

# #1588 The Shutdown That Wasn't And The Chaos That Is

**JAY TOMLINSON - HOST, BEST OF THE LEFT:** [00:00:00] During today's episode, I'm going to be telling you about a show I think you should check out. It's *The Politics of Everything* podcast from the New Republic. So, take a moment to hear what I have to say about them in the middle of the show and listen wherever you get your podcasts. And now welcome to this episode of the award-winning *Best of the Left* podcast, in which we shall take a look at the historical context of the civil war within the GOP, as they have just fought their way out of being able to govern at all with an empty speakership in the House that is grinding Congress to a halt. Sources today include *Today, Explained*, *Democracy Now!*, a virtual town hall with AOC, *Unf\*cking the Republic*, *Straight White American Jesus*, and *FiveThirtyEight Politics*, with additional members only clips from the *Brian Lehrer Show* and *FiveThirtyEight Politics*.

## Shutshow - Today, Explained - Air Date 10-2-23

**JORDAN WEISSMANN:** There are a few different things that the Freedom Caucus wanted. And I should be specific. Yes, it's the Freedom Caucus, but because Republican politics are infinitely complicated, it's like a fractal; you keep [00:01:00] looking and there are just repeated patterns forever.

Some of the hardliners are in the Freedom Caucus, some are not, like Gaetz, but he's sort of temperamentally aligned with them.

**SEAN RAMESWARAM- HOST, TODAY, EXPLAINED:** He's freedom curious.

**JORDAN WEISSMANN:** He's freedom curious. Some, like Marjorie Taylor Greene, have been booted from the Freedom Caucus because she was too close to leadership at points, she was too close to McCarthy, but then she became a pain for him later on.

**UNIDENTIFIED SPEAKER:** I mean, this dynamic is especially fascinating, because Marjorie Taylor Greene is one of the most pro-Trump, pro-MAGA members of the House, and the Freedom Caucus has long been considered one of Trump's top allies in the House.

**JORDAN WEISSMANN:** Anyway, let's just talk about what they actually were looking for. They wanted a lot.

It's hard to summarize everything because their demands were a little bit sprawling, but I think you can really focus on three things.

One, they wanted bigger spending cuts. And this sort of goes back to the debt ceiling deal essentially they had earlier this year. They didn't get the spending cuts they wanted during that in the final agreement. And so this was their second bite of the apple. So they wanted to cut deeper.[00:02:00]

**SPEAKER KEVIN McCARTHY:** We will prevent President Biden's executive overreach to spend money outside the normal process, which President Biden has abused....

**JORDAN WEISSMANN:** Number two, a lot of hard liners, especially the Freedom Caucus, wanted to deal with border security. As they put it, they wanted more spending on the border. They wanted changes on border policy because, as they see it, the flow of migrants coming across the US-Mexico border has just spiraled completely out of control.

**UNIDENTIFIED SPEAKER:** The real issue is not the shutdown. The real issue is the two crises we have in this country, economic security crisis and economic crisis. . .

**JORDAN WEISSMANN:** And number three, another huge issue here is Ukraine. There is a large contingent of the Republican Party, though not all of it, that is essentially done with the war in Ukraine.

**UNIDENTIFIED SPEAKER:** There is a growing rift within the Republican party over how and if to assist Ukraine, as its war against Russia enters its second year.

**JORDAN WEISSMANN:** [00:03:00] They will often connect it directly back to the border. They will say we should be spending that money at home, securing our own borders, not defending somebody else's. And that became a sticking point with the likes of Marjorie Taylor Greene, for instance.

And so I think those three issues -- spending levels, the border, and Ukraine -- dominated the discussion. But there was all sorts of other stuff swirling around that made it hard to summarize what the conservative ask was here.

**UNIDENTIFIED SPEAKER:** Were Democrats willing to negotiate on any of the key cornerstones of the Freedom Caucus asks: spending cuts, more spending at the border, and no more spending in Ukraine?

**JORDAN WEISSMANN:** Dramatic spending cuts? No, I mean, that's a nonstarter. I think that there were whispers about whether or not you could see a deal with some border funding for Ukraine, some kind of Ukraine aid, some kind of trade there. But no, in general, Democrats have not been in a mood to negotiate. That, I think is the gist here, [00:04:00] is that in the House, Democrats were just not even engaging because they saw the Republican Party disintegrating.

**WHITE HOUSE PRESS SECRETARY KARINE JEAN-PIERRE:** It one of the basic items that Congress has to deal with, and it should be done without condition. So there is going to be no negotiation over it. This is something that must get done.

**JORDAN WEISSMANN:** And in the Senate, there was this interesting dynamic where Democrats and Republicans were actually working together in a bipartisan fashion to pass their own budget bills that stuck to the deal that Biden and McCarthy had struck during the debt ceiling showdown. They said we have a deal, we're going to write bills that fund the government at those levels, and we are going to include Ukraine funding, because this is the Senate where most people want Ukraine funding.

So there was two totally different dynamics where you had the House in chaos, mostly because the Republican Party was at war with itself over how to pass a completely partisan bill, and the Senate, where things were just rolling along pretty functionally. And there was a lot of speculation that the Senate might just "jam the House," as they as people on [00:05:00] Capitol Hill like to say -- that they would just send them a bill and make them eat it. And that was going to be the end of story. That's not quite how things played out. But if you went back a few days, that was what a lot of people were expecting.

**SEAN RAMESWARAM- HOST, TODAY, EXPLAINED:** So, yeah, let's talk about how things actually played out. Heading into the weekend, shutdown was the word. And then what the heck happened?

**JORDAN WEISSMANN:** What happened in the end is that Kevin McCarthy swerved.

His strategy was to try to make whatever Herculean effort he could to pass a GOP-only bill, which is the most conservative bill he could, that would then give him some kind of negotiating position with Democrats in the Senate. That was basically his strategy. And in order to both give himself a good negotiating position, but also to keep his job and keep his conference happy. And he just couldn't do it. He could not pass even a temporary spending bill. He was having trouble passing the individual appropriations bills that his hard-line members had asked for.

**UNIDENTIFIED SPEAKER:** What [00:06:00] ultimately happened was that after trying again and again to get just Republican votes on a short-term spending bill, McCarthy couldn't get the votes, no matter how conservative he made that bill . . .

**JORDAN WEISSMANN:** There was a point where all looked lost, where he brought up a short-term spending bill with, I think it was a 30% spending cut baked into it for a short period of time, and also had the border security money. And the hard-liners still said no, because many of them just did not want any kind of short term funding. They are philosophically against the idea of short-term spending bills, so-called "continuing resolutions."

And so it seemed as if nothing could pass the House, until finally he said, okay, fine, it's I'm going to turn and work with the Democrats. And what you ended up getting was what they call a "clean continuing resolution." And what it was is basically it kept funding where it was, just continued the government's funding at previous levels. And it also included disaster aid. But the concession that [00:07:00] Democrats and some Republicans in the Senate had to make in order to get this thing through the House was dropping Ukraine aid from it temporarily.

## **Far-Right Republicans Look to Oust Speaker McCarthy After He Averts Government Shutdown - Democracy Now! - Air Date 10-2-23**

**AMY GOODMAN:** So, can you talk about, first, the drama on Saturday night and what's going to happen to House Speaker McCarthy?

**SASHA ABRAMSKY:** Yeah. Good morning, Amy. It's good to be on.

What happened Saturday night was an entirely predictable consequence of what McCarthy did in order to become speaker last year. Basically, it took 15 votes to become speaker, and to get there, he had to make all kinds of promises to empower the far right of his caucus, people like Matt Gaetz, Marjorie Taylor Greene, Lauren Boebert and so on. It was entirely predictable that if you gave power to bomb throwers, that they would throw bombs. And sure enough, they did.

What they tried to do was shut down the basic functioning of government. You played a clip of McCarthy saying, “Well, I’ve got a part of my caucus who just won’t vote from omnibus spending bills.” Well, if you’re [00:08:00] running in government, you’re in Congress, and you refuse your basic obligation to pass omnibus spending bills to keep government open, you’re responsible if at the end of the day the TSA aren’t paid, the military aren’t paid, if Head Start programs start to shut down, if WIC can’t pay its recipients, if the SNAP program can’t pay its recipients, if people going on holidays to national parks find that the parks are shuttered. And McCarthy realized that. He realized that if he let the government shut down, the Republicans would be blamed fully and squarely for the consequences. McCarthy is nothing if not an opportunist. What McCarthy wants is political power. And so, at the end of the day, McCarthy cut a deal with Democrats to keep government open.

Now, again, it’s entirely predictable, given the fact that he ceded the right, the power to challenge him, if a single member of Congress wanted to challenge him — it’s entirely predictable that within minutes of that compromise, Matt Gaetz had thrown another bomb and said, [00:09:00] “Look, I’m going to be challenging you. I’m going to be making a motion to vacate the speakership.” And that’s the drama that’s going to be playing out this week in Washington, D.C. It’s a crisis entirely of Kevin McCarthy’s own making.

**AMY GOODMAN:** And so, you have the far-right Congressman Matt Gaetz challenging him as speaker, but the Congressional Progressive Caucus will not back him, either.

**SASHA ABRAMSKY:** There’s absolutely no reason that the Democrats, of any stripe — progressive or mainstream or however you want to define them — there is no reason the Democrats should bail McCarthy out. Look, McCarthy launched an entirely spurious impeachment inquiry investigation into President Biden. It was a fishing expedition. There was no evidence there. There was no smoking gun. There was just this hunch that McCarthy had that things weren’t quite right, and therefore he launched an impeachment inquiry. Well, if that’s McCarthy’s strategy, why on Earth would the Democrats not sit back and watch him squirm? And I suspect that’s exactly what they’re going to do this week. If

they want McCarthy, to bail him out, at the bare minimum they're [00:10:00] going to be asking him to put a halt on the impeachment inquiry.

**AMY GOODMAN:** And, of course, that impeachment inquiry hearing that took place on Thursday, the Republicans' own witnesses said there wasn't enough information, like lawyer — like Attorney Turley.

**SASHA ABRAMSKY:** It was sort of joyous. It was sort of joyous to watch. It was Amateurville. I mean, this was not politics of a high caliber. This was the most ill-prepared, ill-thought-out, poorly advised Republican inquiry you could possibly imagine. You contrast it with the meticulousness of the investigations and the hearings into Donald Trump for what he did around Ukraine, for what he did after January 6th. You contrast it with the January 6th committee hearings, the bipartisan hearings, where Liz Cheney went out and said, "Look, here's why this is so dangerous to democracy." That was meticulously prepared. What the Republicans did the other day, it was a partisan show. It had no merit, and it was entirely amateur.

**AMY GOODMAN:** And then you have the [00:11:00] issue of the funding of Ukraine, which is not included in this bill, though the Senate had voted for \$6 billion. Michael Bennet, the senator from Colorado, almost scuttled the deal. And then you have that one lone Democrat who voted against the deal in the House, Quigley from Chicago, also based on the stripping of funding for Ukraine, Sasha.

**SASHA ABRAMSKY:** That's right. Quigley is the chair, I believe, of the Ukrainian Caucus in Congress, and he was absolutely furious that that funding had been stripped. What I find so fascinating about this is the absolute volte-face that the Republican Party has done on foreign policy and on national security since the beginning of the Trump years. If you had gone back 10, 15 years, the Republican Party were the party, self-proclaimed party, of, you know, everything military, everything national security. You fast-forward now, and they're an isolationist party, or at least one wing is isolationist. More than isolationist, they're a pro-Putin party. You know, it's [00:12:00] one thing to say, "Look, we don't want to be involved in wars." It's one thing to say, "We've got to have a debate about the size of the American military." That's fine. But it's completely extraordinary that a significant wing of the Republican Party is throwing in their lot with Vladimir Putin. It's also entirely predictable, because during his presidency, time and again, Trump threw his lot in with Vladimir Putin.

Well, if you're going to throw your lot in with somebody who's dictatorial, if you're going to throw your lot in with somebody who has done everything he



can to undermine democratic systems, not just in the United States, but across the Western world, if that is your bedfellow, you're going to come to strange policy conclusions. And that's what we saw in this debate, that the only way Congress could pass an omnibus spending bill and keep American government open was ceding to the far right on the issue of Ukraine — completely extraordinary to watch. And I can only think it's going to result in all kinds of internal debates within the [00:13:00] Republican Party, because there are people out there, people like Nikki Haley, people like Mike Pence, who, in public, are perfectly willing to say, "That strategy is crazy. It doesn't make sense to appease Vladimir Putin." And they are saying it in public. And I think over the next few months, as we get closer and closer to the primary season, that debate is going to become ever more public and ever more acrimonious.

## **AOC Explains Why Democrats Voted To Remove Kevin McCarthy From Speaker Position - Forbes Breaking News - Air Date 10-6-23**

**REP. ALEXANDRIA OCASIO-CORTEZ:** ...uh, which was the removal of the Speaker of the House. Now, I want to be very clear that, um, this removal was not particularly because Democrats worked with Republicans. This was, I think, a long time coming because of a series of agreements that the former Speaker had essentially agreed to. In January of this year, the Speaker of the House and the Republican Majority Party agreed to change the underlying rules of the House of Representatives. And there's always been something known as a motion to vacate. And this has [00:14:00] almost been like an emergency, smash the glass in case something happens, uh, and something, an extreme emergency around the Speaker of the House occurs, and the Speaker must be removed. This is typically a very high threshold. In order to implement a motion to vacate historically, you must essentially have huge, huge droves of members of the House of Representatives to remove the speaker, and this is precisely because this is such a serious measure that removal is not something that should be politicized or weaponized.

However, in January - that was our take - and in January of this year, however, the Republican Party disagreed, and they changed the underlying House rules to allow just one member to file a motion to vacate. And if just one member initiates a [00:15:00] motion to vacate, then within 48 hours, the House of Representatives must cast a vote, and if that vote yields yes on the motion to vacate, then the speaker is consequently removed.

Now, in January, every single Democrat voted against changing that rule. We said, this is not only a large break from precedent, but it's probably not good for you all to set this precedent for yourselves. And every single Democrat voted against this rule change. However, every single Republican voted for it. And when Republicans have the House majority and when they have control of the House, when every single Republican votes for something, it will happen. That is the nature of a majority. And so the Speaker of the House and the Republican Party insisted [00:16:00] on a one person motion to vacate while they were in the majority. And that is what was implemented. And almost this entire year, the Speaker of the House has been quite beholden to this extremist wing of the party because this motion to vacate that he adopted and approved had been kind of looming over his head.

Now, on top of that, we've also seen a series of destabilizing moves within the institution of the Speaker of the House. The current Speaker, or the former Speaker, Kevin McCarthy, he voted to overturn the results of the U.S. presidential election. Additionally, he held the entire U.S. economy hostage earlier this year and he, by refusing to raise the U.S. debt limit to pay for spending that he himself had already approved of and also that the House had already voted on. In fact, having a debt [00:17:00] limit separate from our budgets is a very strange and bizarre, archaic mechanism that does not exist in most countries. And so, Kevin McCarthy, by holding the entire U.S. economy hostage in March, struck a deal with President Biden. And that's, in that deal, that's one of the reasons why we have student loan repayments that are restarting, in addition to cuts to certain critical services. And regardless of whether we agree with that or not, I was vehemently against it and voted against it, but whether we agree with that or not, at the end of the day, that is the deal that was struck to keep the U.S. government open. Now, President Biden has upheld his end of the deal. He has exacted and executed those concessions that were issued unfairly, but that were issued, uh, in order to keep the government open. And [00:18:00] one of the problems is that Kevin McCarthy has not. And so Biden gave his end of the deal. And in this most recent CR, Kevin McCarthy said, Nevermind. And this has created a situation that has largely become untenable.

And so on Tuesday - Monday or Tuesday - one of the members of the Republican caucus filed a motion to vacate. Now I want to be very clear that pretty much never in the history of the institution has one political party voted for the other party's speaker. Democrats do not elect Republican speakers and Republicans have never elected Democratic speakers. This is almost a foundational part of the institution. And, in fact, it's part of having a party majority. It is, if Republicans are elected in the majority, it is up to Republicans to elect a Republican [00:19:00] speaker. And when Democrats are in the



majority, it is up to Democrats to elect a Democratic speaker. And what happened this week was that Republicans cast this vote, Kevin McCarthy exhibited extraordinary confidence that he would win this vote. He told everyone to bring it on. He said that he did not need to negotiate with Democrats. He did not ask Democrats for votes. He did not indicate in any single way, shape, or form that he would need Democratic votes.

And so the vote happened, and the votes that Kevin McCarthy had publicly suggested that he had, did not follow through within his Republican caucus, and when that happens, that means he lost the motion to vacate, and he was removed as Speaker of the House.

This is the first time that this has ever happened in U.S. history. The last time a [00:20:00] motion to vacate even occurred was over a hundred years ago, and that motion, I believe, failed. And so, this is the first time in U.S. history that a Speaker of the House has been removed and vacated. This also means that the line of succession to the presidency has a hole in it. Usually, the line of succession is the President. If the President cannot serve his duties, it's the Vice President. And after the Vice President, it's the Speaker of the House. Currently, there is no elected Speaker of the House. There's kind of a placeholder known as a Speaker Pro Tempore, but a Speaker Pro Tempore is not, does not qualify, to be able to serve in the line of succession. And so right now, we have the President, the Vice President, the gap, and then what goes after that gap is the current head of the Senate, the eldest serving member of the Senate in the [00:21:00] majority, which is Senator Patty Murray. And so that is the current situation that we are in.

## **The House that Newt Built: The Rise of Matt Gaetz Part 1 - UNFTR - Air Date 10-7-23**

**MAX - HOST, UNFTR:** I'm going to play two clips for you, then we need to talk. The first is right wing rebel Matt Gaetz's closing argument during the vote to oust House Speaker Kevin McCarthy.

**MATT GAETZ:** And when it comes to how those raise money, I take no lecture on asking patriotic Americans to weigh in and contribute to this fight from those who would grovel and bend knee for the lobbyists and special interests who own our leadership, who have... Oh, boo all you want ...who have hollowed out this town and have borrowed against the future of our future generations. I'll be happy to fund my political operation through the work of

hard working Americans 10 and 20 and 30 dollars at a time, and you all keep showing up at the lobbyist fundraisers and see how that goes for you.

**MAX - HOST, UNFTR:** And this one is Steve Bannon on the Bannon's War Room podcast talking about Gaetz.

**STEVE BANNON:** And this was really firing the [00:22:00] Republican wing of the uniparty today. They're coming back hard. In fact, in a few minutes the conference is gonna meet and there's already a big clamor for Matt Gaetz to be thrown outta the ... for the heroic, heroic walking in to the pit of the House and really taking 'em all on. He had bigs and he had good, and that was fine, but it was Matt Gaetz versus the establishment. It was Matt Gaetz versus the swamp. It was Matt Gaetz taking on all comers, and it was, there was no comparison.

**MAX - HOST, UNFTR:** The news channels, the pundit class, internet comment sections, pretty much everyone is trying to figure out the far right wing's endgame in the House of Representatives. But I think we're looking in the wrong place. This is just the most recent capstone in the chaos theory under which the modern GOP is operating. And Democrats are smugly standing by while Republicans stand in a circular firing squad. But they, too, are missing the [00:23:00] larger picture. This is just the latest escapade in a journey that began 30 years ago, at least as far as the House of Representatives is concerned.

But it's part of a larger story that begins with the hostile takeover of our democracy in the mid 1970s. And we've covered the names before. Names that precious few recognize, but unfuckers know all too well. Friedrich Hayek, Michael Horowitz, Gary Becker, Ronald Coase, Aaron Direktor, Milton Friedman, James Buchanan, Charles Koch, David Koch, Louis Powell, Richard Fink, Richard DeVos, Joseph Kors, and so many more. Masters of the universe hell bent on the destruction of democracy. Founders of organizations like the American Legislative Exchange Council, or ALEC, the Cato Institute, Heritage Foundation, Mercatus Center, and the Mont Pelerin Society. The founding fathers of libertarian misery, who birthed a movement that gave us Leonard Leo, Donald Trump, Steve Bannon, Marjorie Taylor Greene, and yes, Matt Gaetz. [00:24:00]

This list is notable for the vast number of omissions, but it shows you how much work we've done trying to understand how the fuck we got here. And because of this work, I know that unfuckers are no longer perplexed. And I'm sure we share a similar experience, by the way. The number of times that you've been in a conversation with a liberal democrat who's still in disbelief over how craven Republicans are, Oh my god, how did we get here? I don't blame them, I just wish they'd come along for the ride because once you see the breadth of it,

the impressive level of coordination and grit that they've demonstrated for 50 plus years, it's no longer really surprising, right? Especially after the Trump years.

Anyway, I want to talk about the historic ouster in the House that we just witnessed by looking at the middle section of the 50 year journey. And then I want to talk through something that honestly is making me really, really nervous.

**MANNY FACES - HOST, UNFTR:** Let me guess, before you get there, we gotta sit through a whole ass history lesson.

**99 - HOST, UNFTR:** And let me also guess that it's going to be brief.

**MAX - HOST, UNFTR:** As a matter of fact, yes and yes. [00:25:00] The middle section of the half century free market libertarian war on democracy is a time that we've covered rather extensively, so I do believe it will be brief, thank you very much. The reason it matters, though, and why we have to touch on it again is because we can draw a straight line from the 1990s to McCarthy's unceremonious departure.

**MANNY FACES - HOST, UNFTR:** Cue solemn history background music and...

**MAX - HOST, UNFTR:** When Newt Gingrich took over as Speaker of the House in 1995, it was a huge moment that we barely appreciate these days. The last time the GOP held the House gavel prior to Gingrich was 1953 to 1955. They held it briefly from 1947 to 1949 as well, which was the first time since 1931. The House was Democratic for most of the modern political era until Gingrich took over, and he set about changing the nature of, not just Congress, but But of the American people. He [00:26:00] did so by entering into what he called a "contract with America", a living, breathing GOP manifesto that aimed to shrink the size of government and restore conservative principles in the country.

There were 10 promises the GOP took...

**MANNY FACES - HOST, UNFTR:** Oh, shit, UNFTR list music is coming up.

**MAX - HOST, UNFTR:** There were 10 promises the GOP took as commandments.

**99 - HOST, UNFTR:** A balanced budget amendment.

**MANNY FACES - HOST, UNFTR:** Increasing instances of the death penalty and more funding for the prison industrial complex and police.

**MAX - HOST, UNFTR:** Prohibiting welfare to young mothers to discourage welfare. Broad based cuts to all welfare programs and implementation of work requirements.

**99 - HOST, UNFTR:** Enforcing child support. Incentivizing adoption, parental rights, and education.

**MANNY FACES - HOST, UNFTR:** \$500 per child tax credits and individual savings accounts for home buying, education, and retirement.

**MAX - HOST, UNFTR:** Strengthening the military and creating a missile defense system.

**99 - HOST, UNFTR:** Capital gains tax cut. Unfunded mandate reforms.

**MANNY FACES - HOST, UNFTR:** Limits on punitive damages, and "loser pays" provisions to prevent [00:27:00] frivolous lawsuits.

**MAX - HOST, UNFTR:** Congressional term limits.

**MANNY FACES - HOST, UNFTR:** And we're back to the history lesson.

Center of domestic political power had moved from the White House to Newt's House. The ruthless romantic had reached his moment with the chance to change America. In a remarkable display of discipline and purpose, Gingrich's House passed all but one of the contract's 10 Commandments in its first 100 days. More importantly, the fundamental debate had shifted to Newt's agenda. Suddenly, the question was not whether to balance the budget and shrink the government, but when and how. The fulcrum of power had shifted, but so had the harsh glare of the spotlight, exposing the Speaker's flaws and his excesses.

In our series on the Clinton years, we detailed how most of what the Gingrich House put forward was ultimately put into effect. Clinton's cynical strategy, [00:28:00] something his advisors termed triangulation, was to get ahead of as much of it as possible and make it part of the Democratic agenda. And so that's what we got: a Clinton legacy, largely authored by Newt Gingrich.

That's a policy story that we've also covered. What I want to dig into is the culture shift that Gingrich introduced into the House, because that's what remains long after his manifesto. Gingrich was perhaps one of the greatest political operatives who ever held the gavel. Ultimately, his corrupt ways and tawdry personal life led to his unraveling in the role, but the effect that he had on the body far outlasted his tenure as speaker. Newt Gingrich is extremely intelligent and perniciously clever. His "contract with America" was a way of galvanizing the conservative base of the country and of painting the GOP into a corner from which they have yet to escape.

## Through the Gaetz of Hell - Straight White American Jesus - Air Date 10-6-23

### **BRAD ONISHI - CO-HOST, STRAIGHT WHITE AMERICAN JESUS:**

So, Leo Strauss, professor, theorist, kind of famous social theorist of [00:29:00] the 20th century, defines nihilism this way: "The desire to destroy the present world and its potentialities, a desire not accompanied by any clear conception of what one wants to put in its place."

I think the easiest way to think about this, Dan, is the Joker when, in the Batman movie, he's described as "some men just want to see the world burn." They want to see the world burn. They don't have anything to offer in its place. They're not trying to build something else. They just want to watch what's there burn for... it's just destruction's sake.

So Dan, you're a social theorist, you're somebody who's probably more well versed in this stuff than me. Off to you. Help us understand political nihilism and then we'll link it to Matt Gaetz and Kevin McCarthy and Donald Trump and the big mess that Republican politics and American politics is today.

### **DANIEL MILLER - CO-HOST, STRAIGHT WHITE AMERICAN**

**JESUS:** Yeah, so we didn't plan it, but it's funny that you highlight that clip. I taught a class for a long time and nihilism was one of the things we were supposed to talk about in there. And we would watch *The Dark Knight Rises*, that's [00:30:00] the Batman movie with the Joker character, and looking at whether or not he's a nihilist, because of that. If you want to see people who aren't nihilists that are called nihilists, and it's just funny, just go with *The Big Lebowski*, but that's just like a side thing.

So I think, not surprisingly, I'm like, oh, Leo Strauss had a good definition. It is, and I think that's the key, is all of these debates people have, if we're gonna

bring it down to earth, and be like, why are we talking about, we're talking about the contemporary GOP, that's what we're talking about. I think that'd be the first point, is that's like the sort of terrifying thing.

So when people think of something like political nihilism, it's supposed to be theoretical or it's supposed to be, I don't know, some sort of vindictive accompaniment of fascism or something. It's not supposed to be something of like mainstream political thought in a well-established democratic system like the US or modern Europe or something like that. And that's what we're looking at. And for me, when we look at the GOP, that's what we see. This is why people have heard me rail about it for years. I think I'm going to be railing about it for years more.

When people talk about the GOP and they still use the term conservatives or conservatism to [00:31:00] apply to it, it's not. I disagree with political conservatism of pretty much every stripe. Or classical liberalism or whatever title you want to give it. Fine. But it's a political philosophy. It has principles. It has reasons why policy decisions are made and so forth. The contemporary GOP doesn't, right? And that notion of destroying the present world and its potentialities or to use the method -- it was Alfred who said it, describing the joker in *The Dark Knight Rises*, who says some people just want to watch the world burn. That's what we see. We see a politics of retribution. We see a politics of payback. And that's what this McCarthy thing really was. We see a politics of targeting people.

So just to give some examples, a laundry list of things we've already talked about lots of times, but just to lead up, because this is just more of the same. When you have the Republican Party targeting queer kids, or targeting people of color, and that's what the book bans are about. They're not about protecting people, they are [00:32:00] about removing voices of color, removing queer voices, removing certain experiences from the public realm. Targeting women through abortion criminalization.

And again, for people who say, well it's about protection -- it's not, it's criminalized. All these things about making it a felony for a doctor to even advise a woman about -- that's vindictive, that is aimed at harming people, that's destroying a certain kind of social order.

Anti-immigration policies, anti-discrimination laws. We talked earlier about how the Military Academy is now under suit for affirmative action. This week, the Naval Academy is named in a suit. The same thing, targeting every time. Anti-vaxing on the offense, not just "don't force me to get a vaccine," but we have attorneys general urging people not to get the vaccine and the active



promulgation of disinformation. Trump playing kingmaker in the House this week, of toying with the idea of being named Speaker of the House and throwing his support behind Jordan. We can talk about that.

[00:33:00] The point is, that's what this politics is. None of these are about principles. None of these are about, oh here's a good stalwart principle. [I] said a number of weeks ago that you can tell that there's no principle there because a Republican now, a mainstream Republican, wouldn't be able to tell you what they advance until you can tell them what position you hold, and then they'll tell you what position they have because it's the opposite.

I did see -- I'll throw this out and then close off, I think it was maybe a TikTok video or somewhere else on social media -- this guy had this hilarious thing, and he was right, where he's like, you know what the Democrats should do right now is put every bit of gun control they want and call it the Stop Hunter Biden Act, because then the Republicans will suddenly vote for all of the gun control measures that they don't want because Hunter Biden is up on gun charges.

That's what we mean practically when we talk about political nihilism, is a system that doesn't have political principle. And just to head it off, are there still conservatives? Yes. Are there still principled? Yes, there are. [00:34:00] I'd love to hear from people. You want to keep them coming? Keep them coming. But the emails that are like, this is still the heart of the -- it's not the heart of the Republican Party. It's like a remainder. It's like a math remainder that you cut off the end when you're rounding up. That's what conservatism is in the GOP now.

So, In concrete terms, political nihilism is what you and I, Brad, have been talking about for years now, what other people are seeing, and I think it's slowly dawning on broader segments of people that there really is, as they might say behind the GOP, there's no *there*, there. There's nothing below this. There's nothing behind it. This is just what it is in the effort to create a kind of Christian American whatever it is that they think they want.

## **The House that Newt Built: The Rise of Matt Gaetz Part 2 - UNFTR - Air Date 10-7-23**

**MAX - HOST, UNFTR:** Well, this philosophy has delivered us into the Lesser Evil era. Now, what's ironic, or maybe just funny, is how each successive GOP leader is ultimately destroyed by their own. Gingrich was ousted by his own.

His replacement, Dennis Hastert, a stern and reliable man who sought to restore some integrity to the Speaker [00:35:00] position, was later arrested on child pornography charges.

Next up was John Boehner, a new protégé who was undone by the next iteration of GOP fuckheads, namely Paul Ryan. Surely fiscal conservative and doe-eyed fitness freak Ryan would weather the storm. And alas, no. By then, norms had flown out the window, and Ryan was quickly humiliated and neutered by Donald J. Trump.

And now we have Kevin McCarthy. McCarthy, who was part of the trio of douche nozzles who called themselves the Young Guns, which included Ryan and Eric Cantor. And now McCarthy has been taken out by the next nozzle in line, the most revolting insurgent yet, Matt Gaetz. Except Gaetz seems to have little interest in taking the gavel for himself. And that's why so many pundits are tying themselves in knots trying to figure out his endgame.

**MANNY FACES - HOST, UNFTR:** I assume that brings us to the scary part?

**MAX - HOST, UNFTR:** It does indeed. [00:36:00]

You reap what you sow. Newt was ambitious. The House Speaker is third in line for the presidency. But Newt made no bones about it. Third is for losers, and he wanted to be president. So he lobbed a bomb into the House chamber and destroyed any pretense of compromise. The House had been overthrown by demagogues, and that's what we've gotten ever since.

Matt Gaetz is Frankenstein's monster. A convenient vessel of despair and cynicism, with a pompadour and a tie. But he doesn't want to be the president. He's angling for something else. The mistake is in thinking he's stupid. I'm so freaked out by this guy, I don't even want to do the Butthead imitation.

**99 - HOST, UNFTR:** I was wondering.

I've been watching him more closely in recent months. It's only when he's up against someone as skilled as Jamie Raskin that Gaetz finds himself on the defensive. But I've watched the way he channels populist talking points and rage into legal arguments to take [00:37:00] powerful figures to task. He's unapologetic, pugnacious, and sharp tongued. He doesn't stumble, doesn't mince words. And if you're merely a casual observer, you might even appreciate some of his takes. Here he is grilling General Mark Milley over the withdrawal from Afghanistan.

**REP. MATT GAETZ:** You spent more time with Bob Woodward on this book than you spent analyzing the very likely prospect that the Afghanistan government was going to fall immediately to the Taliban, didn't you?

**GENERAL MARK MILLEY:** Not even close, Congressman.

**REP. MATT GAETZ:** Oh, really? Because you said right after Kabul fell that no one could have anticipated the immediate fall of the Ghani government. When did you become aware that Joe Biden tried to get Ghani to lie about the conditions in Afghanistan? He did that in July. Did you know that right away?

**GENERAL MARK MILLEY:** I'm not aware of what President Biden --

**REP. MATT GAETZ:** You're not aware of the phone call that Biden had with Ghani where he said, whether it is true or not, we want you to go out there and paint a rosy picture of what's going on in Afghanistan. You're the chief military adviser to the president. You said [00:38:00] that the Taliban was not going to defeat the government of Afghanistan militarily, which, by the way, they cut through them like a hot knife through butter, and then the president tries to get Ghani to lie. When did you become aware of that attempt?

**MAX - HOST, UNFTR:** Confronting FBI Director Christopher Wray.

**REP. MATT GAETZ:** People need to understand what just happened. My Democrat colleague just asked the director of the FBI whether or not they are buying information about our fellow Americans. And the answer is, "Well, we'll just have to get back to you on that. Sounds really complicated. But I have other questions. I'm sitting here with my father. I will make certain that between the man sitting next to me and every person he knows and my ability to forever hold a grudge, that you will regret not following my direction. I am sitting here, waiting for the call with my father." Sounds like a shakedown, doesn't it, Director?

**FBI DIRECTOR CHRISTOPHER WRAY:** I'm not going to get into commenting on that.

**REP. MATT GAETZ:** You seem deeply uncurious about it, don't you? Almost suspiciously uncurious. Are you protecting the Bidens? [00:39:00]

**FBI DIRECTOR CHRISTOPHER WRAY:** Absolutely not. The FBI does not and has no interest in protecting anyone politically.

**REP. MATT GAETZ:** Well, you won't answer the question about whether that's a shakedown. And everybody knows why you won't answer it. Because to the millions of people who will see this, they know it is.

**MAX - HOST, UNFTR:** Fighting over retiring Ukraine's debt.

**MATT GAETZ:** My amendment makes a \$4.5 billion cut. 3.5 billion of that stops us from retiring global debt for Ukraine. Now, I don't think it's an unrealistic position to say that the United States of America should not deficit spend to retire the debt of other countries.

Think about that. We are borrowing money from China to go settle the debts of Ukraine that they accrued far before this war with Russia.

**MAX - HOST, UNFTR:** In areas of the internet that you and I don't travel, on broadcasts that we don't watch, and in circles that we don't run in, Gaetz is going from buffoon to hero because there's literally no structure of [00:40:00] power he won't quarrel with.

Forget who he is and which side of the aisle he's on. He's calling out the military and the FBI. That's traditionally the purview of leftists, but ever since Donald Trump opened the door and questioned the authority of the very levers that he himself controlled, the lunatic fringe has come rushing in behind him.

What scares me is his lack of transparent ambition. He seems to be happy in the role of Lucifer's attack dog, so much so that I'm beginning to think that the chaos that he's sowing isn't a tactic. I think chaos is the endgame. My proof is to look no further than his cozy alignment with Steve Bannon.

Just like the cadre of evil libertarians have been years ahead of the left in building organizations, propaganda campaigns, and operations to steal power and promote disinformation, Steve Bannon is years ahead of the left *and* the right in finding ways to tear the whole system down. He almost did it once. [00:41:00] Do you really think he stopped trying? I mean, this guy was inside the White House. He fucking made it. He got to see the machine from the inside. It's like having the blueprint to the Death Star. No, I think there's something else going on here.

**MANNY FACES - HOST, UNFTR:** Election deniers in key government positions.

**99 - HOST, UNFTR:** Precinct captains and poll watchers enlisted by Bannon's war room.

**MAX - HOST, UNFTR:** RFK Junior is likely switching his affiliation to independent, leaving faith healer Marianne Williamson as the only opposition within the Democratic Party, and barely.

**MANNY FACES - HOST, UNFTR:** Cornel West virtually shut out of the conversation.

**99 - HOST, UNFTR:** Biden decaying before our very eyes.

**MAX - HOST, UNFTR:** No Labels is contemplating a spoiler role with Joe Manchin making a third party run.

**MANNY FACES - HOST, UNFTR:** And Republican infighting bringing this legislative session to a grinding halt, just weeks before another government funding confrontation.

**MAX - HOST, UNFTR:** And now Democrats and progressives are just blithely taking it all in, thinking somehow, Republican voters are going to blame Republicans for chaos on the House floor or even a government [00:42:00] shutdown. But that's just not how it works.

## **Why Our Politics Are Stuck In 2016 - FiveThirtyEight Politics - Air Date 9-25-23**

**LYNN VAVRECK:** So I don't think that Trump leaving politics is necessarily going to end the focus on identity politics. So you, you've seen other people emerge to echo his style of campaigning and his positions and his sort of prioritizing identity inflected issues. But there are a couple pieces of evidence that I think are interesting to think about. So the first is, we saw in 2020 some extraordinary moments in global politics. A global pandemic that did not dislodge this new dimension of conflict in American politics. We saw the largest social justice movement since the Civil Rights and Voting Rights Act in America in the 1960s. That did not dislodge this new dimension of conflict.

**GALEN DRUKE - PRODUCER, FIVETHIRTYEIGHT:** [00:43:00] Those are... Well, that's in many ways a doubling down, right?, of this dimension of conflict in a way, right? Like it's the sort of... Maybe more Democrats approach to identity inflected issues.

**LYNN VAVRECK:** Well, you did see after the murder of George Floyd, everyone's ratings of police went down. Everyone's ratings of the Black Lives Matter movement, I mean, on average, went up. So there was a moment where entrepreneurial or strategic politicians might have capitalized on that. It doesn't happen. Same thing with COVID. In the beginning of COVID, everybody was staying home, washing their hands, canceling visits with family. Then Trump politicizes it. He says, 'March on your state capitol and tell your governors that you're taking back Michigan', et cetera, et cetera. He reintroduces this identity inflected dimension. This is a blue state problem, is how he framed it. So, if [00:44:00] there were a big global political moment or a national political moment, it doesn't even have to be as big as those where one of the two candidates did not try to make it about this existing dimension of conflict, then, maybe, the fight wouldn't be over that dimension.

But here's the problem: having demonstrated that there is political payoff by making politics about this dimension, it will be very difficult for a candidate who wants to win elections to come along and say, Oh, here's this dimension on which the previous two presidential elections, you know, we won one, and we've come within tens of thousands of votes of winning the other, boy, I'm going to forego that, and I'm going to start talking about something else. That's tough. And about foreign policy, I'll just say, historically, it's been very difficult for candidates to make [00:45:00] that the central feature of a national election fight. So I don't see that happening either.

**GALEN DRUKE - PRODUCER, FIVETHIRTYEIGHT:** Yeah, I'll say, you know, listening to stump speeches and reporting on the primaries so far, it seems like Nikki Haley is trying quite hard, like she's really pitching, sort of focusing a lot on China in her speeches in Iowa, New Hampshire, and South Carolina. And voters like it, but I don't know that it really changes the dimension very much.

**LYNN VAVRECK:** You know, that's very smart on her part because that's where her credential, her national stage credential, that's where it is. She is the candidate with a lot of foreign policy experience, who has communicated with other world leaders. So, she does want to talk about that. That's what sets her apart from the other people running. But as you just said, it doesn't mean she's going to be able to refocus the whole election onto that.

**GALEN DRUKE - PRODUCER, FIVETHIRTYEIGHT:** Yeah. I mean, the way that you tell the story is a very Trump-centric story. And I, you know, understand in 2016, we all lived through that. I'll spare our [00:46:00] audience, you know, like too much rehashing of it. But to what extent is identity inflected politics a Republican driven realignment or pivot versus a Democratic one? Because I just said I wasn't going to rehash 2016, but like, we all listened to



Hillary Clinton's stump speech in 2016. It was very much, like, going through every piece of the perceived democratic coalition to say, like, I am here representing LGBTQ Americans, Native Americans, Black Americans, et cetera, and so there's a lot of focus, and you know, the deal me in on the woman card, and I'm with her, and there's a lot of identity inflected politics in the way that Hillary Clinton campaigns, in a way that Barack Obama never would have done, and probably couldn't have done, given that he was the first Black American president.

So, I'm curious for your take on how Democrats play a role in this, or if you think that the way that Clinton campaigned was just a reaction to Trump.

**LYNN VAVRECK:** Yeah, so I think, I'll say three things. The first is that Barack Obama doesn't have to say it [00:47:00] out loud. He just has to show up on the scene. And he's, and he's already priming race in people's minds. So, he doesn't have to talk about it. Second... The 2008 and 2016 presidential elections are happening in incredibly different contexts for the Democratic candidate. Barack Obama can say, 'we are in the middle of a global financial crisis, that party got you into it. Don't change horses midstream. You've had a good run with our party. Why would you want to experiment with something else?'

But as you say then, this unexpected wrinkle enters the contest, i. e. Trump gets the Republican nomination. And he for reasons you can imagine, does not want to talk about the success of the Obama years and getting us out of the global financial crisis. And so he [00:48:00] introduces this other dimension of conflict. Now, at that moment, Clinton does have a choice to make: stick with my, you know, if you remember when she launched her campaign, I'm going around talking to Americans about the economy and about jobs and people are buying new homes and getting new jobs. And guess what? I want to get a new job and move into a new home too. That's how she announced her candidacy. She can stick with that or she can counter what Trump is saying. And as you mentioned, the Democratic coalition does have strong preferences on these identity inflected issues. So, even if she wanted to stick with her economic message, it's very difficult in that moment because the activists in the coalition are saying, You have to respond, you have to respond. And she does. But then we're fighting about the thing Trump wants to be fighting [00:49:00] about.

Okay, so the third thing that I just wanted to say in response to that is your original question was, you know, how much are Democrats culpable for this rise in identity inflected issues, is that post-2016, we get into 2020 and 2022 and now 2024, and we've introduced even more identity inflected issues that we're fighting over. You know, how do we want to think about sports, men's and women's sports teams? How do we want to think about gender and gender

identity and school locker rooms and bathrooms? And states are going to make policy, school districts are going to make policy about these kinds of things. And this is another set of identity inflected issues and policies that have come into this conversation. And we're a long way toward getting resolution on all of these things, but particularly these [00:50:00] new issues.

And so, yes, this is a good place to see how far apart, on average, the parties are, and how people within the parties are similar to one another. This is exactly sort of the drivers of calcification that we're talking about and, I mean, you need both sides to have distance and to have that stickiness.

## Who Will Replace Kevin McCarthy - The Brian Lehrer Show - Air Date 10-6-23

**BRIAN LEHRER - HOST, THE BRIAN LEHRER SHOW:** *The Times* article that you contributed to on this says, "For Mr. Jordan, an Ohioan and co-founder of the Ultra Conservative House Freedom Caucus, the task will be to convince more mainstream Republicans that he can govern and not simply tear things down. He met on Thursday with members of the mainstream caucus, a group of business minded Republicans for Mr. Scalise", the article says, "a Louisianan who has won conference elections before as majority leader. The challenge will be to stay one step ahead of Mr. Jordan and make better inroads with the right wing of the party". So can you talk about the Jordan side of that [00:51:00] first? What might he be doing to cultivate less radical Republicans?

**LUKE BROADWATER:** Well, you know, Jim Jordan, over the past couple of years has shed a little of his reputation as just a bomb thrower who tears things down. You know, when he was the chairman of the House Freedom Caucus, he and his allies really antagonized speaker after speaker and ran a couple of them out, you know, Boehner and Paul Ryan were both sort of run out by the Freedom Caucus. Under McCarthy, Jordan's started to become. interested in being more of a leader in the party and he formed an alliance with McCarthy and became the judiciary chairman and although still seen very much as someone on the far right of the party, he pushed the party more to his way of thinking, to the right wing, and started acting more like a [00:52:00] traditional leadership candidate.

He's trying to make the case to these moderate groups. Yesterday he met with the mainstream caucus. These are sort of more centrist, business minded Republicans. He's trying to make the case that he's, that although you may think of him as this bomb thrower on the right, he can work in leadership, he can

come up with a plan, he can unite the party, and he's not just somebody who wants to tear things down.

So that's the case he's trying to make right now. Um, you know, I think when this race first started, people saw him as an underdog against Scalise. I think the Trump endorsement probably helps him, and he's doing a lot of outreach to try to not be the underdog and to say that these, you know, these moderate groups can trust him.

He's not gonna screw them over, but he's the person who can bring the right along with him. They trust him, and there can be unity in the Republican conference.

**BRIAN LEHRER - HOST, THE BRIAN LEHRER SHOW:** And the challenge for Scalise is the opposite, to cultivate those on the right who might be natural allies of [00:53:00] Jordan?

**LUKE BROADWATER:** Yeah, slightly. I mean, I think... now both of these guys are on the right. I don't want it to be believed that Scalise is some sort of centralist or moderate. But because he's been in leadership before, he's won conference-wide elections, I think he's shown that he can vote for things that centrists like: keeping government open, passing the budget, sort of the normal operations of government. I think there's more trust towards Scalise from the centrists about just sort of the very basics of government: keeping it running, you know, keeping things functioning normally. So, his challenge will be, because Jordan has such a sway over the hard right and the Freedom Caucus types, that can he pick off any of them. And so he's making a lot of calls right now. He's picking up tons of support in the South and the Midwest on these calls.

Now, remember you can't really have a split Republican conference here. You pretty much need [00:54:00] everybody to vote for one person or to be elected speaker. I think you can only lose like four votes. So, somebody's got to emerge as the consensus candidate here, and Scalise is hoping that'll be him.

## **It's Now Or Never For The GOP Candidates - FiveThirtyEight Politics - Air Date 9-28-23**

**GALEN DRUKE - PRODUCER, FIVETHIRTYEIGHT:** One of the things that I do during the debate is just write down every topic as it comes up. So I'm

gonna go through and name all of the topics, and if you think that there's anything worth saying on any of the topics, go 'ding ding ding ding ding' and I'll stop and we can talk about it. And if you never say 'ding ding ding ding ding', I'll just pick the one that was most interesting to me. Okay. So, we began with the ongoing strikes and unions, then Reagan's legacy, government shutdown, childcare, immigration, crime and drugs, inflation, healthcare, education, critical race theory and slavery, LGBTQ issues, then there was the... I just wrote this down all by itself, I feel stupider every time you speak comment, then Ukraine, TikTok, [00:55:00] China, America's Farmers, using force in Mexico, national security, energy, abortion. I didn't hear any 'ding ding ding ding dings.'

**LEAH ASKARINAM - REPORTER, FIVETHIRTYEIGHT:** [ sigh]

**GEOFFREY SKELLEY - ANALYST, FIVETHIRTYEIGHT:** I mean, I guess in terms of, like, the kind of strong comments made by Republican candidates about an issue, you know, immigration or border security, I think, if I recall correctly, DeSantis had a good moment there. Haley had a good moment there. But at the same time, I'm not sure how much, like, I don't know if there's actually anything you can take away on those particular issues in terms of like, it's sort of just very slight degrees of difference. Something like the TikTok moment and talking about China's influence. Like, Ramaswamy was critical of China, but he also was talking up, Well, we have to use TikTok while it's here, kind of thing, and Haley was like, I'm not having any of that, basically.

So that was interesting. I'm not really sure how much it revealed, though, about sort of like internal party disagreements.

**LEAH ASKARINAM - REPORTER, FIVETHIRTYEIGHT:** Yeah, I think that's right, and... [00:56:00] Just thinking about, as you were reading through those, I was, you know, just trying to remember what every candidate said about those different topics, and I will say the candidate that came up the most for me was actually DeSantis, you know, him talking about sending troops to the border and, um, him really doubling down on his, um, history curriculum and the comments about slavery, which was, um, I was really surprised by. And, I also am kind of struck by how little I remember from what Tim Scott said. And I mean, there was, of course, the Nikki Haley moment, but that, in my mind, is curtains [laugh] more than anything else. I wonder, I mean, if we're gonna think about a candidate who needed to have a standout moment tonight, I think that's probably Tim Scott, and now that you're talking about all these topics at once, I'm kinda thinking, like, he didn't really have that, did he?

**GEOFFREY SKELLEY - ANALYST, FIVETHIRTYEIGHT:** Well, I think to your point, Leah, it's [00:57:00] like Scott probably felt the pressure, like, I

gotta, I gotta make something happen here. So, he goes after Haley, who he probably feels like there's maybe some overlap of potential support. But did it really land? Nah, not really. And maybe it exposes that Scott's not particularly good at attacking. And I, and that's maybe understandable given sort of, I think the tenor of how he campaigns, he's sort of positive, happy warrior in a lot of ways. And maybe attacking someone is just not like kind of a natural fit for him. And that's not a criticism. It's just sort of an observation of how he campaigns. It would add up that he might not excel at that particular thing.

**GALEN DRUKE - PRODUCER, FIVETHIRTYEIGHT:** Jeff, I think you make a good point about the issues and the degree of difference between the candidates. So what was notable about the first debate is the degree to which they went in on issues that the candidates didn't agree on: climate change, abortion, you know, [00:58:00] quite toward the top of the debate.

**GEOFFREY SKELLEY - ANALYST, FIVETHIRTYEIGHT:** Even, like, Ukraine.

**GALEN DRUKE - PRODUCER, FIVETHIRTYEIGHT:** Ukraine.

**GEOFFREY SKELLEY - ANALYST, FIVETHIRTYEIGHT:** Like, more about Ukraine and intervention.

**GALEN DRUKE - PRODUCER, FIVETHIRTYEIGHT:** Absolutely. Absolutely. And, but, tonight started more on the unions, I mean, unions is interesting, right?, because it sort of puts into high relief the difference between the Republican Party of Reagan and the Republican Party today, where Reagan famously fires the air traffic controllers, but, you know, now, during this debate, Trump was going to support striking Trump was auto union workers during the debate. So, obviously things have changed.

But I think more what I wanna say is, yes, a lot of the prime issues that they talked about, they largely agree on. So it's gradations of difference. And these issues, like the economy, immigration, wokeness, beating Joe Biden, whatever, these are issues that according to our polling with Ipsos, which we once again did pre and post polling with Ipsos, are, according to voters, the issues that will play the biggest [00:59:00] role in deciding their vote.

Now, what I will say is, you know, this is of the unscientific part, but like, out talking to voters, largely Republican voters, over the past several days, one, they don't know very many of the candidates who are running other than Donald Trump. Some of them couldn't name a single one, or when I would name them,

be like, yeah, I've heard of this person, but I don't know very much about them, and when you ask about the issues that are motivating them, it is, in fact, those issues, but what they talk about is, Oh, well, gas wasn't \$7 under Donald Trump, right? It's almost, it's approaching \$7 in this part of Southern California. Like, I could not actually even believe my eyes when I saw the gas prices coming from a place where everyone complains about \$4 gas. But this is the way in which Donald Trump works as an incumbent. People have a record of what was life like when Donald Trump was president, that they point to as his argument. And so he doesn't even have to be on stage making his case for, this is what I will do on the economy, this [01:00:00] is what I will do on immigration, this is what I will do on China, or tariffs, or national security, or foreign interventions, or whatever. Everyone just already has in mind what were these things like when he was president, and that's his answer to these questions. And none of these candidates are going to be able to really compete with that

**LEAH ASKARINAM - REPORTER, FIVETHIRTYEIGHT:** I mean, totally. I wonder if the candidates on stage were actually, like, uniformly critical of Trump, if that incumbent advantage would be as strong. And I actually don't know if I agree with the argument I'm about to make, um, so bear with me, it's...

**GALEN DRUKE - PRODUCER, FIVETHIRTYEIGHT:** Oh, my favorite kind of argument, I make it all the time.

**GEOFFREY SKELLEY - ANALYST, FIVETHIRTYEIGHT:** Devil's advocate.

**LEAH ASKARINAM - REPORTER, FIVETHIRTYEIGHT:** 1:15 am with [unrecognized], after... Let's, let's do this. Um, no, I think about this a lot with campaigns, how just silence in general allows other candidates to come and fill a void. And that's something that I literally wrote about today for, you know, the *Cook Report*, literally today, about a House race where a candidate [01:01:00] was being really quiet, but had a famous last name, and what could Democrats do with that?

So, if the candidates on stage were all united in saying, Well, Donald Trump isn't actually pro life, or, you know, if they were all united against his position on Ukraine, something like that, I do wonder if he would have to speak up. But because voters' preexisting view of him is what he wants it to be anyway, he doesn't have to change anything and nobody's changing it for him. And this gets back to my central gripe: something's gotta change.



**GEOFFREY SKELLEY - ANALYST, FIVETHIRTYEIGHT:** It's a reasonable thought. I mean, it's sort of like the chorus of Republican leaders, or something, if they were all united saying, like, We can't have Trump again, and here's why, x, y, z, that would probably get some more coverage, it would press Trump in some way. I mean, I don't, it's not a terrible theory. I mean, look, if there are Republicans who do not want Donald Trump to be the nominee, we are definitely at the throw-spaghetti-against-the-wall-and-see-what-sticks part of the campaign already. [01:02:00] So, it's as good a theory as you're gonna hear, so, I don't know, it's a thought.

## Final comments on what divides the parties from each other and from within

**JAY TOMLINSON - HOST, BEST OF THE LEFT:** We've just heard clips today starting with *Today, Explained* breaking down the details of the threatened shutdown. *Democracy Now!* discussed the dynamics of the bomb throwers in the GOP's impact on the party. AOC spoke during a virtual town hall about why the Democrats in Congress didn't vote to save McCarthy from his far right flank. *Unf\*cking the Republic*, in two parts, delved into the history of how Newt Gingrich helped turn the GOP onto its current path. *Straight White American Jesus* discussed Matt Gaetz and the politics of nihilism. And *FiveThirtyEight Politics* took a stab at explaining Trump's impact on the issues we fight over. That's what everybody heard. But members also heard two bonus clips about the two GOP elections we're currently in the middle of. The first from the *Brian Lehrer Show*, looking at the race to replace Kevin McCarthy as speaker of the House. And the second from *FiveThirtyEight Politics* discussing the second debate between [01:03:00] candidates running to unseat Trump from the GOP nomination.

To hear that and have all of our bonus content delivered seamlessly to the new members only podcast feed that you'll receive, sign up to support the show at [bestoftheleft.com/support](https://bestoftheleft.com/support) or shoot me an email requesting a financial hardship membership, because we don't let a lack of funds stand in the way of hearing more information.

Now to wrap up this fight over the speakership has given me some thoughts about the divides within the parties. And, uh, to be completely honest, I didn't fully understand the degree to which there is internal divide within the GOP. I knew there was one. I saw it when the Tea Party entered the scene in 2010. I understood that the more extreme elements of the party basically drove John Boehner out of politics, you know, back in the 2010s. But still, I didn't fully understand. And I think it's because, well, I would argue that the GOP hides it a

little bit better, [01:04:00] but I think there's a little bit of cross-partisan blindness about how the other party works. Which is really interesting because as followers of politics, what people tend to do is pay more attention to the people they disagree with. They understand more about, you know, if you hate Republicans, you're likely to hear more news about the Republicans than Democrats and vice versa. I think. So let me explain.

Within the last year or so I heard or saw a quote from a GOP politician, I don't know which one, and they were talking about how the Democrats are always in such lock step and how they always agree on everything. In contrast to the Republicans, this person was arguing. And you know, they described the Republicans as being like wildly divided and always fighting with each other. And he was sort of arguing that, you know, this is why the Democrats are the real authoritarians and the Republicans are the real big [01:05:00] tent party because we have all kinds of different, you know, opinions and Democrats are like made to agree on everything. And I was like, what? Because the Democrats are always squabbling publicly. You got the Joe Manchins and other conservative Democrats holding the rest of the party hostage. You've got the progressive Squad out there saying a bunch of stuff that to me makes perfect sense, and they're getting condemned for it, not just by Republicans, but also plenty of Democrats, too.

Meanwhile, at least in the media, when Republicans are on TV or anywhere else, they are on their talking points. You can count on basically every one of them to actually use the talking points that are distributed by the party, or, you know, maybe some outside of the party, major influencer. And they're hitting the same notes like as George W. Bush said back in the day, this is a real quote, "See, in my line of work, you got to keep [01:06:00] repeating things over and over and over again for the truth to sink in, to kind of catapult the propaganda". One of the great moments of accidentally saying the quiet part out loud.

So, the GOP is good at that. They're good at saying the same thing from a lot of different people, in a lot of different outlets, all the same way at the same time, day after day, to catapult the propaganda. So, outwardly the GOP has always seemed like the party that's in lockstep because they're all literally saying the same thing. Meanwhile, rank and file Democrats have been complaining for my whole life and a long time before that about how the Democratic Party can not get on a single message to save its life. Many years ago, Paul Begala - he was an advisor to Bill Clinton back in the nineties, but I'm not, I'm talking about, you know, the 20 aughts or whatever - said on TV that Democrats need to take a page out [01:07:00] of the Republican playbook and send out talking points to everyone to repeat. And the host of the show that he was talking to asked him if he would be willing to regurgitate talking points on television that the party had

sent out, and he was like, No, I wouldn't do that. So, even the person who's like, This is what we need to do, is like, Ehh, yeah, I mean, I wouldn't do it, but other people need to do it. Or maybe he'd be willing to do it if he was the one who got to send out the talking points, right? Like, this is the thinking of people on the left, which is fine. I think it's fine to insist on saying what you actually believe, because the reverse is cynical and gross. It's being willing to regurgitate talking points, whether you agree with them or not.

So, that's one of the lost causes for the left. It's never going to happen. They're never going to fall in line and adhere to talking points like that. The right for the most part is [01:08:00] willing to do that. And that's how you get so many stories from, I mean, usually people on the left will tell the story of, like, being in a green room with a conservative, after they've had a TV appearance together and oftentimes the Republican will sort of admit that they're full of shit when they were on air. Like, they don't really believe what they were just saying. And they think that the person on the left is doing the same thing, that they're all playing the same games. So, they're, you know, like, go to the green room and be like, Good one, right? I think I really got those bullshit points across. And the person on the left is like, Wait, what? You don't even believe that stuff? I believe everything I was saying, you know? So there's that just, like, total working at cross purposes. Like, we don't understand how the other side functions.

So, anyway, that's sort of the background, but that brings us to the question of, number one, how would a Republican ever get the idea that the Democrats are always in agreement when we're always publicly disagreeing with each other all the time? [01:09:00] And, number two, how is it that a party like the Republicans that's usually willing to adhere to these mass distributed talking points, how could they actually be so divided in reality, so much so that we've now come to this current state of completely melting down and, you know, bringing Congress to a screeching halt? My way of understanding this is that the biggest difference between the parties isn't about how much or little they disagree internally. Clearly there's plenty of that on both sides. So, that's not the divider between the two parties. The divider is how much they actually care if the government functions or not. Democrats fight internally a lot about what their priorities should be, what policies they should push for, but at the end of the day, the vast majority of them want for the government to do its job and try to help people. So when the fighting is done, a piece of legislation is proposed and because the negotiations have usually already happened at this point, all or [01:10:00] nearly all of the Democrats will usually get on board and support what has been put forward. They all want to be able to say to themselves and their constituents, I supported the thing that the government is doing to help people.

Now, progressives will often think that what they voted for didn't go far enough and they will, you know, argue to their constituents, like, Look, I voted for this, but I want more. And conservative Democrats may worry that whatever they just passed goes too far or costs too much or whatever. And so they'll vote for it, but they'll say, Look, I voted for it because we had to negotiate. But yeah, I'm trying to reign things in, right? That's what they'll say to their constituents. So it gives the impression of lockstep agreement. But that's not really the case.

The GOP also has plenty of examples of voting in lockstep, don't get me wrong, but the divides in the party show themselves off [01:11:00] much more spectacularly than with the Democrats, because the internal fights aren't about how much to try to use the government to help people, but about how severely to hamper the government's ability to function. So, for as much as there is in politics that is just cynical or self-serving, this is where the true divide between the parties is put on display. Democrats very imperfectly and, from a progressive perspective, far too slowly and timidly basically tried to use the government to help people and really try to avoid creating gaps in the government functioning. Republicans more or less just try to tear what pieces of government exists down. And if that means occasionally bringing the whole thing to a halt, that doesn't seem like such a bad thing to them. Or at least some of them.

Now just one last thing, I came across a pretty fun article that helped explain the current chaos and the GOP caucus [01:12:00] and their struggle to find a leader. This is titled "Kevin McCarthy is GOP Incompetence Made Flesh. No Republican equipped to be speaker would want the job in the first place". This is by Noah Berlatsky and it's from a newsletter called *Public Notice*. I just found them recently, but I enjoyed this one. There's just some quick highlights from it. He says, "The House GOP has been a pit of venomous constipated vipers for years now. Only a fool would try to govern a caucus of rabid fools. This really is a case where anyone who wants the job is obviously unqualified. A speaker who would willingly put himself in the hands of the current GOP is a speaker who has demonstrated his own utter inability to do the job. McCarthy is the guy whose ambition prompted him to stick his face in the grungy ceiling fan that is House GOP politics, and refuse to withdraw it [01:13:00] despite the filth and bludgeoning. A competent speaker is, by definition, someone who has a good sense of what can be accomplished and what can't. That means that any competent speaker, like, say John Boehner, is going to take one look at the current state of play in the House and cease to be a speaker candidate." Now, this was written before Jim Jordan and Steve Scalese put themselves forward for the speakership. And then Scalese, like, very quickly pulled himself out. I mean, he's like the slightly more reasonable of the two. And I think he basically did what this writer suggests, he took a look, is like, Yeah, like, if I can get the votes

on the first try, I'll go for it. And if not, I'm out of here, 'cause who needs this absurdity?

Now, continuing just a little bit, and this writer's also talking about the broader politics in the GOP right now. He says, "Trumpified Republicans don't merely have to embrace conservative policies. They have to [01:14:00] believe that the 2020 election was stolen. They have to believe contrary to all evidence that Biden was engaged in corrupt business dealings in Ukraine. They have to think that shutting down the government will somehow end the numerous criminal proceedings against Trump. In short, to be a successful GOP politician right now, you need to be a fool or a liar, or preferably both and severing yourself from reality is not a great path to effective governance". So, there's that too. There's the make-the-government-work ethic of the Democrats and the stop-the-government-from-working ideology of the Republicans. That's been there for a long time now. But now we've added on top of that be you must be either a fool, a liar, or both element to GOP politics and the prospects of good governments at that point starts to trend towards zero.

That is going to be it for today. As always, keep the comments coming in. I would love to hear your thoughts or questions about this [01:15:00] or anything else you can leave us a voicemail or send us a text to 202-999-3991 or simply email me to [jay@bestoftheleft.com](mailto:jay@bestoftheleft.com). Thanks to everyone for listening. Thanks to Deon Clark and Erin Clayton for their research work for the show and participation in our bonus episodes. Thanks to our Transcriptionist Trio, Ken, Brian, and LaWendy 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 already support the show by becoming a member or purchasing gift memberships at [bestoftheleft.com/support](https://bestoftheleft.com/support). You can join them by signing up today, it would be greatly appreciated. You'll find that link in the show notes, along with a link to join our Discord community, where you can continue the discussion.

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 twice weekly, thanks entirely to the members and donors to the show [01:16:00] from [bestoftheleft.com](https://bestoftheleft.com).