THE BROOKINGS INSTITUTION

WEBINAR

ONE BILLION AMERICANS:
THE CASE FOR THINKING BIGGER

Washington, D.C.

Friday, October 9, 2020

Discussion:

MODERATOR: RICHARD V. REEVES
Senior Fellow and Director, Future of the Middle Class Initiative
Co-Director, Center on Children and Families
The Brookings Institution

MATT YGLESIAS
Co-Founder and Senior Correspondent
Vox

* * * * *

P R O C E E D I N G S

MR. REEVES: Hi, a very warm welcome from me. I'm Richards Reeves, Senior Fellow at the Brookings Institution, which you can see, at least virtually, behind me, and a very warm welcome to our guest, today, Matthew Yglesias.

We're here to talk about Matthew's new book: One billion Americans: The case for thinking bigger. I'm going to dive into that shortly, also inviting you to throw your questions in. Use the #onebillionamericans or events@brookings.edu. We want to hear your questions. I'm going to kind of dive in, in just a moment, but first of all, a warm welcome to you, as well, Matthew.

Congratulations on your book. Tell us, before we get into the substance, what is it like to do a book tour from your basement?

MR. YGLESIAS: You know, it's -- it's a little bit different. I was really looking forward to, you know, visiting some different cities, seeing, you know, my favorite independent book stores lining up, you know, different friends of mine, different places. The nice thing about the virtual book tour is that I have been able to do a lot, right? It's much more, sort of, time efficient. So, I have been able to talk to a lot of people, be on a ton of podcasts, a lot of different radio stations around the country, so, you know, that's interesting. I think, like most people, I kind of miss getting out and about, actually --

MR. REEVES: Yeah, there's a -- there's got to be a midpoint, right?

MR. YGLESIAS: -- into the world --

MR. REEVES: There has to be a happy medium.

MR. YGLESIAS: -- but, you know, I mean, you know, it will be interesting going forward, right? What of the sort of do everything on Zoom Landscape actually sticks with us? Because it does have some real advantages, you know, in terms of an --

MR. REEVES: Sure.

MR. YGLESIAS: -- emergency, and things like that --

MR. REEVES: Which planes do you get on, and which ones do you --

MR. YGLESIAS: Exactly.

MR. REEVES: -- think, maybe I can do that one right.

MR. YGLESIAS: But, you know, I'm sick of it at this point.

MR. REEVES: Yeah.

MR. YGLESIAS: I know, all I want to do is shake people's hands.

MR. REEVES: Yeah, I get it. I'm with you. So, I also -- just congratulations, the book is getting, you know, a lot of attention against some pretty serious headwinds, given, you know, there are a few other things going on, and you, obviously, you knew that going in to it. Lots of attention, lots of reviews, the podcast seems to be doing very well, and, in fact, to kind of, at least one of the people blurbing it, so, I should introduce you properly.

Normally people say, you don't need any introduction, at least in the Wonka sphere --

MR. YGLESIAS: Sure.

MR. REEVES: -- Matt, you probably don't, but co-founder of Vox, and the host of the Weeds, just a, you know, fabulous policy podcast, and you've had some of our, like, Brookings colleagues on there, and so on, so, and actually one of the blurbers of the book, says it a genius, the book, and says it's bracing and ambitious, but that's Ezra Klein, who is your -- one of the other founders. So, well -- well chosen, but -- but one of the things I want to say when we dig into this, coming -- this myself, as kind of a new American, is that the central thesis of the book is -- I want to start there because it's sort of intrinsically expansive growth based, bigger is better view, right?

It's just that America is kind of an idea of expansion, right? It's a sort of grow or die sense. It's almost like, you know, a young country, not as a metaphor, but actually just gen -- real, not settling down, you know, ready to kind of move and grow, and, so, which I think is against a lot of pessimism you see on the left and right now, so, there is this, you know, I appreciated that, because I think that, kind of expansiveness grow or die thing, it, you know, it does feel to me that that's intrinsically American.

So, there's two questions, all right? One is: is that right, do you think that's always been in the, kind of, American DNA, the idea of growth movement expansion, and, then, secondly, say a little bit more about, why bigger is better because there's any number of reasons. It could be militarily, economically, et cetera, and then we'll kind of respond, but is that right? Are we inescapably expansionist, in this country, we've got to get bigger?

MR. YGLESIAS: Well, you know, I think that at our best, we sort of, have been, right?

That we have been a country that is based on a charter of ideas, right, and a country that, you know, from 13 colonies, to -- from sea to shining sea, and that is very much welded into the American idea, right? So, it's been a diverse country from the get go, I mean, we look back at, you know, sort of Colonial America, and we say, well, that was actually quite a homogenous place, but -- but they felt it was diverse at the time, you know, Episcopalians, and Congregationalists, and Quakers, and Catholics, and they said okay, well, we are going to write down on piece of paper, sort of, founding principles, and that's what America is, and other people could come here, and be Americans, by signing on to those principles, and other places could become America, right?

And we, you know, we talk now sometimes about Puerto Rico, there's -- but colonization has been very marginal, to American History, right? We instead incorporate places and we incorporate people, into this set of ideas, and it's how we became a, you know, a pretty large country, in the scheme of things.

MR. REEVES: Yeah, it's growing, west and -- yeah, yeah, yeah.

MR. YGLESIAS: Yeah, I mean, wait, I mean like all these people came here, and we went all the -- all the way to the west, and that's been an important theme throughout our history. You know, I mean, I actually think, I mean, as long as I'm here with you, you know, one sort of thought about dream hoarders is, well, like, do we have a finite quantity of "American Dream," that then has be, like, hoarded or redistributed, or can America be more, right? Because a lot of what we do in our politics, these days, is sort of fight over quasi-fixed pies.

But, you know, one of the big ideas of this book, is try to think more expansively, try to think less inwardly, but in terms of our role in the world --

MR. REEVES: Yeah.

MR. YGLESIAS: -- and in terms of other countries. So, you know, bigger is better, I think, along a number of dimensions, but the kind of prime one, the main sort of frame of the book is that the United States has been the world's leading economy, leading military power, for a bit over 100 years, now, for as long as anyone is alive, in effect, and we are in a position where that is now at risk, and people are aware that it's at risk.

There's a lot of, sort of, discourse about China, in security circles, a lot of anxiety in our

Trade Policy, but I argue that, you know, we should focus on the fundamentals there, that we can't -- we can't stop China from trying to become a wealthier country. We probably shouldn't, like, even if we could.

MR. REEVES: Right, even morally, that would be wrong.

MR. YGLESIAS: Right, I mean, there's a lot of alarming aspects to the rise of China, but also a lot of good ones, but anyway, we can't, so it doesn't matter, but we do control our own destiny, right? The United States has been on a different historical trajectory from Canada, since our inception, and it's because America's founders have wanted to be a sort of a Great Nation, right, not a -- not a nice place off in the corner, but a shining city on a hill, that does things in the world, and we can do that again. We can be deliberate about that, and try to both do more to support, you know, having families and children here, and be more open to sort of recruitment from the world around us, and that that will have, you know, important internal but also external benefits.

MR. REEVES: Do you worry that this idea of greatness, of American greatness, which I think is -- is part of this idea of growth, and so on, has been somewhat tarnished now, not least, by Donald Trump making America great, as his slogan, and a lot of those on the left, would say, actually this kind of tendency towards imperialism and growth has started destroying the planet, and why do we have to be number one, and that's a problem, and I think, he's probably getting some of that heat from the left. It looks like this basic premise that we should be great, we should seek to be number one, top dog, as he kind of put it. That's just wrong, like why -- and it's actually a fundamentally conservative or even -- in other words, like if Trump hadn't used it, could you have called -- you could have called your book "Make America Great Again," or "Keep America Greater." Talk about this idea of greatness, and how that's been politized.

MR. YGLESIAS: Yeah, I mean, I probably wouldn't have written the book, if not for Trump and that slogan, because Trump got me thinking about this subject. You know, I think like most people in America, I kind of took for granted, to some extent, like America's leading position in the world, and Trump put this theme on the table in a big way, and also in a very specific way, right?

So, I did an interview, it was concurrent with the book coming out, but separate with Veronica Escobar, a member of Congress from El Paso, and she said, you know, I see that slogan, and, to me, that just means, like, he wants to make America white again, she said, and you know I -- I think

that's true on one level, right? I mean, this is a lot of his "great again," right? He needs this very much.

MR. REEVES: Yeah, the "again," yeah.

MR. YGLESIAS: It's like, let's go back to how things were in the past, and I don't think that's right, you know, I mean, you can think about it in racial terms, or if you don't, nostalgia just doesn't get you anywhere, as a political program. Make things the way they were --

MR. REEVES: Yeah.

MR. YGLESIAS: -- decades ago, like, that's not realistic, but the idea that America should be great, should aspire to greatness, you know, that resonates with a lot of people, and I think for good reason, and I do think that there is, on the left, not just as a backlash to Trump, but a kind of a politics of anti-patriotism, that I think, is sort of a conceptual and political dead end, and also, I think wrong on the merits. I mean, there are a lot of small countries, you know, that are not quote, unquote, not great, that are none the less, great places to live, right?

MR. REEVES: Right.

MR. YGLESIAS: There's nothing wrong with Demark, or Finland, or Canada, or New Zealand, but they are on some level, free riding on the existence of a International Order, that's dominated by liberal powers, and they have avoided, I mean, America has not always used its power responsibly, in an International Arena, and I think it's a great privilege in some ways, to get to be Demark, and look around, and be like, hey, like we -- there's no Vietnam War, there's no Iraq, in our history.

You know, but at the same time, we do things to establish a military and economic climate, and that alone, I mean, often in partnership with the U.K., to a lesser extent in France, but like bigger countries, that have a larger military tradition, are doing things that the sort of smaller, more quiescent liberal powers take advantage of, and the whole world, or all the liberal elements of the world would regret it, if the torch of International Hegemony was passed to China.

It would have a negative impact on Americans but also on Canadians, and --

MR. REEVES: Right.

MR. YGLESIAS: -- people all around the world.

MR. REEVES: Well, I wanted to ask about that, because, you know, you have a background in thinking about geopolitics and foreign relations, and to try and get to the bottom of the

extent to which this is a geopolitical argument, as much as an economic argument, or a social welfare argument, you know, it's more domestically, which is, how different will your argument be if it wasn't China that was challenging for the top dog? You know, I'm thinking, of course, you know, from my own background is, maybe one of the reasons it was easier for, you know, Britain to sort of -- see its own empire being eclipsed by the American empire was because, well, you know, liberal democracy is kind of similar, even in that case, spoke with the same language, and so, although one empire waned and another rose, that was within the context of broadly shared liberal, you know, liberal foundations, and so, would the book be different if, let's imagine it was, you know, the U.K., and as I'm from --?

MR. YGLESIAS: Yeah.

MR. REEVES: -- you know, or is it how China specific is your concern that the U.S. remains number one?

MR. YGLESIAS: I mean, it would be a very different book, if not for that. I mean, the economic, the domestic analysis, it all holds up, but, so, there's a journalist that I love, Doug Saunders, he wrote a book called "Maximum Canada," and it has a similar thesis. It calls for a tripling of the Canadian population, but it obviously doesn't have that geopolitical hook to it, at all. It's purely an argument about economic benefits of population growth in the context of a sparsely populated English-speaking liberal settlers' state.

So, I think, you know, the facts carry over, but, to me, it changes -- it's relevant, you know, because if we were talking about seeding Hegemony to Finland, you know, who cares, right --

MR. REEVES: All right.

MR. YGLESIAS: -- on some level, and I think it matters for the politics, though, because we obviously have significant tensions in this country, about cultural change, right? There are people who don't like the fact that the ethic balance and the cultural balance in the country is shifting, and it is difficult to, in some definitive way, say that that is wrong or that is mistaken, and if you look at certain countries, right, like the -- the purpose of Finland, is to be a land for Finns. And if people there want to say, well, too many people who aren't Finnish, and, like, it's not a land of Finns anymore.

I don't know, I mean, not every Finnish person finds that compelling, but it makes a certain amount of sense. You know, I'm Jewish, there is a country that purports to be, like, the state for

Jews, and obviously that very heavily shapes their immigration policy, and many other things, but the Unites States is not like that, right? That is not our founding principle. This is not a country for White people, or a country for Christian people. It's a country dedicated to the proposition that all men are created equal, you know --

MR. REEVES: Right.

MR. YGLESIAS: -- and that means something, right? And so, I think that you gain traction outside of the narrowly economic, you know, neoliberal sphere, by appealing to the geopolitical interests, the cultural and ideological foundations of the country, in a way that is important, which is to say, like, factually, Donald Trump is not making America great again, with his policy approach, like, he is making us a small country, like in literal sense --

MR. REEVES: Yeah, yes.

MR. YGLESIAS: -- as well as a conceptual one, and if you continue on the trajectory that he has us on, of fewer legal immigrants, also fewer unauthorized immigrants, also a less generous welfare state. A lot of Tweets about how we have to uphold single family zoning, like all this stuff, like we are going to become a lesser country, like in a literal sense, not just in a this is not who we are kind of sense, but like --

MR. REEVES: Yes, smaller.

MR. YGLESIAS: -- more people and urban growth is, like, the only way that America can continue to be this sort of number one.

MR. REEVES: Well, let's switch. Let's move on to discussion of immigration, which actually even with some of the questions that are flying in and out, right now, get at this, this question of immigration. So, you describe, you know, more people. So, there's this more-ness, as I said at the beginning, too, at which -- and a big part of that, obviously, in the title of the book, which you've used as a kind of organizing frame of a billion is just -- is more people, and you describe the easy way to get more people, as through immigration, and we'll perhaps come back to the harder way of doing it, which is through increasing fertility in a moment, but, like, the easy to get more people is to just let more people in, and I'd just like you to talk a bit more about how you -- what you mean by better immigrants, and in a couple of ways. One is this whole merit-based argument, and we see you've very strongly criticize the

cotton raise approach, because it wouldn't let in Kazuo Ishiguro, which was a great example, and just too -- it's too narrowly, it's too constricted, but you do see -- but you, you know, the idea of better going forward, anyway, appeals to you, and particularly this issue of better in terms of fit, fit with the culture. So, you just said we're not like Finland, or Israel, right? We're not for Finns or Jews, but we're also not not like that entirely, right?

And so, I'm just going to go -- the sense in which we're not not, it intrigues me, and I know that on one of the podcasts you did, I think it may have been with Ben Shapiro, you got into a discussion about Syrian Christians and language and so, so, what extent does a better immigrant, I mean, the skill stuff, which I hear a bit about that, but secondly, to what extent is it legitimate to consider things like cultural fit, to the ideals of America or language or religion, and so on. So, you can tackle that a bit.

MR. YGLESIAS: Yeah, I mean, when I say better, I meant pretty narrowly, the skill focus. Obviously, there's nothing better about being a native English speaker, versus Swahili, or anything else.

MR. REEVES: Right, or Christian -- Christian versus Jewish, or anything at all.

MR. YGLESIAS: Right. And you know, I mean, I'm Jewish, so I'm not going to say, there's something -- there's something --

MR. REEVES: You're not hoping for a Christianization.

MR. YGLESIAS: -- there something better about Christian people.

MR. REEVES: Right.

MR. YGLESIAS: What I am saying is that I think immigration is so good that it behooves people who like immigration, to bend a little, to the preferences of people who are skeptical about it, and to listen to what they are saying, and try to make a deal, you know, to the extent that you can, right? So, you know, what I was saying on -- I think it was Shapiro's show, right? There was this situation around refugees from Syria, where Republicans, like, they really didn't want to let any Syrian refugees in.

MR. REEVES: Right.

MR. YGLESIAS: And then some U.S. Leaders, I think Arab-Christian Leaders, were pointing out that a lot of the people fleeing the conflict were, themselves, Christians, and, you know, this is very, like, sad, and Ted Cruz kind of floated the idea, like, well, maybe we should -- maybe should let

Syrian Christians in, as refugees, and in America, just the kind of bureaucratic inertia, was like, no, well we can't do that, right, like it would be discriminatory, and, you know, okay. I mean, it would be, but compromising on just leveling down, and letting no refugees in --

MR. REEVES: This are none, if the counterfactual is none, then --

MR. YGLESIAS: Right, whereas, I mean, you look at -- so, we treat people fleeing Cuba differently from people fleeing any other country on earth, and there's no good reason for that, right? Like, it does not logically defensible, but to level down and say, well, we need to treat people leaving Cuba as stingily as we people leaving every other country, that, to me, doesn't make sense. Like, if an ethnic lobby, inside the Republican Party, wants to argue for generous treatment of Cubans and I, as a Cosmopolitan person, want to argue for generous treatment for everybody, then that's okay, like we -- we should -- and actually I should say the Obama Administration, near the end of their term, they did actually clamp down, somewhat, on people leaving Cuba, seemly, I think, in an effort to mess with Donald Trump, you know, make problems for him, and it hasn't worked as a political gambit. South Florida, the Cuban population, remains heavily republican.

Trump has not re-lifted those restrictions, and it's just sad, like it's -- well, we have thousands of people, who, under the old rules, would be in here now, who are not, as a result of a mix between Obama Era Shifts and Trump Era Shifts, in the Asylum Policy, and that's just bad, right? So, I think if we want to be -- have special preference for English speakers, and we want to have special prefer for people from certain parts of the world, that's okay.

I also do think, realistically, you know, it still would -- that still would mean, in practice, probably taking a lot of people from Africa, or people from the Afro-Caribbean, that's where English speaking Christians, who want to move to the United States, live.

MR. REEVES: Right.

MR. YGLESIAS: You know, Trump says, you know, well, he wants Norwegians, which is -- that's a hard one. Norway's a very --

MR. REEVES: Yes, right, specific. Very specific immigration policy.

MR. YGLESIAS: I mean, Norway's a very wealthy country, with a very small population.

MR. REEVES: Right.

MR. YGLESIAS: That being said, you could even make a deal on that. Like, years ago, I had an intern from Norway. She was on one of those practical -- practical training visas, that you get after you student visa. Then, she had to go back to Norway because it's just hard to immigrate to the United States, no matter what, and Trump had made it harder to stay, on those practical training things. He didn't lobby for a Norway extension. So, you know, that would be dumb, obviously, as special Norwegians only immigration provision --

MR. REEVES: No, exactly but --

MR. YGLESIAS: -- but I wouldn't say no to it.

MR. REEVES: Right. So, this -- it feels to me that this is -- this is a deal they were trying to strike here, right? Right now, there's this kind of immigration bad view, and then you use a merit based system, almost as an anti-immigration policy, actually, and that's kind of what's happening on some people on the right, and then a all immigration good, any kind of selectivity, any sense that there's better or worse is just, you know, unacceptable, and it seems like a you're just willing to do it kind of deal, which is, look, if there is a bit of anxiety, and there's some arguments that are sort of making sure that these -- some fit. If what I get for that is I get to let a whole bunch more people in, I will take that deal, and that -- then that, politically, has more chance of being lifted up than an approach to just anybody can come in, up to a certain level, right?

MR. YGLESIAS: Right, well, and particularly because, you know, at the extremes, right? So, immigrants from the Indian sub-continent have been very successful in the United States, a great asset to our society here. It's clearly true that if -- there's -- a lot of people live in India. If 700 million people from India arrived tomorrow, that would be very disruptive, like on any number of different levels.

MR. REEVES: Right.

MR. YGLESIAS: So I -- I don't -- I don't like, worry about that happening because the political constraints bite so much sooner then that, but, yeah, I mean, I want to say, that, like immigration is -- is good, and if people really have specific objections, we should try to work with that, and go for it because so much of what's actually happening, is, you know -- so, Cotton has this bill, and he says, okay, well we should -- we should let people in with skills. Then okay, and then he says, okay and we should also cut the number of people who come in half, and we should give you extra points for winning Olympic

medals, but not in team sports, and for winning a Nobel --

MR. REEVES: Yeah.

MR. YGLESIAS: -- Prize, but not in literature, and it's like, well, what's -- what's going on here? This is like a level of paranoia, about foreigners, that makes no sense.

MR. REEVES: I think it's smaller, rather than bigger. Well, let's turn to the hard way of getting more people, which is to increase the fertility -- fertility rate, more -- more children, and let's talk about what I would see as your kind of progressive pro-natalism, and there's lots in there. You know, certainly, there's lots of things which people on the left would like, you know, the Universal Child Allowances, paid leave, et cetera, to try and reduce the opportunity cost, especially of parenting.

So, there's the cost, of course, but -- but I think you acknowledge that it's much more about the opportunity cost, especially as women's wages and employment levels have gone up. In fact, in recent work, we show that middle-class American families would have seen no increase in income at all, since 1980, had it not been for the increase in women's work, especially mothers' work. So, actually, there's one point -- one point I didn't disagree, in the book. I have to say, it's on a personal level. One point in the book, you -- and you do this for good economic reasons, you say that there is -- parenting is like playing in a string quartet.

MR. YGLESIAS: Yeah.

MR. REEVES: You know, I had three kids, and I've played in a string quartet, it's nothing like that. It -- it's that -- there is -- there is -- trust me, there is no similarity, whatsoever, between sitting down with three adults playing a string quartet, but -- but your point was about labor -- labor intensity. So, talk a bit more about how hard that actually, all right -- because it seems to me, that the issues around religiosity and culture and so on, those are huge, about what it means to be a progressive pro-natalist, because you're running into a lot of wins there.

One is the women's movement has, to a very large extent, rested on fewer children, not more, and that meant more economic power for women, and that probably remains the case, even in a country as far as the U.S. So, talk a bit more about kind of why you've ended up this unusual pro-natalist position, I think, given that you're coming at it from a more progressive stand.

MR. YGLESIAS: Yeah, I mean, it -- it's interesting, because the idea, okay, well, we

should have paid parental leave, or we should have pre-school programs. Those are not unfamiliar, progressive ideas, or feminist ideas, right? I mean, if you look at, like, I mean, particularly, in democratic party politics, it's -- those are normally coded as sort of women's topics, and it's the women Senators who sort of wrote the Parental Leave Act, even though --

MR. REEVES: Right.

MR. YGLESIAS: -- it's a gender-neutral concept. It is factually true, as far as I can tell, from academic research, that if you did these things the democrats want, people would have more children, but Democrats don't like to talk about that. Then, conversely, the people who are most interested in having more children are conservative people, and they don't like the idea of spending money on stuff. So, they look at this exact same literature, and they see that, well, the increase in the number of children people have is modest.

And so, in their mind, if you love babies and you hate the welfare state, you say, okay, well, this doesn't work, right? And, a lot of conservatives say that, they say, oh, they've tried this and it doesn't work. If you look at it, though, like it does work, it's just -- it costs a lot of money and the change in fertility is modest.

MR. REEVES: Yeah.

MR. YGLESIAS: But if you like those programs, as progressive people do, like, this is a real impact that exist there. It is not the case -- the typical American family is not composed of an incredibly ambitious, incredibly successful, political pro, who, like, all they want to do is shatter glass ceilings. Like, people have jobs, they -- they're working to live, not living to work. If you made it a little less financially burdensome to have children, they would -- they would have more. It's clear in surveys, it's clear in the cross-national data, it's clear in time series, for when these things are rolled out, and what's true thought, is that the impact is not huge. Like, if you thought these were all terrible ideas, like, the extra babies alone would not sudden turn them into compelling ideas --

MR. REEVES: You can justify it.

MR. YGLESIAS: -- right?

MR. REEVES: But you think a good idea is, anyway, because they support working families and we have many more dual earners couples, and so on. So, if you did all these things, and it

turned out that it only moved the fertility rate a little bit, which, I think, my reading of the evidence, and I won't claim to be an expert on that particular field, is that it's pretty -- you don't get that much movement, even when you throw a lot of public policy at it, if you go down that route, you get some, but I get the sense that, you know, you would've put the same policies into a book about helping families to make more money. It's -- you have more economic security. So, you don't need the pro-natal argument to argue with those policies. You want them anyway; you just think that's maybe a bonus. Is that fair?

MR. YGLESIAS: I mean, it's a question of prioritization, right? There's a lot of things that, from a sort of economical quality standpoint, I might say are good ideas to do, right? And if I didn't care at all about population growth, things like that, I think what I would say is probably that sectoral bargaining, right, the things in the labor market structure are more powerful levers for egalitarianism --

MR. REEVES: Right.

MR. YGLESIAS: -- than this, this welfare state stuff. The reason I have a book, that promotes one set of ideas, is that I have come to think that the impact on fertility, and on long term population trends, and on geopolitics is, in fact, very important.

MR. REEVES: Right, and you -- yeah.

MR. YGLESIAS: So, you know -- then I was on a Tyler Cohen Show, and he said, like, well, isn't the real answer here to make people more religious?

MR. REEVES: Yeah.

MR. YGLESIAS: Which obviously it is, on one level, but that's not a --

MR. REEVES: Yeah, but it's really hard to find -- it's really hard to find a public policy for that.

MR. YGLESIAS: Right, I mean, I don't know of any policy lever, that's just, like, make people go be Mormons. It would actually improve a lot of things in American society, if everyone became churchgoing Mormons, as far as that --

MR. REEVES: Right.

MR. YGLESIAS: -- because you would -- because you would drink less, right? And alcohol abuse is a huge social --

MR. REEVES: There's a whole number of things, yeah --

MR. YGLESIAS: But --

MR. REEVES: -- just because something is good, doesn't mean it is a good public policy to promote that thing, but there is also another issue here, which is, I mean it's kind of icky territory, and I commend you for going into it, for that reason. It's much easier not to because there has, and I think you've mentioned this in the book. There's this, actually, a kind of, pro-natal policy has been really, I think, infected, I think it's the right word, that's kind of a great replacement staff, whether it's about Winner Whites, you know, White Supremacists saying, you know, all these other people outbreeding us.

We've got to have more White kids, but, of course, given the age distribution of the U.S., and given what you're likely to see, in terms of immigration, any successful pro-natalist policy is going to result in more Black children, and immigrant children, and Hispanic children, and so, it will accelerate the diversification of the U.S. Is that, A, empirically true, and, B, something that you just think is something we should be celebrating? Because there is this kind of weird, sort of, odd politics of pro-natal policy.

MR. YGLESIAS: Yeah, I mean, I don't -- I mean, I don't think we should be trying to manipulate the ethnic balance of the country at all, but you know -- but -- but --

MR. REEVES: No. No, I'm saying it's a result -- it's a result.

MR. YGLESIAS: Yes. Yes, I mean, there is a theme. The great replacement is the idea that liberals are trying to, like, we're moving in immigrants because White people aren't having babies anymore, and so, consequently, there are some people on the left, who view any discussion of this topic as inherently tied to that kind of White Nationalist Politics. Factually, right, like, unless the program was specifically targeted to only give benefits to White people, the population of 20-somethings, which is where the leverage is --

MR. REEVES: And maybe not where the babies are born, yeah.

MR. YGLESIAS: Right, that is a much less White group of people than the country as a whole, and the decline in the number of children being had is -- actually, it was much larger in the African-American population because, I mean, we actually did the opposite of this, in the '90s Welfare Report, as we sort of tried to micro-target Black mothers, and get them to have fewer children, and successfully, but I think in a not great way, and then also, you know, immigrants, themselves, have children, right? So, there's a complicated interplay of these two kinds of things, but I think, basically, you would be

accelerating the diversification of the country, simply because the child baring population is more diverse.

MR. REEVES: Yeah, it seems -- it seems unavoidable, although not stated. So, we have actually some questions coming in, which relate to something I was going to move on to, which is this issue of density. So, I'll frame this, first of all, because, at parts of the book, it was -- it felt, to me, you were arguing almost as much for a denser America, as for a bigger America, and, of course, denser sort of means smaller. You made your point that we're getting smaller, economically, right? We are getting more economically concentrated.

So, we're sort of big, but shrinking, in an economic sense, but you make strong argument for density, more innovation, more productivity, actually better for the climate, et cetera, so. There's a very strong, kind of urban argument running through this. You, then, say that has spillover effects for small towns and rural areas, and they're kind of in this reciprocal economic relationship, and then you some ideas about how to regenerate the heartland, which we can maybe get to, but would it be fair to say that this is almost -- this is as much an argument for a more urban and denser America, as it is for a bigger America, and what's the relationship between those two?

MR. YGLESIAS: Right, well, I mean, the United States is large. We have -- we're the third largest population, already, because we have, I believe, the third largest land area, but we're much more densely populated than Russia or China, less dense than China or India. So, it's an argument that we should be bigger, that we should be larger, but then a lot people see the downside as, well, to be larger, we would have to be denser, and that would be bad.

So, I think it's important to take people through both the fact that United States is really not dense. I mean, my sort of headline fact, I would like to be able to learn from this book, is that one billion Americans would be as dense as France --

MR. REEVES: It's a great fact.

MR. YGLESIAS: -- half as dense as Germany --

MR. REEVES: It great.

MR. YGLESIAS: -- still nothing compared to -- I take it you're from England?

MR. REEVES: I am, I am.

MR. YGLESIAS: Which the U.K. is much denser than triple the United States, and -- and

that's bec -- nobody lives in Scotland.

MR. REEVES: Right.

MR. YGLESIAS: So, like, actual England is --

MR. REEVES: Well I have some Scottish relatives, but you're right. The whole of West Coast of Scotland, it doesn't feel -- it feels crowed in the cities, but it doesn't feel crowded in North Wales, or West -- West of Scotland.

MR. YGLESIAS: Exactly, and so, the way modern people exist, right? You just -- you have this phenomenon, that, like, cities are crowded, right? London is crowded, Glasgow is crowded, even though it's not that big a city, and then you can have huge empty spaces, even in sparsely populated countries, but, so, then the question becomes, like, are cities sights of immiseration, in which case we might really worry about density, or are they good? And they're good, like, cities -- it's not that everybody has to live in a city.

There's nothing wrong with being a farmer, living in the country, but prosperity is driven, largely, by urbanization, and sort of urban concentrations. So, there's reason to believe that a denser, larger, America would also be a wealthier America.

MR. REEVES: Yeah, and there's this question about NIMBYism and, you know, what that means, to say that, you know, the return you, I think you cite Ricardo, the return of kind of land scarcity, you know, and, you know, it's shame that Henry George was more popular in Europe, than the U.S., but that's a whole difference conversation, which we'd need Jenny Ships for, who I know you've had on your show.

MR. YGLESIAS: Yes.

MR. REEVES: And you actually refer to Jenny's work on kind of gentle density. So, this -- that's relevant to this question. We've got a few, actually, from Evan and a few others, about this problem of NIMBYism. So, you talk about the asymmetry here, the political asymmetry, the people who are defending the status quo, know who they are, and know where they live, the people who might benefit from somewhat less regulated land use, don't know who they are yet, and so don't show up. So, it's really hard to organize theNIMBYs because they don't know who they are yet, and you talk quite a lot about that.

And you talk about the need for broad brush approach, you know, none of this big bang Warren style, and I think a lot of that makes a lot of sense, but then you say, well, the action here has to be at the state level, and I agree with that, and I think most of my colleagues would, that states are really starting to move on this, but, thus far, the states haven't had that much success, in terms of actually enacting this legislation, against the forces of NIMBYism, and that's one of the questions we kind of had here.

Talk a bit more about how you see the politics of density, more broadly, and of NIMBY verses YIMBY, I'm sorry to simplify it, but --

MR. YGLESIAS: Yeah, (laughing)

MR. REEVES: -- playing out, because it not wor -- it hasn't happened in Massachusetts, or California, or New York yet, and those are the kind of places where you'd hope it would have happened, right?

MR. YGLESIAS: Well, I mean, I think whether or not you think state level zoning reform has been successful depends somewhat on your baseline expectations, and one thing that I've learned about American politics, over the years, is that the right baseline is nothing will happen. It's very challenging to make legislative changes in the United States.

So, in California, earlier this term, we had a bill that would have substantially increased density. It passed the State Senate, and it passed the State Assembly, yet, through some --

MR. REEVES: We all -- we all got very excited. This is Scott Weiner's bill, right?

MR. YGLESIAS: Yes.

MR. REEVES: We've got -- everyone's watching it, yeah.

MR. YGLESIAS: So, through some piece of mystical process, it didn't go to the Governor's desk because it wasn't passed in the right timing because the state senate president and the assembly president were mad at each other about an unrelated issue. So, that's not great. Like, I am sad that that happened. At the same time, I think, it's an existence proof that the politics of this are doable, right?

There are things you can't do, right? There are things that don't get on the agenda, or that, you know, if you put them on the agenda, they get no support. But California has passed several

waves of accessory dwelling unit reform that's good. It's passed a few things targeted on affordable housing, that's good. Both Seattle -- I'm sorry. Both Washington and Oregon have passed statewide, sort of zoning reform things.

On the east coast, we've done nothing. The East Coast states have done absolutely nothing useful at all.

MR. REEVES: Yeah, there was a bill in Massachusetts, I think, that didn't go anywhere.

MR. YGLESIAS: Oh, yeah, I mean, they have been introduced, you know? I mean, a friend of mine in Maryland Legislature has a good bill. There's a bill in the Virginia Legislature, but those are -- if the best example I'd had was the East Coast bills, you'd say, okay, this doesn't work. The fact that, in the West Coast, they're up there, right, it does say to me that, like, political leadership counts for something, right? Like, you could --

MR. REEVES: Yeah.

MR. YGLESIAS: Andrew Cuomo was a pretty good Governor, I think, in many ways, certainly not averse to the idea of, like, centralizing power, or trying to do big things, but, like, he is not interested in housing as a topic, right? He governs the state that is probably most crippled --

MR. REEVES: Yeah.

MR. YGLESIAS: -- by NIMBY Regulations. You even just compare the New Jersey Suburbs of New York City, to the ones in New York, and, like, the New York NIMBY situation is catastrophic, and you, like, you need an elected official there to say he wants to take this problem on. You know, Massachusetts, too, I mean, I talk to people, Democrats, there, who sit around, and they're like, they're very frustrated because Charlie Baker has, like, a 90 percent approval rating, or something, and I said -- I was, like, well, why don't you propose, like, actually trying to solve one your state's big problems, like, that might be interesting to people.

And they're like, oh, no, no, no, you know, like, the voters won't like that. And I'm like, well, like, what you're doing now, like, you're getting beaten, like, really badly, in this blue state, by a Republican Governor, who is like a nice calm guy --

MR. REEVES: Yeah.

MR. YGLESIAS: -- but he stands for the status quos. So, it's like try to change

something, like use your imagination.

MR. REEVES: Yeah, and you actually did -- so, it does require -- because otherwise, if you leave it at a local level, the asymmetries will come back in. It does lead to -- we've had a few questions about what can we learn from -- about transits? So, let's --

MR. YGLESIAS: Yeah.

MR. REEVES: -- let's move on to that because, again, it's a related concern, isn't it? So, well, if we all live in these, how are we all going to get around, or I can't even get on the bus, there are trains that don't work, et cetera, so, and you talk quite a lot about that, and the question specifically is kind of what lessons can we learn from international experience, in terms of doing better on transit and traffic, generally.

You do talk about congestion charging. So, I would love hear more about that, but just, you know, again, it's a, you know, it's a thing that progressives just sell. I'm in favor of transit. All right, but, then if you drill down, what do you mean by that? They -- then, they mean specifically and not other things. So, what are we getting right and wrong about transit, and where can we learn from?

MR. YGLESIAS: Yeah, so, the United States has actually spent more on mass transit than I think most liberals realize or would like to acknowledge because, you know, progressives, they like mass transits, and they like spending money on things. So, when they see that, you know, the U.S. has very low transit ridership, they would like to blame a lack of spending -- you know, one just like weird fact, in the book, is the whole city of Dallas has a four-line light rail system that has fewer riders then the single line tram in Turin, Italy.

MR. REEVES: Yeah.

MR. YGLESIAS: Now, some of that, right, just like if, I mean -- European cities are denser the American cities --

MR. REEVES: Right.

MR. YGLESIAS: -- but Dallas is a lot bigger than Turin. It's a much more expensive rail system. Nobody rides it because we don't have land use near the stations that allows for the construction because it's like why would you take mass transit anywhere, right?

Like, if --

MR. REEVES: Yeah, if you have to drive a mile, to the transit -- the whole point is if you can't walk to it, it loses most of its appeal. So, that's what the California bill was going to do, right?

MR. YGLESIAS: Right.

MR. REEVES: It's supposed to be around transit.

MR. YGLESIAS: Right, and so, so, Los Angeles has built a pretty big subway system, but they didn't change the zoning near the stations, right? So, everybody's idea in American transit is, like, somebody else should take the train, so I can keep driving --

MR. REEVES: Yes.

MR. YGLESIAS: -- because they don't want to change anything about how the roads work (overtalking).

MR. REEVES: Correct. Where are these people going? Why are they all on the road? Is it different for every drive to work? Yeah.

MR. YGLESIAS: Right, and so, that doesn't, you know, that doesn't work. There's also operational things, if you want to, you know -- the first draft of the book went into excruciating detail about the Commuter Rail in the United States, but most Americans are aware that we are a laggard, in terms of mass transit, but we are very resistant to doing this sort of obvious thing, when you are a laggard. Well, just bring some foreigners in, right?

And when they tried it, you know, in New York, briefly, they had a -- MTA had who had worked in London and Toronto --

MR. REEVES: Yeah.

MR. YGLESIAS: -- and it worked very well, and people kept saying, like, oh, he's made the subway a lot better, and then he got fired, due to personality clashes with the Governor, which is unfortunate, but the basic logic that, you know, Paris, Berlin, London, even much smaller European cities, like Milan and Munich, have just much better transit operations. Oh, then, in Asia, it's like so lightyears ahead. I don't even know if we can talk to those people --

MR. REEVES: Yeah, yeah.

MR. YGLESIAS: -- but, you know, bring some people in, from countries where the operations work better, and they know what to do.

MR. REEVES: So, they would get in under your merit-based system. It's not theirs -- some -- some --

MR. YGLESIAS: Exactly.

MR. REEVES: Talk about congestion pricing because that's important, you know, it's obviously a difficult political one, and that's been asked by a couple of people, as well, I can see.

MR. YGLESIAS: Yeah.

MR. REEVES: I mean, it's just charging Americans to drive around their own city in their own car.

MR. YGLESIAS: Disaster.

MR. REEVES: Talk me through -- talk me through the politics of it.

MR. YGLESIAS: Well, so, look, 90 percent of the book is, like, you think this problem is going to happen if the population grows, but you're wrong. Traffic jams is the exception to that.

MR. REEVES: Right.

MR. YGLESIAS: Like, it is -- it is factually true that if we had more people, there would be more traffic jams, and so, I argue that we should address traffic jams the way several Asian and European cities do, the way, you know, nerdy economists say you should, and that's charging people to use the roads at peak times. The politics of it are difficult. I mean, they're difficult in the United States, but, as far as I can tell, they've been difficult everywhere it's been tried.

MR. REEVES: Correct.

MR. YGLESIAS: This has always been an idea that technicians think is good, and the electorate is very skeptical of, but what's telling to me is that it has tended not to be reversed, right? So, lots of pol --

MR. REEVES: Right. I was going (inaudible). Yeah, sorry, I was going to give you the example of London, actually --

MR. YGLESIAS: Right.

MR. REEVES: -- on both frames. One, it's like, all the policy, you can't possibly do that, and then Ken Livingston just woke up one morning and did it, right, and everyone said he's going to get killed for it, politically, then he just did it, he just decided I'm going to do it, right? And then Forrest

Johnson becomes the Mayor after him, and, guess what, keeps it, right --

MR. YGLESIAS: Right.

MR. REEVES: -- because the infrastructure's in place, the revenue stream's in place, and so, all the little conservatives who were kind of freaking out about it, and Livingston just did it. So, it takes -- I think de Blasio is on record as saying, well, the politics just wouldn't work in New York, anyway, quite frankly. Well, that was true in London, until Ken Livingston said screw the politics, I'm just going to do it, and change the politics.

MR. YGLESIAS: Yeah, and it's telling in that regard, right? So, you know, Stockholm, Oslo, it's just very controversial every place it's gone in, but there's no place where the new regime has gotten rid of it, and the reason is, I think, the revenue, right? So, it's -- if you're congestion pricing scheme is already in place, then it is generating revenue. So, if you were to get rid of congestion pricing, you would need to cut services or raise taxes, and cutting services is unpopular, raising taxes is unpopular.

MR. REEVES: Yeah.

MR. YGLESIAS: So, why would you do an unpopular tax increase, who's -- that also makes your traffic congestion worse?

MR. REEVES: Right.

MR. YGLESIAS: Right, like, it doesn't -- it doesn't make any sense, and so, but, on the flipside, it's like, no, I don't want to pay to drive around Washington any more than anybody else does --

MR. REEVES: Right.

MR. YGLESIAS: -- but if my property taxes got lower, right, like that would be nice. I --

MR. REEVES: If, you know, and if, when you did drive, you could drive, you know, faster than six miles per hour.

MR. YGLESIAS: Well, and that's the thing, right?

MR. REEVES: Right.

MR. YGLESIAS: It's that nobody, like, you know, I don't want to pay any taxes, I don't want services to be cut, I don't want traffic jams.

MR. REEVES: Right.

MR. YGLESIAS: It's just like an impossible triad, right, but it's -- given that local governments are going to raise revenue, like, why not raise revenue in ways that have significant co-benefits --?

MR. REEVES: Yeah.

MR. YGLESIAS: -- versus, you know, a sales tax, right? Like, what is the -- we have, I think, a 10 percent tax on restaurant meals here, and, like, who does that help? Like, they --

MR. REEVES: Yeah. So, there's a question, actually, from Timothy Wojan, The National Science Foundation, worrying about climate change and emission, in particular.

MR. YGLESIAS: Yeah.

MR. REEVES: So, let's talk about that, partly in light of, you know, you -- I don't think you explicitly come out for a carbon tax, although, certainly, it's implicit, I think, in what you're talking about, but more -- so, there's this specific policy thing, which is why not carbon tax, but secondly, isn't this the U.S. statistic here, that Timothy quotes, says, four percent of the population, currently 15 percent of carbon emissions. Hey, let's triple that. It's a disaster for climate change.

So, I think you say, first of all, there's something you can do about climate change. You're not quite as, perhaps, as fearful about it as others, but, more importantly, you don't seem to think this would be such a disaster for climate change, as people could reasonably expect, given our current levels of emissions, once you've tripled the population.

MR. YGLESIAS: Well, you know, I -- there's a lot you can say about climate change. You know, a main thing that I want to say is that the primary reason why emissions in the United States are so much larger than emissions in, say, Haiti is that Haiti is very, very poor, and the United States is very wealthy. So, you know, when people come here, like, global emissions does go up, and it goes up largely, though, because people are becoming wealthier, and I don't think you should think of climate as, like, an issue that exists distinct from all the other issues of the world, right?

So, you have ways of reducing carbon emissions that involve small offsetting sacrifices, and you have ways that involve large offsetting sacrifices. So, I think that preventing people from moving to the United States is an incredibly high-cost, you know, climate strategy, that doesn't make sense, whereas, like, carbon taxes, I mean, this is exactly the same as congestion pricing, right? Like, the

Federal government raises all kinds of revenue. If we could raise revenue by taxing carbon emission instead of other things, like, that would be really good, right? That's like a zero-social cost, and we should definitely do that.

If we spend money on, you know, subsidizing clean energy projects, that's costly, but moderately costly and has a high benefit. So, you know, I mean, if I was to write a book about climate change, like, the book would say we should do things to reduce emissions --

MR. REEVES: Right.

MR. YGLESIAS: -- that have modest or negative social costs, not things -- because, look, I mean, like, we could drop a nuclear bomb on Chicago. That would reduce --

MR. REEVES: Right.

MR. YGLESIAS: -- carbon emissions, but, like --

MR. REEVES: Yeah, or maybe recessions turn out to be amazing, so, right. They're --

MR. YGLESIAS: Right, right. I mean, like, the global financial crisis.

MR. REEVES: Crushed the economy, yeah.

MR. YGLESIAS: Okay, so, you know, there's a strain of eco-doomism on the left, that I think is converse of MAGA thought on the right, right, that is so concerned about ecological problems that it would sacrifice everything to their alter, and I don't want to do too much of a balance thing, there, because it doesn't influence actual public policy in the same way, right? It's like Donald Trump versus Joe Biden. There's no, like, eco-doom wing of real politics, but when you get into intellectual circles, you go on NPR call-in shows, and, you know, talk at bookstores. You do hear from a lot of people, who are like, well, you know, we need to stop economic development in the third world, and, like, that doesn't seem like a good idea to me, at all.

MR. REEVES: Yeah, yeah. A lot more questions, actually, on climate change, but I think you've cov -- you've really, really covered that. Let's -- I want to -- the other area I do want to get into is decentralization because it relates to the density point, and you talk about decentralizing government, decentralizing business, and you're then using immigration policy to have kind of American renewal visas in certain places. So, you'd come in, but you live for five years in place that most needs the injection of energy that you get from immigration. Let's just focus on the first two.

So, you were excited when the Trump administration said they were going to start moving agencies, including USDA, and then you say it was a disaster. So, that seems to be more a question of how rather than what, within principle. Therefore, is that true, that you think that that was --?

MR. YGLESIAS: Yeah, I mean, I --

MR. REEVES: -- terribly executed, politically executed in a horrific way, but if had done it better it would have been a good idea?

MR. YGLESIAS: Yeah, I mean, I think, you know, you talk about tripling the population, and you could do it entirely through sort of anti-NIMBY stuff, right, and, you know, New -- Metro New York becomes bigger than Tokyo and so does, like, four other coastal cities. I think, realistically, we should try to drive some population growth to the parts of the country that have been experiencing population decline, and one good lever for that is this idea of trying to sort of move government agencies and public sector stuff out of what's become a very expensive but very affluent metro area here, in greater Washington. Now, of course, I wrote this before COVID, before everybody does everything on Zoom.

MR. REEVES: Right.

MR. YGLESIAS: So, I think, to an extent, we're all thinking a little bit more uncertainly about what the actual future of the relationship between where people live and where they work is. Conceivably, the long-term future, now, of a lot of rank-and-file public sector work is people will do it remotely, which is -- that is not what my book says. Instead, I assume people will continue to commute to offices and say we should think about relocating those jobs. You know, I think Trump did it, well, Trump is not a very thoughtful public policy person, in general, but --

MR. REEVES: You think? I think you're allowed to say that, even though we're nonpartisan.

MR. YGLESIAS: Yeah, that's -- he has -- a lot of politicians in the United States, though, of whom Trump is one, but not unique, want to drive polarization.

MR. REEVES: Yeah.

MR. YGLESIAS: So, they want to come up with ideas that will be rejected by their opponents, and that I just think is a bad trend, right, and so, he essentially did agency relocation in that spirit, right, and kind of welcomed people complaining about it because then he gets to triangulate --

MR. REEVES: Because they want to -- because they want to own the libs. I would say the same about the salt deduction, actually, which I've written about (overtalking).

MR. YGLESIAS: Yeah.

MR. REEVES: I think was good policy, actually, but it was done for such obviously naked political reasons that it was like the Dems are going to hate this in the blue cities and the states, and, sure enough, they do.

MR. YGLESIAS: Right, it's like, oh, let's make them squeal --

MR. REEVES: Yeah.

MR. YGLESIAS: -- and then we can -- and that's, you know, I mean (overtalking).

MR. REEVES: And vice versa, presumably, right, it's true both ways.

MR. YGLESIAS: Yeah, I mean, I think a lot of progressives -- and a big theme of this point, this book is trying to connect some ideas that I have learned in the past 10 years, mostly circulating and left of center policy circles, and connect them to some values and themes that I think are important to conservative people in the United States of America. A lot of people just don't want to do that, right? Like, they want a fight, and, you know, my colleague and good friend, Ezra Klein, his book is why we're polarized, and he looks at the big kind of structural factors behind that, and, to me, this is a book that's like how could we transcend that, and why would we, right?

MR. REEVES: Yeah.

MR. YGLESIAS: An international challenge is traditionally a reason for partisans to try to think beyond partisan politics, and if you're doing that, it's like, well, how could we think about that, and trying to take the problems of midwestern cities seriously, as actual topics for concern and not just as kind of like things we can yell about is one of the ideas in the book, and so, one idea is we could let cities sponsor immigrants the way we let companies sponsor immigrants. We could move agencies. We could encourage companies, right? We could say quietly, to Jeff Bezos, like, eh, you might get a little more slack on some of your regulatory questions if your company was seen as benefitting a broad --

MR. REEVES: Well --

MR. YGLESIAS: -- constituency of people. Maybe you should talk to some of the guys who handle the defense contracts, and make sure that -- you know, I don't know what odd -- you see

these ads in the subway, and it's like the joint strike fighters make -- manufacture in 47 different states.

MR. REEVES: I know, and you kind of think who are they selling that to because I'm not buying a joint strike fighter. It's not -- at least I don't think I am, but do you take credit cards?

MR. YGLESIAS: But, you know, I wish the -- I want to take the technology and finance executives on a tour of those metro ads from the defense contractors and be like, maybe do the politics this way, you know?

MR. REEVES: Yeah.

MR. YGLESIAS: Like, it's -- it's ultimately healthier for the country to spread the wealth around a little bit.

MR. REEVES: Let me ask you one more -- one more question before -- before my closing question, which is from -- this is a question from -- it's an unfair question because you don't write about it, but from Sherry Lind, about the older population, and obviously that's not your focus here, but to the extent that this is -- at the beginning, which, you know, I talked about, so, it's kind of in a way a youthful agenda, and there's the old joke about you know you're middle-aged when your broad mind and narrow waist have swapped places, and there's some truth into that. That truth is, you know, older population are more culturally conservative, whiter, et cetera, least likely to be on board, perhaps, with this kind of agenda, and so, what would you say, if you were trying to argue, even, with, you know, an advocacy group for older Americans, this -- what's in this for them, specifically, because on the face of it, this feels like a more exciting agenda for a kind of urban 30-year-old than for a kind of, you know, semi-rural 60-year-old. What would you say to them?

MR. YGLESIAS: Well, you know, there's deep and profound interconnections between urban rural areas, between younger people and older people. I mean, ultimately, if you sort of peel past the vein of financing, right, like, the reason can retire in good living standards is that there are other people who are working. The reason your assets that you save while you're working can be worth something when you retire is that there's younger people who want to purchase them, and so, having growth is important, I think, to older Americans' well-being, over the kind of longer haul, and I also -- you know, older people can be more culturally conservative in a lot of ways, but are also people who actually remember a time when American society was more dynamic --

MR. REEVES: Yes.

MR. YGLESIAS: -- than it is, and, you know, I think it's always worth asking people what are we nostalgic for when we think back to the situation that prevailed, in the 1950s and 1960s, because it was a past time and it was a different America, but it was actually a faster changing America, right?

MR. REEVES: Right.

MR. YGLESIAS: Living standards were rising more rapidly back then --

MR. REEVES: Some.

MR. YGLESIAS: -- which was great, but that meant things were -- things were changing very rapidly. The built environment, in particular, was changing constantly because that's what it means, actually, to live in a prosperous, growing egalitarian society, is that a lot of stuff changes, and what we have been locked into is a sort of perverse view in which people are very unhappy with the status quo, but then also very resistant to change, right?

MR. REEVES: Yeah.

MR. YGLESIAS: Then, like, something -- it -- that doesn't work, right? If what you saw -- I mean, COVID is its own thing, but, you know, going back --

MR. REEVES: Sure.

MR. YGLESIAS: -- going back before that, you didn't hear a lot of people embracing a kind of politics of complacency, but there was incredible resistance to change, right, and my whole project here, it's like I want people to get back in touch with, like, how could things be better, and to be better, they have to be different.

MR. REEVES: Yes, and I think tapping into that, like, the kind of bring back-ery that we talked about, and that was actually the last thing I wanted to invite you to reflect a bit personally on because, in some ways, I would say this, this book, is going against a lot of currents. It is forward-looking in an era that's quite nostalgic. It is optimistic, when you can see rising levels of pessimism among many people. It's seeking, by part, opportunities to do deals in an era that's kind of much more polarized.

So, it has a certain -- a very different feel to it. It almost has an older American feel to it, right now. So, you know, if all of that's true, and if I'm right, that to some extent it is kind of against some of what's in the atmosphere right now, how did you get to that place, all right, because -- and it's also big

ideas, not incremental. So, it's like -- and what sustains you, in terms of that position, and are you hopeful that your -- you're also trying, and if so, why, right? As you look forward -- because I can imagine you could think well about the next four to eight years, or you could just think, all right, more of the same from both sides. Everyone's competing about different versions of the past, and we've lost that future orientation that I think is a heart we -- but what gives you hope about that?

MR. YGLESIAS: You know, I think hope is, on some level, a kind of an existential choice rather than an analytical one. I don't think there's any point in living a life that is based on telling people things won't work. You know, I have a whole other guise in which more radical people are yelling at me all the time because I say it's important to sort of pursue and accept incremental change, but I always -- I'm a huge fan of Max Weber and Pollock's because of the vocation, and he says, you know, we would not have achieved anything, unless we dreamed of being possible, and yet, like, you need to recognize what's possible and say yes to it.

So, I think, you know, in my role as a writer and as a public figure, and as someone who is not a practitioner of bear-knuckled electoral politics, my responsibility is to try to paint vistas for the world that I hope will be appealing to people and will kind of catch on with them. I've always loved, as I know a lot of people, usually in politics, are, I always loved Star Trek, and that sort of mid-century American liberalism that was very optimistic, and forward-looking, and not -- not naïve about the realities of the United States of America, but believing in the values, and principles, and the possibility of change and transformation and betterment.

So, you know, I look at the disasters that are surrounding us currently, and it makes me sad, and yet, in a spirit of optimism, we have seen breakthroughs on a pharmacological level that are unprecedented in their speed, and not all done in the United States, but much of it in -- actually, in the United States and the U.K., which are two of the countries that have done worst with, like, the, like, social management aspect of this, have done well on the technological aspect, and we're here doing this on Zoom.

Lots of white collar workers all over the world are taking advantage of digital tools, largely developed in the United States, often developed by companies that are founded by immigrants, and things that were dismissed, I think, 12-18 months ago, as, like, toys or useless. We're now actually

seeing the power of that Silicon Valley technology to address big issues, right, and I am hopeful that, you know, when we get beyond this, hopefully, we will have learned something about, like, how to organize a crash program to address urgent public health needs with pharmaceutical development, how to use digital technology to transcend some of the problems about traffic jams and housing scarcity and the geo-spatial geo -- you know, distribution of opportunity.

So, you know, America is actually quite good at engineering problems, and bad at certain other aspects of governance, but as a hopeful person, you know, I see this as an area that we've actually made a lot of progress under times of strain, and I want people to take the risks to our geopolitical standing a little bit more seriously because it's something that is in the air, but not really been the focus of our politics, but I do think that when -- that the problems, right, when people talk about, well, why this can't work, it winds up aligning so heavily on questions about traffic jams and, like, where will the --

MR. REEVES: Right.

MR. YGLESIAS: -- apartment buildings go, but these are very solvable problems, right? If we decide that, like, actually, we want to be number one, like, we can address the other issue.

MR. REEVES: It's like if we set that goal, that long-run goal, then we can do that. So, we are at -- we're at time, and I will say that if you're looking for -- if I was blurbing your book now, Matt, I think I'd say you are one of the least fashionable, most needed public figures, a true optimist, and I will --

MR. YGLESIAS: Well, that's very kind.

MR. REEVES: So, let's -- everyone should definitely read this book. There's plenty in it to argue with, plenty with -- to agree with. Certainly, it's a manifesto for optimism, and I would say that your time will be much better spent reading this book and thinking about its implications than looking at your Twitter feed or tuning into the latest news. The long term is inherent in it, the openness is inherent. This is, to go back to kind of Popper's language, the Tony Blair news, the big difference is no longer between left and right, it's between open and closed, and I think this is an (inaudible) for openness and optimism and a kind of a spirit of the future, which can then, as you say, turn into discussions about specific land use regulations, but the beating heart of the book is that future orientation and optimism, and I thoroughly commend it to everybody, and I just wanted to thank you again, on behalf of Brookings, for not only this book but your work in this space, and I thank you for coming today.

MR. YGLESIAS: Thank you.

MR. REEVES: Thank you all for tuning in. Take care.

* * * * *

CERTIFICATE OF NOTARY PUBLIC

I, Carleton J. Anderson, III do hereby certify that the forgoing electronic file when originally transmitted was reduced to text at my direction; that said transcript is a true record of the proceedings therein referenced; that I am neither counsel for, related to, nor employed by any of the parties to the action in which these proceedings were taken; and, furthermore, that I am neither a relative or employee of any attorney or counsel employed by the parties hereto, nor financially or otherwise interested in the outcome of this action.

Carleton J. Anderson, III

(Signature and Seal on File)

Notary Public in and for the Commonwealth of Virginia

Commission No. 351998

Expires: November 30, 2020