing that a little? At the end of the day, you do – I mean, voters will move in Pennsylvania, in Michigan, and Wisconsin just the way they move in other states, I mean it's a little bit overdone, isn't it?

MURPHY: You're exactly right. Part of the wisdom is there's an Electoral College fortress now. By the way you know who invented –

KRISTOL: Right, which the Senate stuff has helped, I think, the fact that he held the Senate in 2018 reminded people –

MURPHY: Yeah, we had the advantage in the Senate, but globally we're in trouble.

KRISTOL: Yeah, and the Senate doesn't – It's not a good analogy because the Senate is two senators per state whereas the Electoral College, with the slight exception of the fact that everybody gets two, is population based, right?

MURPHY: Yeah, that said, what this is really about is there are like 3,300 counties in the U.S., and Hillary got the huge majority of her vote from about 170 of them.

KRISTOL: Right, right.

MURPHY: So, if the Democrats run a super woke candidate who will run San Francisco from 80 to 85 doesn't really change the outcome because we know what the California Electoral College count will be. So, one voter in Pasco, Florida or Lucerne County, Pennsylvania, or Macomb County, Michigan is worth 25,000 voters in California.

KRISTOL: Right.

MURPHY: So the Democrats really ought to be playing to that crowd, but in their own – the narcissism of primary voters, which is true on both sides – it's a warmer bath to go make San Francisco happier because that's where the center of gravity might be.

KRISTOL: And where are a lot of Democratic donors are. So the primaries do cut a little against an intelligent Electoral College strategy for now, but presumably they have months –

MURPHY: The incentives are all the opposite.

KRISTOL: – they have months to, to adapt to this.

MURPHY: I think so. You know who invented the Electoral College? Alexander Hamilton.

KRISTOL: Right.

MURPHY: That is the one song that did not make the musical.

KRISTOL: Yeah.

MURPHY: What was I thinking? Cha-cha-cha.

KRISTOL: Well, they had a different, but it really was supposed to be an Electoral College of people, *individuals* who would actually select someone. Now it's this sort of voting mechanism, which honestly I sort of agree with the left here in some ways, I mean, it's not a particularly intelligent vote –

A winner take all by state isn't what you would necessarily invent, it doesn't really –

MURPHY: It is the original idea so Boston and New York didn't run the country.

KRISTOL: Right.

MURPHY: And it was part of creating the Union.

KRISTOL: But, also, if you look at the Federalist Papers it was also about *individuals* getting together to actually select someone who should be president, which they did understand was a very difficult and important job, and you didn't want to leave that up to just random demagogues going around yelling at people, which is, you know –

MURPHY: What has happened –

KRISTOL: That changed quite quickly, of course.

MURPHY: – the concentration of population –

KRISTOL: Right.

MURPHY: It's happened five times in American history, none in the 20th century, twice in the 21st, '20 and 2016 –

KRISTOL: The distinction between popular and electoral.

MURPHY: Yeah, yeah, which is why in '16, one reason everybody got it wrong, was the formula of the popular vote will extrapolate the Electoral College had almost always been true.

KRISTOL: Right.

MURPHY: There'd been one, uh, eruption of that in over 100 years, which was 2000.

KRISTOL: And that was a half million, that is Gore won the popular vote by half a million, and everyone thought – and I remember this, people were doing rough back of the envelope, “once you get over a million margin you can’t really, it can’t really get separated.” You would – Very few people understood you could go to 2.5 million in the in the popular vote and still lose.

MURPHY: Right, that’s why everybody got it wrong. The polls were right about the popular vote, which is what they measured, and the networks are too cheap – Not the networks, the media in general, to do state polling. And the campaign stopped state polling, the Hillary one, and Trump’s poll was whatever some guy named Louie in the back row of the limo told him, you know, they made it all up.

So, there was a secret, there was a Republican, kind of, consultant betting pool in Florida based on Duval County, Jacksonville, which is first to report, and it came back Trump was a little behind Romney, who had lost, so everybody thought it was over. The Trump’s guy in Florida and some of the Trump national people were in the thing and they were betting Trump was losing Florida. Nobody in the Trump campaign thought he’d win, and part of the reason for that is Trump underperformed Republican normal in the suburbs, not by a lot, but by a little, most of the time.

KRISTOL: Right.

MURPHY: But he had these spikes in a few place that we’d never seen before. Did better than Reagan in Wilkes-Barre, twice Reagan’s margin.

KRISTOL: Yeah, the working class and rural areas.

MURPHY: Yeah, basically an electoral riot of sorts, legitimate, he won, he’s president, but that is hard to model for because it’s very much a black swan. So will that be recreated? The Democrats will have to help and they might.

KRISTOL: Surprises that you would look for or moments or, you know, inflection points in 2020? What do we know is going to happen? We know there will be conventions of each party, we know there will be – Well we don’t know, there may be debates, there have been in the last bunch of elections.

MURPHY: I think Trump will try a lot of tactics, starting after the New Hampshire primary and Iowa Caucus because he won’t be able to stand the cable TV being about a champion to beat him with crowds. So you will see Trump pull every smoke bomb he can. I keep thinking he’s going to fire Pence and start the new reality show, who will the next vice president be?

KRISTOL: What do you think about that?

MURPHY: I think he’ll do it in a minute because he’s going to go crazy and he’s going to want to change the subject back to him.

KRISTOL: So you think the odds are not trivial that he dumps Pence.

MURPHY: I’ve said for two years I, I think he’s going to try. He needs to bust a big move, in his view as a producer, the other show is getting all the attention. That can’t happen, me, me, me. So I think a lot of Trump erratic stuff. I think he’ll be down to dregs, he’s already down to dregs, but the dreg factor will get worse. More people will leave administration, more crazy whims, he will deteriorate even more.

KRISTOL: I mean, you’ve got to be tempted to do foreign policy stuff because that you can do more unilaterally than Congress.

MURPHY: Though, he has always been all talk and no cruise missiles, which is good.

KRISTOL: Right, but he could do the opposite, he could do more talk. That is it could be, “hey, we have a deal with North Korea. We’ve gave away we’ve always insisted on in terms of denuclearization.”

MURPHY: I got the Iranians *and* the North Koreans to come to my Doral Country Club and we solved the whole thing.

KRISTOL: Right, they have nuclear weapons, but nonetheless we’re having a handshake, we’re having a handshake.

MURPHY: They’re building a statue to me.

KRISTOL: Don’t you think? I think there’s a real tendency.

MURPHY: Oh, Nixon to China for the second time.

KRISTOL: Right, totally, yeah, yeah.

MURPHY: So I think there will be plenty of erratic White House behavior. I think more people will bail out or find out who Anonymous is, which won’t affect the election, but I’m obsessed with it.

I have a theory, I don’t want to ruin anybody’s career –

KRISTOL: No, let’s go back to Anonymous in one second because I want to hear about that, but I would say the other thing, on domestic policy, I think like Nixon, Trump will sell out every –

MURPHY: Every.

KRISTOL: Not just us type of conservatives, but even his own base. We saw this a little bit with this Mexico-Canada thing where he took basically all of Pelosi’s, all the Democrat’s insistence on it, and I have no view on the merits of this, but on various pro-labor, pro-environmental type things, he didn’t care.

Pat Toomey, who actually is kind of a principled free trader, who has liked country free trade deals with all this is now in a state, but I could see him, if he is impeached but not convicted, it could be just one legislative victory for the Democrats with Trump saying, “See, I can get things done.” You know?

MURPHY: Yeah, yeah. I’ll never forget a big Republican fundraising type came to me during the 2000 campaign, 2016, and said, you know, I just met with Trump, wants me to raise a bunch of money for him. This was a regular Republican, didn’t support Trump in the thing, but now, you know, “party loyalty, we got our nominee.: So I went to the meeting and this person said, you know, I told him, I said, “some of this rhetoric and everything, Mr. Trump or Donald.” And Donald said, “Oh that’s all, that’s a rube show. You know? I’m just playing the game. I tell those yahoos, they buy it, can you believe it? You know how many hats they’re buying? Woo-hoo.”

So, yeah, he’ll sell anybody out, anybody. He’s all transactional. So, yeah, I think it’ll be a bumpy ride with him. In the internet era I’m not sure we won’t have a couple of independent things –

KRISTOL: Right.

MURPHY: Some Bernie type breaks away if it’s Biden is too corporate, you know, something, there will be some mischief there. The world’s a powder keg. Lots could go sideways.

KRISTOL: What do you think, if you got actually Sanders or Warren, if it becomes clear, and it could be as early February 15th, more likely let’s say March 3rd.

MURPHY: Yeah, March 4th.

KRISTOL: Either Sanders or Warren is likely to be the nominee, do you think at that point – It does seem like –

MURPHY: Yes.

KRISTOL: – there is a possibility that an independent, I mean you got Trump –

MURPHY: It's a nightmare. The distribution system is Coke-Pepsi, very hard to do, you and I disagree a little on this.

KRISTOL: No, no, I totally agree, it's hard to do, but it's hard to do, but more than usually there would be some instinct to try to do it.

MURPHY: Bloomberg, last time, his theory was "if it's Bernie versus Trump –

KRISTOL: Right.

MURPHY: Holy shit, I'm the independent."

KRISTOL: Yeah, but you think someone –

MURPHY: Which would have been a patriotic act.

KRISTOL: And someone might try to do it again and that would distort the race some, I'm not sure which way, incidentally.

MURPHY: Well, one of the problems is – Let's just game it out for a minute, then we can crack the Anonymous case. If it happens, ultimately it will go to the Congress, even if the third party wonder candidate gets the plurality, which is very tough, ballot access, everything. Then the Republicans and the Democrats have to decide and I think the Republicans dig in for Trump, again. The hostage videos, you know?

KRISTOL: Yeah, unless he doesn't win the popular vote – I don't know.

MURPHY: Well, no, we keep trying to find a way. I mean, Axelrod gives me crap about this every podcast.

KRISTOL: I know, I know.

MURPHY: Because I think there are three or four Republicans in the Senate who really want to vote for impeachment, but the party loyalty is – One of them, a Trump agnostic, won't tell me what that senator might do, but has publically been very silent, was like yeah, they make it pretty clear. "You're ostracized, you get a primary, and you never pass a piece of legislation, and half of the stuff I pass there nobody has ever heard, but it means a lot to the zipper industry, which has 200,000 employees in my state."

KRISTOL: Right, you get nothing for your state. I've been told they say that, your state is finished.

MURPHY: Yeah, you're done, yeah.

KRISTOL: Yeah, in terms of all the discretionary stuff, the Executive Branch –

MURPHY: No, no, they go declare war on your state.

KRISTOL: – spends which is a lot, right, you know.

MURPHY: Which is back to the Juan Peron, Putin world of politics.

KRISTOL: Totally. Before we get to Anonymous, VP, if he dumps Pence who does he put on?

MURPHY: Well he'll need a food tester, but I think he'll first go to Nikki Haley. I think he'll, I think he'll arrange a show, find some general –

KRISTOL: So you think if he dumps Pence it's not like the normal, not that it ever really happens, but the normal way it could have happened – though it doesn't happen, like I was Vice President Quayle's Chief of Staff – which would be last minute at the convention, drama.

MURPHY: You guys would have been thinking about that.

KRISTOL: Oh, it came closer than people realize, but that's another conversation. But what, with him he'd want the two month drama, right?

MURPHY: Yeah, no, he says, uh, Mike Pence has told me he wants to go back to Indiana, what a great job.

KRISTOL: Or he wants to be Secretary of State or something.

MURPHY: Right, yeah, yeah, yeah. Mike Pence to the Amtrak, he's going to do a hell of a job. And then we orchestrate the search for a new vice president. You know, confetti, spotlights, and he teases it out, and it'll be a general, it'll be a TV celebrity like him, it'll be Nikki Haley, because Queens, 1958, Trump is like, "Hey, the broads hate me, get a broad. I solved it, genius."

And, so, now, now Nikki, who is the most ambitious and ruthless pol I think in the Republican Party, how she plays that, does she go along? Or does she play for later? She's running now. You know, she's signing prospect mail for everybody, but anyway, that's her set of calculations, and she and Satan will get together and work that out. But it'll be a show and I think his instinct, if she behaves, will be to land on her.

KRISTOL: But I think he won't want, yeah, the Democrats to just dominate everything in February, March, April, so you're right. He'll want to do something.

MURPHY: He'll react to the election coverage.

KRISTOL: He'll want to do something.

MURPHY: When he sees Buttigieg or Biden or Warren with 3,000 cheering people in a big rally, Dump Trump and the building shaking.

KRISTOL: Headlines.

MURPHY: On every channel.

KRISTOL: Well, and headlines on every channel, so X wins New Hampshire.

MURPHY: Trump in Trouble.

KRISTOL: Yeah, yeah. Yeah, or just –

MURPHY: You know what the Dems ought to do, by the way, I'm surprised, I pitched this to some Dem types four years ago. Get a plane, bump Tom Perez, don't need any more speeches from Tom. Get five or six –

KRISTOL: He's the DNC Chairmen, we should tell our viewers who probably haven't noticed, haven't noticed that.

MURPHY: If you ever watch the CSPAN feed you got to sit through an hour of local officials and Tom before the debate, the world's worst warm up comic. But get some good comedians with followings and go on a road show all about Trump, follow him, and stream it on TV. It'll drive him crazy.

KRISTOL: That's a good idea.

MURPHY: He can't stand being laughed at. You know, Obama, having some good jokes at his expense at the Grid Iron is what put us into this national nightmare.

KRISTOL: Yeah, at the White House Correspondent's Dinner, yeah, one of them.

MURPHY: Sorry, Correspondent's Dinner. Trump's smoldering there, "Nobody's made fun of me like that since my fa – fa – father."

KRISTOL: They should take more of our advice, but anyway they don't. The Democrats, the Democrats, we're discredited, we're discredited –

MURPHY: We're here in the ornate, no ferns studio.

KRISTOL: – never Trump types. Okay, tell me about Anonymous here for a minute before we go off.

MURPHY: Well, you know, I used to obsess on Deep Throat, I was wrong about that, Len Garmin wrote a great book about it. So, I skimmed the book, and there were like three kind of tells in it, I think. Tell one is this person was very literate with history, even historical quotes, made me think speechwriter. You know "As de Gaulle once said..."

KRISTOL: Yeah, right.

MURPHY: Well educated, not a comms hack, but somebody who is around policy and maybe policy communications. Somebody who had a teacher when they were in high school who fought in the war, I think he meant World War II, or she, when they wrote it, which would mean older.

And then finally, there is a note about this Haley stuff saying the view in the building was she would solve the woman problem in the GOP which shows how dumb a lot of the GOP is about women. That is not the statement of the usual kind of chowder head GOP dude. So I thought maybe a woman. And so I put them all together and I – and a principled conservative. Somebody who was around in the Reagan era. Somebody who is keeping the job maybe for a reason, maybe they're not wealthy, and so it's a painful decision to quit.

So I came around and I'm thinking of a senior person who is a little older in the speech writing world who is thoughtful, good writer, knows history, and knows the conservative movement, and might have had a teacher who fought in the Second World War, and I think you know who I mean.

KRISTOL: Yep.

MURPHY: So that's –

KRISTOL: You think we should, we shouldn't say.

MURPHY: I don't want to hurt –

KRISTOL: No, we don't want to. There are other people I've heard speculation about, which would also be consistent with interest in national security –

MURPHY: Not a woman though, that's the –

KRISTOL: I don't have a woman either, no.

MURPHY: That one doesn't click.

KRISTOL: I have someone who is in the national security side, who has been a journalist, and therefore would know how to write this kind of book, and well educated, cares a lot, knows history some, knows about conservative principles.

I tend to agree, it doesn't feel like just kind of 28-year-old, you know –

MURPHY: No, and it's the kind of senior conservatoid type that the young staffer, even though they may not be that high ranking, would come to and say, "What do you think? You've been around. You've worked in other places."

KRISTOL: Yeah, yeah.

MURPHY: Yeah, so there you go.

KRISTOL: We'll have to – You should write this up, though.

MURPHY: I just don't want to – I hate to, you know, because I'm an apostate, so I don't want to hurt anybody.

KRISTOL: Yeah.

MURPHY: But we'll come back, we'll come back, and we can ask the universe here.

KRISTOL: Yeah, the – I'm glad you have this. You're enraptured with that wrap, with that app. So we'll come back in what, what do you think? We'll come back when someone has the Democratic nomination or is about to have it.

MURPHY: Yeah.

KRISTOL: We'll discuss what we've done wrong.

MURPHY: General election scorecard in April.

KRISTOL: The final point, I guess, for me, my takeaway for the viewers and you're more of a pro at this than I, so I'm sort of a viewer myself in this is, you know, there's this huge warm up, which has gone all through all of 20 – from what? March, April basically 2019 to now. It will continue to go on for the next month or so.

And then there's reality, and it really happens fast, and people forget how fast it just sort of, people who were plausible 20% chances to get the nomination become 1% in a week. Right after – Iowa and New Hampshire are just so big.

MURPHY: There's going to be – 30 days of –

KRISTOL: And it seems to be your pace of point, it could be that Iowa and New Hampshire are muddled, and four and five are still in, and we go to March 3rd, and even then it could be a muddle, I guess. Well, let me just ask one parenthesis –

MURPHY: I think there are the big 3 and Bloomberg.

KRISTOL: Uh-huh, by March, out of Iowa or out of New Hampshire, at least?

MURPHY: Maybe, it depends how close New Hampshire is, could be two then, but probably three.

KRISTOL: So you do buy – So that week of February, whatever it is, February 3rd and 10th, or 2nd, whatever, I guess it's 8 days, so 3rd and 11th maybe. Whatever that week is of Iowa, or 8 days of Iowa and New Hampshire you think are huge.

MURPHY: Huge.

KRISTOL: And people should start paying attention very seriously in mid-late January.

MURPHY: I would say look at it this way, 30 days of January leading up to the crescendo, 30 days of February where there are going to be winners and losers and fatalities and twists and turns and extremely high stakes, and then March 3rd is going – It could go on because they have proportional delegates, but we're going to know a lot on March 4th, a lot.

KRISTOL: And do you still believe – we talked about this a year ago, I think, but you thought there was some non-trivial chance that because of the proportionality and because they're fairly evenly balanced candidates in this race right now.

MURPHY: Yeah.

KRISTOL: That you do have two or three go on, you have three, more than two, since if it's two you get a winner, but you have three or four go on.

MURPHY: Yeah, if Biden has a weird comeback from Iowa where if he's third in Iowa and second in New Hampshire –

KRISTOL: Then wins South Carolina.

MURPHY: And he's great and then he implodes in the middle of February and then it's mixed in March. You know, you can see a way, remember they have proportional delegates, so third place can even get some delegates.

KRISTOL: With the thresholds, you don't get, it's hard.

MURPHY: Yeah, it's really top two, but the top two can go on forever.

KRISTOL: Yeah, and you could end up at a convention. You could end up being slightly, someone could be shy of 50.

MURPHY: Unlikely, I'd bet against it, but it is not impossible at all.

KRISTOL: A contested convention, on the novelistic front, where you had Buttigieg winning as the kind of correct literary solution, so to speak, to the Trump problem.

MURPHY: Yeah, opposite to Trump, yeah.

KRISTOL: I'd say a contested convention would be a pretty good literary gimmick to have to culminate the insanity of the Trump years, the first contested convention since, since 1940, I guess it would be, is that right? '52 sort of, yeah.

MURPHY: The contested convention after a ballot or two becomes about the head of the teacher's union and the head of AFSCME, because they've got like half the delegates, the bodies.

KRISTOL: Once they're liberated from having to vote for who wins the primary. That would be something else. Who would win a contested convention on the Democrats? I'm sure Hillary, Kerry they all think they got to come back –

MURPHY: My charm, yeah, yeah.

KRISTOL: – the person who has been there before, but of course it could go the absolute opposite way, right?

MURPHY: Yeah, we were always worried, back in '96 with Dole, a lot of our delegates were Pat Robertson people because they would win the caucuses to pick the body that was instructed by the primary. So we always thought of the convention of the living dead on the third ballot they all like turnover and the Robertson, all the Dole signs go to the floor.

So, yes, but maybe we'll do a special no ferns Kristol Conversation from there, if it happens.

KRISTOL: Yeah, that would be something. Where would that be? Charlotte in August, but we'll get together before then and we'll do one after we see what happens in the first four states.

MURPHY: See how wrong we were.

KRISTOL: See how wrong we were.

MURPHY: You have Deval Patrick runs the table.

KRISTOL: That's right, that would be huge. Mike Murphy, thanks very much for joining –

MURPHY: Thank you, I love doing it.

KRISTOL: – joining me today. And thank you for joining us on CONVERSATIONS.

[END]