

THE BROOKINGS INSTITUTION
FALK AUDITORIUM

WHAT TO EXPECT FROM THE 2019 STATE OF THE UNION

Washington, D.C.
Monday, January 28, 2019

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P R O C E E D I N G S

MS. REYNOLDS: All right. Good morning, everyone. My name is Molly Reynolds. I am a senior fellow in the Governance Studies Program here at Brookings. Thank you for joining us today for an event on the State of the Union.

When we scheduled this event we expected that President Trump would be delivering his annual address to Congress on Tuesday night. He's not doing so and the exact timing of the speech remains to be set, but we thought we would convene our panel anyway to discuss both what we expect the President to speak about when he does appear before Congress, but also more generally to talk about the current state of the relationship between the Legislative and the Executive branches.

I couldn't imagine a better panel of folks than my four Governance Studies colleagues here with me to tackle these questions. You have full bios, but briefly we have with us E.J. Dionne, who's the W. Averell Harriman Chair and a senior fellow in Governance Studies; Ben Wittes, a senior fellow and the editor-in-chief of Lawfare; John Hudak, and senior fellow and the deputy director of the Center for Effective Public Management; and Vanessa Williamson, who is also a senior fellow.

So let us begin. So, E.J., some folks have argued that at this point the State of the Union is an anachronism, a televised spectacle that does little to benefit the country. Does the State of the Union matter? Does it play any kind of useful role in the relationship between Congress and the President at this point? And by the way, what is the State of the Union?

MR. DIONNE: Well, thank you. Thank you all for coming. It's a great joy to be on this panel. Molly knows more about Congress than the people who wrote Article 1, so it's great to have her here. And I want to quote my colleague Ben Wittes, who said, "The Union has a state even if there is no speech," which I thought was wonderful, which is why

we're here.

I want to answer the first part briefly, answer the second part, and then go back to the first part. The State of the Union speech I think is still useful, but it's less useful than it used to be because of polarization. And your attitude toward whether the State of the Union is a good thing or not depends, A, on your attitude toward presidential power and, B, on your attitude toward the President who happens to be in power at a given moment.

My answer on what is the State of the Union, the State of the Union is fair and balanced. I don't mean that in quite the sense that our friends at Fox News mean it. I think the single most important fact about today versus a year ago is that the Democrats took over the House of Representatives. And I think we've already seen in the first weeks of the year in the shutdown fight how important that is.

And I think as we go forward it's important to realize not only is Nancy Pelosi Speaker, but that because Senate rules require 60 votes for almost everything, not judges, that Chuck Schumer in alliance with Nancy Pelosi can kind of multiply -- it's a force multiplier. And that when Schumer and Pelosi stick together as they did in this fight, they can have quite a lot of influence not only on the outcome, but also on the way the debate goes forward. And we can talk more about that because I think this shutdown leaves Democrats united and Republicans much less united. And I think it's clearer how Democrats are going to proceed than how Republicans are, and we can talk more about that as we go on.

In terms of the State of the Union speech I've always loved these things. Shows what a weird kid I was. I liked them when I was a teenager. And the reason I like them is because they require a President, it's probably why the Founders put it in the Constitution -- they didn't put televised in the Constitution -- because it really requires a President to say, hey, here is what I want to do with my power and here's what I want

Congress to do. And that's a very useful thing for the country.

Now, it's become less useful because partisan polarization means that people on the other side, people who don't like the President, don't watch the State of the Union to the same degree they used to. That's also changed the media landscape. You can watch ESPN if you don't like the President or any number of other things now. But I still think it's useful because answering the question "what is the State of the Union" as we are implicitly all of us are going to do today is important.

And taking a stand vis-à-vis the President's agenda is important. And if an opposition is shrewd enough, they can use the occasion to put some of their own ideas on the table and show how they contrast with the President's.

So for all those reasons I still think it's useful, but I also know from Twitter that that is a less and less popular view.

MS. REYNOLDS: Thanks, E.J. So I want to turn to Ben and I want to ask you, Ben, why do you think the address became such a flashpoint between Congress, particularly Speaker Pelosi and the President? Does this, as part of the how the 116th Congress began, tell us anything about where the relationship between the President and Congress might be going? Are we just destined for more of this level of confrontation over the next two years?

MR. WITTES: So the answer to the second part of your question is easy. Yes, it is a harbinger of relentless confrontation over the next two years.

The question of why it became so tempestuous and difficult I think is part of this larger question of how this shutdown became quite as contentious as it was. And I think the answer to that is, first of all, it became this contentious because it was wrapped up and driven by the politics of the shutdown. But there was a Kabuki theater aspect of that, too, because the whole vocabulary of the shutdown was about whether or not to appropriate

money for the wall.

And a dirty little secret: that was not actually the stakes in the shutdown. Right? You know, there is a fair degree of consensus that there should be additional money for border security. There's a fair degree of consensus that some degree of physical barrier, whether in the form of fencing or whatever, is a part of border security. There's no dispute between the major political figures about that. And yet we got really torn up to the point of, you know, shutting down the government for 35 days over this. And the State of the Union politics got wrapped up in that.

And I want to submit that there were actually two drivers behind that, neither of which really had very much to do with the wall. The first was simply the question of whether the President of the United States gets to make a deal and then renege on it, change position, make additional demands, and Congress has to sit still for that. And there was a very powerful inclination in Congress that if you allow that kind of -- the vocabulary they used was "hostage taking," if you all that kind of hostage taking, then you will be essentially enslaved to the President's will for the next however many years.

And the second issue, which is kind of a subsidiary issue to that, but I think a very important subtext, is does the President have to take Nancy Pelosi seriously? And a huge amount of this fight was simply about his -- and you can attribute to it whatever. Is it refusal -- denial that the Democrats are in control of the House? Is it sexism? Is it -- there's probably elements of all of that. The President did not want to take Nancy Pelosi seriously and Nancy Pelosi needs to be taken seriously. And by the way, is constitutionally entitled to be taken seriously. She is the Speaker of the House, which is, you know, an actual constitutional office.

And the standoff and the fight over the State of the Union was really a subsidiary dimension of those two axes, which were really the last 35 days of shutdown

politics.

So unlike E.J., I am somebody who actually loathes the State of the Union. And I've loathed the State of the Union since before it was cool. If you go back to my Twitter feed over the last few States of the Union under control of presidents of both parties, I always Tweet that I'm not watching it, I'm merely watching the Twitter reaction to it.

I do think the State of the Union this year is a particularly interesting one, despite my general distaste for it, because whenever it takes place, it will take place against this backdrop of these two individuals, you know, who have just locked horns, having to engage one another in a polite, civilized, even warm -- the expectations of the form of the State of the Union address involves warmth and collegiality between the branches. And, you know, the President will have to give this speech with her sitting in back of him. And, you know, we can talk more about that.

I think it's actually a very dangerous political moment for him to have to do that, but that's a -- you know, against this backdrop of contentiousness and confrontation. That's a pretty remarkable thing to have happened, whether it happens tomorrow, which it won't, or, you know, at some point in the reasonably near future, which it probably will.

MS. REYNOLDS: So I'm actually going to turn to Vanessa next because Ben talked a fair amount about the shutdown in the context of his answer. And I want to ask you a question about the shutdown, Vanessa.

So as we sit here, the parts of the government that have been shuttered are in the process of reopening. People are heading back to work. You know, we saw Congress and the President act to bring the shutdown to a close on Friday. But before that happened, do you think we had gotten to a point where average Americans were really starting to feel the effects of the shutdown? Why or why not? How does that fit into our narrative about what brought it to an end?

MS. WILLIAMSON: Sure. So I think, you know, I was struck on Friday when we saw the beginning of the shutdown at LaGuardia that we were once again seeing New York airports play a very important role in resistance to Trump policy. Right? We saw the same thing with the travel ban. And I think, you know, that's not for no reason. I think that when you shut down a major part of American infrastructure, then all of a sudden things are very serious and you realize the extent to which the government is a player in the economy, which is so obvious and yet is something that sometimes doesn't really get discussed.

So the shutdown certainly had effects that would have -- people would be aware of from the media, for instance the national parks getting shut down and, in many cases, being damaged relatively severely by people entering them when there was no one to take care of those parks. Interestingly and ironically, immigration hearings were delayed for this reason, which so sort of hit back on that sort of main issue that was nominally underlying the shutdown.

And, of course, 800,000 federal workers were either furloughed or working without pay. And I think all of these effects combined certainly you learned about them from the media, but I think you were beginning to feel some of the effects more broadly, maybe not directly. And it'll be a little while before we have the actual numbers on this, but if there -- people were saying that if there were a month-long shutdown you would expect fourth quarter GDP to go down by about 2 percent. So we will see whether that was the accurate estimate, but certainly the recognition that 800,000 people either working without pay or not getting paid and not going to work, that actually has an effect on the economy at a certain point. Right?

Certainly people in Northern Virginia noticed it right away. We've noticed it here in the city. But this has effects nationwide. And I think those things were beginning to

become more obvious.

One way in which you might be able to see that is the effect that the shutdown had on Trump's approval ratings, which declined quite substantially. They hit a year-long low. He dropped between 4 and 6 percentage points in approval just over the course of shutdown, which was 35 days. Quite remarkable.

And so some of that might be due -- you know, it would take some very careful statistical work to assess -- might be due to direct effects of the shutdown. It may also be due to the sense that this shutdown occurred and the President was not getting his way. Right? So it may have affected his base in watching this game play out that Ben was talking about, that perhaps their preferred team wasn't winning and they're expressing an objection to that.

MS. REYNOLDS: Thanks, Vanessa. So now I do want to turn to John and I want to talk a little bit about what we should expect from the speech itself when it does happen. And so I have sort of two questions.

One is what do you think -- I guess maybe three questions. One, what do you think the President will emphasize in his speech? What do you think the members of Congress who will be sitting in that room would like him to emphasize? And what do you think his -- Vanessa mentioned kind of his base supporters and the electorate. What are they looking for in this kind of high-profile speech?

MR. HUDAK: Sure. Thanks, Molly. I'm with E.J., I really like State of the Union addresses. I think they're important not just constitutionally, but institutionally. And I think they do paint a vision for a President's legislative agenda for at least that next year. But if the President is more effective it could paint broader visions of interesting legislation that could come forward.

I think that this State of the Union Address is going to be significant because

we actually don't have any idea what the President's legislative interests are for the next two years. And I don't say that necessarily in a critical way, but if I were a Trump supporter, if I was a Trump antagonist, if I was one of the weird people who don't have an opinion on Donald Trump, I would equally be interested in wondering what direction does the President want to take public policy.

Now granted, with divided government, we don't know whether he will be able to achieve those ends, but it's important to put that out there. And the power of presidential rhetoric at a State of the Union to set an agenda with the Congress is important. I think this President underestimates that.

It's a very weird clash between a President who loves pomp and circumstance perhaps more than any of his predecessors, but then has in those moments an inability to use that podium, that platform to be as effective as he can be. And so I think it's one of those weird moments where people on all sides of the political divide are just looking to the President to know what's next. What is next on domestic politics? What is next in foreign affairs?

I do think he is going to speak quite a bit about border security and immigration issues, despite warnings to the President from his own party during the midterms that that is not what he should be talking about. He continuously talks about it because for him it is a central issue, it is a central value, and it is something that -- let me back up a little bit. When the President gets addicted to a set of talking points or addicted to an issue, it is very hard to break that addiction for him, and right now he is addicted to immigration policy. And so I suspect no matter what happens in the resolution of funding in advance or perhaps, likely, after February 15th, this is still going to be a drum that he continues to beat.

And I think that's unfortunate. There's a lot of other issues that Americans

can deeply about. There are a lot of other issues that Americans want to know what the President believes. And there are certain issues that the President can probably find common ground with congressional Democrats if he wants to. The question is exactly that, does he want to?

I think it's going to be a fiery speech. I disagree with Ben on one point. While I agree that there is a decorum and an expectation of behavior at a State of the Union, this President has shown no respect for norms and governing norms. And I would not be surprised if this was an unprecedented State of the Union in terms of tone and in terms of stomping on the norms that we expect from presidents and legislative leaders in the context of that event.

MS. REYNOLDS: So I actually have a follow-up question for you, John, on something that you mentioned, which is that in a lot of ways the President doesn't really have a clear legislative agenda. And we also know that the Trump administration has been far from a well-oiled machine. We've seen a lot of staff turnover, including in key positions like the White House Chief of Staff.

How does that kind of dynamic within the administration affect the development of something like the State of the Union? Can we talk a little bit about what the usual process within the Executive Branch is for generating a speech like this? And how is the Trump administration -- might we expect it to be different on those dimensions?

MR. HUDAK: A State of the Union Address is really interesting within government. Every agency within the federal government wants the President to say one sentence, at least one sentence, that touches on what their agency does or what their agency is expected to do. And there --

MR. DIONNE: That's why they're so damn long.

MR. HUDAK: Exactly. (Laughter) There's a fight within the administration

from the small agencies that you've never heard of in the alphabet soup of bureaucracy all the way up to the Department of Defense that you want something mentioned or you want a statement on a certain issue. And that competition of ideas does not always end up with lines in the State of the Union based on the best ideas, but based on the best politicking within the Executive Branch.

When you have turnover like this in the Executive Branch -- and on our FixGov blog, Katie Tenpas has some great analysis of the actual numbers and the amount of turnover that has happened in this administration and how unprecedented it is -- it is hard for brand-new agency heads or especially acting agency heads to be able to muscle their way into a State of the Union Address. And that sometimes exists because agencies are doing things that don't rise to the presidential level, but sometimes that happens to the detriment of very important areas of public policy.

You know, the Department of Agriculture was just closed for almost six weeks. Most people who live in urban areas don't ever think about the things that the Department of Agriculture does. There are a lot of farmers who suffered mightily under this shutdown because loans were not getting processed; because other benefits that farmers depend on, particularly in the off-season, were not flowing to those farmers. I would hope that the President would talk about agriculture policy in his speech. That's a base within his political camp and it is a base that I think a lot of people didn't hear a lot from in terms of the harms of the shutdown on them.

I don't know if Sonny Perdue is going to be able to bring to the President's attention that agriculture policy is actually much more important than \$5.7 billion for a wall that that'll build a couple of hundred feet of. And the reality of that is if the President doesn't think something is important and the agency heads can't convince the President of that, then we don't hear about important areas of public policy.

MR. DIONNE: Can I say something to build on that?

MS. REYNOLDS: Absolutely.

MR. DIONNE: I want to go back to your point about what you called the President's addiction to immigration policy. I think two things are really going to be interesting to watch.

One will be I think there will be actually a war between the Democrats and the Republicans and the President on the other side not necessarily on what can be passed, because in this context it's going to be very hard to pass big things that will be agreed upon across the parties. There's talk about infrastructure, which the President likes to talk about, but his infrastructure plan bears -- which is a lot of tax breaks and not a whole lot of capital, bears very little resemblance to what Democrats talk about. But I think that the Democrats have a job in this Congress of showing the country what democratic governance would look like if Democrats took back the power to pass things.

And Pelosi's task is really interesting because if you look at this freshman class, it's really an extraordinary group of people, first of all. But secondly, it really is a microcosm, the two sets of constituencies quite different that the Democratic Party has to bring together. On the one hand, there are the progressives whom we're hearing quite a lot from, particularly Alexandria Ocasio-Cortez, but also people like Ayanna Pressley from Boston and others. But there were a whole lot of people elected from suburban districts, who 40 years ago might well have been moderate to liberal Republicans back when we had moderate to liberal Republicans, people like Connie Morella out in Montgomery County many years ago.

And the Democratic Party has to get those two sides working together on a common agenda or they're going to have a real problem. And I think there are some things in healthcare, in infrastructure, in education and training where they actually can come

together. Those are the kinds of issues they want to push to the fore.

What's fascinating on the Republican side is what do they want to talk about? Because their whole focus up to now has really been judges, tax cuts, and a lot of talk about immigration. And the President likes it obviously because that seemed to flip some voters his way. It was a key issue for him, but it's not clear. Certainly the shutdown suggests, this is not a unifying issue.

And I think for the first time, in a way, Republicans are going to face a much more fundamental choice than they did up to now between their fear of losing a primary to somebody who's pro Trump and their actual fear of their whole system of power coming down on their heads as this shutdown showed. And I thought it was significant that six Republicans in the Senate voted with the Democrats on the shutdown. I think that suggested a real sort of -- you know, a kind of subterranean debate that comes out on the surface when, say, The Washington Post reports on that very difficult lunch that Senate Republicans had with each other right after the failure of their proposal.

MS. REYNOLDS: All right. I have one follow-up for Vanessa on the substance and then we'll turn a little bit back to the politics. So as E.J. just mentioned, one of the few, certainly sort of to the extent there is a signature legislative achievement from the first two years of the Trump presidency it was the tax bill. Do we expect the President will talk about the tax bill or tax policy really at all in the State of the Union? Why? Why not, if we don't think it that's going to happen?

MS. WILLIAMSON: Right.

MR. DIONNE: Could I just say, Vanessa wrote one of the most prophetic pieces we have produced pointing out why the tax bill would hurt the Republicans in this election more than help them, and she turned out to be right because it was based on data.
(Laughter)

MS. WILLIAMSON: That's so rare these days. Yeah, so I think the Tax Cuts and Jobs Act obviously was a major signature achievement of the Republican Congress when they had unified control, and it was striking to the extent to which, first, they didn't run on that. I mean, probably because they read my report. (Laughter) But Trump doesn't like talking about it.

I mean, you may remember that, what, probably just over a year ago now where Trump was at a very sort of standard President's event where he was supposed to talk about the economy. And, you know, these are just standard local events where you have business leaders and you talk about what you're going to do for the economy. And he has a set of notes that he's supposed to read about the Tax Cuts and Jobs Act which directed all this money to businesses, to wealthy people primarily, but he can talk about these tax cuts. And he looks down at his notes and literally throws them over his shoulder and starts talking about immigration. Right?

So this, I think, was a death knell for the idea that we're going to have any conversation about tax policy in this country, which breaks my heart. But more generally, I think it gets back to the central question that's already sort of come up, the Republican Party doesn't have a forward-looking agenda outside of this immigration debate. And having shut down the government over it and not seeing substantial improvement in the public in terms of support for the immigration policy that Trump has called for I think has left them in a real bind.

MR. WITTES: Just before we leave the subject of the substance of the speech I just want to remind everybody that the first part of the State of the Union Address is always a victory lap. Even if you're in the trough of a recession, the President says the State of the Union is, you know, better than it looks or something. (Laughter) And then trots out 25 minutes of positive talking points about the things the administration has done.

And although for a lot of centrists and left-of-center people this administration does not seem to have shrouded itself in accomplishments, in fact it has a pretty substantial set of stories to tell that you can say are largely a result of luck or accretions of prior policy or whatever, but they actually do get to say it and it does fill up a fair bit of time. And so if the President does not take the teleprompter and throw it over this shoulder, which is always a possibility --

MR. DIONNE: That would be great. (Laughter) That would be great television.

MR. WITTES: I mean, you can expect the first part of the speech to be about a period of robust economic growth and job creation, about crushing ISIS, about successful deregulatory policy, about tax cuts, and about a general economic climate that is better than it has been in a good long time.

Now, in a normal presidency that would actually occupy the whole first third of the speech, right, and before you get into the embittered, bad mood stuff that MS-13 is coming to kill your children and people being bound and gagged and stuff. You cannot necessarily count on Trump to do that, but it is available for him to do. And I think you can count on his speechwriters to try to get him to do that. And in the past, in these most formal set piece environments he has been pretty good about sticking to script.

You'll recall that in his first joint session address to Congress shortly after his inauguration the pundit community was stunned at how presidential he looked in that address. In fact, I forget who it was who said that today Donald Trump became President on CNN, and it was a big deal. And the reason was simply that he had stuck to the teleprompter speech and done these things. (Laughter)

And so I would say don't underestimate the value of a 20-minute presentation of the good news of the last, you know, two years as presented by professional

speechwriters and as delivered by somebody who rarely, but occasionally, does actually read what's put in front of him in roughly the organized in which it's put in front of him. And I do think that is -- you know, it is important to remember that there really is a story to tell there and that will, I think, occupy a substantial portion of the early part of the speech.

MS. REYNOLDS: One achievement that I would add to Ben's list that I would expect him to discuss in the early part of the speech are judges and a very large number of conservative judicial nominees who have been confirmed to seats on the federal bench over the past two years.

So I have a question for E.J. that builds a little bit on something you said earlier in talking about the Democrats. So we know that the Democratic response is a feature of the State of the Union. You know, the out party, the party that doesn't hold the White House, traditionally gives a response after the State of the Union. We know that last year it was given by Congressman Joe Kennedy from a place very near and dear to your heart.

MR. DIONNE: My hometown.

MS. REYNOLDS: Fall River, Massachusetts.

MR. DIONNE: Diamond Vocational High School in Fall River, Massachusetts.

MS. REYNOLDS: But can you talk a little bit about what we might, whenever the speech does happen, what we might expect to see from a Democratic response?

MR. DIONNE: Yeah, a couple of things. I do think that a lot of the commentary on Trump is summarized by President George W. Bush's line "the soft bigotry of low expectations." And he really does profit from that. You read from a teleprompter and you're great.

And the other thing I just want to say, as Ben was talking I think he was underscoring something very important. Trump is an incumbent who behaves as if he's in the opposition. And it's really striking that while he does give some of the elements that Ben talked about, you know, it's my great economy and all of that, he really wants to paint a picture, and in a way he needs to for his purposes on immigration, of the country in such a dire state that after two years he is essentially saying we haven't solved these problems yet. And that's a hard argument for him to make since Republicans until this point have been in charge of the whole elected part of the government.

First of all, Nancy Pelosi and Chuck Schumer are going to have a heck of a time picking somebody who's not running for President in the Democratic Party and that's really problematic. (Laughter) I can't wait to see who they pick because it's very -- I don't have an obvious candidate who comes to mind. And it'll be an interesting pick because they need someone who can speak in a way for both sides or several sides of the Democratic Party and pull this together. Joe Kennedy was a perfect figure for that. And going to my hometown was perfect because it's a blue collar town that has suffered a lot economically over a long period of time, so it was a way for Democrats to signal to blue collar voters who may have moved over to Trump, hey, we're thinking about you more than he is.

I don't know what their message is going to be this year. But I think that what you will have in terms of the content, it was really dictated by the campaign they ran in this fall's elections that actually worked. It's really striking that the Democrats who won did not highlight Trump. They didn't have to; that so many of the voters who are anti-Trump were already mobilized. They were a lot of the organizers on all of these campaigns, so these candidates talked a lot about healthcare, helped by the Republican efforts to repeal the ACA, and particularly a defense of the right of people insured to have their preexisting conditions covered. So I think you'll hear a lot about that, about drug prices, and some

sense of forward movement on covering people on healthcare.

I think you'll hear a lot about how to transition people to the jobs of the next era. But I think Democrats are going to have to learn to be very careful. I've always thought that when liberals go to blue collar folks who feel the deal they made with the economy was broken when they lost their decent jobs and find themselves in 10-, \$15-an-hour jobs -- and that, by the way, is in the inner city and not just in Trump places. This is a problem that crosses racial lines. I think when they say, well, we'll send you back to school, it is heard as you're going to have to become just like me. And I think there is an implicit elitism there.

I thought, even though he lost, Richard Cordray, who ran for governor of Ohio, came up with an interesting twist on that. He had an ad that said you shouldn't have to go to college to join the middle class. And I think some version of that is going to become a popular Democratic talking point.

I think they will talk about taxes some, to Vanessa's happiness. I think they'll criticize the effects of the tax cut and the distributional effects.

And then they're going to talk about political reform. And it is still worth noting, it got lost in the shutdown, H.R. 1 is a vast political reform bill on voting rights, on campaign finance, on gerrymandering.

So I think those are the kind of pillars that you're going to hear from any Democrat. But I think we should have a lottery here, see who can predict the non-presidential candidate who will deliver the Democratic address. I don't know if anybody here has --

MR. WITTES: Abigail Spanberger.

MR. DIONNE: Yeah. No, I'm --

MR. HUDAK: So just to pick up on -- I agree with everything that E.J. said, but I would add to it I think you're going to see the Democratic response also talking about

respect.

MR. DIONNE: Yes.

MR. HUDAK: Something that is critically important in Democratic messaging and something that almost always works as a contrast against what the President is saying, again whether it's tying people up in the backs of vans or MS-13 murdering people. The way that he talks about immigration policy creates a real opening for a Democrat to talk about respect, whether it's political respect, mutual respect, gender or sexual respect, whatever it is.

And one other point, I think in the choosing -- in the selection of who will delivery the Democratic response this year, I think that the Speaker will also remember that she did get dinged a bit from progressives by picking a white male who was from a wealthy dynasty to deliver the Democratic response last year. And the optics of that I think were atrocious for the Democratic Party. And even though having it in a vocational school and the message of the speech was quite good, I think the optics of who that person is, is going to be as important to the Speaker as the message that person delivers.

MS. WILLIAMSON: If I can jump in one more.

MS. REYNOLDS: Yeah.

MS. WILLIAMSON: I think thing that you would expect to hear, sort of following up, you're exactly right, Ben, that there's a lot about the economy that Trump can talk about. I think the Democrats are going to have to respond to that. One aspect of that I think is probably going to be highlighting the decline in insurance rates. Right? And that has been really substantial in a short period of time and is pretty directly attributable to policy changes. So I think that -- I would be shocked if that were not highlighted.

MR. DIONNE: By the way, I disagree that the effect was atrocious. I do agree that it is likely this time around, especially with the enormous influx of women in

Congress, I would bet more on a woman than a man to give that speech.

And, you know, Abigail Spanberger is a great choice. Fascinating woman from -- a former CIA agent whom I spent time with before the election and liked very much. But I think it's tricky because I think she also has to -- and Schumer also have to think about the left of the party. And I think it's possible, although it's awkward, that maybe you'd have two.

I've argued that Abigail Spanberger and Ayanna Pressley need to become best friends, who are two -- and after I wrote that they very kindly Tweeted a picture of them giving each other a hug. (Laughter) So I took that as a positive sign for the future.

MS. REYNOLDS: All right, thanks, E.J. So I want to come back to Ben to get him to talk a little bit more about something really interesting you brought up in your opening comments, and then I'll let anyone else kind of share their thoughts on this question. And then we'll turn to audience questions.

So, Ben, one of the things you said in your answer to my first question is that the fact that when the State of the Union does happen it will involve President Trump going to Capitol Hill and having to stand and give a speech in front of Nancy Pelosi.

MR. WITTES: And beneath.

MS. REYNOLDS: Yes.

MR. WITTES: In front of and beneath.

MS. REYNOLDS: Yes, has sort of particular consequences for him and where he is politically. Can you talk a little bit more about sort of what you mean when you say that?

MR. WITTES: Well, so I want to start with the psychology of it from her point of view because I actually -- obviously I have not, for the record, spoken to either her or her staff about this at all. But I suspect that this optics was one of the reasons that she

disinvited him in the first place.

The State of the Union involves ritualized shows of chumminess from the time the President walks in and everybody gives a sort of demonstrative standing ovation, despite what they may be muttering under their breath. And there's these warm handshakes and hugs. And, you know, if you were doing that in her House, and this is literally her House, and you're doing it in an environment in which the government is shut down and large segments of the Democratic base believe that, you know, you're not being confrontational enough, right, the optics of that are really bad for her. And I think that's a big part of what drove her to make sure that this doesn't happen until she wins.

Now flip that on its head. She's won and he has to walk in there and he has to hug her, give a warm handshake at a minimum, right? They have to smile at each other. And then he has to give a speech in which he doesn't get to see what she's doing. (Laughter) And she gets to smirk the whole time from a position above him, looking down on him.

Now, that is bad. Like I just, you know, I don't know how much thought the White House has put into that, but that's 50 minutes of her getting to do things like this (indicating) or this (indicating). (Laughter) Right? These little micro movements of the face that everybody will be Tweeting about, everybody will be noticing when she does clap and when she doesn't clap. Everybody will be noticing these little things that she does.

And look, I mean, one thing we have learned about Nancy Pelosi in the last -- I mean, for people who didn't already know it is that she's a professional. And unlike Donald Trump, by the way, she actually thinks about these things and she knows what she's doing here and she behaves pretty strategically.

And so I think this is a -- I agree with John that he may decide that the right way to deal with this problem is to trample on a lot of norms and to violate the rules. I do

think that the rules of this confrontation, this next phase, dramatically disfavor him in the optics of his interactions with her. And it shows up as having lost to her. He has to stand beneath her while she smiles and he gives a speech in the context of his defeat. And I think that's a very tricky political situation for him.

MR. DIONNE: Could I just say, I think Ben is absolutely right about the drama and about Nancy Pelosi's role. I predict she will not smirk very much at all. And I think that's one of the reasons she's been effective.

She met with a group of columnists last Friday as the shutdown was getting settled. She said a really interesting thing. She said that she tries as much as -- she tries always to treat the President with respect, both because of his office and out of respect for the people who voted for him, which is a very strategic thing to be thinking about because some of those people who voted for him actually voted Democratic for Congress in this last election.

So I think there will be -- you know, I think she will, exactly as Ben said, be very acutely aware how she looks every second the camera -- there will be a camera on her face trying to find the moment. But I think that -- I bet the smirk is not something you're going to see a lot, but you may see other forms of disapproval, but I think they'll be more direct.

MR. WITTES: So my point is not that she will do these things. My point is that he is subjected to the possibility of her doing these things. And he does not have anywhere to hide and he does not -- and he knows that she's in back of him, but can't see what she's doing.

MR. DIONNE: No, that's a great point.

MR. WITTES: And that's just a very vulnerable situation optically.

MR. HUDAK: And I think another dynamic of the State of the Union that

could affect the President and his delivery of the speech is that unlike most times he's giving a speech, half of the room will not be applauding when he speaks. In his first State of the Union Address --

MR. DIONNE: Actually more than 50 percent of the room will not be.

(Laughter)

MR. HUDAK: And in his first State of the Union Address he handled that quite well. That is not necessarily foreshadowing of him handling it well this time. And if he's feeling like he is in a weakened position, which he empirically is, and the dynamics that Ben correctly described, not knowing what's going on behind him except knowing that the woman who is above him just beat him twice pretty badly, and then seeing, as E.J. said, more than 50 percent of the room not applauding him, that could become psychologically difficult for the President. And the reaction could be stepping on those norms and reacting in ways that we don't necessarily anticipate a President to do in that setting.

MS. REYNOLDS: All right. I will now turn to all of you for questions. Please state your name, where you're from, and then follow up with a brief question, and then we'll go from there. And there are microphones. We'll start right up here in the front.

MR. EPSTEIN: Hi, I'm Barry Epstein from Silver Spring. I just -- from the standpoint of the Speaker what do you think her timing will be as to when she allows him to give the State of the Union?

MS. REYNOLDS: It's a great question. I'll just say one thing about sort of why it's not happening on Tuesday and then I'll let others share their thoughts.

So at this point, there would have been both a major logistical challenge to pulling it off between now and Tuesday and then I think an underappreciated part of the State of the Union is the fact that not only do all the members of Congress and Cabinet officials and so on come and sit on the floor of the House, members of Congress also bring

guests to sit in the gallery and it's a perk that they like to distribute. So the idea of if the speech is going to happen I think members probably want that to work, too.

So, you know, we're not going to see it on Tuesday. I don't know what thoughts folks have on when we might see it.

MR. DIONNE: If it were up to me I think the choice I'd make if I were in Pelosi's situation is say let's get the government open, let's get this deal, and then we can have a normal State of the Union. I'm just not sure she can wait that long. I don't know what kind of pressures there are, but I think a logical thing would be let's settle this so there's no shutdown hanging over and then we can have something like a normal State of the Union. But I have no idea if that's what's going to happen.

MR. WITTES: I think there's also a Mitch McConnell to that.

MR. DIONNE: Yes.

MR. WITTES: I think, you know, if you're Mitch McConnell and your concern has been to not subject your -- to minimally subject yourself to the politics of the shutdown and to sort of consider that a matter between Schumer and Pelosi on the one hand and the President on the other, getting yourself in the middle of a State of the Union in the interim while this is still ongoing may not be the greatest idea in the world. And so I wouldn't be altogether surprised if for reasons of his own McConnell finds himself in agreement with E.J. here and there's just a sort of understanding let's get the final deal done and then we can have this under a somewhat more relaxed circumstance.

MR. DIONNE: That's kind of a miracle, just that last point about McConnell and I agreeing. (Laughter) It shows how much our politics is scrambled.

MR. HUDAK: I think from the Speaker's perspective one of the last things she wants is for the President to have the opportunity to make a power play or get additional leverage through his speech by convincing Americans that he is on the right side of the

issue and that she is not. And that opportunity exists in a State of the Union Address. So I think holding it before February 15th is -- would be unwise for the Speaker.

MS. REYNOLDS: Great. We'll take you right there.

MS. SAWYER SAMP: Hi, thank you. My name is Lisa Sawyer Samp from JPMorgan Chase. And I wanted to ask you about the foreign policy aspects of the speech.

There was a piece in Axios that's been put forth elsewhere that the President's third year may focus more on foreign policy, especially with his hands tied on domestic policy with the Democrats now in control of the House. So what topics do you think he may touch on? And I know you mentioned crushing ISIS, but if there are others I'd be curious to know.

MR. WITTES: Yeah. So, first of all, I think the background point here is correct and it's not limited to Trump by any means. But any time a President feels hamstrung in congressional relations the temptation to turn to foreign policy issues where the President's hands are much freer is always there and it's often a creature of a sort of post midterm President's run for office as domestic policy presidents and then they find themselves fascinated by foreign policy after midterm setbacks.

So the President has a number of options available to him in this. And so, first of all, there is the ISIS side where he has a good story to tell, although it's a story that is complicated by his more recent apparent abandonment of Syria, which nonetheless he is very proud of and wants to talk about. And so I think you will probably get some we smashed ISIS and now we're bringing the troops home kind of rhetoric.

I do think there's a similar dynamic going on in Afghanistan right now. There's apparently a framework agreement that is happening.

And then there's Venezuela, right, which he is clearly animated by. And by the way, unlike some of these other areas where he is, you know, very much defying a fairly

broad consensus, particularly with respect to the Syria withdrawal, Venezuela, he's reflecting -- I mean, whether people think the recognition decision that he made is right or wrong, there's a wide degree of agreement that the Maduro government is something horrible and that there is a genuine crisis going on there. And so I think he can expect a wider degree of support on the Venezuela side than he will in some of the more contentious areas of policy.

And then finally, you know, because he is Trump, he will talk about trade. And again, that falls somewhat in the category of immigration. It's probably not advisable for him to talk about trade. It's not an area where he's like doing well. But he thinks he's doing well and it is actually -- you know, this is somebody without a whole lot of core beliefs. This is one of them. Right?

Like one of his core beliefs in life is that he hates foreigners and, you know, that drives his immigration views.

MR. HUDAK: Except the ones he marries. (Laughter)

MR. WITTES: Right.

MR. DIONNE: And the ones he hires at his --

MR. WITTES: You know, he does not like, you know, other countries as a general matter. He doesn't want them immigrating to the United States and he doesn't want to trade with them. And so I do think, you know, that will show up, whether it shows up as about abusive U.S. trade relations by allies or whether it shows up in terms of a sort of China discussion.

One additional element that's also related, you know, he has an ongoing problem reassuring NATO that he actually believes in NATO.

MR. DIONNE: You think?

MR. WITTES: And he may have to or feel the need. There are a lot of people at the Defense Department who think it is important for him to address that on an

ongoing basis.

MS. WILLIAMSON: But one thing on trade specifically and then I'll let E.J. come in.

MR. DIONNE: No, please.

MS. WILLIAMSON: Which is that on trade the Trade Agreement With Mexico and Canada, I don't know how we're pronouncing that acronym, the successor to NAFTA, is something on which he needs Nancy Pelosi's support in order to move it through Congress. Nancy Pelosi in her last go around as Speaker of the House during the end of the Bush administration was not shy about using her power over ratifying trade agreements as a negotiating point of leverage with the President. So to the extent that she is drawing on the successful playbook from her previous time as Speaker, I think that'll be a particularly interesting issue to watch in Congress this year and certainly in the context of the State of the Union.

MR. HUDAK: That's a really good point.

MR. DIONNE: And she has avoided so far taking a really hard line against it. She's sort of suggesting maybe something can happen here.

First of all, thank you for that question. I do think -- I don't think it's just because of our proclivities that we didn't mention foreign policy, and it's good that you brought it in. I think that foreign policy has been in the background, partly because of the shutdown.

Just one thought on your question, which is I think the challenge -- or I think there will probably be internal debate in the administration on whether his dealing with foreign policy will be relatively conventional -- that is to say go through the list that Ben rightly looked at: Venezuela, ISIS, and to some degree trade -- or whether it is more a Bannon-Stephen Miller speech where he really chooses to put "America First" rhetoric as

sort of surrounding all of his initiatives. And I think he believes the America -- you know, to the extent that he believes anything, I think he really believes this "America First" rhetoric, believes it is key to his support. So does he go relatively conventional or does he go more ideological I think is going to be an interesting question.

MS. WILLIAMSON: And if I could add one more thing to that. You know, the likelihood that the State of the Union is a laundry list is high under all circumstances.

MR. DIONNE: No.

MS. WILLIAMSON: But with no sort of hand on the rudder of any central organizing principle within the Executive Branch right now, I think you could quite easily have both happening in different paragraphs directly after one another.

MR. DIONNE: Yes. No, no, that's true. I've always thought it's unfair to laundries that we use their -- (Laughter) anyway, go ahead.

MR. HUDAK: I agree with everything that my colleagues just said. I think the one area -- and Ben really went through the list of pretty much the President's greatest hits. I think Venezuela is new to that list, but presidents do this. Right? They have their list of accomplishments that they recite over and over, and it's particularly true in foreign policy.

I think one area that might be surprising or new is that you're starting to see the President talk about the opioids crisis as a foreign policy issue as much as it is a domestic policy issue, which I find fairly impressive. Because it's so much easier, I think, for a President to talk about the crisis at home and not about the supply chain abroad. And if the President begins to discuss this more, I think we'll see further movement on opioid policy in a more rigorous and more thoughtful way that looks at not just demand, but supply.

I'd like to see him talk about opioids as a foreign policy crisis and issue. And I think we've had a few weeks that suggest that he might be headed in that direction.

MR. WITTES: One additional quick foreign policy point, I doubt he'll talk

about Saudi Arabia. (Laughter)

MR. DIONNE: Or Russia. (Laughter)

MR. WITTES: Sometimes he can't help it on Russia.

MS. REYNOLDS: On the other side.

MS. ROSS: Thank you so much. Michaela Ross with Bloomberg Government.

We talked a little bit about what you're expecting for Trump to be speaking about with immigration policy and border security, but I'd be really interested to hear what you think the Democratic response is going to be. How much are they going to be talking about border security? And do you think that's necessary for them?

MR. DIONNE: Yes, I think you're already seeing in their proposal that they're trying to match Trump's money on border security, but spend it differently. And there were reports that some of the newer members from more moderate districts wanted to make sure their voters knew they cared about border security.

And I think what you'll see perhaps is linking that rhetorically to a larger solution the problem going back to immigration reform in a bigger way. And I think they will continue to talk a lot about the Dreamers.

But I think the premise of your question is right, that they will want to say we care about -- they don't want this to be about border security. They want it to be about the wall and they want to build a wall, as it were, between border and security and the wall, and that's what I think they're going to try to do.

MR. HUDAK: And I think you'll see Democrats say, you know, immigration is an issue we should all care about and there's a right way to deal with it and a wrong way to deal with it, and the President is doing it in all the wrong ways, whether it's a border wall that's going to be ineffective, whether it's separating families, whether it's keeping kids in

cages. And they'll go down their laundry list of criticisms of the President's administration of immigration policy in his first two years, constantly setting up that contrast to say it's not that we're against border security, but we're against doing it this way.

MR. WITTES: But one thing just within the Democratic world is they are quite riven on this subject, which they paper over sometimes and, you know, strong leadership has allowed them to paper over. But, you know, there is a segment of the Democratic Caucus and the Democratic world that essentially is against enforcement. Right? That's the sort of abolish ICE world. And that is a growing segment that is actually hostile to immigration enforcement.

And one of the problems that the Democratic Party has on this issue is that there's a segment that is willing to trade strong border enforcement and security for a bunch of other immigration goods, regularization of people who are already here. There is also a segment that is not. Right? And moreover, there is a segment that really dislikes interior enforcement, as well.

And so eventually, the Democrats have been really saved from having to resolve a lot of this stuff within their own Caucus by the fixation on the part of the President on the wall, which they can all say to the extent that you're talking about a sea-to-shining-sea, concrete, 30-foot barrier that the President draws pictures of, we're opposed to that. But that masks some pretty deep divisions within the Democratic world about what they are and aren't willing to support.

MR. DIONNE: Could -- go ahead, Vanessa.

MS. WILLIAMSON: I was just going to add to that I think that the Democratic base has also moved substantially leftward on immigration precisely because it has become so much more clearly a partisan issue. This is a sort of standard move that happens when there's a strong degree of partisanship in the country, as an issue becomes

seen as, well, if you're in favor of this that makes you a Republican and, therefore, in the Trump camp. Democrats are becoming aware of that and moving pretty strongly left very noticeably on immigration.

MR. DIONNE: But could I ask both of you this? Here's what struck me is when "Abolish ICE" entered the public conversation partly because Ocasio-Cortez made an issue of it when she won that race and then it became a big discussion, what struck me is how quickly Democrats backed away from that and how little you are hearing "Abolish ICE" now from the Democratic side. So that I agree there were tensions in the party on this, I think it will be easier to paper them over when they're in opposition than when they actually have to make choices.

But I also sense that there is an awareness in even on the left of the party that while these positions you're suggesting, there's truth to what you say, I think there is some caution about it in the wake of the election.

MR. WITTES: So that is certainly true and it's certainly true that the leadership is not enthusiastic about this and has managed to impose a certain amount of discipline. But if you're looking at the range of respectable opinion that elected leaders in the Democratic Party have, remember the Sanctuary Cities movement is part of this, as well, there is an anxiety in the Democratic Caucus, in the Democratic world about immigration enforcement.

And there's no component of immigration enforcement that is not controversial except one, which is when somebody shows up at an airport, presents a passport and there's no valid visa, people seem to accept that you can put that person on a plane and send them back to wherever they came from. Beyond that, there really isn't a substantial area of immigration enforcement that is uncontroversial. And that is something that -- you know, that is one of the things on the Democratic side that inhibits a clear

negotiating position that causes -- you know, that commands the entire Caucus' allegiance.

MR. DIONNE: You know, when you say that it suddenly occurred to me the most dangerous thing Trump could do would be to be reasonable and to put a plausible immigration proposal on the table. And that what may save the Democrats is I'm not sure that's possible.

MR. WITTES: And so, you know, it's funny you say that because that's exactly what George W. Bush did. Right? George W. Bush, for those of you who don't remember, really cared about this issue and had a vision that his Department of Homeland Security really pushed of comprehensive immigration reform. It was ultimately killed by Republican opposition to it. However --

MR. DIONNE: Foreshadowing Trump.

MR. WITTES: Foreshadowing Trump. But it was an incredible slog to get the Democratic side into a posture where Democrats and moderate Republicans could basically all support what the Bush administration was trying to do.

MS. REYNOLDS: Vanessa.

MS. WILLIAMSON: I was going to say that on the question of "Abolish ICE," I think in some ways there's actually a lot -- there are a lot of things that that could mean, rather like appealing Obamacare. Right?

MR. DIONNE: Yes.

MS. WILLIAMSON: You could claim victory on that in any of a number of different ways. And I think that you're very likely to see that wiggle room being used pretty thoroughly assuming that the Democrats are eventually in a position to make policy choices.

MR. HUDAK: And briefly, I think one of the other reasons the Democratic leadership has stepped away from this issue so quickly is that it's bad policy. It's stupid, hammer and -- or, you know, it's not scalpel policy rather. And it is -- there's a lot that ICE

does. This idea that ICE just deports people underestimates the importance that that agency serves to our country. And so, yeah, it's easy.

It's actually a Trump-style policy. Here's a big blanket statement with no information behind it and I'm just going to keep repeating it, like "Build a wall." And the idea is that should ICE be reformed? Absolutely. Should processes and policies within ICE be changed? Absolutely. But do we want to get rid of Customs enforcement in the United States? Absolutely not.

And so until we start talking about policy in a serious way, the changes that are necessary are not going to happen. And I think for the Speaker she understands what ICE does, unlike some freshman members who don't, and sees an importance of when you're talking about large-scale policy change to be thoughtful about it at the same time.

MR. DIONNE: If a Democratic pollster were in the room they'd be passing a note saying how do you get these people to shut up about immigration? We want them to talk about healthcare. And I think that's part of the dynamic on the immigration issue.

MS. REYNOLDS: And to E.J.'s point about, you know, what Trump could do here is be reasonable, I think every opportunity he's had to put forth a reasonable immigration proposal has failed miserably. I mean, we saw that in the proposal that they put forth as their counter --

MR. DIONNE: Compromise.

MS. REYNOLDS: Right.

MR. DIONNE: So-called.

MS. REYNOLDS: And then if you -- it's hard to think back a full year to the set of immigration votes that the Senate took last February after the last short government shutdown, and the one that was the President's proposal did not get votes from all of the Republicans. So there's very little sort of track record that suggests that that's where we are

going.

All right, all the way up in the front here.

MR. CHECCO: Thank you very much. Larry Checco, senior advisor to Serve USA.

Given all that's been said about all this policy what do you believe is the likelihood of another shutdown? I think it would be political suicide. I think the American public is just tired of that as almost policy. And I think that people would end up in the streets. We've seen what happened.

And unlike the conservative side that doesn't see what government can perform, government's an organizing principle and I think a lot of Americans have come to that realization after these last 35 days.

Would President Trump resort to a national emergency, as well? Those are the two questions, shutdown and national emergency.

MR. DIONNE: National emergency, perhaps. Shutdown, no, because for the very reasons you describe. I would say there's a 2 percent chance just so I could say, well, I said there was a 2 percent chance. (Laughter) But I think it's highly unlikely.

But I could see his resorting to the national emergency, although there's a lot of opposition, quiet opposition, in the Republican Party to this and they would have to eat a lot of their words about presidential power. But they also worry what Democrats would do to such a power if the courts said that he had used it legitimately. I'm curious what Ben's view is on this.

MR. WITTES: Yes, I think the likelihood of a shutdown is somewhat higher than 2 percent. You know, nobody -- I think of this environment as similar to the environment in Europe prior to the outbreak of World War I. Right? (Laughter)

MR. DIONNE: God help us.

MR. WITTES: You have a general atmosphere of heightened tensions in which -- that amounts to a kind of prisoner's dilemma in which nobody quite knows anybody else's next move. And in that environment it is very easy for the Archduke Franz Ferdinand to get assassinated and that triggers this whole series of things, and I think we should not be overly confident that because this eventuality is in nobody's particular interest that it doesn't end up happening anyway. I wouldn't assign it an especially high likelihood, but I don't think it's a near zero possibility either.

As to the declaration of a state of emergency, that I think is ultimately very likely, particularly if the President doesn't get what he wants by means of appropriation. And the reason it's likely is that there is a plausible, although not especially strong, legal basis for it. And from the President's point of view you can do it, you may or may not get struck -- you know, batted back by the courts quickly or slowly, but you can at least then claim you've done everything in your power to build the wall and that you've exhausted every possible remedy and you've been stymied, both by the radical liberals in Congress and by the liberal activist judges in the courts. And I think that's a better position for him to be in as a rhetorical matter with his base than simply saying, well, I got beat and I gave up.

MR. HUDAK: Yeah, I agree with that quite a bit. And it's not so much that -- the problem he's going to face in the courts is not declaring the emergency. I have no doubt he has the power to do that. It's what he does under that emergency declaration that's going to get him into trouble.

And I agree with Ben's point, the President is going to blame those liberals in Congress and blame those liberal judges. It's probably going to be conservative judges he faces who are going to give him a much harder time on what he's doing under that national emergency than liberal judges will.

MS. REYNOLDS: So just one more point and then we have time for one

more question. I'm going to take it from this woman right here, which is to say that one thing that I think will be important to watch over the next three weeks is the degree to which the deal to reopen the government specifically sort of cleaved the Homeland Security negotiations into something different than the negotiations for the rest of the government. So if you were to ask me do I think there's a chance that DHS shuts down again versus the rest of the government, I think that's a legitimate possibility.

MR. DIONNE: That's smart, yeah.

MS. REYNOLDS: In part because what they agreed to to reopen the government was specific negotiations on the Homeland Security bill and then doing something about everything else.

And so last question right here.

MR. DIONNE: Although that hits the airports, right?

MS. REYNOLDS: It does.

MR. DIONNE: Which is really problematic.

MS. REYNOLDS: And so that's obviously another dimension here, but just in terms of things to watch over the next three weeks.

MS. MAMEROW: Hi, I'm Natalie Mamerow with the American Society of Civil Engineers.

Something I haven't heard is infrastructure. What are the prospects of the President talking about infrastructure in the State of the Union?

MR. DIONNE: Oh, I mentioned infrastructure. I love infrastructure. And I think he will talk about it some. I would be surprised if he doesn't mention it because he always mentions it. In principle it ought to be the easiest thing to get done because Democrats really, really would like to pass an infrastructure bill.

And as I said before, I just think having them agree on what -- you know, it's

Bill Clinton, you know, it all depends on the meaning of the word "infrastructure" because the Trump proposal has largely been about a lot of tax breaks and the like. The Democrats want to put real money into rather old-fashioned plus newfangled. I mean, I think Democrats would like to have universal broadband as part of infrastructure, too.

It's the most logical thing for them to agree on, but the late -- from Ohio, he died a couple years ago.

MR. HUDAK: Voinovich?

MR. DIONNE: Republican.

MR. HUDAK: Voinovich?

MR. DIONNE: No, no, a great member of Congress. Oh, age is getting to me. He left Congress, he said, because you can't even pass a roads bill anymore. And that's a real problem in our Republic.

So I'm pessimistic about the possibility, but I think there'll be a lot of talk about it and I'd love it to happen.

MS. REYNOLDS: All right, on that note, thank you all for coming to an event about something that's not actually happening tomorrow. (Laughter) And we'll see you next time.

MR. DIONNE: Great questions, thank you. (Applause)

Oh, what the heck was his name? Lovely guy. Oh, Steve LaTourette is the name I forgot, wonderful late member of Congress, Republican.

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