

# CONVERSATIONS

WITH BILL KRISTOL

## **James Carville Conversation**

*Filmed May 29, 2024*

BILL KRISTOL:

Hi, I'm Bill Kristol. Welcome back to *Conversations*. I'm very pleased to be joined again by James Carville. We last spoke in September. James was worried about the Biden campaign, gave some useful advice, I think. We can talk about where he thinks things stand now. I won't even bother with the introduction of James, he needs none. So James, thanks for joining me.

JAMES CARVILLE:

Well, thank you, Bill. Always a pleasure. But I wish it were under the happiest circumstances, but here we are.

BILL KRISTOL:

Well, let's make them happier.

JAMES CARVILLE:

Yeah.

BILL KRISTOL:

We can do it here. Tell... where are we in the campaign and the presidential campaign, we're discussing, what is it? May 29th, just after Memorial Day. That's a traditional break point, right? Where everyone says, "Okay, where are we on Memorial Day?" Where are we? And then, let's get to what should be done.

JAMES CARVILLE:

Well, first of all, just if you look at the overall thing, people feel like the country's gone in the wrong direction. The combined number of people that would rather have another choice is high, as I can ever remember it. The third-party vote at this time is as high as I could ever remember it. But the actual distance between President Biden and Trump is anywhere between even and Biden minus 2. It's 2.5 maybe. It's clearly very close.

There clearly can be events that can have an impact on the outcome of this election. But we're headed to election that not very many people are very excited about that, that's the undeniable truth, and how that turns out in terms of turnout, that's anybody's guess.

BILL KRISTOL:

If you had your 30 seconds with President Biden, any one point you'd emphasize most that they're not doing quite right, or they could be doing that they're not doing, or two points, three points?

JAMES CARVILLE:

I would say don't tell people how good the economy is because what happens is he says that, and statistically, he's right. You can point to five things that say the economy has performed well. But the problem you have, Bill, is the economy is great for people like you and I. It is not good for under 35 or under 30. And if you think about it, if you're a net-saver, you live in a pretty good economy, even given the cost of living everything. But these young people see no hope that they'll ever buy a house, interest rates, insurance rates, they're completely priced out of market. These thieves that run these institutions of higher learning, who Scott Galloway correctly called your alma mater hedge fund that has classes—

BILL KRISTOL:

A very wealthy hedge fund, right? 52—

JAMES CARVILLE:

Yeah, a lot of people feel like they can't afford it, and I would urge Biden to talk about the things that he's done to help people get through the cost of living, like prescription drug price caps and releasing the strategic petroleum reserve. And there's another thing that I would really urge him to talk about, it's not very fancy, it's always been around, it's always popular, but never enforced, is just put the minimum wage at \$15. You're doing terribly with younger voters and black voters. Well, there's a lot of young people and black people that make the minimum wage. If you look at the historic chart of the value to minimum wage, you can see.

And so, not only you're going to raise somebody making \$7.50 an hour, somebody who's making \$12 an hour, their salaries will go up appropriately. Now you say, "Well, it's going to [inaudible]," but we do know that every dollar a low wage worker makes gets put back into the economy. A dollar you give to a high wage person, they put a fourth in the economy, a half in savings, and a fourth to pay taxes or something. They don't have that savings part; they're net borrowers. So, that's really hurting him in the economy and it's hurting him with young voters.

BILL KRISTOL:

I guess two questions to follow up on that. It sounds to me like you think the inflation slash economic wellbeing, especially of younger and less well-off people, remains the crucial issue he's got to address A, and B, I'm struck when you talk about these things, you're very clear and they sound they could be attractive politically, am I wrong to say that the Biden campaign, I feel like he gives some good speeches and he has some good policies, but they're not sustained somehow? I feel like everything is a one-off and there's no theme or narrative. Is that a little unfair or is that just the way the world is today with social media and stuff? Or what do you think about that? You ran a campaign that was very good at staying on message and developing a very consistent message for weeks and months.

JAMES CARVILLE:

I think it's very fair. I think it's very fair. And there are things that he's for that people don't know. And one of the big problems they have and that everyone has is we don't know how to run against Trump because he's a liar, but he's going to appoint bad people to the government, all right? There's so many things. Is he a crook? Is he a risk to national security? Is he going to end the federal bureaucracy as we know it? Is he going to put these really crazy judges on a bench? Is he going to get out of NATO? And

people are just sort of overwhelmed, and we're not focused in on how we want to run against Trump.

And the president's campaign, I think that economic message is, "things are better than you think they are," which if left alone, maybe some pea shoots of hope, some consumer confidence numbers might look a little bit better, but you've got to let people come to that conclusion because if you come to that conclusion for them and they don't think it's a good economy, they say, "Well, how can this guy fix something that he doesn't even think is broke?"

And I have to say this: every conversation that everyone has in every focus group about President Biden begins with age, in the middle it's age, and at the end it's age, and that's a real fact that they have to live with, and they've just got to plow through it. And getting mad at *The New York Times* for talking about his age is not going to work.

BILL KRISTOL:

Presumably, one way to follow through it is to have a forward-looking agenda, as you were saying. I do feel like that's—

JAMES CARVILLE:

Yes. It would be nice if he came out with three or four things he will hit with his second term to give at least something other than, "You should be happy with what you got." The messages from Biden should be, "You should be happy with what you got," and from Trump is, "You should be happy with what you had," but there's no message in there that says, "You're going to be happy with what you're going to see." And it's ripe, and he could do that, he could say, "We have unfinished work. I have a record to build on, not to sit on, we've created foundation by chips and new green energy projects," and anything like that, but have some future conclusion that it's all going to get better.

BILL KRISTOL:

And that's pretty urgent that they start saying that, you think? President Biden sometimes says, "Well, people don't focus until the fall," and all this, but I don't know.

JAMES CARVILLE:

I hear that all the time. And I'm sure that people come in and say that, and people say, "The average American spends four minutes a day worrying about politics," or, "No one is going to decide until after they all go to the shore," and they won't decide until they come back from the shore or they go to the Hamptons. After they go to the Hamptons, they're going to decide. No, they're watching and they're absorbing what's going on around them.

And I've heard all of these theories about when voters decide and don't decide. Our big problem, the Democrats' big problem, is I don't see how we can replicate the 2020 coalition. Under 30 was 17% of the share, in other words, 17 out of 100 people who voted in 2020 were under 30. And of that, President Biden got 62%. Black was 12% share: about every 100 people that voted that were black, Biden got 90%. I don't think you're going to hit those numbers this year, so you have to make it up somewhere else. Now, the good news is we do seem to be doing somewhat better with older whites, which is good because they vote higher than other people. So, if you had to have somebody that you're doing better on, that's not a bad demographic to have. But, and I've said this before, and I'll say it again: I think maybe some people are uncomfortable talking about it, but the Democrats have a male problem. Males are 48%

of the vote. I defy anyone to listen to say NPR and not hear, four times that, “This is coming down to college educated women” or “No, I think it’s coming down to women of color.” Well, women in general, yes—women are 52%, but how do you develop a political party that talks to 52% of the country? That’s a big part, and albeit 52%, but we want to think about the 48% sometimes.

BILL KRISTOL:

Yeah. And I was struck, I was recently, I’ve been quoting your former boss and your friend Bill Clinton, what is it, Americans prefer strong and wrongs—

JAMES CARVILLE:

Strong and wrong than weak and right. I—

BILL KRISTOL:

Do you believe that? Is that part of the problem here?

JAMES CARVILLE:

I believe it to a point. I don’t think they want strong and authoritarian, or strong and wrong or strong and crooked, but I do think his general point is that they prefer decisive people who really... I think that Biden looks weak, maybe he’s done everything he can in his dealings with Netanyahu. He just keeps saying, “No more of this, no more of that,” and of course you get more of this, you get more of that, and it’s a problem. Gaza’s completely misunderstood by the press. What else is new? The Harvard poll, if you remember, the two things they cared the least about were Gaza and student loans. I’m not surprised at all, but outside of—

BILL KRISTOL:

This is a poll of young voters, right?

JAMES CARVILLE:

Young voters, yes, under 30. They gave them 15 issues and number 14 and number 15 was student loans and Gaza. I forget what order they came in, but there was so few people, it’s not even worth worrying about, which of course completely disrupts the view. Now, forget the campus protests of whoever they are, if they even go to college, but there is a general unease among people about what’s happening in Gaza. That’s undeniable. And it’s not just Rashida Tlaib or my favorite, the meal plan revolutionary.

BILL KRISTOL:

Yeah, there was that.

JAMES CARVILLE:

“If we don’t have our mac and cheese, we’re not going to have a revolution,” oh, okay. But yeah, it’s just overall discomfort, like, did they really have to do that? And it’s creating a world of confusion in foreign policy, obviously. Even allies are starting to get really... they’ve got Ireland, I guess Spain and Norway recognized Palestine, something like that. You can feel where this thing is going and it’s not in a great direction.

BILL KRISTOL:

And I do think that whatever the right policy is or whatever need there might be for change in policy, the extent to which the Biden administration allows itself to look as if it's being dragged along towards these changes... this is very true of Ukraine policy too, I think... as opposed to sort of saying, "Okay, now we're doing this." I mean, Reagan made some pretty terrible decisions. We had terrible disaster in Lebanon and the fall of '83 with the Marines being killed. But one got the sense... I mean, he acknowledged it and then he pivoted very quickly. And I'm not using that as an example. And Reagan, of course, everyone cites, is too much. He's too high a standard, I suppose, on a political scale, but it feels like they could be more decisive, whichever course he chooses to take. Or even if he chooses to change course.

JAMES CARVILLE:

Yeah, I remember '83, the [inaudible] you know? I actually think he was too willing to move on. I think some people really screwed that up.

BILL KRISTOL:

I agree totally. Yeah.

JAMES CARVILLE:

But he got beyond it. That's undeniable. But there was some... look, there's no more massive act of negligence on a part of any nation since World War II than there was about Israeli government on October 7th. That's just staggeringly... and so much of that was a result of hubris, of thinking we had everything under control, it was all done. And boy, when you look back at how arrogant they were, you could see how something like this would happen. And... what really bothers me, is just how does this thing end? I mean, maybe you've talked to a lot more people in foreign policy than I do, but what is Gaza going to be like five years from now other than a place where journalists are going to come and see what a pathetic wretched life they have? I don't see it going any [inaudible]. Maybe it will, but right now it is pretty hard to see how this thing ends.

BILL KRISTOL:

Yeah. And I guess this is the trouble with being an incumbent, right? I mean that you are blamed for stuff that happens that you're not really responsible for, but the world looks chaotic and...

JAMES CARVILLE:

Right. So Bill, the people are demonstrating against Biden and the public is blaming Biden for the demonstration. So I mean you got to be in a really bad situation where people are protesting you and people are bad and you're allowing people to protest. One time, there was a story I read, I couldn't stop laughing. It was some anti-Biden-Gaza protesters, and there was some Proud Boys or something, counter-protesters, and the only thing they could agree on is they started chanting, "F Joe Biden, F Joe Biden." And then the public thinks that, well, Joe Biden can't control his demonstrators. He's the only person that's divided... that brought the unite the right and the Palestine liberation, whatever these people call themselves. That was the moment that I said, oh man, this guy can't win no matter what he does.

BILL KRISTOL:

Well, but I think you think he could win. I mean it's maybe slightly less than fifty-fifty. What about the timing? So it's the end of May. We have this debate presumably on

June 27th. Is that A, likely to happen in your view and B, is that actually a moment where people might focus in a big way as opposed to one speech here, one speech there kind of thing?

JAMES CARVILLE:

So let's take something we know as a fact. Democrats have not lost since Kansas. This has happened. Maybe it has... I think somebody pointed out [inaudible]... Western Nebraska that we were supposed to lose about 23 and lost about seven. All right? So we know that. We know this tribe's voting day. If he's fortunate... I don't think Trump will go to the debate. And I base that on, he'll do anything that's not in his perceived self-interest. And this is one of these things where he could hurt... Biden has a chance to help himself.

But let's say that he goes. If I were his debate coach, I would say that I am not outsourcing Supreme Court picks. Plain and simple I will ask every prospective nominee. Do you believe there's an inherent right to privacy in the Constitution as I do? If they answer yes, I would say, "Do you believe that the Supreme Court should operate under the same code of ethics as federal district courts do throughout the United States." Answer's yes, I'll consider that nominee, because I think it'll really, really drive hope. And Trump's trying to... you can watch him. He's "Oh, I'll have every state, I'll think of something. We're going to have great policy." And it is the best issue that Democrats have. It just is. Time and time again, you see it proving itself in one special after another. So that has to be part of President Biden's reelection strategy, an integral part. But it has to be said in a way that people can understand.

BILL KRISTOL:

Yeah, I think the backward-looking, "he's responsible for jobs" is okay, but the way you put it is good because it's forward-looking, right? I'm going to do this as president in the next four years. And Trump, incidentally, we know what he's going to do. He already had four years to appoint these people.

JAMES CARVILLE:

Right, and he can brag on it. He's going to continue to give you the same kind of courts you got right now. The same court restricting rights, the same court of ethical calamities after another, the same partisanship. I mean, for almost all our lives Bill, the Supreme Court was never a big issue. We'd talk about it, the partisans, ah it was good for fundraising, it gets the base excited. All right, then let's move on to something else. Now it's become an enormous issue.

And the other thing I would do, and I'm trying to encourage it and I think I'm going to get it done, is an entire 10-page piece of research on every effort that Republicans have tried or said they wanted to get rid of birth control. Because I got news for you, birth control is popular out there. Those pills, the people like them. And you got to drive it home. You got to keep them answering. You got to keep Trump off guard. You can do it with things like this. You can't let him get his footing. I just don't see him being a sufficient irritant out there. But then they have a big financial advantage. They could open up some opportunities here over the summer.

BILL KRISTOL:

Yeah, I mean, I think people's views settle in and I think this notion that you wait until September strikes me as very risky. You have the conventions in July and August. Those things are kind of shows, but they don't really change, I don't think people's

minds. So you really... June feels to me like a big month to make progress both with paid advertising and with earned media messaging, and then if there's a debate at the end. And if there's not a debate, I guess Biden at least gets to beat up Trump for ducking out, right?

JAMES CARVILLE:

Well, yeah. The other thing is, one of the things that we've seen over our careers is the erosion of the convention bounce. I remember when Dukakis actually went ahead of Bush after the convention. Didn't stay ahead obviously, but even Mondale gained a lot of ground on Reagan post-convention. Now you don't get a one or two... the convention doesn't even matter anymore. So in the events that people have traditionally mocked things by the convention bounce, the Labor Day start, that just doesn't apply in today's presidential politics, I don't think.

BILL KRISTOL:

Do you think though the debate would still be important? I mean, that seems like that's an unusual moment if it happens.

JAMES CARVILLE:

If the debate is about abortion, it will help a lot. And if the debate... I actually think that... I'm really thinking hard about this, but they should run against MAGA and not Trump.

BILL KRISTOL:

Interesting. Explain that.

JAMES CARVILLE:

Because MAGA is less popular than Trump. And what I would think that Biden's [inaudible] says, "you've been overtaken by this MAGA movement." Because we need a lot of people who voted for Trump and not all of them are MAGAs. A lot of them have different reasons. We need some of those people. And if we can drive a stake between MAGA and them, we could get some or some could stay home because they're not comfortable with it.

And I do think that MAGA is going to be here. Martha Ann Alito will be here far after Biden/Trump is gone. Let me tell you, she'll be here. So I think that's a potential to tie him to the movement. 'Cause the movement is, according to NBC poll, is a 24% approve. He's 42. I think you have an opportunity there, but you got to take opportunities at every point. And I think there's only so much Biden can do. I think if you've talked to them, they'd say, "James, that's a great idea," but we've got to get him out there to say that and that that's not the easiest thing in the world to do. And I can understand that. But let's see if we have this debate on the.. June the 27th.

BILL KRISTOL:

Yeah. I am struck how much people just assume it's going to happen because Trump said he would do it. I assume Trump won't do it if he thinks it not in his interest.

JAMES CARVILLE:

He said he was going to testify to trial. [Inaudible] he thought that. And you know what? When he didn't testify, it didn't cost him anything. There was very little... even,

“well sir, you said...” so he’ll say... he’s already said, “CNN can’t host, they’re not fair.”

He’s just going to brush it off and say, “It can’t be fair. I told Biden to take a drug test. He wouldn’t take a drug test.” My answer would be, “Will you give us the records that Keith Schiller stole from Dr. Bornstein in 2017 that no one’s ever asked you about it? You went in his office, the doctor said he felt like he was raped, sent your goons in there and be glad to, you release those health records.” But he doesn’t pay. He’s paid zero price for not testifying his own path. None. And from that, he’s learned, I can do what I want. I can back out of a debate. What are they going to do to me?

BILL KRISTOL:

I mean, do you think though that Biden literally every day for the next month just says, in the course of discussing whatever issue he’s discussing, “I very much look forward to debating Donald Trump on this. I’m going to explain why my policies are better than his.” I mean, it would make it a little hard. You could do a little... make them pay a little bit of a price maybe. I don’t know. Maybe not. He seems to be good at avoiding paying prices.

JAMES CARVILLE:

I think that’s a good idea: “That’s something I want to discuss on June 27th, in the presence of Donald Trump.” And I think it’s much more effective. “But as you know, Jennifer, we’re very committed to blah, blah, blah.” I actually, I think definitely it’s a good idea at every point. And we’re glad that people talk about this economy, that economy. We’d obviously be glad to discuss that up and coming debate with Donald Trump, June 27th, CNN. Be there, be square. We’re looking forward to it and we’re looking forward to having another big debate so people can see where we are in this thing. Yeah, I think that gives you some lift because you know he don’t want to do it.

BILL KRISTOL:

Yeah. You could even release some questions ahead of time that you give Donald Trump the advantage of knowing what you’re going to tell him about the courts or whatever.

JAMES CARVILLE:

Yeah, yeah.

BILL KRISTOL:

And they’re gimmicks, right? They don’t seem to use gimmicks. I don’t know why not. Gimmicks are kind of useful in campaigns, I think. I mean, gimmicks are not unimportant in campaigns, right? You got to bring this stuff home somehow, and they just seem, that’s what, I guess what I am slightly... I don’t know,

JAMES CARVILLE:

Gimmicks and soundbites. I always tell people there’s one soundbite that would supplant all of the combined wisdom in the world. Love your neighbor as yourself. Give me anything more profound than that with deeper meaning, with... treat others as you want to be treated yourself. That the general concept of the golden rule, it’s a breathtakingly good soundbite. It’s very short, takes no time, and everybody understands the implications of it all. Now the problem Biden has is he’s not very, and he never has been, very good on the attack. It is not just that he’s old, he is just never



been a particularly effective attack politician and how much of this he can pull off, I don't know.

BILL KRISTOL:

Yeah, that's interesting. What about this, we're talking Wednesday morning, the 29th. The trial is about to go to the jury in New York. Do you think that has any potential for affecting anything? Could the campaign use it effectively over a month if he's convicted?

JAMES CARVILLE:

All this coverage in all these panels and he did this. This was a good day for that. I saw the expression on his face and I saw this and we got a panel here and there've been so many lawyer panels that I don't even know what to even think anymore. But the question, can it have an effect? The answer is yes, if he's acquitted or even a hung jury, that will excite his people and it will demoralize a lot of Democrats. How much, don't know. An acquittal would be very good for him and would really demoralize them.

Now, the lawyers say there's not going to be an acquittal. I don't know, but if there's a guilty verdict, remember juries are supreme. And what that juror, that foreman, whoever goes out and speaks for the jury says is going to have a lot of say. You can say, "Well, it's a Manhattan jury." Well, it's a Manhattan jury, Manhattan, Kansas, Manhattan, New York, they're all people. And they all sat there, you know, we sat for six weeks. We listened to 28 hours testimony. We went through every charge. We waited. That matters to people.

And so, people say, well, the hardcore Trump people, probably not going to affect the hardcore. But as we talked about earlier, he can't win with just MAGA. And so, a lot of people that you know that even I know some, they don't want to vote for a Democrat. They're very uncomfortable with Trump, but they don't know, this will keep them away. They'll either vote for Biden or not vote.

You just can't look at the Trump vote as hardcore MAGA because we know that's not enough. And Haley gets 22% in a closed Republican primary in a place like Indiana and Nebraska, it's a lot of people. And that 22% is going to have terribly hard time voting for a Democrat, and the most likely scenario for most of them is they will return to their traditional partisan habits.

But a conviction could stop that. So I think it can have an impact. It's not going to be a moment where somebody in South Mississippi comes up to me at the Walmart and says, "James, God, I was so wrong all of my life and thank God I saw the light." No, that's not going to happen. But you could get some what I call loosely aligned voters, and there may be some loosely aligned Democrats that think the economy was better under Trump and just may stop some bleeding on that end too.

BILL KRISTOL:

Yeah, that sounds right to me. It seems to me though that, I mean the Biden campaign to come back to the campaign for a minute, or even the outside groups, they have a tendency to think, okay, well the guilty thing will explain itself. Whereas I think they really need to be ready to just do a massive effort to plaster the phrase convicted felon on Trump's forehead because it will affect maybe some 2%, 3%, 4% of those Republicans, give them a permission structure to stay home. Maybe for some of them to vote for Biden, I don't know, but I worry that they think that the news explains itself. You know what I mean? And okay, guilty verdict, that's done. Let's move on.

JAMES CARVILLE:

The question is how does Biden address Trump in debate? Former President Trump and future inmate. I think so much of the Biden campaign is spent getting Biden in the right mood and to do a few things. I think it's probably a lot harder than we believe over there. They have to be very, very careful how he's deployed and they have to husband him pretty closely. And I can't fault them for that, but yes sir, how are you going to address him?

BILL KRISTOL:

Yeah, that's a good point. But in the meantime, you can use paid media and stuff to really remind people.

JAMES CARVILLE:

But the big thing is going to be the jury. If there's a conviction, how those jurors come across is going to have a lot to do with how much people accept this verdict.

BILL KRISTOL:

Yeah, that's interesting. And if Trump loses it, which he might and attacks the jury, I feel like that's an opportunity also to say he's attacking these Americans who are doing their duty. Right?

JAMES CARVILLE:

Right. If these jurors, what I'd give to prepare one of them for Sunday morning TV. First of all, collectively, this jury took 21,250 hours out of their lives. We listened to X... 28,000 words of testimony. We sat there and observed every witness. We conscientiously went through every document, and we could arrive at no other conclusion but this. Boom. Boom. And who the jury is, who they elect foreman, how articulate she or he is. Yeah, it all depends a lot, but how that jury justifies what they did can have a lot of effect on public opinion, and we never really considered politics in this, to be honest with you. The judge told us not to and we tried to follow. The judge said it's like any other American would. Any of that kind of talk will get you a long, long way.

BILL KRISTOL:

Yeah, that's interesting. I do think people have been a little too quick to dismiss that case. It's not the case everyone wanted. It's not January 6th, it's not federal court, but yeah, jury convictions have a certain—

JAMES CARVILLE:

My favorite is Fareed Zakaria, who's a nice guy, but he said, "Yeah, if an ordinary American did this he wouldn't be indicted." Well, what ordinary American is going to have sex with a porn star, ask the porn star to beat him on the butt with a rolled-up magazine, then have a catch-and-kill story, then come up with \$130,000 so somebody doesn't find out and embarrass your presidential campaign. Well, yeah, I guess if an average American did that, I would think. Because that's just not an everyday occurrence in America, is it?

When you stop and you think about it, I'm sure I wasn't there for closing, but I'm sure the prosecution argued, look, the law entitles you to certain information before you make a decision. That's your right, the law grants that to you, and he hid that from the

American people who were the real victims here. If it didn't matter, then if it was public, then people could easily conclude that it didn't matter. But they weren't given that choice. Because of Mr. Trump's duplicity, that was hidden from people, which they had a right to know. I think if you make that argument, the fraud that was perpetrated was on the people, on the voter, I think that'll take you a longer way.

BILL KRISTOL:

Yeah, that's good. That's good.

JAMES CARVILLE:

And it is also good to talk about the facts of the case. Well, I don't know if the average American did this and you go through it and go, Jesus did all that happen? Yeah, it all happened.

BILL KRISTOL:

That would be something if on June 27th Biden says what you just said, that would be a memorable moment in American presidential politics.

JAMES CARVILLE:

Yeah, like I say, the Republicans have, I mean, first of all, your group, which is can't say enough good about the way that y'all understand the threat ahead and let's don't whine and complain. Let's just try to get this threat dealt with. And then we can deal with something else four years from now. And as again, you have these one-fifth to one-fourth of Republican primary voters is just obstinate about not voting for Trump, and that's a lot. Then on the Democratic side, our biggest weaknesses are, first of all the ages, but you can't do a thing about that. It's really tepid numbers among under-thirty and really tepid numbers with Blacks and a lot of it driven by males.

BILL KRISTOL:

Yeah, there's no obvious fix for some of that, but I think your point, just say a little more about the MAGA extremism point. I think that was really true in 2022 when Republican Voters Against Trump, we did a lot against Mastriano in Pennsylvania and other extreme MAGA candidates. And the extremism MAGA message worked. We didn't really talk about Trump much in those races, and Shapiro won by [inaudible] and Shapiro didn't and Whitmer didn't and they won by 15 and 10 points in swing states. I feel like there's more to be developed there. And the Trump stuff almost swamps everything else, and people forget how actually extreme some of these policies are.

JAMES CARVILLE:

By the way, Shapiro, I might have more admiration and respect for him than any politician in America. What they did was just really smart politics of getting Mastriano and kind of helping him be the nominee, and you can talk about Nick Fuentes. Why not? He had dinner with Nick Fuentes. And what cracks me up is some... 20% of what I'd call, quote, "pro-Israel" unquote, community likes Trump. Okay, well, you like Nick Fuentes. How about a Hamas leader in Moscow meeting with Putin? Well, you're not that bothered about Ukraine, but you can't stand Hamas. Well, guess who Hamas is buttering up to? None other Vladimir Putin. We need to be a little clear in delineating our enemies here. But there's also a limit to what the president and his campaign can achieve. If you had a candidate of George W. Bush, I believe Obama or Clinton, most candidates, they could go out and execute. Biden can't do that. That's an asset that they

just have to be very careful how they deploy, and it has to be only under laboratory conditions. That's just a function of having an 82-year-old candidate, or soon to be an 82-year-old candidate. It's just one asset you don't have.

BILL KRISTOL:

Yeah, one keeps coming back to that fortunately, but it is what it is. Do you agree that the Trump campaign, leaving aside Trump who's not very disciplined and says some things he probably shouldn't and all that, but the Trump, A, he's not without skill himself, obviously he's a demagogue, but the Trump campaign has been pretty, I say this with regret, but pretty competent and pretty professional, don't you think for the last year or so?

JAMES CARVILLE:

I do, and it's much better. I think just Susie Wiles is kind of a professional, and it does seem, and other people have said the same thing, it was more of a haphazard, by-the-seat-of-your-pants, Steve Bannon, everybody fighting over money. I do think it's more disciplined. I agree with you, and I think that a lot of people would agree with you.

BILL KRISTOL:

And I think it's led to some underrating of them in a sense. Everyone keeps waiting for them to make some horrible mistakes, but they're running a pretty, except for Trump personally to some degree, they're running a pretty disciplined campaign.

JAMES CARVILLE:

What they did in the primaries was really remarkable. We tend to write that off. He was an incumbent, polarizing figure. You would say, "Well, he's going to get what he starts out with..." And actually he ended up with a lot. What they did to Ron DeSantis, what Susie Wiles did to Ron DeSantis has to be one of the great cutting jobs I've ever seen in politics. But he didn't even know what hit him. They had him eating pudding with his fingers. And the story is she was the big operative. She made him. He was this guy with no personality and she got him elected to Congress. He was not supposed to win for governor. She got him elected governor. And then Mrs. DeSantis turned on her and drove her right to Mar-a-Lago, and Ron DeSantis ain't been the same since he's [inaudible] with Ms. Wiles, I promise you.

When this all emerges... and I don't even think I know her. Her daddy was like, Pat Summerall, was a big time sports announcer.

BILL KRISTOL:

Right.

JAMES CARVILLE:

I got to tell you, from a distance, man, that woman wields a really effective knife. Phew.

BILL KRISTOL:

No, I think that's important, and I do think they're kind of underestimated. So, Trump goes to the South Bronx for that 4,000 person rally the other night after the trial.

JAMES CARVILLE:

And then—

BILL KRISTOL:

And everyone's ridiculing him up there.

JAMES CARVILLE:

—the two felons up there.

BILL KRISTOL:

What's that?

JAMES CARVILLE:

The two felons.

BILL KRISTOL:

Yeah. He had the felons, so that was a little lunatic.

JAMES CARVILLE:

Yeah.

BILL KRISTOL:

But everyone was ridiculing him on the Democratic Biden campaign. He's going to a place he can't win, New York. And what's he wasting his time for? I feel like that was pretty effective. He showed that he's willing to go anywhere. He went to an 85% blue area. Biden never goes to an 85% red area. He can say to Hispanics in other parts of the country, "Hey, I'm willing to campaign anywhere. And I care about you guys." Maybe—

JAMES CARVILLE:

Yeah. I think there ain't much money. And it was cheap, it was convenient.

BILL KRISTOL:

Right.

JAMES CARVILLE:

He got a ton of press.

BILL KRISTOL:

Right.

JAMES CARVILLE:

I think we could make something about the two convicted felons that he had there. Whatever, but it was right. And he says, "Oh, I'm going to carry New York. I'm going to carry California." But most politicians actually deep down think they can do anything. I remember at the end of the '92 campaign, Bill Clinton snuck off and went to Mississippi. "What the shit is going on there?" "Well, William [inaudible] went and Mike Espy said if I came here, they thought I could win."

I said, "Oh, Jesus." I saw Mike Espy a year ago. "What the hell did you do that for?" But they actually... Bill Clinton thinks, if I can just get in front of the bank president, I can convince him. Sir, you're not going to convince him. Guy's been a Republican since before he was born, okay? And I think Trump has that... I'd hate to equate anybody with Trump, but I think he's got that kind of salesman optimism about him. If you just get me in front of these people, "the Blacks, they love me."

BILL KRISTOL:

Yeah. And again, it only has to work with like one out of 20, right? It's not like he has to convince massive numbers.

JAMES CARVILLE:

Yes. We're dealing in a universe of fairly small tolerances here. There's some sort of custom to taking a porn trip and your approval goes up 5%. That'll convince you. The things we talked about, they just don't, they don't happen anymore.

BILL KRISTOL:

I guess the one thing that will happen, maybe we can close in a minute on this, I thank you for taking all this time, is I guess he will make a VP pick. That's traditional. Do you have any view on both what Trump's going to do and should do? It's one of the few things that's going to happen this summer that's actually different.

JAMES CARVILLE:

What he's going to do on what?

BILL KRISTOL:

The vice presidential pick for Trump.

JAMES CARVILLE:

My own view is probably Doug Burgum.

BILL KRISTOL:

Yeah, that's kind of been my view, too. We haven't even talked about that. Yeah.

JAMES CARVILLE:

He doesn't do anything. And I guess his Pence pick was a little... I think Pence might've helped him a little bit. It did give him a little patina of credibility with these evangelical voters and... Look, I read a *Washington Post* story about him offering these energy companies \$1 billion dollars... if they raise \$1 billion dollars, they can write his plan. I don't know. That's not typical. That's not normal. "Oh, it happens all the time." Actually, I never have seen a presidential candidate offer to let them write their own regulations, their own bill if they raised \$1 billion for him? No, I don't think that happens all the time.

You and I have seen a lot in Washington. I don't think we've ever seen that, nor anything remotely like that. I've certainly said, "Well, we'll certainly be very considerate and understand a lot of the issues you have are concerns that we share. And my trusted aide here, please call Bill if you got any kind of issues that have come up." Or anything like that. But no, I've never heard of that. No one would say, "Well, yeah, James, that's \$1 billion for regulatory..." no, that's pretty unusual.

BILL KRISTOL:

Yeah. It wouldn't be a bad thing to make an issue of either in the campaign or in the debate, I suppose. No, I've also thought the safest pick. Trump will just go for the safest pick who won't cause any trouble for him. And Pence was that in a way in 2016, with a little plus on the evangelical side. And Burgum is a rich business guy. And I also think this is a... let's end on this... Your point about the males vote, which maybe it's worth developing a little more. I think Trump does not think it hurts him to have two males on the ticket.

I think everyone thinks he's going to pick a woman or a minority, but I don't know that he... I think he has a sort of view which is pretty cynical, and we may not like it, but that two older white rich guys, that's kind of attractive to Republicans, and it's not that unattractive to a certain type of swing voter who thinks, well, those guys know what they're doing. They're business guys, they're et cetera. Tough guys.

JAMES CARVILLE:

He seems pretty intent that he's going to do it his way. He's telling you, "We're not going to have any of this General Kelly, Rex Tillerson, Gary Cohn. We're not going through that anymore." He's really laying the groundwork to say, "I ran on this. I told you I was going to do this. Now I'm going to do it." And I could see somebody saying, "Well, if you pick another white male, you're going to get a lot of flack." And he said, "That's exactly the kind of flack I want." That may be just what he wants to do. And I'm not doing it like you tell me to do it. I'm doing it my own way.

And by the way, he'll have a point if he wins. He told you on day one what he was going to do. He told you the kind of people that he was going to appoint and he's going to take that as a complete justification to do whatever I want to do. I didn't hide it from the voters, I told them. And to some extent, he is telling us. And it's always the thing that a voter hears. We say in one breath, "You're going to do all these horrible things." In the next breath we say, "Don't vote for him because you can't believe a word he says." Well, that's where you get into a jam. Do you believe him or not believe him? And I think when it comes to his own personal power, you always have to believe him.

BILL KRISTOL:

FYeah.

JAMES CARVILLE:

And he'll say anything to acquire more of that. But I don't know. But it's a contradictory message. You can't believe a word he says, but you have to believe that he's going to end the Constitution as we know it.

BILL KRISTOL:

Yeah. And it fits in with... I hear this from ex-Republicans who were tempted to go back to Trump all the time: "Well, the first term the guardrails held. Why won't they hold in the second term?" They barely held, and none of the people who helped hold them up are going to be there in the second term, Pence and Mattis and—

JAMES CARVILLE:

Gary Cohn is not going to be there to move things around on your desk so you don't see it.

BILL KRISTOL:

Right.

JAMES CARVILLE:

Or General Kelly's not going to be there to—

BILL KRISTOL:

Bringing that home is hard to voters, I think, that they saw him for four years. They think it wasn't that terrible. What's the problem? You got to really... that's why it has to be a forward-looking campaign. Someone was quoted the other day in the paper, "If it's a referendum on Trump's presidency against Biden's presidency, that's not good for Biden." Fairly or unfairly, but people retrospectively have sort of whitewashed their memories of the Trump presidency.

JAMES CARVILLE:

There's one word that Biden needs to use more often: the recovery. By saying, "The recovery," is enough. You remind people that we were down. We can argue whether or not people were better off four years ago or whatever, but we can't argue that we're certainly better off when I took office on January 1, 2021. But use the word recovery because that connotes that you're recovering from something.

So, if you see somebody that just had surgery and you say, "How do you feel?" They don't go... then you say, "How do you feel?" "I'm recovering?" You say, "Well, good. I'm glad to hear that." Not to say that, "I'm fine," but, "I'm recovering," because, oh yeah, if I had open heart surgery I would want to be recovering too, or anything like that. So I think that's one word that they need to use. And that people will say, "Well, yeah, it was better than it was."

And I don't think it's a frontline attack but it's certainly a secondary attack if he answers, is the grotesque mismanagement of the pandemic. I mean, we just forget how bad that was. A I don't blame people. Who wants to remember? I hated the God damn thing. But I think every little word is going to count in this, and I think recovery is one of those words that can help him.

BILL KRISTOL:

James, thank you for this conversation. Thank you for all this good advice to president and his team.

JAMES CARVILLE:

Thank you all for all the fricking work you're doing. Tim liked my last video. He told me, "Play it on the show."

BILL KRISTOL:

That's good. That's good. But we'll get together after the debate, or the non-debate, on June 27th and do an analysis of how the whole thing's been turned around by your council to the president.

JAMES CARVILLE:

And it's a good start to the day in the Pacific time zone.

BILL KRISTOL:



Thank you, James. And thank you all for joining us on *Conversations*.