

## **You Might Be Right - Post Election - Transcript**

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**Marianne Wanamaker:** Welcome to "You Might Be Right," a place for civil conversations about tough topics brought to you by the Baker School of Public Policy and Public Affairs at the University of Tennessee, with funding support from members of our Producers Circle. To learn more about how you can support our work, visit [Youmightberight.org](http://Youmightberight.org).

An unprecedented presidential campaign ended with the decisive election of Donald Trump. Trump made inroads with nearly every demographic group, riding a wave of global anti-incumbent sentiment and voter dissatisfaction with the economy.

In this episode, our hosts, former Tennessee Governors Phil Bredesen and Bill Haslam, are joined by a presidential historian and a political scholar to debrief the election. What have we learned and what can history tell us about what might be next?

This episode was recorded on November 14th, 2024, nine days after the presidential election.

**Bill Haslam:** Well, Phil, it's a little different world than the last time we talked.

**Phil Bredesen:** I hadn't noticed. Has something happened here in the past couple of weeks?

**Bill Haslam:** We're a week and a half post-election. That's obviously been very significant, and so that feels like the right topic for today. We have two great guests, and then we're going to finish the show by the two of us giving our impressions of the election, what happened, and what's next.

**Phil Bredesen:** I think this could be interesting and I hope timely and I hope informative.

**Bill Haslam:** Could be interesting? You don't have a lot of faith in us.

**Phil Bredesen:** Well, I'm just still working on it.

Well, Bill, we've got two great guests, as you have said here today, and I'd like to introduce the first one, Dr. Andy Busch. Andy is the associate director of the Institute of American Civics at the Baker School, a fine institution if I can say so. Previously taught at the University of Denver and Claremont McKenna College He focuses on American political institutions, elections, and public policy.

He's also been a visiting fellow at the Princeton University James Madison program. He's authored or co-authored a couple of dozen books on these topics, most recently about Ronald Reagan and the firing of the air traffic controllers. Participated in national forums on key issues, has a BA from the University of Colorado, MA and PhD from the University of Virginia.

And Andy, we're delighted to have you.

**Andy Busch:** Well, thank you. It's a real pleasure to be here.

**Bill Haslam:** We also have Dr. Lindsay Chervinsky, who's actually not new. Our listeners will remember her from when we were up at Mount Vernon, and she's a presidential historian and is now the executive director of the George Washington Presidential Library at Mount Vernon. She's done a lot of research. And particularly worthy of notice is she wrote about The Cabinet: George Washington and the Creation of an American Institution, which is obviously timely today. And she wrote about John Adams and the Making the Presidency.

So thrilled to have you with us today, Lindsay.

**Lindsay Chervinsky:** Thank you.

**Phil Bredesen:** I want to just start out with the question of a historical context. It's something you both know a great deal about. Is this truly an extraordinary point in time in American history? Have we been in similar places with similar kinds of issues before? How do you see that?

**Lindsay Chervinsky:** Well, I think there are certainly elements of our experience that have occurred before. We've been in moments of really intense partisanship, been in moments where political violence feels like it's a common threat, concerns about xenophobia and civil rights and citizenship. So these things tend to happen in cycles and they ebb and they flow. The 1790s, the 1850s, the 1890s, the 1960s – these are all examples of times that I think we've seen similar patterns. And, of course, the Grover Cleveland example of losing a reelection campaign and then coming back and winning is an apt parallel for the current presidential cycle that we have just experienced.

But there are also things about the moment that we are living in that are unprecedented and I use that word carefully. In the previous election, we had never had a major party candidate deny the outcome of the race. Even in the Civil War, the South left because it accepted the result. It didn't deny the result. And so that is definitely something we've never seen before.

**Andy Busch:** Yeah, I think there are a lot of extraordinary things about this election, including the thing that Dr. Chervinsky just mentioned. You have a president who loses and then comes back. It's only happened one other time in American history. We've had a president who dropped out five weeks before the convention. We had two assassination attempts during the election campaign.

We had the first, speaking of John Quincy Adams, really the first major party nominee I would say since John Quincy Adams 200 years ago, who gained the position without ever having either won a contested convention or primaries. It's been one or the other usually. And in this case, neither. And so very unusual. I would say in those respects, probably the most unusual

and perhaps even bizarre election since 1968.

On the other hand, what we had in a lot of ways, looking at it from a political science perspective, is a situation where without knowing anything about the candidates, without knowing any of this hubbub that happened over the last year, you had a vice president running when the president had about a 40 percent approval rating and two-thirds of the people in the country in polls said that they thought that the country was on the wrong track.

So in that sense, the outcome at least was completely ordinary. It was what you would expect, if you don't know anything else about the situation. And in that respect, it's a lot like maybe 1980 or '92 or 2008 when people's perceptions of the economy were down, they didn't like the incumbents that much, and you had a major change.

**Bill Haslam:** And I'd add to that, you had not only the vice president of a unpopular president, but who failed to distinguish herself from that president in any way.

Well, let me ask you this. The country, really almost every county shifted right, even the counties that Vice President Harris won. You had New York. The county that New York's in was only like a 10-point gap or something. Every border county, Hispanic county along the Texas-Mexico border, President Trump won. What caused this major rightward shift, if you will?

**Andy Busch:** Well, I think there were a couple of issues that helped to drive it in a big way. One was inflation. The inflation rate, the rate at which prices are rising, has gone down over the last couple of years. But the price increases that were quite major the first couple of years of the Biden administration remained in place. I mean, they didn't get lower. The prices didn't go down. They just started going up by a slightly slower rate. So you have that. Inflation is historically an issue that drives big changes. You saw that in 1980 as well.

And I think the immigration issue is one where in 2020 there were a lot of people who felt that President Trump's approach had been too harsh, that it was too extreme, but in a sense that the Biden administration went to the opposite extreme. And there were a lot of problems on the border. So to me it's not surprising that some of the areas that were most affected by that border situation wound up flipping. It's not the typical thing to have those really big changes, but you do see it sometimes when issues are lined up just the right way.

**Lindsay Chervinsky:** One of the things that I think is interesting about history is often when we're living through a historical moment, we know that, we're just not totally sure what direction we're going yet. And I think in this moment, it's hard to tell if the shift right is genuinely an ideological shift in the nation or is more just a rejection of where we currently are. This is also identified as an anti-incumbency feeling or spirit. And that is one that has been felt across the globe. I think in every single election in this calendar year, the incumbent party has been thrown out. And so it's hard to tell if that shift right is one that is going to be permanent and long-lasting or is more just a general rejection of where we currently are.

**Phil Bredezen:** And I was actually about to ask, and you've partially answered it, do you have a sense of whether there actually is a shift right in political views underlying this or this simply is we're going to throw the bums out and put the other bums in, which has happened with great regularity? Is there any sense that the country itself is ideologically moving right as opposed to voting for a more right candidate?

**Lindsay Chervinsky:** Well, I'm not sure that we really know. My only sense of the ideological piece is not even necessarily that the country itself is moving right, but rather a rejection of the sense of where the Democratic Party is. And I say sense quite intentionally because I think in the minds of a lot of voters, they still identify the Democratic Party with a lot of the positions of 2016, 2019, 2020, as opposed to what is actually articulated in this very current moment. So things like defunding the police or using taxpayer dollars to pay for sex changes for undocumented immigrants. These were not things that were discussed in this campaign cycle, but in the minds of the voters I think are still quite pressing.

**Bill Haslam:** Let me ask this to both of you. Before this election, both sides felt like if the other guys win, this is a existential threat to democracy in our country. What would you say to folks maybe particularly since the Democrats were on the losing side of this, what would you say to those who say democracy is at risk because of this election and maybe the same thing you would've said to Republicans before?

**Andy Busch:** Well, I would start with some of the things that Dr. Chervinsky started with right off the bat, and that is that we've gone through a lot of historical moments that have been very difficult, including contested elections, political violence, even concerns that the president was becoming dictatorial. You saw this in the 1790s. You saw it under Andrew Jackson. The reason the Whig Party came into existence was to oppose what they thought was a dictatorial tendency on the part of Andrew Jackson.

You have Richard Nixon compiling enemies lists and trying to get the IRS to go after his political adversaries. Even in the last few years, there are some people who complained that President Biden was acting in a somewhat monarchical way by trying to forgive student loans, which in a sense was in their view at least taking onto himself the power of the purse, which is something that the legislatures have been fighting for since before there were legislatures. I mean, the Magna Carta, before there was even a legislature really in Britain was about that. I think these things, these concerns are not unprecedented. That's not to say that they aren't genuine or that there aren't reasons for concern. I would say, generally speaking, if I were to give people advice on either side, one piece of advice would be learn your history so you understand that this is not a completely unprecedented moment, but also be vigilant.

Know your constitution. Know your rights. Know how checks and balances are supposed to work so that if they don't work, you recognize it. Exercise your right to vote. And I think each side needs to do a better job of thinking institutionally rather than just what gets them advantage in the short run. And that means, among other things, being willing to police your own side.

And that's something that has fallen by the wayside to some extent, the willingness of parties to police their own in the way that, for example, Howard Baker did during the Watergate crisis. He was willing to police his own side, and you just don't see that as much anymore. And when you have that, you do start to have a breakdown of some of the checks and balances.

**Lindsay Chervinsky:** I agree with a lot of that. I think it was Ben Wittes who said – I don't remember. I need to credit this idea. I was not the originator of it, but democracy is not a light switch. You don't turn it on and turn it off. It's really much more of a dimmer system that moves in 360 degrees. And so at any given moment, we can have a stronger democracy or a weaker democracy, and maybe there are steps in different directions, but it doesn't mean that it's gone just because the election went a certain way.

And so I think the key is to focus on the real elements of what it means to have a democratic system and to be less influenced by or less focused on the rhetoric and the outrage and some of perhaps the more theatrical elements, and instead, focus on the rule of law. How is the rule of law holding up? How are elections? Are they free and fair and safe? Even if we don't like the outcome, we just had a fantastically free and fair and safe election. Are things like accountability still applicable? Are things like our institutions and representation still applicable?

And so I think if we can focus on the things that actually really genuinely make up what it means to be a republic and try and support those and advocate for those, we will be in a much better position.

**Phil Bredezen:** Just a follow-up question to that, certainly Donald Trump is coming in with an intended agenda to make substantial major changes in the way government works. And I often think back to, I probably won't get the quote exactly right, but when Eisenhower was elected, Truman saying, "Poor Ike, he'll get in the office and he'll say, do this and do that, and nothing will happen." Is Trump going to experience the same thing?

**Lindsay Chervinsky:** Well, ironically, of course, Eisenhower actually got a great deal done and was a very effective executive, because he really actually knew how to manage men. No president gets everything passed that they want to get passed. That's just a rule of politics, regardless of who they are and whether they control all three houses of government or not. So he will certainly not accomplish everything that he has promised that he will do.

But he's made very clear that he learned from last time. He learned what obstacles got in his way last time. He learned to surround himself with people who won't slow him down. And a lot of the people in Congress, whether it be in the House or the Senate, who served as roadblocks are no longer there. And so I think it is highly likely that he will achieve more of his agenda this term than he did the first time.

**Andy Busch:** Yeah, I think in general I would agree with that. I think that he is going to face issues the longer time goes on because I think right now Republicans are excited about the fact that they seem to have won all three branches. Donald Trump will have come into office with at

least a plurality of the popular vote, as well as the Electoral College. May not have the majority, may not have more than 50 percent by the time everything is counted, but he'll almost certainly have a plurality.

So they're riding high at the moment, but they also have very small margins in the House. And there's a House election that'll be coming up in two years. They have a little bit bigger cushion in the Senate relative to the size of the body, but there's a Senate election coming up in two years and the map is as bad for Republicans two years from now as it was for Democrats this year. I think you're going to start to see vulnerable incumbents in both Houses who will start to try to distinguish themselves if they're in tough races and it doesn't take very many of them. And the courts are still going to be there. And even though Trump will have made a lot of court appointments, one of his complaints at the end of his last term was that a lot of the folks that he put on the court were not willing to just go along with whatever he wanted. And he might have "fixed" that problem in his political appointees, but I don't think the courts are going to change. I think they will continue to operate independently.

**Bill Haslam:** Let me ask both of you. What are the key differences between this election of '24 and the election of '20 which ended up with roughly similar margins on the other side? What were the differences?

**Lindsay Chervinsky:** Well, I think there are maybe a couple. The first is who is seen as the incumbent? So Trump was in office and he was seen, of course, he was naturally therefore the incumbent. And I think we were still in a moment where anti-incumbent spirit was riding pretty high. I think that's been pretty much a constant perhaps since maybe 2008. And so he had less ability to say he could come in and fix it because he was already in office.

I think Biden seemed like a candidate that most people associated with normalcy. So he would offer a return to normalcy in a way that Harris couldn't really do because she was really very much linked to his administration. And I think that in terms of COVID, for all that voters have appeared to have forgiven Trump for his role in that, at the time, a lot of Americans were really mad at him for his handling of the COVID pandemic crisis. And so there were just a lot of big institutional factors that were at play.

**Andy Busch:** I think, if you look at the map, not a lot did change. Basically, not a lot changed from 2016, I should say. So what happened basically was that there were a number of states that President Trump had won by very small margins in 2016. He wound up losing them in 2020 and hence the presidency. And this time around he won them back again. The states that he won in this election were pretty much all the same states that he won in 2016 plus Nevada. That was the only difference.

I was reading an analyst last week who said, "Well, it's almost as if 2020 didn't happen. It was just a blip in there." You had the pandemic. You had other things going on. We almost went straight from 2016 to 2024 without a whole lot of change. What did change was that where Trump won narrowly, he won a bit less narrowly. I mean, these were margins that were bigger

than the few tenths of a percent in 2016.

And the other big change that people haven't talked about as much is that, although you touched on it earlier in regard to the South Texas areas, is that there are areas that were generally really strongly Democratic that lost a lot of support for the Democratic side without them actually flipping. So you look at New York, you look at New Jersey, you look at Illinois, these are states that in 2020 Joe Biden won by double digits, sometimes by upwards of 20 points.

And in 2024, those margins in all of those states were about half of what they were. One of the signs to me that Donald Trump was probably going to have a good night was when it became clear that he was holding it pretty close in Virginia, which he did wind up losing, but he only lost by five instead of 10. So that was a big change and one that doesn't show up on the map as clearly because there were states that Trump lost before and he lost them again. But the fact that he lost them by a lot less is what has, I think, given him probably the plurality and the popular vote.

**Phil Bredesen:** I just had a quick question. I'm trying to understand. The country is full of people on both parties who are always going to be there. They're always going to be Democrats. They're always going to be Republicans. And there's some group in the middle that I guess can go either way. In your mind, for someone who voted for Biden the last time, but this time decided to vote for Trump, one of these so-called undecideds or independents or whatever, what do you think was going through their mind? I mean, what was at play there that would make them change their mind about that?

**Lindsay Chervinsky:** Well, based on the focus groups that I've listened to, it seems like the predominant factor in the case of those voters is they felt like their wallet was in a better place when Trump was in office. And for all of our talk about identity and class and all of that, I think people tend to vote with their wallets, or to borrow James Carville's phrase, "It's the economy, stupid."

And so I think that for people who feel like they're struggling and their purse doesn't stretch as far, they're willing to tolerate a whole lot. One person said, "I'll turn off my TV and ignore him for four years, but my wallet will be in a better place." And I think that about sums it up.

**Andy Busch:** Yeah, I mean, I think that's a large part of it.

**Phil Bredesen:** Well, that's a depressing sum up.

**Bill Haslam:** Andy, you have a thought on that?

**Andy Busch:** Oh yeah, I think that's a large part of it. I think there was just a sense too that everything was going wrong, not just the economy, but you look around the world, things not going well in lots of ways there too. I think there was just a sense that it was time for a change.

In 2020, a lot of the Biden voters were Biden voters because they decided it was time for a change, and they decided it was still time for a change.

**Bill Haslam:** Let me ask each of you a final question. We usually end this with asking our guests a statement Howard Baker made of always remember the other person might be right. What did you personally learn from this election that you didn't know before? If we could somehow say, how do you view this versus how you looked at it two or three weeks ago, what would you say?

**Andy Busch:** Versus two or three weeks ago, I don't think I would say much different. By the time we got to the election, I was pretty convinced that it could go either way. It's not really surprised too much by the outcome. But a year and a half ago, I actually wrote a piece in which I argued that it was unlikely that Donald Trump could win. If he did, it was unlikely that he would carry the popular vote with him. And if he did all of that, the least likely thing would be that he would have learned really useful, beneficial things from his first term.

I was clearly wrong about the first two things. So a year and a half ago, I was not on the right track. I will reserve judgment on the third of those points. We'll see how things go. But I thought that he had too much baggage. I really did. I thought that President Trump was carrying a little bit too much baggage for people to support. He had about a 47 percent ceiling all through his presidency, in his two elections before, and I was not at that point convinced that he could breach that.

**Lindsay Chervinsky:** I will confess that I'm a pro-democracy voter and so I really view small D democracy as the fundamental upon which all of their policies and positions should be built. And while I understand that not a lot of voters necessarily have that same intellectual framework, I thought that there were enough other things that would shift the outcome of the election or at least make it closer.

I thought that more women would vote based on post Roe v. Wade and the Dobbs decision. I thought that more voters would be swayed by the indictments against Trump. I thought that more voters would be swayed by his threats to set up military tribunals. These are what I consider to be democracy issues. And it turns out that those things a lot of people feel like are a luxury when they're struggling day to day.

And so that was a really important lesson for me. And what I have to rethink is how that type of message is communicated. How do I, as someone who studies and shares information about our republic and our democratic institutions, how can I do a better job of sharing the history of that and helping people understand that I think that is a fundamental thing to pursuing all of the other freedoms?

FDR said, "Freedom from want, freedom of religion, all of those things depend on a democratic society." So how can I do a better job of helping people understand that that is the bedrock for everything else?



**Phil Bredesen:** I have through my political career constantly been just brought up short and reminded that a lot of people vote very instrumentally. It's not about abstract issues, it's about how do I feel today about my pocketbook? How do I feel today about this cultural issue? I'll put up with a lot of other stuff if you pull the right lever on these things that are bothering me.

**Bill Haslam:** Thank you both for joining us. So we appreciate your insight. Like I said, I think this is a, I don't know a better way to frame this than a historical election. I mean, for all the reasons that you've talked about. So thank you both for bringing us your perspective on this. We're very grateful.

**Andy Busch:** Well, thank you.

**Lindsay Chervinsky:** Thank you so much for having us.

**Bill Haslam:** Tell me your thoughts. I'd love to hear what's your fundamental case here about what happened?

**Phil Bredesen:** I have a little different take on the election. I don't see it so much in terms of it was the Democrats versus the Republicans and so on. To me, what happened was for the first time in a very long time, there was a rejection of I guess what you call the liberal democratic order of governing. I mean, forgetting the word liberal, it's the way you and I governed.

**Bill Haslam:** Small D. It's small D.

**Phil Bredesen:** Small L.

**Bill Haslam:** And small D. Right.

**Phil Bredesen:** It's what Howard Baker was, very much an institutionalist, believed in that kind of approach. And people seemed very willing to give it up this time around. The question that raises for me is not so much, well, what should the Democrats have done differently strategically or what did the Republicans do right, to say the big thing that seemed to me to happen was this rejection of the style of governing which this country has had for a very long time in favor of something very, very different.

And that leads me to say, okay, I'm part of that group that's been in charge, as are you. What did we do wrong? I mean, what did we miss about what was going on in the country that this whole fundamental approach to government in our country has just been rejected out of hand in this election?

**Bill Haslam:** Well, I think that's definitely worth us exploring and hopefully we can do that down the road in these podcasts. But also I would throw out this, there's a saying that there's an answer to every problem that is simple, obvious, clear, and wrong. Because one of the things I

learned in office is most issues are a lot more complicated than you think they are. There's another side to the argument.

Was it Burke who said, you should operate on institutions the same way you would operate on your father, carefully and slowly. Because you want to make sure you don't cause a new problem in solving the other problems. So I think one of the things worth exploring is this idea for folks out there, well, that's easy. If you'll just hit the simple button, my life would be better.

**Phil Bredezen:** But I think there's a reason that bumper stickers exist. I mean, there's a lot of people think in those terms. If these political things are not part of your daily life in the way they are for you or me or somebody in academia doing it, I think it's more instrumental. It's more about just what's bothering you today and who do you think will do the best job of fixing that.

I guess what has bothered me is that Donald Trump has said so many things, which are just at 180 degrees from stuff that we have professed to believe profoundly, things having to do with the rule of law and the like. What has happened that those are not disqualifying?

I mean, I think for any election prior to a decade ago or something, those are disqualifying things on the face of it. They no longer are and the person saying them has won. His ability to implement that stuff is another question, but I'd sure like to know in what ways we have failed to understand what's going on in the country at the level that you have this kind of a flop.

**Bill Haslam:** I think, I mean, Dr. Chervinsky, partly her answer was at the end of the day, what I feel in my wallet might overrule or does overrule what I feel and think other places. I'd say you had that with you can't ignore the immigration issue. I think I'm right here. There were average of 975,000 people a year coming in illegally when President Trump was in office and that number went to three or 4 million a year. That's a felt need that people felt real strongly.

I think the third thing, you could always look and see what's working by what campaigns are doubling down on. And the Trump campaign, the ad that they ran five times more than even the ads about the economy was about the free transgender surgeries even for illegal Immigrants. And I think folks were going, the line was in there, "She's for they/them. He's for you." And I think they hit a cultural nerve there as well of people saying, "I feel like things are changing fast and I'm a little tired of people telling me that what I think isn't appropriate."

**Phil Bredezen:** Yeah, well, I couldn't agree with you more. I mean, I think those things were very damaging, but we had a Democratic nominee who was a senator from California. I mean, she is going to have a record of saying things like that to become a senator from California.

**Bill Haslam:** And had run in a primary in '20 that was a very different environment.

**Phil Bredezen:** Right.

**Bill Haslam:** One thought I have is this, that we're an evenly divided country. I mean, like I said,

the House is going to end up a handful of votes apart. The Senate now is going to probably be 53/47, but was one or two votes the other way last time. Presidential elections are all close. I mean, in some ways this was a huge directional shift. But in terms of electoral margins, out of the last 60, this was 44th, so it wasn't like this – while it was decisive, I don't know if it deserves landslide category.

But one thought I have is this, we're an evenly divided country. One side wins. So in '20 Biden wins. And if you remember, the Senate was still up for grabs after the election because the two seats in Georgia were contested. Trump basically goes down to Georgia in the runoff election in Georgia for two seats and almost half encourages Republicans not to vote.

And so Democrats win those two seats, control the Senate. And so people convinced Biden, "You should go big. You should go be FDR. This is a time to go big." And they do. They do with the Inflation Reduction Act, a lot of other policies. My theory is Republicans are getting ready to do the exact same thing. And so in this country that's evenly split, we're going to go from guardrail to guardrail. We veered off hard to the left. President Trump has some pretty decisive activities he's going to take. He's going to veer hard to the right. And that nobody is going to have this lasting majority until they figure out that living guardrail to guardrail is not a way to have an enduring leadership like the Dems did from FDR all the way up until Eisenhower.

**Phil Bredeesen:** I've always felt that things like everybody who comes into office, and you and I had the same thing, one of the measures is what do you do in the first 100 days, which I always thought was a – and then in the 100th day, the newspapers will make a list of what you've accomplished and haven't that –

**Bill Haslam:** Kind of a JFK deal, right? He made a big point.

**Phil Bredeesen:** Well, it started out with FDR, who took office at a time when the country was really flat on its back and decisive action was called for in terms of that. And I've often thought that kind of was damaging to the process of governing, to expect somebody to come in and then all these things you do because it just invites the I'm going to dive in here before I really know what I'm doing or what the problem is and make these changes.

I think that the notion that presidents come in and whatever their majorities are, that suddenly it's a mandate to go big and the other side. And there's probably a lot of that way from fringier parts of your party. It's just something we've got to get over as a country and just get back to the notion of a little more standardized process.

I think the Congress partly at fault. This notion of getting the Congress back to something like regular order, I think is really important, where you actually do what the Congress is intended to do, which things are proposed and they're debated in committees and they're marked up and they're done. And both parties are completely guilty of avoiding that entirely. I think about Obamacare from my party.

**Bill Haslam:** I've tried to make the point on here before, our Constitution was designed with the idea that there would be competing ideas and thoughts and that compromise would be required. That was the subtext of the Constitution, if you will. Now, because compromise has gotten a bad connotation, nobody's willing to go do the hard stuff, which requires getting folks on the other side to come toward you because it looks like compromise, like I said, which puts you in a bad spot.

I think the result is the legislative branch has said, "We can't or won't solve these big issues," so they've defaulted to the President or they've pushed it to the courts. And so because of the lack of courage to do the hard things, we've seen a growth in the power of the presidency and more things ended up in the court than I think were ever intended to be decided in the court system.

**Phil Bredeesen:** There's no question about that. I mean, I'm not in office now, so I can say this, but I think the Congress is a disgrace. I think it fails to do the most fundamental things that it was intended to do. It was supposed to be a separate center of power, a check and balance. It has completely failed in that. We'll see what happens in the next few weeks here, but they completely failed in that fundamental things about running the government, like preparing a budget.

There's nothing much more fundamental than deciding how you want to spend those resources, and they've been completely unable to do that for an extended period of time now. I don't know what the answer is, but I think just the failure of Congress to fulfill its constitutional purpose is right at the heart of a lot of the issues we have.

**Bill Haslam:** I think wrapped up in there, you hear a lot of folks say, "I'll never give an inch." One of our prior guests, Yuval Levin, talked about folks who say that I'll never give an inch are basically promising not to do their job, because our system is not designed for people to go draw a hard line in the sand and say, "I'll never ever move past that to try to solve a problem." Because again, in an evenly split country, that just means you're going to default to no answer, which means the President decides or a court decides.

**Phil Bredeesen:** So you have any ideas about how to fix all this, Phil?

**Bill Haslam:** Well, listen, as Senator Baker used to always say, "the Republic will survive." You can always count on Americans to do the right thing after we've tried everything else. I think Churchill said that or somebody. But my sense is we're getting ready to go through a learning period as a country. And my hope is that we don't just continue to have this knee-jerk, we've been over here. We have inflation. We have immigration out of control. The culture has gotten too woke. Let's jerk back over here. And then we're going to get everything done while we can, while we have the steering wheel, knowing that once they get the steering wheel, they're just going to pull it back over to the other side. I don't think that's a recipe for success.

**Phil Bredeesen:** No, I agree with you. I mean, people talk about this as a historical election, and I certainly agree it is. I just don't think we know why it's been a historical election yet, that there's

a lot of stuff to be played out. But I think the country will be different a decade from now and that you'll see this as a fundamental turning point. I just don't know in what way.

**Bill Haslam:** Let me ask you one final question. When you look at our politics today, there's a meanness and a sadness about it. Politics has always been rough. Ten miles from here, Jackson on his deathbed. They said, "Do you have any regrets?" And he said, "Yes. I wish I'd shot Clay and hung Calhoun."

And Clay was the Speaker of the House and Calhoun was his own Vice President. So it's always been rough, but there just seems to be a meanness now, that's a quaint word, I know, but that's actually encouraged and applauded. And when the other side gives up an inch of ground, there's cheering and ridicule from one side. Any thoughts about how we address that?

**Phil Bredeesen:** I think a lot of things they just come back to the population as a whole. I mean, ultimately, you can talk about dysfunction in Washington or the way things are playing out, but it ultimately comes down to the choices that people have made when they've gone into the voting booths and what they value and what they see as qualifying or disqualifying in candidates.

I mean, really it's more than on his ability. It's that there's a really mean undercurrent to a lot of the stuff now. I think it's starting to bother people. One of the feedbacks that I get about our podcasts from people is just, I kind of like you hear people talking that don't agree on something, but they're nice to each other. It's one of the things that people seem to value. And I think just electing some people who are willing to conduct themselves in that kind of a way really helps.

**Bill Haslam:** Well, thanks. It's been a good season going through the election, having these conversations with you. Like you said, my sense is you're right. We have a lot learn about what happened in the last election and what that means. And then as always, elections have consequences and we'll see how they play out over the coming year.

**Phil Bredeesen:** That's very good. I think we will have no lack of topics to discuss.

**Bill Haslam:** And maybe the idea, the thought you brought up when we started this of, again, what you call liberal democracy, which is again, small L small D. We're not talking left-right, Republican-Democrat. We're talking the political institutional process that is governed to this country for a long time that seems to be held in low regard now. What happened, what do we own of that, and what can be changed?

**Phil Bredeesen:** It's affected the two parties differently and so on. But I mean, it's also affected the Republican Party. I mean, people like Howard Baker would today either be driven out of the party or made to take a knee, and that's very different than it was even a couple decades ago.

**Bill Haslam:** A lot more to talk about. Thanks. Have a great Thanksgiving.

**Phil Bredesen:** Same to you.

**Marianne Wanamaker:** Thanks for listening to "You Might Be Right." Be sure to follow on Apple Podcasts, Spotify, or wherever you listen to your favorite shows. And please help spread the word by sharing, rating and reviewing the show.

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