

CONVERSATIONS

WITH BILL KRISTOL

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BILL KRISTOL:

Hi, welcome back to *Conversations*. I'm Bill Kristol. Very pleased to be joined today—I think this is our third conversation together—by AB Stoddard, a veteran correspondent and analyst of Congress, I suppose primarily maybe, but really all things Washington and all things political and an observer of Trump from the beginning and not a fan of Trump from the beginning. I think it's very fair to say, AB, but also very much on the mark. I think really so much of what you wrote and said over these last several years has stood up so well and being... understanding the radicalism of what a Trump second term would look like. But I don't want to put words in your mouth so you can tell us about that. But first, welcome back, AB.

AB STODDARD:

It's great to be with you, Bill. Thank you.

BILL KRISTOL:

You were alarmed. You thought the second term would be different from the first term. We discussed this ourselves. I remember talking to you right after election day, but what are we now in since election day? It's been November, December, January, February, March, five months. What strikes you, what surprised you?

AB STODDARD:

Well, when I was on Fox News panels in 2015 and 2016 and we were talking about the rise of Trump first, of course it wasn't taken seriously and our late great friend, Charles Krauthammer, I believe, called him a rodeo clown. So he was dismissed, but as he made gains, I continued to make the point that he would not ever hold the national interest in regard and that he didn't believe in a constitution or the courts or the Congress in separation of powers, and it was dismissed at the time as, “Well, this is sort of his style, right? Isn't it fun, like the apprentice-y businessman, he wants it to be the Trump org, and that's great. That's how he runs his family business. Oh, well that's kind of his style.” And at the time, I could sense the danger in that, and if you really had watched his pathologies to put it mildly, it was clear that that would become very dangerous and that we were not, the US government was not to be his vanity project.

And in the end he wins. You and I talked at length between '17 and '20. It was clear that he was trying to make the case, lay the pretense for the election to be stolen through the post office and other means should he lose. And we were talking at the time about the lack of alarm from people like John Kelly and Jim Mattis and very serious people who'd been around him, some of whom had already left about what a second term would be like. What if he won? What if he beat Biden? What if he left NATO? What else would he do? Because without the pressures of reelection, he had many clear plans in mind and then other ones that we suspected would be incredibly destructive. And that didn't seem to be a conversation that was sort of clouded by Covid and the American people were in a panic. In the end, Biden prevails, Trump says it's stolen, but we knew that a second term of Trump would be drastically different than the first, and then for him to come back, I just knew that if Biden stuck it out and wouldn't leave the race, wouldn't give the voters another viable option soon enough, which of course he did not. And he turned out to be a man of much more hubris than I believed in '21 and '22. He gives Trump this opportunity. The voters have him —Biden—because of his age. Everyone believes that Ron DeSantis is going to rise up and vanquish Trump. I knew that wouldn't happen. You knew that wouldn't happen. And Trump wins the nomination. And then of course he's on track

to win this election, and at that point it was so clear in '23, '24 that if he was given the powers of the presidency again by the voters after he tried to steal an election and overthrow the government, there would be nothing that he wouldn't try absolutely nothing. Did I know how organized it would be by the Heritage Foundation, Russ Vought, current OMB director and the project 2025? No, at that point, I didn't know how specific the plans would be, how shrewd and keen the organization was, but I knew his impulses would be that there would be nothing he wouldn't trample, steal, corrupt take for himself. So the thing that I'll finish with, Bill, is that I am not surprised by the force of what we've seen. I am only surprised by the speed.

BILL KRISTOL:

Interesting. Yeah, I'd say two things and then you're free to comment on one. Yeah, I think maybe, I mean I was always very conscious of the guardrails in the first term, the internal guardrails. I spoke to some of those people before they went in and at that time I didn't urge them, but I agreed with their decision to go in. I wasn't one of those who criticized from the outside when John Kelly and Jim Mattis and John Bolton and people like that went in because I thought, and they did constrain him. We didn't quite know as much of course about Washington. He was surprised to have won. It was easier to push back and there were a lot of people pushing back at once. People underestimate that, I think. That I had a feel for having been in government. If you have Pompeo and Bolton and Esper, and they're all telling you in different ways, "You can't quite do this." You can be a tough guy as Trump likes to think he is or have a few other people on the outside saying go for it, but it's just hard practically to pull that off. But the self-confidence that came from coming back after January 6th, crushing his opponents to the Republican primary, probably maybe the failed assassination attempt. I don't know, I assume he's not religious enough to think he really was saved by God, but it certainly gave him some greater sense maybe of destiny or something and then deciding he wanted to run on the real America First, the real Heritage Project 2025 platform. I mean, all that I think just has made the second term so different from the first term, both in theory, in intention, you might say, but also in practice because of those guardrails.

And then—I'll just add one thing to what you said is getting, two things and then you talk, please. Getting these people who were so unqualified as nominees and so radical as nominees, Kash Patel as director of the FBI, I mean, no one's ever heard of anything like that really, or obviously the Pete Hegseth as Sec Def... literally incomparable to anyone we've had in that position. Getting them through I think also gave him another shot in the arm. Daring to nominate them was bold, but then I don't know, maybe he sort of thought deep down one or two won't make it, but I'll show that I tried. Getting them all through and then Musk, I guess is the other wild card that showed up. So anyway, don't you think that somehow all of this together—feel free to disentangle or correct my entanglement there—but has just put us in a very different place than even we thought we might be. I think on November 5th,

AB STODDARD:

Right. I would look at three things. So I think that the one thing those of us at *The Bulwark* who were predicting doom were definitely only caught off guard by the Elon factor. We knew that loyalists would come in and replace people of expertise and integrity and ethics, and it would be filled with people who were nihilists and inexperienced and just only loyal to Trump, ready to trample parts of the government without a second thought in service to his whims. Also, and this was, I tried to make this clear as much as I could in 2024, whether in things I wrote or in speeches I gave, pre-pardoned so that they could carry out any illegal or unconstitutional order. So very, very dangerous who he would bring in the second time learning from the mistakes of the resistance he faced internally in the first term.

Then those nominees, I agree with you, I think he thought that he wouldn't get them all through. It's kind of a wild card. In negotiations, you go crazy with your first offer expecting to lose it, and that gets you crazy light in your second choice. So that's really not what happened. Republicans folded. It empowered Trump, but now that I've listened to Anne Applebaum, who had recently described Victor Orbán's breaking down of all of the different components of Hungary that would help him concentrate and centralize power, you see that it is textbook,

right? The speed surprised to me. I knew he would do all these things, but it really helps once he got those nominees in place, and that was a real victory to see the Republicans fold that quickly. Watching him go after universities, the free press, sort of everything at once, and then you combine Elon, this X factor we didn't expect. A co-president, an outsider, technically an illegal immigrant to this country, come in... the biggest government contractor that we have and just take data if he wants it for his AI company—that he hopes will surpass Sam Altman's, 'cause he hates him—rampaging through, firing people, cutting valuable programs, not leaving a record, not making the case for why it's efficient to cut these things. That was so unexpected. But now that I see it stepping back a bit, I see that it is part of an intentional formula that if you destabilize the populace that rapidly and you could produce that much chaos, you're desensitizing them that much faster to do whatever you want as quickly as you want. So what I thought he would do, which would be give us medium doses of chaos over a certain period of time, definitely create a kleptocracy, definitely corrupt as many institutions and eviscerate as much trust as he could as soon as he could. But what I thought was going to be a more measured schedule... Now I see how effective it is because as soon as you carpet bomb with all of these disruptions and acts of destruction, the sooner the populace is sort of desensitized. And so now that I watch people teaching us more about Orbán, I'm reading more closely, I see that that's actually was smart to create that many explosions that fast.

BILL KRISTOL:

Well, yeah, let's come back to the smart question. Maybe he also was a little too aggressive and we'll see whether the resistance is a little... could be stronger because of the attempt to shock at all and a bit of a reaction to it. But I mean, two things I guess strike me. I'd be curious for your thoughts. On the one hand, I'd say he's gotten further in eviscerating the rule of law than even I expected he would be able to do so quickly. I mean we just have lost even the pretense that we're going to have a justice department that holds anyone in the Trump administration, certainly the Trump White House, but I'd say elsewhere in the administration, accountable and it is entirely now about punishing his enemies and rewarding his friends. So we're so far beyond a little bit of tweaking at the edges and some past administrations where of course your AG is a little nicer maybe to you or people in your party than the other party, but actually a pretty big effort since Watergate, I would say, to almost not do that and to bend over backwards.

I think almost literally every administration since Watergate has had a special counsel appointed by the Attorney General or the Deputy Attorney General, if the attorney general recused himself. Even Trump's first term, right? I'm thinking of this... What strikes me is how radical it is... in the first term, Trump still felt constrained enough that he had to have a special counsel to look into the firing of Comey, and then Sessions felt old fashioned enough to recuse himself and Rosenstein appoints Mueller and Trump doesn't really quite have the nerve to fire him, and there's an actual special counsel report, leave aside Bill Barr and stuff for minute. But still. to even say those words, "special counsel report," there's the Signal text scandal that broke last week. I mean, I'm so struck in the coverage of that that no one even said, "well, gee, I mean maybe the Justice Department needs to look into that. The FBI, they need to have a special task force. Maybe not a special counsel, but some people who look into career people see what happened here." I mean, that's all so gone and I mean the implications of that for four years I think are pretty horrifying. Second thing is too much, but you can do both.

So that I kind of expected, but I'd say the speed of it, I agree with you, is astonishing and dangerous in my opinion. Second thing is the assault on just the basic other parts of government that Trump had no particular problem with in his first term. Trump was not a libertarian, he wasn't reading books about... Cato Institute studies about how government was too big. He didn't particularly care much about that. And so far as one could tell, he even had a standard business type approach. Well, they waste a lot of money. On the other hand, he presumably does care about curing diseases and stuff, or at least isn't against it. The evisceration of CDC and NIH... that I really find slightly mysterious. He's not a rabble-rousing populist who thinks everyone with a degree as an idiot. He's proud of his own degrees, his own family, didn't he have some uncle at MIT... I mean, I sort of expected Trump... he might not like Fauci of course and all that, but to go in more of a conventional direction, you might say, of putting in

people loyal to him, but trying not to just destroy these agencies, letting Musk do that. I guess it's centralizes power, personalizes power to get rid of all these people of independent standing, but it's a little bit risky. It seems to me. Anyway, so rule of law side of things and the kind of, I'm going to call it the NIH... to shorthand it, the NIH, but Social Security Administration. He was president for four years. He didn't think we have to get rid of a whole bunch of social security offices because it's somehow wasting money. It's an unbelievably tiny amount of money, and if it keeps his voters happy and they can go get their benefits fixed, and if something goes wrong by going to some office, well, that's a pretty small price to pay. So the rule of law side I'm curious about, and then the kind of eviscerating-of-government side.

AB STODDARD:

Trump has been very clear since he came on the stage in 2015 that he is a transactional guy, very interested in a deep safety net. He didn't want to take anybody's benefits away from them, be it Medicare, social security. He was the anti-Paul Ryan/Mitt Romney ticket. He basically... we're going to have a debt bomb, but he figures he'll be gone, and he's called himself the king of debt. He doesn't care about any of this. So it is very interesting that there is now kind of this resurgence of just a few—maybe three of them—republicans in Congress who have relocated their fiscal rectitude and feel that we need to be told about how just unsustainable this is, that we borrow money from other people and we can't go on like this, subsidizing businesses on and on. That's why we have to have tariffs, whatever. I don't believe in the end that Trump is on board for enacting deep Medicaid cuts and really eviscerating social security, but I believe that he believes that Elon is very helpful to him.

And so if there are a few broken bodies, a few burned out cars on this rampage, oh, well, it'll all just get cleaned up later. And he continues to do that propaganda stuff, which is, oh, there's so much bloat in the government. We had to do this. I mean, there'll be a few hardships, but we got to clean this up. And as far as the rule of law, I really truly did... Anyway, so I don't believe in the end he's on board for entitlement reform and I think that will be an issue down the road, but right now people are trying to all sing from the same hymn book. As for the rule of law, I did expect the Justice Department to be this corrupted immediately and to use it as a show of force and dominance and to try to scare people that he wouldn't even be subtle about it.

I expect 5:00 AM raids with 20 cop cars outside the houses of people I won't name. Once they can pull together a “case” against them. I think that he relishes that. That's really what drives him the most is using the Justice Department to go after his enemies because of course he believed that the Biden administration weaponized the system against him because he was actually held to account for his crimes to an extent, and then ultimately not because he was spared in time for the election. But what surprises me, Bill, is that the rest of the rule of law has... a lot of judges are stopping a lot of the government efficiency stuff and the Elon rampage in the name of DOGE. But it's up, it's down, it's hard to keep track of. We don't know which ones in the end will be actually blocked in the long term. It's a lot of injunctions, et cetera. But the law firms, the idea that people once had someone who crossed Trump on their staff or still do, and so they have to fold to him and give him millions and millions of dollars in pro bono work, and he's relishing, he's just bragging about how easy it is to bend them and the universities and they're all saying, “yes sir, what's next?” That, of course, I didn't expect. And that has gone much more smoothly for him, I think, than he thought it would.

BILL KRISTOL:

Yeah. Well, let's talk about that. We've talked about Trump. What about the resistance to Trump? I agree, none of us... I bet you could Google a million articles about a Trump second term and never see the term “law firms.” That was not on people's radar screen that he's also going to go punish them, try to damage their business, threaten them existentially, the Paul Weiss guy claimed, and also get tens of millions of dollars of pro bono work that's friendly to him. Universities maybe we expected that a little more, I suppose. The businesses, not big tech stuff, we've all just taken that for granted now, but that was a big deal when it happened right after the election and pretty... Zuckerberg, Bezos, pretty striking. I mean, maybe we'll get to

the Democratic party itself, the more political side of things in a few minutes, but what have we learned about America in terms of the resistance?

AB STODDARD:

Well, yeah, we'll get to Democrats afterwards. I see sort of the population and then the institutions of law, of acting, yeah.

BILL KRISTOL:

That's a good distinction...

AB STODDARD:

And they're different. I feel that we've seen with the law firms always and others, a lot of hands in the air saying, we're trying to protect our business. We had no choice. You've mentioned this in recent conversations. I mean, what am I going to do? Always the back against the wall. And then there's been preemptive cowering because of these other examples like, well, that'll be me next, and I have shareholders, or I have a board or whatever, and I gotta pay my employees, and so I have to survive. It is really difficult, in terms of watching the authoritarian model, to watch people capitulate so soon because the sooner they do, the more we'll see. The longer we might not be able to stop Trump's destruction of institutions, he's going to do what he can to deplete trust in them, but the sooner he cripples them, the harder it'll be for other outliers to try to stand up.

You have to hang together as long as you can and then break, not break first. And so that's really... it's very powerful, their inability to unite, refusal to plan for this. Maybe the law firms didn't see it coming. Obviously, the Democratic Party, in my view, completely wasted the transition and knew what was coming. But these institutions really needed to band together because that's the only strength you have is in numbers, and they didn't. So that was sort of a shock. I feel among the public... people that I speak to who are not in politics, they are anti-Trump, a lot of them, but not focused on the day-to-day. So they're seeing on their phones, phones, Elon does something crazy, four days later, they're seeing on the phones that a judge maybe stopped part of it. They're just going on with their lives. They know that prices are not going down, they don't like that. They know that the Social Security administration is no longer getting it someone on the phone with their grandfather or father. They don't like that. They don't like tariffs. They don't like, they're really focused on prices and essential services, but they're not focused, in my view yet, on the attack on our freedoms. And so they are not focused on free speech violations. They're not focused on due process violations, on what, not only the deportations to Venezuelans to El Salvador mean, but what it means when somebody is snatched, nonviolent, non-criminal and just sent to Louisiana without due process. I don't see a popular reaction and a voter reaction to that yet. So that, of course, my conversations are anecdotal. His polling is down to 42 in some surveys, but I don't know that there's such a backlash to that yet. Wisconsin judicial race could look like the exception. We could see more of that— voters reacting in these special elections and really turning out because of energized by fury. But I'm not really seeing a mass reaction to the totality of it, and I think that's worrisome.

BILL KRISTOL:

Yeah, we're speaking, just to be clear, Wednesday, April 2nd, the day after the Wisconsin race, we're speaking a few hours before Trump's...

AB STODDARD:

“Liberation Day.”

BILL KRISTOL:

...tariffs announcement, we'll get to it in a second. But yeah, I do think it's a bit of a chicken and egg thing. I mean, the law firms collapse because they see Trump still at 45, 46% maybe in some of these polls, and they think he's got Republican Congress. And then when the law firms collapse, I think people think, "Well, geez, if these big institutions, universities, law firms are going along with Trump, I guess there's some truth to what he's doing. It's not so dangerous. They wouldn't do it if it were really dangerous." So I think it's a bit of a spiral there of lack of alarm. What do you think about— do you think the more practical effects, let's assume tariffs have some negative economic effects, either inflationary or recessionary or both, I suppose, and let's assume that people can't get their social security questions answered and that sort of thing. Republicans, I guess, are going to try to cut some spending, some pretty basic Medicare/Medicaid-type spending in the budget. I mean, do you think normal politics kicks in at that point and maybe Trump is less popular six months from now?

AB STODDAR:

I do. I do think that there's going to be a real erosion in essential services that you can fire the nuclear guys and rehire them, but what we're looking at particularly with just this week at HHS. HHS is a 13-department agency. I was listening to former HHS secretary, Kathleen Sebelius described this, that they didn't make a plan about their reductions. They have no idea who's under them. They have no idea what these programs do at the state level, the local level, tribal levels. She's described it as a birth to death. A government agency that touches our lives in ways that we're not thinking about and we don't even know. But that clearly the leadership that Robert F. Kennedy Jr. And the leadership of HHS doesn't realize. So there will be a rolling backlash to all of this, I believe, and the tariffs are going to put the Republicans in a very difficult position. When he says on the one hand, "Oh, we're going to basically bail us out of debt because tariffs are going to produce all this revenue," but the next day people are getting waivers and exemptions after they've been on the phone with him... You can't use them as a revenue source and then play whack-a-mole with the tariffs, which is what he's done so far. And so there's so much uncertainty that... I see businesses really suffering because the tariff might look bad on Wednesday, better than following Monday, but they can't make their plans. Consumers, the same. When do I buy a car? When do I sign this lease? How do I move forward? The tariffs go up, they go down. And then I think politically it brings real pain to Republicans where the hardest hit states will be red and they're kind of anti tariff but in his cross hairs. Only a few of them have spoken out this week and he's already been crapping on them on his social media site by name, including Rand Paul from Kentucky, first standing up and saying, this is going to hit the consumer. So I see, I think the normal politics will creep in terms of the tariffs combined with the program cuts in the months to come. I don't know where that leads us, but I think that, I don't know that it helps the Democratic party who doesn't have a leader. I don't know what it does to Trump who's planning to stay in a third term, but I know that it'll cause his disapproval to rise and Republicans to be feeling some pain.

BILL KRISTOL:

Oh, that's interesting. You've already mentioned HHS and Robert F. Kennedy Jr. I guess I didn't even mention him earlier in the unbelievable cascade of confirmations... Patel and Bondi I think are awful. But you could see from a party loyalty point of view maybe why some of the Republican senators— she's the Florida AG, Patel worked on The Hill, Hegseth, someone they all knew from Fox. They had no such reason to confirm Robert F. Kennedy Jr. He'd been a Democrat until yesterday and sort of on the left insofar as he had political views and hostile to a lot of the groups that the Republicans and the Senate like, like the drug companies and pharmaceutical companies and so forth. And to say nothing of NIH and people who— major parts of the government that fund institutions that are important to a lot of these members and their states, and the idea that they just confirmed him and the journal was sort of against him... They were worried about him, but they didn't really go to the mattress on it. And then suddenly now it's like, oh my God, he's our worst fears. I mean, are we sufficiently appreciative of the fact that this lunatic is the secretary of HHS and is not, contrary to what people sort of thought, has not pulled back at all? And I mean, I'm a little freaked out about this. I have sort of secondary family relations, mostly on Susan's side, in medical and research science world. And

I actually know some people in that world too from around here and New York, and I mean, this is bad, they think. And they're not hysterics. And incidentally, a lot of them have been critical of NIH... It's a bureaucracy, they don't always fund the right things. They have the usual gripes you have with big government agencies, but the degree of damage that's being done, and maybe voters don't understand if research on Parkinson's gets slowed down or eviscerated because you don't see the effect, exactly. You know what I mean? You don't see the progress that's not made. It's not like social security office being closed, but I really wonder how much that's going to percolate out through sort of Republican-ish voting groups, right? Physicians, executives and pharma companies. I don't know. I am a little struck that people may be underestimating that side of things. Do you think that's possible?

AB STODDARD:

I do. This is going to affect a lot of people in the months to come in ways that they yes, don't yet realize. Look, it was very interesting how much Trump and his lieutenants made clear to Republican senators that Tulsi Gabbard, a former Democrat, and RFK junior, a former Democrat, were politically a very important part, a prize for Trump in his reelection. An important part of building a broader coalition that would win him reelection and win over nonpartisan voters, non MAGA people who are basically reluctant or nonvoters, to really build up enough of his numbers. And so it was very important to him that they be confirmed. And watching Bill Cassidy, a serious man, senator from Louisiana, a doctor, struggle with that vote, knowing that RFK Jr has really promoted quack science and conspiracies for a long time. That he's anti-vaccine... Bill Cassidy's on the fence... was really, you could really see him turning himself into a pretzel and he ends up supporting him and now is going to call him before his committee to talk about all the firings and he's upset and concerned. That was all predictable. RFK Junior is a really troubled guy and really an unstable person who also just spews falsehoods. And so this was not something to take a chance on. All of this was predictable, and it's really quite enraging. Jonathan Rauch, who's a very well-known writer and will be known to people who listen to this, famously posted around 10 days ago that he had a friend who drove two hours for her breast cancer chemotherapy treatments that were part of an NIH trial only to arrive at the location to be told without any phone call or warning that it had been canceled. And there was no future plans for any new protocols or any new treatments for her. And this kind of thing is going to ripple out through people's lives, people who have kids with special needs, people who have diabetes, whatever it is. Like you said, maybe they don't have Parkinson's yet and they don't know how much forward-looking, extremely necessary research and development is going to be scrapped, trials, projects. But we have the people who track measles outbreaks, the people who track salmonella outbreaks and recall the food. I mean, these people are just going to just disappear and this is going to be felt in the next year and it's incredibly, incredibly dangerous.

BILL KRISTOL:

Yeah, no, I'm kind of in more of a state. I'm still most in A state I suppose about the rule of law stuff. I just think it's, but this is very bad too. So it's such a multi-pronged assault. And again, some of it you can't... Rule of law stuff, you can see why Trump wants to do that. This I am slightly mystified by in the sense that why isn't in his political interest to spend more money on fighting cancer? I mean, that's sort of a classic. If you look at the other demagogues and authoritarians, they actually often do spend a fair... they try to be the person who's vaguely in favor of kind of solving these kinds of problems. They're not ideological problems and they can throw money at it. What do they care? So anyway, but it is striking that he' so... Elon in this respect may be doing damage politically to Trump and as well as to the country, who knows. But what about the Democrats? They're the opposition party. They should be blowing, calling, sounding these alarms and rallying the opposition. They're in the minority and you've studied Congress and covered Congress a lot, and you know how weak or weak that makes you, even if you're a very large minority, which they are relatively speaking in Congress, but I don't know. What's your judgment of the Democrats?

AB STODDARD:

Well, again, I mentioned before that I am just horrified at how much they wasted the transition, a leaderless party.

BILL KRISTOL:

That's so interesting. I hadn't really focused on the transition as a key moment. People have now focused—

AB STODDARD:

It's almost three months.

BILL KRISTOL:

Yeah... yeah, that they could have really gotten a lot of stuff lined up, right?

AB STODDARD:

But that's how broken they were. They're so divided. They're so mad at Biden, but they're not coming out and publicly telling the voters we're sorry. We stood by a man who was unelectable who needed to retire. We looked the other way. We pretended it was okay. So there's a lot of rage from the voters across political ideological spectrum, but then also among their party about them sticking by Biden and not kicking him out and providing them with a better alternative. And then they have no leader, so they're really angry at each other and we have a left-right chasm also in the party, where progressives are saying, if you'd only talked about a minimum wage and these other things... saving the climate, you would've energized more voters to turn out for Harris. That's actually not true. David Shor, who's the Democrats, maybe the best political, but the data scientist, but the Democrat's best one has just released his findings of the 24 election showing that if reluctant and non-voters showed up, all registered voters showed up, Harris wouldn't have lost by 1.5 points, she would've lost by five because those voters are trending to Trump.

So they are in a huge hole, and I understand that in that they're in a really dangerous place. They lose 90% of counties in the election. All seven swing states, they're in a panic. They're grieving, they're smarting, they're spinning in circles. There's no one to bring them together. So I get how crippled they are, but again, between November five and January 20 is a long time to try to pick up the pieces and try to prepare for what Senator Chris Murphy of Connecticut did, which was a clear coming attack on the constitutional order from Trump in a second term, completely liberated from his previous constraints. The writing was on the wall, and Murphy just seemed like the only one at the beginning who was prepared to come and talk about this.

“This is why he's letting billionaires do this. He's running a kleptocracy. They're getting rich on a crypto scheme, the family's making whatever they need to make while all these programs are being decimated and vets are being fired and everything.” So he was sort of the only one in the beginning out of the gate being articulate. I see other voices making an attempt. Seth Moulton, Jason Crow, they're both members of Congress who are veterans. They've been pretty brave. Senator Mark Kelly's been out there sticking his neck out as well. And I am impressed that they've come together and tried in the face of Republicans canceling town halls, to coordinate a strategy—because this party's not coordinated right now—to coordinate a strategy of going to Republican districts and holding their own Democratic town halls and calling out Republicans for being cowards. “They don't want to face you. They're too scared of you. They let Elon run wild and basically they've abdicated their responsibility to Elon in terms of the power of the [inaudible] congress.” That's incredibly effective, I think, the fact that they're doing that. Everything else makes me worry. The new DNC chair Ken Martin is saying things like, “Oh, our message is fine. We just need to connect it to the voters.” Like, no, their message is not fine. There's a lot of hesitation. You and I have talked about this. Where have they been on the deportations? I mean, this week we learned a man protected by temporary protective status who fled to this country from violence in El Salvador and is from Maryland and is married to an American and has two kids and is not a criminal, I guess, has some traffic violations, was

deported to Venezuela. And the government's response is, he can't be returned to the US and a court ... It's too late. He's gone and he doesn't get his due process. They admitted the error.

This is so beyond enraging and tragic, and where is the response from the Democrats? So that's tied up in, oh, immigration is a toxic issue because Biden completely abdicated his responsibility to secure the border. He wouldn't touch this issue because it divided his party and then it destroyed him politically and the rest of them don't want to talk about it. So there's a lot of things I see them pulling their punches on, which is ridiculous. And I get their liabilities, their political liabilities, they're hamstrung by a lack of leader. We just see at this point AOC and Bernie having these events, which is great. Going out and trying to build on energy is great. Cory Booker goes down in history Tuesday night, finishing a 25 hour filibuster on the Senate floor to break the record of Strom Thurman and Ted Cruz in an epic event that I think will really produce a lot more energy.

I mean, you lead by example. He's not a presidential candidate, he's not in leadership in the Senate, but what he did was so inspiring. He spent the entire time talking about the Trump administration and the damage it's doing. He didn't read *Green Eggs and Ham*, he didn't do any dances. I mean, it was all seriously substantive and directed at what's going on. It got more than 400 million likes on TikTok, which means people from around the world were watching it. It was dominant on YouTube all day. Republicans are worried about it because they said, "What is he doing just making a speech? Well, what's that, nobody cares." People will care and that kind of thing will travel because Democrats are just looking, the voters are looking for some kind of response, some kind of a fight. So what I'm saying is I see a pickup between January 20 and April two.

It's not good enough, but I see something is building in terms of people being willing to get out there. And of course they need resources, they need coordination. They need to stop fighting, they need to stop blaming, and I think they need to actually attack Trump's assault on five different subjects a day. I mean, they can't hide from any issue. And yeah, you can't jump at the news and that's what he wants you to do. And he throws out distracting things like Greenland and so you shouldn't follow that like a dog to the bone. But why can't they, I keep thinking, do a golden era or what does he called it? "The golden age whiteboard," where they every day a different person, it's AOC one day, it's a businessman, small businessman from Kansas. The next week it's Mark Cuban. The week after that it's, I don't know somebody but maybe five numbers. This is how much money Elon has made from the government since January 20. These are the free speech violations and due process violations from this last week alone. This is the total since January. This is the price of eggs. These are the market losses since Trump took over. This is how much money his family's making in crypto. These are the valuable programs that have been cut, and this is how many vets have been fired. I mean, that's not hard. I applaud Booker, but I feel like there's just so much more obvious stuff they could be doing to spread a message about how dangerous this is and how many promises Trump has made that he's just completely breaking. He's not even trying to pretend that he's going to fulfill them.

BILL KRISTOL:

They do overthink everything in my sense. I've spoken to a few groups of Democrats in the last month or two, and it's, we have to decide on this issue. We have to do kitchen table, we can't do this. They can do a lot of things that a lot of different people can do a lot of different things and they speak to different constituencies. It's a very big country and the business types who care about tariffs or consumers who care about tariffs are different from the people who have relatives who have temporary protected status or who know people very well who have temporary protected status. Venezuelans, nations which he's taking away, different from the people who are most outraged about the deportations you mentioned to El Salvador, different from people who care about Ukraine and care about NATO. And there are again, they're sort of, so I don't even have to put my finger on it...

Republicans are pretty good at this, I think. They've, over the years, they see that there are different groups that care about different issues and will attack Biden on the border here, will attack them on radical, I don't know, Latinx here and whatever, femin— being bad to men here

and college students here, and you know. And you see what gets traction and what doesn't. But again, things get traction to different degrees with different groups. The Democrats want some magic phrase and they sort of hit upon the kitchen table stuff and prices, which is of course a legitimate issue, but a little bit fighting the last war too to some degree and reminds people of Biden and they're sort of surprisingly, yeah, anyway, they overthink. But I feel like Wisconsin might have some effect. They ran a pretty, I was actually had a little zoom couple hours ago with the chairman of the Wisconsin party.

They ran it pretty, as he said, we didn't overthink things. This is a pretty straightforward campaign. The Republicans want to use the courts to have their interest groups including the wealthy and Musk is supporting this guy and that can't be good and they want to ban abortion in Wisconsin. That was extremely important part of the message. And they also want to use the courts on some healthcare issues which have come to the Supreme Court to restrict access. And that was basically it. And they just said it over and over again and they had a good candidate, not a famous candidate, but a good candidate, and they won by 10 points. I mean, I do think maybe there's a bit of a lesson there for the other Dems, and maybe things will play into their hands a little bit because they will have to be votes in Congress on reconciliation and on taxes and on things.

It's hard when you don't control Congress. You can't have the hearing today on the NIH cuts. But you could do quasi hearings, right? I mean, they're a little too paralyzed by, "Well, we're in the minority, we can't do this." You still get a hearing room. You could have the heads of three medical schools testify and fine. Is it elitist that medical school has, well, maybe some voters, but a lot of other people kind of think, gee, I don't know. Shouldn't we be advancing on the research against diseases? And same with foreign policy where I think Ukraine is an issue that splits the Republicans, right? Half of them voted for the Ukraine aid last year. Trump's selling out Zelensky to Putin. I don't know. There's a constituency for that. So they've slightly paralyzed themselves more than they had to maybe. But maybe that's beginning to change, I don't know.

And maybe some entrepreneurial younger Democrats will decide, "I can make a name for my... I think Booker, I'm sorry to go on so long, but I think Booker really might be a useful wake up call for them. You don't have to get everyone's permission. You don't have to be. I mean, he was well known as he'd run for president and so forth, but you don't have to be a leader of the party to say this stuff. Other people can do their mini versions of it. I'm not thinking particularly here of speaking 25 hours. I'm just thinking of taking an issue and making a big fuss about it. Sanders and AOCs also, I do think there's kind of a moment for a lots of people to be much more entrepreneurial and maybe the example of some of these people going out and doing all this stuff will change the Democrats' tendency to sit around and have another seminar on this and, "got to get some more polling in on some of this before we say a word."

AB STODDARD:

No, I agree.

BILL KRISTOL:

You've covered the Democrats so long. What is with the polling stuff? They're just obsessed with polling in a very Silly way.

AB STODDARD:

They're very tied to data. I agree with you. And look, they literally have nothing left to lose. That's how bad it is. Once they realize that, I think they'll take more chances and they'll be more creative. And I do think that you lead by example. The Booker thing was inspired. I mean, I'm sorry. He stopped eating food on Friday. He stopped drinking water on Sunday. He planned it. He broke this segregationists' record. He talked the whole time about John Lewis and all this uplifting stuff he talked about scripture with another senator, Chris Coons. I mean, it made for good YouTube, it made for good TikTok and it was very smart. And people will see the energy that came from that and they'll be willing to try other things. And also they desperately need

new leaders. So let a thousand voices bloom. I mean, Jason Crow is from Colorado. One of the things he's been doing is going on TV and basically talking about where he's from. He wants people to go into red areas. He worked construction, he served in the military. He knows what it's like to struggle to find healthcare coverage, to get a job where that would be provided.

He basically, he says, you can't go to Walmart and buy a Carhartt jacket, a Carhartt boots, and show up at an event and try to talk to working class people and win them back from Trump. You have to be authentic. I've seen him repeat this message. I mean, this is somebody who's making an effort not only to get the message across to Democrats, but to become a voice for the Democrats. And so I think that kind of thing will spread. People have to take chances and they have to get out there. And Jasmine Crockett went viral on the oversight committee before Trump was reelected. So now she's running around trying to be a voice, and she made a mistake recently. So people are getting worried about that. People are worried also about having AOC and Bernie before facing because they're too liberal. That's all fine.

But I think if you get out there and you carpet bomb in the face of the assault on our system that we're facing, something will stick. And that's why I think the idea of having some kind of rotating voices on a unified message, like my whiteboard idea is that you can get a mother who is affected in a measles outbreak one week and the next a senator. But it always comes back to the idea that you needed government more than you knew. They're decimating it in a reckless way. They didn't plan this. They didn't poll test it, they didn't consult experts. It was all completely capricious. And that will drive home that your taxpayer dollar is basically being stolen. I mean, your concerns are not at the top of the Doge efficiency agenda or Trump's either. And they don't have to get into lofty talk about democracy. They don't have to talk about Elon's connections to Putin, Trump's selling out to Putin. I get that, they tried that last year. Fine, let other people do that. So they can do kitchen in a much more, I think politically potent and compelling way than they're right now.

BILL KRISTOL:

Yeah, and I think imaginative way too, right? I mean, Yeah, they're too... Anyway, we will see if they take some of this advice and it feels like they're going in that direction a little bit, but they always want to let the perfect be the enemy of the good. And I do think, I've been in a couple of these... spoken to groups of Democrats. "We have to fix the brand." Well, you do ultimately have to fix the brand, but no one cares about the Democratic brand right now what they care about is Trump. He's the dominant figure to say the least in American politics. He's unbelievably dominant. And so you have to oppose Trump and you have to take Trump down some. The way I think of it, I don't know if you agree with this, is that this a sort of 2025-2026 agenda, which is really opposing Trump, knocking Trump's numbers down, laying the groundwork for, first of all, let's make sure there really is a free and fair election in '26, but then doing well at it.

And then secondly, there's a 2027, 2028 agenda, which is obviously finding a good nominee or a good cast of candidates from whom to choose a nominee, fixing "the Democratic brand" in the Bill Clinton way as he did in '91, '92. I was thinking about that analogy. I've said they all want to be Clinton. That was a good example of defeating an incumbent president who had looked very strong. Republicans had won three elections in a row. But the Democrats in Congress in '89, '90 did damage to Bush... and '91, they didn't have any great Democratic brand. They just fought Bush on a lot of issues and caused trouble for the Bush administration. God knows it wasn't like the Trump administration. Anyway, I do, I feel like the Democrats, it's in a way attribute to them. They're kind of earnest, they want to govern well, so they want to have a lot of seminars about, "Ultimately we have to be for reform, but we also have to defend the institutions."

That's all correct, but they're a little... for now, I think they could be more of an opposition party, honestly. And I guess we'll see if they go in that direction. And also knock Trump's—let's get to the Republicans and close with them—but if they knock Trump's numbers down, the argument's always been maybe you get four Republican senators, four Republican house members to jump ship on some votes at least. And then you start to get some fractures in the Republican party. And that does have, I can say this, having been in government, that has an

effect on the governing party. I mean, if you start to have to worry about your own members and just the image of losing some of these votes, losing some of your members legitimates concerns among the citizenry. Like, “Well gee, even these Republicans are worried about what Trump is doing on issue X Bill Cassidy-type thing.” And so anyway, do you think that's practical though? If his numbers get knocked down some, if the Democrats get more energized and use your whiteboard and more effective, do Republicans ever defect?

AB STODDARD:

I don't think so because they're only looking out for their primaries and that hasn't changed. So until and unless people stop threatening them in their driveway and on the phone and online, I mean these are real threats to their security if they go against Trump and then they to win their next primary and hold their seats. There's no reason for Susan Collins not to retire. She didn't have to vote for RFK junior. She is going to be in cycle again in '26, and she's going to be 74 and she wants to run until she's 80. She's had a wonderful career of standing up for the right things and bucking her party. She could just retire now and continue to oppose what she thinks is wrong. So that concerns me that they're not going to step back. I want to say another thing about the Democrats. I think it's really important because of what we started with, which is the authoritarian project and how it's structured and how you break down these institutions and centralize your power.

They need to start talking about Trump in this third term right now. And he did release an executive order recently, and it doesn't really matter what the terms were, but we can get into that, basically dictating to states how they should make these changes to their electoral systems. The federal government doesn't run elections, states do and localities do. So there actually, there has been a Democratic response. They're suing. And Hakeem Jeffries, the house Democratic leader and Schumer are on the lawsuit saying it's a power grab. And that's really important. Republicans are going to say, “Oh, see the Democrats, they're opposing Trump because he wants stricter ID requirements. So non-citizen “illegals” can't vote. No, what they're stopping—and they need to make this clear to the voters—no matter what's in that EO, he doesn't have the power to dictate the way elections are run to the states.

He's setting up a pretense for the states that don't follow him to say their elections were rigged. And this talk of the third term and whether or not your vote is going to count, I think alongside kitchen table issues is absolutely essential. To try to educate the public on what's coming. That Trump in the end intends to control the rule of law, the courts, everything. But he wants to control elections. He wants to find a way to a third term. I don't care if Republicans would say, “Of course he's saying this. He doesn't want to be a lame duck, so he doesn't really mean it. And the 22nd amendment...” No, Democrats have to push this into the debate. “Okay, Republican congressman or senator, are you really opposed to him running a third time? Do you want him when he is 78 to run till he is, I mean after he's 82 to run again, when you said Biden couldn't? Where are you? We need you on the record. What will you do to stop it?”

And I think that really it's really important, this idea that Trump in the White House believes that he can control elections down to the local level. It's a big threat. And I think that has to be articulated to voters.

BILL KRISTOL:

I think it's so interesting about third term because I'd say the conventional view been to dismiss it, as you said, it's like Trump being Trump. I think you're right. Both A, one shouldn't dismiss it in reality because it's not like, gee, the guy didn't try to stay in office before when there was constitutional and legal prohibitions against it. And B, as a kind of political matter, I kind of agree. It puts more concrete aspect on... He wants to control the entire government and states as well. He wants to have the Justice Department reward his friends, but he's not just doing that for three or four years, and then he's going to leave and let the next Justice Department investigate all these crimes. He may have immunity, but what about all the other people who don't? He wants to do this because he wants to be there for as long as he wants to be there.

And if it's not him directly, it's his, I don't know who, his relatives or people who are totally loyal to him. I think painting that picture is a little hard because it's America. We're not used to that. And people don't focus that much on some of these more abstract, if you want to put it this way, issues. But I think the third term, is a way to get people to focus on it, right?

AB STODDARD:

Exactly.

BILL KRISTOL:

It's one of those things that people dismiss as unimportant, but actually could become the face of his authoritarian effort.

AB STODDARD:

It's critical because... I'm with Liz Cheney. He never intends to leave. He intends to die there. That's my belief. You'll have other guests on this show that disagree, and you don't have to agree with me. That's my a hundred percent opinion. I don't waver on that. There is a discussion as he tipped his hat to about JD Vance running and he would be his vice president. So then there's a 12th amendment issue with that.

BILL KRISTOL:

But they won't even bother doing that, I don't think.

AB STODDARD:

But Bill, I don't think—

BILL KRISTOL:

He'll run in the primary. He'll get the 10 million votes and then they'll tell the courts, what are you going to tell the voters? They can't pick me again because of some provision that was put in 230 years ago that's out of date?

AB STODDARD:

Completely. And that's why Democrats should say now, he doesn't even intend to do that scheme with JD Vance. But I think actually talking about JD Vance, who I think is very unpopular, is good for the Democrats, don't you think he's supposed to be the next president? Is he going to get rolled by Trump? But yes, Trump is going to just get on state ballots. His loyal minions will put him there, and he is just going to full steam ahead, run again. So I think it is, it's the headline of his authoritarian movement. He plans to never leave, and I think it's really essential that that gets into the media discussion. Eventually voters will pick up on it, but it's not, oh, isn't that funny? He's just doing that so he has more influence now because he doesn't want to be called a lame duck. No, it's real. And Democrats should treat it like a real plan because just days ago, he didn't even wait until 100 days or a year, just days ago. He said, oh yeah, we talk about it all the time. People want me to do it. There's lots of different ways. He's open about it. So it has to be a headline, in my opinion. He's not disavowing it.

BILL KRISTOL:

Yeah, that's really great. I mean, I think you're absolutely right. Yeah, I was just struck as a former chief of staff to a vice president, he didn't even have the courtesy or the instinct, I would say, to say, "Well, of course my vice president is well equipped to succeed me." And that would be the normal answer, right? And A, he doesn't believe that, I suppose B, he couldn't care less about JD Vance and about what JD Vance feels when he hears Trump. I mean, it's kind of insulting to the vice president when you're in your second term as president and you're

saying that, yeah, I think I probably do need to have a third term to keep this country on track or something. But...

AB STODDARD:

He, in an interview with Bret Baier weeks and weeks ago, Bret Baier says to Trump, “So you're going to be moving on in four years and by the midterms, JD Vance is going to be looking for endorsement.” Trump goes, “Oh no, [inaudible] there are plenty of other good people.”

Basically says it doesn't need to be Vance right away, but it's too early to talk about that. No, he's thrown him under the bus already, I think.

BILL KRISTOL:

Amazing. Well, last thing, give us, you're used to following Washington and the cycles of the seasons, so to speak, but of Congress, I suppose in particular. What to look for in your opinion, when would you say, when will we have more of a sense of the possible Republican defections, possible Democratic resistance strengthening, possible intra-Trump administration issues or external issues having an effect or not? Are we looking at you expecting... would we be having a very different conversation two months from now, six months from now, 18 months from now? What's your time horizon here?

AB STODDARD:

I think by the end of this year, there will be a lot of division in the Republican party because they have all of the budget and tax fights ahead, and that's really going to be... I don't know, maybe they all fall in line. But look, they fought over proxy voting this week in the house. I mean, there's plenty of fodder for Republicans to fight and to divide and for rifts to open up. And I see... you mentioned Ukraine, and it is a good issue Democrats should exploit to divide Republicans. Trump is using some occasional tough talk on Putin, and he's going at this plan that he said was only going to take one day to bring peace to the region, which we all know means give a bunch of territory to the Russians. But I was interested to see Senator Cornyn, who was competing for the majority leader position against Senator Thune tweet... He picked up a line from a *Wall Street Journal* editorial board writing about the fact that Putin is not interested in a peace deal, and the line is the Russian dictator is stringing President Trump along over a 30-day ceasefire Ukraine has already accepted. And in it, he says he doesn't want peace. He doesn't want a deal. And so, it was interesting to me that Roger Wicker has been a little louder on—Senator from Mississippi—on Russia. Of course, Mitch McConnell has all along. And then now another Senator, Senator Cornyn. Senator Murkowski has been outspoken all along. She's an outlier, obviously. I was really disappointed in their whole reaction to this national security breach, we'll call it, because they invited a civilian journalist into an insecure chat about war plans. And this “Signal gate” is just a little more than a week old, and Republicans looked the other way. Mike Turner, who's the intel chair on the house side, brought himself only to a TV studio to say, I guess this was courageous of him, that that information clearly would've been classified. But then he just said the way it was handled was so “surprising.”

BILL KRISTOL:

He was deposed as house intel chair by Trump, basically at Trump's direction.

AB STODDARD:

Oh, yes, I'm sorry. Sorry.

BILL KRISTOL:

He wasn't, no, no, but I'm saying you're

AB STODDARD:

Former. Yeah,

BILL KRISTOL:

But that makes it even more astonishing. What does he owe Trump? I mean, he literally lost the job he cared the most about on The Hill. And that's what's kind of astonishing. I guess we'll close with this, just maybe do you think, I don't know, by September 30th, with all the drama with the budgets and Ukraine and NATO, there'll be a NATO summit. God knows what Trump will do there. Maybe we will begin to see—God knows you and I have spent eight years being disappointed to say the least by Republicans—but maybe at some point they snap a little bit, or as you said, maybe not even quite the ones who face primaries don't, but then there are others and maybe some candidates emerge somewhere who aren't simply, but maybe not, incidentally, the greed with which the whole party... to me it's just now whole generations of politicians who've made their way by being slavish imitators of Trump and lackies to Trump is, I guess we can't discount that.

AB STODDARD:

I think that you're right. If Republican candidates emerge who are critical, Democrats really have to amplify them and embrace them. This needs to be, like you said, at least a year and a half before Democrats want to present a candidate and their own platform and new ideas that are part of their party, identify with their party. They need to join hands with Republicans and independents in a coalition in '25 and '26 to just resist the authoritarian takeover. I have watched them look away from, again, Elon, who is completely conflicted outside of government, unelected, taking away the power of the purse. I've watched them ignore this Signal thing, humiliating Zelensky at the White House. Don Bacon, who's a congressman, who's an Air Force brigadier general, write in op-ed in the *New York Times*, just basically pretending like this is some other Republican party.

He's like, we need to stand up to Putin and make clear that we oppose authoritarianism and we represent democracy. And this is a Ronald Reagan moment. It was just a cry for help. It was so not facing the reality of Trump's Russian alliance and his abandonment of NATO. And so maybe in the months to come, they get more clear about that, about destroying alliances, eviscerating NATO, the importance of standing up to Putin. Maybe I can see that as the one subject area in which they move, but I don't see them opposing him on the way he's trampling the constitutional order. And I think that we will have days when Kash Patel and Pam Bondi unleash just unthinkable things to serve Trump's whims and corrupt the rule of law. And I do not expect for Republicans in Congress to come out and say, "This is not the way we do things in this country." I just don't. I have no hope—

BILL KRISTOL:

No, fair enough.

AB STODDARD:

...because of the things that they've looked away from. So I hope the Treaty Organization is enough to compel them to be brave here and there, and that's important. But in terms of what he's doing here domestically, I just don't see any opposition from them.

BILL KRISTOL:

You're probably right though the judges... there is a little bit of a catch 22. If the judges are strong and the Democrats are strong, then maybe some Republicans decide at some point, or even if they don't decide, maybe they can hold off a lot of things just for the sake of the country, but we can have that discussion. We will have to resume this. This is very, very interesting though. Very, not entirely cheerful, I mean, but hardheaded. No, it's really important to have this kind of serious look at what's happen. I do think still for everything that we've had now for the first two and a half months of the Trump administration, Trump's second term, people are not facing what's happened so far and what's likely to happen.

There's a lot of sense—I'll just close by asking you to react to this—a lot of sense of, oh, that's really been crazy, but now it's going to subside and it's going to kind of be normal. But I feel like it's just as likely that we've seen two and a half months of movement from here to here, and the next two and a half months is going to be from here to here, right? I mean, it's not as if, especially if he's succeeding in some of these things, why would they stop now, so to speak? The authoritarians want to keep going.

AB STODDARD:

Yeah, that's the problem. I do find among my friends and peers and family, people who are not following this closely, they believe that there's this a hundred day sprint and then it will end. And that I think that they believe there's some guardrails that are going to magically appear like airbags in a car accident. And Susie Wiles, the chief of staff, will have a conversation with a very high-ranking person, the CIA, and all this nonsense will be stopped. That's not what happens. It accelerates and it grows because the more power you give him, the more he'll take and the less pushback he gets, the freer he is. And so, I think what we've seen in the last couple of months is that he's been given permission and he will take it. That's the way Trump is, and he believes... his pathologies create a story for him that this is what the people want, that they adore everything he does.

And so when he doesn't have to take a lot of phone calls from senators over tariffs or crapping on Volodymyr Zelensky in the Oval Office or whatever he feels, that's permission from more destruction. So he's not acting like a man who is worried about reelection when he talks about a third term, he says that people are demanding it because everything he's doing is so popular. So I think people need to not underestimate the fact that things could be much, much worse in three months or a year. And that's why the time is now to push back and what people can do individually, and I think it's important to mention this when they're not a senator who can make a speech on a floor that goes viral around the world, is they can just talk to each other. It's not that hard. Talk to people in your life about how this is affecting your families or your communities. You don't have to go out and go to a protest and wear a pink hat. You don't have to put your face on camera, you don't have to stick your neck out. It's really about trying to build awareness and energy around the value and magic of our system and why ruining it will be extremely damaging and it'll be hard to get back. And so the sooner people sort of awaken and the sooner they respond the less damage. We'll see.

BILL KRISTOL:

That's really well said AB, and a very good note to end on, and we'll get back together maybe at the end of the fiscal, I don't know, September 30th, whatever would be a good time at the end of the year and really see where we are. But it's been, you deserve a lot of credit for, I think, seeing the essence of what Trump was up to very early and then trying to alert people. And I hope this conversation has been helpful to people as well. So thank you for joining me again.

AB STODDARD:

Thank you, Bill.

BILL KRISTOL:

And thank you all for joining us on *Conversations*.