

# CONVERSATIONS

WITH BILL KRISTOL

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BILL KRISTOL:

Hi, I'm Bill Kristol. Welcome back to *Conversations*. I'm very pleased to be joined again by my friend James Carville. We last had one of these conversations, I think right after Memorial Day. Joe Biden was the likely Democratic nominee, he was trailing Donald Trump. We were a little down on the dumps, I would say, even though we concealed it very well, of course. James is always cheerful, but I think we were slightly pessimistic about things. It's a different world now, I guess, or is it? Where do we stand? Where's the race really stand now, and what should we be looking for?

JAMES CARVILLE:

First of all, thank you for having me on. Secondly, yes, it is decidedly better. It's not overwhelming, it wasn't a huge shift, but we're probably down two or three and we probably up two or three. In this environment, that's a lot. I don't know how much you can move, but we're testing and I think we'll test the upward number here in the next couple of weeks, at least I hope we do.

But yes, everything is better. The polls better, fundraising is better, the enthusiasm is better. It's just unreasonable to even think it's not better. Now, how much it is, I see some of these giddy people on TV and like hey, knock it off. You laugh after the election, not before the election.

BILL KRISTOL:

You were a longtime believer that President Biden shouldn't run for reelection for another four years, even though he's been a good president, that people did not want an 82-year-old and all that, and they wanted a choice of someone younger. I think you certainly vindicated in that judgment, in my opinion, by just the wave of relief almost and enthusiasm that followed Biden stepping down. How much of it is the positive judgment on Vice President Harris at this point? She has had two weeks to campaign and reintroduce herself.

JAMES CARVILLE:

Not as much as some people think. It's like I tell people, if you have an infected wisdom tooth and you go to dentist and they pull it out, you feel on top of the world. God, you really don't feel any better than you would if you never had the infected wisdom tooth, but you do feel better now it's gone, just as an example. But I think that people wanted to like her. They were so glad to have a relief and they came in with disposition. And to her credit, just literally everything she's done since... Was it three weeks now? Seems like 300 years?

BILL KRISTOL:

No, I think just two and a half, maybe. Two—

JAMES CARVILLE:

It was on a Sunday, [inaudible].

BILL KRISTOL:

Two weeks and two days, yeah. We're talking Tuesday the 6th, I think.

JAMES CARVILLE:

So far, she has done nothing to dampen people's enthusiasm, she hasn't done anything remotely dumb, so I have reason to actually be encouraged. She looks like she's really grown, and people would tell me that. That's one thing I will say is people internally would say, "James, she's different. She's more confident," and not just White House staff people, people that would go in there. Economists, historians, the same people go in and out of the White House. It doesn't matter who's in there. To a person that would all say she's very confident and asks very good questions and seems to be well briefed. I'm happy that she's like this. I'm not totally surprised.

BILL KRISTOL:

You think that there's reasonable hope that that lasts? They've done a good job, don't you think, of rolling her out? She hasn't done any interviews in these two weeks. I notice people are beginning to whine and complain about that. That seems to me to be the sense. What do you think about that?

JAMES CARVILLE:

First of all, where is it written you have to do press interviews? It's nowhere. Secondly, she's accepted the debate that Trump has weaseled out of and said, "I've got a good idea. Ask me the question at the debate." It may be in her interest to do that. I was telling... Katie Couric has a podcast like this, I guess, and I was on there last week and I said, "Maybe she could do a Sarah Palin thing, but maybe she shouldn't."

As you well know, these things are fraught with danger, but I am not impressed by the argument that she needs to sit down and be grilled for 50 minutes on Sunday morning TV. Don't think that's what we need, but I expect she might do a little bit more than people think.

BILL KRISTOL:

We're speaking on Tuesday morning the 6th. She and her vice presidential pick will, I guess, go on a multi-state tour bus tour or bus and plane tour, whatever it'll be, for the next five, six days. Reminds me a little of Clinton, Gore '92, which you remember extremely well. There's a little downtime and then the convention, so talk us through what to look for, what advice you would give them over these next two, three weeks, which seemed pretty important to me.

JAMES CARVILLE:

Politics, to be so trite, every journey begins with a step. We all know that. People really don't know who she is. We think we know her, but we really kinda don't. There's a *Fox* caricature of who she is, we know she's a California liberal, we know she's multi-ethnic or biracial, I don't know and I hate talking about that shit anyway, but we know all of that.

What she has a chance to do, and she's got it pretty much front and center between now and the Thursday night at the convention, tell us more about you. Make us like you. We're open to it. We're on a date here and we like you going into it, and try not to pick your nose. What I'm saying is she needs more definition because people really do not know her, and I think she has a chance to do that. I also think she should come out with some policy prescriptions. If it's just you want Biden or you want Trump, that's not going to inspire people. I experienced... I want to push forward. There's a guy I would recommend [inaudible], I read it this morning... Ezra Klein, who I think is a very bright guy. Democratic Senator of Hawaii, Brian Schatz, I think is... She ought to listen to him. I know it's not a swing state, but you ought to give a guy a call because he's actually got some pretty good ideas, I thought.

Anything that she can do with cost of living, affordability, that's all gold. Mine that gold. Just a couple of more things, they don't have to be radical or anything like that. Can be common sense, mainstream left of center, I guess you would say, kind of ideas. People like that. She can start with the extension of the tax cuts on incomes over \$400,000 that are going to expire next

year. These are places that you can start and you can act prospective and future oriented. I think that's important also.

BILL KRISTOL:

Let's go over those a little bit more, though. There's the bio side and let's say the issues side. On the biographical side, anything particular she should stress apart from just being pleasant and charming and all that stuff, obviously.

JAMES CARVILLE:

Look, her bio is not all American. I think both of her parents were professors at Berkeley. I don't have anything against Berkeley, but she doesn't have a bootstrap story. I think she grew up relatively affluent. College professors don't starve to death. I don't know.

She's got a lot of people and she can talk about it, but I don't think her bio is... That that's the kind of thing that she's going to win this on. It's fine to talk about it, experiences she had. I think if I were her, in terms of my past experience, I would talk more about being an AG and being a consumer advocate and being a DA and being tough on crime seems to be kinda in right now, if I say so myself. I've never been very much of a pro-crime guy.

BILL KRISTOL:

It's been in for a long time. I don't think... Especially for Democrats, they need to show it, right?

JAMES CARVILLE:

That's been a serious flaw. Most Democrats don't fall for that, most elected Democrats don't fall for that, but it sort of sets something in and there's enough... By the way, I don't want to forget this. There's a big event today in the Democratic Party. Huge. That is the primary election in the first Congressional district of Missouri, think of it as St. Louis, where you have the ultimate, what I'd call "squadette" or whatever in Cori Bush. They are—Mark Mellman and them—and she's of course, let's just say she's very pro-Palestinian, to put it at that, but it's an understatement.

She's running against a guy named Wesley Bell, who's actually a prosecutor, and describes himself as a Black liberal. Remember that used scare people now. Oh, Jesus Christ. Yes, of course. Come on in. They put a bunch of money in there, but they're running a really smart campaign, all right? They're not running it. He's got good consultants. They're talking about she voted against the Infrastructure bill. One of 10 people. I hope I'm right, but I think Bell's going to win and tomorrow, I will be commenting on it.

BILL KRISTOL:

That would be the second person in the squad to be defeated and I think in both cases, the campaigns... Even though a lot of people were interested in it, probably because of Middle East politics and other stuff, the actual messaging of the campaign was more about just not being a radical obstructionist really, and being a mainstream liberal.

JAMES CARVILLE:

These people have literally been... Not only are they wrong about everything, they destroy everything. We're going to have to deal with Harris's 2019. That's a possible—

BILL KRISTOL:

Let's talk about that because I think the ad she had up today, I saw the new one is pretty much along the lines you're suggesting. She's a prosecutor, but they've cleverly, I think, linked together being tough on crime, not linked together but said she's prosecuted in a way that

criminals and she's also got after big corporations that have been ripping people off. It's like she gets the populist economic stuff in a little bit and she gets the tough on crime in.

JAMES CARVILLE:

Good for her. You go, girl.

BILL KRISTOL:

That seems like an intelligent ad. Let's talk about playing defense a little. It seems to me the two biggest problems she has with the 2019 position she took and that Democratic primary, why was that primary so crazy? I can't even remember how... I forgot until I saw one of these Republican ads, how frankly, nuts at all seemed.

And then I think the 2020 with the pick of Governor Walz, the 2020 riots in Minnesota, which were pretty bad honestly. I don't even understand it about this fund that she urged people to give money to bail people out. Anyway, make that, they're going to put the crime issue front and center, the Republicans, I believe like, today. How would you advise her to deal with that? Either 2019 and/or 2020.

JAMES CARVILLE:

There's a minor fact, and I would bring it up. The crime rate since Joe Biden and Kamala Harris's second office has plummeted. Yes, historic numbers. I don't quite know what you're talking about, but we took over a high crime country under the administration of Donald Trump, which by the way, became a high crime country under the administration of Donald Trump. I think we can definitely talk about that. The Democratic—parts of the Democratic Party, not Joe Biden, not Democratic primary voters, decidedly not—lost their minds. And everybody thought this was the wave of the future. The identity politics is being essential to any discussion of politics. And of course it was a giant mistake. She bought into that. As did other people. Whoever advised her in 2019, I hope to throw them all out in the Pacific Ocean. And to a guy like me, you could see this coming.

So I went backed and looked in April 27th, 2021, I did an interview on *Vox* and I said, "This stuff is killing us. This is the dumbest thing that you can imagine." And I'll give myself credit. I was right. I call "defund the police" the three stupidest words in the history of the English language. And of course no one's talking about it now. And that just everything that they touch turns to garbage. And I think people have caught onto them. And people say, "James, you say some controversial stuff." I said, "It's not controversial if 90% of the people agree with you. That's not. It's controversial when 51% agree with you."

BILL KRISTOL:

Yeah, because...

JAMES CARVILLE:

Go ahead.

BILL KRISTOL:

I know you said it to me in our first conversation, which was 2021, I think at the Amherst faculty lounge and all that, and people were all, gee, I could do something Amherst faculty Lounge in the English professors at Amherst. That was terrible of you to do that, James.

JAMES CARVILLE:

I thought it was actually a pretty good—

BILL KRISTOL:

It was good.

JAMES CARVILLE:

Pretty good way to drive it across.

BILL KRISTOL:

Does she have to almost explicitly say, "Look, I said these things in 2019."

JAMES CARVILLE:

Absolutely.

BILL KRISTOL:

"But I've learned in three and a half years in the White House... " Does she have to almost explicitly walk away from some of them?

JAMES CARVILLE:

Absolutely. And you live and you learn. I've learned. I've seen how global conflicts work. I've seen how domestic unrest works. I've seen these things and you can accuse me of growing. Right?

BILL KRISTOL:

That'd be good.

JAMES CARVILLE:

You can. One of my favorites was John Maynard Keynes said, "When the facts change, I changed my mind. What do you do?" You can sit there and argue forever. I just changed my mind. You might've argued in 2002 and Bill Clinton, I mean Hillary Clinton, Barack Obama would agree with you that gay marriage was a bad idea. Okay, I've changed my mind. He said, "Well, in 1997 you said this." Okay, fine. I don't think that anymore.

BILL KRISTOL:

It'd be interesting to see if she actually just says those words, "I've changed my mind." I think it would actually be effective and it would play into the notion or help the notion of making her campaign forward-looking, not relitigating, everything she ever said and not...

JAMES CARVILLE:

Knowing what I know about this office, if you talk to me four years from now, there are going to be some things I've changed from own also.

BILL KRISTOL:

Yeah.

JAMES CARVILLE:

You got to get out of it with some humanity and humor. But if you start explaining structural racism and police reform and community outreach, you're dead. At that point, you're dead. And by the way, Black Lives Matter is a real estate holding company, and they actually started with a pretty good idea. I mean, it's fair to say for 400 years there's been a concerted effort to dehumanize Blacks, particularly Black males. It just is. And when it started, I thought it had a... I had some sympathy for it. And then of course it was what it was... Eric Hoffer said, "Every

movement begins as a cause, morphs into a business and ends up a racket." They didn't take it long to get to the racket stage at all.

BILL KRISTOL:

So she has this little tour with the two of them for the next week. Then the convention. Anything special about the convention you would recommend? Not recommend? Biden will speak on the first night, I suppose, and exit, which is typically the way you do it with the outgoing incumbent president. I don't know, special message, special teams. What's the key thing to accomplish?

JAMES CARVILLE:

I think in the back of my mind, this convention should be about a plan is "we get you." And the more that it's like that... Also, I would say one thing, don't let it become a celebration of coastal culture. That's a real problem because everybody's going to want to be there. Everybody's going to be wanting to shoehorn in. Pick your speakers, pick your entertainment. I saw I was very pleased this morning, Wisconsin, apparently I'm going to keep up with music that much being we're older, but they got a Wisconsin rock band or indie band or something that's playing. That's cool.

Of course, you got Ben Wikler there. He's not going to let anything stupid happen, but just don't get overrun with Beyonce or Taylor Swift or anything like that. Not that Beyonce, Taylor Swift, anything wrong with them, but if you get people saying, "These people are all too cool for me, I can't fit in that," then you're going to lose. Just remember all of that. And Tim Walz is just an antidote against all of that kind of stuff. But we'll see. You should have a good convention. You'd have to really, really screw this up to have a bad one. You got too much going for you.

BILL KRISTOL:

But as you say, that's for all that we know her, she's not really well known. So you have the standard challenge, but also opportunity of a challenger of a way. I mean, we'll come to Trump in a minute, but he's kind of the incumbent in this scenario, it seems to me. And she's the less well-known challenger who has to define herself.

JAMES CARVILLE:

Correct.

BILL KRISTOL:

And Walz is a very little-known VP pick. He hasn't run for president himself the way other have or so forth. So it's a pretty undefined ticket, I'd say as these things go, which is both could be good or bad, right?

JAMES CARVILLE:

Yeah. And you got a chance to definition. What is the definition you put on this? Okay. You're exactly right. It goes back to the original point. She's not really that well known. And the first person to grab a paintbrush and start painting is going to be the memory. And we have a shot because it could be hard for them to break through.

BILL KRISTOL:

Are you surprised? I think the relative failure of the Trump campaign to define her negatively over these first two weeks... I mean, I kind of expected them to really come out of the box with stuff on her that from 2019, if only those, what she said then to really dump a lot of... spend a lot of money in the swing states. But maybe she's just had so much momentum that it didn't penetrate. She's had a very good two weeks. But do you agree that the Trump campaign's had a not very good two weeks?

JAMES CARVILLE:

This is why *The Bulwark* exists. Something is going on at Mar a Lago, I'm not sure what it is. That Black journalist thing? Some people actually think that was planned, but this guy, LaCivita, Susie Wiles, they're not stupid. I mean, they've won elections before. And what's coming out of there is... you're right, they don't know where to go. They let it get away from them. It was like they got hit in the... And they were totally... They didn't see this coming?

I mean, if you and I were running that campaign, I'd say, "Bill, three things can happen. Biden dropped out, it's Harris. Biden drops out, it's an open thing." But you would have a plan that you would pull off the shelf. You would be ready for that or you would anticipate it. From what little bit I can read, they were just standing there feeling good about themselves and then they got hit in the mouth and they didn't have... There was no concerted organized thought out reaction, which is pretty amazing. It really is.

BILL KRISTOL:

I guess it's a piece with the overconfidence that went with picking Vance at the Republican Convention. I mean, one thing is how fast it all happened. Trump assassination attempt, Saturday, was the 13th of July. Convention begins the 15th. Vance has picked the 15th. Trump gives a speech on the Thursday, Biden out on the Sunday, and people as late as that Wednesday, Thursday, I think I did [David Axelrod and Mike Murphy], we were all slightly down on the dumps that the move to persuade President Biden to step aside, which we've all been involved in, was not going to succeed. I actually was a little more optimistic, but people were... So to be fair to them, maybe they just assumed that Biden was going to be stubborn and Pelosi had no more cards to play and they could just count on that. I don't know. What do you think?

JAMES CARVILLE:

That's why *The Bulwark* exists. Or Tim Alberta, that's why Tim exists. I don't know, but certainly, it was in early July, I said, President Biden will not be up for reelection in 2024. Did I have inside information? No, but if you go in the New York Times and you say something in the first sentence of an op-ed, you got to have a lot of confidence in your thought process. And I did. I didn't think it was a way... At the end of the day when he snapped at Jason Crowe, I knew it was... And I said, "That's not who he is." And Jason Crow is... if there's anything that modern Democratic Party ought to be about, it should be Jason Crow.

BILL KRISTOL:

Right.

JAMES CARVILLE:

He's a prototype of what a modern Democrat should be. And I just think Biden was tired, older, cranky, and it was just a sign that he was going to eventually come around.

BILL KRISTOL:

Yeah, no, you were right. You told me, I remember, during the period that sort of the Herb Stein thing, what can't continue won't continue. I mean, I feel like that you always had more confidence that it would have to work itself out. It might take two or three weeks, which it did, but it did.

So let's assume that the Trump campaign got blindsided a little. I don't know, Trump himself seems a little rattled actually. I think by running against Harris, he really had internalized the notion he was going to get to beat up Biden and be the challenger against the incumbent for a long time. What now though? As you say, LaCivita and Susie, Wiles and Fabrizio know what they're doing. They're presumably trying to adjust. Maybe Trump can adjust. I don't know.

What do you think? How much has Trump sort of genuinely seem to have lost it a little bit? Not to give advice to the Trump campaign, but what should the Harris campaign be preparing for the Trump campaign to do? Because I think it would be also overconfident to assume they're going to be rattled for three months here, right?

JAMES CARVILLE:

The first thing you anticipate is obvious. They're going to put 2019 front and center. It's pretty clear. I mean, they'll get around to it, but they'll eventually get there. So I think, I hope this is going on. I have some reason to think it's a little bit more than a hope. Trump is like a guy with an act that worked brilliantly and then all of a sudden it didn't work as well. And you keep trying harder. You tell the same jokes and you tell them a little bit louder, you're a little more emphasis, but they don't have the same punch. And when you watch him, that rally in Georgia I think is significant because he didn't fill it up and he blamed Georgia State— a well-known liberal, coastal, elite institution. But the people were walking out and his reaction is, "I got to keep them. I'll just get crazier." And so he's like Brian Kemp. Okay, who's you know, Brian Kemp is Karl Rove's kind of wet dream of what a modern Republican should be. And he's just like savaging the guy. You could see he's trying to do anything he can to keep the crowd and keep them on their feet and keep them motivated. And like I say, he's an old comedian. Punchlines just don't work like they used to and he's just struggling.

BILL KRISTOL:

And do you think it'd be hard for him to regain his balance? I mean, it's hard to know, right?

JAMES CARVILLE:

All I can say is we need to do everything we can to keep him off his balance, not predict if he can get his balance back. And I think the debates are golden opportunities because he doesn't want to do it. He does not want do it. He's got too much at risk. It's a multiracial female that he's got to go against and Vance is going to have to debate Walz and Walz is going to... Pretty confident in Walz's position. And if I was Walz, I'd say, "Actually use a sofa to watch television on." But anyway. But I do think the argument over debates is pretty essential here to keeping Trump off guard. I do.

BILL KRISTOL:

Yeah. Develop that a little bit. Normally these debates about debates are kind of like endless things and then you end up agreeing or whatever. But do you think this is actually important for Harris to emphasize that she wants the debate? Should she actually accept the debate that's different from the ABC one that was originally set up?

JAMES CARVILLE:

So here we are and we have a normal conversation... August conversation about debate. It's something we forgot. Something actually happened on June 27th. It actually happened right in front of us. So there's just... Shall we say the debate awareness index is pretty high right now compared to normal? And this is not, "Let's get Jim Baker and [inaudible] and Frank Fahrenkopf and hammer out the rules yet." This is not where we are on this. And so you had an originally scheduled, let's say, September 4th, September 10th *ABC* debate that he's backed out of. And then he says he's going to debate on *Fox* as they're planned, but my idea is to say, "Good, let's debate on *Fox* on September 18th because that is the night of the day they got to sentence your fatass in Manhattan. So I'm going to make it convenient for you. You can just go right uptown from the Manhattan courthouse to *Fox* Studio. It's the night of the debate. It's right down sixth Avenue and you can have your debate."

And it says 90 minutes. And *Fox*, no matter what, they have a narrow operating range that they can operate on. They can't set you up that much. And if they do, you're going to win anyway.



And they know that. And plus, she has a great line to say, "Well, you paid three quarters of a billion dollars for a lie, why would I believe your question? But go ahead. Next you go, Brett." Okay, there's all kinds of... You have a lot in your tool kit. And then he... Now he's caught in a vice because he said he would do it on *Fox*. She said fine. She made the date specific. And I think that's the kind of infighting that you got to do. And I think it'd be pretty effective.

BILL KRISTOL:

Yeah, that sounds interesting. And then they end up debating, you think?

JAMES CARVILLE:

Eh... You know I'm not very good... It is going to be a lot of heat. It's going to give her... Giving your opponent an answer to everything. "Well, why didn't he say it to my face?" And she said that at first. That's something that we used in... "Hey, if you got something to say about me, you son of a bitch, say it to my face." You've heard that growing up. I mean that's as common as anything. It's particularly common in middle America. So as long as he does not debate her, she has a classic answer to anything that's thrown at her. And he's instinctive enough to realize this. He's got a lot to risk either way. I would much rather be her than him. And of course, she also has another kind of built in advantage. She'd kind of be judged against Biden's June the 27th performance, which is... It's pretty low bar. But I think the whole debate question is elevated and I think she has a pretty good position in it.

BILL KRISTOL:

Yeah, no, I hadn't really focused on that. I think it's really a good point. Of course, I'm aware that June 27th is the most consequential presidential debate in history at this point since it caused an actual change in candidates. But you're right. So there's, as you say, greater debate awareness in general, which gives her a chance to use the issue in a more maybe important way than... Typically, there's such tit-for-tat. It's totally trivial, I think, the effect of.. "You said you would debate there. Here, we should have three debates, not two."

JAMES CARVILLE:

Whatever it takes to chicken George out.

BILL KRISTOL:

Right.

JAMES CARVILLE:

But this is more... You can't use a historical benchmark to talk about this because debates have now taken on near legendary status in American politics.

BILL KRISTOL:

Yep. Speaking of historical benchmarks, so I mean, on the one hand, we've never seen an election like this in all kinds of ways, particularly Biden getting out. I was thinking about this the other day, and this is not a criticism, I think it's the first ticket in modern times since the modern primary system came into being where both candidates on one ticket, in this case on the Democratic ticket, and neither of them has ever gotten a vote in a Democratic primary for president, that is every race we've all been involved in or watched... In the early days, they only had a few primaries, Humphrey and all that. But still every nominee in both parties had gotten some primary votes, certainly from '72 on. '76 on, let's just say. And mostly had won the primaries. And then the VP nominees had often run and gotten at least some primary votes, especially if they were the losing candidate. Or Gore had run in '88 and then was picked in '92. So it just accentuates, I think, what uncharted waters we're in. I mean, we don't have...

JAMES CARVILLE:

Why don't you...? You should make a list. People that listen to this, make a list of all of this, "First time this happened in the 2024 election." First time somebody dropped out, first time they had a debate in June. So something tells me we're going to see a lot more first here. We're not done with first. We should have a running list of, "First time..." Blank. And it was the first... Very obvious, first time a woman's been ahead of a ticket or first time... I hate the term, woman of color, but that's okay. You're non... I don't have an objection to it. I just think it's such progressive arrogance to assume that everybody who is not white is the same.

BILL KRISTOL:

Right.

JAMES CARVILLE:

That's why it drives me crazy. But anyway, whatever, first non-Caucasian to ever be at the top of the ticket, first to never get a single primary vote. That's one of my favorite arguments that I got. I get this a lot. I like to do kind of right-wing media, unlike most people because it keeps me... It's good when you... In old age, they tell you to do these, you should play bridge and you should do... I go on there. They call it the Democratic Party, but it's Anti-Democrat. I said if anybody felt... If some democratic primary vote in Indiana is mad that their vote for Biden wouldn't count, I hadn't heard from him. If some donor said, "Well, there's actually one donor." "Well, good. Give him his money back." Okay, fine. The idea that... And it's always been a fascinating thing. The Republicans used to love to call us the Democrat Party.

BILL KRISTOL:

Right.

JAMES CARVILLE:

I think I told the story but I'll repeat because it was good. It was Clayton Yeutter, who was the chairman of the RNC, was the first who called it the Democratic Party. And they asked him why. And he said, "Well, a political party has a right to be called what it wants to be called," which seemed like a kind of reasonable thing that a polite guy from Nebraska would say. I mean, you call people what you want, but that argument is beyond silly. But it is interesting, they never got a vote.

BILL KRISTOL:

Yeah. What attacks on Trump are most effective in your judgment? There's been... Democracy does work. It doesn't work. Weird works, it doesn't work. I don't know, the numbers that spooked me and I think you and Sosnick and others was retrospectively, people think they were better off under the Trump presidency. That's a bit of an uphill climb if that number stays the way it is, I guess. But anyway, just what would your two or three points be?

JAMES CARVILLE:

I would have three attacks. You ready? Drum roll, please. One, past. Two, yesterday. Three, stale. Okay.

BILL KRISTOL:

Yeah. Yeah, those sounds familiar to each. It sounded like one attack, not three attacks.

JAMES CARVILLE:

Okay. Yeah, that's called the idea that you're—

BILL KRISTOL:

I got the point. That was quick of me.

JAMES CARVILLE:

...saying three things but you're saying one thing because... The political science department at UMass, Amherst is actually pretty good. And they do a very good poll, like I do. They release it over the week. It is good. "The reasons to vote for Harris," you have to look at it. Protect Social Security, Medicare, 32. Will fight for reproductive rights, 32. Represents the future, 66. So just take the obvious, which is he is yesterday, he wants to go back. I want to push forward. Don't get distracted from what the public really thinks about this.

BILL KRISTOL:

Yeah, no, I actually talked about that UMass poll, I guess, in the newsletter yesterday or something, because I thought it's more helpful than a lot of others. It just seems to ask the questions intelligently about issues and stuff. And it shows Harris up three now, which seems to be about where things may be, which I guess—

JAMES CARVILLE:

That gives you some confidence. It's certainly not outside of any... It's right in... But the questions are really worth taking a look at because it gives you a little bit more... It's deeper... I think these are, sounds like an oxymoron, but really talented political scientists.

BILL KRISTOL:

There you go. So this is your version of change of...? What was the '92 slogan?

JAMES CARVILLE:

“Change versus more of the same.”

BILL KRISTOL:

And you think that—?

JAMES CARVILLE:

I would say change versus going, but yesterday versus tomorrow because he's not in, but you want to project him as stale, part of the same thing that keeps not producing... Anything like that.

BILL KRISTOL:

But going back I think is a key.

JAMES CARVILLE:

Yeah. Going back is the advantage.

BILL KRISTOL:

Going forward.

JAMES CARVILLE:

We don't want to go back. We don't want to push forward.

BILL KRISTOL:

Yeah. Now for all the change and uncharted waters, we still have an electoral college. And I suppose... Well, tell me mean, do you have any controversial or not obvious views on which states matter or the Midwest versus the Sunbelt and all that kind of stuff?

JAMES CARVILLE:

Nothing changes math. And the math is you got to win Pennsylvania, Michigan, and Wisconsin. I think Georgia has tightened up... Actually, I think North Carolina much bigger opportunity than people think because I think there could be some negative coattails with the governor's gubernatorial candidate there. Obviously Arizona is more competitive. Maybe the state that traditionally votes Republican I feel better about is North Carolina. The state that has traditionally voted democratic that I don't feel as good as I should is Nevada. Now I take the swab.

BILL KRISTOL:

Yep, yeah.

JAMES CARVILLE:

But the insurance policy is Pennsylvania, Michigan, Wisconsin. And I do think that Walz brings some comfort level to—I don't think direct, but—to the kind of upper Midwest, which is really critical. But math doesn't change. I'm involved with a group. We raised over \$100,000,000 and we concentrate on 77 counties in Pennsylvania, Michigan and Wisconsin. None of them, Philadelphia, Detroit or Milwaukee. And if we can keep cut the margins, I think we can win those states. We did it, it worked in 2020 and I have every reason to believe it can help in 2024, but it's not going to change. Let's understand one thing, math is still a viable topic here.

BILL KRISTOL:

Say a word about that. Not so much the project, but just the thinking behind the project. Because I think it's such an important point that I'm amazed how many people don't get it. Intelligent people who follow politics, which is they sort of think, "Well, you're losing this county so you got to focus on the other counties." But of course, a vote you pick up in a statewide, this isn't true of congressional districts, but in a statewide race, losing... If you had two counties the same size, let's just do it like that to make it easy. Picking up a point in the county you're losing 66/34 counts exactly the same as picking up a point in the county you're winning 80/20, right? I mean, you know—

JAMES CARVILLE:

It actually is more, I'll tell you. So, I'll go through the thinking, but you're dead on, spot on. What we would do is we were very much into finding videos of Trump. We wanted to be the John Stewart video vault archive, and what we realized is that it really didn't matter that much. So, then we sat down and we would look at Cambria County, Pennsylvania and Hillary lost it, I don't have exact numbers right in front of me. Maybe she lost 78/22. And we said, "Man, if we could lose this thing 74/26 in Blair County and Luzerne County," and you go through the whole laundry list of them, then you would really in effect change sea level.

That was our total thinking and that we could get much more bang for... So, if you think about it, you pull out a new voter in Philadelphia, you net one vote. You get a Trump 2016 voter in Cambria County and they become a Biden 2020 voter, you actually net two votes. The math works in your favor. And we were able... In most of our donations are pretty high-end people, a lot of them in finance, and they understand that. I'd say, "Look, if you've got 10 things and you got four underperforming assets, it's pretty good if you get one of them to perform a little less worse." That's what we're trying to of.

BILL KRISTOL:

Right. Less underperformance counts just as much in the stock market as better or overperformance, right?

JAMES CARVILLE:

Exactly. Exactly.

BILL KRISTOL:

That's a good way of putting it.

JAMES CARVILLE:

When you're fortunate enough to have people that understand that and can explain it, it's a valuable thing because most people want to just give money to Amy McGrath or fund something that they like. A Detroit voter registration project, which I have nothing against. I'm all for Detroit voter registration projects, but that's what other people would do. It's not what we do. We're kind of a one-trick pony kind of people.

BILL KRISTOL:

Let me ask you one, maybe close with this. In our previous conversation... Actually, the two we had where you were worried about Biden, you commented that he seemed to be holding the older white voters okay, but there was massive erosion among younger voters and Black and Hispanic voters I think. Harris changed that equation much? Does she have a challenge with the older white voters? Does she still hold them? How does that work?

JAMES CARVILLE:

Look, she has a potential to hold them or most of them, but what she does really have advantage. We had John Della Volpe on our podcast last week. He was a Harvard youth survey guy, which actually in spite of being from your alma mater, it's actually quite good.

BILL KRISTOL:

Right. No, they do a pretty good, they do a pretty big survey of young voters, right?

JAMES CARVILLE:

Yeah. And he said that there's real changes, that there is. And I believe it. And I think the upside of getting more under-30, more non-whites, particularly Blacks, excited is considerably better than the downside is, is that some of the older voters who Biden, may not vote or back off a little bit, but that's an exchange I'd be happy to make.

BILL KRISTOL:

And also if they were already for Biden, I kind of doubt that they'd desert a Harris ticket.

JAMES CARVILLE:

I don't think so.

BILL KRISTOL:

I know if they already had gone to Trump, which of course many of them have, maybe Biden could have gotten a couple more back, which Harris won't get. But yeah, I'm inclined to think that she... And I suppose Walz, I mean I wasn't crazy about that pick, but I think you could

argue he helps with that demographic actually, right? I mean, he's the most Biden-like VP candidate I guess, of the ones who were in the picking.

JAMES CARVILLE:

So, Harris went more with the Obama model than the Clinton model.

BILL KRISTOL:

Yeah, that's a good way of putting it.

JAMES CARVILLE:

Okay. We kind of went generational. She sort of went steady governance. But I tell you, the people that I know in Minnesota that know him... Apparently, just from the Democratic point of view, he's been very effective and is kind of what you see. And I personally liked Shapiro a lot, would call him a friend of mine, but it would've been a San Francisco-Philadelphia ticket. If you know, that is always kind of bothered me that we are a little too coastal. And it's fresh water, they decided on fresh water and not salt water. And it is basically that simple I think. But my number one pick would've been Beshear, but so be it.

BILL KRISTOL:

Yeah, I feel like that gets you a lot of the... but, whatever.

JAMES CARVILLE:

It gets you a [inaudible]. But Walz, I'm so on this train and blowing the whistle and we'll rolling. This is the choice and let's roll.

BILL KRISTOL:

Final question. Speaking of VP candidates, I have a hunch that Vance could hurt actually the Trump ticket a little more than people think. Normally, VPs don't matter much as we've been... I think that's the conventional wisdom, except maybe for '92 I think where you guys were helped by the Gore pick. And '80, which I do think Bush helped Reagan as a kind of taking the edge off the charge of extremism. But do you agree that Vance is weird enough to use Walz's term that it not only doesn't help Trump but could actually hurt him?

JAMES CARVILLE:

Well, I do because I don't think we're through finding out things about JD Vance. Okay. As I say, I think there are more shoes in that closet. And like today he gave a book blurb to Jack Posobiec.

BILL KRISTOL:

Oh, that guy. Yeah.

JAMES CARVILLE:

I mean, all right, this is some [inaudible] stuff, dude. Let me tell you. And I know people ask me to do a book blurb and I'm very generous about book blurbs. No, this is like, you do the basic stuff. So somebody say, "Hey, James. I'm professor of political science at UCSD, and can you do a book blurb?" And I'll look up the guy and okay, he looks all right. Sure. It's a thrilling book. You should read it. It's full of insight and everybody's done that shit. Okay? We all know that, but man, this is a bridge too far.

And I just think you're going to keep finding... Because I kind of think that's who he is. And he's really into this crazy... Look, I think the people that say we need higher birth rates actually

have a point. I'm not a guy that just dismisses, but how you achieve it and what else you do and everything else is kind of a, to say to least, a delicate subject. And they want to have some kind of a religious... They do, I'm sorry.

And the guy that has been most influential in all this is a guy from Baton Rouge named Rod Dreher. And the press pays too little attention to Rod because he's very there on that kind of nationalistic... He lives in Hungary now, [inaudible] about. But Rod is very, as you know in that world, because you had to deal with it more than most people had to deal with, he's really, really influential. And that's a lot of that kind of thinking that you would have some basically three-child policy.

BILL KRISTOL:

Yeah, I agree. And the religious nationalist stuff and the intolerance and the mean-spiritedness. I just felt like all that... Trump gets away with a ton because as you said earlier, it's a shtick and people kind of assume, he doesn't quite believe a lot of it and he's irresponsible and all that. But Vance, it's like DeSantis, right? I mean, it's sort of, you get the unattractive side of Trump without any of the stuff taking the edge off, it feels like to me.

JAMES CARVILLE:

And other thing you just know there's more behind that door. You know we're not through.

BILL KRISTOL:

All right. James, you got to go. I got to go.

JAMES CARVILLE:

Yes, sir.

BILL KRISTOL:

This has been terrific, very insightful. Hopefully, I assume Vice President Harris will be watching it when we release it tomorrow when she's on the road there with Governor Walz. She has a little time. And we will get back together and see how we stand in a month, I guess.

JAMES CARVILLE:

I'm confident somebody will bring it up to her. I don't know if she'll watch it, but—

BILL KRISTOL:

Well, a summary. That's what staff are for, the best of the conversation. You know?

JAMES CARVILLE:

One of the great joys of this campaign is people I've worked against all my life, I've come to work with and spent time with. And watching the Olympics, and I love... One of the things about if you play sports, the good thing about running track is you see the same people all the time. When you're warming up for a race, you're actually shooting the bull with a guy. And when you play football, you just see somebody through a helmet, you don't see them.

It's what I like about politics. We're kind of like track athletes. We all kind of hang out together and get to know each other and that kind of stuff. But we still—

BILL KRISTOL:

It's been a pleasure for me—

JAMES CARVILLE:

—want to win.

BILL KRISTOL:

Yeah, a pleasure for me too, but let's win. I think that would be good too.

JAMES CARVILLE:

Absolutely. Yes, sir. That's right.

BILL KRISTOL:

Make it even more of a pleasure.

JAMES CARVILLE:

Thank you, Bill.

BILL KRISTOL:

James Carville. James, thank you for joining me and thank you all for joining us on *Conversations*.

JAMES CARVILLE:

Thank you. Thank you.