

#1387 Hyper-Partisanship is Baked Into the System, Not a Result of Bad Actors

JAY TOMLINSON - HOST, BEST OF THE LEFT: [00:00:00] Welcome to this episode of the award-winning Best of the Left podcast in which we shall learn about the current state of hyper-partisanship and its origins. The system seems to be broken because it is broken, and it was never designed to work this way in the first place. And then what about the bygone era of bipartisanship we all look back wistfully on? Well, it's likely that was a fluke and the result of one party dominance in the New Deal era, something that is not likely to be repeated anytime soon, and it is not the norm throughout history.

Before we get started though, another just quick reminder to catch everyone up in case you missed it. We are in a break-glass-in-case-of-emergency financial situation here at the show. We lost our Amazon affiliate funding, which was like losing 400 members all at once all canceling at the same time. And so, we asked you to remember these three things. Memberships are key. That is what we survive on. So, just a couple of bucks a month, \$6 a month gets you our bonus content and everything like that or more. I mean, lots of people have been donating more and we cannot thank them enough for doing that. So, after losing about 400 members' worth and then announcing this, we have so far regained the equivalent of about 250 new members' worth with new signups and people increasing their pledges. So, if you can become a member and help get us back to sustainability, please do and we'll thank you forever. Also, we have a new merch store, so obviously there's a bunch of Best of the Left merch available. But if you look through to our store and then buy some other design from some other designer anywhere else on the site, we'll actually get a cut of that, too. So, if you have some t-shirt shopping to do, maybe check out our store and then have a look around. And then most excitingly we launched our Refer-o-matic program that you can use to earn rewards just for sharing the show and helping us grow the audience. So, the links to all of that are in our show notes. And now, on to the show itself with clips today from Professor Buzzkill, the Ezra Klein show and the Framelab podcast.

Changes in American Political Parties Part 1 - Professor Buzzkill History Podcast - Air Date 7-2-20

PROF. NASH: [00:02:21] Certainly the first several decades, certainly the first three and a half decades of this fifth party system period after 1933 was dominated by what's called a New Deal coalition.

JOSEPH COOHILL - HOST PROFESSOR BUZZKILL: [00:02:33] Okay. And these are Democrats?

PROF. NASH: [00:02:36] Democratic party. This is a coalition, sort of a grouping of groups, a group of voter blocks comes together under Franklin Roosevelt that is so powerful that it leads to a period of Democratic dominance.

JOSEPH COOHILL - HOST PROFESSOR BUZZKILL: [00:02:47] And it can't be, right, it can't be overturned. Okay. Right. In theory, anyway, at least in Congress.

PROF. NASH: [00:02:52] It turns out to be pretty, pretty robust and you see it again, it might fade a bit and then come back. It elects a string of Democratic presidents. It's one of the big reasons why the House, the House of Representatives is dominated by the Democrats for 40 straight years, between 1954 and 1994. There's a reason they call it the Gingrich revolution, because the Democrats had this stranglehold on the House.

The coalition consists of major groups, primary among them organized labor, which is given new strength under Franklin Roosevelt. A significant percentage of farmers, right? Who had traditionally been Republican, but switch to Democrats and often stay with the Democrats because of government intervention, things like foreign price supports and the saving of farm mortgages and that sort of thing.

African-Americans who, because the great migration have moved north in significant numbers and can vote, and they become an important voting block in the Democratic party. In the 1930s already, right? Look at 1948, when the Democrats officially dragging some Democrats kicking and screaming and they adopt a civil rights plank in 1948. Why is that? Because the urban bosses have decided that the African-American votes are too important to ignore and that you have to make this an issue, even if it means basically alienating millions of white southerners, which is exactly what happens in 1948. Truman --

JOSEPH COOHILL - HOST PROFESSOR BUZZKILL: [00:04:11] And then that then presumably builds up over time and helps lead to the Gingrich revolution and other things like that.

PROF. NASH: [00:04:17] Exactly -- helps lead to the Southern strategy, et cetera. Right. In other words that white southerners are put back in play, having been by definition Democratic for decades. And then also, urban immigrants, a lot of relatively recent arrivals, in other words was non-white Anglo-Saxon Protestants. We might call them hyphenated Americans, right?

JOSEPH COOHILL - HOST PROFESSOR BUZZKILL: [00:04:38] They were called that in the teens and twenties.

PROF. NASH: [00:04:40] Italian-Americans, Greek Americans, Polish Americans, Irish Americans, who often they had felt frozen out of politics or welcomed into politics and often given even given government posts in the New Deal.

JOSEPH COOHILL - HOST PROFESSOR BUZZKILL: [00:04:53] Yes. Right.

PROF. NASH: [00:04:54] A lot of these folks are Catholics. A lot of these folks were in the cities, but by definition, urban neighborhoods, but they become a much more staunch voting block for Democrats in this period.

JOSEPH COOHILL - HOST PROFESSOR BUZZKILL: [00:05:06] Okay.

PROF. NASH: [00:05:06] So you put all that together and that's a winning coalition. That's that's going to lead Truman to win in 1948. Right? Dewey defeats Truman? That was in the bag for the Republicans. Why did Truman win? The New Deal coalition. Why does Kennedy win in '60? What does LBJ win in '64? This coalition has great staying power and helps define this last party system.

JOSEPH COOHILL - HOST PROFESSOR BUZZKILL: [00:05:27] Okay. Is that why -- is the New Deal coalition why JFK and even LBJ in '64, why they talk about the Democratic party being the party of --they don't say this specifically -- but the party of the little guy?

PROF. NASH: [00:05:43] Yes. Yes.

JOSEPH COOHILL - HOST PROFESSOR BUZZKILL: [00:05:45] It's not going to be the party of the Wall Street financiers.

PROF. NASH: [00:05:47] Correct.

JOSEPH COOHILL - HOST PROFESSOR BUZZKILL: [00:05:48] Lots of different types of little guys, right, guys, and little gals, pardon me, but they used "little guys" back in that day as a phrase. But they are all --the thing that binds them together is they were all little, they're not rich.

PROF. NASH: [00:06:01] This happens early on under Roosevelt where in terms of -- 'cause remember the parties back then also ran on money.

JOSEPH COOHILL - HOST PROFESSOR BUZZKILL: [00:06:07] Yeah that's true.

PROF. NASH: [00:06:08] Roosevelt, especially in 1936, openly cuts ties with business, denies himself that spigot of money. And where does the money come from? Organized labor. Which, because he was allowed to organize and raise money and you start to see the first PACs, the first political action committees are the CIO PAC.

It's a, it's a big labor filling in that gap for money. So it's not like there were no fat cats defending, sort of supporting Democrats. But if you compare the two parties, yeah. The party has made a deliberate turn in a more populous direction, relying on the little people and quote unquote little people and representing them.

Right. Absolutely true

JOSEPH COOHILL - HOST PROFESSOR BUZZKILL: [00:06:43] Professor, this is so complicated in many ways. It's understandable that the thing that people latch onto as a misunderstanding, as a misnomer, is the names at this -- for the last hundred years into the period we're talking about -- the names stayed the same,

PROF. NASH: [00:06:58] The names stay the same, but what's going on beneath the labels changes a great deal in lots of ways that we don't have time to get into.

JOSEPH COOHILL - HOST PROFESSOR BUZZKILL: [00:07:04] Yeah.

PROF. NASH: [00:07:05] You can argue that the whole idea that you break it up into these distinct systems, the last few decades is sort of artificial.

JOSEPH COOHILL - HOST PROFESSOR BUZZKILL: [00:07:11] Oh, sure, sure, sure.

PROF. NASH: [00:07:12] In any of those periods, there are changes going on and the parties are morphing. The parties are often flipping positions. You know, in the late 19th century, the Republican party was the party of protectionism and the Democrats were the party of

free trade. And then they switched places. And by the way, today, it almost looks like they're switching places again on the issue. Yeah, right? Yeah.

JOSEPH COOHILL - HOST PROFESSOR BUZZKILL: [00:07:33] The Democrats have this stain of having KKK members in them.

PROF. NASH: [00:07:38] And then it's the party of civil rights, which it is today with a couple, only a couple of exceptions.

And there are a lot of other issues which we won't get into where they also flip positions. Right. So it's really ahistorical to say, Oh, this label means this now and for all time. It's ahistorical, ahistorical, right. In other words--

JOSEPH COOHILL - HOST PROFESSOR BUZZKILL: [00:07:56] That's what you said, but it didn't quite sound like that.

PROF. NASH: [00:07:59] A historical, what?

JOSEPH COOHILL - HOST PROFESSOR BUZZKILL: [00:08:01] Yes. It's historically not valid to say.

PROF. NASH: [00:08:04] Right. So one of the things, some of the, what are some things that have happened sort of recently that have sort of changed the picture? In our time, parties are a lot less powerful than they used to be.

JOSEPH COOHILL - HOST PROFESSOR BUZZKILL: [00:08:14] Oh, well, yeah. Okay. That's right.

PROF. NASH: [00:08:15] It's much harder to keep party politicians and party members in line as much more like herding cats today.

JOSEPH COOHILL - HOST PROFESSOR BUZZKILL: [00:08:22] Yeah.

PROF. NASH: [00:08:24] Primaries are the be all and end all of selecting candidates, which was not the case.

Smoke-filled room -- I won't say it doesn't exist. You still have backroom deals being made, but not like the old type that were major decisions where a candidate like Warren G. Harding is selected by a meeting by a bunch of guys sitting around the table, smoking cigars, literally.

Right. And that's literally how that went down. Now. That is impossible. Conventions basically are now multi-day infomercials where they decide nothing.

JOSEPH COOHILL - HOST PROFESSOR BUZZKILL: [00:08:52] That's right. Yeah. Right. That's -- I mean, I stop watching them.

PROF. NASH: [00:08:55] If I were president of a network, I would not televise them anymore. No, or I'd make the party pay me a lot of money.

JOSEPH COOHILL - HOST PROFESSOR BUZZKILL: [00:09:02] Consider that they sort of do it because they're kind of forced to produce public --

PROF. NASH: [00:09:08] No one wants to be the first one not to televise it.

JOSEPH COOHILL - HOST PROFESSOR BUZZKILL: [00:09:10] They're sort of civic educational. The networks --

PROF. NASH: [00:09:14] It's like they play some civic education role necessarily right now. They're basically we did. We did. Why should we, why should the networks be forced to televise a party among party activists?

JOSEPH COOHILL - HOST PROFESSOR BUZZKILL: [00:09:23] No, no, no, no, no, small "p" parties to big "P" parties.

That makes no sense.

PROF. NASH: [00:09:27] You don't have party bosses anymore. Yeah. You know, you don't have, you have no mayor Daley, like you used to have. Right. By the way, they're their were -- if you look at what the political scientists say -- there were some good things about the discipline party structure in the ward bosses and that's sort of thing.

JOSEPH COOHILL - HOST PROFESSOR BUZZKILL: [00:09:43] Oh yeah, he didn't get wacko candidates.

PROF. NASH: [00:09:46] Yeah.

And other things too. In other words, you've replaced one bad system with another bad system or one flawed system with another flawed system, I'll put it that way.

Frances Lee on why bipartisanship is irrational Part 1 - The Ezra Klein Show - Air Date 12-3-20

EZRA KLEIN - HOST, THE EZRA KLEIN SHOW: [00:09:57] You have a lot of quotes, particularly from the pre 1980 or Newt Gingrich era Republicans saying, look, the problem with Republicans in Congress right now is they're so used to being the minority party, they don't believe they're going to become the majority, so they just cooperate with Democratic chairman because their best possible outcome is congressional Democrats give them some crumbs, they give them a seat at the table, but that as soon as it becomes truly competitive and you can get back into power, your best strategy is not cooperating with the, the other party it's, as you say, destroying the other party.

And it seems to me that what that means is that bipartisanship is fundamentally irrational. That in a zero-sum political context, where we have elections where only one side can win and the other side will lose, by definition if the first side wins, that the fundamental thing that our system often needs to govern well, which is bipartisanship given all of our veto points, that it's irrational. You'd almost have to be crazy to do it under normal competitive conditions.

FRANCES LEE: [00:11:05] I mean, those are the implications that competition does undercut the incentives to work across party lines. I would say, I think that incentive structure is more pronounced for the party that has less institutional power. Presidents can get some mileage out of triangulation, out of reaching out to try to win bi-partisan and ascent. Now they need to do so in a way that would avoid alienating their own base voters, but if they are able to do

so then that gives them additional legitimacy. In other words, if they're able to get bipartisan support for what they want to do that's a feather in their cap.

So you'd expect more bipartisanship on the part of the party in power, but whether the out party, whether the party with less institutional power is willing to grant that, that's another question. And it's not in their interest a lot of the time to work cooperatively because it undercuts their ability to make the case for their own return to power.

EZRA KLEIN - HOST, THE EZRA KLEIN SHOW: [00:12:12] And isn't that a very important part of the incentives as the minority party understands them? Something that it always seemed to me that Mitch McConnell understood well in the Obama era was that voters would blame the party in power for the absence of a governing bipartisan majority, but it was the party out of power that actually controlled the resource of bipartisanship.

And when you have that kind of disjuncture between accountability and capability, you get the kind of outcomes we have here, because whether or not people want bipartisanship, if the reality is that they're always going to blame the party in power for not getting it, then it's really, really - you would imagine that the binding constraint here is that the minority party doesn't want to be blamed for being partisan and obstructionist. But if they don't get blamed for being partisan and obstructionist, cause that's not how people think about this, they just blame whoever holds the presidency for whatever is going on, then why not obstruct everything all the time?

FRANCES LEE: [00:13:15] I mean, I do think that there is that sort of knee-jerk assumption that a lack of bipartisanship means that those with more power are not doing their part in reaching out or trying to accommodate, but it takes two to tango and we need to pay attention to the incentives of the party with less institutional power and whether they have their own reason not to participate, even if a good faith outreach is made.

EZRA KLEIN - HOST, THE EZRA KLEIN SHOW: [00:13:42] So this seems to me to get us to, I both think like very rich and very tricky territory. And this is, I think more than anything, why I've learned so much from your work and why I so badly wanted you on the show. I think both in your book *Beyond Ideology* and this newer book, you're taking aim at pretty fundamental assumptions that govern certainly how the media covers politics, but I think also like how a lot of voters understand politics.

And the core one here seems to me to be that we can't have a competitive zero-sum election system grafted on to a system of governments that requires compromise to work and expect the thing to function. And that when it doesn't function, we tend to blame individuals. We say, okay, Barack Obama isn't reaching out enough or Mitch McConnell is being obstructionist or whatever it might be, depending on which perspective you come at it from. And obviously I have my views about which of those is correct. Like I think Mitch McConnell was obstructionist, but I think we blame individuals without focusing really on the system.

It seems to me if you just listen to the media and voters that they would like Washington to work better, and by work better they mean something like agree more and come together more, but you can't get that by changing out the individuals. If the system encourages this kind of behavior, then you're going to keep getting it no matter who you switch out. And so it seems to me there's this very big disconnect between the way we want the system to work

and the way our system is actually set up to work, but I never see anybody, like. ANYBODY, with a plan for changing that?

FRANCES LEE: [00:15:20] The American political system has rock-solid legitimacy with the broad American public. There's no belief out there that there's something systematically wrong with the structure of American government. So political leaders don't criticize it, they don't think there'd be any purchase in doing so. And very little by way of reform proposed at the systemic level, that it's just a widely held set of beliefs that if the system isn't working well, it's just the wrong people in it, as opposed to something systematically wrong with the institutions.

Add on that it has a long history. The basic structure of American government has been in place now for more than two centuries. And so in light of that, we believe that it will continue and it should continue and that you look back to landmark successes in American government and say, "well, the system has functioned in the past, why not now? It must be the wrong people. It's basically the same institution it must therefore be the folks we've got in there now," without instead thinking about how the system functions differently depending on political circumstances and that the politics of the present moment are pretty toxic for bipartisanship, compromise. And that has a great deal to do with the intense, pervasive, knife's edge competition that characterizes the battle for institutional control.

EZRA KLEIN - HOST, THE EZRA KLEIN SHOW: [00:16:59] Do you buy the argument made by the late political sociologist L that the American political system, it basically shouldn't work? That a system where you have different branches being democratically elected and then going to war with each other with no way to resolve that, it shouldn't work but it did in America because we had this weird, strange, aberrant political system where our parties weren't very ideologically polarized. So you had like conservative Democrats and liberal Republicans, and you had a system where the ferocity of the competition was damped by the weirdness of the parties, but now those parties have become polarized and they've become ideologically sorted, and so the fundamental contradictions of our political system are now coming to the fore.

FRANCES LEE: [00:17:43] Certainly it looks like we're in the middle of one of those contests of legitimacy right now that Linz described. That you have in this government shutdown that's ongoing, you have a president citing that his legitimacy out of the 2016 election, that he was elected - building a wall was a central campaign promise. He must have it. He has to be able to deliver on that. And you have a Democratic majority in the House of Representatives sent in 2018 in the midst of a campaign where building the wall and the migrant caravan played a big role, and yet they carried the majority.

And so it's a contest right now of competing legitimacies, and they are at loggerheads in exactly the kind of way that Linz described would occur when you have cohesive parties that each hold control of competing institutions, that under those circumstances whose legitimacy should prevail? And yet as the question's posed right now, both cannot prevail and neither is prepared to concede.

Trump, Evangelicals, Fascism, Torture, Propaganda Q + A Part 1 - FrameLab Podcast - Air Date 3-17-18

GIL DURAN - HOST, FrameLab: [00:18:56] The next question is from Leticia Sarrenzo. The framing theory: is it always black and white? Is there no room for shades of gray between two ideas?

DR. GEORGE LAKOFF - HOST, FrameLab: [00:19:08] I've talked a lot, and we on these broadcasts have talked a lot, about what I've called bi-conceptualism, the idea, for example, that a moderate doesn't . . . There is no ideal ideology of the moderate that all moderates believe. A moderate conservative has some progressive principles; a moderate progressive has some conservative principles.

And it's important to understand the neuroscience behind this because progressive and conservative thought are contradictory. So, how can you have contradictory modes of thought in the same brain? The answer is very simple, and it's there in basic neuroscience. There are circuits called "mutual inhibition." The activation of one turns the other off. This happens in every muscle in your body. You take your arm, your flexor muscle. When that gets tense, and you make a muscle in your arm, the extensor underneath gets relaxed. If you want to hit backwards and tense your flexor muscle -- no, your extensor muscle -- your flexor muscle has to relax. That is mutual inhibition. It is happening not only in those muscles but between every pair of muscles in your body. Every time you blink or move your mouth or shrug your shoulders, all of those things involve mutual inhibition circuitry. And that circuitry is in your brain as well.

Now, this is very important because [for] people who are bi-conceptual who are mostly conservative but partly progressive, mostly progressive but partly conservative, there's no middle. There's no gray area that is neutral between them. It's not a gray area. It is a divide between them, and that in certain issues they're one, and other issues they're the other. But they are using different moral bases for those particular issues. They're shifting either unconsciously from one to the other, just as every time you move your arm, you're shifting unconsciously between whether you're flexing your flexor or relaxing your flexor.

GIL DURAN - HOST, FrameLab: [00:21:24] So, these are the swing voters that everyone's always trying to reach. Is that who these people would be? And you're trying to activate the progressive part of their brain, understanding that on some issues they're going to be conservative. And so, she's asking, is it all black and white? Is there any gray, is it correct to describe the bi-conceptual thinking as that gray area?

DR. GEORGE LAKOFF - HOST, FrameLab: [00:21:47] No. It is not gray. There is no ideology that's in-between. There's no ideology that just fits all moderates. What you have in each case is either a progressive or conservative ideology but applied to different issues and shifting back and forth. And most people are like this. Most people have some parts of their lives -- most progressives are conservative about some issues or other; most conservatives are progressive, that is, nurturant, about some issues or other. We've talked about in group nurturance with where people in conservative communities care about the people in the communities and act as if they were progressives, but just for the people in their communities.

Is there something that you're conservative about?

Absolutely. I was a professor for 50 years before I retired. And, I was conservative about a very special thing. In conservatism, the idea is that your fate is determined by you. You are

responsible for what happens to you. And that in conservatism, that's true for everything. But, in my teaching, I didn't apply it to everything. I applied it to one thing: your homework. Do your homework. You do your homework, you'll get a good grade. You don't do your homework, you won't.

GIL DURAN - HOST, FrameLab: [00:23:11] No in-between?

DR. GEORGE LAKOFF - HOST, FrameLab: [00:23:13] No in-between. We didn't get, you know, . . .The people who didn't do their homework just didn't get good grades.

Sometimes they complained. They thought they were just good people and should get good grades. But sorry, you didn't do that reading. You didn't do that homework. You didn't get good grades.

Changes in American Political Parties Part 2 - Professor Buzzkill History Podcast - Air Date 7-2-20

PROF. NASH: [00:23:30] Also, a really important development in recent years is what I will call our realignment.

JOSEPH COOHILL - HOST PROFESSOR BUZZKILL: [00:23:35] Oh, okay.

PROF. NASH: [00:23:35] Not over the slavery issue, but if you compare our system today in our two parties today with our party of say 20, 30 years ago, there's no comparison in terms of what the parties represent. Each party has become much more purely ideological.

JOSEPH COOHILL - HOST PROFESSOR BUZZKILL: [00:23:49] Okay.

PROF. NASH: [00:23:50] For a long, long time, way back in the 19th century, the parties had wings. Most political systems represent a variety of views by having a multi-party system. We represent a variety of views with two parties. By definition, you're going to have wings. You can't represent all the views with just two parties. You have to have wings. And if you don't have wings, you're not going to survive.

JOSEPH COOHILL - HOST PROFESSOR BUZZKILL: [00:24:12] Moderates and extremists.

PROF. NASH: [00:24:13] Exactly. So, you know, you have moderate Democrats, you have liberal Democrats, you have conservative Democrats. And the same thing for the Republicans. That is no longer the case. Southern Democrats leave their party for the GOP. Liberal Republicans vanish.

JOSEPH COOHILL - HOST PROFESSOR BUZZKILL: [00:24:27] I grew up the Republican.

PROF. NASH: [00:24:29] I grew up with people like Nelson, Rockefeller, or Lowell Weicker or Alliance people who were not only Republicans who were liberal, but they were more liberal than some conservative Democrats were. In other words, the two parties intersected, if you measure, or if you sort of judge politicians on their political views and stances.

Liberal Republicans have basically vanished. Even so-called blue dog Democrats, relatively conservative Democrats who was hanging on in the South, have vanished. Yes, you have

moderates and extremists within each party, but the sort of length of political spectrum that they represent has shrunk. Vastly. And you have virtually no overlap between the two parties. And you have a quote unquote liberal party and a quote unquote conservative party.

That represents realignment. Right?

JOSEPH COOHILL - HOST PROFESSOR BUZZKILL: [00:25:18] Oh, I see. I see.

PROF. NASH: [00:25:19] And maybe that warrants a new party system. I could make a good argument for that. But that's the current reality and that's not what we used to see. I mean, used to have, let's put it this way. The Democratic party used to embrace, at roughly the same time, everyone from Bob La Follette to Strom Thurmond.

JOSEPH COOHILL - HOST PROFESSOR BUZZKILL: [00:25:34] Bob La Follette being the progressive Senator from Wisconsin.

PROF. NASH: [00:25:37] Wisconsin, earlier in the 20th century, but who ran as a third party candidate in 1924. Super, super progressive. Someone or someone like him who would have been a social Democrat in a European system.

Yeah. Well, that's right. Yeah. Yeah.

Where Strom Thurmond would have been too conservative for most Republicans, and they're in the same party.

And same thing on the Republican side. The Republican party in the same era encompasses both Nelson Rockefeller and Joe McCarthy. I mean, that's insane.

JOSEPH COOHILL - HOST PROFESSOR BUZZKILL: [00:26:04] No, absolutely.

PROF. NASH: [00:26:05] They're both Republicans, they're official members of the Republican party. And yet, is there any intersection at all on the issues between those two people? Probably not. There might be a couple, but well, defense spending. Yeah. I mean something like that. I mean, this is basically in the Cold War, everyone agrees, with only a couple of exceptions. That you don't see any more, and that has all sorts of ripple effects. It's one of the reasons why you have what we call partisan gridlock.

JOSEPH COOHILL - HOST PROFESSOR BUZZKILL: [00:26:32] Because the parties are more ideologically pure.

PROF. NASH: [00:26:34] You can't pick off someone from the other side to align with you on a particular vote, because they don't exist. That person who sees eye to eye with you on that issue, they don't exist in the other party.

JOSEPH COOHILL - HOST PROFESSOR BUZZKILL: [00:26:45] Would have existed in the forties and fifties.

PROF. NASH: [00:26:47] Right.

And that itself has a ripple effects. People are down on politicians and the government because it seems like it can't do anything. Well, it can't do anything partly because of the nature of our party system and what it has become.

JOSEPH COOHILL - HOST PROFESSOR BUZZKILL: [00:26:56] Well, what hasn't changed?

PROF. NASH: [00:26:58] What hasn't changed is the fact that we have a two party system. That they have a virtual lock on the system, for lots of reasons, including the electoral college.

JOSEPH COOHILL - HOST PROFESSOR BUZZKILL: [00:27:08] Yeah, that's right.

PROF. NASH: [00:27:08] But let me put it this way. As looking at 2016, it is far more likely for an outsider to "take over."

JOSEPH COOHILL - HOST PROFESSOR BUZZKILL: [00:27:15] 2016?

PROF. NASH: [00:27:17] Yeah. 2016. Where an outsider, in the form of Donald Trump.

JOSEPH COOHILL - HOST PROFESSOR BUZZKILL: [00:27:20] Okay. I see. Yeah, the election. Right?

PROF. NASH: [00:27:22] I'm sorry. The presidential election 2016. It's far more likely for something like that to happen. In other words, an outsider or a non-politician to "take over" -- and we can debate about whether that's actually the case -- but takes over one of the two parties.

That's far more likely than a genuine third-party threat to arise. Also one of the two parties absorbing a third party's issue is much more likely than a third party arising. You've seen this on multiple occasions. I remember 1992, when you had a serious third-party threat -- I mean, threat to the two parties. It's not a national threat, where Ross Perot runs and is an independent. Remember, I don't know if you remember him in his pie charts. He was the one who put the deficit on the national agenda. And what do you know? In no time at all, people like Bill Clinton and Bob Dole were talking about the deficit.

JOSEPH COOHILL - HOST PROFESSOR BUZZKILL: [00:28:18] That's right.

PROF. NASH: [00:28:18] That's what happens. Because the two parties aren't stupid. If any issue they haven't been addressing gains traction with the third party, they will quickly make it their own and make that third party go away.

JOSEPH COOHILL - HOST PROFESSOR BUZZKILL: [00:28:28] And they'll make it sound as if they're more deficit hawks than the other, the other major party.

Right. And that that's the burden that any third party runs.

But there're some other issues, too. For example, if you're elected president as an independent, the Congress is still dominated by the two parties. Then what? You run into what I call the Jesse Ventura problem. Because remember, he was elected as an independent in Minnesota as governor, and now he has to contend with a legislature that has no independents in it. Now what? Those people feel no allegiance to you. You're an independent, right? All these things that might work okay in a parliamentary system one way or another, don't work in our system because it's not a parliamentary system.

So the emergence of an actual third party that is going to win national elections, I think is highly unlikely for the foreseeable future.

Now I'm sure I'll be proven wrong in 2020, because we're not supposed to make predictions, but we are looking at a firmly-emplaced two-party system for the foreseeable future.

Trump, Evangelicals, Fascism, Torture, Propaganda Q + A Part 2 - FrameLab Podcast - Air Date 3-17-18

GIL DURAN - HOST, FrameLab: [00:29:27] Eric asks, do you worry the excessive use of extreme language by some on the far left is lessening its overall impact? For example, the constant use of the word "fascist."

DR. GEORGE LAKOFF - HOST, FrameLab: [00:29:39] This is a tricky question for a number of reasons. You have an alternative, and if you say the alternative is "authoritarian," it's not really enough. Because authoritarian doesn't get at things like sexism and racism and homophobia and those aspects of things. It doesn't get at being prejudiced against Muslims or, you know, not letting immigrants in. Authoritarian does get a lot of what is going on in the Trump administration, that is, to have some absolute authority that's there. But it misses a point. Fascism goes a bit overboard because in fascism you also have that authoritarian government running the corporations, running the businesses. We don't have that here yet, although there is collusion. That is, you have the government trying to work with businesses that get them to make more money and to get support from business. But the fact is it's not fascist yet. So there isn't a simple term.

GIL DURAN - HOST, FrameLab: [00:30:50] Well, what about the Nazism we do see proudly on display? I mean, you know, I think maybe Eric's referring to Antifa's approach. But I don't think Antifa really represents most Democrats or progressives; it's a pretty small portion of that. But they are a reaction to these people who have taken to marching around with swastikas, with Hitler haircuts, with Confederate flags, the people like the Richard Spencers of the world, people who give Nazi salutes, who use the word "hail," "hail Trump" in one of Richard Spencer's speeches. So the right wing, the extreme right wing, has been deliberately manipulating the symbols of Nazism and fascism and getting a rise out of the other side in that way.

DR. GEORGE LAKOFF - HOST, FrameLab: [00:31:32] But that's why this is a tricky issue. Yeah. Because that is all true. Those elements of fascism are there. The more extreme parts where you run all the companies is not there. Authoritarianism doesn't cover it. We don't have a word that just does it. But you know, there's a reason with Antifa to say, Hey, these, these are fascist elements, crucial fascist elements, but not the total fascism. So, the idea of using "fascist" as a simplistic term isn't there, but there are contexts where it seems appropriate. Just as you said, when you're saying, Oh, there are lots of good folks among those neo-Nazis . . .

GIL DURAN - HOST, FrameLab: [00:32:17] Well, in a way, thinking politically here, shouldn't we just be doing our best to ascribe all of these awful, ugly features of the current conservative ideology to the label "Republican?"

DR. GEORGE LAKOFF - HOST, FrameLab: [00:32:32] This is really important. The label Republican is seen as an almost neutral label, just as being a Democrat is, that is, it's respectable. Being a Republican is respectable. I know someone who moved to California.

Before she moved to California, she worked for Governor Pataki in New York who was a Republican. And she said, look, Governor Pataki was a very respectable person. Governor Pataki would never say the things that Trump said. He didn't do the most horrible things that Trump did. He was a Republican; he carried out largely Republican -- at least economic -- policies. But, you know, it was perfectly respectable, and is for most people, to be a Republican. To say you're a Republican doesn't mean that you're a fascist, even though when you vote Republican you vote for people who are supporting fascist tendencies.

Now, this is very tricky because if you say that someone is a registered member of a party, that doesn't mean they agree with everything in the party. So, that is what makes it respectable. On the other hand, when the only people you're able to vote for, that is, when the Republican party became super conservative under Newt Gingrich back in 1994 when the moderate Republicans were voted out pretty much in the Republican primaries, what happened was that the respectable Republicans as candidates weren't there. You've got Republicans in office, carrying out policies that look in many cases like fascist policies, not fully but partly, and that go even beyond authoritarianism. So, this is a very tricky thing. We don't have good words for it. To say we are going to just call everybody who believes in the strict father morality down to being a white nationalist a Republican is missing the ordinary definition of Republican. Most people when they say Republican don't mean that.

GIL DURAN - HOST, FrameLab: [00:34:55] Well, do you think that's changing? Do you think that the brand damage that Donald Trump is doing to the Republican party is something that is significant, and shouldn't the Republicans who are giving Trump a pass and aiding and abetting him in these efforts be held accountable for everything he does? I mean, it is politics where it's one party vs. the other.

DR. GEORGE LAKOFF - HOST, FrameLab: [00:35:17] What you have is an interesting situation where the Republicans are supporting ultra-conservative candidates. And a lot of people don't want that to happen as you saw in the election of Conor Lamb versus Saccone. That is important that they had an ultra-conservative candidate, and a Democrat, who is not completely liberal by any means, who had certain conservative policies, who was bi-conceptual. And he was running in a district that had voted 20% for Trump. That was a very conservative district. Those folks in that district are bi-conceptual in certain ways, but not liberal. Not totally liberal by any means. And here is where you see bi-conceptualism showing up. They are for unions; they are for -- they are steelworkers in that district . . .

GIL DURAN - HOST, FrameLab: [00:36:19] for healthcare and the Raiders . . .

DR. GEORGE LAKOFF - HOST, FrameLab: [00:36:21] And therefore they're for unions and for healthcare and for decent wages and decent working conditions, and so on. And that mattered and mattered a great deal. They were not for the steel companies. And, so this is, though Trump went there and say [sic] he was supporting the steel workers because he was supporting the steel companies the people in the unions understood that that was ridiculous.

Frances Lee on why bipartisanship is irrational Part 2 - The Ezra Klein Show - Air Date 12-3-20

EZRA KLEIN - HOST, THE EZRA KLEIN SHOW: [00:36:50] This is one of the opinions I hold that is very unpopular in liberal circles. But I think a lot about the Mitch McConnell - Merrick Garland affair, and the anger that Mitch McConnell, who had the votes - and obviously if he didn't have the votes he wasn't going to be able to do that, but he had the votes, I think at that time, Republicans had 54 or 55 seats in the Senate, and he did not want a liberal president, Barack Obama, to fill Antonin Scalia's Supreme Court seat. And what he did was unprecedented and the way he justified it was clearly bullshit, but there's this question that the system itself raises, which is what did he actually do wrong?

Aside from being a break with a lot of historical precedent for McConnell to not give Garland a hearing, why should we expect an ideologically distinct coalition, a conservative coalition in this case, to clear a Democratic or left-of-center Supreme Court justice? I mean, we did in the past, it happened in the past, so that seems to be why we do it, but if you backed out, it's not how we think other legislation is going to go. Right? Not how we expect Congress to act on other important matters of ideological consequence.

And that's kind of space of legitimacy, which is I think an important word for you to bring into this conversation, seems really significant to me. What McConnell did feels illegitimate, in some ways I think was philosophically illegitimate, but it's clearly was within his power in the system. And it's also clearly the incentives of the underlying system itself. And there's this increasing gap it feels to me between how we think American politics should work on a values level and how the rules are actually set up for it to work if both sides are maximizing their leverage and their power and their ideological purity. And as that gap grows wider, it's creating a legitimacy crisis, but in every individual case, the politicians in question can turn around and say, you gave me this power. This is what the rules say. I don't know what your problem is.

FRANCES LEE: [00:38:57] Right. What McConnell did made all the sense in the world relative to the voters that elected a Republican majority to the Senate, with with judicial nominations playing a central role in the campaign promises that Republicans make. But what his action does is it poses the question of how divided government can work, because it's not limited only to the Supreme Court.

How can the President make his executive branch appointments? How can he run an executive branch if he cannot get his appointees confirmed? And yet a President facing a different party another party in control of the Senate, that party doesn't want to confirm the sorts of people that the President would want. So our system relies to a great extent on a kind of forbearance that where even though the party in control of the Senate has the ability to deny the President appointments to the executive branch and to the judiciary, just doesn't go all out. Exercises influence, but does not, across the board, withhold ascent.

So what Obama did under those circumstances is the sort of thing that Presidents usually do is they try to take into account what sort of person would be acceptable to the opposing party in control of the Senate. And in choosing Merrick Garland he chose someone who had a reputation for moderation and centrism, and someone who was older and therefore wouldn't hold this the Supreme court seat for a long time. Those were overtures he made, but the fundamental problem was that potential control of the Supreme Court seemed to be in play and Republicans were not prepared to give over Antonin Scalia's seat. And so the president was just told that this matter would be decided in the elections.

And if we carry this logic through, it raises the question of how divided government can function at all. Even though, of course, divided government is our normal state of affairs in American politics.

EZRA KLEIN - HOST, THE EZRA KLEIN SHOW: [00:41:08] This seems to me to relate very directly back to your thesis, which is that competition makes both sides more ruthless. It makes both sides act to maximize their power, as opposed to exercise forbearance. I don't have proof of this, but I think that if what had happened been - I guess it was 2016 that Scalia died - that Ginsburg had retired, I think there's some possibility with there not really being a competition there for control of the court, it would have just been like the status quo as we had it, that Garland could have gotten through.

I can't say that for sure. I think there's also a chance McConnell does the same thing, but I think there's at the very least a possibility of it. I think that in general, the two sides are much more open to the status quo on the court continuing than they are to things that could flip controller or flip further power towards one party or the other. And similarly in everything we're talking about here with the way McConnell acted there, this kind of constant competition for control of the Senate and the House seems really important.

I love the word forbearance here, it seems so important to me. You have this quote from John Boehner in a 2006 letter to House Republicans where he says, and I believe this is a letter where he's actually running for the Republican leadership position, he says, what is the job of Republican leader in the minority? It's to hold the job for a short time as possible. And if you don't believe you're going to be able to get out of the minority, well then maybe the job is to make sure Republicans have as much power as they can and to exercise forbearance and other things. But if you can get out of the minority, there's no time for forbearance, you have to get out of the minority—that is job one.

And it seems to be a reasonable way of saying the way Congress actually works in periods of competition is job one is winning your personal reelection, two is winning the majority, and governing is like somewhere lower. But it seems to be forbearance and competition are in almost perfect opposition.

FRANCES LEE: [00:43:06] It just makes sense that if you think that after the next set of elections, you might be in power, why cut a deal now That you'll have more power later and so the pervasive tendency in American politics to kick the can down the road on major issues I think owes something to this competitive context as well where you can't get to a resolution of issues because the power struggle is still ongoing. That elections really don't settle anything, that the party that loses doesn't really think it's going to be out for very long.

Frances Lee on why bipartisanship is irrational Part 3 - The Ezra Klein Show - Air Date 12-3-20

EZRA KLEIN - HOST, THE EZRA KLEIN SHOW: [00:43:37] This is a bit more of a philosophical question, but there's an often unexamined intuition in our system that bipartisanship is a good thing and that ideas that have bipartisanship behind them are good things. And I'm curious what you think of that. Because it does seem to me that in a conceptual party system, what you have is parties representing quite different ideas and in another system the

party with power would just be able to put its ideas into play, and then the party out of power could critique them, and that there's this kind of clarity in the choices. And in American politics, we seem to want parties that don't offer clear choices.

We used to have that so maybe that's part of why we like it, but is there any reason, conceptually, to think that - putting aside the fact that our system requires bipartisanship to work given its veto points in the filibuster and whatever else - is there any reason to think that bipartisanship actually makes systems work better, that it should be such a high value that we try to build it into the very functioning of our system versus simply saying, "eh, bipartisanship is illogical," we want to have different views, like let the parties be partisan and let whoever has power just govern?

FRANCES LEE: [00:44:49] I would say we can't fully set aside the fact that the system requires bipartisanship, that the system was not designed with parties in mind, parties grew up within the system, but when the framers put the constitutional system together, they did not plan for parties to play the kind of role that they play. So the complex division of power, bicameralism, separation of powers between Congress and the President, that tends to require the parties to work together because there's so many veto points, almost any organized opposition can stop things from happening, much less organized partisan opposition.

But you can try and make a normative case for bipartisanship on other grounds, I'd say we need to set it in the context of the American electorate, where both parties are minority parties, that neither party garners the trust of most Americans. And so under those circumstances, a party governing on narrow party lines is provoking huge backlash because there's the other party in the electorate, and then there's also a large share of voters who don't like or trust either party that well. They may have a tendency to prefer one party over the other in their voting behavior, but they refuse to align themselves publicly with a party, they are suspicious of parties period—that parties are partial. It's not the national interest, it's a partisan interest that that's how parties are seeing. And so bipartisanship helps to transcend that legitimacy problem, illegitimacy problem, that effectively two major parties that are both minority parties.

EZRA KLEIN - HOST, THE EZRA KLEIN SHOW: [00:46:38] So I like that idea of them both being minority parties, I think that's important. And it relates to something I wanted to ask you. I'm very interested in the way political identity is expanding and strengthening in America. And you don't talk that much about political identity in the book, but I'm curious, knowing the literature as you do, if you think this period of intense competition leads to changes in political identity or validation or reinforcement of political identity.

FRANCES LEE: [00:47:07] I think it raises the salience of partisan identities, this period of intense competition. Rivalry tends to do that in all realms of life, why not in politics as well? So, yes, I do think it makes that contest for power more visible for people. They think about parties more. There's so much more coverage of parties in the lead up to congressional elections. For example, most of the news articles are about the prospects of change party control, one institution or another. That's not how congressional elections were historically covered in the news.

That they used to be about individual races or about what was going on in different regions of the country, because of course, party control was not in play. The fact that it's in play

means that the salience of which party wins is raised. And so there's so much more attention to that, which I think does play into rivalries and helps to submit people's commitments to their partisan identities, at least for those Americans who have a partisan identity.

EZRA KLEIN - HOST, THE EZRA KLEIN SHOW: [00:48:19] So another piece of this that I think is interesting. So I've recently had a conversation, although I think it may come out after this one, with the neuroscientist Robert Sapolsky, who studies stress and the way anxiety affects primate and human brains. And he talks about how when studying primates, if you're in a period where the hierarchies are unstable, it changes who feels stress. All of a sudden people in power and dominant people feel a lot of stress and anxiety, it reduces short-term planning, and it can make you angrier, and it has all these sort of bad downstream mental effects.

And it really made me think a lot about your book, which is that for a long time and other way of almost saying what you're saying, to get it out of the competition language, is that America had very stable political hierarchies. The parties knew what their places were, more or less, and so they could kind of relax into it, and plan on longer time horizons, and act more calmly, and had a little bit more space in which to interact with the other party and figure out what they wanted to do. But now they don't. The political hierarchy is constantly unstable and constantly changing and so everybody feels that stress of volatility all of the time with all the things that stress and threat do to the human mind.

I'm curious if you think that's true. Your book focuses a lot on institutional behavior, but obviously, to some degree, institutional behavior is built out of the behavior of individuals and you spoke to a lot of individuals for the project. Do you think that this changes how individuals see themselves in each other and just like the daily, level of cortisol in their bloodstream to constantly be in this war for control?

FRANCES LEE: [00:50:00] That's a super interesting idea. I wrote that book, it's published on an academic press and I stuck within my area of expertise as a political scientist. So I wrote about institutions and incentives, but the psychology that you're pointing to makes a great deal of sense to me and suggest that I need to spend a little time taking into account this broader context in which struggle for power shapes, emotions and psychology and identity and things that go a little bit outside of what we normally deal with as institutionally focused political scientist.

EZRA KLEIN - HOST, THE EZRA KLEIN SHOW: [00:50:35] The one that I think about a lot is planning. It seems to me that the kind of time horizon on which you can plan is really important. And one, we know that stress acts on the human brain, such that you have less working memory and, deferring gratification now to get something later becomes much harder, but if you have no idea what politics is going to look like in four, six years, it creates, it seems to me, this inability to defer something now for later, this inability to say, "yeah, maybe we're not going to win this one without doing something really awful, like say the Merrick Garland situation, but, you know, it's worth it."

This system is important, right? Like the ability to treat something as you're playing for 20 or 50 year posterity versus the ability to treat it like what you do now is the only thing that matters. You hear this in business a lot with the focus on quarterly earnings reports, but it seems to me to be true in politics too, that we talk about competition in the way that the parties are acting against each other, but just something happening there as well as if they

can't plan, like everything is about the next election and that just raises the stakes of everything. That kind of willingness to let the other party win or accept something not going the way you wanted it to now. It's like, you can't do that, you've got to shut down the government. You've got to threaten the debt ceiling. You've got to not even give Merrick, Garland a hearing. You can't have any weakness because you're not playing for the long term and so you don't care about the longterm of the system. You're playing for right now and to be in power next year.

FRANCES LEE: [00:52:08] Yeah. So th that's looking at the the insecurity that those in power continually experience. They're hanging on by their fingernails. They do not have secure institutional control and so this does make it hard to think about what you're going to do down the road. It's just a matter of surviving in power. And so that constant preoccupation with the power struggle. That I think is something political scientists and those of us who think about how elections are supposed to work in democratic politics, haven't taken sufficient account of. We tend to celebrate electoral competition as a way to provide accountability and to incentivize politicians to consider the effects of what they do, because they'll be held accountable. But the downside is that when you have this constant intense competition is that politicians are continually preoccupied with politics, with their stakes, with their ability to hold onto power, with messaging, with their image, as opposed to being able to think about what they actually want to do with power.

EZRA KLEIN - HOST, THE EZRA KLEIN SHOW: [00:53:18] So I want to talk about, um, we've been talking, I think primarily here about Congress. I want to talk about the Presidency and in this case, President Trump for a couple of minutes. So, I think something I learned from your book *Beyond Ideology* is that we have some wrong ideas about how Presidential power works and particularly how it probably works in periods of divided government. That the opposition party becomes more likely to oppose anything the President takes a position on because the President is a leader of the party there they're in conflict with. And that seems like a hard thing even for Presidents who are used to trying to appeal to the other side, like George W. Bush or Barack Obama, in different ways in their careers. That's something that even they, I think have trouble with. They feel that to get something done in divided government, they should go out and give speeches and raise the salience of it.

But Donald Trump really seems to feel that way. Like he really does not seem to me to have a mode that is not rallying his own side and it strikes me, at least if you believe that part of the job of the president is to get his agenda passed into law, or as much of it as possible, that Donald Trump is almost uniquely unsuited for a period of divided government. That he almost has nothing in the toolbox for what do you do when you taking a position, makes it less likely that your idea can get through Congress. I'm curious how you think about Donald Trump in a *Beyond Ideology* framework.

FRANCES LEE: [00:54:39] Well, I do think you've seen the kind of dynamics described in *Beyond Ideology* playing out in the Trump years, even though I agree with you that I don't think President Trump has been focused particularly on winning over fence-sitters or opponents to his position. But even with that said, you see exactly the kind of polarization of opinion on issues, which with which the President is associated, where the out party, the party that the President doesn't control, in this case the Democrats, move. Their issue positions change in reaction to presidential leadership and change in contrary ways.

It is the case that a public opinion among Democrats used to be more favorable towards border wall or border barriers than it is now. Basically the public opinion on that among Democrats shifted very hard against border barriers after Trump entered the Presidential race. So certainly as President there's no Democratic support for that, but there used to be a more openness to that idea when it was not part of a party program. You also see Democrats shifting their position and becoming somewhat more favorable towards troops abroad for an intervention. More favorable towards a troop presence in Syria than they were. So you see Democrats reacting against.

Now you also see the same sort of pattern where the President is able to lead his own party, even though he can't lead the opposing party. So you see change in opinion among Republicans on issues like free trade or attitudes towards international alliances or towards Russian President Putin. That you see Republican attitudes shifting in those ways to align better with the President who they support. But that polarization in a system that requires bipartisanship to function most of the time - in fact, even in unified government, bipartisanship is necessary because of the filibuster in the Senate. That polarization makes the President's job more difficult, that when they take a position that it tends to alienate the opposing party.

Summary

JAY TOMLINSON - HOST, BEST OF THE LEFT: [00:56:53] We've just heard clips today starting with: Professor Buzzkill in two parts discussing the history of America's political parties and how we got to now; the Ezra Klein Show in two parts discussed the structural nature of the problems with congressional gridlock; and the Framelab podcast featuring Prof. George Lakoff [who] explained how partisanship meets policy in the minds of individuals, why moderation is folly and how to reframe progressive arguments to reach new supporters.

So, that's what everyone heard, and then members also got a bonus clip from Ezra Klein continuing their discussion about the dynamics of hyper-partisanship and the effects it has on society. For non-members, that bonus clip is linked in the show notes and as part of the transcript for today's episode so you can still find it. But if you want to hear that and all of our bonus content delivered seamlessly into your podcast feed, sign up to support the show. Now, especially in our time of need at bestofleft.com/support or request a financial hardship membership because we don't make a lack of funds a barrier to hearing more information. Every request is granted. No questions asked. And now we'll hear from you.

Sharing in misery - Zeke from Steamboat Springs, CO

VOICEMAILER: ZEKE FROM STEAMBOAT SPRINGS, CO: [00:58:11] Jay!, hey man. And bless you and your people. My name is Zeke Z E K E. And I'm out of Steamboat Springs, Colorado. I just lost all the venison that I harvested this fall to a FedEx/UPS mishap, you know, and things weren't going so good.

And I got home and I saw your recent episode, man. I decided to drop you a little bit of money. I hope it helps. It came through, the payment went through. So, it's what I've got right now. And, it's for you and your people to keep doing what you do. Because you're a force for good, man, and the world needs you.

I just thought I would share my misery with you, because for some reason you felt like the right person to call. And I just truly hope that everything's going well with you, that I was able to share with you, even though I'm not able to share what I was hoping to share with the people around me, who really were hoping to have it, which is food on the plate, you know. Which I think it's the big point of all of this, that we're working toward together. It's moments of mutual aid and suffering and solidarity together.

So, in faith brother. Bye.

Another Dave from Olympia shares the wealth - Eric from Portland

VOICEMAILER: ERIC FROM PORTLAND: [00:59:30] Hi, Jay!, this is Eric from Portland, or another Dave from Olympia, if you like. I've lived through different experiences that have certainly showed me that the system we're living in doesn't reward some of the most important of work.

And considering how the year has been and the kind of people we've lost, like Michael Brooks, I'm not ready for you to get shut down.

So, because I'm fortunate because the economic winds had changed for me -- and there's really no justice in it going either way for how bad it used to be, or for how good it is now -- the least I can do is share that with you in this time of need.

I'm leaving this message because I'm hoping that if there's others like me out there that are doing well, and that know what it's like to not do well, either from experience or just from having empathy and observation, that maybe they can do the same thing.

Man, do you know? It couldn't hurt to have a few more Daves from Olympia out there to help you out.

Here's the best for you, Jay!. And I just hope you can do everything possible to make it through this. Take care.

Final comments on where your money to the show goes

JAY TOMLINSON - HOST, BEST OF THE LEFT: [01:00:43] Thanks to all those who called into the voicemail line or wrote in their messages to be played as voicemails. If you'd like to leave a comment or question of your own to be played on the show, you can record a message at (202) 999-3991 or write me a message to jay@bestoftheleft.com. Thanks very much to the two callers that were heard from today for their support and all their kind words. Thanks of course to everyone who's been stepping up right now. I said previously in a previous episode that we had recouped about 250 members worth of monthly and annual pledges, and the fact is I did my math a little wrong. I miscalculated and ended up getting ahead of myself. So since memberships have continued to flow in over the past few days, now we're just about at 250. So I got ahead of myself, but the members caught up. So now they made me be accurate. So, it sounds like we haven't made progress since the last

episode, but we have. I just misstated it. I also want to point out that we do accept one-time donations. A listener wrote in saying that we should have that as an option. So, I clearly don't talk about it enough. So, if anyone can't commit to a membership or just doesn't want to, for whatever reason, or wants to make a really generous donation but just on a one-time basis, we have you covered. There is a one-time donation option listed on our support page, right alongside memberships and gift memberships.

And now, since we know that it's hard to see or really understand all the work and the money that goes into this show -- you probably assume it's a lot, but you don't really know what's going on -- so we wanted to give you a little glimpse into some of our expenses. Amanda wrote up this list. She just started listing things like, Oh my God, I can't believe how much stuff we have to do and how many things we have to pay for. So, she wrote it all down and here's the quick breakdown. And frankly, I kind of think we're missing a few things, but I just can't think of them at the moment.

So, right up front, obviously, podcast hosting costs. We do host the actual audio files that get downloaded, the analytics that we need to give to advertisers, all of that costs money. And you may be asking yourself, Hey, aren't there free hosting options? Yes, there are, but don't bother recommending them to me. You really get what you pay for. I would rather be either the customer rather than the product, or I would rather stick with my current hosting company which values your privacy as a listener and doesn't want to use every single trick in the book to mine your data to help make me and themselves money. So, I just pay a service fee for that.

We have a separate website hosting service. So, that includes communication tools like our email blasts. That's where we host all the show notes and our transcriptions. It helps drive search engine optimization for the show. We have two part-time assistant producers who do a huge chunk of the research, Erin and Dion. They sort through dozens of hours of content for every single episode that we produce, and them doing it means that I don't have to do it. So that helps me not burn out and lets me focus on other things, plus having more people do the research means that we have diversified our curation lens, so to say. And then of course we have a part-time activism czar/social media manager/graphic designer/occasional co-host, the amazing Amanda, who just does everything that needs to be done that I don't have time for. She just happened to have this particular set of skills that she could bring to the task.

We just paid a huge chunk of money right before we lost our funding. We paid this huge chunk of money for the specialized artificial intelligence transcription software that allows us to provide complete transcripts of our long, super complex mini voiced episodes. And that allows me to work in collaboration with our Monosyllabic Transcriptionist Trio of volunteers, Ben, Dan and Ken, to help put the finishing touches on, but the transcription software that does sort of the bulk of that work is a pretty penny. So, we just paid a bunch of money for that for the sake of having transcripts.

And that is the same software that enables us to do our "voicedmails" for those either not comfortable or unable to leave a typical voicemail so that we can hear from more voices on the show. So, we're really excited about that software and happy to be using it, but that definitely costs money.

We subscribe to a license of a giant library of music so that we can use that legally on the show, and then you get into the waters of subscriptions to so many little tools and digital services that it's too many to list, but they all get used all the time and you start to come together to help make the show what it is and make it sound great and have the widest variety of sources and all of those things. You just wouldn't believe how many little tools it takes that I've pieced together bit by bit over the years to make the show work. And then last, and hopefully not least, I need to make a living. And so after all of those expenses, I just keep whatever's left over, and right now that is nothing. No, that's not true. It's that what is left over is no longer enough to cover my expenses as a human living in the world. Before we lost that funding, I could cover my normal expenses and was doing sort of okay, and now I'm not.

So, now you have a sense of what goes into the show and why we need members and have to harp on this all the time. And then in a moment like this, it makes things pretty urgent because there's just a lot of balls in the air.

So, now the last thing, totally aside from funding the show, I just want to reiterate what I think is one of the more exciting new features that we're introducing which is our referral program. Because a lot of the problems we have would be solved if we just had more listeners, and the best way to get more listeners is for you, our adoring supporters, to share the show with the people who you think would appreciate it. And so we've implemented a referral program to make that fun and incentivize you a little bit by giving you rewards for sharing the show. So, right now I have another slate of people to thank for having made their first referrals: Travis H., Alan from Connecticut which no one is surprised about, Gretchen G., Bob W. and Raynette Gabrielle, a huge thanks to the five of you for getting started with the referral program. And I don't want anyone to forget about the reward for referring just five new listeners. It's something you cannot get anywhere else for any price, the custom artwork designed in collaboration between myself and Amanda. Just to talk about another thing, we spent a whole lot of time on in this last couple of weeks as we've been ramping up these projects. We made some what I think is really great artwork that goes on your phone or tablet, and we think you're going to love them and want to be able to share them with you, and so you get access to that as soon as you refer your fifth new listener to the show. And of course, links to membership and merch and the refer-o-matic and all of that are in the show notes. The one-time donations of course can be made right on the same membership page.

So, that's the update I have for you. Instead of just asking for money again, I wanted to give you some background information. So hopefully that was informative and enjoyable.

As always, keep the comments coming in at 202 999-3991 or by emailing me to at jay@bestoftheleft.com. That is going to be it for today. Thanks to everyone for listening. Thanks to Deon Clark and Erin Clayton for their research work for the show.

Thanks to the Monosyllabic Transcriptionist Trio, Ben, Dan, and Ken for their volunteer work helping to put our transcripts together. And thanks of course to Amanda Hoffman for all of her work on our social media outlets, activism segments, graphic design, webmaster, occasional bonus show co-host. And thanks to all those who support the show by becoming a member or purchasing gift memberships@bestoftheleft.com/support. That is absolutely how the program survives. For details on the show itself, including links to all of the sources

and music used in this and every episode, all that information can always be found in the show notes, on the blog and likely right on the device you're using to listen.

So, coming to you from far outside the conventional wisdom of Washington DC, my name is Jay, and this has been the best of left podcast coming to you twice weekly thanks entirely to the members and donors to the show from bestoftheleft.com.