

#1545 Agents of Chaos: The New Congress

Intro 2-22-23

JAY TOMLINSON - HOST, BEST OF THE LEFT: [00:00:00] Welcome to this episode of the award-winning Best of the Left Podcast, in which we should take a look at some of the work of the chaotic wrecking crew that is the GOP of the 118th Congress, including their plan to hold the world economy hostage and weaponize the government against Democrats, all while in fighting their way to the 2024 presidential election.

Clips today are from the PBS NewsHour, Velshi on MSNBC, Greater Boston, Morning Joe, The BradCast, All In with Chris Hayes, and The Damage Report, with an additional members-only clip from The Gray Area. And stay tuned to the end where I'll discuss how the ideological dividing lines keep getting more complicated.

What House Speaker McCarthy's concessions to get elected mean for the nation - PBS NewsHour - Air Date 1-7-23

GEORGE YANG - ANCHOR, PBS NEWSHOUR: There is finally a Speaker of the House of Representatives. After four days of defeats and deal-making, Republican Kevin McCarthy was elected to the job early this morning on the 15th try. That's the most [00:01:00] since before the Civil War.

UNNAMED SPEAKER: So help you God.

KEVIN MCCARTHY: Yes, I do.

UNNAMED SPEAKER: Congratulations and God speed.

GEORGE YANG - ANCHOR, PBS NEWSHOUR: His victory came during a dramatic and sometimes rancorous session. After he fell one vote short on the 14th try, McCarthy confronted holdouts Matt Gaetz of Florida and Lauren Boebert of Colorado. Tempers flared. At one point, McCarthy supporter Mike Rogers of Alabama had to be restrained.

After winning the post that had eluded him for years, McCarthy outlined a conservative agenda that included investigations of the Biden administration.

KEVIN MCCARTHY: We will hold the swamp accountable, from the withdrawal of Afghanistan to the origins of COVID, into the weaponization of the FBI.

Let me be very clear. We will use the power of the purse and [00:02:00] the power of the subpoena to get the job done.

GEORGE YANG - ANCHOR, PBS NEWSHOUR: Later, he credited a key backer for helping him get across the finish line.

KEVIN MCCARTHY: I do wanna especially thank president Trump. I don't think anybody should doubt his influence.

All members-elect will raise their right hand.

GEORGE YANG - ANCHOR, PBS NEWSHOUR: The election of a speaker cleared the way to formally assemble the 118th Congress as House members took the oath of office.

KEVIN MCCARTHY: Congratulations. You are now members of the 118th Congress.

GEORGE YANG - ANCHOR, PBS NEWSHOUR: McCarthy's victory came after a series of concessions that give hardline conservatives greater influence in the House, notably on spending and tax bills. What's McCarthy's prolonged battle and the deals he cut mean for his leadership, for the House and for the governing of the nation? Sarah Binder is a George Washington University political scientist and a senior fellow at the Brookings Institution.

[00:03:00] Sarah, one of the things that Speaker McCarthy said last night is, what we do here today, next week, next month, and next year will set the tone for everything that follows. What tone was set by what happened this week?

SARAH BINDER: Well, what we watched play out in front of us, in levels of detail we're not usually accustomed to on CSPAN, was a very slim, fractured majority trying to get on the same page. And what we saw was the Speaker to be in doubt at times, trying to figure out how much could he give away to his opponents and would they take it, would they take these concessions that they were demanding and then give him his votes?

We'll see those fractures emerge throughout this coming Congress for sure.

GEORGE YANG - ANCHOR, PBS NEWSHOUR: Look ahead and in what ways are we gonna see those fractures?

SARAH BINDER: So one of the core issues that divides the holdouts from Speaker McCarthy is the question about the [00:04:00] federal budget, federal deficits, and federal debt.

And there are two things this Congress, like most congresses, will have to do at some point. Mostly in the fall, they will need to pass spending bills, get them through the House, the Senate, and the White House, pass spending bills that most recently raise Federal spending, both for domestic side and defense side.

But his opponents have vowed not to do that. They want to cut, they wanna cut both defense spending, which the defense hawks in the Republican Party aren't going to want to do, and they're gonna wanna severely cut domestic spending. And it's not clear that 218 Republicans, even, especially those from swing districts won by President Biden, it's not clear they're gonna go along.

So how do you keep the government funded and open? Will there be a government shutdown?

GEORGE YANG - ANCHOR, PBS NEWSHOUR: Do you think any of these concessions may come back to haunt him?

SARAH BINDER: Well, I think the key concessions here, first of [00:05:00] all, are Speaker McCarthy's willingness in his agreement to put three Freedom Caucus members from the far right of the conference, to put them on the Rules committee, which is an arm of the Republican leadership. That's the committee that decides which bills would go to the floor, under what conditions, will there be amendments, who will offer the amendments? With three Freedom Caucus members on that committee, it's going to put them in a position to try to advance their policies, not just to block things on the floor that they've sort of mastered in the past. I think that could come back to haunt Speaker McCarthy.

Others will point to this motion to vacate the speakership. That's existed in the past. I think, McCarthy, it's a thin reed that he's standing on already and that threat of deposing him, it's gonna put a little more oomph behind those threats.

GEORGE YANG - ANCHOR, PBS NEWSHOUR: You talk about a slim, fractured majority. I mean, the fact that, that it was really about 20 [00:06:00] members that tied the House up in knots, are we gonna see more of that?

SARAH BINDER: McCarthy comes into the speakership, by all accounts, quite weakened by what he's given away. And I think that's going to encourage not just the original five holdouts and not merely the 20 who secured some concessions in this dealmaking over the speakership. I think that will encourage other members of the Republican majority to come forward and to push their perspectives as well. Right? Think about those -- there's about 18 members who are elected in districts that President Biden won. Those folks aren't gonna be that happy lining up behind the agenda of the Freedom Caucus. And that's trouble ahead. That's really trouble ahead for Speaker McCarthy.

GOP is playing with U.S. prosperity in fight over debt ceiling - MSNBC - Air Date 1-14-23

ALI VELSHI - HOST, MSNBC: Newly-empowered House conservatives have triggered a high stakes fight over the debt ceiling. Yesterday the Treasury Secretary, Janet Yellen, announced that the US will hit its debt limit on Thursday. She warned House Speaker Kevin McCarthy that it's "critical that [00:07:00] Congress act in a timely manner to increase or suspend the debt limit."

Republicans in the House, intent on cutting government spending, are coming up with a contingency plan. According to the Washington Post, "House Republicans are preparing the plan, telling the Treasury Department what to do if Congress and the White House don't agree to lift the nation's debt limit later this year."

The Post adds that the emerging contingency plan shows how Republicans are preparing to threaten not to lift the nation's debt ceiling without major spending cuts from the Biden administration. If Republicans decide not to lift the ceiling, it will undoubtedly start a fiscal showdown that's gonna have big consequences for the American people.

Now it's important to understand the debt ceiling. Here's how it works: The government takes in money through things like taxes and duties, and it spends money on all the things that government spends money on. If in a given year the

government spends more than it takes in, that's a deficit. According to the US Treasury Department, in the last 50 years, the federal government's [00:08:00] budget has run a deficit all but five times, most recently in 2001. Now let's look at 2021: The federal budget for that year, the Congressional Budget Office says, the federal government brought in roughly \$4 trillion. That year, the government spent \$6.8 trillion, creating a deficit, a shortfall, if you will, of nearly \$2.8 trillion. Now, you take all these deficits and you put them together, and that becomes the national debt, which now stands at roughly \$31.5 trillion.

Now, many people validly worry about this debt and how we're going to pay it back, and that's an important consideration. But until we get an answer to that, let's just look at how those deficits and that debt are financed. Where does the money come from for the interest payments and for the repayments of them? It comes from bonds issued by the government and then sold to investors. The bond is a promise to pay back a loan at a certain interest rate. The rate is relatively low because a loan made to the United States government is considered the safest [00:09:00] investment on the planet.

But now, once again, that is at risk, as some Republicans threatened to not allow the debt limit, or the amount of money the government can borrow to pay bills it's already incurred, to be raised. If they succeed in that effort, the government would have to do what an individual or a company would have to do: reprioritize who gets paid first, and in the case of the US government, interest on those bonds have to be paid first, because if a payment to a bond holder is missed, the credit rating of the entire United States could drop, and the interest rate for borrowing any more money goes up. That could cause inflation. As costs get more expensive, it could cause a recession or make a recession that we might be headed into worse. The worst-case scenario is that it causes both inflation and a recession, which is a very difficult position to get out of.

The idea that a government, like a household, shouldn't spend more than it takes in is interesting, but it's incomplete, because a household is made up of [00:10:00] people with a limited time to work. America is an entire economy with a lot of ways to generate income and a lot of time to pay it off. It's not that government should spend without any regard to how and when their debt will be paid. It's just that the calculus for a mature, strong economy cannot be fairly compared to you and your personal financial obligations.

Now, I know you're thinking, we've been here before many times and we never failed to actually get the debt ceiling raised. This is all a game of chicken. And you may be right. I hope you're right. But if you're wrong, because you're

underestimating the resolve of those Republicans who are prepared to burn the house down, we could all be headed for real trouble.

What's different about this time is that while inflation is coming down, it's still three times as high as we'd like it to be, and that's okay because the Fed can keep raising interest rates to fight inflation. Except there are real fears that all the effort that the Fed is putting into fighting inflation could have the effect of slowing the economy down too much, triggering a recession. That's a real possibility. [00:11:00]

And here's the problem with having inflation and a recession at the same time: You fight inflation by raising interest rates. You discourage people from spending. You fight recession by lowering interest rates and encouraging people to spend. But you can't raise and lower interest rates at the same time.

If we get ourselves into that position, we could be in for a very difficult few years economically, years in which interest rates are high, economic growth is low, home prices collapse, jobs are lost, wages drop and your 401k suffers. That's what Republicans who threaten not to raise the debt ceiling are really playing with: not their political futures as much as your and the country's prosperity.

Sen. Elizabeth Warren: Impending debt ceiling showdown a 'manufactured crisis' - GBH News - Air Date 1-19-23

HOST - GREATER BOSTON: Republican officials are insisting on deep cuts in federal spending in exchange for raising that borrowing limit. And that's something Democrats in Congress and the White House say they're unwilling to consider.

WHITE HOUSE PRESS SECRETARY KARINE JEAN-PIERRE: It is something that should be done without conditions. We should not be negotiating around it. It is the duty, the basic duty of Congress to [00:12:00] get that done.

HOST - GREATER BOSTON: So where does that leave us now? The senior senator from Massachusetts, Elizabeth Warren, joins me now. Welcome, Senator.

SEN. ELIZABETH WARREN: Thank you. Good to be with you.

HOST - GREATER BOSTON: Good to see you. So the White House says it won't negotiate on this. Your colleague, Joe Manchin, has proposed dealing with it by creating new committees to propose spending cuts and have these sort of expedited to the floor. Who's got the better idea?

SEN. ELIZABETH WARREN: Look, I wanna think about it this way: This is a manufactured crisis. The debt ceiling is not real in the sense that it has something to do with constraining spending. We've already authorized all that spending. This is about the United States following through on its legal obligations.

But here's the deal: The Republicans don't really care about the debt ceiling. And you know how I know that? I know that for multiple reasons. What they're really trying to do is make sure that the wealthy and the well connected just don't pay their fair share in taxes. First [00:13:00] bill out of the hopper for Republicans was to cut funding to the IRS so the IRS doesn't have money to go after wealthy tax cheats.

Second thing they put right directly into the rules for the House this time around is if anybody wants to do any spending, no, no, no, because it'll add to the debt ceiling. But if you wanna cut taxes for billionaires and giant corporations, you can add to the national debt to do that.

Look, our problem is a problem on the revenue side. It's a problem that the wealthy and the well connected are not paying a fair share in taxes. So we want to solve this problem. If the Republicans are serious about the national debt, then fine; let's stitch up some of the corporate tax loopholes, let's make billionaires pay a fair share. We can fix this problem.

HOST - GREATER BOSTON: Well, unsurprisingly, I'm sure to you and others, the Republicans don't see it that way. Let's listen to a brief summary from the House speaker, Kevin McCarthy, how he views this issue.

KEVIN MCCARTHY: But if [00:14:00] you had the child and you gave him a credit card and they kept raising it and they hit the limit, so you just raised it again, clean, increase, and again, and again, would you just keep doing that or would you change the behavior?

HOST - GREATER BOSTON: Your response?

SEN. ELIZABETH WARREN: Uh, that is like the dumbest analogy I think I've ever heard. Excuse me. The national debt is not like a credit card. It does

not authorize spending. We vote as a Congress on spending, and that's what we've done, in Democratic administrations, in Republican administrations.

The better way to understand what Kevin McCarthy is saying is after you've run up the bill, maybe you could just tell all your creditors, you're actually not going to pay them. That's the crisis he's trying to manufacture. And what he wants to do is make absolutely sure that the rich folks don't pay any more, but that we impose taxes on everyone else.

Look, the problem we've got right now is a problem of an imbalance between [00:15:00] revenues and spending. And it's not right just to say, oh, I know, let's do cuts and not take a look at the revenue side of this.

Besides, look what happened the last time the Republicans manufactured this crisis back in 2011, and they got a bunch of cuts in spending and what was the consequence? The consequence was that they kept unemployment elevated, growth was suppressed, and a lot of people across this country felt that pain. And why? So that billionaires and giant corporations could keep escaping paying the taxes they owe. And that's just not right.

This isn't about do we need to make a cut here or a cut there? It's really about who pays: the rich, or everybody else?

Joe: Debt ceiling fight is just a lose lose for McCarthy - MSNBC - Air Date 1-18-23

JOE SCARBOROUGH - HOST, MORNING JOE: I would love somebody to ask Kevin McCarthy, I'd love somebody to ask these Republicans who were suddenly born-again balanced budgeters, I'd love to ask 'em where were they when Donald Trump was president, where [00:16:00] were they when they controlled the House? Where were they when they controlled the Senate? Where were they when they controlled the White House? Where were they when they controlled all three? Let me tell you where they were. They were right there, pigs at the trough, increasing the deficit and America's federal debt to record levels, in 2017, in 2018. Donald Trump again in 2019. In 2020. Kevin McCarthy never said anything like this in 2017 or 18 or 19 or 20. None of these backbenchers said anything about this in 2017, 2018. How do I know? Because I kept talking about it. And no Republican wanted to talk about it. I even talked to Mark Meadows when he was a head of the Freedom Caucus. I said, Mark, this is what you're supposed to do. Stop chasing conspiracy theories. Work on a plan to balance the budget, work on the plan to rein in [00:17:00] spending,

because if you don't do it when you have a president in the White House, you're gonna have no credibility when you have a Democrat in the White House.

Why in the hell would any Democrat listen to these people acting like they're fiscally responsible, when we saw the deficit explode when Republicans ran Washington under George W. Bush, and it's exploded again and to record levels under Donald Trump.

This is gonna end really badly for Republicans. They can figure out how to negotiate a peaceful way out of this now, or they can do it after the economy crashes down. But the Democrats aren't gonna move on this and they certainly shouldn't move on this cuz this is pure political posturing.

JOHN HEILEMANN: Yeah. And I think that's really one of the great lessons of the last, what, let's say new millennial politics, Joe, like after 2000, right, now that we've had two terms of George W. Bush and we had one term of Donald Trump.

Whatever Republicans once thought about the deficit, whatever they once thought about spending, about fiscal discipline, about reforming entitlements, about all the things that, back in your day, at least people [00:18:00] both paid lip service to and occasionally voted on, they no longer have any credibility on those issues. What's pretty clear is that Republicans has become the -- the phrase that sums it all up: they care about deficits when Democrats are in office, they don't care about deficit *at all* when Republicans are in the White House. And every Democrat and every thinking person, you just can't look at the record of the red ink spilled in the Bush and Trump administrations, and particularly when Republicans were in control, and not draw that conclusion.

I think Democrats finally, there's not very much of a caucus anymore in the Democratic Party for pretending the Republican Party is serious about this stuff.

Morning Joe Reporter: The number is \$7.8 trillion added to the debt during the Trump years, thanks in large part to those tax cuts.

JOE SCARBOROUGH - HOST, MORNING JOE: We know how this ends, right? You've got four or five, six extremists in the House of Representatives that are willing to wreck the economy because they don't care. They'll just raise more money off of wrecking the economy, destroying the economy. You've got Democrats running the Senate, you have Democrats running the White House, you've got Democrats, 212 [00:19:00] votes in the House of Representatives. There's no way that they're going to fold to a couple of extremists.

So what does that mean? We're gonna get pushed up against a deadline. Things are going to melt down. And then you're going to have Republicans folding, just like the Wall Street Journal said, you know they will, especially the Republicans that got elected in Biden's District.

So again, this is all gesturing. This is all farce. But the problem is they could wreck the economy. They could cost 3 million people to lose their jobs. They could cost people billions of dollars in 401K accounts. This is gesturing with a catastrophic price, potentially.

Right-Wingers FINALLY Exposed For Crushing Plot In Real Time - The Damage Report - Air Date 2-12-23

JOHN IADAROLA - HOST, THE DAMAGE REPORT: And in case you aren't familiar with what's been going around in Republican circles, here is an awesome montage Ashley put together. A reminder of their actual positions on entitlement reform.

REPORTER: Where should [00:20:00] those budget cuts come from, right now? Medicare and Social Security? The White House insists Republicans want to cut. What cuts do you want?

KEVIN MCCARTHY: Well, let me be clear about that, and I've been clear many times. No, we're not talking about that. And to really be able to do this right, I'm not gonna negotiate this in the press.

LINDSEY GRAHAM: Entitlements are gonna consume the budget. Medicare and Social Security and other entitlement programs are worth saving, are gonna consume the debt. So entitlement reform is a must for us to not become Greece.

NEWS CLIPS: Recently put out an 11 point plan to rescue America. Two of the big points of which are "all Americans should pay some income tax." It also says, "all federal legislation sunsets in five years". So that would raise taxes on half of Americans and potentially sunset programs like Medicare, Medicaid, and Social Security, why would you propose something like that in an election year?

SEN. RICK SCOTT: Sure. Well, John, that's of course the Democrat talking points. It's a...

NEWS CLIPS: No no, no. It's in the plan. It's in the plan.

SEN. RICK SCOTT: [00:21:00] But here's here, but here's... let's think about reality for a second. Let's talk about Medicare.

NEWS CLIPS: But senator, but senator, hang on. It's not a democratic talking point it's in the plan.

SEN. MIKE LEE: I'm here right now to tell you one thing that you probably haven't ever heard from a politician. It will be my objective to phase out Social Security, to pull it up by the roots and get rid of it.

MATT GAETZ: If it was Matt Gaetz. I, I think that we do need reforms to Social Security and Medicare. I understand politically, enough people...

STEVE BANNON: but that can come later. That gets not gonna happen. Now, Medicaid, you don't need to have a,

MATT GAETZ: By the way, Medicaid should not be a sacred cow big time.

JOHN IADAROLA - HOST, THE DAMAGE REPORT: There's meat on the bones, he said earlier, and he's not the only ones. We need great stuff of Rick Scott. It's in the, you could look at it. He wants to make it something that has to be voted on every few years, which is not something you do to something you consider to be sacred, that cannot be challenged.

And jumping ahead, Mike Pence just last week said they should privatize Social Security. [00:22:00] And of course, Matt Gaetz has been attacking these programs as well. And by the way, I understand that the mainstream media is gonna be focusing on Social Security and Medicare and many people are obviously on that and they're very important programs, but they also routinely talk about cutting Medicaid, and that's the one that we're supposed to not pay any attention to cuz those people are poor. Screw them, we don't actually care about what happens to them.

But anyway, the idea that people like Jonathan Carl would be running cover for the Republicans, going into a negotiation where Kevin McCarthy is saying, no, I am not going to agree that we won't be talking about those. That's not how we're gonna negotiate. It is super clear what they actually want.

The real reason behind the Republican Party infighting Part 1 - All In W Chris Hayes - Air Date 2-10-23

CHRIS HAYES - HOST, ALL IN: His floundering presidential campaign has left a power vacuum within the Republican Party, and a flood of conservatives have rushed in to fill it, each claiming they should be the next face of the movement. All the different factions of the party are now openly brawling with each other in a battle royale playing out in Washington and in the shadow of the Republican 2024 primary.

Earlier this week, Donald Trump took a typically bombastic shot at a potential rival, [00:23:00] Florida Governor Ron DeSantis. In a series of posts to his knockoff Twitter platform, Trump shared a photo purportedly depicting DeSantis, then a high school teacher, seemingly attended a party with a group of female high school students. In the posts, Trump spread claims without evidence that DeSantis groomed his students, which is to say, attempted to lay the groundwork to later sexually abuse them. That's the claim that's being made. NBC News has not verified the photo in question. DeSantis has not commented on it. We reached out to DeSantis' office, and have not heard back.

Obviously, Donald Trump's a pathological liar with a long history of smearing his opponents with false allegations. I have to say there is some irony here. As we have covered on the show, some forces on the political right have become increasingly brazen about baselessly smearing their opponents on the left as child abusers and groomers.

These ugly smears, which have no place in our political system, are often directed at members of the LGBT community, but by no means exclusively. In fact, [00:24:00] last year DeSantis' then-Press Secretary, Christina Pushaw, tweeted in support of his controversial bill banning discussion of gender identity and sexuality in Florida classrooms by saying "the bill that liberals inaccurately call 'Don't Say Gay' would be more accurately described as an anti grooming bill". And " if you're against the anti-grooming bill, you are probably a groomer, or at least you don't denounce the grooming of 4- to 8-year-old children". Those attacks were coming from DeSantis' own press secretary in support of legislation DeSantis himself championed.

Now that legislation was predicated on the idea that simply discussing banal facts about identity is tantamount to child abuse. But Ron DeSantis, well, he

messed around and found out. He's now getting a taste of his own medicine. The Florida Governor's low energy response to getting smeared demonstrates just how unwilling some Republicans still are to challenge Trump directly.

RON DESANTIS: I spend my time delivering results for the people of Florida and fighting against Joe Biden. That's how I [00:25:00] spend my time. I don't spend my time trying to smear other Republicans.

CHRIS HAYES - HOST, ALL IN: So, Donald Trump posed something on his knockoff platform saying, "Ron DeSantis is sexually grooming underage girls". Ron DeSantis says, "I don't spend my time smearing other Republicans." We're early, okay? This is just the beginning of a very long primary season. Now, elsewhere in the Republican field, other likely candidates are also beefing. Former Trump Secretary of State, Mike Pompeo, and former Trump UN Ambassador Nikki Haley, are both taking public shots on one another as they vie for the Trumpism-without-Trump lane in next year's primary.

The chaos extends well beyond the presidential primary. In the House, of course, Speaker Kevin McCarthy, who barely won that title at all after his members of his conference revolted, can barely keep his own party in line. Heck, he couldn't even prevent his MAGA troll caucus from openly heckling the President of United States during Tuesday's State [00:26:00] of the Union address.

Meanwhile, one of the most infamous members of McCarthy's House, in fact, we have to say the most infamous, New York Republican Congressman George Santos, has inspired a mutiny within the. Republican Senator Mitt Romney saying publicly, he does not think the "ethically and factually challenged freshmen should be representing the Republican Party in Congress." Yesterday, House Democrats filed a resolution to expel Santos, which, this is important, New York Republican Congressman, Marc Molinaro, told a reporter he supports. Now, this kind of fractious infighting, very public, is sort of the kind of behavior you'd expect in the House, particularly after that week of speaker votes. But in the Senate, oh, in the Senate, the infighting is out in the open in a way I really have never seen before.

Earlier this month, you'll remember, Republican minority leader, Mitch McConnell, unceremoniously booted two Republicans, Florida's Rick Scott and Utah's Mike Lee, off the prestigious Commerce Committee. Apparently it was an act of retaliation after Scott challenged [00:27:00] McConnell for the leadership spot and Lee supported him. And Senator Scott doesn't seem happy.

ALFIE WILLIAMS: How's your relationship with Senator Mitch McConnell?

SEN. RICK SCOTT: I work with all the Republican senators. I work with some of the Democrat senators. I'm gonna work hard to represent my state, and I tell everybody, I'm gonna represent the state of Florida. That's what I got elected to do. I, I mean, look, I, you can vote any way you want. I'm gonna vote for the citizens of Florida.

ALFIE WILLIAMS: But are you guys cool with each other? Are are you talking?

SEN. RICK SCOTT: Well, he kicked me, he just kicked me off a committee, I mean, so that was pretty petty.

CHRIS HAYES - HOST, ALL IN: Now try not be to be distracted by Rick Scott's incredible amounts of charisma. This feud between Senator Scott and Leader McConnell extends all the way back to March of last year. That was when Scott issued the Plan to Rescue America, which included the now famous proposals to sunset all federal legislation including Social Security and Medicare, in five years. McConnell was furious with Scott and made no secret of what he thought about [00:28:00] the plan Scott had proposed.

MITCH MCCONNELL: If we're fortunate enough to have the majority next year, I'll be the majority leader. I'll decide in consultation with my members what to put on the floor. We will not have, as part of our agenda, a bill that raises taxes on half of the American people and sunsets Social Security and Medicare within five years. That will not be of a Republican Senate majority agenda.

CHRIS HAYES - HOST, ALL IN: Yeah, that's Mitch McConnell. That's not Joe Biden at the State of the Union. That's Mitch McConnell at the press conference. And, fun fact, Rick Scott also spoke at that press conference where McConnell declared his plan dead on arrival. Now, fast forward to the State of Union this week, where President Joe Biden basically just repeated what Mitch McConnell said, calling out Scott's plan, using it to make Republicans say on live television that Medicare and Social Security are off the table for cuts.

Now, Rick Scott is trapped. No one from his party is [00:29:00] coming to help him because he basically handed Joe Biden and Democrats the perfect ammunition against Republicans. Scott's lame attempts to defend himself have also failed, including publishing a tweet that confirms he proposed exactly what Biden said. And now Joe Biden is just twisting the knife. At Biden's event

yesterday in Tampa, Florida, Scott's home state, every seat in the audience had a brochure on it showing Rick Scott's plan. And today, when asked about Biden's speech, State of the Union speech, Leader McConnell made some remarks that, for him, are about as explicit and cutting as you can get.

MITCH MCCONNELL: Well, unfortunately, that was the Scott plan. That's not a Republican plan. That was the Rick Scott plan. There were no plans to raise taxes on half the American people or to sunset Medicare or Social Security. And it's just a bad idea. Uh, I think it will be a challenge for him to deal with this in his own reelection in Florida, a state with more elderly people than any other state in America.

CHRIS HAYES - HOST, ALL IN: A challenge [00:30:00] to deal with in his own reelection in Florida. McConnell could have just not said anything. He could've said Joe Biden was lying or exaggerating. Instead, he called Rick Scott out by name, said it was a bad idea, and hung him out to dry. The core conflict here, when you take a step back, the reason you're seeing this - you know, Trump and DeSantis and the House Republican Caucus, and now Scott and McConnell, they're all fighting each other - is that, when it comes down to it, what do they stand for? Like, what do you wanna do, guys? What's your deal? What's your agenda? Getting rid of the most significant social insurance programs in the 20th century is not popular, but it has been a shared goal for many people inside the conservative movement. But what they actually want the government to do for people is a question they do not have very good or particularly popular answers to. In fact, the only thing they do seem intent on making sure of is that their political enemies are punished.

House GOP Twitter/Hunter Biden laptop 'censorship' hearing crashes and burns Part 1 - The BradCast - Air Date 2-9-23

BRAD FRIEDMAN - HOST, THE BRADCAST: The title of this hearing is called Hearing on the Weaponization to [00:31:00] the Federal Government. As Congressman, Democratic Congressman, from Maryland, Jamie Raskin, noted during the Thursday hearing...

CONGRESSMAN RASKIN: Millions of Americans already feared that weaponization is the right name for this special subcommittee, not because weaponization of the government is its target, but because weaponization of the government is its purpose. What's in a name? Well, everything is here. The odd

name of the weaponization subcommittee constitutes a case of pure psychological projection. When former President Donald Trump and his followers accuse you of doing something, they're usually telling you exactly what their own plans are.

BRAD FRIEDMAN - HOST, THE BRADCAST: Yeah, that sounds about right. This hearing, this committee according to TPM's David, Kurtz, "is a full frontal attack on the rule of law, masquerading as a probative investigation period. End of sentence." he writes. " You'll see a lot of news [00:32:00] coverage," he says, "of this hearing that will serve to amplify and legitimize it." Well, we will see. "House Republicans could run the Barnum and Bailey Circus into a Capitol Hill hearing room and political reporters would still cover it as a hearing because it's in a hearing room. Duh. What are you stupid?" That's what he says. "Just remember," Kurtz writes, "the Justice Department under Donald Trump was more politicized, the extent of which we are still learning, than at any time since Watergate. And the Trump play adopted in full by the House GOP now is to accuse your opponents of exactly the wrongdoing that you are committing. It's an obvious and easy to follow playbook," he writes, "don't be fooled."

To that end, perhaps we will have more coverage of Thursday's hearing on future BradCasts, but on Wednesday, the much hyped House Oversight Committee hearing targeting Twitter [00:33:00] apparently did not go as well as Republicans had planned. In fact, not by a long shot. In fact, it backfired in sometimes "spectacular fashion" as a CNN Business headline declared. This hearing was based on the phony Sturm und Drang that was caused by what Twitter's new owner, Elon Musk, has dubbed the Twitter Files, when he opened up the social media company's internal messaging system recently to a few selected theoretical journalists who write stories about whatever they found in hopes of backing up the idea that poor Republicans somehow, who call themselves conservatives, were not only mistreated by Twitter up until Musk purchased it, but somehow Twitter actually stole the 2020 presidential election from Donald Trump. Because for about two days back in October of 2020, [00:34:00] they prevented the widespread sharing of an article by the Rupert Murdoch owned New York Post, citing what was purported to be information found in an abandoned laptop belonging to Hunter Biden, the president's son. Actually he wasn't the president at the time but Joe Biden's son, and it included all sorts of scandalous personal emails that was found on this laptop. This all happened when the FBI had been warning social media networks in advance of the 2020 election that they expected another hack and dump operation by Russia in the lead up to that 2020 election, just like the one that we saw before the 2016 election, when the DNC and Hillary Clinton related emails were stolen and dumped to WikiLeaks for publication.

When the Hunter Biden laptop story broke in early October of 2020, Twitter and other social media sites did not know how to deal with it at the time, and [00:35:00] they prevented it at least for a day or so from wide circulation while they tried to figure out how to best proceed, especially since they had been given warnings by the FBI about something like this that could happen. So this is what Republicans are now saying resulted in a rigged election for Joe Biden. About two days when the story was still available to be read at the New York Post and everywhere else, but it wasn't allowed to be widely circulated with links on Twitter in early October, for about two days or so. Only this about three weeks before the actual November election. This is the great Twitter FBI theft of the 2020 election that you may have heard about, as the Trumpers are now pretending.

The once credible journalist Matt Taibbi, using selective files from the internal Twitter archives, he pretended to make these claims that somehow the government, [00:36:00] apparently, by the way, Donald Trump's own FBI at the time, was somehow censoring Twitter. These knuckleheads claim that the FBI paid millions of dollars to Twitter to censor stuff that reflected poorly, somehow, on Joe Biden. This is Donald Trump's FBI doing this, and they were paid to ban users who supported Donald Trump. But that's actually not what Taibbi's selective quoted internal emails actually showed, for those who bothered to read them as I did, and I suspect many right wingers did not, or they did not care about the actual facts they found there.

Twitter, in fact, did receive money from the FBI, but that was money that the FBI had to pay them according to the law, because it was in exchange for Twitter responding to various unrelated requests for documents and information regarding crimes and such. And even Taibbi himself [00:37:00] said that he found no evidence of the government forcing Twitter to censor anything. And yet here we are with, republicans now pretending to be the victims of a grand government censorship scandal and conspiracy, and a First Amendment violation, even though Twitter, by the way, is a private company. It's allowed to censor anything it likes.

And making it all even more absurd, as the GOP House hearings revealed on Wednesday, the government actually did try to censor Twitter after all, but failed. It turns out that the Donald Trump White House did the very thing that these so-called conservatives have loudly claimed without evidence that the so-called Deep State did. Yes, the Trump administration actually pressured Twitter directly to censor and remove unfavorable content, including one notable example that came up near [00:38:00] the end of Wednesday's hearings, finding that the Trump White House tried to get Twitter to take down a Tweet

back in 2019 by a model and TV personality who called Donald Trump a name. A name that I don't think I can say on FCC radio, probably shouldn't. But his fifis were so hurt that the White House tried to muscle Twitter into getting rid of this tweet. They declined to do so, they left it up, but there's your example of the weaponization of the federal government.

The real reason behind the Republican Party infighting Part 2 - All In W Chris Hayes - Air Date 2-10-23

CHRIS HAYES - HOST, ALL IN: If you were having a conversation with this constituent, in St. Croix, and they said, What's the deal with this committee? What would be your 60 second, 30 second version of what this committee is?

REP. STACEY PLASKETT: Sure. That this committee is the Republican Party's attempt to utilize the congressional process to air previous grievances and to set the stage for conspiracy theories for the 2024 election.

CHRIS HAYES - HOST, ALL IN: That's fully what it is to you.

REP. STACEY PLASKETT: That's exactly what this is.

CHRIS HAYES - HOST, ALL IN: There is, [00:39:00] you know, I was struck yesterday by how there was like, Ron Johnson was mad about Ivermectin, which was the, you know, the tapeworm drug that a bunch of conservatives got super into for prescribing off-label for COVID. And then Tulsi Gabbard was talking about wokeism. But I, it was a little unclear, like, what's the actual thing here?

REP. STACEY PLASKETT: Well, in this hearing, I couldn't figure it out myself because they talked, oh, they talked about the Twitter files, right?

CHRIS HAYES - HOST, ALL IN: Yes, they did.

REP. STACEY PLASKETT: Which is their new thing. Uh, the new rabbit hole that they wanted everyone to go down into. Uh, Grassley was talking about Hunter Biden and his laptop and that kept being repeated throughout the hearing. It is every grievance, every conspiracy theory that the GOP has, being

brought out and kind of offered up for their audience to say, Which one of these would you like us to go into for the next two years?

CHRIS HAYES - HOST, ALL IN: So, you pointed out, in the clip we just played, of a real, a possible threat, right?

REP. STACEY PLASKETT: Yes.

CHRIS HAYES - HOST, ALL IN: Which is essentially [00:40:00] using it as a tool of, essentially, obstruction. This is *The Washington Post* reporting on some of the requests that are made in the Justice Department that Jim Jordan, who chairs the committee, requests the Justice Department include an ask for documents and information related to the court-authorized search of Mar-a-Lago, which also was executed as part of the ongoing probe into the former president's mishandling of classified information. You're a member of Congress, right? So, you understand these sort of branch equities, which is that you don't want the executive just telling Congress to, like, go take a long walk of a short pier. At the same time, it does seem important to protect the integrity of the investigations. How do you square that tension?

REP. STACEY PLASKETT: Sure, of course. Us lawyers talk about this notion of accommodation, where Congress will request information and the executive branch, whichever branch it is, will say, Let's see how we can give this to you, and then block off areas and say, You know, we're actually doing an investigation on this. This is a criminal matter. Might we just inform you of where we are and after the criminal matter [00:41:00] has been resolved, or reaches a head, then we will brief you in full on that particular matter. Now, Jim Jordan has not bothered with any of that.

CHRIS HAYES - HOST, ALL IN: As opposed to, and my understanding is, that was something that the January 6th Committee, other oversight committees under Democrats' control, did do. There was quite a bit of attempts at accommodation before they got to subpoenas generally.

REP. STACEY PLASKETT: Definitely. And that's how Congress has operated up until this group of individuals that we have, that are on the, you know, within the first month of Congress, he's issuing subpoenas. And what he's saying is, Oh, well, we were looking into this for the last two, three years. That does not mean that you can then, all of a sudden, as soon as you grab the gavel, just throw out subpoenas willy-nilly like that doesn't have any import to it. You are, he is, devaluing the institution of Congress. There are serious issues that Americans are concerned with, and there are serious [00:42:00] oversight areas.

And investigations that we do need to go into, that we do need to sh ensure that the integrity of the FBI, DOJ, and all of these agencies, is being run properly and Congress does have authority over that. But when you cast this wide net for any conspiracy theory that you want, that erodes even more America's already shaky feelings and lack of confidence in the process.

CHRIS HAYES - HOST, ALL IN: Let me push on this, a little bit on this, on the Hunter Biden. So, Hunter Biden was issued subpoenas, his lawyers wrote back, and I don't know if it was from this committee or from oversight, I forget what...

REP. STACEY PLASKETT: It was from oversight.

CHRIS HAYES - HOST, ALL IN: ... wrote back saying basically, there's no proper legislative purpose here, we're not gonna comply. That seems a place where, you know, the notion of upholding compelled power of Congress does seem an important institutional equity, no matter the party. What do you think?

REP. STACEY PLASKETT: Sure. And I'm sure that there will be some back and forth between, uh, Hunter Biden's attorneys and counsel in Congress and [00:43:00] they will probably work out some arrangement somewhere down the line. And that's something that happens even in civil matters as well as criminal matters. What are the confines? What exactly do you want this for? How can we give you the information that you're looking at? And then, unfortunately, Chris, what's gonna happen is they're gonna get the information, they may not find what they want, and they're still going to say that there's a conspiracy.

CHRIS HAYES - HOST, ALL IN: This is the thing that I find really, I mean, with Benghazi, right? Let's go back to Benghazi, which seems in some ways the model here and they did, like, you know, with Benghazi, the basic, central thing that happened, which is that these four Americans died and it was awful, right? At least I understood, like, the core of the thing.

REP. STACEY PLASKETT: Sure.

CHRIS HAYES - HOST, ALL IN: The story was that there was malfeasance or incompetence or a cover-up about the malfeasance and incompetence. In this case, I don't even get what the thing is. Like, what's the scandal? I still can't, you can't even name it.

REP. STACEY PLASKETT: Well, the scandal is, and the thing is, is that we, conservative GOP Trump followers, don't like people impeding Donald Trump.[00:44:00] And we are going to fight tooth and nail...

CHRIS HAYES - HOST, ALL IN: So, it flows from that to you.

REP. STACEY PLASKETT: That's what it flows out of, is you have, now, you're no longer just investigating, you're no longer just arresting, inner city youth, you are actually coming after us for saying White supremacist, insurrection, seditious, treasonous matters? How dare you. We're gonna start an investigation against you, the government, for coming after us.

CHRIS HAYES - HOST, ALL IN: Right. This idea of the weaponization is a way of describing...

REP. STACEY PLASKETT: ...what they're doing.

CHRIS HAYES - HOST, ALL IN: Right. Yes. It's aspirational. Yes.

REP. STACEY PLASKETT: Exactly. It's a mirror.

House GOP Twitter Hunter Biden laptop 'censorship' hearing crashes and burns Part 2 - The BradCast - Air cDate 2-9-23

BRAD FRIEDMAN - HOST, THE BRADCAST: Just to give you a small sense of some of the bufoonery at this hearing, coming from the Republican side of the committee room.

CONGRESSMAN: Mr. Chairman, it's clear conservative voices are being silenced on social media in the mainstream. I appreciate this hearing. I might also suggest we look into holding one on DirecTV, Newsmax and OANN.

CLAY HIGGINS: You ladies and gentlemen, interfered [00:45:00] with the United States of America 2020 presidential election, knowingly and willingly. That's the bad news. It's gonna get worse, because this is the investigation part. Later comes the arrest part. Your attorneys are familiar with that. Mr. Chairman, I'd like to spend five hours with these ladies and gentlemen during depositions, surely yet to come.

BRAD FRIEDMAN - HOST, THE BRADCAST: You go Congressman. Meanwhile, back here in the world of reality, in fact, there will be no such arrests yet to come of former Twitter employees. Sorry to disappoint you there, boys. In the lengthy hearing on Wednesday, however, former Twitter executives explained why a 48 hour hold was placed on promotion of a single new article on Twitter.

DEZI DOYEN - CO-HOST, THE BRADCAST: And remember, it's just 48 hours. It went back up on Twitter right after that.

BRAD FRIEDMAN - HOST, THE BRADCAST: It actually, it never came down on Twitter, that's the thing. They just [00:46:00] wouldn't allow it to be shared, retweeted and so forth. They didn't even remove the links as I understand it. But this situation was instituted, in part, because they had to make a very fast decision. They had limited information at the time right before the election, a month or so before, and in part because it also included non-consensual publication of nude photos of Hunter Biden.

Ranking a Democratic member on the GOP-led panel is Congressman Jamie Raskin again of Maryland. He contrasted Joe Biden's wildly successful State of the Union address on Tuesday night, detailing a huge list of accomplishments over the past two years with what Republicans are now trying to do. Their current agenda to investigate allegations that Twitter's content moderation policies somehow suppressed right-wing voices.

JAMIE RASKIN: We return not to focus [00:47:00] on advancing this robust agenda of progress, but instead to take up an authentically trivial pursuit, all based on the obsessive victimology of right-wing politics in America. The majority is called a hearing to revisit a two-year-old story about a private editorial decision by Twitter, not to allow links to a single New York Post article made for a two-day period that had no discernible influence on anyone or anything.

The New York Post published the article in its own pages, and it was carried by lots of other media outlets. It was widely discussed, including on Twitter itself, even during the brief moment in time when links weren't provided, and it was a fixture in right-wing media for the next three weeks before the election. I think even the chairman and other members of this committee were out on TV and social media talking about it. But instead of letting this trivial pursuit go, my colleagues have tried to whip up a faux scandal about this two day lapse in their ability to spread Hunter Biden propaganda on a private media [00:48:00] platform. Silly does not even begin to capture this obsession.

In America, private media companies can decide what to publish or how to curate content, however they want. If Twitter wants to have nothing but tweets commenting on New York, Post articles run all day, it can do that. If it makes such tweets mentioning New York Post never see the light of day, they can do that too. That's what the First Amendment means. Twitter can ban Donald Trump for inciting violent insurrection against the union, as he was impeached by the House of Representatives and as 57 of a hundred senators found he did, and he can also try to resurrect his political career.

Those decisions, however heroic or imbecilic you think they might be, are protected by the First Amendment in the United States of America. Rather than conspiring to suppress right-wing MAGA speech, as my colleagues astonishingly claim, twitter and other media companies knowingly facilitated Trump's spread of disinformation and gave voice to his followers' glorification of violence and [00:49:00] calls for Civil War.

BRAD FRIEDMAN - HOST, THE BRADCAST: That was Constitutional law professor Jamie Raskin, Congressman from Maryland at the House Oversight Committee on Wednesday. Congressman Jim Jordan of Ohio tried to argue that the FBI had notified Twitter about some postings that violated its terms of service. In some cases, Twitter took down the posts and others they didn't. According to former Head of Trust and Safety, Yoel Roth, one of the witnesses on the panel on at Wednesday's hearings, he told Jim Jordan that no, he did not believe receiving a request to material from the government amounted to a First Amendment violation in any way.

In the cases referred to here, this would have been Donald Trump's FBI, don't forget, sending requests for review. To Twitter. This was his FBI back in 2020, which Democratic Congressman Gerry Connolly [00:50:00] of Virginia noted when bringing up evidence showing that then President Trump frequently pressured Twitter, himself, to moderate content, whereas neither private citizen nor President Joe Biden ever has.

GERRY CONNOLLY: My, my, my what happens when you hold a hearing and you can't prove your point. It's wrong for government to call Twitter and say, take down a tweet. Did I hear that correct, Mr. Roth?

YOEL ROTH: That was my understanding, yes.

GERRY CONNOLLY: Yeah. So on May 27th, 2020, President Donald J. Trump tweeted and I quote, "Republicans feel that social media platforms totally silence conservatives. We will strongly regulate," he went on to say, "or

close them down before we ever allow this to happen." It's appropriate for the President of the United States to direct or otherwise [00:51:00] influence a social media company to take down its content?

ANIKA NAVAROLI: I think it's a very slippery.

GERRY CONNOLLY: Mr. Roth, Ms. Gadde Mr. Baker, any evidence that Joe Biden's ever done that?

YOEL ROTH: Certainly none that I'm aware of, no.

VIJAYA GADDE: I don't recall anything like that.

GERRY CONNOLLY: There's no evidence he's ever done that, but there's plenty of evidence Donald Trump tried to do that, and if we're gonna have a hearing about the misuse of social media and the intrusion of government in the content on social media, we've got an environment rich target, but it's not Joe Biden, it's Donald J. Trump. And of course, we don't want to talk about that.

BRAD FRIEDMAN - HOST, THE BRADCAST: Finally, for now, freshman Congressman Maxwell Frost of Florida, the youngest member of Congress just elected at, I think he's 25 years old, he called out Republicans for the real reason [00:52:00] for holding this ridiculous hearing.

MAXWELL FROST: We get it. My Republican colleagues wish that the Hunter Biden story would've helped them win the 2020 election, and that didn't happen, and so they're angry about it, and that's the point of this hearing. And so I wanna say my colleagues don't worry, there's still many platforms you can spread disinformation on—Parlor, Truth Social—that have questionable editorial policies, but aren't here today.

BRAD FRIEDMAN - HOST, THE BRADCAST: Yeah. And you can also by the. Spread that crap on Twitter still today, now that Elon Musk owns it and now that Donald Trump is welcome back onto Twitter for all the lies he wants. I believe it was not long thereafter Congressman Frost's thoughts there when one of the former Twitter employees revealed that tweet from Chrissy Teigen, that model, with content that I can't share on FCC radio, calling Trump a name or two, which the then White House called Twitter to demand they take down, the very thing that [00:53:00] Republicans were trying, but failing, to claim, somehow, that the liberal deep state in the federal government was actually doing.

Happily, Twitter did not take that tweet down, but that was just about the only example of violations of the First Amendment that Republicans were able to shake out of this silly hearing, when you had a president of the United States actually calling and demanding that tweets be taken down, that tweets be censored, that the right to free speech be removed.

Anyway, there was much more at this hearing, including some stuff from from right-wingers that make them look really, really dumb. I won't torture you for now with that.

DEZI DOYEN - CO-HOST, THE BRADCAST: Well, I just wanna say that I think that it is a real shame that apparently we are going to have to spend a lot of time debunking Republican disinformation in the coming months and weeks.

BRAD FRIEDMAN - HOST, THE BRADCAST: Yeah, but you know what, whenever they have these hearings, even playing just a little bit of it there, hopefully that gives you an idea of what is coming out of these [00:54:00] so-called hearings by the Republican majority in the house and how ridiculous it all is and how dumb it ends up them look.

Is America broken? - The Gray Area with Sean Illing - Air Date 2-2-23

ALANA NEWHOUSE: The debate that I find the most interesting and that I think is gonna be the one that is gonna take us through the next, call it, 5 to 10 years, isn't a debate between Republicans or Democrats, or between the left and the right, or even between progressives and conservatives. The debate that I find myself most drawn to, and that I think a lot of other people increasingly want to participate in, is a debate about our institutions, and about the viability of them and the health of them.

The two sides that I saw emerging, I roughly call brokenists and status-quoists. And, in the piece, I try to articulate the vision that each side has. And I hope that I express sympathy and interest in both [00:55:00] arguments because I feel drawn to both sides.

My sense of the status-quoists' argument is that they feel, with a lot of validity, that we have a lot of institutions in American life that took many, many years to build that actually create safety and predictability and opportunity for a lot of people, and that there's an almost nihilistic, burn-it-all-down energy that they

feel coming from other people in American life, because inevitably they see problems in those institutions and they wanna fix them.

On the other side, there are people who I call brokenists, and those are people for whom the broken aspect of the big blocks of institutional life that they have to interact with, whether that's a university, whether it's their health insurance, whether it's a government entity, [00:56:00] what they're feeling in almost in a 360 way is a sense of decay and a sense that these things simply don't work. And that, I think, in the case of many brokenists, there's a feeling that not only did those institutions not work, but that they're not reformable and that we would be better off spending our energy building new replacements for them rather than trying to reform them.

So the tension is between those two sides.

SEAN ILLING - HOST, THE GRAY AREA: Yes. And I think you really do a service here in giving us that language. It's a very useful distinction. There's a man you quote in the piece, he's a reader who reached out to you. His name is Ryan, and he said some very relatable things, for me, and his perspective, his frustration, really, serves as a kind of anchor for your essay. Can you say a bit about him and what he articulated to you?

ALANA NEWHOUSE: Yes. [00:57:00] I met Ryan because, uh, two years ago, I wrote a piece called "Everything is Broken", which was my personal *cri de cœur* about the broken aspects of American society that were affecting my life. And in the wake of that essay, I got hundreds of emails and DMs and texts from people. One of them was from a man named Ryan, who was about my age, lives in Ohio, former vet, actually third generation African American veteran. And Ryan reached out and said, This piece spoke to me so deeply because this is what I feel, too. I feel that American society is so broken and I don't understand why. We ended up actually becoming friends. We had a lot more in common than I think either of us expected when he reached out and over the course of a year of texting and sharing articles and just becoming friends, we were having conversations about how our thought was developing, [00:58:00] and one day Ryan said on the phone with me, you know, I realize I'm having conversations with people. Sometimes they're people who see themselves as on the right. Sometimes they're people who see themselves on the left. And the thing that determines whether or not I can talk to them is actually how they think about institutions. I don't care whether they come from the left or come from the right, whether they're a libertarian or a socialist, I care whether or not they look at these institutions and they think they're remotely healthy. Because if they do, I think they're nuts. And if they don't, I can have a conversation.

The reason why I like the frame is because, as a reporter, it actually allows me to hear people and hear their concerns differently. It takes me out of rubrics that are familiar and allows me to really listen. And so, you brought up the issues of class and of economic concerns, I hear them more clearly and [00:59:00] loudly when I see them through the dichotomy of how our institutions are serving people.

Let's talk about Medicaid. Can Medicaid actually properly get people the support that they need? That's a class issue, right? But it's also a health-of-the-institution issue. And maybe if we take it out of the left-right dichotomy, we can have the conversation that we wanna have, because it doesn't get people rooted in their defenses and their biases. It allows us to say, Well, wait a minute. What if we say, Instead of whether or not we believe in Medicaid or don't believe in Medicaid, believe in a social safety net, what if we talk about the effectiveness of the social safety net? How is ours working? And, as long as we have it, can we improve it? Is it possible even? Because if it isn't, that starts a whole new conversation. For me, that's generative and that feels exciting because it also feels future oriented.

SEAN ILLING - HOST, THE GRAY AREA: You talk about following the cracks in the foundation of society, the way of [01:00:00] seismologist tracks slips in the tectonic plates, and I still don't really know where the cracks are or where they lead. I mean, I guess I have vague ideas, but it's very hard to isolate causes and precisely because of some of these technological changes, I worry all the time about getting a distorted picture of the world by viewing it through the funhouse mirror that is the internet. Is it possible that things really aren't as broken as they seem?

ALANA NEWHOUSE: Yes.

SEAN ILLING - HOST, THE GRAY AREA: Maybe it just feels that way because we're more aware of the brokenness that was always there and we're just confronted with it all the time.

ALANA NEWHOUSE: Yes, absolutely. You know, the same parent I just described, parent of a special needs child who could tell you everything that's broken about the health insurance landscape, about Medicaid, about everything, in the same sentence that they will say, Medicaid is deeply broken, they will also say, and don't you dare take it away. [01:01:00] I need it desperately. Right? The imperative for those of us who wanna think about these things is also, even if it's not fixable, we probably have the responsibility to create its replacement before we burn the original down to the ground. Because if not, we

might as well live with this half or mostly broken system. It's better than nothing. I mean, just in terms of your question about the cracks, that's kind of the reason why it's really important to stick with seeing what those cracks are and to talk to the people who tell you they're falling into them. Because they're the only ones who know. They're the only ones who can help you walk that crack back to its origin point.

SEAN ILLING - HOST, THE GRAY AREA: I have some brokenist and some status-quoist tendencies. I can be either, depending on the day you ask me. I don't know what the hell that makes me. I guess, if I'm hearing you, it makes me like a lot of people.

ALANA NEWHOUSE: Right.

SEAN ILLING - HOST, THE GRAY AREA: You know, somewhere in the middle. [01:02:00] I was probably at my most brokenist in the throes of the pandemic. The experience of watching even that, be so easily and neatly subsumed by our partisan rancor, that was a kind of tipping point for me and a realization that the information environment now in conjunction with all these other forces has really combined to create an incredibly unstable situation that I do not think is sustainable.

ALANA NEWHOUSE: I think if you can maintain having both brokenist and status-quoist ways of looking at the world, or you can feel comfortable with either one of them or both, what that allows you to do is judge things at a local level, which is where I think all things are gonna get built or fixed anyway. It's a little bit like cleaning out your closet. So, there's a bunch of stuff that you're gonna take and you're gonna throw it away, but not every item of clothing. Then there are a bunch of things that you're gonna take and be like, These are really [01:03:00] important to me. I'm gonna get them fixed. And then there are things that work great. They do great for you. So, you keep those. If you have a philosophy about your closet, you're gonna end up with a bad closet. If you're like, nothing here has to change. We're not changing anything. You're just gonna end up with a bunch of stuff you can't use. And a bunch of stuff that doesn't look good on you, right? And if you walk in and you're like, we're throwing everything out, you may lose something that was really important to you, that actually worked really well, that maybe was from your grandmother. Like, you don't want that. And I think that American society right now is at a place where it would be amazing if we could almost assess everything, look at everything and say, How can we make this better for more people? How can we make this work better and help more people and make better, safer, more enriching lives for more of us?

Final comments on the complicating of the ideological dividing lines through societal change

JAY TOMLINSON - HOST, BEST OF THE LEFT: We've just heard clips today starting with the *PBS NewsHour*, explaining the fallout of McCarthy making [01:04:00] promises to the extreme right in order to be elected speaker. Ali Velshi on MSNBC laid out the consequences of the threat of defaulting on the nation's debts. *Greater Boston* spoke with Senator Elizabeth Warren about why it's easy to tell that Republicans don't care about the debt. *Morning Joe* did much the same thing by referencing the Republicans record through the Bush and Trump years. *The Damage Report* looked at the Rick Scott agenda for slashing and burning basically everything good the government does. *All In with Chris Hayes* looked at the infighting of Republicans in Congress and 2024 presidential hopefuls amid a lack of a real agenda. And *The Bradcast*, in two parts, along with another segment from *All In*, looked at the new GOP committee on weaponizing the government.

That's what everybody heard, but members also heard a bonus clip from *The Gray Area* zooming out to discuss the brokenness of our institutions and the need to reassess what can be salvaged and what needs to be rebuilt. To hear that and have all of our bonus contents delivered seamlessly [01:05:00] to the new members-only podcast feed that you'll receive, sign up to support the show at bestoftheleft.com/support or shoot me an email requesting a financial hardship membership, because we don't let lack of funds stand in the way of hearing more information.

And now for some final thoughts of mine. There were three unrelated clips in the show today that I think are more connected than they may appear at first glance. The first was from Joe Scarborough on MSNBC. The second was part of the discussion of *The Bradcast* talking about the weaponization of the government committee. And the third was the members bonus clip discussing the topic of broken institutions. Joe Scarborough, for anyone who doesn't know, is a former Republican congressman. I first came across him on MSNBC in the early 2000s when he was cheerleading the Iraq and Afghanistan wars, and even though he's been in the anti-Trump camp all along, you know, for the past few years, he's definitely not a traditional [01:06:00] choice for Best of the Left. The next point I'm highlighting is Brad Friedman discussing the sadly, untrustworthy reporting of Matt Taibbi, who used to be a very trusted journalist on the left, also back in the 2000s, particularly on the banking system and financial crash. And the final clip that only the members heard was discussing

broken institutions and making the point about the value of cross partisan conversations. One person is described as better able to talk across the partisan divide with people who agree that our institutions are broken than with those who align ideologically, but think our institutions are healthy. In my experience, that's like the difference between people like me, who may agree grudgingly that the institution of Obamacare is technically better than the previous status quo, but still think it's a horribly flawed system, and those who hail it as an accomplishment of Barack Obama and the Democrats[01:07:00] which must be defended against nearly all criticism. To me that argument is ridiculous and is a conversation killer. Whereas someone who agrees with me that our healthcare system is broken but has wildly different ideas of how to fix it, could actually be someone who's easier to have a conversation with than the alternative.

Now I'm connecting these cases, Matt Taibbi, Joe Scarborough, and the reframing of our politics outside the partisan divide, but rather along the, Do you think things are functional or not? divide to highlight elements of a sort of political realignment that I think we're in the middle of right now. Taibbi is definitely not a lone oddball. He is representative of a minority swath of the left that has shifted in odd ways, similar to how Scarborough is representative of a minority swath of the right that has also shifted, or maybe had the rest of the right shift away from them. The point is to move beyond, you know, individuals or even these small [01:08:00] groups, to point out it's actually the ground that is shifting beneath our feet quite a bit. There are elements of the far right and left that are going off the deep end a bit though, just to clarify, I wouldn't call it the far left that is going off the deep end because it's not about the distance left they've gone that's the problem. It's really just about how well or poorly they're handling the changes we're going through. I mean, I personally know communists who think that Taibbi and his ilk are misguided and untrustworthy. But it's not because they've gone too far left, they've just lost grip of reality, not unlike the far right. And to be clear, I'm not coming close to equating these two either the dumb-dumb left, as we'll call them, I didn't coin that term, is far, far out of power. Which is actually much of the cause of their frustration, while the far right is extremely close to power as the base of supporters for Donald Trump, Ron DeSantis or Tucker Carlson, all of whom have a pretty good shot at the Republican nomination in [01:09:00] 2024.

So I think much of the evolution of the far right and the dumb-dumb left has to do with how people are responding to our institutions and larger economic system being broken. With this framing of broken institutions, including neoliberalism, it's easier to see why so many voters in 2016 were deciding between Bernie Sanders and Donald Trump. I mean, it was a mystery at the time, I remember. But Bernie was earnestly following his long-held beliefs that our institutions and economics were broken and needed reform. While Trump

paid cynical lip service to economic populism and criticized our broken institutions, but never had any plans to fix either one. So they weren't actually similar candidates, but they looked similar to some of the disaffected and disgruntled who were fed up with a broken system. So both movements stem from legitimate criticisms of broken institutions that are failing to support people through a particularly destabilizing moment in history, as [01:10:00] society shifts through things like the technological and internet revolution, amid neoliberal cutting of social safety nets.

But these two movements come to very different conclusions about what should be done about it. And then because the right's answers to these problems don't actually work, then they throw in a bunch of bigotry and racism as a scapegoat. So, Trump's win bolstered the power of the far right. While Bernie's loss fractured the left between the progressive left, that Bernie himself actually represented, and the dumb-dumb left that grew out of the self-destructed and misguided Bernie or Bust movement that Bernie himself disavowed.

So, in conclusion, in this extremely short commentary on what is obviously a much, much larger topic, things are complicated and getting more so. Lots of people are beginning to see the problems with our institutions as well as many of the underlying assumptions upon which our entire society is [01:11:00] built. And yet very few people are coming to the same conclusions as one another. So, it's important to be careful who you listen to and whose opinions you trust. I've certainly noticed my job getting harder over the past several years as ideologies and perspectives have been put in a sort of blender and people who I used to be able to trust, I can't, and people who I never thought I would trust started saying relatively reasonable things.

Now, I think we may be in a bit of an ideological gold rush as the old system crumbles and differing ideas struggle to be born and gain widespread adoption. Just as in capitalism, there are many hucksters and scammers trying to cash in, as well as plenty of true believers who start with very reasonable concerns, but come to catastrophic conclusions. So, in order to make sense of this changing world, I think we need new frames to see these new emerging patterns. I think that the bonus clip today discussing brokenism [01:12:00] versus status-quoism, I think that's a framing, that's a good one. It's a good start, but it's not the only one. So, there's definitely more work to be done. And if you wanna do a deeper dive into another aspect of this same phenomenon, I just read a long piece from *Vanity Fair* called "Inside the Dissident Fringe, Where the New Right Meets the Far Left, and Everyone's Bracing for Apocalypse". I think that article touches on a lot of concepts that we're going to be unpacking for a long time to come.

As always, keep the comments coming in. You can leave us a voicemail as always, or you can now send us text messages through SMS, WhatsApp, or Signal, all with the same number, 202-999-3991 , or you can keep it old school by emailing me to jay@bestoftheleft.com.

That's going to be it for today. Thanks to everyone for listening. Thanks to Dion Clark and Erin Clayton for their research work for the show, and participation in our bonus episodes. Thanks to the Monosyllabic [01:13:00] Transcriptionist, Trio, Ben, Ken, and Brian, for their volunteer work helping put our transcripts together. Thanks to Amanda Hoffman for all of her work on our social media outlets, activism segments, graphic designing, web mastering and bonus show co-hosting. And thanks to those who support the show by becoming a member or purchasing gift memberships at bestoftheleft.com/support, through our Patreon page, or from right inside the Apple Podcast app. Membership is how you get instant access to our incredibly good and often funny bonus episodes, in addition to there being extra content, no ads, and chapter markers in all of our regular episodes, all through your regular podcast player. And you can continue the discussion by joining our Discord community. There is a link to join in the show notes.

So coming to you from far outside the conventional wisdom of Washington, DC, my name is Jay, and this has been the Best of the Left podcast coming to you twice weekly, thanks entirely to the members and donors to the show from bestoftheleft.com.