

#1453 The Tea Party Too (School Board Backlash and the Dark Money Behind it)

[00:00:00] **JAY TOMLINSON - HOST, BEST OF THE LEFT:** Welcome to this episode of the award-winning *Best of the Left Podcast*, in which we should take a look at the rawkus school board meetings where parents have been expressing their displeasure with protecting one another from a deadly pandemic or making children aware of the existence of systemic racism in America. Just as with the Tea Party 11 years ago, the dark money behind the movement didn't light the fire, but is very adept at fanning the flames.

Clips today are from *Today, Explained*, *Zerlina*, *the NPR Politics Podcast*, *All In with Chris Hayes*, *the Thom Hartmann Program*, and *Battleground*, with additional members-only clips from *Zerlina* and *Battleground*.

School board brawl - Today, Explained - Air Date 11-2-21

[00:00:42] **SEAN RAMESWARAM - HOST, TODAY, EXPLAINED:** You've been covering these extremely vitriolic school board fights for NPR, what's going on and why?

[00:00:49] **ANYA KAMENETZ:** I mean, I think the best description that I've heard is from Melissa Ryan who tracks a right-wing organizing, and she said school board meetings are kind of the new Tea Party. Vast range of activists are really choosing to confront various things that they see as being winning culture-war issues.

[00:01:06] **SEAN RAMESWARAM - HOST, TODAY, EXPLAINED:** And though these fights and races are small and local, there are bigger implications?

[00:01:13] **ANYA KAMENETZ:** Absolutely. I think most prominently in the governor's race in Virginia, Glen Youngkin, the Republican, has chosen to make a version of the school board confrontations basically his closing issue in the race.

[00:01:25] **GLEN YOUNGKIN:** Terry McAuliffe says parents don't have any role in their kids' education. The same moment where parents stand up and say, oh yes, we do.

[00:01:36] **ANYA KAMENETZ:** But there's also a number of, a record number of, school board recalls that have gone through in the last year, and people running to replace school board members that they see as being on the wrong side of these types of issues.

[00:01:48] **SEAN RAMESWARAM - HOST, TODAY, EXPLAINED:** And why now? Why is this happening this year? Should we blame the pandemic? Nobody likes the pandemic.

[00:01:54] **ANYA KAMENETZ:** Obviously parents everywhere have been completely overwhelmed and frustrated by the path that their schools have taken at some point in the past year and a half, but the other thing that happened of course, is at school board meetings themselves went virtual because of the pandemic. And that really lowered the bar for participation, for better and for worse.

[00:02:13] **SEAN RAMESWARAM - HOST, TODAY, EXPLAINED:** So school board meeting used to be a thing you needed to get in your car and cancel your plans and go to and wait around for, but now it's just something you can do in your living room while you have the computer on mute. And that kind of opened up the flood gates.

[00:02:25] **ANYA KAMENETZ:** I think so, yeah.

[00:02:27] **ARCHIVE SOUNDBITE:** We know who you are!

And I'm going to come for everybody that comes at my kid with this stupid, ridiculous mandate!

So as you can see, fists are now flying, all of this on live television.

You are allowing child abuse. You are allowing child abuse. You, with your snotty little face, you're allowing it as well.

[00:02:51] **ANYA KAMENETZ:** Also what opened up the flood gates is that parents were really upset. There were so many contradictory messages going forward. There were conflicts with unions in some places, conflicts over hybrid models, and so, yeah, parents got upset, they got active, they got vocal about

either reopening schools or it's not safe to reopen school. So you see really more involvement happening and more unhappy parents.

[00:03:13] **SEAN RAMESWARAM - HOST, TODAY, EXPLAINED:** So, how does this evolve over the course of the pandemic? How does this go from just being people sounding off on a Zoom meeting or something from their homes to whatever it is now?

[00:03:21] **ANYA KAMENETZ:** School reopening itself, as well as masking, we're both very polarized.

[00:03:28] **ARCHIVE SOUNDBITE:** You're packing 300 kids, almost 300 kids into a school. How is that following the guidelines that everyone has put out?

[00:03:39] **ANYA KAMENETZ:** They became very polarized issues under the last president.

[00:03:43] **FORMER PRESIDENT DONALD TRUMP:** Think it's going to be good for them politically. So they keep the schools closed. No way. So we're very much going to put pressure on, uh, governors and everybody else to open the schools.

[00:03:53] **ANYA KAMENETZ:** Trump also championed the notion of critical race theory, being a thing.

[00:03:57] **FORMER PRESIDENT DONALD TRUMP:** I ended it because it's racist. I ended it because a lot of people were complaining that they were asked to do things that were absolutely insane. That it was a radical revolution that was taking place in our military, uh, in our schools.

[00:04:13] **ANYA KAMENETZ:** We should pause to note the critical race theory is a legal theory that's taught in law schools and undergraduate seminars and not in K-12 schools, but it's shorthand for what is sometimes called "woke education" or just really attempting to teach kids about history and racism as a structural issue.

[00:04:28] **SEAN RAMESWARAM - HOST, TODAY, EXPLAINED:** Where are these cultural wars happening everywhere? Florida?

[00:04:32] **ANYA KAMENETZ:** I would say that the school board fights are not ubiquitous by any means, and they're not seen, notably, in a lot of big cities,

which tend to be more blue cities. The places that I've seen them a lot have been more medium-sized suburban school districts, sometimes a little bit larger, but in purple states. So Washington state, in Michigan, in Pennsylvania, Ohio, and this notable one in San Diego county.

[00:04:58] **SEAN RAMESWARAM - HOST, TODAY, EXPLAINED:** Can you give me some examples of the more extraordinary things you've seen?

[00:05:02] **ANYA KAMENETZ:** In Gwinnett County, Georgia, there is a scope of member named Karen Watkins, and when she was elected last fall, she flipped the school board, she and another fellow candidate, they flipped the school board to be majority people of color and majority democratic. And this is in a suburban Atlanta county that's become very diverse over the last couple of decades. And she was targeted off the bat by a policy group that is a offshoot of an offshoot of Focus on the Family, and they produced this attack ad.

[00:05:34] **POLITICAL AD:** A ticket of radical liberals is running for school board. Their platform: radical sex indoctrination, removing safety officers from school, and teaching our children a false version of American history. The result? More teen pregnancy.

[00:05:48] **ANYA KAMENETZ:** This rhetoric from this video ad was parroted in messages to her on hundreds of messages she got on Facebook. One of them she read to me was "Karen. Here's some news for you. The Democratic communist baby killer party doesn't have any values."

[00:06:02] **SEAN RAMESWARAM - HOST, TODAY, EXPLAINED:** Yikes.

[00:06:03] **KAREN WATKINS:** You know, I had a parent call me, call me and told me that they're coming for me. How am I supposed to take that?

[00:06:11] **ANYA KAMENETZ:** It's intense. And so when these people showed up at the school board meeting, she and her colleague felt so threatened that they had to leave the room.

[00:06:20] **KAREN WATKINS:** We ask everyone wear a mask as that is the policy. If you are unable to comply, please leave the premises.

[00:06:35] **ANYA KAMENETZ:** And so it's a pretty effective protest because they are posing a threat, basically, by standing there, at least in the eyes of the folks that are at these meetings.

[00:06:45] **KAREN WATKINS:** Got a little testy in there. People saying, stand your ground. It can't remove all of us. Literally stand your ground. That's enough for me. When you're saying things like that, they trigger things in my brain.

[00:06:57] **ANYA KAMENETZ:** So it feels very scary. And she's not the only one who's been threatened in a way that feels personal.

[00:07:05] **SEAN RAMESWARAM - HOST, TODAY, EXPLAINED:** It just feels like watching these videos and hearing these clips, it's people are so, so angry. And if you're disconnected from this world, you're just kinda like, these are your neighbors. Why are you so mad at your neighbors?

[00:07:20] **ANYA KAMENETZ:** Not just angry, but the disconnection from a normal frame of reference or normal modes of behavior. And I think what happened in Poway, California to me is kind of the most extreme example of this.

[00:07:31] **SCHOOL BOARD PROTESTER:** You're not going to hold a meeting?

[00:07:35] **ANYA KAMENETZ:** The school board members were meeting, but in a closed session. They were livestreaming the public comments, but the protestors made their way inside, and the school board members felt like the best way to deescalate would be to leave. And so the protestors, who were anti-mask protestors, came into a public meeting room and then they declared themselves the new school board. They held a vote.

[00:08:00] **SCHOOL BOARD PROTESTER:** No, they need to vacate because they actually have lost their jobs. So this is the new board. They need to leave.

[00:08:09] **SEAN RAMESWARAM - HOST, TODAY, EXPLAINED:** Was it some sort of, I mean, the word I want to use here is insurrection. Was it some sort of revolt?

[00:08:15] **ANYA KAMENETZ:** The clerk of the Poway school board called it a mini insurrection. She said, January 6th is our September 9th because, basically, on the one hand, of course there was no legal consequence to this. Well, in two ways. First of all, the police didn't arrest anyone. No one was detained and no one was kicked out. They were allowed to go freely. But also

to, I mean, they didn't become the school board because they held a vote. They're kind of just inhabiting their own reality.

School Board Members Face Violent Threats - Zerlina. - Air Date 10-6-21

[00:08:41] **ZERLINA MAXWELL - HOST, ZERLINA.:** Dr. Blackstock, I'm going to start with you; besides being a doctor on the front lines of the pandemic, you're a parent. Uh, what are your reaction to these threats of violence against school board members over mask mandates?

[00:08:54] **DR. UCHE BLACKSTOCK:** Thanks so much for having me, Zerlina. You know, it's... it's shocking, because we have the evidence and data that backs up that masks work, that all of these interventions that we're using in schools to prevent the spread of coronavirus, they actually work. And these parents that are protesting, they appear to have very entrenched, anti-science beliefs.

And it's one thing to have those beliefs, but it's another thing to be violent, and threaten school board members. And I think it's actually incredibly unacceptable.

[00:09:26] **ZERLINA MAXWELL - HOST, ZERLINA.:** It's scary to see. And especially someone... I was raised by pastors, so when I see people proclaiming Jesus Christ, and then lead... you know, sending people to their deaths, I really have a problem with that. The Bible actually specifically addresses this mate-- this point.

Um, but Maya, I feel like, in the legal context, right? We're back here, um, in... in the earthly realm, um, what could the Justice Department do about these sorts of threats? I mean, in his... historically the Justice Department, or the Federal Government, had to step in to protect people in the context of education, but this is a whole new world.

So what can be done?

[00:10:05] **MAYA WILEY:** Well, Zerlina, one of the things that Merrick Garland said in his memo was that, you know, they had to investigate... he was asking the Federal Bureau of Investigations to investigate possible criminal activity, of threats of violence, uh, and intimidation. And it is a crime. It is a federal crime.

So, certainly there's always the possibility that people will face criminal prosecution for this kind of conduct.

I think what is so important to note, particularly because you took us back to the fight for school desegregation/ integration, is that we don't have a constitutional right to an education in this country under the U S constitution.

And it's one of the reasons that Merrick Garland can't say what so many of us watching this think we should be able to say in this country today, which is, 'You don't get to prevent educators from educating our kids, both safely when it comes to health, and being able to enter that building, but also in terms of the content of their education.'

Because just as we're seeing the same fight over mask mandates, we're seeing it over teaching our differences. Teaching the fact that we have different experiences, whether we're Black, or Native American, or descended from the Irish who came over after the Great, you know, potato famine.

All of that matters in a pluralistic democracy. It's not a quality education without that. And what we're seeing is opposition to the education of our children, and we should all be deeply concerned about that.

[00:11:40] **ZERLINA MAXWELL - HOST, ZERLINA.:** And one of the things, to that point, about just simply educating children on the basics of American history-- because we're not talking about critical race theory. I joke that like I went to law school and I think I might have read one essay ever on Critical Race Theory. Like, it was... and it was in an elective class. Like, this is not something you're learning in sixth grade, or younger, um, or even through high school.

So Maya, it feels like this is actually about something else, right? It's not really about Critical Race Theory; most of the people against it probably couldn't explain to you what it is. But that's why I brought up 50 years ago, because it feels like you have angry crowds of mostly white parents, and back 50 years ago, they were protesting integration. Now you have crowds of mostly white parents who are protesting against their children learning about that racism in our history.

So I feel like there's a through line here, we should point out.

[00:12:40] **MAYA WILEY:** Absolutely. Uh, you and I are on the same page on this one.

And I would also argue this as a health issue as well, because racism is stressful and it actually has health impacts on children. But also your point I tweeted, when we were seeing some of these images of violent looking, angry, spewing parents outside of these schools, with kids walking in with masks, being intimidated, taunted, yelled at; the images were exactly like those of Ruby Bridges. Photographs that we saw with large U. S. Marshals walking little Ruby Bridges into a New Orleans public school because she was a Black child walking into a white building. And the images are so strikingly the same. But I would also argue that we're fighting about the same thing.

You know, I... what does it mean to be in a country that has so many of us with different backgrounds, experiences, and histories, including a country that has some history that we have to face down, and we haven't.

And there's just too much right now that we're seeing in this... in this dialogue that is fundamentally about identity, not about facts, as the doctor said, not about data, not about what keeps us safe, and not about what educates our children into both being able to participate in a global economy, where they have to be able to both look at data, but also work with other people who are different from themselves.

That's what democracy demands of us. That's what it means to create society and community. And this is the opposite of the "Beloved Community."

[00:14:13] **ZERLINA MAXWELL - HOST, ZERLINA.:** One of the things I've been thinking about a lot lately is, especially as you see parents yelling at school board meetings, and it's like, "I don't want you to make my child hate white people!"

I mean, uh, I guess that's what they feel will happen, if your child learns about Jim Crow and slavery and segregation. But in a lot of ways... maybe we should flip this, because historically we've talked about those things, Jim Crow, segregation, and slavery, as parts of Black history. But I've actually started to think about these things as a part of white America's history.

So what do you think about just flipping it? It's white history!

[00:14:49] **MAYA WILEY:** Well, as we've always said, Black history is American history. But you're absolutely right. It's white history, because it was, frankly, white people who made that history. We shouldn't forget that, but this is the point. All history is all of our history and we can't possibly understand both where we are today, why things are the way they are, what kinds of things

might make it better for all of us, if we're unwilling to take a look at it, and change it.

You know, whether that's health data, uh, whether that's how we organize our schools. We're the only industrialized country in the world that funds our schools locally. Uh, and it has impacted the quality of our education, and race is a big reason why that is the case.

But it hurts white students too, by the way, because whether you're in Louisiana, or Texas, or California, if you're in an urban or rural area with... that's low-income and white, you are actually being harmed by that same structure.

And, you know, it's really important that we start to have these conversations as an "us;" just because our experiences are different doesn't mean we don't have a way to work together on getting where we need to go. And I think that's what's so dangerous about the fact that this has become an "us and them," and that any discussion about our experiences, or how we feel, or what our history is, has now become so terrible.

And one other thing I'll just say about your points Zerlina: historically, Italians weren't white; Jews weren't white; the Irish weren't white. So, do they count? Do they get, like... because they got mistreated, do they not get to talk about that? Because it might make, I don't know, white Anglo-Saxon Protestants uncomfortable?

I don't know. But I think that's exactly the [point], it was really a double standard. It doesn't work for any of us, and we have to change it.

Why Are School Board Officials Getting Death Threats? - The NPR Politics Podcast - Air Date 10-19-21

[00:16:41] **TAMARA KEITH - HOST, THE NPR POLITICS PODCAST:**

This is serious stuff. And all of us, in one capacity or another, have watched school board meetings before, and they are typically not the most exciting events. They are not the most contentious events, typically. Usually only a few people show up, but things have been different.

[00:17:02] **ANYA KAMENETZ:** That's right, and it's the worst that people have seen in recent memory. So I've talked to school board members at this

point in five states. I talked to Sara Clark Pierson, she's the president of the Grand Ledge School Board. That's a medium-sized district near Lansing, Michigan, and she's been in public service for 30 years, and she said she's never seen this kind of anger and aggression. And she describes this really upsetting scene where someone in a public meeting got up and accused her of a crime with no evidence, and they even brought up the end of her marriage.

[00:17:32] **SARA CLARK PIERSON:** No one in the community likes you. You're an embarrassment. In fact, even your family doesn't like you, and that's why they left you. And then the people in the audience stood up and started shouting, embezzler.

[00:17:41] **DOMENICO MONTANARO:** Good grief.

[00:17:42] **TAMARA KEITH - HOST, THE NPR POLITICS PODCAST:** Wow.

[00:17:42] **ANYA KAMENETZ:** Yeah.

[00:17:43] **DOMENICO MONTANARO:** That's pretty personal stuff.

[00:17:44] **TAMARA KEITH - HOST, THE NPR POLITICS PODCAST:** Yeah. I think that this is different, in a way, from presidential politics because this is your local community. These are people you know or who you sit on the sidelines with at soccer or whatever it is. It's coming from inside the house, if you will. It's inside the family. Similarly, I was in Ohio doing some reporting and spoke to board members of the Centerville City Schools. Megan Murray Sparks says that, before a recent board meeting - and they knew that it was going to be contentious and it was going to be about the mask mandate that they have at the schools - that she was afraid.

[00:18:26] **MEGAN MURRAY SPARKS:** We had a police officer at every entrance to the South Commons. We had security. They had a safe room that they were going to put us in, that they had planned out if anything was to happen. I was so scared before the meeting, I was physically ill in the bathroom, texting my priest, like, "I am so scared. I don't know what to do." And he's trying to tell me, everything is going to be fine. You're going to be OK.

[00:18:49] **TAMARA KEITH - HOST, THE NPR POLITICS PODCAST:** So, Anya, we have now heard two people describing really contentious moments at school board meetings. What is happening?

[00:18:59] **ANYA KAMENETZ:** So this is a national issue. The attorney general, we've heard, is making some moves to investigate and try to coordinate a federal law enforcement response because this is happening all over the place. And I really do think that it's coming from two directions at once. There is authentic grievance at the local parent level. Just from 18 months of pandemic schooling, parents are fed up. They were fed up about schools being closed and about - now they're upset about mask mandates in different places. So that is authentic.

At the same time, there is a very large infrastructure of groups that you can easily find online that will provide scripts, toolkits, activists supports, connections to legal help, template letters, model legislation. There's even a PAC - called 1776 PAC - that will fund you if you want to run for school board and overturn your local school board against sort of anti-racist education. So there's a lot of stuff behind this, and I think it really is not just isolated things here and there.

[00:20:06] **DOMENICO MONTANARO:** Yeah. I think that one of the mistakes, though, that we made - a lot of people in the media - back when the Tea Party uprisings were happening in 2009, 2010, all of that, was people trying to say that they were astroturfed, that they were funded by some broader organization that was then turning people out. While there was some of that, and there is some of that now where you're seeing some of these groups clearly funded, what I think you're seeing more and what was happening then was you have this kind of cultural grievance movement that people latch onto whatever the culture moment is whether it's this or whether it was any number of things, back then it was health care, and then they organize with new and also traditional tools, using Facebook, for example, to meet up and figure out where to be.

And you do have people within each of these school districts and areas and states who know what the talking points should be, who then help filter those talking points down to some of the people who are going to these school board meetings so that they're all on the same page. So there's some organization to it, but it's certainly coming from a place of a groundswell movement among a vocal minority of people.

[00:21:21] **TAMARA KEITH - HOST, THE NPR POLITICS PODCAST:** Well, and I will say that in Centerville, where I've been doing my reporting, some of the people, some of the moms who stood up and spoke at a board meeting back in April are now running to replace the board members who they say didn't listen to them. Heather Schultz is one of those candidates. And she

basically gave the board members a warning back in April, and now she's following through on it.

[00:21:44] **HEATHER SCHULTZ:** If you continue to ignore the families speaking out against this and other related topics, the people who elected you will replace you with people who support our ideals and goals because we are no longer asleep at the wheel.

[00:21:55] **ANYA KAMENETZ:** Yeah. I saw that there is a record number of school board recalls that happened actually this year according to Ballotpedia. So this is something that is also happening that the next step from coming to a meeting, making a public comment, is actually getting involved in politics yourself.

[00:22:09] **DOMENICO MONTANARO:** Yeah. And let's see if there's a majority for that. This is what happens in this country when it comes to democratic processes, is that people can run. People can run for president. They can run for their local school board. They can run for governor or senator or whatever. They need a majority to win. I think that what's changed now from what it used to be is that I think we're seeing with former President Trump that if he loses or someone who believes the same way that he does, they don't necessarily accept the outcome.

[00:22:34] **ANYA KAMENETZ:** Well, just as a counterpoint, in a super-low turnout, traditionally off-year public election like a school board election, you don't necessarily need a majority of all the parents. You just need a majority of the voters. And when there's national money coming in to buy ads, I've seen to set up websites against certain candidates, people can get in who maybe don't represent the majority of the voters in that area.

[00:22:57] **DOMENICO MONTANARO:** That's always the case in our politics, right? It's a majority of the voters.

[00:23:00] **TAMARA KEITH - HOST, THE NPR POLITICS PODCAST:** Right. And school board elections are typically low turnout, but I think a question that I have is this focus on school boards, is it changing politics? Is it going to have an effect beyond just the school boards?

[00:23:17] **DOMENICO MONTANARO:** Well, it may not be that the school boards are changing things nationally. It may be that the national politics have changed the school boards. And I think that what we've said before in this

podcast that it seems that all politics is national now. And I think we're seeing that over and over again in lots of places.

[00:23:31] **TAMARA KEITH - HOST, THE NPR POLITICS PODCAST:** Right. It used to be all politics are local, and maybe now it's the other way around.

How Right-Wing Groups Are Catalyzing Culture War Battles In Schools - All In w/ Chris Hayes - Air Date 10-18-21

[00:23:35] **ARCHIVE SOUNDBITE:** CROWD: You work for us! You work for us! You work for us! Hear our voice! Hear our voice! Hear our voice!

[00:23:44] **CHRIS HAYES - HOST, ALL IN:** A chaotic scene at the 2009 town hall for Congressman Kathy Castor is one of many protests that unfolded across the country in response to the Affordable Care Act, as the tea party turned from a grassroots movement into a political juggernaut. But tonight we know it wasn't activist alone who fueled that transformation. Groups like Americans for Prosperity, funded by billionaire conservatives Charles and David Koch, amplified the tea party through dark money.

As writer Jeff Nesbitt wrote in Time magazine in 2016, the Koch brothers have almost certainly spent or raised more than a billion dollars to successfully bend one of the two national parties in America to their will. The long rise of the tea party movement was orchestrated, well-funded and deliberate.

We're now seeing a similar phenomenon play out in these school board meetings across the country. A leaked letter obtained by the Washington Post shows how a Koch-backed group has fueled opposition to school mask mandates. A new report from the political newsletter, Popular Information reveals how local school board issues in Virginia are being weaponized by Koch-backed groups in an attempt to swing the governor's race in Republicans' favor.

That piece was written by the founder and editor of Popular Information, Judd Legum and he joins me now. Judd, it is striking how similar the tea party protests in 2009 are to a lot of what we're seeing the school board. They have very similar vibes. In some cases they have the same people involved and the same organizations.

What are these organizations? Who funds them? What are they up to?

[00:25:17] **JUDD LEGUM:** Well, a lot of that we don't know the answer to, and that's by design. The main organization that you talked about in your intro before the break, Parents Defending Education, was only founded in March of this year. And we won't know even the limited information that you can learn about a nonprofit like that won't be available for two plus years. And that's not a mistake.

Now, what you can do is you can look at the people involved, and you can look at what their history is. And as we know, the person who's in charge of the Parents Defending Education, which is the primary group operating nationwide, but specifically in Virginia, focusing on the Glenn Youngkin race, has extensive contacts to the Koch organization, really has spent our entire career working for Koch-linked and Koch-funded organizations. So you can put two and two together and figure out what's going on.

[00:26:13] **CHRIS HAYES - HOST, ALL IN:** Yeah, and I, I want to be clear. I mean, this is not some sort of conspiracy and it's not AstroTurf. It is political. It's what political organizing looks like. I mean, there is some anger on the ground. There's a lot of focus on this in right-wing media. And then these groups come in, particularly in the right, they use dark money more than often than not, to essentially mold and shape and sustain and cultivate and push this agenda. It's interesting to me that this is where they have landed on school boards and not just with one issue, but sort of across a variety of different issues.

[00:26:45] **JUDD LEGUM:** Well, that's true. Not everyone who is going to these school board meetings is a paid operative. Now some of them who are appearing on TV and presenting themselves as run-of-the-mill parents are in fact paid operatives. That's what the guy learned in the course of this reporting. But there are parents who are genuinely concerned about critical race theory and other issues, whether or not that's accurate. But I think what this is really, and I think that the tea party analogy is apt. It's a rebranding of the MAGA movement. It's a lot of the people who were upset about these cultural trends and it's now repackaging it. And this is especially important in Virginia, where Glenn Youngkin is seeking to mobilize that same constituency of voters without invoking Trump's name and without alienating the conservative voters who might be turned off by Trump. And that's why we see this playing out in Northern Virginia, which is the key battle ground for the Virginia governor's race.

[00:27:51] **CHRIS HAYES - HOST, ALL IN:** Yeah. That's a really good point, that that essentially this is politically useful for this very specific reason. That particularly in the Virginia race -- where again, this has been a key part thing that Youngkin's been banging on about -- that you don't want to alienate voters with too much Trump, too much MAGA iconography because it's a state that Joe Biden won by 10 points, but you want a marshall that grassroots rage. And so this becomes a convenient way to do it in this new shell.

And we're seeing it becomes essentially a proxy for the Youngkin campaign. We're seeing polling, CBS said that 62% of people said Virginia school curriculum on race and history will be a major factor in how they vote, which I think is a testament to how effective some of this organizing has been.

[00:28:33] **JUDD LEGUM:** Yeah. And Youngkin is leaning into this. His main ad or one of his main ads that's on repeat on cable television online is based on an attack that originated out of the school board. He will be appearing tomorrow in Fairfax County to talk about these issues and parents' rights. This is really the closing argument, not only for Youngkin, but for candidates, Republican candidates down the line. They think that this is a winning issue.

The point that I was trying to expose, or the issue that I was trying to expose is that a lot of these issues are contrived, in that they don't reflect a real change in the school system. They really reflect a real change in political strategy. Whereas a lot of these things were just happening. They were considered non-partisan. It was just the administration of schools are now being charged and really put under a magnifying glass in a way that is intended to extract maximum political benefit.

And that's what we're seeing.

[00:29:36] **CHRIS HAYES - HOST, ALL IN:** What is really fascinating, when you look at them, the McAuliffe line he said about vetoing, a bill that, around sort of curriculum and books had to do with an LGBTQ book I believe. And then you've got the sort of critical race theory moral panic. And then the masking stuff. At some level, it's like, there's not really a real conceptual connection between the masking and the critical race theory. These are distinct issues. One has to do with public health and the suppression of a viral respiratory infection among children. The other has to do with very profound and deep political questions about our history. The fact that they've both been the targets tell you something about what's driving this, more than the individual issue itself.

[00:30:16] **JUDD LEGUM:** Yeah. And really what's motivated this latest controversy in Virginia are two books. They were actually award-winning books. They do depict some sexually explicit, same-sex sexually explicit material, but they've been around since 2019. They're coming up now and they're being used as an attack, a false attack on Terry McAuliffe for vetoing the bill he did in 2016. So we're picking whatever issues we can from whatever time period, we're putting them all together and we're seeing what sticks. They managed to get a sound bite and that's what's really driving the closing of this Virginia gubernatorial race as we enter into the closing weeks. It's really been remarkable how successful this effort has been.

Weaponized Schoolboards Manipulated To Elect GOP Governor (w/ Judd Legum) - The Thom Hartmann Program - Air Date 10-19-21

[00:31:04] **THOM HARTMANN - HOST, THE THOM HARTMANN PROGRAM:** Would you agree with my analysis that the reason why the Koch network would fund school boards to freak out about critical race theory or about mask mandates, which frankly I doubt Charles Koch gives a rat's ass about, but that they would fund these things instead because these wedge issues can be used to get Republicans elected, who would never get elected if they simply said that their main agenda was to encourage the use of fossil fuels and discourage taxation of rich people, to get these people elected so that they can then go ahead and encourage fossil fuels and cut taxes.

[00:31:41] **JUDD LEGUM:** I think that's close to how I view it. But let me explain how I think. And I think the Virginia -- and which of course has an election that's coming up in November, one of the few states is --

[00:31:51] **THOM HARTMANN - HOST, THE THOM HARTMANN PROGRAM:** This is being used against Terry McAuliffe, is the case in point here specifically.

[00:31:54] **JUDD LEGUM:** Elections. Now Biden won Virginia by 10 points. So it's Terry McAuliffe, he's the Democratic nominee. There's a guy called Glenn Youngkin who's the Republican nominee. Glenn Youngkin knows that he really can't fully embrace Trump because he's going to alienate a lot of people. There aren't enough Trump supporters in Virginia for him to win. But, at the

same time, he needs to motivate those voters and make sure they they show up for him.

So what this is fundamentally is a rebranding of the MAGA movement across all of these issues that are now being focused on school boards to excite and energize that base. And Glenn Youngkin is really leaning into this. He's gonna appear in Fairfax County, which is a key Northern Virginia county to make some sort of announcement this evening about schools. A lot of his ads are based on schools. A lot of the Republicans up and down the ticket are running ads based on these school and school board issues. So it's a way that Republicans are trying to thread the needle and win in a state where Trump is not that popular. It's not Alabama or Utah, Alabama or whatever.

[00:33:22] **THOM HARTMANN - HOST, THE THOM HARTMANN PROGRAM:** Yeah. Yeah. Wouldn't another way to say that be, basically, they're obviously trying to win an election. But B, this is a test ground. This, this is the Willie Horton ad of our era, which was used against Michael Dukakis by George Herbert Walker Bush back in 1988.

And that "scary black guy, scary black guy," and Dukakis wasn't even the governor who came up with the idea of letting people out of prison, that was the Republican governor before him, he simply happened to be in the governor's seat when that happened with Willie Horton. So it was a lie to begin with, but it was a lie that the Republican party turned into a huge nationwide meme, and they coasted on that whole "we're tough on black criminals" thing, so effectively that Bill Clinton picked up that mantra. You know, "I'm going to put a hundred thousand cops on the streets" and Hillary talking about super predators and all this kind of stuff. So now it's "Oh my God, they're indoctrinating our children about, they're making white people, white children feel guilty for having white skin and they're promoting homosexuality in the schools and this kind of stuff.

It looks to me like they're testing something as much as they are doing something. What do you think about that?

[00:34:33] **JUDD LEGUM:** I think that's right. I mean, we're seeing this all around the country, you know, it's really much more intense Virginia because of the context and the election, but it's not just happening in Virginia. It's happening in Ohio. It's happening in Florida. It's happening everywhere. And I imagine we'll see a good bit of it in 2022, but I think you're right, regardless, but I think you're right. If this works in Virginia, if Glenn Youngkin wins, I think

you will see this non-stop. And so in that sense, I think it really is a testing ground for this.

[00:35:04] **THOM HARTMANN - HOST, THE THOM HARTMANN PROGRAM:** Or even if he loses by one point, he was 10 points down when this thing started. If they can move somebody nine points, even, you know, even if Youngkin loses, what are they going to do in Wisconsin where the race might be four points?

[00:35:17] **JUDD LEGUM:** Yeah, I think that's right. I think that's right. And I think that you're going to see a lot of it. That's really why I started digging into it was that I noticed that this was already being injected into a lot of the 2022 campaigns that really getting started now and will only intensify in the next few months.

And there is a lot of money behind this. I mean, there are very well-financed, they're hiring very expensive conservative lawyers, filing lawsuits. This is not a slap dash operation. There's paid staff. They're slick websites. There's talking points. There's FOIA requests. It's a very extensive, well-financed effort.

[00:36:03] **THOM HARTMANN - HOST, THE THOM HARTMANN PROGRAM:** What are the parallels between this effort and the tea party effort to blow up Obamacare, or at least make sure that there's no public option in it, etc., that was also funded by the Koch network?

[00:36:13] **JUDD LEGUM:** No one is going to cover in a big way, just some gathering of Republicans who are upset at Democrats who are in power. But what the tea party did, was it refreshed that, and it said, this isn't the Republican party. This is the tea party movement. We're this groundswell of opposition. It's, it's organic, it's the people rising up. And that's the same thing. And I think using the identity as parents, which is seen as a kind of a non-partisan position within our political conversation; you're parents, you're looking out for children, you're not partisan, you're not pursuing a particular kind of political agenda. You're trying to do what's best for your community. Rebranding the MAGA movement as this parents movement, I think has been very effective, particularly at the local level of framing this kind of coverage and starting to shift the conversation beyond Trump into something that's more powerful.

QAnon: Coming to a School Board Near You with Mike Rothschild - Battleground

with Amanda Litman and Faiz Shakir - Air Date 9-16-21

[00:37:16] **MIKE ROTHSCHILD:** The basics of QAnon are that, there is a supposed military intelligence team called "Q," using a variety of extremely awful messages to leak cryptic clues and rhetorical questions leading up to a massive purge of the Deep State by president Donald Trump.

But the very basics of it, what it was from the first of those drops, as they're called, made on 4chan in late October, 2017, up until Joe Biden's inauguration, was that, there was a military intelligence team using this image board to let Patriots and Trump devotees know what was about to happen, and how to prepare for it, and how they could play a part in enacting this great purge, and fighting this secret war between good and evil.

Q really works because it's much more of a... an umbrella of conspiracy theories rather than one. I mean, it's why the subtitle for the book is "The Conspiracy Theory of Everything," because that's really what "Q" is.

There is old school anti-Semitism, that's been around for centuries; there's the satanic panic; there's, uh, political conspiracy theories of the 2016 election; there's, uh, affinity frauds that go back a couple of decades; you can get into aliens; you can get into suppressed cures for diseases; you can get into secret technology.

Anything you want can be found under QAnon. So, it really wasn't a surprise to me when these people started showing up at school board meetings screaming about how vaccines were poison, and how masks are slave muzzles, but also, Joe Biden's not the real president, and also there's a Deep State, and also the Jews control everything.

Everything has been, kind of, merged together under one giant mythology that is now becoming conservative orthodoxy. So, even talking about what QAnon is at this point, when you're talking about QAnon you're really just talking about what a lot of Republicans believe.

[00:39:21] **AMANDA LITMAN - HOST, BATTLEGROUND:** So, you get to something really interesting, which is that, the Venn diagram between the Republican party and Q Anon, while not a perfect circle,

[00:39:27] **MIKE ROTHSCHILD:** Right.

[00:39:28] **AMANDA LITMAN - HOST, BATTLEGROUND:** Um, there are certainly many Republicans who do not ascribe to QAnon, and there are, I am sure, some Democrats who ascribe to QAnon, or some components of the...

[00:39:38] **MIKE ROTHSCHILD:** There are. Yeah.

[00:39:39] **AMANDA LITMAN - HOST, BATTLEGROUND:** But, almost certainly, the core activists of the Republican Party, at this point, are made up, in large part, I think, at least based on my understanding, of people who ascribed fully some part of the QAnon ideology, or the QAnon conspiracy theories.

[00:39:54] **MIKE ROTHSCHILD:** Yeah. They will not identify as a QAnon believers; in fact, they will say, "Well, I'm not one of those crazy Q people..." But then, they say things that are exactly aligned with QAnon. You know, they'll talk about the Deep State; trafficking-- you know, "We got to save the children!" You know, they'll, they'll make insinuations that Joe Biden maybe doesn't know where he is at any given point.

I mean, this is all just basic Q Anon stuff. And, what's happening is, that really lurid stuff, the sex trafficking, and the satanic rituals, that stuff is being, kind of, sanded down in favor of a much more mainstream, much more vanilla version of the conspiracy theory that's always been an American politics: that there is a string pulling cabal, you can call it the Deep State, you can call it the Illuminati, you can call it the New World Order, you know, the Bilderbergs, the Trilateral Commission; there's always something. Or multiple somethings. That are actually pulling the strings. And "Q" adapts very quickly to it, it's a very adaptable set of beliefs and of mythology.

[00:40:53] **AMANDA LITMAN - HOST, BATTLEGROUND:** QAnon believers and folks who ascribed to least some part of QAnon ideology are taking over the Republican Party from the bottom up. There was this incredible ProPublica investigation just out earlier last week, about how after Steve Bannon went on his podcast, which he says has, like 400,000 listeners, and said, "Calling on the quote unquote deplorables to take over their public and party from the bottom up," um, ProPublica called a bunch of county chairs in competitive states to find out: "Did that happen?" Um, 41 of the 65 counties they surveyed reported an unusual increase in precinct officers. There was something like more than 8,500 new Republican precinct officers, which for folks who may not be familiar, precinct officers are, like, the lowest level of county party officials. They're the ones who often make decisions about, like,

the polling place, or special appointments. It's the way that you begin to take over a party.

And it's very resonant with what happened with the Tea Party a decade ago.

[00:41:47] **MIKE ROTHSCILD:** Yeah.

[00:41:47] **AMANDA LITMAN - HOST, BATTLEGROUND:** So, in the way that, maybe, the Tea Party had, sort of, mega donor money behind it, or Ted Cruz type folks leading the charge, Q has begun to do the same thing, which makes it a real political threat, not just to Democrats, but also to Republicans, and more broadly, to democracy.

There's so much of this is driven by a "Stop the Steal," anti CRT, anti equity education mentality, as part of that.

I don't even know how to begin to fix this.

[00:42:14] **MIKE ROTHSCILD:** Yeah. I mean, what we're seeing is, basically, exactly what the Tea Party did, and what the anti-abortion movement did, what the Christian Right did; I mean this very low level organizing that doesn't make headlines, that people don't talk about on Rachel Maddow, most of the time.

It's the grunt work of democracy that the local news doesn't cover. I mean, that's why these people are running for school boards, and running for city councils, and running for small town mayors, because these are really winnable elections. You've got, maybe, a couple hundred people voting in some of these elections.

And if you make a name for yourself, and you get some publicity by screaming about how they want to turn our kids into slaves by putting masks on them, and how critical Race theory is going to make it illegal to be white and walk down the street, you're going to get people to go, "Oh, I've been thinking that for a while, but he's got the guts to say it. I'm going to get behind him."

And suddenly you've radicalized these very local elections that don't make the news, that people don't talk about. You know, people don't vote in the off year precinct election. But that's where democracy really starts. And I think it's a brilliant strategy of the Bannons and the Mike Flynn's of the world to get people really excited about these really unexciting races, because they're easy to win, and they're easy to infiltrate, and they're easy to push really toxic ideas onto a larger group of people.

[00:43:37] **AMANDA LITMAN - HOST, BATTLEGROUND:** I saw Mike Flynn, or at least a quote from Mike Flynn, was pinned to the top of a major Q forum...

[00:43:42] **MIKE ROTHSCHILD:** Yes.

[00:43:43] **AMANDA LITMAN - HOST, BATTLEGROUND:** Forum, whatever.

[00:43:45] **MIKE ROTHSCHILD:** Great awakening.

[00:43:46] **AMANDA LITMAN - HOST, BATTLEGROUND:** Great Awakening, of, like, "Run for school board! Run for school board! It's time to run for local office. Take over your local city and county." I think, they're not hiding the secret here...

[00:43:55] **MIKE ROTHSCHILD:** There's no hiding at all! This is all being done publicly! You can go online and find clips of school board meetings from around the country, with, just, people screaming and threatening, and, you know, parents showing up at schools with zip ties because the principal had the gall to have kids COVID tested once a week.

People are, kind of, losing their minds right now. And there are a lot of people who are really good at exploiting that. It doesn't have to be a giant conspiracy, it doesn't have to be the Russians doing it to us. We do it to ourselves, all the time, over and over.

[00:44:25] **AMANDA LITMAN - HOST, BATTLEGROUND:** So what do people... I want to say regular people, but QAnon people are regular people...

[00:44:32] **MIKE ROTHSCHILD:** A hundred percent!.

[00:44:33] **AMANDA LITMAN - HOST, BATTLEGROUND:** So what do people who are not Q followers, or acolytes, do to combat this? How do... how do we push back?

[00:44:39] **MIKE ROTHSCHILD:** First of all, you need to keep tabs on the people in your circle who might be susceptible to this. It doesn't have to be confrontational. It's just a conversation. It's a friendly check to somebody going down a bad path before they go down it, because once they start to go down it, it's very hard to get them out of it.

I think, you know, as we were talking about, we really need to do what they're doing, which is: focus local. We got to stop worrying about all of the things in Washington that we cannot control. Worry about the things you can control. Know who's running for your school board. It's not super sexy, but it has to be done.

We can't lose. You know, we can't lose the school boards. We can't lose mayoral elections and city councils. That's how they take control. They don't take control with troops kicking down the Oval Office door and arresting Joe Biden. They take control because they're on their school board and you didn't do anything about it.

So, watch your friends and family, keep tabs on their social media, practice your own digital literacy and your own digital hygiene, you know, really make sure the stuff that you're sharing is real, and... and you're not sharing it just because it sounds good.

And get involved. Vote in the local elections, run in the local elections, campaign in the local elections, help somebody out.

Do it at the local level because that's where they're doing it. And we've got to meet them where they're doing it.

GOP's Critical Race Theory Crusade Is The New Tea Party Movement - Zerlina. - Air Date 6-28-21

[00:45:58] **ZERLINA MAXWELL - HOST, ZERLINA.:** Hayes, let's start by reminding everyone at home, who's like not a political junkie, what the Tea Party was, and the difference it made in the 2010 midterm elections.

[00:46:09] **HAYES BROWN:** Yeah, sure. So, the Tea Party started off with a rant on-- honestly-- our sister network, CNBC; an analyst there was really upset about the... you know, a high amount of debt that was being racked up by the federal government in... at the start of the Great Recession. All these bailouts for big businesses, and eventually the auto industry, et cetera.

And that got people riled up. But it also got conservative activists thinking, "We can use this." And so, by Tax Day in 2009, we see Tea Party marches and

protests swelling up to thousands of thousands of people in cities across the country.

That energy and continued all the way through the 2010 midterms, with conservative activists, like you said, funneling money and support and inter... and activism into pushing these Tea Party groups, uh, and making sure that they had the wherewithal to go to the polls in 2010 and vote for a Republican candidate.

And, at first, it was, sort of, like, a fringe thing. Like most GOP establishment figures were like, "Ah, Tea Party, whatever." But then they started knocking off establishment figures in the primaries.

And eventually we got to people who, like... Marco Rubio, people forget, was a Tea Party candidate at first, in 2010. Uh, people who are now currently considered, you know, part of the structure of Congress were, uh, originally Tea Partiers and seen as, just, the Far Right. And they have taken over the Republican Party since then.

So now, here we are, they're still in power. And despite the fact that, you know, the amount of spending and debt, which is what they were originally yelling about, under Trump, never went down. They, just, kind of, were cool with it, because guess what? We didn't have a Black president during those years.

[00:47:48] **ZERLINA MAXWELL - HOST, ZERLINA.:** No, it's so, so true.

And I was reflecting on the early days of the Tea Party, when all the folks would show up at the town halls, and they'd make a big fuss, they'd post the video. And back then it was, like, early on in things going viral. So it was like, "Oh my God, what's happening at these town halls?" But then, it turned out, it was all manufactured. Which, I feel like, is what's happening now. So this was a good a trip down memory lane, for me.

What do you think, uh, about the idea that the Tea Party is, basically, way explicitly racist? Because you say, the Tea Party was low key racist, uh, but the kid-- Critical Race Theory movement is high key racist. I just say, actually, they're both... both pretty racist...

[00:48:34] **HAYES BROWN:** So, but see, here, the thing is, everyone who was paying attention could see the very racist elements within the Tea Party; the signs, the yelling, the fact that it was Barack Obama that they were protesting

against, but not yelling about George W Bush's spending, at the time. Uh, no, they... it was very racist.

But, [???] establishment figures and the leaders in the Tea Party movement, this loose coalition of groups, felt the need to say, "No, no, it's not that Obama's Black. We're not racist. We don't care about that. We just don't want federal government money being handed out to people who don't deserve it. Who don't deserve it. You know what I'm saying, here."

Black people.

They didn't want him going to Black and brown people.

They were upset... Uh, this is something that was born out through, you know, uh, studies, uh, academic studies from Harvard researchers and others, to show that that was a big impetus for people to join the Tea Party movement, to consider themselves Tea Partiers, was this idea that the federal government was spending too much money on minorities. And that is something that, uh, was found out as.. You know, "economic anxiety," et cetera. "Uh, it's all about debt and deficit and these wonky ideas," when really, it really did boil down to race.

So I say they were low-key racist, not because they weren't racist, but because they felt the need to cover it up.

This is clearly about race. It's right in the name "Critical Race Theory." They are being very blatant about the idea that this is about race.

And... and they're twisting this very academic, high level term into something that it isn't. And making suburban parents afraid that little Timmy is being taught he's a bad person.

QAnon: Coming to a School Board Near You with Mike Rothschild Part 2 - Battleground with Amanda Litman and Faiz Shakir - Air Date 9-16-21

[00:50:08] **AMANDA LITMAN - HOST, BATTLEGROUND:** People who've listened to this podcast will notice that there's some similar themes that keep coming up, as we've had conversations about the big structural problems.

You know, everything from, like, the Republican control of the Supreme Court, which was cultivated by investment in local elections and judicial appointments; the anti CRT fight, which, similarly, cultivated by Republican investment in a media apparatus, and local elections, and education systems.

You know, all of these are overlapping. That is, one because that's what I'm personally very interested in. But two, because I think it's... it all culminates in a very particular moment in which, you know, there's the demise of religion in American society; the demise of trust in institutions; the demise of civic engagement in terms of community, like, you're not part of the social club, or the Kiwanis, or the Rotary, or what have you.

[00:50:56] **MIKE ROTHSCILD:** Right.

[00:50:56] **AMANDA LITMAN - HOST, BATTLEGROUND:** All of that, combined with the economic anxiety that so many people really do feel, rightfully so, and looking for someone to blame, and for a community to join. I think that that loneliness component here, actually, can't be underrated as a reason why people are engaging in this.

[00:51:13] **MIKE ROTHSCILD:** Yeah, people are isolated. People are lonely. There's not a surprise that so many people flock to Q who are older, people who, had... maybe, their kids had moved out. Maybe they were widowed. Maybe they had just retired, and suddenly the social and family structures that they had for so long are not there anymore. And they, maybe, haven't done the best job at cultivating community and friendships.

So they go online, and they find people who are going through the same thing. Q works, not because of, like, mind control, or brainwashing, or rewiring the way you think. It works by giving you a community of people who think the same thing that you do, and who validate your beliefs, and your fears. Everyone wants that. Everyone needs that.

And Q is just really good at cultivating it.

[00:52:01] **AMANDA LITMAN - HOST, BATTLEGROUND:** And it's a role that I think political parties used to play, and could still play, eventually, one day, but that have become so... for one, under-funded, but two, like, so hard to engage with in a way that still builds, sort of, familial relationships. It's, like, too personal, almost.

[00:52:19] **MIKE ROTHSCILD:** Right.

[00:52:19] **AMANDA LITMAN - HOST, BATTLEGROUND:** And it feels too intransigent. Whereas Q gives you a space where, as you well put it, you can believe this, and then you can solve it.

[00:52:26] **MIKE ROTHSCHILD:** Yeah. It's very much, sort of, the local politics of, like, getting a pothole filled, or, you know, getting a bus bench repaired. I mean, it's really critical stuff.

We're so focused on what's happening at the national level: the Supreme Court; the filibuster; the \$3 trillion spending package; which is all super important.

But it's also really important to know who's on your school board. Who do you talk to to get a problem fixed? Who do you talk to about a problem neighbour? You know, those are the basics of community.

And Q filled that need of, I mean, certainly it's not, like, local politics, but it's the, "Hey, we're all getting together and we're solving a problem together."

And it's not a problem like the filibuster, or expanding the court. We can't do anything about that! But I can influence my local school board by giving them the good information, by telling them what I've learned from Steve Bannon, and from Q Anon, and from InfoWars.

And Democrats aren't doing that! No, we're still trying to figure out, you know, who paid off Brett Kavanaugh's credit cards. We're not concerned about the, you know, Q Anon lunatics who are going to be deciding what our kids get taught. And I think maybe we need to focus a little bit more on that.

[00:53:43] **AMANDA LITMAN - HOST, BATTLEGROUND:** I mean, that's all I do with all my time. I agree with you a hundred percent.

Um, I'm wondering if you could play prognosticator for a moment. What do you think the impact of Q will be in 2022 on the elections?

[00:53:54] **MIKE ROTHSCHILD:** Um, it's going to be enormous. And I think it's going to be a little tricky to quantify, because the Q movement is really leaving that branding behind. Uh, one of the things that happens to me when I talk about Q Anon is that I immediately get flooded with, you know, egg accounts on Twitter, going like, "There is no QAnon! I know you!" You know. "The media made that up!" Because there was a Q drop right before the election, uh, saying, basically, to drop the idea of Q, that the phrase they used

was, "There is Q. There anons. There is no Q Anon." I mean, that sort of classic thought terminating cliché use that cults

[00:54:31] **AMANDA LITMAN - HOST, BATTLEGROUND:** It's time for a rebrand!

[00:54:32] **MIKE ROTHSCHILD:** Yeah. Time for a refresh.

So, they're not talking about Q, they're not talking about Epstein Island anymore. That stuff is really being sanded down. But the anti-vaccine hysteria, the pro dodgy horse paste cure, the anti mask stuff, anti critical race theory, anti-Joe-Biden-being-the-real-president, that stuff is not going anywhere.

And it's getting bigger, and it's getting more mainstream, and it's having more and more people talk about it in a way that doesn't quite sound so conspiratorial, and sinister, but sounds more helpful of... you know, "Why are they forcing this vaccine on us?" You know, "Why do they care if I take Ivermectin?"

And it becomes very personal. And it stops depending on, sort of, a weird guy in Japan and making message board posts, and more dependent on what you believe, your truth, your experience. And people will get behind that.

It's not really easy to follow. But it's really easy to say, "I don't want Fauchi telling me what to do." And so, that's what it's going to be in 2022.

Complicated feelings on policing - Maureen from Boston

[00:55:39] **VOICEDMAILER: MAUREEN FROM BOSTON:** Hi Jay!, this is Maureen from Boston.

First, I have a few questions:

Why do we see nothing of Kamala Harris? And was Joe Manchin ever listened to, or famous before 2021? If not, he would never become a Republican now as some have predicted, because as a Republican his voice would be once again ignored. Now, as the obstinate Democrat, he has more power than most politicians could dream of.

Second, I'm in an unusual position in matters concerning police.

I know many police use their powers to express their reactionary, racist, anti-poverty biases. I agree that unrestrained power is deadly. Police must be held to account for their actions and failures to act. I also believe that they have been given mandates to enforce unjust, biased, intrusive laws and to act in place of therapists, doctors and comforters.

Many of them are compassionate and caring as they “protect and serve.” I know that these officers do face danger daily. For instance, my son works in a town of about 31,000, of which over 90% are white. Race is rarely an issue in his work.

Several years ago, a police officer was killed in a nearby town while trying to serve a warrant on a man who failed to appear for his trial for a violent offense. The officer was shot in the head and died. I was sick, I could have been the grieving mother.

A short while later there was a disturbance of the peace call. Generally, this requires officers to direct people to turn down the music or to break up an out-of-control party. Luckily, my son felt that something was off that night and so directed the pair to don bullet-proof vests. The officers approached the door of the peace-disturbers only to be hit by bullets shot through the front door.

My son and other police raced to the scene. One person had been shot in the chest and shoulder. The bullet-proof vest may have saved his life. The other had been hit in his neck, millimeters from his carotid artery. My son cradled him until help arrived.

My son dove repeatedly into freezing waters to get a driver trapped in his car which had left the road.

He discovered that a car he had begun to chase for driving erratically had one of its passengers lying on the back seat with a shotgun ready to blast him through the door if my son hadn't called off the dangerous chase.

I've heard him cry over deaths of wanted criminals. I've heard his anguish over a father holding a young child hostage And his delight when a lost toddler is found.

Police are needed. We count on them to catch the bad guys and to protect us. We pass strict laws and force police to enforce them. Drug operations have heavy artillery which makes near-military police equipment necessary in limited instances.

He and I often debate force needed, the need to honor civil rights, and cases in the news. But he and I know that his life is in danger daily and that those seeking power over others aren't fit to police anyone.

And he keeps cash handy in case I need bail if I'm arrested at a march or rally.

Summary 11-6-21

[00:58:31] **JAY TOMLINSON - HOST, BEST OF THE LEFT:** We've just heard clips today starting with *Today, Explained* breaking down the dynamics of some notable school board meetings. *Zerlina* made a direct comparison between the protests of today and the angry parents of the 60s protesting integration. *The NPR Politics Podcast* discussed the influence of national politics on local matters. *All In with Chris Hayes* made the direct comparison of this year's protests with that of the Tea Party. *The Thom Hartmann Program* dug even deeper into the motivations of right-wing billionaire backers for fanning these particular flames. And *Battleground* brought in the topic of QAnon to describe the influence of the conspiracy theory on mainstream republicanism.

That's what everyone heard, but members also heard bonus clips, including *Zerlina* also making the connection between these protests and the Tea Party, with an emphasis on the thread of racism that runs through both. And *Battleground* continued their discussion about QAnon and looked ahead to the impact on the 2022 elections.

To hear that and all of our bonus content delivered seamlessly into your podcast feed, sign up to support the show at bestoftheleft.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.

Final comments on the nature of the debate over the present and future of policing

[00:59:54] **JAY TOMLINSON - HOST, BEST OF THE LEFT:** Thanks to all of those who called into the voicemail line or wrote in their messages to be played as VoicedMails. If you'd like to leave a comment or a 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.

So we heard from Maureen from Boston today with a couple of questions and some comments.

So one at a time: What's going on with Kamala Harris? My take is that she's been working on immigration policy. That's sort of the thing she was assigned to do, and it hasn't been going well. We've done shows about it. And so I would imagine that there's an effort to keep it relatively low profile until they have something to brag about, such as recently, they announced that they were going to try to give money to the separated families. So that's the sort of thing that they would publicize. But in terms of making progress on changing our immigration policies, which hadn't been good for an extremely long time, it's not like Trump made a great system terrible. We're not going to make it good overnight. And since that's her project, they are not publicizing it. And so we don't hear from her a lot.

Also, she's been doing campaign speeches in support of Democrats, like during the California recall election and this year's off-year elections. And so those don't become national news. They're not interesting enough to talk about.

So again, she's, she's sort of out there, she's doing her thing, but it's not newsworthy to the casual news consumer.

As for Manchin, as far as I can tell slash remember, he was last relevant back during his reelection campaign in 2018, there was certainly interest in supporting his primary opponent to try to remove him from the Democratic ticket. But, he was also around during the Brett Kavanaugh confirmation hearings and all of that. But, yeah, unsurprisingly, he only becomes relevant every time the Senate is split 50-50, and then he becomes incredibly relevant. If he became a Republican, he may even hold that same pivotal position in a split Senate. And if it's not split, he would probably also be irrelevant as a Republican.

Now, as for Maureen's stories of individual police, either in danger or having morals or compassion or any of those things, I appreciate where Maureen is coming from, but I don't find those stories are very compelling because they don't take into account the holistic view of a future without police that people are working towards.

There's not an imaginary, "Oh, wouldn't it be great if society was just like it is today, except without police." What is implicit in the campaign is the desire to make policing unnecessary, not to just to get rid of it, but for it to actually be unnecessary.

So for instance, one of the stories that Maureen told was about how well armed drug gangs are, and uses that as an explanation for why police need to also be well-armed. But to me, all I hear is another good reason to decriminalize drugs. I mean, those gangs can only make the money they do, which necessitates the weapons that they have, because the drugs they sell are illegal. So that's a perfect example of making that form of policing unnecessary by decriminalizing drugs, thereby removing the incentive to sell drugs illegally.

But generally speaking, describing the current dangers and the individual goodness of some cops just misses the point of the campaign to remake society, and sidesteps all of the systemic forces at work within policing. Whenever you individualize a concept, it distracts from the systemic forces at play and opens the door to lots of excuses about "Well, but I mean, this individual person is good and has feelings, and so you can't paint them all with the same brush," and that is just not how systemic thinking works. The phrase that defenders of police use to simultaneously condemn bad cops while defending the system is, "Well, it's just one bad apple." But that's about the most ironic turn of phrase they could have chosen to go with because the end of that saying is that one bad apple spoils the barrel. That is a phrase about an individual apple, which is actually about the systemic problem of an apple going bad. I mean, that is absolutely more in line with the progressive argument about the systemically bad nature of policing and the destructive nature of power, that even relatively moral officers end up being entrapped by, just like all those good apples in the barrel who get turned rotten by the one bad apple that went bad first.

But to close off, all of this reminded me of one of the most disingenuous criticisms made by the right toward members of the squad, like AOC. And to be clear, I am not comparing Maureen's comments to the far right. I don't think she's saying things similar to what they're saying. But she did sort of remind me of them.

So the squad advocates defunding the police and redistributing that money to other government services and programs that would better serve society. You know, in other words, it's the concept that I dubbed "skate park politics." If skaters are bothering people in a public park, don't just use hostile architecture to shoo them away, build a skate park to serve the underlying needs of the

community, thereby not just solving the problem, but improving society in the meantime.

So the right points this out, in contrast to the fact that those women also spend money on private security to protect themselves, as if these are contradictory actions. Their advocacy is about the world they hope to build. Their need for private security is a necessity of the world we currently live in, particularly because the world we live in is infused with patriarchal white supremacy that sees the squad as so dangerous to the status quo power dynamics, that there are millions of people in the country who would absolutely rejoice if harm came to any of those women. So the right fights against making improvements to society, fosters the environment of danger for those working for change, and then criticize those same people for living realistically in our current world, rather than pretending that their lives are not under threat.

So to be clear, I am not criticizing Maureen for having complicated feelings about policing. Of course anyone who is as close to the subject as she is, would put more emphasis on the requirements of the here and now just as the squad does when they hire their private security. The important thing to keep in mind is that the changes we're advocating for will take time, and that everyone who is advocating for those changes up to and including the total abolition of policing know that it'll take time. So these are not contradictory positions. They're positions that take time into consideration.

As always, keep the comments coming in at 202-999-3991, or by emailing me to 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, and participation in our bonus episodes. Thanks to the Monosyllabic, Transcriptionist Trio, Ben, Ken, and Scott for their volunteer work helping put our transcripts together. Thanks to Amanda Hoffman for all of her work on our social media outlets, activism segments, graphic designing, web mastering, and bonus show co-hosting. And thanks to those who support the show by becoming a member or purchasing gift memberships at BestoftheLeft.com/support or from right inside the Apple podcast app. Membership is how you get instant access to our incredibly good bonus episodes, in addition to there being extra content and no ads in all of our regular episodes.

So coming to you from far outside the conventional wisdom of Washington, DC, my name is Jay!, and this has been the Best of the Left podcast coming to

you twice weekly, thanks entirely to the members and donors to the show
fromBestoftheLeft.com.