

#1606 Biden's Barriers and Boons to Reelection

JAY TOMLINSON - HOST, BEST OF THE LEFT: [00:00:00] Welcome to this episode of the award-winning *Best of Left Podcast* and which we will look at an election year where more than ever before democracy itself is on the ballot, and yet there is less democracy actually happening in the lead up to the election than anytime in recent memory. And, with two profoundly disliked candidates running, the supporters of democratic ideals have a hard uphill push ahead of them.

Sources today include *The Majority Report*, *Ring of Fire*, *the Humanist Report*, *MSNBC*, the *NPR Politics Podcast*, the *Professional Left Podcast*, and *Olurinatti*; with additional members only clips from *Future Hindsight* and the *NPR Politics Podcast*.

Democratic Strategists Have Their Heads In The Sand - The Majority Report - Air Date 1-24-24

SAM SEDER - HOST, THE MAJORITY REPORT: Republicans are one by one losing their majority in the House with resignations and whatnot. Also it seems that Johnson's whole strategy is going to be we're not going to pass any [00:01:00] immigration bill whatsoever. Even as much as the Democrats are compromising on it. Where does this leave it? This almost reminds me of when Obama tried to cut Social Security and the Freedom Caucus back in 2010 wouldn't say yes. And so the Democrats couldn't come out and campaign "they're going to cut Social Security" because it was the Democrats who were willing to offer it. And yet, what's going to happen when the Republicans just use immigration as a bludgeon on Biden, but Biden doesn't want to come out and actually defend immigrants in any way.

DAVE WEIGEL: Oh, yes, so there's a few issues like this. This is a big one though. I would say energy policy is the same, where the Biden administration's slowly moving towards a policy that eliminates some of the political problems they see, except it doesn't, because Republicans don't give them credit and Democrats don't like it. And this is one of them. The Republican approach -- [00:02:00] I hate using "they" -- but I can say a common line you heard from Republicans, Kevin McCarthy would say this, is "Democrats want the issue.

They don't want a solution. They want the issue of immigration because they can use it against us, and because yada yada, Great Replacement Theory." Side note, that was probably the most memorable thing I saw in Iowa was Vivek Ramaswamy was late to an event and Steve King, who had endorsed him, just vamped by talking about the Great Replacement Theory for eight minutes. But that's how they talk about this.

And they really are, I think, running down the clock. The expectation from them is in a year and four days, Donald Trump is going to be president again. Why should we agree to anything until Donald Trump is president? Why would you take a deal with Joe Biden that you can throw out and say, all right, no deal whatsoever.

You saw Stephen Miller, who expects to be back in a Trump administration, saying deportations begin at noon on inauguration day. So this is mitigating against any deal is the sense that Republicans have that we can make, this is a [00:03:00] loser for Biden, every day that there's footage of people in New York, migrants living in hotels, we can talk about it.

It came up a lot in the trail. Immigration was the top issue in the exit poll, but also every candidate was saying, look at these reports of migrants living in schools in New York. The issue is great for them. And one, they don't want any compromises that Biden would offer in terms of a path to citizenship. Every Republican in this race, even Nikki Haley, who we just started talking about trying to appeal to Democrats, their position is deport everybody who's here illegally. So if their starting position is deport everybody, and they think they're going to win the election, the cost to them is 11 plus months of people crossing the border and getting asylum, who they can then deport.

Is that ideal? No, but it seems like it mostly is making life hell for Eric Adams and for Brandon Johnson and for Karen Bates.

If you are in a cynical mindset, which I usually am, that's the incentives. What would be good for Republicans if there's a deal on immigration and border crossings [00:04:00] decrease, asylum seekers decrease, and Biden says, look, I fixed a problem. That's not good for them. And that's how I see this issue. I do see it as driven through the presidential campaign. But they're pretty clear on it. Just if the worst things are for Biden, no matter what the human cost is, the better they are for us.

SAM SEDER - HOST, THE MAJORITY REPORT: And I imagine when you're dealing with the Republican electorate, it's people who are not as

engaged in this as maybe you would if you were in a Democratic primary, but is Biden's support -- like a complete, unmitigated support for Israel and what people are seeing in Gaza is that, are people talking about that in the Republican primary at all? Are you hearing stuff from like non-Republicans as you go around reporting?

DAVE WEIGEL: No, it didn't really. The most that came up with Republicans is the Trump argument, which is if he was still president, we Israel would be fine, never would have been attacked. And it just folds into -- they don't even praise Biden for doing things that they [00:05:00] agree with. They say, yeah, but things are worse than they would have been if he wasn't there.

And he does get no -- I'm not saying he should get credit from Democrats, I'm saying he doesn't, he doesn't get any. I think he gets the DMFI, APAC, etc. Democrats who have worked to beat people they disagree with. They like his policy. They're not running ads against him. But in all the polling, younger voters don't like the way that Biden's handling this.

I've seen -- not in Iowa -- I've seen Genocide Joe tags, posters, in bigger cities. I think it has become a problem, not in Iowa, but in polling of Michigan, it's clearly a problem. Voters under 35. And this is, if you went to college, you didn't go to college, you're white, you're black, whatever, this is very well known phenomenon.

SAM SEDER - HOST, THE MAJORITY REPORT: I think it's very much an age, people under the age 40 or 35 is across the board, it seems to me. There's just a much more sensitivity to it.

DAVE WEIGEL: You've only known Israel as Benjamin Netanyahu's Israel. You've only known it as a country that is perfectly safe -- I [00:06:00] should say, there are attacks -- but a country that is able to defend most attacks and brutally, effectively counterattack, destroy anyone who has attacked it as it's done in Palestine right now. It is not, if you're a boomer, you remember Golda Meir, you remember the country almost being destroyed. That's not how young people view Israel, not to get into a whole tangent. I have not seen a place where that would play out for Biden.

Now, in New Hampshire there are Palestinian Americans who live here, Lebanese Americans who live in the state., There is some opposition, but it's really only in Minnesota, Georgia and Michigan where this is significant. And when you ask Democrats about it -- I asked the governor of Minnesota about that a few weeks ago -- they just think, yes we'll get to a point where Trump is

the alternative. And if young people see the Trump-Biden choice, at best they will vote for Biden reluctantly. At worst, they're going to stay home or vote for Cornel West. And they're just not really processing, okay, we need to change direction because we're going to lose votes on this. [00:07:00] Not so far what I've seen.

Bidenomics Continue To Worsen For Young Adults - The Ring of Fire - Air Date 1-21-24

MIKE PAPANTONIO - HOST, THE RING OF FIRE: The Biden administration keeps telling us that the economy is humming along just fine, but for young Americans, things are really getting worse. Huge percentages of young voters being forced to move back in with their parents because they can't afford rent or mortgages, even though they're working two jobs to make ends meet.

That's the state of affairs moving into The 2024 election. How does it affect things?

FARRON COUSINS - HOST, THE RING OF FIRE: It's horrible for Biden. And here's the thing. Look, I'm on social media all the time and that's, yeah, you got a much younger crowd, especially over on Twitter. A lot of them talk about how sick and tired they are of hearing this administration tell them that the economy is doing great. Because when you look on paper, you look at the numbers, yeah, the economy is doing great. We've got record low unemployment, stock market going through the roof, inflation is coming down. Price is still way up and a lot of that is price gouging.

But get down on the micro level, not the macro level. Get down to the micro level, and that is where you start to [00:08:00] see how bad the divide is in this country. Because if you're somebody who's over 40 --

MIKE PAPANTONIO - HOST, THE RING OF FIRE: You're talking about age, age divide, right?

FARRON COUSINS - HOST, THE RING OF FIRE: Yeah. if you're over 40, you're feeling the recovery, you're doing pretty good. You're under 40? It's hell for these people right now.

MIKE PAPANTONIO - HOST, THE RING OF FIRE: Here are the numbers, Farron. Almost 30 percent of Gen Zers, reported they can't afford rent

and they had to move back with their family. It's one out of three adults between 18 and 34 today are living with their parents. And that's not that they just don't want to work. Some of them are working two jobs. And, part of it is we've talked about before is you've got Wall Street coming in buying up houses, buying up entire neighborhoods so they can jack the rents up.

But this, I don't see this getting any better and I don't know how, I don't know how you can, in one side of your mouth saying, this is really good, we got a great economy. You have more movement right now with minorities and younger voters moving away from [00:09:00] Democrats. They're moving away. You've got, I think every week you've got some high profile minority leader coming out and saying, you know, we've all invested in the Democratic party; what's it done for us? And so this is another one of those stories, isn't it?

And I think, yeah, it has to be addressed. You can't move into the election, say, and put your head in the sand and say everything's okay. Bernie Sanders, I think, really handled it well.

FARRON COUSINS - HOST, THE RING OF FIRE: Yeah, Bernie came out recently and essentially he said, Biden has to change course. It was that simple. He said he has to change the course. And of course, Bernie's big thing is always these economic inequality issues. And this is where Biden has plenty of leeway to do something. He could go out there, hold a press conference in 10 minutes from now and say, look, we got a problem in the country where we've got Wall Street bankers moving into small town America, buying up all your homes and then charging you double what the rent should be, triple what the rent should be. I want to make that illegal.

Is Biden Trying to Lose - The Humanist Report - Air Date 1-18-24

MIKE FIGUEREDO - HOST, THE HUMANIST REPORT: [00:10:00]

When it comes to young people, the administration seemingly doesn't even have a strategy in place to address their concerns. And I say this because in an interview with Joy Reid on MSNBC, Illinois Governor J. B. Pritzker, who is an advisor to Biden's 2024 campaign, he really did not have a strong answer when he was asked about Biden's weakness with young voters.

So let's listen to what he has to say, and then there's a follow up that's even worse. But first, here he is.

JOY REID: I think that there is some significant anecdotal evidence that President Biden does have some issues in terms of parts of the younger electorate that are not in a good place with him on things like Gaza, on the bombing of Yemen. There were just protests outside of the White House this past week. There is some energy that's building, particularly among Arab American voters, Muslim American voters who say they will not vote for him because of his stance on Gaza. Is that, is it bedwetting? Or is the White House maybe [00:11:00] not paying enough attention to real passionate objections to its policies by younger voters that they need to turn out? And I mean younger voters, including younger African American voters.

GOVERNOR JB PRITZKER: Well, when you're a responsible leader, when you're in office, you have to make tough decisions, no doubt about it. And every time you have to make a tough decision, someone doesn't like it. The truth is that we've seen Joe Biden underestimated all along in his entire career and especially in 2020. In 2024, I think what we're going to see is a real focus on the things that really matter to people's individual lives, to their families, to their communities. And that's the economy. It means their freedoms. We talked about choice. In a lot of places in the country, people are deeply concerned about gun violence. And we know that Joe Biden has stood up for a ban on assault weapons, and he has stood up for violence prevention programs in a way that Republicans just want to let [00:12:00] go and frankly, let people shoot each other wherever they may be with as many guns as they may want to have.

So I do think that a focus on the issues that really matter to working families across the United States is gonna matter for Joe Biden in a positive way. Now, they're always detractors, right? There are people that even that vote for Donald Trump, who don't like things about Donald Trump. But in the end, when people are going to see the two visions for the future of America, that young people and people of color across the United States, not to mention the vast majority of American workers know that it's Joe Biden that's fighting for them, and Joe Biden that'll do better for them. Donald Trump will be a disaster for those groups.

MIKE FIGUEREDO - HOST, THE HUMANIST REPORT: Incredibly naive. Again, the young people Joe Biden needs aren't voting for Donald Trump. They don't support Trump. The risk is them just not voting altogether. And tepidly signaling support for gun safety laws and abortion [00:13:00] rights is not going to sufficiently mobilize young people.

Biden needs a concrete action plan that he talks about nonstop to mobilize these voters. And even if he has that, it still might not work because they can't put aside the fact that he's supporting a genocide.

But Joy Reid, to her credit, who's been excellent lately, she asked a follow up question since she seemingly wasn't convinced. And it gets so much worse.

JOY REID: You don't think that the White House needs to adjust or the Biden reelection campaign needs to adjust in any way its messaging on issues of war and peace? Because these are issues -- I mean, we are on MLK Day and we do know that one of the things that Dr. King did later in his life was to oppose the Vietnam War. And this was an important issue to him, as important in the end of his life as fighting for living wages and for racial justice. You know, issues of war and peace are passion issues. They're voting issues. And for a lot of younger Americans, not even just younger Americans, but a [00:14:00] lot of progressives and a lot of just people who have a humanist view of the world, the Gaza issue is a voting issue. So you're saying that people will ignore that? You don't think that the White House needs to in any way adjust its messaging on that?

GOVERNOR JB PRITZKER: Well, look, here's what the White House has been doing. They're fighting what has become a mortal enemy of the United States, and that's Vladimir Putin. They're standing up for democracy in Ukraine, they're fighting against terrorism in the Middle East. Those are the things that I think the messages that the Biden administration needs to make sure they're getting out to people.

But look, nobody likes war. We'd like to have all of this ratcheted down and go away. And I know the president wants that, right? But it, you have to have a careful foreign policy expert in the White House who understands how to manage all that in a very difficult environment.

You think Donald Trump has shown that he can do that? Do you think Donald Trump would handle this better than Joe Biden? The answer clearly is [00:15:00] no.

MIKE FIGUEREDO - HOST, THE HUMANIST REPORT: [Groans] We're doomed. We are doomed. She asks him about Gaza and he pivots to Putin and ends with, well, at least Biden's not as bad as Trump. I promise you, that is not going to resonate with young people who want him to stop doing a genocide. But they don't get it.

But what that answer does tell me is that the Biden administration doesn't actually have a plan to meaningfully address young voters' concerns.

So the question is, how exactly does Joe Biden plan to win back the White House without young voters? There's two responses to this.

First, he either assumes that they'll acquiesce in November, and that's a possibility. But it's a big if. And it was a gamble that Hillary Clinton also made in 2016 that didn't pay off. So I don't know that I'd want to make that gamble if I were Joe Biden with how much is at stake.

But second, he maybe thinks that he doesn't need young voters. He can just use negative partisanship against [00:16:00] Trump again to win over voters, in particular voters that Trump is losing: moderate voters, independents. And that seems to be his game plan, right? So after Trump won the Iowa caucus in a landslide, here's what Joe Biden tweeted: "Looks like Donald Trump just won Iowa. He's the clear frontrunner on the other side at this point. But here's the thing. This election was always going to be you and me versus extreme MAGA Republicans. It was true yesterday, and it'll be true tomorrow."

So if you'll notice, he's making a really interesting distinction here. It's us versus extreme MAGA Republicans, meaning not all Republicans are bad, just the most sycophantic Trump supporters. Now, I think that this is naive to an extent, because the Republican Party is the party of Donald Trump, so to pretend as if there's this massive swath of Republicans who are just like itching to vote against Trump, I think they're probably gonna suck it up and vote for Trump.

So, the intent behind this, though, is to [00:17:00] signal to moderate Republicans that they are welcome in Joe Biden's coalition. And this is what Joe Scarborough hinted at as well.

JOE SCARBOROUGH: We're running, he says, against extreme MAGA Republicans. Mika, it's not an us versus them. Joe Biden's not saying all Republicans are bad guys, all Republicans hate the rule of law, all Republicans still are going to Chinese religious cult websites to get their information. No, he's talking about extreme MAGA Republicans. It makes a difference, because there are a lot of Republicans out there that again, this is about conversion. There are a lot of independents out there that Joe Biden's going to get voting for it.

MIKE FIGUEREDO - HOST, THE HUMANIST REPORT: I think that Joe Scarborough is correct to assume that converting moderates and independents is Joe Biden's strategy here. And in some ways, it could pay off, right? I think that his position on abortion is going to help him with independents, for example, and maybe some moderate Republicans, although not much.

But with that being said, it's wishful thinking to [00:18:00] believe that you're going to make up enough ground with moderates and independents. to account for the hemorrhaging of young support. I'm not saying that you forego the strategy of courting moderates altogether, but it's not a binary choice, and it's not something that should be your main strategy. It should be supplemental to your existing strategy of mobilizing young people and your core base, people of color.

Maddow on Trump-Biden rematch 'Not very much democracy in election about saving democracy' - MSNBC - Air Date 1-24-24

RACHEL MADDOW - HOST, THE RACHEL MADDOW SHOW: On the Republican campaign schedule this year, you guys, there were supposed to be two debates after Iowa and before the New Hampshire primary. Remember that? We all blocked it out on our calendars. We all planned to be here. This was one of the things that was going to happen. It was awkward because they were only a few days apart, but there's only eight days between Iowa and New Hampshire. They were going to squeeze in two debates between Iowa And New Hampshire, two more chances for the candidates to make final appeals to New Hampshire voters before the polls opened in New Hampshire today. Did those happen? No. No, they did not.

Those debates did not happen because Donald Trump is refusing to [00:19:00] debate this year. Nikki Haley said it would be pointless to hold another debate without Trump when, in her words, Ron DeSantis was closer to zero than he was to her. So why would she bother talking to him? This is sort of a fair point, but that does mean there were no New Hampshire debates at all.

Now, my in-laws live in New Hampshire. I have lots of family and lots of acquaintances in New Hampshire. I spend lots of time in New Hampshire. I did not expect to hear this, but I did anecdotally hear a lot of people say that they were mad there were no New Hampshire debates. The Republican primary debates, none of them included the front runner, none of them included Trump. But they were in Wisconsin and Florida and California and none of them were in New Hampshire because they were supposedly going to be these two dedicated New Hampshire debates, both of them off. And so people in New Hampshire, at least anecdotally in my experience, were mad about that.

But more broadly, that is becoming kind of a theme this year, more so than at any time since the Civil War. This is the election in which we're deciding whether or not to keep a democracy.

But there's [00:20:00] not very much democracy in this contest thus far, right? With an incumbent president, which is true any time you have an incumbent president, there's no real primary on the Democratic side. It may be the shortest primary ever on the Republican side, which is what we've been talking to Steve Kornacki about all night. Supporters of the frontrunner are emphatically demanding that everybody has to clear the field so we can stop with all this darn voting. The voting is so offensive. We've got no debates for the Democratic nominee. We've got no debates for the likely Republican nominee. Very possibly, we've got no general election debates at all. Because neither Trump nor Biden has debated thus far. Neither of them seems to want to. And so why would they?

We are now in a fight to save democracy in this country, but we are trying to fight for it without using democracy to fight for it, which feels historically unprecedented, but if there's one thing we've learned, nothing is.

2024 Election Is About The Fight For Democracy - The NPR Politics Podcast - Air Date 1-25-24

ASHLEY LOPEZ - REPORTER, NPR: It's been three years since the January 6th attack at the Capitol. The insurrection [00:21:00] has changed the way America talks about democracy.

President Biden gave a speech today near Valley Forge, Pennsylvania. Of course, that's a famous revolutionary war site, so there's a significance in picking that as a location for a campaign event. Biden framed the 2024 election as an inflection point where Americans have to decide whether or not democracy and democratic values are what the country believes in.

PRESIDENT JOE BIDEN: Today. I make this sacred pledge to you, the defense protection and preservation of American democracy will remain as it has been the central cause of my presidency.

ASHLEY LOPEZ - REPORTER, NPR: Sue, Biden's campaign in 2020 said they were fighting, "a battle for the soul of the nation," and now you can hear

him using the events of January 6th specifically as a stark example of this is what the country faces if Trump is reelected.

SUSAN DAVIS - CORRESPONDENT, NPR: There's clearly connective tissue here between Joe Biden's reason for running the first time in 2020, [00:22:00] which he said was in response to Trump's reaction to the racist uprising in Charlottesville, healing a soul of a nation, protecting and defending American norms. And again, in 2024, he said today that it would be the central cause of his presidency.

What I find Interesting about this speech is it's what I would call a better angel speech. It's just speaking to the ideals and values of American citizens. It wasn't a policy speech. He was not running on an agenda. There was nothing affirmative that he would do as president. It was basically just making the case for keeping things the way they are, for preserving the powers of the presidency as they exist today.

In contrast to his likely opponent, who is very Openly running on remaking the idea of how far executive power should go, having a much more emboldened executive, and frankly, as Joe Biden said today, Donald Trump has also been very clear that he would use the power of his office to exact revenge on his political enemies.[00:23:00]

CLAUDIA GRISALES - REPORTER, NPR: I think one big challenge that Biden is facing when we look at the American electorate is that he's losing the audience, if you will, in terms of what role Trump is played or has played in the January 6th attack. We see that in a recent poll by the *Washington Post* and the University of Maryland, that within a three year span, we've seen the percentage of Americans who see that Trump played a role in the siege, that number has declined.

This poll found that that number was at about 53%, that's down from 60% in 2021. So, This is clearly on the mind of the president and the Biden/Harris campaign, because they're trying to fight that narrative back. The House Select January 6th Committee is no longer out there telling their part of the story in terms of what they found in their bipartisan investigation, and Republicans have been able to fill in that gap with more [00:24:00] disinformation.

SUSAN DAVIS - CORRESPONDENT, NPR: I do think that, to me, might speak to how much of Biden's speech today was backward looking, recounting the events of January 6th and recounting all the court challenges to the election and the legitimacy of it. Because in some ways, either many Americans have

forgotten or don't view it the same way. They don't blame Trump to the same extent that the president does. And it was almost like a history lesson, "let me remind you of what my opponent did," and yes, there was an element of it that was about this year in this election, but I was surprised at the balance of how much of it was backward looking versus the question put to the country and the coming 11 months.

ASHLEY LOPEZ - REPORTER, NPR: Yeah, and you can also see Trump making the same argument, right? As I was watching Biden's speech, my inbox was getting a lot of Trump, "the Democrats are a threat to democracy." He's also making the case that his campaign is about protecting democracy from the threat they see from Biden and Democrats, mostly on issues of free speech and stuff like that.

SUSAN DAVIS - CORRESPONDENT, NPR: That is true. From a conservative standpoint, you could argue that they don't like the [00:25:00] direction that liberals and Democrats are taking the country in, but I also think when we talk about this, we have to make clear that a lot of Republicans views are predicated on false information. Sure, you might think democracy is at stake if you think that Joe Biden stole an election.

If you think the sitting president is illegitimately elected, you would say, yeah, of course, democracy is at stake in 2024. That same *Washington Post* poll that Claudia referenced also indicated that a third of self identified Republicans believe that January 6th was orchestrated by the FBI, it's based on a conspiracy theory. That's not an insignificant portion of Republican voters.

So yes. Republican voters and Donald Trump continues to falsely allege that the election was stolen, he continues to stoke all of these conspiratorial ideas. So I think that we have to keep that in context when we talk about, voters seeing democracy on the ballot. A lot of voters see democracy on the ballot based off of false information.

Iowa, New Hampshire, and No Fair Remembering 2012 - The Professional Left Podcast - Air Date 1-24-24

BLUE GAL - CO-HOST, THE PROFESSIONAL LEFT PODCAST: One is, it [00:26:00] is like every other survey that the Democrats send out for fundraising purposes, to make it seem as though, and there are people for whom

this works, " they want to hear what I think, so I'll fill out this survey and send it in with a check, and whether they do anything with it or not is immaterial."

First thing they want is your email address, of course, and your cell phone number. And then the questions are, section one, we want to understand the beliefs of voters like you. Which of the below best describes you? Very liberal, somewhat liberal, moderate, somewhat conservative, very conservative, I don't know, or other?

DRIFTGLASS - CO-HOST, THE PROFESSIONAL LEFT PODCAST:
Independent.

BLUE GAL - CO-HOST, THE PROFESSIONAL LEFT PODCAST:
Independent isn't in there. I'm an independent.

DRIFTGLASS - CO-HOST, THE PROFESSIONAL LEFT PODCAST: Isn't that weird? Yeah.

BLUE GAL - CO-HOST, THE PROFESSIONAL LEFT PODCAST:
Section 2, on a scale of 1 to 5, 1 being not involved and 5 being very involved, how much do you plan to be involved in elections in 2024?[00:27:00]

Section 3, in what ways do you plan to help Democrats win their races? And there are signing petitions, hosting an event Volunteering to call voters or text message voters, knocking on doors, helping to register voters, none of the above, I'm not sure. Okay.

DRIFTGLASS - CO-HOST, THE PROFESSIONAL LEFT PODCAST:
There's no physically threatening Republican voters or changing vote signs?

BLUE GAL - CO-HOST, THE PROFESSIONAL LEFT PODCAST:
Physically threatening Republican voters is not on here, because we don't work that way. That's a different survey.

DRIFTGLASS - CO-HOST, THE PROFESSIONAL LEFT PODCAST: Oh, oh, okay, okay.

BLUE GAL - CO-HOST, THE PROFESSIONAL LEFT PODCAST: Now, here is the workshopped and focus grouped question that made me think, okay, this is podcastable. Section four. What are some of the key issues keeping you up at night? Please choose three.

DRIFTGLASS - CO-HOST, THE PROFESSIONAL LEFT PODCAST: Will there be a season six of Fargo? Why isn't Margot Robbie nominated for a goddamn Academy Award?

BLUE GAL - CO-HOST, THE PROFESSIONAL LEFT PODCAST: That goes under other.

DRIFTGLASS - CO-HOST, THE PROFESSIONAL LEFT PODCAST: It keeps me awake at night, Joe Biden. Fix this shit, fix it now!

BLUE GAL - CO-HOST, THE PROFESSIONAL LEFT PODCAST: Why was the director of [00:28:00] Barbie denied a nomination.

DRIFTGLASS - CO-HOST, THE PROFESSIONAL LEFT PODCAST: It gets the best picture nomination.

BLUE GAL - CO-HOST, THE PROFESSIONAL LEFT PODCAST: She got best picture, but okay.

So, please choose three. I don't know how you could choose three of these, but: GOP attacks on abortion access, our nation's ongoing gun violence epidemic, the climate crisis, book bans and attacks on our public school teachers, Republicans trying to reverse our historic progress on LGBTQ plus rights, the global rise of far right ideologies, and other.

And I just thought, the keeping you up at night thing is a really critical choice, and it proves to me that someone in the Biden world is actually tapping into the anger and anxiety of Democratic voters. And you don't see it on the media. We do not get a voice on MSNBC. They are too busy desperately looking for Nikki Haley [00:29:00] voters to show that independents and moderates want a different thing other than the message that Donald Trump is sending.

DRIFTGLASS - CO-HOST, THE PROFESSIONAL LEFT PODCAST: Well, there's that anecdote from, I think, New Hampshire or Iowa, where a reporter was looking for some local color and ended up talking to a New York Times editor. Because there's not enough bodies to go around. It's become New York Times pitch bot. We wanted to know what America's foreign policy should be vis a vis Gaza, so we talked to six undecided voters in a diner in New Hampshire. Nikki Haley leaning voters in a car park and it's just fucking ridiculous. And this part of the survey is the stick. This is what's coming if you don't fix this shit.

BLUE GAL - CO-HOST, THE PROFESSIONAL LEFT PODCAST: That's the stick, and section five is the carrot, which is what is giving you hope during this time in America. And you can just hear the Leonard Bernstein... the strings coming up, and the sunrise and the so forth.

But it's please rank in order of importance, one equals most important, and it's all of the [00:30:00] accomplishments of the Biden administration listed. The Inflation Reduction Act, the Bipartisan Infrastructure Law, Historic action to address gun violence epidemics through the bipartisan Safer Communities Act, the Violence Against Women Act, capping the price of insulin, the last one is Justice Katonji Brown Jackson, the first Black woman and public defender to serve on the Supreme Court.

Which does give me hope, I'm not dissing any of that.

DRIFTGLASS - C0-HOST, THE PROFESSIONAL LEFT PODCAST: No, no, that's all good stuff.

BLUE GAL - CO-HOST, THE PROFESSIONAL LEFT PODCAST: But this is a marketing effort, is what I'm saying. And it shows me that despite the desperate desire of the media to pretend we don't exist, to pretend that democratic anger has no place in this race.

DRIFTGLASS - C0-HOST, THE PROFESSIONAL LEFT PODCAST: That's right.

BLUE GAL - CO-HOST, THE PROFESSIONAL LEFT PODCAST: It does. And it's being heard by people that want to elect Joe Biden.

DRIFTGLASS - C0-HOST, THE PROFESSIONAL LEFT PODCAST: It also flies in the face of the constant dumbing down of messaging, which is, voters can only think about one thing. It's gotta be about abortion [00:31:00] or democracy or the economy. Can't be like two things or three things or nine things, because, human beings in their house, at home here, we can only think of one thing at once. I must get coffee, therefore, the cat starved because I can't possibly feed the cats and get coffee at the same time. My little brain just doesn't work that way. No, people can be distressed about multiple things. And you can be really pissed at Joe Biden about some things and really look at him and go, "on the other hand, all these other things are going very well, and the alternative is so horrifying, I'm willing to give him my vote, because, on balance, there's no contest between these two." As opposed to, "you gotta pick democracy or abortion or economy."

And that might work for Republican voters.

BLUE GAL - CO-HOST, THE PROFESSIONAL LEFT PODCAST: The person who has proved that you can be subtle about these issues is Kamala Harris. Because her messaging all week on the anniversary of Roe has been, "you can have strong religious beliefs about abortion. You can believe that you would never get one. Your [00:32:00] religious beliefs are your religious beliefs. Do you want the government deciding what you do with your body?"

DRIFTGLASS - C0-HOST, THE PROFESSIONAL LEFT PODCAST: And the fact that she's out this week is somebody at the White House is aware that she needs more FaceTime on real specific issues to boost her ratings.

BLUE GAL - CO-HOST, THE PROFESSIONAL LEFT PODCAST: And she's the one to talk about this issue.

DRIFTGLASS - C0-HOST, THE PROFESSIONAL LEFT PODCAST: But all of this bullshit. We've heard over the last year about nobody likes Kamala Harris. She's the most ineffective vice president. We did a whole show about, who was the most effective vice president, what are you talking about? Vice president's job is to...

BLUE GAL - CO-HOST, THE PROFESSIONAL LEFT PODCAST: Dan Quayle?

DRIFTGLASS - C0-HOST, THE PROFESSIONAL LEFT PODCAST: Their job is to be the wallpaper in the White House. Their job is to fit into the background and do what the president asks them to do, that's their goddamn job. So why are you picking on this. Oh, that's right.

BLUE GAL - CO-HOST, THE PROFESSIONAL LEFT PODCAST: We all know why they're picking on this.

DRIFTGLASS - C0-HOST, THE PROFESSIONAL LEFT PODCAST: That's why you're picking on her because your friends, your racist friends, can't say Black woman, but they can't say she's not a very good vice president. Well, she's a fine vice president. I'm very happy she's vice president and putting her in front of a microphone on issues that she's very good at talking about it is a tremendous asset to the Biden administration.

BLUE GAL - CO-HOST, THE PROFESSIONAL LEFT PODCAST: It's a phenomenal asset. And with the anniversary, timing it with the [00:33:00]

anniversary makes the news media have a slot for it. They love anniversaries. And there was an article in the New Yorker, which started with all of the turmoil, and this goes back to our initial theme of the important drinking hasn't started yet. The entire year that we're going to have of election turmoil is going to end on election night with everyone focused on the Philadelphia suburbs and Maricopa County, Arizona. And remember that.

And that doesn't mean don't vote. That means get out and vote. And especially in the House races, especially in your local races, the headliners, Trump versus Biden, is really just that. It's a headliner to get all of these other races filled with the right people.

Biden Talks Reproductive Rights - The NPR Politics Podcast - Air Date 1-24-24

DANIELLE KURTZLEBEN - REPORTER, NPR: President Joe Biden and Vice President Kamala Harris made their first joint campaign appearance yesterday in Virginia for a reproductive rights rally. They were joined by [00:34:00] Second Gentleman Doug Emhoff, who told the crowd that abortion is not just a women's issue, it's everyone's issue. Meanwhile, First Lady Jill Biden recounted the story of a friend in high school who became pregnant, and Jill Biden warned the crowd of how the nation was returning to a time of shame, secrecy, silence, danger, and even death.

Deepa, abortion is clearly a really, really big topic, it has been in the last couple of national elections, so let's talk about this. Vice President Harris spoke before the president, and this was her second event this week. where she spoke directly about reproductive rights. And then President Joe Biden also spoke on abortion, which is not a topic he talks on a whole lot, so what was their messaging like overall, and do the two differ in how they talk about it?

DEEPA SHIVARAM - REPORTER, NPR: I mean, this was a big show of force event. You had not only the president and the vice president there, but the first lady, Jill Biden, the second gentleman, Doug Emhoff, all four principals being at one campaign rally. Not something that really happens every day. So this was definitely a big show of force. And of course, a little bit of counter [00:35:00] programming to the New Hampshire primary going on, and all the coverage of Trump and Nikki Haley, and things like that.

And what they really wanted to do was rile this crowd up and make sure that voters and Democratic voters really know that, yes this reversal of Roe

happened in 2022 and they are not taking their foot off the gas. And what you heard in common, I will say, that was a major point that both Vice President Harris and President Biden said yesterday was they named Donald Trump and they laid the blame for the reversal of Roe on Trump.

PRESIDENT JOE BIDEN: And let there be no mistake, the person most responsible for taking away this freedom in America is Donald Trump.

DEEPA SHIVARAM - REPORTER, NPR: And you're right, Danielle, to point out that. This is not a topic that we hear Joe Biden talk about all that often, he has an interesting history with his own personal beliefs on abortion. He is, of course, a practicing Catholic and has said in the past that, he's not really big on abortion, but he is really supportive of Roe. So what you heard a little bit differently yesterday is Biden emphasizing that this is something that he strongly believes is cruel.

PRESIDENT JOE BIDEN: The cruelty is astounding [00:36:00] and it's a direct affront to a woman's dignity, to be told by extreme politicians and judges to wait to get sicker and sicker before anything can happen, even to the point where you heard your life had been determined to be in danger.

DEEPA SHIVARAM - REPORTER, NPR: Just honing in on that message of this is about health care, something that Kamala Harris said was that this is a health care crisis, and so you're hearing both of them in lockstep talking about Donald Trump on this issue and also talking about how this is a decision that the government should not be making.

DANIELLE KURTZLEBEN - REPORTER, NPR: It's also very clear Democrats are not being subtle about how much they intend to focus on abortion in campaigns up and down the ballot this November. I also thought it was notable that the Biden campaign put out an abortion related ad, but it focuses on this clip of Donald Trump bragging about the fact that he played a central role in overturning Roe v. Wade by appointing conservative justices and says, "and I'm proud to have done it."

And when you hear that clip, you're like, oh, we are going to hear that clip thousands [00:37:00] of times before election day. If anything, that might be the singular case that the Biden campaign is going to make here, that Trump is the one that played a critical role in rolling back Roe v. Wade and reelecting Joe Biden will push the country closer to potentially codifying Roe v. Wade if Democrats continue to control the White House and Congress.

DEEPA SHIVARAM - REPORTER, NPR: And that was something Biden ended his speech with yesterday. He was saying, they're not done yet. Like yes, Donald Trump is proud to have made the Roe reversal possible and also that a national abortion ban is on the table very much that momentum of yes, this happened as an in the past and like it is still actively happening.

DANIELLE KURTZLEBEN - REPORTER, NPR: And it is relatively rare for Joe Biden to do a whole event, a whole speech like this focusing on abortion and reproductive rights. And I know that some reproductive rights supporters, for example aren't super enthusiastic about him on the topic, therefore they might not even trust him.

It strikes me that his past on this, his Catholic faith which he cites in his stances on this, that this all could cut two ways. One is, yeah, [00:38:00] it might not enthuse some of the more enthusiastic abortion rights supporters, but on the other hand, is it possible that his history of, I guess you could say moderation, could appeal to people who are more in the middle.

DEEPA SHIVARAM - REPORTER, NPR: I was wondering the same thing is that what is the role for Joe Biden here to speak out on this issue? Because look at his counterpart, right? Kamala Harris is the most effective messenger on this from the White House. We have a woman vice president. She's someone who not only, is a woman and can speak from her own Personal identity, but also was a prosecutor and has specifically gone into the law and she tells the story a little bit more often now, which I think is also interesting about how she decided to become a lawyer because of her own history of having a friend in high school.

You mentioned that Jill Biden was talking about her friend in high school and that experience. Kamala Harris had a friend in high school who was being molested, and that was one of the reasons that she wanted to become a lawyer to focus on crimes against women and children. And she's been sharing that a lot more on the trail as well.

You have that in the White House and she's there and she's up front and she's [00:39:00] traveling and carrying on that message, so I think there is this backseat role for Biden in a way where he has to come in and talk about this, but that question of who is he reaching I think is really interesting.

I will say, I think, a lot of folks will point out that his record has never been to restrict the right to have choice. So, while people are maybe not super enthusiastic on his history in terms of the issue writ large, like he is someone

who supports the right to choose, obviously. And so I think they're just happy to see him out and talking about it.

DANIELLE KURTZLEBEN - REPORTER, NPR: There's also no more gray area in politics on the issue of abortion. When Joe Biden first got into office many, many years ago, it was a much more complex debate, especially for Democrats. There was a lot of Democrats at the time when he was coming up through politics that were abortion opponents. And this has been one of those dividing issues where I don't believe there is a single what you would call pro life Democrat left in Congress, with the exception of maybe Henry Cuellar in Texas, but even he has support for abortion rights to some extent.

And there's very few or almost no [00:40:00] Republicans left who support abortion rights with the exception in the Senate of senators like Lisa Murkowski and Susan Collins. So even if a voter who's passionate about this issue doesn't believe that Joe Biden shares their passion for the issue, there should be no doubt among voters of which party would vote to expand abortion rights and which party would not, because there's no middle anymore on that area in elected office.

A Better Way to Vote Deb Otis - Future Hindsight - Air Date 1-11-24

MILA ATMOS - HOST, FUTURE HINDSIGHT: So, this year, 2024, we know that the election coverage will be dominated by the presidential race, and the Iowa caucuses are just around the corner now. How are you and the movement thinking about ranked choice voting this year in 2024, aside from, let's say, Oregon? Do you have a specific focus?

DEB OTIS: Well, the presidential race is really making our case for us. Consider the discussions about possible third party or independent candidates entering the general election. We hear a lot about this No Labels Party, possibly groups like the Forward Party or other independent candidates who might want to run, and all of a sudden, people start throwing the spoiler word around.

[00:41:00] Some folks pressure the candidates not to run, saying that you might split the vote and help the other side. Some people will pressure their friends and neighbors, "hey don't waste your vote," which is really misguided. Candidates who want to run want to have a platform, they want to have their issues out there, and voters should feel free to vote for the candidates they like best.

And now that's going to happen in Maine, for example, where they use ranked choice voting. People will be able to rank the presidential candidates, and so Maine's electoral college votes are going to be based on the ranked choice voting votes. In other states, especially swing states, voters are going to have to be strategists. Voters will go into the voting booth doing the math. "How can I vote my conscience and make my vote as impactful as possible without hurting my own side?"

MILA ATMOS - HOST, FUTURE HINDSIGHT: Oh, thanks for putting it this way. This makes it very clear. So I guess at the end of the year, we'll see whether Maine will make the case for the rest of the country to use ranked choice voting also for presidential elections.

DEB OTIS: By the end of the year, I think we [00:42:00] could double the number of states that use it. We've got at least two states that will be running ranked choice voting ballot measures in Fall of this year, possibly up to three more states, so potentially up to five. But definitely we'll see statewide ballot measures from Oregon and Nevada, and so they could join Maine and Alaska and double the number of states.

MILA ATMOS - HOST, FUTURE HINDSIGHT: Oh, that's amazing. So what's your strategy to put Ranked Choice Voting on the ballot that people can vote on or introduce it in state houses and state legislators, let's say, where there is not an option to put it on a ballot? What's your strategy to make it become standard across the country? How do we pass it?

DEB OTIS: There are a couple of different paths to achieve this, and I will flag this is a reform. Changing the status quo can be hard, and so at times it can feel like you're fighting an uphill battle here, but it gives me hope to see the growth in this movement.

Several years ago, it tended to be smaller groups trying to pass it by ballot measure. Now we have a [00:43:00] lot of support from elected officials. And so the state legislative victory is a viable path now. In 2023, there were twice as many pro ranked choice bills in state legislatures as in the prior year. This year in 2024, we're expecting that trend to continue, as elected officials start to see that this can actually make their job easier, this can improve their relationship with constituents, and this can allow them to get things done without being punished for, say, crossing the aisle or making a compromise, as long as they are following the will of the voters and maintain the voter support.

Why Voting Still Matters The 2024 Election Survival Guide - Olurinatti - Air Date 12-31-23

NINA TURNER: I get the frustration that people are having because their, as you laid out, material needs are not being met by either party and I surmise that neither major party is answering to the needs of the people. So folks might say, Well, Senator Turner, you still a Democrat? Yes, I am. I am still a Democrat because I'm still fighting, you know, because we only have two major parties right now, and you [00:44:00] gotta be able to lea... it's tactical more than anything. I want people to understand that. Yes, to answer your question directly, while I went all around the block, voting is still a relevant tool, but notice how I said it is one of many tools. It is not the only tool. It will not come and save us immediately. There are other things that we conscious-minded people should be doing in and around and before elections, because election is the last, it's the last leg of the race. It's not the first leg. We gotta be out there agitating, we gotta agitate, aggravate, push for the things that we wanna see elected officials do. We have to organize, you know, Michael Render, a. k. a. Killer Mike, a dear friend of mine, he has a saying that I think fits for anybody that's in organizing, and it's 'plan, plot, organize, strategize, and mobilize'. That is what we must be doing at all times. Voting in and of [00:45:00] itself is not going to be the thing that gets us there. We gotta do the other things in and around it.

And we have to be engaged as a community beyond just federal politics. Who's in the state houses and governor's mansions matter. Who's on the regional level or what we would call the county level of government matters. Who's on school boards matter. And who serves on the local levels of government matter. So when people say the off year election, as far as I'm concerned, there is no year that's off, because every single year, no matter where you live, there are either issues on the ballot or there's somebody on the ballot, who sits in the judiciary matters, too.

IMANI GANDY: Every administration is going to be the adversary of the people, the oppositional force we have to try to move or fight through. So you vote for the outcome easiest for you to fight. And as someone on the left, I can fight the Democrats. But I, we, have absolutely no [00:46:00] ability to fight or push the Republicans. Republicans don't care if we oppose their agenda, or don't approve of what they're doing. Ah, ah, ah, ah, they do care, actually, because they love it when we oppose what they're doing.

DAVID DOEL: You cannot pressure, as someone who's an activist on the left, you cannot pressure somebody who is a Republican. So, you know, and that goes to all the potential energy wasted during the four years of Trump. Like, all the potential pressure that could have been on Hillary for other things were spent on hoping Trump doesn't steal the next election.

Like, it was just, the focus is completely off of anything material because you can't expect a Republican president and the party controlling Congress to do anything for your life. So it's all about, you know, trying to prevent just how bad what they're going to do is. Which you can argue in some ways is also when Democrats are in power, too, but it's still, it's to much different degrees.

And people also, I think, get caught up in this idea that, Oh, if I vote for this person then I can't complain. Which is, I don't know who thought this [00:47:00] idea up, but that's ridiculous. Like, just because you voted for say, uh, Kathy 'Hotchul' or Hochul, whatever it is, just cause you voted for her doesn't mean you now have to support everything she does.

No, you, you get to criticize, you get to push, you get to pressure in however way, whoever's in power, whoever you want, because, but the difference being with a Democrat in power, there is more of a potential there to actually have some impact because it is a Democratic politician and they have to worry about losing some votes from some people, so they have to speak to some of those issues, some of those groups that otherwise a Republican would not be caring about at all.

FD SIGNIFIER: It's, so, the thing that I'm sure you're going to get in this video is that we are working against our own best interests by keeping them in power. And to me, that fundamentally misunderstands the nature of power. We are not keeping them in power, right? We are the only check on the power they actually [00:48:00] get from all these other institutions, systems, that we suffer under. So we don't keep them, like, they're going to be there regardless, or somebody worse is going to be there that we can't check at all.

MIKE FIGUEREDO - HOST, THE HUMANIST REPORT: Although this election is probably a little bit different because I think this is going to come down to Trump versus Biden, probably, and if that's the case, I think that a lot of voters, particularly liberals and lefties, are going to see that this is more about democracy than anything else. Like, this is kind of make or break. Like, to me, I'm not going to vote for Joe Biden because I think that he is going to do anything about my student loan debt or expand healthcare at all. I'm voting for him because he's not Donald Trump. And I think that that really matters, even if I know that he's not going to like benefit me in any way, shape or form,

politically speaking, and I know that I can't really push him left. I'm voting for him because he's not Trump. It's as simple as that.

FD SIGNIFIER: Yeah. So I feel like I have the best take on this. Nobody's going to be better than what I'm about to give you right here, right? Vote [00:49:00] like you wash your hands. The same energy that when you take a shit, or you play you outside and you've been doing something, right?, you wash your hands. You don't wash your hands cause you like to. You don't wash your hands to keep you from getting shot or keep you from getting cancer or anything like that. You wash your hands cause it's a basic minimal thing you can do to lower the risk of catching some bullshit.

NINA TURNER: Yes. Yes.

FD SIGNIFIER: And like the thing that I think people struggle with is they want, we've been taught voting is like this bigger, more profound thing. That we are who we vote for. We identify what the party we represent. We wear the colors. We fly the flags and shit. And like, I get it. I was there, like, 2008 FD had the hope shirt, and the [inaudible] on, was playing will.i.am, you know what I'm saying? I was in there and then 2012 FD [00:50:00] was like, Ah! It don't make that much difference. Especially, so like, if I didn't live in Georgia...

NINA TURNER: Yeah.

FD SIGNIFIER: ...I might vote for Cornel West. I might vote for insert random [bleeped] here that's not, doesn't have a real chance, as a personal statement or as a branding strategy or some shit. I live in a low key swing state. So I'mma vote for, I'mma vote for Joe Biden. I'mma do it.

2024 Election Is About The Fight For Democracy Part 2 - The NPR Politics Podcast - Air Date 1-25-24

ASHLEY LOPEZ - REPORTER, NPR: Of course, an election year doesn't just mean a presidential race. All of the House of Representatives is up for election and 34 Senate seats are up as well. Let's focus on the Senate for a moment. Democrats face an uphill battle to maintain their narrow majority.

Sue, I want to focus on two states that you recently reported on and look closely at. That's Ohio and Montana. Can you tell me about those races?

SUSAN DAVIS - CORRESPONDENT, NPR: Sure. I mean, these are probably two of the marquee Senate races for the 2024 election year, in that both [00:51:00] states have an incumbent Democrat running for reelection in a state where the Republican nominee, likely Donald Trump, is all but certain to win.

So what does that mean? That means that they're going to need a significant portion of voters in their respective states to split their tickets to vote for Donald Trump at the top and vote for a Democrat for Senate. And that is not only difficult to do, it is increasingly becoming one of the most difficult things to do in American politics because people don't split their tickets anymore.

Just one point to underscore that: in 2020, there was just one state, the State of Maine, in which the top of the ballot and the Senate race had different outcomes. Joe Biden won Maine and Republican Senator Susan Collins did. She is the only senator who has been able to pull that off in recent elections.

ASHLEY LOPEZ - REPORTER, NPR: Claudia, I feel like we can't discount West Virginia here where Joe Manchin, a reliable, if not sometimes temperamental Democrat, is retiring. Given the state's conservative tilt, do you think Democrats are just [00:52:00] writing off West Virginia as like a loss for them?

CLAUDIA GRISALES - REPORTER, NPR: I think you can say in some ways they are, at least quietly, they may tell you they're writing off West Virginia. That was an interesting part of Sue's reporting this past month with Manchin resigning his place in that seat that really changes the calculations for Democrats in terms of their path forward and trying to reclaim a majority. And in the end, it really narrows those options for them. It also highlights another interesting trend that Sue, you've been tracking for several years, which is voters getting further entrenched in their own bubbles in terms of going red or blue and not splitting tickets anymore. And I think West Virginia is a classic example of that. We'll see that state really go red in the upcoming election without Manchin there. And so, it's interesting. Democrats are bullish, as the one Sue spoke to about perhaps reclaiming that majority, but the odds of that [00:53:00] happening are really, really tough.

SUSAN DAVIS - CORRESPONDENT, NPR: Look, I try not to go too deep on math, but the math here matters. You know, Senate Democrats have a 51-49 majority as we sit here today. And Joe Manchin retiring means that the best case scenario, if Democrats shoot the moon in 2024 and hold every incumbent, they're still looking at a 50-50 Senate.

Now, you talk to really optimistic Democrats and say, Hey, we could put Texas in play. We could put Florida in play with Ted Cruz running for reelection, and Rick Scott. I'm not going to say that's not going to happen, but I'm going to say in January of 2024, it's not accurate to call those races toss ups. I think there's going to be a roller coaster of things that are going to happen this year. But right now, Democrats are entirely on defense. There is nowhere where they are looking realistically to expand the majority. And if anything, like these red state Democrats, Jon Tester in Montana, Sherrod Brown in Ohio, and then other just competitive states, Arizona, Pennsylvania, are going to be either highly competitive or uphill battles.

And the [00:54:00] caveat here, which you always have to talk about when we're talking about the Senate majority, is who are they going to run against? And the thing that I think Democrats feel the most confident about, but it's completely out of their control, is who Republican primary voters ultimately nominate to run against these Democrats. Because we have seen in 2022, 2020, 2018, the caliber of the Republican candidate will matter a lot to the outcome of these elections.

ASHLEY LOPEZ - REPORTER, NPR: Which I guess is a lesson you'd think Republicans probably learned from 2022, right?

SUSAN DAVIS - CORRESPONDENT, NPR: You would think, but again, like, Trump has certainly overtaken the Republican Party. It is Trump's Republican Party. But you still have very key establishment players, like Senate minority leader, Mitch McConnell, who's aligned with the outside super PAC, the Senate Leadership Fund, which is run by McConnell allies who are still very much players in these Senate races and who have a very different idea of who a good general election candidate is compared to often the candidate that ultimately [00:55:00] Donald Trump might endorse in some of these races.

What I think is different in 2024, and another reason Republicans should feel a bit confident, is that, but obviously a lot of that's volatile. Who the establishment wants and who Republican primary voters pick has been one of the big stories of the past decade in politics. And so Republican primaries don't really start in earnest until March, so these races won't really start to take shape until the spring and summer. But if you *are* Mitch McConnell and the Republican senators sitting here today, you feel pretty good about 2024. And the only way you could really lose it is if Trump is the nominee and really loses big in the election and drags down tickets, or you put up candidates that just can't win among a broader electorate.

CLAUDIA GRISALES - REPORTER, NPR: Yeah, I think Democrats in the end are really going to need a Hail Mary moment, if you will. When you look at some of these contests, like a surprise win, you know, in a race such as Florida with Debbie Mucarsel-Powell going against Rick Scott, or Arizona, Ruben Gallego [00:56:00] is expected to be the Democratic nominee, we're still waiting to see what Kyrsten Sinema does, who *was* a Democrat, she's now an Independent, and that could really shake up that race if she decides to stay in it. And so we'll see which way that race goes as well.

SUSAN DAVIS - CORRESPONDENT, NPR: I will say that I do think Democrats have a Hail Mary, and I think that a lot of them believe it's the issue of abortion.

ASHLEY LOPEZ - REPORTER, NPR: Yeah.

CLAUDIA GRISALES - REPORTER, NPR: Mmm hmm.

SUSAN DAVIS - CORRESPONDENT, NPR: Especially, as we've seen, it's been a very motivating issue for voters. It seems to continue to be something that animates voters. And people like Jon Tester and Sherrod Brown, I think that, if they win, if they can pull it off, it's because their states sided with them on the abortion question. It's clear that Democratic campaigns are going to make abortion access central to every single one of these races. And in places like Montana, you know, every place is unique, but I think Montana is a good example where it's, Yeah, you'd call it a red state, but it's not a red state in the way that like Alabama is. It's a bit more of a libertarian state, um, [00:57:00] individual liberty, individual freedom. And you hear that in the way Jon Tester's talking about this issue, he's like, Liberty matters to Montanans. Freedom matters to Montanans. And if they can make that a winning argument, that could be the Hail Mary.

ASHLEY LOPEZ - REPORTER, NPR: Right. And Claudia, I mean, how likely do you think it is that one party could control everything after elections this year? Or do you think like divided government is more likely here?

CLAUDIA GRISALES - REPORTER, NPR: In terms of one party controlling everything, it's not an impossible outcome. It is possible, but it's hard to see, especially when we talk about the reporting that Sue and others have seen, especially with the electorate in terms of voters getting further entrenched into their bases of their parties. It's hard to see that we will not end up with a divided government once again. How divided, and what way, that remains to be seen. But it seems to be really reflective over the last few

elections and perhaps what we see the coming year of the country, where it is and how closely divided it is.

ASHLEY LOPEZ - REPORTER, NPR: [00:58:00] Always the wild card.

Final comments on how the game of election messaging works

JAY TOMLINSON - HOST, BEST OF THE LEFT: We've just heard clips today, starting with *The Majority Report* looking at GOP cynicism on immigration and Biden's disregard of young voters regarding genocide in Gaza. *Ring of Fire* looked at the disconnect between the overall economy and the economics experienced by the youth. *The Humanist Report* discussed the weak talking points from a Biden surrogate in response to valid questions about the impact of the president's stance on Israel and Gaza. Rachel Maddow on *MSNBC* pointed out the very small amount of democracy actually happening this election year. *The NPR Politics Podcast* gave an analysis on how Biden is attempting to frame his campaign as a defender of democratic norms. *The Professional Left Podcast* discussed the marketing of left-wing anger and Biden accomplishments. *The NPR Politics Podcast* looked at Biden finally taking abortion rights head on. And *Olurinatti* compiled a series of arguments for why voting matters.

That's what [00:59:00] everybody heard, but members also heard bonus clips from *Future Hindsight* discussing the benefits to democracy of ranked choice voting. And the *NPR Politics Podcast* got into the weeds looking at the upcoming election and the likelihood of continued divided government between the parties.

To hear that and have all of our bonus contents delivered seamlessly 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 a lack of funds stand in the way of hearing more information.

Now to wrap up, I just have a couple of comments about how to interpret campaign speak, particularly in the media, like we heard today from JB Pritzker speaking with Joy Reid. To refresh, the conversation was about whether the Biden administration and reelection campaign should be thinking about changing course regarding Israel and Gaza because of how deeply unpopular their current [01:00:00] stance is among young voters.

The first thing to understand is that JB Pritzker is a surrogate for Biden, which means that he is empowered to go and speak on behalf of the campaign. But the expectation is that surrogates will not deviate far from approved talking points and will not criticize the campaign they're supporting. So, Joy Reid was asking questions of Pritzker about whether he would advise Biden to change course on how fervently they've been supporting Israel. And he gave very evasive answers that redirected the discussion. What's important to understand is that that is outside the approved parameters of a surrogate to answer questions like that. And so, being evasive is basically the only option available and what literally any surrogate for any campaign would have likely done in that scenario.

Now, I understand that the point I'm making may sound like only a slight [01:01:00] difference, but I actually think it's an important distinction. We should think of Biden and his close circle of communication strategists, the ones actually empowered to change messaging of the Biden White House and campaign, as - for this analogy, we'll call them humans, full thinking, feeling logic-using humans. But we should think of the surrogates, like JB Pritzker as parrots who have simply been trained to talk by the humans. If you want to know what the approved talking points are on any given topic on any given day, then speaking with a surrogate parrot is fine. They'll just regurgitate the talking points. But if you want critical analysis of those talking points, the parrots aren't going to be able to help you.

Now, at this point, I know this sounds like media criticism so far, but it isn't, and I'm actually trying to drill down into something deeper. As a viewer or [01:02:00] listener of that conversation, it is not illogical to see a Biden surrogate, ostensibly representing the Biden campaign, being evasive about Israel and conclude that it is the policy of the Biden campaign to be evasive about Israel. Right? But I'm pointing out an alternate reason for that evasiveness, which includes, first, understanding how circuits work and, second, understanding the fourth dimension of politics, which is time. It's pretty clear that when that interview was recorded, Biden's team hadn't figured out what to do or say about Israel yet. But it doesn't mean that they won't. And I very much hope that they do figure out a better stance than their current one. And if the humans in charge come up with some new talking points based on a pivot in their stance, for instance, you can be sure that the surrogates will be the first to hear about it and will be out in force parroting [01:03:00] whatever the new messages.

So, what I'm saying is that we shouldn't despair, like the guy from *The Humanist Report* did on the show today, because a Biden surrogate couldn't give a good answer on Israel and evaded his way out of it with some other weak talking points about Biden being better than Trump. We have to simply

understand what the game is that's being played and how it's played, then keep the pressure up, because it really does make a difference.

So, here's a different example. I was reading a bunch of articles this week about what Biden needs to do to win the election. And two of them discussed his seeming aversion to talking very much about abortion. During his big campaign kickoff speech that was supposed to be like the opening salvo of his campaign, abortion wasn't even mentioned once. At least one of the articles titled "Biden is whiffing it on the most important issue for Democrats", this is from *Slate* magazine, you know, that was written this past week with the [01:04:00] anniversary of the overturning of *Roe v. Wade* in mind. And it mentioned that Kamala Harris was reportedly about to go on an abortion rights tour of the US but that Biden himself really hasn't put it as high enough of a priority. And then two days after that article came out - I'm not saying that the two are connected, but you know, the timing, and obviously the anniversary of the overturning of *Roe* is relevant to all of it - couple days after that article came out, Biden gave a major speech standing in front of a giant "Restore Roe" sign. The point is that pressure works. Politicians pivot and new messaging has always been developed along with new policy stances.

Obviously that article from *Slate* was not the first criticism the administration had gotten or, you know, the Biden campaign had gotten, on needing to be more full-throated about their support of abortion rights. It was likely, you know, one of the [01:05:00] last pieces of criticism before they rolled out their big abortion rights sort of element of their campaign, right?, Joe Biden front and center. And maybe it's true that he's usually not very comfortable talking about that issue. He has a weird history, you know, Catholicism and, you know, discomfort talking about it, but it kind of sounds like he's coming around and that definitely happened in large part because of outside pressure.

So, back to the surrogates, you know, wishing that they would be less mealy-mouthed in the media when they don't have any talking points is like being frustrated at a parrot when you ask them like, Look, I get it that you want a cracker, but what I'm asking is why do you and other parrots seem to like crackers so much when they're not even part of your natural diet? Do we even know the health effects of crackers on parrots? What sort of answer do you expect to get from that parrot? Right? However, making surrogates and, by [01:06:00] extension, the campaign look foolish on national television when they can't get their messaging straight is a great way to put the pressure on. People like Pritzker don't want to look foolish and feel like they're being hung out to dry while trying to prop up the campaign. I can certainly imagine someone like that calling up Biden or his communications team and demanding that they work up some better talking points and ideally a better policy stance

on Israel so that they can all stop looking like fools every time that question comes up from journalists and it is sure to continue to come up.

So does all that makes sense? You know, basically, don't despair about the inflexibility of a politician just because their surrogate answers difficult questions inflexibly. And understand that pressure really does work for forcing politicians to change not only their tune, but the tune that'll be parroted throughout the campaign surrogate expanded [01:07:00] universe. So, keep making demands for Biden to improve his policies, his stances, his messaging, and, as was made very clear by the last clip of the show today, don't lose sight of the bigger picture all at the same time.

That is going to be a for today. As always keep the comments coming in. I would love to hear your thoughts or questions about this or anything else. You can leave us a voicemail or send us a text at 202-999-3991, or simply email me to 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 Ben, 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. You can join them by signing up today at [01:08:00] 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 that would be greatly appreciated. You'll find that link in the show notes, along with our link to join our Discord community, where you can also 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 you twice weekly, thanks entirely to the members and donors to the show from bestoftheleft.com.