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THREATS TO DEMOCRACY IN THE TRUMP ERA

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P R O C E E D I N G S

MR. RAUCH: Good morning, everyone. Thank you so much for coming. What a wonderful mix of old friends and fresh faces. My name's Jonathan Rauch. I'm a senior fellow here at The Brookings Institution and a contributing editor of *The Atlantic* magazine. It's my duty and my privilege and joy to be the moderator here today on this extraordinary panel.

Before introducing our guests I wanted to do something just slightly unusual and take the temperature of the room just to understand where we stand -- (Laughter) -- relative to probably the most fundamental question that all of our panelists will be discussing. The oath of office of the President of United States is remarkably concise and effective, like everything else in the text of the Constitution. I will read the entirety. It says, "I do solemnly swear that I will faithfully execute the office of the President of the United States, and will to the best of my ability, preserve, protect, and defend the Constitution of the United States."

That's it. It doesn't say that I will do a good job of preserving, protecting, and defending the Constitution or that I will do it in the way that Republicans would like it to be done or Democrats would like it to be done. It just says, "I will to the best of my ability preserve, protect, and defend the Constitution." In other words, I will really, really try. (Laughter)

So here's the question that I want to ask the room. I'm going to ask you to raise your hand if you think that President Trump is really trying to fulfill the oath of office and to preserve, protect, and defend the Constitution. And then I'll ask you to raise your hand if you think he is not doing that. And then finally to raise your hand if you don't know. And this is just to understand what kind of conversation we're having.

So raise your hand if you think President Trump is trying to the best of his ability to preserve, protect, and defend the Constitution of the United States. So that

looks like three hands. Okay, raise your hands high. That's three people.

Raise your hands if you think he is not trying really hard. I think I see a pattern. (Laughter)

Raise your hand if you don't know.

Just for the heck of it, let's try the last two Presidents, same question.

Barack Obama, did he try really hard to preserve, protect, and defend the Constitution?

Yes. No. Don't know.

Okay, George W. Bush, did he try really hard to preserve, protect, and defend the Constitution? No. And don't know. Don't know, that's interesting.

Okay. So what this tells me is that we're having an unusual conversation today because in this room we're having a conversation we have not had about any President since maybe Richard Nixon potentially. Most people in this room don't think the President is even fulfilling the basic terms of his oath. He's not doing the job as President, a threshold question.

To talk about that today, three extraordinary people: David Frum, senior editor of *The Atlantic* and for our purposes most important the author of the new book "Trumpocracy: The Corruption of the American Republic", which you can buy here. I urge you to do so. It is a powerful book. It debuted on the New York Times bestseller list and it's going to be there for a long time.

Elaine Kamarck, my colleague at Brookings, senior fellow here and the director of the Center for Effective Public Management, has worked in several administrations, as well as having a Ph.D. and being a scholar of the presidency and politics.

And finally, Benjamin Wittes, who is a senior fellow at Brookings and the editor of Lawfare, the extraordinary blog about the law of war and related topics.

Our format is the usual format. David's going to talk for a little while

about the big ideas in his book, we'll have a few comments, we'll talk among ourselves, and then we'll turn it over to you. Enough from me. David.

MR. FRUM: Thank you. Well, thank you, Jonathan, and thank you all for being here. I have, like many of you, spent many fascinating and fruitful hours in this very room, often to discuss problems in the governance of places like Armenia and Azerbaijan, and Congo, places in the South America, never thinking that someday we would have this conversation about the United States, yet here we are.

Trumpocracy is a discussion of the abuse not just of the presidency, but of the whole of the American government. It's about a system of power, not just about one man. It's guided by a few master ideas and in order to speed the conversation and not monologue, I will just indicate a couple of what I think are the ideas that I really want to inject into the conversation.

The first is to understand that the state of democracy is not like an old-fashioned light switch that is on or off. It is like a dimmer. It is moving in one direction or another. There are a lot of ways for democracy to retreat without having a total democratic collapse.

Immediately after Donald Trump was elected there were some loose comparisons for the most spectacular democratic collapse in history which spread across the European continent in the early 1930s, in the wake of the most devastating war in human history to that point, in the wake of savage inflations and economic depression to the point of starvation. That history is obviously not going to recur in the 21st century. But what we are seeing is that democracy is in decline across large parts of the world's surface: India, South Africa, the Philippines, Turkey, Poland, Hungary, very nearly so in France, very nearly so in the Netherlands, ominous indications of such even in Germany.

It is arrogant to assume that the United States would be immune to these trends. The United States is not. But what we are dealing with here is not that we are

going to collapse overnight to a totalitarian night. Big, modern, bureaucratic states don't work that way. The analogy I keep using is that Donald Trump is not the heart attack of democracy, he is the gum disease of democracy. (Laughter) You can die from gum disease, but it festers for a long time before it finishes you off.

The second master idea is that we have to be careful about assuming that checks and balances are anything more than a metaphor. The Constitution has been described as a machine that will go of itself. And it was described that way by one of my predecessors at *The Atlantic* as a matter of fact in the 1880s. People don't often read the whole paragraph, which says while people think the Constitution's a machine that will go of itself, it is not. It is operated by people.

And one of the things to understand what I mean by "Trumpocracy" is to understand that what we're seeing here is a breakdown not just of the President and not just of the White House staff and not just of the Executive Office of the presidency, but there are large systems of enabling. Jimmy Carter faced a Democratic Congress for four years. Bill Clinton faced a Democratic Congress for two years. And both of them were checked and stymied in many ways. George W. Bush, even with Republicans, found he was unable to achieve major parts of the program that he wanted to implement, notably Social Security privatization through a Congress of his own party.

But over past years and decades, and especially since the Great Recession and the Obama presidency, we have seen the parties become much more parliamentary, and the Republican Party particularly so.

Donald Trump doesn't have much of an agenda of his own and he has struck a bargain with people in Congress who do have agendas that he will sign bills that are very unpopular, that probably certainly no Democratic President would sign and probably few first-term Republican Presidents would sign. He will sign those bills if in return he is given protection for actions that no President in American history has ever

dared undertake, including running a massive global influence business while President.

I don't think -- we all know what we keep forgetting, that right now the President of the United States is receiving millions of dollars of undisclosed payments, we don't know how much, from business partners worldwide. There are Trump Towers. President Trump did not build them, but he licensed his celebrity name to them in Manila, in Istanbul, in four locations in India, in the United Arab Emirates, and the President receives checks. How much? We don't know.

How much are they as a portion of his income? Are they small, medium, large, or almost everything? We don't know. What are the nature of the contacts he has with these foreign business partners? We don't know. We do know who they are and we do know that they are subject to power by the governments of their own countries. And that raises some questions that, again, it would be very helpful to have disclosure.

And in order to protect the President from these obvious question his party in Congress has had to shut down a lot of the ordinary oversight work. That mechanism is failing in a way that it did not fail under President Clinton, President Carter, or under President George W. Bush.

I want to direct, especially in this hall of people who study government so closely, to one of the master ideas that has gotten the least attention in the discussion of the book. And that is that when you think that the institutions will save you, we are seeing from many institutions of government what I call an autoimmune disorder, where institutions are responding defensively to Donald Trump in ways that also are damaging. And one of the reasons why I think this is not going to be just a passing, well, that was crazy moment that we will look back on is I think a lot of damage of the autoimmune disorders may persist. And here's what I have specifically in mind.

We saw at the beginning of the administration a lot of leaking by intelligence agencies trying to protect the country from dangerous threats. The reason

Michael Flynn is not national security advisor is because people in the know leaked information that gave the lie to Michael Flynn's descriptions of his interactions with the Russian ambassador. But in order to give him the lie important secrets had to be revealed. Presumably the Russian ambassador had his conversations with Michael Flynn over a medium that he believed to be secure. Now, he was informed at the same time that we learned that Michael Flynn lied, the Russian ambassador learned that secure medium, not so secure. And it will never be used again, presumably.

We have seen the military find ways to escape the President's authority. And we have to ask the question how informative really is the President's Daily Brief now that we know it's shared not with two or three people -- the national security advisor and the chief of staff; I think Bill Clinton shared it with the First Lady -- but typically the circle is three or four people for the Daily Brief of the highest eminence? President Trump shares his Daily Brief with 14 people and blurts its contents to casual visitors to the White House. How informative is that brief? Especially once you know, as the author, the President isn't going to read it, doesn't want it to be long, wants mostly pictures.

The intelligence agencies often want to escape from civilian control. The military, like any bureaucracy, wants to escape from civilian control. And Donald Trump is making it clear this is a matter actually of high public interest. But how difficult will it be to bring them back under control, especially if the next President is a very liberal Democrat who the military and the intelligence agencies mistrust for more traditional kinds of reasons? We could be looking at 4, 8, 12 years in which the national security apparatus of the United States shakes off the controls that were placed there in the middle 1970s. I mean, it has been half a century, but it's a new habit.

I'll give you one example of an institution that probably is dead and never recover, and that is the House Intelligence Committee. The House Intelligence Committee depends on the intelligence community sharing information voluntarily

because their ability to get hold of information that the intelligence people don't want to share is pretty limited. But since the scandals of the middle 1970s, the intelligence scandals, the agencies have realized we are more safe, more secure, more legitimate if Congress does oversight, as well as the Executive Branch. But that depends on us trusting Congress to act in a professional way and to understand how secrets are used and not to rummage through the files in order to make cheap political points.

Well, we have just seen a massive violation of those norms not just by the President, but by the House of Representatives; and not just by the leadership of that committee, but enabled by the highest leadership in Congress for cheap partisan reasons, but in a way that has to make you wonder if you're in the intelligence community you cannot trust Congress with real secrets ever again.

Let me pause there. There's a lot to talk about. But I want to say one last thing.

I grew up in Canada, I still spend a lot of time there and that gives me a somewhat different perspective on American life than many Americans have. Americans take it for granted that the American story must be a happy one. That what happens in other countries cannot happen here and that things will always turn out right in the end.

I think other countries have different experiences. And that serene American self-confidence that everything will have a happy ending, as enjoyable and delightful and admirable as it is, may be the greatest obstacle to this time ensuring the story really does have a happy ending. Thanks.

MR. RAUCH: Elaine, does this story have a happy ending?

MS. KAMARCK: Well, you know, David, it's interesting you should end on that because as an American who grew up in America, I actually believe that. Okay? I actually have in my heart always, and this is more emotional than intellectual, that we will always come out on the right side. I like that Churchill quote, you know, you can trust

the Americans to always do the wrong thing until there's no other alternative and then they do the right thing. So, you know, I kind of have an optimism about that.

Two years ago, more than two years ago, in this room, before Donald Trump was elected, I was asked from this panel about him. And to the consternation of many of the people in the room I said, yeah, if he's elected, he'll be impeached. And I said that two years ago, it's on here, and I actually still believe that.

But let me go around and I loved your book because your book brings up everything that is important to think about with this presidency. I think that the fact that you understand the GOP coalition so well and one point that is almost never discussed, but John and I have been working on in our work on political realism, is you point to the strength of the institutional Republican Party. And as somebody who's been on the Democratic National Committee for 20 years, I can tell you that I keep trying to tell them that you need to build an institution, that the Republicans have an institution. And when to their consternation, because I was at the Republican Convention and they did not like their nominee, the fact is that's a massive, well-oiled machinery and it goes into play for their guy.

I also like the fact that you characterize the GOP coalition as of the nation's biggest winners and biggest losers. And the irony is that that's not a very sustainable coalition. Most people think, oh, Democrats should go after the losers in that. I actually think that what may be happening is we may be getting the winners in that. And those winners are white, Republican, suburban women who are appalled at this guy because, let's face it, women don't like bullies. And the guy, if nothing else, is a massive bully.

And I think you warn us about a chilling, chilling possibility in technology when you talk about the fact that there's the technology out there that may soon be licensed to make videos of celebrities and other famous people and make those videos

look real. And we've seen fake news. This is even worse because, as everybody knows, the visual is so much more powerful even than the written word.

But let me go to some things that make me question the book. You call the Republicans enablers. All right. And I want to offer -- I'm not sure I believe this, but I want to offer an alternative here, which is that, in fact, the Republican Party is acquiescing, yes, because they have a policy agenda. They just got a big piece of that, which was the tax cut, okay. But I'm not sure that they are enablers and I'm not sure that they are as pro Trump as you would suggest or some people would suggest. And let me bring up a couple things.

Over the summer, Donald Trump systematically pissed off 14 -- because I counted them; I was counting them -- 14 members of the United States Senate, Republican members. And I remember thinking and I wrote a bunch of stuff on this that's weird. Why would he take off after his own party? And it's part and parcel, of course, of the Trump nonsense, which is that he does things that actually don't make much sense in his own interest. And that made me wonder.

Secondly, you don't talk too much about Pence. And having worked for a Vice President, Al Gore, when that Vice President was under -- when his President was being impeached, I can tell you that there is no more difficult position in the world than to be the Vice President. And I think Pence is doing exactly the right thing. You can't be publicly critical of the President because then it looks -- I mean, you're the person most likely to be advantaged if the President gets kicked out, resigns, gets impeached, gets convicted, whatever. So you've got to really hold back. You've got to show a happy face even in totally idiotic circumstances. And I think that's what Pence is doing.

Look what else Pence is doing. He's very friendly with the House of Representatives. Hmm, what a surprise. He spends his weekends while Trump is golfing at Mar-a-Lago or Bedminster, where is Pence? He's campaigning for

Republicans. Okay?

I think Pence has played -- and he is, as far as we know, he has been at arm's length from all the Russia nonsense even, and his one stepping out from the shadows, has been to be the guy who said you got to get rid of Flynn. Flynn lied to me, you got to get rid of Flynn.

So I think that the Republican Party looks like enablers, but, A, they have a President in waiting, that's one thing; B, when the Trump presidency began and they fired Flynn, I started writing about Watergate. Watergate, Watergate, Watergate. Watergate is near and dear to my heart because I was a first-year graduate student in 1973, and that's all we did was Watergate morning, noon, and night. Okay. So I started paying a lot of attention to Watergate.

Lately, I'm going back in time to an era that I don't actually personally remember, but McCarthyism. And the interesting thing about McCarthyism is I think just reading the history and my father-in-law was involved in this, so I have some firsthand -- he's now dead -- some firsthand knowledge of this, the country felt like they were in the grip of something awful. And the Republican Party, again, was supportive on the face of it, but very worried underneath. And when McCarthy failed, when Senator Ralph -- what was his name?

MR. RAUCH: Flanders, I think.

MS. KAMARCK: Yes, when Senator Ralph Flanders -- thank you -- put forth the censure bill in 1954, in a period of about five months McCarthyism collapsed. It just collapsed. It was like the country was in the thrall of something and it just ended. And I kind of wonder if there won't be a moment when people say about this President and about the Trumpocracy, which David has shown us beautifully, enough. All right, enough. And the Republican Party I think will be the ones that have to start that. So that's my thoughts after reading a wonderful book which everybody should buy on the

way out.

MR. RAUCH: Thanks, that was terrific. David, if you could keep a few of those points in mind we'll come back to you for a general reaction.

Ben, maybe now is as good a time as any to follow Elaine's remarks with a quotation from today's New York Times since they're both relevant to the same point. Ross Douthat, who's a columnist there, maybe this is yesterday's *Times*, has a column reacting to an article that Ben and I wrote in Atlantic calling for a boycott of the Republican Party until they get their act together. And he called it "The Taming of a Demagogue," and I'm going to read a fairly actual substantial chunk just to give you an idea of how the charge sheet look.

What Douthat says is, and I quote, "In almost every case, the establishment Republicans crowding his cabinet or influencing him from the Senate have had a gentling or restraining effect upon Trump's presidency. Here is a short list of moves -- some authoritarian, some just destabilizing -- that Trump promised or threatened during the campaign: reinstating waterboarding and allowing torture; shaking up NATO and striking a deal that abandons American allies to a Russian sphere of influence; pulling the United States out of NAFTA; changing libel laws to make it easier to bankrupt his critics in the press; launching a major trade war with China; pulling the United States out of the Iranian nuclear deal; installing cronies and relatives in high judicial posts; banning Muslims entry to the United States; and deporting millions of illegal immigrants in an enormous sweep. A year later none of these things have happened; few have even been meaningfully attempted."

What's your take on the situation we're in?

MR. WITTES: So, first of all, my voice is mostly gone right now and I'm coughing a lot, so please forgive me for any guttural hacking noises that emerge in the course of what follows. (Laughter)

So on Ross Douthat's criticism, I'm fascinated that this constitutes a rebuttal to the idea that the Republicans in Congress have been an enabling force to note all the things that haven't happened without reference to the things that have. One could actually make a similar list about Putin. You know, it's a little bit like to note when he invaded Crimea and the Eastern Ukraine that the Western Ukraine is fine. (Laughter) And I'm just not sure quite what it proves.

There's no doubt that congressional Republicans have filed the rough edges off of certain things. And there's also no doubt that the aggregate impact of them has been not to confront a whole lot of other things that some of us feel rather desperately need to be confronted and need to be pushed back against.

Which brings me to the way Jonathan opened this entire discussion, which is I think exactly the right place, which is the Presidential Oath of Office. David's book is -- I think he used this term in introducing it, but I actually want to highlight it. The use of the word "Trumpocracy" is a very clever way of talking, zooming out a little bit from the person and personality of Donald Trump and to what David called a system of power in his remarks here. But I actually want to use a slightly different word for it. The word I want to use is "regime." And it's a way of thinking about the structure of organization and government that the system around Trump is built around. And I think the major contribution of the book is to zoom out a little bit from Trump to that aggregated set of structures and the way they interlock and weave within one another.

The oath is a very interesting place to start talking about that. And I wasn't meaning to talk about it, but since Jonathan began with it and the fact that you all don't seem to take his Oath of Office very seriously, 200 people in the room, 3 raised their hands in affirmation of his oath.

So let me give you a counterexample, which is when Barack Obama was interviewed, I can't remember if it was The New Yorker or Vanity Fair, there was a long

interview with Barack Obama relatively late in his presidency. And he is asked about undoing a whole lot of aspects of George W. Bush's approach to counterterrorism. And I read this interview with a lot of interest because that's actually the area and national security law is actually the area that I work in. And I found Obama's answer fascinating.

So he starts out by saying, the first thing I want to say, this is about heavy-duty stuff, you know, torture, right, so the first thing I want to say is that George W. Bush is a very good man and he cares about the country a lot. That's not an exact quote, but if somebody pulls the actual article it's a pretty emphatic statement. And everything that follows he says in the context of precisely what you guys all just refused to do, which is to raise his hand when Jonathan asked do you trust your predecessor's oath, and say absolutely.

And so a critical factor, in my view, of what David calls Trumpocracy is the fact that a very large number of people -- and I want to be frank, I count myself as one of them -- do not believe the man's Oath of Office. And that should cause us to reflect for a moment on a point that Jonathan made, but didn't ask the subsequent question, so I'm going to ask it now, which is why is the text of the Oath of Office in the Constitution at all? Nobody else's Oath of Office is in the Constitution. The President's oath is spelled out verbatim.

It's a striking thing if you read the Constitution that all of a sudden there's this like screenplay, right, what the President has to say. And it specifically says that he will say on oath or affirmation. Founders took oaths very, very seriously. I'm not going to go into why or what the sort of history of that is, but it was a matter of considerable passion for them when something was to be given with an oath.

And the reason is that, you know, the quote that we always use from John Adams, which is actually from the Massachusetts Constitution, that aspire to a government of laws, not men, is wrong. I mean, with all due respect to John Adams, we

have a government that integrates laws and people. And one of the things that makes people function in that system is civic virtue and the fact that certain behaviors are just unthinkable. The word that everybody uses these days, this past year, everybody learned this word to throw around is "norms," right, the norms we have of the presidency.

But I think the real issue here, the embodiment of that set of civic virtues that we expect in certain people, is the oath. And so when Jonathan looks out at an audience and says how many people take the President's oath seriously, and he gets 1-1/2 percent to say yes, if we assume there are 300 people -- or 200 people in the room, that's a very striking statement.

Now, I started being concerned about this early in the campaign. When I looked at Donald Trump it was really a number of things: the egomania, the bigotry, all sorts of things. But most importantly for me it was the demands that there be prosecutions of his political opponents. And when he started doing that I started thinking about the question what does it mean to have a presidency in the total absence of civic virtue? What happens if you detach those two ideas?

By the way, I recently read Ron Chernow's biography of Washington. Washington, one of the things that comes through was written long before Donald Trump comes to prominence, it's not written with reference to any contemporary event, is how obsessed he was with civic virtue, his own, his own virtue and appearance of it, really, really mattered to him. So what happens if you have a President who just doesn't care? That that's just, you know, some people do the civic virtue thing, some people don't do the civic virtue thing, right?

And the irony is that when I started thinking about that you ended up with certain predictions, which is grotesque abuses of prosecutorial discretion; removal of people, and I specifically identified the FBI director as somebody he was going to have to get rid of; demands for investigative outcomes. Now, these are some of the things that

actually constitute Trumpocracy. Right? Because once -- none of them are law. None of them -- there's no law that says the Justice Department is functionally independent of the presidency. In fact, such as there is law, Article II of the Constitution says the opposite. What creates that reality is the President's Oath of Office.

And so I'm going to stop here, but I want to say that it is worth thinking about Jonathan's question as you read this book because I think it actually gives a frame for understanding these many disparate elements that David describes of the structure of power. And I think it gives -- you can ask yourself through every page of this book would a President who swore that Oath of Office sincerely or even who was capable of swearing an oath sincerely -- right, that's a separate question (Laughter) -- would he do these things? Would he say these things? Would he behave this way?

And if I can paraphrase Justice Scalia, if that question does not answer itself, then the idea of independent law enforcement in the United States may have no meaning.

MR. RAUCH: Thank you. It was striking when I asked the question of the room of three Presidents that it was clear that some people preferred Obama to Bush, but clear majorities of hands went up, obviously majorities of hands went up for people in this room saying that both George W. Bush and Barack Obama took their Oath of Office seriously and did their best to execute it, whereas three people said that about the current President. That tells you something about the break with the past that we're seeing at present.

So, David, let's focus for a minute on Elaine's comments and on Ross' column, which is similar in some ways. One thing to say about your book is, oh, my god, it's not just Trump, it's Trumpocracy, it's a whole system, it's a regime, and the American Republic has already been corrupted. It's interesting that the subtitle of your book is not "The Corruption of the American Presidency," or "The Corruption of the Republican

Party.” It’s “The Corruption of the American Republic.” So one reading is that’s happened already. Now what?

Another reason is, no, wait a minute, there’s still a whole lot of infrastructure there. There’s a lot of mechanism in the Republican Party. There’s a lot of subterranean sentiment. Hold your horses.

Can you react to that?

MR. FRUM: One of my reactions to what Elaine said is when you have a phenomenon that’s bigger than the United States, you can’t settle for an American explanation. And this new kind of approach to government -- repressive kleptocracy, can we call it? -- it’s spreading around the planet. Authoritarian populism when it’s not in power, it’s spreading around the planet and around the developed world. And when you’re trying to understand it and predict it, you have to have reference to more than the United States.

The Western country where repressive kleptocracy is most advanced is Hungary under Viktor Orbán. And I’ll aside Putin and even Erdoğan, but a Western country is Hungary. Viktor Orbán has not wrongfully arrested a single person. Hungary remains a signatory to the European Declaration of Human Rights and it remains subject to the jurisdiction of the high courts of the European Union. And yet, media critics of Viktor Orbán have been driven out of the country. None of them have been hurt in any way, they just can’t make a living.

He has politicized not only the courts, but the Central Bank, and has built an elaborate system of financial fraud. He’s also jerry-rigged the constitution. He’s genuinely popular. He’s surely the single most popular person in the country, but he’s been able to finagle the constitution so that his plurality of public opinion is translated into a two-thirds vote in the Hungarian Parliament sufficient to amend the Hungarian constitution. But there are no concentration camps. And although people do, I noticed

when I was last in Budapest, look both ways before they begin to talk. They talk and Americans talk.

So when you think about the future, when you think about how all this is okay, the difference from this than, say, the McCarthy period, McCarthy was not President. And the courts, the federal courts, remained in session. And everyone understood in 1953 that the President of the United States, a very cautious man, had his hands on the lever of the trapdoor and was just biding his time for the moment when he could pull the lever and McCarthy would fall. And McCarthy was then entrapped into attacking a genuinely powerful institution: the United States Army. And his opponents, they had a plan. It took them a while to execute it, they had to deal with public opinion, but his opponents who had power had a plan and were always planning to finish him off, and they pretty quickly did. McCarthy's career lasted, it's sad to see, for about three years.

To Ross' column, as Ben said, you could do the list the other way. And one of the things where you'd see the most impact is on America's global leadership. Trans-Pacific Partnership, the whole architecture that was going to build, for the Pacific, the beginnings of the kind of security and trading system we have in the Atlantic, Trump cancelled it. That was one of his very first acts.

The attacks on the U.S.-South Korea relationship while militarizing the conflict with the North that happened right away.

When Ross says that NATO's intact, NATO is not intact. What NATO is ultimately is a concept of creditworthiness. The United States really will wage ultimate war, putting at risk New York, Los Angeles, and San Francisco, to protect Estonia. You either believe that or you don't, and you'd be a damn fool of an Estonian if you believe it. And it doesn't matter how often the President says, yeah, probably, if he just said once, hmm, maybe not. The credit is gone and we all know that that credit is gone. And the

Estonians certainly know it and all over the world you see people making new arrangements because the United States has made that journey, the biggest journey in math, from nonexistence to existence, the nonexistence of a doubt to the existence of a doubt.

I want to say one last thing about the attack on norms. The Trump people say -- they used to say there was no collusion, but then they say collusion is not a crime. (Laughter) Just if you're asking. They're not wrong that collusion is not a crime. I mean, there are things in the Russia matter that if true are crimes.

It is a crime, obviously, to hack communications, quite a serious crime to hack communications. And if you hack the communications and you share them, the person who receives them directly from the hacker is also probably committing a crime, although there's some carve-outs for media organizations and it's an interesting question whether WikiLeaks is a media organization. But if there are two steps there's no crime. I mean, information is stolen, is given to WikiLeaks, is given to you, that's probably not a crime.

It's also a crime to receive a thing of value from a foreign entity. If the Russians were to have driven a truck full of doughnuts and coffee to a Trump rally somewhere that would clearly be a violation of election law. It's not so clear that information counts as a thing of value, so that may have to be litigated whether that's a crime.

But on the core evil of an American presidential candidate sitting down with representatives of a hostile foreign government and saying how can we work together to achieve our common aims, that's not illegal. It's not illegal not only because you couldn't write the law, but because it genuinely -- I mean, it has not occurred to anybody that such a thing could ever happen. Politics is our check on that.

Treason is defined in the Constitution and this is not treason, but

obviously such disloyal behavior is unthinkable. And it is assumed that if anyone were ever caught in cahoots with a foreign power, as Henry Wallace was caught in the election of 1948, that would just confine you to the utter most margins of American politics. The American people would never stand for such a thing.

But if it happens, the law won't help you because the law does not contemplate such a thing. And that is probably the place that we're going to go.

But you know who did contemplate this possibility? The authors of the Constitution. Twice in Madison's notes they instance as a fear what the President might do. The case of Charles II, who is king of England during the time of the grandfathers and great-grandfathers of the authors of the Constitution. Charles II had financial problems and he accepted a permanent subsidy from Louis XIV, the better funded king of France. And in exchange for the subsidy Charles II did nothing as Louis XIV invaded and overran the Netherlands, who would later become a British ally -- an English, then British ally. And he handed over English possessions on the mainland of Europe to Louis XIV. And they cited this as exactly the kind of behavior that they were worried a president of the then relatively poor, relatively small United States might do at the behest of powerful monarchies, like Spain, England, France, and Britain, all of whom then had territory in the Americas. They worried about this and they cited this as impeachable conduct if we had an American Charles II.

It's something we need to keep in mind because the law on its own is a poor instrument. When I started my work on the book one of the things I did was I came up with a series of scenarios and I went to people and started to ask White House Counsel's Office or other high legal office staffs what is the legal check on this? What is the legal check on that? And, you know, we'd sort of go through, well, there isn't one because it's just assumed the President wouldn't do it. And if he did, the Congress would stop him. And if the Congress didn't stop him, the public would rise up.

But if the public doesn't rise up and Congress doesn't check, there's no law there for so many of these things. And that is the new problem that we face and not face alone, but face in common with so many people around the world.

MR. WITTES: The fact that in the extraordinary odyssey of the last two years, the fact that comes back and haunts me the most often as the single most extraordinary is that a full year and a half ago, and six months before he took the Oath of Office, a man running for the presidency of the United States held a press conference to ask an adversarial foreign power to illegally intervene in our election in full public view.

Now, if, hypothetically, I were to criticize your book -- not that I would ever do that because it's a wonderful book (Laughter) -- but I would say in a way there's too much in it. There's such an embarrassment of riches when you want to write a book about strange or troubling things that Donald Trump has done over his career. It's easy to lose focus. And to me the titanic item that looms over everything else is that this is a person who in full public view collaborated in public with a foreign power to undermine a U.S. election illegally, then he went on to deny that this had happened, and then he went on to fire the people investigating it, and we know the rest of the story. To me the single most troubling fact is that that happened it was not instantly flattened by the Mack truck of American public reaction.

MR. FRUM: I don't to hog the mic, but to make a very quick point on that.

MR. WITTES: It's actually your event.

MR. FRUM: That the great unknown in the Trump-Russia collusion story is to what extent did information flow back to Russia from the United States? We don't yet know the answer to that. But one of the things I present in the book is a timeline of the amazingly effectively coordinated Trump-WikiLeaks messaging, especially in the last month of the election.

And I lay out, when you do a sort of hour-by-hour and the key dates here are the end of the first week in October, the Access Hollywood tape comes out. David Fahrenthold of the Washington Post breaks that story about 4:00 on the afternoon of Friday, October 7th. The Trump people knew that another WikiLeaks dump was coming. And we know that because Roger Stone Tweeted about it and they were all ready. They expected it to come on Wednesday, October the 5th.

Julian Assange had a press conference on Tuesday, October the 4th. When the release did not happen on Wednesday, October the 5th, Trumpworld was horrified. Alex Jones devoted his show on October 5th denouncing Julian Assange for not keeping his promise, for not doing the release. Whoever was controlling that release date, with steely discipline and perhaps foreknowledge, who knows, waited and waited and waited for another 48 hours.

The Fahrenthold release comes at 4:00. The WikiLeaks dump comes within an hour.

When the WikiLeaks dump happens it's a big bunch of stuff, some of it pretty interesting, most of it not. You get the notes on a couple of the Hillary Clinton speeches to banks. The thing that the Trump people decided to weaponize -- remember, I think it was Steve Bannon tells Michael Wolff we couldn't collude with ourselves because we're that incompetent. So this super-incompetent campaign that can't do anything, within minutes has found two emails inside the trove that repeat criticisms of the Roman Catholic teaching on women and sexuality that are shared, I cite this in the book, by about three-quarters of American Catholics. But taken out of context and artfully misrepresented, the quotes can be seen as an attack on conservative Catholic teaching of a kind that probably most Catholics even out of context would accept, but that culturally conservative Catholics in the upper Midwest might resent, the people who decided the election.

Those emails were weaponized within minutes and the Trump campaign had converged on that as their line of attack and their way out of the *Access Hollywood* problem by the end of the afternoon on October 7th, and they were up and ready to go first thing on October 8th. Mike Pence was talking about it, President Trump was talking about it, Kellyanne Conway was talking about it. And maybe they were just for once in their lives quick off their unnimble feet, but it's suggestive. And there are many other examples of this where it just looks like there's a lot more to this story.

And if the story acquires the full dimensions that the uncredulous mind thinks, as Jonathan says, this is the biggest espionage success in the history of the world. Bigger than the Rosenbergs.

MR. RAUCH: So, Elaine, there's an implicit difference in perspective between you and David about how far gone we are. I think you see us in an earlier stage than David does. If you will, if you feel like it, let's kind of stipulate that David is right. No, actually, let's stipulate that you're right. (Laughter) That's going to be easier for you to do.

MR. FRUM: We always stipulate that we're right.

MR. RAUCH: Let's say there's going to a reassertion of some norms by some Republicans and maybe it happens this year before the election. How much, if any, institutional and norm damage has been done already and what are the implications of that?

MS. KAMARCK: Okay, that's a good question because it's one of the places I wanted to go. I totally agree with you about Russia, okay? And, in fact, I would take this one step further on what you were just saying, David.

If we can track the weaponization of that information to certain parts of Pennsylvania, Michigan, and Wisconsin, all of which have very conservative and large Catholic communities, then we kind of know that takes us one step further to collusion

because it's the targeting of this sort of thing that really matters. And, of course, this election was won by 110,000 votes in those 3 places, so I'm with you on that.

Institutionally, I think the difference between the United States and between some of these Eastern European countries, like Hungary, is that Eastern Europe in particular emerged from Communism and did not have the experience of an independent, bureaucratic state that operated according to law, not men. They still were under the -- you know, let's face it, they were only the children and the grandchildren of a Communist era.

The United States, Britain, other countries have a very long tradition of a bureaucratic state that operates on law. So let's use the example of Trump's first Executive Order.

There's about 9,000, 10,000 Border Patrol agents around the world. Trump signs the Executive Order. It is within his right to sign it at the time because he uses the vagueness in the law. The GS-9s and 10s at the border around the world -- maybe 12s and 13s, I'm not quite sure where they are now -- immediately implement and, of course, it's a mess. Right? There's confusion, everybody's complaining, et cetera. But that's because the bureaucrats are following the law as they see it at that moment, which is the President's Executive Order.

Well, it takes a couple days and what happens? The court stops it. The court says no, no, no, no, hold on, can't. Do those bureaucrats continue to implement? No, they stop. They're not listening to Donald Trump. They're listening to the rule of law. And at that moment, the rule of law says no, no, no, whatever the President says, stop for this time being.

Now, that's a mature democracy. Mature democracies work on the rule of law. They don't work on the rule of men.

And I look at another example you use in the book, which is the

Pentagon order on transgenders. Right? What did the Pentagon do? The next day did they take all five transgender people in the military -- believe me, there are not a lot -- did they just throw them out on their ears. No, not a single person has been thrown, not a single transgender person has been thrown out of the military. What did they do? They made it a study commission. Mattis says they're going to study it.

Okay, the bureaucracy is not reacting to Donald Trump's idiotic Tweets and moments. The bureaucracy is reacting to the rule of law. Now, how does that change? In the United States we change the law, right? And he's been fairly unsuccessful at doing that, as I think the Ross Douthat thing matters.

And I'd say one final thing, which is we confuse institutional degradation and worries with policy stuff. So the Trans-Pacific Partnership, all right, which you mentioned, I heard Bill Clinton say in this very room a couple years ago I don't think we could have passed NAFTA or any trade agreements in this climate. Trade agreements are really unpopular these days. There's a piece of the Democratic coalition that never liked the darn things and now there's a big piece of the Republican coalition. So I think that is actually -- I think him stopping that was reflecting, in fact, where the American people are or a large part of the American people are. That's not the same as -- having a policy disagreement isn't the same as the undermining of institutions, and I think we tend to mix them up a little bit.

MR. RAUCH: I'm come to you about all this in a second, but on a scale of maybe -- we'll make this really, really crude, do it "The McLaughlin Group" way. (Laughter) Scale of 1 to 10, Elaine Kamarck, how much institutional damage so far, 1 to 10?

MS. KAMARCK: Well, wait, which is which?

MR. RAUCH: Ten is maximum institutional damage, we're in deep trouble, democracy is in peril. One is, oh, system's fine.

MS. KAMARCK: I'd say 2 to 3. And the reason is that David's point --

MR. RAUCH: Oh, groans around the room, let it be noted.

MS. KAMARCK: Groans, groans. And the reason I'd say 2 to 3 is that I think David's point about the national security apparatus leaking for good reasons, but also creates a bad precedent that could continue. So I wouldn't say there's none, but I would say there's less than other people think.

MR. RAUCH: Ben, your turn.

MR. WITTES: So first of all, just a purely factual matter, I think there's somewhere between 1,000 and 6,000 transgender people in the U.S. military.

MS. KAMARCK: Okay.

MR. WITTES: It's not a huge number, but it's not trivial either, and particularly at the higher ends. So I think you want to distinguish between two forms of institutional damage, right? One is the form that is done and the injury is there and visible and would require active repair. And on that point I actually agree with Elaine, that there's not that much, that if you subbed in normal government tomorrow, it wouldn't snap back to normal. And the institutions have held up remarkably well despite, in some cases, particularly the FBI for which I have a lot of personal feelings, I think the institutions have held up really well under remarkable assault. And I think if you allowed them three months to recover without inflicting more damage, they'd be fine. The Justice Department, also.

But there's another sense in which I vehemently disagree with Elaine. And I think the damage is much more profound, and that's just in the department of proof of concept. So you've taken all of these things that are completely unthinkable and you've just done them. And, you know, it is totally unthinkable that the President of the United States would Tweet an attack on the general counsel of the FBI. Let's just pause a moment over that.

Now, if you reacted when I said that, he did, right, because that's they way a lot of you reacted, like that is actually because Donald Trump has made it so thinkable that you didn't even remember that it happened several weeks ago, just before or just after the turn of the year.

It is completely unthinkable that the President of the United States would be monetizing a hotel next to the White House. The other day I submitted a FOIA request for U.S. Government payments to that hotel for housing foreign visitors. I think that FOIA request will probably generate evidence that the State Department is actually making payments to the Trump Hotel. I don't know that for sure, but I believe it.

This list of things that should be completely unthinkable and are actually our reality is very long and I'm not going to bore you with them. Actually, you know, one of the really interesting things about David's book is, as Jonathan said, that it is an embarrassment of riches of this sort of list of stuff. Right?

Now, I think almost all of that stuff, the moment you have sane, reasonable leadership again disappears. But the memory of it doesn't disappear. And the memory, the knowledge that what had been unthinkable is now thought and done, and can be returned to by perhaps more skillful demagogues is not something we are going to put aside quickly.

MR. RAUCH: Elaine?

MS. KAMARCK: You know, this sort of debate we're having here is interesting because as we look forward, how are we going to know how dangerous this is? Right? And one of the ways we'll know is whether or not there is a grass-roots Trumpism as opposed to a top-down takeover. Okay.

Trump took over the Republican Party from the top down. Okay. Most Republicans were, as we can remember, until the very end were like appalled and nervous and thought for sure that he was going to lose, so it wouldn't make any

difference anyway. People were talking about the 2016 Trump convention like the Democrats' 1972 convention.

One of the things we will be watching here at Brookings in our congressional work this year is we're going to be looking at every single congressional primary in the United States. And what we're going to look for is, are there Trump-like challengers? Are there people, are there mini Trumps out there running in congressional primaries and then, of course, winning Republican congressional primaries?

Now, the reason that's important for this discussion is that if, in fact, there is a -- Trumpism becomes not just something that is Trump at this point in time, but becomes a movement that is embedded in the Republican Party, two things will happen. First of all, you'll consistently get a hardcore of the Republican caucus that is pulling it in this direction. And secondly, you will, even for those who are not really Trumpites, you'll get a fear of being primaried by Trump types. Okay? So we'll know and from this stage we will tell you in September, and I might be very wrong, okay, we'll know what that activity looks like at the grass-roots level.

In 2016, there was none. Okay. In 2016, there was Trump at the top of the ticket and in the congressional primaries there weren't many Trumps. And so what we are going to be looking for -- and if we find a lot of mini Trumps I'll be the first to say, okay, I'm wrong -- that there's bigger damage possible in the United States.

MR. RAUCH: Ben, then we'll come back to you, David, and then we'll go to question.

MR. WITTES: So just very quickly, I am less afraid of the mini Trump than I am of the normal politician who -- the person who actually does take his oath seriously, or her oath seriously, but has a memory of the idea that it is possible to call up a particular investigative outcome from the Justice Department and whisper in the ear of somebody who is in a position to do it that that's what you expect, and has a memory that

you can do that and not get impeached. That's the fear. And that's the institutional damage that cannot measure today, may never materialize, but I think is -- and that's just an example of it that's close to my heart, but that there are a thousand of them throughout David's book, where you ask yourself the question how much of this is showing proof of concept for what may become replicatable? And that's what we mean when we use the term "normalize."

MR. RAUCH: And an observation on that is, yes, we don't know yet how much is normalized. Every morning of every day now I get up and thank John Mitchell. Does anyone remember who John Mitchell is? I thank John Mitchell for going to prison for 19 months because right now in the government there are lots of people, who, if orders come from the White House to do this and that, remember what happened to John Mitchell. That is a crucial stabilizing force. We don't know yet whether that will hold.

So before we go to the audience, which we're about to do, David, many things to chew on here. I'd love to hear your answer to *The McLaughlin Group* question or anything else.

MR. FRUM: Will there be a recovery? How easy will it be? I think we already know the answer to that. No and it will be hard, and here's why.

Here's who a recovery could happen. Donald Trump got into the presidency on a lucky bounce in the Electoral College, began to do all these things and all these crazy Tweets. Congress was genuinely horrified. His party reluctantly went along with it. But then there followed in 2018 a giant wave election of the 1994 type where on high turnout there was a collapse in the support of the President's party, among the President's own voters. And that Congress then set about actually hemming the President and even to impeach him if he ever did anything like it again, and this was backed by a considerable consensus of American public opinion, I would say we're fine.

That's not going to happen. We already know that's not going to happen.

The Democrats might make gains in 2018, probably they will, although the economy is good and wages are rising and the tax cut will put money into the pockets of very rich people, but also designated constituencies. California will pay a nice tax cut for middle-income parents all over the Midwest.

But here's the idea that has really been entered into our politics and it will not be removed. If you watch Fox they will not repeat this claim that Trump actually won the popular vote, but what you'll hear again and again and again from everyone there is the President is expressing the will of American people. Now, mathematically, scientifically, this is obviously untrue, but it is true if you have inwardly redefined the American people in such a way as to exclude about a third of the American people from counting as the legitimate. There are the proper American people and then there are all these strangers who don't have a right to be counted.

And that, I think, what is the final base of Trumpocracy that we see across the Western world? They're reacting to this ethnic transformation that has come to democracies. By redefining our party system, no longer as between labor and capital, between people who work in the public sector and people who work in the private sector, but as between -- and this is happening everywhere -- people whose grandparents belong to the local ethnic majority and people whose grandparents did not belong to the local ethnic majority. And then regardless of your class situation, if your grandparents didn't belong to the local ethnic majority, you're in the party of what used to be the left; and regardless of your class situation, if your parents did, you're in the party of what used to be the right.

And that is why democratic institutions are under pressure, because the people -- the Trump voter does not reject the concept of democracy exactly. What the Trump voter rejects is that certain Americans have a right to participate in their democracy. Their views don't count and a system that counts their views is illegitimate.

And what they're looking for is a rectification of American democracy such that legitimacy comes from the votes of the proper Americans.

And that is the true resource of Donald Trump and that isn't going anywhere.

MR. RAUCH: Over to you guys. We had three dowdy souls who said they thought Trump was taking his oath seriously. If any of them are inclined to ask a question, we certainly welcome that.

I'm going to make the usual request that nobody filibuster or make long statements because I think there are going to be a lot of people who want to participate and we've got 20 minutes to do it in.

So I'm going to start in the very back. I think there's a microphone. The gentleman in the black by the camera.

SPEAKER: Thank you. A question for Elaine. You gave us Mike Pence's calculation. I wonder about Paul Ryan. I see him as a critical figure. He, I assume, is intending to have a political future and he's concerned about the 2018 elections. What is his calculation at this point? How far will he go with Trump?

MS. KAMARCK: I think that Paul Ryan is in a very tough situation. He has found himself in sort of an impossible situation, right? Remember that everybody has now learned, and you can see it even with the Democrats, right, everybody's now learned that Trump is a baby and you have to say nice things about him. Right? So everybody goes out of their way to say nice things about Trump publicly, even if they don't like him and they're working against him somewhere else.

And I think Ryan is in a position where he sees his speakership going away in 2018. Okay. He's going to lose -- the probability is there that he will lose the House of Representatives. Now, by what margin is the question because if it's a narrow loss, okay, the fight goes on. If it is a mammoth wave, right, if the Democrats pick up 50

seats, okay, a Truman 1946 sort of wave, then I think that Paul Ryan's political career is finished. Okay. It's absolutely finished.

I think there's a second aspect to Ryan that is particularly -- that's not often talked about. The ascendant part of the Republican coalition, those that David so eloquently said, those who were hurt by globalization, they don't like this Paul Ryan business about cutting Social Security and Medicare, I mean, the very foundation, the very social safety net these people rely on. And so Paul Ryan is increasingly out of step with the sort of new energy brought into the Republican Party by Donald Trump.

So I think on policy and on politics, I think Ryan is in trouble and may, in fact, no longer be the rising star of the Republican Party, but the falling star of the Republican Party.

MR. RAUCH: Anyone else on Ryan particularly? No?

The lady in the scarf by the aisle four rows from the back.

SPEAKER: Thank you very much.

MR. RAUCH: No, I'm sorry, this one back here. That's okay, please continue.

SPEAKER: Oh, excuse me, I'm sorry. Mr. Frum, you mentioned the importance of the public uprising. Can you give some specifics, some suggestions?

MR. FRUM: Suggestions about what, what works?

SPEAKER: Yeah, just specific things of what people could do.

MR. FRUM: I think the most important thing that people do is mobilize into acts of traditional political organization. One of the things that has been I think in enabling factor to Trump is the dissolution of the party idea and the movement of political mobilization and energy of outside parties. Occupy Wall Street and the Tea Party were harbingers of this.

I think one of the things that is heartening, and there are things to be

optimistic about that we saw in 2017, and one was that the opposition to Donald Trump took remarkably orderly, law-abiding, conservative, and political forms. You didn't see a lot of misconduct in the streets and people blocking traffic. What you saw were some of the most -- protest marches of a scale of orderliness never seen maybe since the days of the women's suffrage protests. And what you've seen is rising attention to legitimate and truthful media. And we will see in November of 2018 whether people have registered to vote and made themselves heard. Those are the most important things.

One of the things I think that we all should keep in mind is that we all as individuals have a role as not only consumers of media, but as publishers of media. If you carry a smartphone in your pocket, and I assume most people in an audience like this do, you command more communications power than Walter Cronkite ever had at his disposal. Use it wisely. Because every day there are people who are sending you lies and you are a choke point in your personal network of whether the lies go forward or stop with you.

MR. RAUCH: Fascinating.

SPEAKER: Thank you. You know, you had mentioned that the Republicans were enablers. I think they're even worse. I think they're collaborators. And could you please comment on the Republicans who actually have nothing to lose by fighting Trump, for instance Corker and Flake, who've already declared that they will not run again? And also, sometimes Susan Collins and John McCain, as well, who still refuse to fight Trump even though they have the least to lose. Thank you.

MR. RAUCH: Who wants a crack at that?

MR. FRUM: Well, yeah, one obvious thing that Congress could have done and that Paul Ryan could have done that would have -- no one would ask them to abandon their political belief and not to confirm the conservative judges that they were sent to Congress to support and not to pass -- vote for the kinds of tax changes that they

believe in, but they could have passed a prospective law beginning in 2020 that anybody who accepts a major party nomination, President of the United States, on the day that that receives Secret Service protection, the Secretary of the Treasury shall release their past four tax returns. You could pass that law applying to the future.

And that would send a message to the Trump family about their political future. It would send a message to the Trump family that society does not accept their financial conduct. It doesn't impose any retrospective statement about the 2016 election. They could have done that and that doesn't happen.

And I think that confronts us with something. I have a lot of time for the Michael Wolff book, probably more than -- I've learned things from it and I recommend it to people. But I think one of the things that is systematically wrong in that book and actually unhelpful and maybe even dangerous is it presents a Donald Trump who is at bottom a doddering, helpless person. And as the Bob Corker example shows, as the Lindsay Graham example shows, Donald Trump has a will to power unlike any occupant of that office maybe since Lyndon Johnson, greater I would argue even than him. So he may not know much about stuff, he may not care much about the traditional activity of the President, he may be very lazy about all the things that are part of the job of the President, but he's quite energetic with things that are not part of the job of the President. And in one-to-one encounters with people, he breaks them and subsumes them.

And the Corker example, I mean, I remember thinking, you know, Woodrow Wilson picked a fight with the chairman of the Senate Foreign Relations Committee. It didn't go so well for him. And Donald Trump did and he just broke the man's backbone.

MR. WITTES: So a couple things on that. A while back I was at David's house at a book party for Anne Applebaum. And few days later, I read that -- I forget where I read this -- that the remains of the Never Trump conservative movement now fit

in David Frum's living room where, in fact, this party had taken place. (Laughter) And it had the ring of truth.

I think you are being a little hard on the members who have actually done the most. And it is not that I would not like to see them do more, but being Jeff Flake, that is a tough project. Being Bob Corker, that's hard, you know. And these are -- you're selecting for a group of people who are by the nature of being a U.S. senator, who are very ambitious, who imagine themselves as having a real connection to a voter base, and who often have higher aspirations either within the Senate or elsewhere. And this is a group of people who in an environment in which almost nobody of their kind are speaking out at all, they have done a certain amount of it and, in Flake's case and Corker's case in particular, have made some very powerful statements, and in McCain's case sank the healthcare bill.

And I think it is quite easy to sit from outside the political ecosystem in which such people operate and complain that they don't do more. I share the complaint. I wish that movement no longer fit in David Frum's living room. But I do think it is a little bit facile. And I think the ferocity of the environment in which these people have to function, even as people who aren't running again. I mean, I watched Sarah Huckabee Sanders' press conference yesterday and she was spitting venom for Jeff Flake. And every time the White House does that just imagine what his Twitter feed looks like, imagine what the volume of threats that they get, imagine the mail and call volume, all the metrics by which a politician gets feedback from voters.

And so I would not want to be too critical of them as individuals for not doing more. I wish they would. I'm grateful for what they do.

MR. RAUCH: I can't resist asking Elaine. I know there's still a lot of questions, but, Elaine, what should Democrats do in this situation?

MS. KAMARCK: Vote. Vote and get every possible person you can to

vote. And I've told all my liberal friends for one year only, even if you only do it for one year, don't send the checks to this group or that group or all these groups that come up. Send it to the damn party. Because in the end it is the party that matters. In the end it is the party that organizes the Congress and controls the committee chairmanship, et cetera. So parties still do matter. They're the one institution in American democracy that we love to hate and yet are absolutely critical to the way the democracy works. And so I'd say, you know, support the Democratic Party and support the Democratic candidates.

MR. FRUM: As a non-Democrat let me add one refining point.

MR. RAUCH: Though not necessarily a Republican.

MR. FRUM: Oh, no, I'm a registered Republican and I'm staying. And I have a long answer as to why I'm doing that, but this is not a year where the Republican has shown itself at its best. (Laughter) 1864, much better year. (Laughter)

I would say my plea to Democrats, and I know this is going against the institutional and temperamental grain, avoid gesture politics. Avoid messiahs. I would say not only should you -- my advice to Democrats is support the most boring Democrats you can find. (Laughter)

MS. KAMARCK: That's right. That's exactly right.

MR. FRUM: If you can find a mayonnaise farmer somewhere in Kentucky, that person. (Laughter)

MS. KAMARCK: Well, in fact, I recently wrote for Brookings a piece attacking Tom Steyer. Okay? You do not need to make impeachment a condition of receiving Tom Steyer's billions. There's no Democrat out there that's going to be dragged to an impeachment vote, believe me. And by politicizing it as he has done for his own personal political benefit, okay, he is undermining the possibility that next year there will be articles of impeachment on obstruction of justice, which right now that's the way that train is going.

So Democrats need to attack the President for all the things we've talked about here, for his conflicts of interest, for the Trumpocracy, for his attacks on the justice system, for everything, but stay away from impeachment. What Tom Steyer is doing is absolutely detrimental to his eventual cause. And that's why I think it's all about Tom Steyer and it's not really about the party.

MR. RAUCH: Back to you. Let's see, let's go to the front row. We've been ignoring the front of the room. We have two here. Why don't you both briefly state them and then we'll just talk about them?

MR. CHECCO: Thank you very much. Larry Checco, Checco Communications. I'd like to rebut a little bit about what Ben said about --

MR. RAUCH: Can we have just a brief question, not a rebuttal, please.

MR. CHECCO: Yeah.

MR. RAUCH: We've only got five minutes left.

MR. CHECCO: Okay, all right. I think that this Oath of Office that we talked a lot about, it's not only the President that takes the oath, it's the Congress. And I feel that they have not lived up to their oaths, as well. And what scares the bejeebers out of me, and I think the question is, what does it mean to be a Republican these days? I think a lot of people as Independents like me see the Republicans as venal and Democrats as feckless at this point.

MR. RAUCH: Thank you.

MR. CHECCO: And there you go.

MR. RAUCH: There you go. Good question, thank you.

SPEAKER: Mine will be brief. In terms of the logistics of the campaign, how much was Cambridge Analytics sort of the linchpin? And I guess legally, if they were the linchpin go-between between U.S. data and Russian, would that be illegal?

MR. RAUCH: What does it mean to be a Republican, David? You've

given that some thought.

MR. FRUM: Given that some thought. What it means to be a Republican, what it has always meant, is that although the questions about the role of the state, the size of government, amount of debt, amount of regulation, although those questions are in abeyance, they remain important questions, especially at the state and local level in the United States. And people who have conservative views on those questions, as I do, that's why we're Republicans.

But one more thing about what it means to be a Republican and why I encourage people who are disaffected Republicans to stay and not to quite, it does no good to a society to have one party that is committed to democratic means. If you believe in both conservative values and democratic means, you have to stay in the party where democratic means are most in pressure. Go to where the trouble is, that's where you're needed.

MR. RAUCH: Thank you, a powerful answer. Do you want to talk about Cambridge Analytics with just a sentence of background on the question?

MR. WITTES: Yes, I don't know the answer to that question. I mean, I think that is really one of the questions that we have --

MR. RAUCH: This is a question about the targeting and whether there was collusion in targeting of campaign information.

MR. WITTES: Exactly, and I think there's -- the least interesting component of the answer to that question is going to be the criminal question. The most interesting component, and this is -- I'm hopeful that the Senate Intelligence Committee investigation may really be able to shed some light on it, is the narrative component. What do we need to know here about what happened? And I think it's one of the really interesting questions about the campaign side of that set of interactions.

Very briefly, sir, the answer to your question about oaths, you are quite

correct, every single member of Congress takes not quite the same oath, but more or less the same other that the President does. And there is a different, though, which is that there are 535 of them and they're bicameral and that the power is diffused through a very large number of those oaths, and so no one of them matters all that much.

The scariest words in the United States Constitution are the first words of Article II, which say, "The executive power shall be vested in a president of the United States." They don't say some of the executive power, it doesn't say most of the executive power, it doesn't say a lot of the executive power. And it is a unitary body and the Executive Branch is Donald Trump. And that's why the President's oath is sitting there in the Constitution and members of Congress' are not.

MR. RAUCH: Thank you. Sir, on the far edge, third row from the back, if we can get a mic over to you. Short and sweet, if you don't mind.

SPEAKER: Okay. Something I've been concerned about, especially with Trump's election in 2016, was America's obsession with celebrities in general. And this has been shown with people --

MR. RAUCH: Oprah for President. (Laughter)

SPEAKER: Yeah. Yeah, this has been shown there. So could you guys -- or guys and girls just speak about that and talk about, you know, if you think it's a problem or if you don't think it's a problem basically?

MR. RAUCH: Celebrities.

MR. FRUM: I would say one thing. Look, celebrities, Americans have always voted for or favored celebrity candidates. What is altered is what made you a celebrity. Ulysses Grant was the most famous man in the United States in his time and Zachary Taylor was a giant celebrity, as was Andrew Jackson. It used to be that the way you became a national celebrity and really almost the only way was to be a military hero. And today we have other kinds of celebrity. That's what is concerning.

You know, if David Petraeus or somebody like him had been on the cover of Time magazine, if we'd won the war in Iraq, whoever the general who won it would probably be a very strong candidate for President of the United States.

MR. RAUCH: Elaine, what do you think, Oprah for President?

MS. KAMARCK: Yeah. We just -- you know, Quinnipiac did a poll recently asking people about celebrities, and guess what. Over 60 percent of Americans said, no, they don't want a celebrity President. And, in fact, they asked about -- in the same poll they loved Oprah, but they didn't want her to be President.

I think if you look at the way we elect presidents, we tend to elect the opposite of what we had before. Okay? So, I mean, I would bet right now that our next President will be a white man who is really boring and knows a lot about policy.

(Laughter) It'll be the antidote to Donald Trump.

MR. RAUCH: We're talking Tim Kaine, aren't we?

MS. KAMARCK: What? Tim Kaine. (Laughter) That's one of many possibilities.

MR. RAUCH: There are still many hands, but not enough time. We have a couple minutes to go back to the panel and anything that any of you want to add that you've heard today that deserves emphasis on your way out the door other than please buy David's book. (Laughter)

MR. FRUM: I would say that I think the hope for the country is in rooms like this. The big surprise to me as an author has been going around the country, and I was in Louisville, Kentucky, as well as Santa Monica, and I'll be in more places like that, and seeing the incredible level of interest. I don't take that as a statement on me because I've published millions of words that have not generated anything like the interest. It's a statement about the concern.

And if we can operationalize this and make -- we can save the country if

we understand what it means to operationalize this. It's not about looking for a new messiah. It's not about looking for an anti-Trump. It's about defending the things that are under attack.

I find myself again and again thinking of the words of Eugene Victor Debs, who talked about this kind of personal politics. Debs, the great Socialist leader of the early 20th century, once said to a roomful of people who adored him and hung on his every word I would not lead you to the promised land if I could because if I could lead you in, somebody else could lead you out.

What we need to get back to is an understanding that what makes America great is that it's bigger than any human being. And if we can have a politics based on that concept, then maybe we can make America great again.

MR. RAUCH: David, will you be signing books?

MR. FRUM: I would be honored.

MR. RAUCH: Thank you, everybody, and especially thank you to the panel. (Applause)

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