

Transcript 15 Unicorns Pt. 2

Announcer: Welcome to Civil Discourse. This podcast will use government documents to illuminate the workings of the American government and offer context around the effects of government agencies in your everyday life. And now your hosts, Nia Rodgers, public affairs librarian, and Dr. John Augenbaugh, political science professor.

N. Rodgers: Thank you for joining us. We're in part 2 of what I think will probably be 3 parts of discussing the nomination process for becoming a department secretary. The document that we're looking at is the nomination of Michael Azar, excuse me, Alex Azar, II to be the Secretary of Health and Human services before the Committee on Finance. The link for that will be on our research guide. We are not going to talk about Mr. Azar or his specific qualities to this job. That's not what our purpose here -- our purpose here is to discuss this document. What's going into it? And what the process is for, now that we've got a nominee, now that we've got one of our unicorns, see our last episode if you don't know what I mean, then what do we do from here? So, Aughie's going to answer some questions for me, because he's patient and kind, and that's what he always does. That's why he's my favorite. The document starts with two opening statements made by two senators. And it looks to me like it's the chair and the co-chair of that committee. Is that always the case? Is that usually the case?

J. Aughenbaugh: Uhhh.

N. Rodgers: Or does it just depends in that?

J. Aughenbaugh: It depends.

N. Rodgers: Two people who say, "I like this guy."

J. Aughenbaugh: Yeah.

N. Rodgers: Or, "I don't like this guy." Are the statements always positive?

J. Aughenbaugh: The opening statements?

N. Rodgers: Mmm-hmm

J. Aughenbaugh: Typically, yes.

N. Rodgers: OK. So they're in support of the candidate.

J. Aughenbaugh: Yeah, so, it really comes down to what the committee chair and the ranking minority senator on the committee decide, how they want to go about doing it. What you typically see are two senators. In the best case scenario you get one Republican-one Democrat or one Democrat-one Republican who say, "I really like this nominee, and I'm going to go ahead and offer opening remarks to highlight why I, as a senator, like this nominee." OK.

N. Rodgers: Are opening remarks delivered verbally? Are they delivered in print? Or are they delivered both ways?

J. Aughenbaugh: They're delivered both ways.

N. Rodgers: So what we're seeing here is a transcript.

J. Aughenbaugh: It is.

N. Rodgers: And so some it was live, right? Some of it was testimony.

J. Aughenbaugh: Mmm-hmm.

N. Rodgers: And some of it is just put in for the record as, "I don't want to talk in Congress, but I want to be heard."

J. Aughenbaugh: Yes, yeah.

N. Rodgers: "I don't want to talk, but I want to be heard."

J. Aughenbaugh: And more than likely, by the way, if the opening statements are made by senators, they were probably written by a senator's staffer.

N. Rodgers: Oh, OK.

J. Aughenbaugh: It's very infrequent that a senator is actually going to go ahead and do the research and write it up. Now the senator will have final approval, but let's face it they're very busy people. So you have the opening statements, and it's kind of sort of like, you know, "Here's Johnny." You know, "Here's Nia. Nia's our nominee."

N. Rodgers: "Nia's spiffy. We like her."

J. Aughenbaugh: "Nia is our nominee."

N. Rodgers: I wish they would say "spiffy."

J. Aughenbaugh: I don't ever recall seeing that in opening statements.

N. Rodgers: But wouldn't that be awesome? If senators said, like, "Nia's spiffy. OK. We're done talking about it now."

J. Aughenbaugh: No.

N. Rodgers: That would be incredibly short. They're never that short. I looked at these, and they were several pages...

J. Aughenbaugh: Sure.

N. Rodgers: ...in the document, because they're...I guess what they're trying is to lay out sort of convincing groundwork before this person starts talking.

J. Aughenbaugh: Yes. It's kind of sort of like an introduction of a keynote speaker at a conference.

N. Rodgers: Ahh! You would never say something bad about them. "He beats his wife." Or whatever, I mean you would never say that.

J. Aughenbaugh: Yeah. "Notwithstanding, this nominee's propensity to use cocaine."

N. Rodgers: "Other than her cocaine use, Nia's great!"

J. Aughenbaugh: Great!

N. Rodgers: OK, so you would not say those kinds.

J. Aughenbaugh: These opening statements are very much like...

N. Rodgers: ...cheerlead-y, sort of.

J. Aughenbaugh: Yeah, yeah.

N. Rodgers: Happy.

J. Aughenbaugh: And then that's typically when the chairperson of the committee will then turn over the hearing to the nominee to give an opening statement.

N. Rodgers: Yes! I saw that. That's the next thing, you dashed clever man, you, for looking ahead. I noticed that he. So, does he read that statement? Is it smart for the nominee to read the statement as he's written it?

J. Aughenbaugh: Yes.

N. Rodgers: Because they've probably vetted the crap out of it before.

J. Aughenbaugh: It's perfectly acceptable to read it.

N. Rodgers: OK.

J. Aughenbaugh: It's perfectly acceptable.

N. Rodgers: You're not expected to perform, in the sense of being an actor.

J. Aughenbaugh: No, no, no. And in fact,

N. Rodgers: Don't have to learn the lines.

J. Aughenbaugh: In fact, most nominees will write up their opening statement and submit it to the committee days in advance.

N. Rodgers: Oh! OK. So this is not a mysterious process.

J. Aughenbaugh: Oh, no! It's extremely well scripted.

N. Rodgers: So I have a couple questions about. So like a specific committee always hears for a specific nominee, right?

J. Aughenbaugh: That's correct.

N. Rodgers: And it usually has to do with oversight.

J. Aughenbaugh: That's right.

N. Rodgers: Like they're going to be the oversight committee or the main oversight committee of this person.

J. Aughenbaugh: Yep. That's right.

N. Rodgers: It's always the Senate because... Isn't there something in the Constitution somewhere, mumbly, mumbly advise and consent?

J. Aughenbaugh: Yes.

N. Rodgers: I'm pretty sure it's better written than that. Sorry! Sorry, Madison. Sorry. I didn't mean to be insulting there.

J. Aughenbaugh: No, no, no. It's...

N. Rodgers: But isn't there a section there that says something about that?

J. Aughenbaugh: It's in the Constitution. The President gets to nominate executive branch positions, judicial branch positions, but it's a shared power. It is shared with the United States Senate. This is what most of us get taught at a very early age: checks and balances. This is accountability. Because, again, if you think about how, in the private sector, the CEO of a corporation gets to choose the important unit heads of the corporation. Then you get judged on performance. In our Constitution, the President doesn't have that authority alone. It's shared with the Congress.

N. Rodgers: It's shared with the Senate.

J. Aughenbaugh: Yeah, with the Senate.

N. Rodgers: So the House gets no say.

J. Aughenbaugh: No, no, no, yeah.

N. Rodgers: We don't care what the House thinks.

J. Aughenbaugh: No, the only time we care about what the House thinks is with the budget process. But in re...Now, will members of the House express their opinion on nominees to the Senate, in particular the designated Senate committee? Sure.

N. Rodgers: OK.

J. Aughenbaugh: And sometimes you even see members of the House who will testify.

N. Rodgers: Oh, on behalf of a...

J. Aughenbaugh: Or against!

N. Rodgers: Oh, eww.

J. Aughenbaugh: Oh, yeah.

N. Rodgers: Oh, that's bad.

J. Aughenbaugh: Yes.

N. Rodgers: That's the all-bad channel.

J. Aughenbaugh: That's the ultimate sign of I'm really against this nominee, if I ask the Senate committee that is holding the confirmation hearing, "Can I speak against the President's nominee?"

N. Rodgers: Can that committee deny you?

J. Aughenbaugh: Sure.

N. Rodgers: OK.

J. Aughenbaugh: And in fact,

N. Rodgers: But then you go immediately outside and hold a press conference and say, "They won't let me say the following."

J. Aughenbaugh: Conference, yes.

N. Rodgers: Humma-humma-humma-humma. And you say all the things you were going to say.

J. Aughenbaugh: And then today with social media, you just go ahead and, you know.

N. Rodgers: You post it somewhere.

J. Aughenbaugh: You post it somewhere, okay.

N. Rodgers: Put it on the candidate's wall.

J. Aughenbaugh: Wall, yeah, right.

N. Rodgers: Sorry, that's just. That would be mean and rude. Not to say that they wouldn't do it, but that would be mean and rude.

J. Aughenbaugh: Oh, my goodness, of course not.

N. Rodgers: They would never be mean and rude.

J. Aughenbaugh: Yeah, yeah, because members of the political branches are never juvenile.

N. Rodgers: So, okay, so the statement by the nominee is. Do they write that? Do they have a lawyer write that? Do they put that through Grammarly? Do they? How do they?

J. Aughenbaugh: OK. Oh it's it's a...it's a product of many hands.

N. Rodgers: OK.

J. Aughenbaugh: Many nominees, again, these are experts. These are important people. They've had positions of authority either in the public or private sector. They'll write a draft.

N. Rodgers: OK.

J. Aughenbaugh: But then the White House will say,

N. Rodgers: "Gimme that draft version."

J. Aughenbaugh: Yeah.

N. Rodgers: And then they'll get out their red pen and start making...

J. Aughenbaugh: So the White House staff, if you will, the political operation, of the executive branch...

N. Rodgers: So this is not the President?

J. Aughenbaugh: Oh, no, no, no.

N. Rodgers: This is staffers.

J. Aughenbaugh: Yeah, I mean, this is the chief of staff or, more than likely, the deputy chief of staff, okay, will go through it politically. Then it will be vetted by the office of legal counsel.

N. Rodgers: OK. I was going to ask you, "When do the lawyers come in?"

J. Aughenbaugh: Yeah. And then you may even have legal counsel for the department that the person is nominated to be in charge of might take a look at it.

N. Rodgers: Wow.

J. Aughenbaugh: Yes.

N. Rodgers: So, from the time that your nomination comes up to the time you sit down in front of this Senate committee, is gonna be...

J. Aughenbaugh: Oh, typically...

N. Rodgers: Months? Weeks?

J. Aughenbaugh: Weeks, months. Think about, for instance, right now the nominee to be the U.S. Attorney General, the head of the Justice Department...

N. Rodgers: He passed yesterday, by the way. If you don't know when this podcast is made, now you do.

J. Aughenbaugh: Yes. OK. William Barr

N. Rodgers: Along party lines.

J. Aughenbaugh: Yes, along party lines.

N. Rodgers: 54 to 43 or something.

J. Aughenbaugh: OK. Barr was nominated months ago.

N. Rodgers: Oh, okay.

J. Aughenbaugh: Alright. He testified a couple times.

N. Rodgers: Oh, so they can bring him back.

J. Aughenbaugh: Sure.

N. Rodgers: This isn't just a one-time, necessarily, process. What we're looking at may be a one time.

J. Aughenbaugh: One time, for most it's one time.

N. Rodgers: OK. But if it's particularly controversial, or if it's particularly difficult or something else comes up in the meantime, they can ask you back to.

J. Aughenbaugh: In the case of the Justice Department, why Barr was brought back is a little-known special counsel investigation. And what would he do as attorney general with the final report? Et cetera, etc.

N. Rodgers: Oh, and we're, by the way, totally going to do a podcast on commissions and commission reports at some point.

J. Aughenbaugh: Yeah.

N. Rodgers: Because we want to talk about what that process is like, what goes into that.

J. Aughenbaugh: But, I mean, for most of them, it's a one shot. OK? It's held over two, possibly three days, and, but...

N. Rodgers: But it's an interview, basically.

J. Aughenbaugh: It is an interview, so when...

N. Rodgers: So it's like a job interview, only at the extreme level...

J. Aughenbaugh: Extreme, yes.

N. Rodgers: ...of job interviews.

J. Aughenbaugh: Most of us would be, like, "Why haven't we heard yet?" Well, because the senate committee hasn't yet had the hearing and, by the way, they haven't scheduled it for another three weeks. You enjoy your time off. Enjoy waiting.

N. Rodgers: That's true. You put in an application, and then you hear nothing...

J. Aughenbaugh: And then you're like...

N. Rodgers: ...from the job, and you start to sweat.

J. Aughenbaugh: Yeah.

N. Rodgers: Did they get my application? Do they know I'm out here? So wow, this is even more excruciating for these people.

J. Aughenbaugh: Sure. And it's entirely up to the committee, usually the committee chair. You know, if the committee chair's got a good relationship with the ranking minority leader of the committee, they'll work together on setting the date for the hearing, who will get to testify, etc..

N. Rodgers: But if they don't, great googly mooglies, then you have. Then this poor person is going to get chewed up like chum in this process. OK, so it's really, really helpful if the two, if the committee chair and co-chair will work together on this sort of thing.

J. Aughenbaugh: Yeah, and Nia, you hardly ever see a co-chair. You only see co-chairs when the Senate is split evenly between Republicans and Democrats. What you have is a committee chair, and the majority party gets to decide who the committee chairs are. Committee chairs are typically the most tenured member on that committee. And when I say tenured, length of service in the Senate.

N. Rodgers: Not oldest.

J. Aughenbaugh: Not the oldest.

N. Rodgers: We love Strom Thurmond, but he wasn't necessarily the senior on a particular committee. Although by the time he served, he probably was.

J. Aughenbaugh: But then you have the ranking minority member. The ranking minority member is the person in the minority party on the committee that has the most tenure. OK.

N. Rodgers: Does that switch when the power dynamic switches? Like in the House, did that just switch during the new Congress?

J. Aughenbaugh: Sure. Yes.

N. Rodgers: People who were the chair are now the minority?

J. Aughenbaugh: Yeah, they become the ~~minority leader~~, the ranking minority member of the committee.

N. Rodgers: OK.

J. Aughenbaugh: And in regards to...

N. Rodgers: Ohhh. So it hurts you in a lot of ways when you lose an election, not just...

J. Aughenbaugh: And I explain this to my students with some regularity. Why we pay attention to elections in other states, in other districts is the majority party gets to determine who will be the chairs of committees.

N. Rodgers: Which is an incredibly powerful thing.

J. Aughenbaugh: Yeah. Because the chairs get to dictate so much of what committees do.

N. Rodgers: Is there a...could a chair put off...

J. Aughenbaugh: Sure.

N. Rodgers: ...this nomination?

J. Aughenbaugh: Uh-huh.

N. Rodgers: So they could drag their feet and just say...

J. Aughenbaugh: Oh yeah. They can drag their feet.

N. Rodgers: "We'll get to you next year."

J. Aughenbaugh: Yes.

N. Rodgers: It'll all be good. They could drag it out so long that a nominee says, "I can't wait anymore."

J. Aughenbaugh: Yes.

N. Rodgers: Like, I have to have a job. I have to have income. I have to have -- or whatever it is that they need.

J. Aughenbaugh: I can't put my life...

N. Rodgers: This is too frustrating.

J. Aughenbaugh: I can't put my life on hold.

N. Rodgers: OK.

J. Aughenbaugh: Nia, you see this...

N. Rodgers: So you could really do some harm there.

J. Aughenbaugh: Yeah.

N. Rodgers: If you were trying to stop a President's agenda in the Senate.

J. Aughenbaugh: Sure.

N. Rodgers: If you were the opposite party, you could just slow the nominations down.

J. Aughenbaugh: Yes.

N. Rodgers: To an excruciating level.

J. Aughenbaugh: And where you see this the most is not so much with Cabinet secretary nominations, but you see this with federal court judge nominations, where, if the Senate is controlled by the party in opposition to the President, the different party, they will drag their feet in regards to holding hearings. And because the way the Senate works is until the committee takes a vote, hopefully a positive vote, until they take a vote, a nominee never gets voted on by the entirety of the Senate. So everything in regards to the Senate starts with the committee hearing. So if the committee drags their feet in scheduling a hearing, or says, "We need to have follow-up hearings." You know, a nominee could go ahead and say, "I've been waiting around for months. And I still might be voted in the affirmative. And I might get a vote then on the Senate floor. But I'm tired of waiting. Or I can't put my family through this. Or I'm on sabbatical from my current job, and..."

N. Rodgers: And a decision has to be made.

J. Aughenbaugh: "A decision has to be made." OK. And again, you see this more with federal court judge nominations, where some of them have been waiting for, and I kid you not, years for a hearing, for years.

N. Rodgers: Can I just say that would make me angry. If I was that person,

J. Aughenbaugh: Yes.

N. Rodgers: It would make me angry because I would clearly be a pawn.

J. Aughenbaugh: Yes. You're...

N. Rodgers: And at that point, it's not about me.

J. Aughenbaugh: At that point you're a political...

N. Rodgers: It's about

J. Aughenbaugh: It's about politics.

N. Rodgers: It's about stymying the process.

J. Aughenbaugh: The process. And again,

N. Rodgers: So that, do justices go through the same process as we're talking about here?

J. Aughenbaugh: Sure.

N. Rodgers: Do they have statements?

J. Aughenbaugh: Yes.

N. Rodgers: And then there's testifying? And...

J. Aughenbaugh: Yes, yes.

N. Rodgers: OK, so that happens with all nominees that come before the Senate.

J. Aughenbaugh: Nominations before the Senate, that's right.

N. Rodgers: OK.

J. Aughenbaugh: Any nominee from the President for a cabinet secretary position, federal judgeship, goes in front of a committee in the Senate. And the Senate as a full body never acts until the committee has taken a vote.

N. Rodgers: But they can't kill a nomination.

J. Aughenbaugh: No, they can only report out, OK, we voted against it.

N. Rodgers: OK, so they can say, "We think this is a terrible idea, but y'all go ahead and give your opinion." But once you've kind of failed in the committee, you've failed.

J. Aughenbaugh: Committee, yes.

N. Rodgers: So I assume that rather than doing that to you publicly, which is kind of humiliating and sort of horrible, that they would go to the President and say,

J. Aughenbaugh: "You ought to..."

N. Rodgers: "This is not going to work."

J. Aughenbaugh: Yeah, pull 'em.

N. Rodgers: "You should pull this nomination."

J. Aughenbaugh: Yes. And sometimes...

N. Rodgers: Because this is the all bad channel.

J. Aughenbaugh: And sometimes Presidents get stubborn.

N. Rodgers: "Do it anyway! Let's have a full Senate vote. I'm going to make phone calls. I'm gonna try to work the process and see if I can..."

J. Aughenbaugh: Yeah, I'm gonna twist arms, or I'm going to use this failed nominee to show the people how the Senate is not doing the people's work.

N. Rodgers: Ohhh. OK. So it's a two-edged sword.

J. Aughenbaugh: It's a two edged sword.

N. Rodgers: You have to decide you really hate this person or you really think this person would do damage,

J. Aughenbaugh: That's right.

N. Rodgers: or bad things. It's not necessarily that it's personal.

J. Aughenbaugh: Oh!

N. Rodgers: It's not necessarily that you don't like them individually. You may not know them individually.

J. Aughenbaugh: No, and many...

NA: It may be that they answered a question, and you go, "Whoah, Nelly! That's not something we're interested in hearing..."

J. Aughenbaugh: And so much of it is...

NA: from a nominee.

J. Aughenbaugh: Yes.

N. Rodgers: Like I think that I'd like to cut the administration, or in my case when I was going to think about being the head of the Department of Defense (I know, it was a failure from the start.) -- but anyway, if I decide to do that, and I went in for my nomination process and said, "I've just decided to cut the workforce in half." They would probably say, "Huh, we'd like a coffee break, please." And then they'd all go back to their offices and they all would call the President at the same time, which would be great for the switchboard at the White House, and say, "Are you kidding? This person has to go." They've just said something...

J. Aughenbaugh: Yes.

N. Rodgers: ...basically career ending.

J. Aughenbaugh: Yes, yes.

N. Rodgers: Which is, I assume, why you have the lawyer sitting next to you...

J. Aughenbaugh: Yeah, cuz the lawyer...

N. Rodgers: ...at the table, so they can reach over gently and pat your hand and go, "No." And say, "Don't say that."

J. Aughenbaugh: And in some cases, they don't even pat your hand gently. They might just go ahead and like,

N. Rodgers: Do they object to you saying that?

J. Aughenbaugh: No, they'll just...

N. Rodgers: They can't do that. It's not a court. It's not a court.

J. Aughenbaugh: They'll grab your collar and start whispering in your ear, or they'll, like, you know, physically grab your forearm and squeeze.

N. Rodgers: Ah.

J. Aughenbaugh: Right. So, in most cases, it's not personal, right. And for any nominee, that's one of the things that is so difficult about this process. Sure, it's about you and your qualifications, etc.. But there is a larger political context here. The Senate might be trying to send a message to a President by how difficult they make the process. Even if the committee votes to recommend a positive vote on the Senate floor, they still might try to send political messages. And one of the ways they send political messages, if you take a look at the rest of the transcript of this document that's in the resource guide, they'll have interest groups who...

N. Rodgers: I was going to ask you about that. That's the last part of the document

J. Aughenbaugh: Yes.

N. Rodgers: It's these statements put in by interest groups. And some of them are glowing and, sort of, wonderful. And some of them are, "Over our dead bodies!"

J. Aughenbaugh: Bodies, yeah yeah.

N. Rodgers: "We are not going to do this!" And then some of them ask questions like they want, they want Senators to bring this up...

J. Aughenbaugh: That's right.

N. Rodgers: ...during the testimony, because they're not allowed, I guess. OK, so the only people who are allowed to ask the person questions are people on the committee, right?

J. Aughenbaugh: That's right.

N. Rodgers: You can't stand in the gallery and yell, "Ask him about this."

J. Aughenbaugh: No, no.

N. Rodgers: Because that's not gonna...

J. Aughenbaugh: No, no, no.

N. Rodgers: That's not gonna happen. So those people can submit...

J. Aughenbaugh: Yes.

N. Rodgers: rather pointed questions sometimes.

J. Aughenbaugh: Yeah, and...

N. Rodgers: And so those are interest groups. What is that about? Are they specifically people who would be affected by that nominee's, um, what they would be doing as secretary or what they would be doing as a justice?

J. Aughenbaugh: Yeah. These are interest groups that are impacted by the department that the nominee might lead.

N. Rodgers: OK.

J. Aughenbaugh: So they're like, OK, you know, "We would like the Senators to explore the nominee's previous statements about this particular program in the department." Because they are concerned about what that nominee might do with that program.

N. Rodgers: Ah. So, Nia published, at some point, a letter about how the Department of Defense was too large and she could see it as blah blah blah overgrowth, and we need to cut that in half. "We'd like you to ask her about that."

J. Aughenbaugh: Yeah.

N. Rodgers: "Because we're alarmed by that."

J. Aughenbaugh: Yes.

N. Rodgers: So I assume that justices, sometimes it's interest groups asking about previous, um, adjudications they've made.

J. Aughenbaugh: Yeah, previous opinions, or speeches they've given,

N. Rodgers: OK.

J. Aughenbaugh: or law review articles.

N. Rodgers: And speeches, if you're a justice, if you're applying to be a federal judge, a speech counts as your...

J. Aughenbaugh: Oh, sure.

N. Rodgers: public persona, right?

J. Aughenbaugh: Sure.

N. Rodgers: It's not that those two things are separate, even though theoretically they should be separate.

J. Aughenbaugh: Yeah.

N. Rodgers: It should be that you could have an opinion and still be a judge in a case and be able to be...

J. Aughenbaugh: We as academics really struggle with this. And the reason why we struggle with this is, if you're at a college or a university, you want people to go ahead and explore different ideas, try out, you know, what would this theory mean? Or does this fit my epistemology or my paradigm? For nominees, for cabinet secretary positions, if you're just thinking aloud, and you think aloud in a speech or an op-ed that you wrote or something you said to...

N. Rodgers: "The Upside of Communism," and you want to be the Secretary of Commerce or...

J. Aughenbaugh: Yeah, there might be...

N. Rodgers: ...or the Secretary of Treasury, they might say, "Hmm."

J. Aughenbaugh: Members of the Senate are going to be like...

N. Rodgers: "Whatcha mean by that?"

J. Aughenbaugh: Yeah, right. The example I like to use in my policy class is if you've been nominated to be the commissioner of the Social Security Administration, and at some point in time, you said, "Well the easiest way to solve what will more than likely be a huge problem for the Social Security trust fund -- we have too many elderly and not enough paying into the system -- is that we engage in a broad-based euthanasia program."

N. Rodgers: Soylent Green.

J. Aughenbaugh: OK.

N. Rodgers: OK.

J. Aughenbaugh: And you're just thinking aloud, right.

N. Rodgers: Right.

J. Aughenbaugh: You're just like, "We've got a demographics problem here."

N. Rodgers: "Here's one solution."

J. Aughenbaugh: One solution, right. OK, you're going to get asked about that.

N. Rodgers: The AARP is going to come for you.

J. Aughenbaugh: Yes, the AARP, OK, will ask for time at your confirmation hearing. More than likely, they will have submitted a question sheet for, like, every member on the Senate committee, and will make it very clear to each member of that committee how many elderly live in their states.

N. Rodgers: Right, in their district, that vote, because we know that older folks tend to vote.

J. Aughenbaugh: To vote more than younger folks.

N. Rodgers: There's some real.

J. Aughenbaugh: So, again, this is part of a...

N. Rodgers: So that's citizenry power coming into this part of it.

J. Aughenbaugh: That's right. And, yes we can be critical of interest groups for a lot of different reasons, but remember, interest groups represent their members. And many of us are members of interest groups. And senators know that interest groups can mobilize people to vote, to donate money for campaigns, all things that are important to senators. So they're going to pay attention to what these interest groups are going to have to say. So this is a job interview. And unlike in other job interviews where two or three people that customers may never we interact with, we interact with those who are making the decision, members of Congress. And members of Congress are going to want to pay attention to those that contribute to the electoral process. So in this job interview, it's important for you as a citizen to pay attention, if this is a nominee for a department to you important to you or family members or friends. It's important for you to go ahead and take a look at. What have they said? What are interest groups that I'm a member of or I'm partial to, what are they saying about this candidate, not this candidate, this nominee. So, if you think about it as a job interview, albeit one that's a very unique..very unique..a unique. Something can't be very unique, right. A unique..

N. Rodgers: I can be. I'm very unique.

J. Aughenbaugh: Of course you are. So am I because I drink a lot of coffee. But nevertheless, it's a job interview. It's a different kind of job interview. But, in part, people who we have chosen, either as President or as members of the Senate, are doing our bidding. They're making the decision. And if enough of us are like, "Man, this nominee's comments about what economic system we should have, but he's going to be the next Secretary of Commerce, woah! Or, you know, the next Commissioner of the Social Security Administration is talking about getting rid of a whole bunch of old people."

N. Rodgers: Yep

J. Aughenbaugh: "Or a nominee for the Department of Education is thinking about outsourcing federally subsidized loans. Hey! Doesn't my kid get a federally subsidized loan?"

N. Rodgers: We should talk about that.

J. Aughenbaugh: Yeah, right. We should ask these questions.

Announcer: You've been listening to Civil Discourse, brought to you by VCU Libraries. Opinions expressed are solely the speaker's own and do not reflect the views or opinions of VCU or VCU Libraries. Special thanks to The Workshop for technical assistance. Music by Isaak Hopson. Find more information at <https://guides.library.vcu.edu/discourse>. As always, no documents were harmed in the making of this podcast.