

## Transcript: Turkey Pardons

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 host, Nia Rodgers public affairs librarian, and Dr. John Aughenbaugh, political science professor.

N Rodgers: Hey, Augie.

J Aughenbaugh.: Morning Nia. How are you?

N Rodgers: I'm good. How are you?

J Aughenbaugh.: Oh, I'm good. Thank you.

N Rodgers: So hopefully this episode, all things being equal will come out the week of Thanksgiving.

J Aughenbaugh.: Well, yeah. That would be-

N Rodgers: So I have questions for you.

J Aughenbaugh.: Okay.

N Rodgers: So I know you and I both love the West Wing.

J Aughenbaugh.: Yes.

N Rodgers: Which we should establish right away that I'm huge Allison Janney fan. I think she's fantastic in everything she's in, but especially fantastic in the West Wing. And there was an episode where she was having to pick which of the turkeys we'd be the most photogenic for pictures with the family, which one would get pardoned.

J Aughenbaugh.: That's right.

N Rodgers: And it got me thinking, surely there is not a constitutional. Please tell me that. Although actually what I think I may want you to tell me is that there is a constitutional clause about pardoning turkeys.

J Aughenbaugh.: No. there is no constitutional clause. At least not one in the US constitution.

N Rodgers: Is there one in somebody else's constitution? Because that would be awesome and right in saving turkeys.

J Aughenbaugh.: I might have to go ahead and do some comparative research here, to see, if there are any clauses in other Western democratic constitutions. But there is no clause in the US constitution that gives the president the authority to pardon turkeys. Okay. And by the way, the episode that you're referencing is one of my favorite West Wing episodes of all time. The name of it is a Shibboleth, and it's about a bunch of... The main plot is a bunch of Christians in China who tried to gain asylum into the United States. And one of the ways that president Bartlet establishes that they are truly Christian is by doing what's called a Shibboleth to test their faith. Okay.

N Rodgers: Oh, that's right. Okay.

J Aughenbaugh.: Yeah. And it's an episode that's got a lot of religious discussion because Toby, who is the president's communications director, also kind of loses his stuff if you will, in regards to the issue of school prayer. And this is all going on at the same time. And then you got another cell plot where the president's body person, Charlie, okay, has been instructed to go out and find the president a really good curvy knife for turkeys.

N Rodgers: That's right. I'd forgotten that part too, which is extremely meaningful at the end of the episode, which we're apparently going to ruin, are we going to ruin it for people?

J Aughenbaugh.: Well, I mean they should still go ahead and see the episode if for nothing else, just for two scenes. One, when CJ shows up at her office and there are two turkeys in her office because the rest of her colleagues deciding to pull a prank, go ahead and, "Oh yeah, we'll just go ahead and stick the turkeys."

N Rodgers: Oh yeah. They say, "Which one do you want to part? You have to pick one." And they're like, "Oh, put them in CJ's office."

J Aughenbaugh.: In CJ's office. And then the other one, and this is the same episode where Bartlett finds out for the first time that the Butterball company has a 24 hour white line where you can call-

N Rodgers: And he calls them to test them.

J Aughenbaugh.: To test them.

N Rodgers: About stuffing, right?

J Aughenbaugh.: Yes, right.

N Rodgers: Oh my goodness. I'd forgotten that episode too.

J Aughenbaugh.: Okay. And there's just a part of me. Okay. Who would like to see any and all of our presidents? Okay.

N Rodgers: Call the Butterball hotline.

J Aughenbaugh.: Hotline, right? Because truth be told, the first time I actually cooked a turkey on my own, I did not believe the instructions in this cookbook I had. Right? Because I'm a geek. So I go out and buy a cookbook. Right? I didn't believe the instructions. So the turkey that I purchased at the grocery store was a frozen turkey. Okay. Was actually a Butterball and on the wrapping, okay. They have, "If you have questions on how to prepare your turkey, please call the..."

N Rodgers: It's [inaudible 00:05:03] number. Yeah.

J Aughenbaugh.: Okay. And I called them. Right? Okay.

N Rodgers: Were they extremely helpful?

J Aughenbaugh.: Extremely helpful. I mean, they talk me through the entire process from preparing the bird okay to preheating the oven on making sure that there was enough water in the pan to keep the bird moist. They even gave me instructions on various stuffing options. Okay. And how you have to go ahead and do this, before you stick the bird in.

N Rodgers: Right.

J Aughenbaugh.: Because I was just like, what do you mean? I got to go ahead and put the bread, the pieces of bread inside the turkey. You want me to stick my hands where? Right?

N Rodgers: Right. Ew.

J Aughenbaugh.: And the woman was just like, "It's a dead bird." And it's like, "Oh yeah, yeah." Right? But anyways, okay. I digress. But I mean, it's her-

N Rodgers: And we're sorry to all the vegetarians.

J Aughenbaugh.: Yes, but it's a great episode. You ought to watch it. Oh, you should watch pretty much in particular, the first two, what? Maybe three seasons of the West Wing.

N Rodgers: And then you can kind of stop because it turns into a soap opera.

J Aughenbaugh.: But the first-

N Rodgers: But that one is exceptional. It's an exceptional episode.

J Aughenbaugh.: Yes.

N Rodgers: And Bartlett says in that episode that he cannot pardon a turkey.

J Aughenbaugh.: Yes.

N Rodgers: In fact, he's rather angry with the young man who brings the turkey and tells him that he has not gotten the proper civics education.

J Aughenbaugh.: Education. Right. So Bartlett, the old school teacher, I think he was a school teacher before he became governor of what? New Hampshire?

N Rodgers: Yeah.

J Aughenbaugh.: Okay. Starts schooling this teenage boy who's from some-

N Rodgers: From the farm, where the turkeys come from.

J Aughenbaugh.: Yeah, he was directed to go to the front gate or the white house with two turkeys.

N Rodgers: Right.

J Aughenbaugh.: After that, okay, he goes-

N Rodgers: Yeah, he gets shuffled around, poor guy.

J Aughenbaugh.: Yeah.

N Rodgers: So he can't pardon a turkey?

J Aughenbaugh.: Correct.

N Rodgers: And that actually is accurate in the episode?

J Aughenbaugh.: That is correct in the sense of he can't constitutionally pardon a turkey. That is correct because they-

N Rodgers: Doesn't he in fact induct that turkey into the military?

J Aughenbaugh.: Okay.

N Rodgers: Because he can draft.

J Aughenbaugh.: Yes.

N Rodgers: He has the power of draft.

J Aughenbaugh.: To draft, because he's commander-in-chief, right?

N Rodgers: So he drafts the turkey into the military.

J Aughenbaugh.: He drafts the turkey because CJ's point is she kind of sorta grows fond of both birds.

N Rodgers: Right.

J Aughenbaugh.: Okay.

N Rodgers: She doesn't want either one to-

J Aughenbaugh.: Yeah, she actually even names them.

N Rodgers: And she tries to buy one for the guy and he's like, "No, it's already sold." She's like, "No, you can't." She's very attached.

J Aughenbaugh.: Yeah. She grows very attached. So she says to the president, "Okay, I don't want either one of these birds to be killed." Okay. And the president was like, "CJ, what do you want me to do?" And she was just like, "Well can't you do something?" He goes, "Okay, I'm going to go ahead and draft the one who I don't pardon." And then you're like, wow.

N Rodgers: That was pretty good move.

J Aughenbaugh.: Yeah. Right? Okay. Now that's an interesting take.

N Rodgers: Would all presidents thought on their feet that quickly?

J Aughenbaugh.: Oh my goodness.

N Rodgers: Because the world would be a different place.

J Aughenbaugh.: A different place. Right. Okay. But the president does have pardon power.

N Rodgers: Right. And just in all seriousness for just a moment. So presidents, the pardon power is like... You have to appeal to the president, right? You have to show why you would want to pardon. And then presidents can grant them or not grant them at will. Right? That's not a... There's nothing that requires a president to give a pardon, including to a turkey or to a human or to anything else that's not a required, that's like a gimme power of the president. Right? You get to do that, but not have to do that.

J Aughenbaugh.: Yeah. It's not a mandate. It's an authority.

N Rodgers: Thank you. That's-

J Aughenbaugh.: Okay. No, that'd be-

N Rodgers: Thank you for putting it in real words.

J Aughenbaugh.: Okay. No, but that's a rather important distinction. Okay. Because there are some things that the branches of the government are required to do per the constitution.

N Rodgers: Census.

J Aughenbaugh.: Yeah. The census, in a previous podcast episode, we talked about the census. The Congress has to pass a budget. Okay? The president is to take care to faithfully execute the law. That's a mandate. But there are things that are authorities. You don't have to exercise an authority. The analogy I use in my classes is that, I tell them according to VCU, I could quiz you guys every class session I have that authority. I just don't choose to exercise that authority. And of course they look at me like, "You would actually quiz us every day?"

N Rodgers: Well, and there are some professors that do a brief quiz every day as their attendance.

J Aughenbaugh.: Sure.

N Rodgers: They use that as a measure of were you here and where are you paying attention in the first five minutes of class? And it's got two questions or four questions. It's not a big deal except that it, it shows whether you were there and active and ready to learn.

J Aughenbaugh.: Yeah. I mean-

N Rodgers: At a given moment.

J Aughenbaugh.: In other faculty, you're like, "I don't take attendance." Other faculty are like, "Oh, I don't care if you show up. I don't even care if you participate." If you don't show up and you don't participate, well chances are you're not going to do well in the class and that's on you. It's not on me."

N Rodgers: Because you're grown ups.

J Aughenbaugh.: Yeah. You're adults. Right?

N Rodgers: Right.

J Aughenbaugh.: So the president has the authority to grant pardons and also offer clemency. Okay? And the difference is a pardon basically just goes ahead and erases if you will, your record, right? That you did anything that, you violated a criminal statute. So a really good example was when Nixon resigned, his successor, Gerald Ford granted him a pardon for any crimes he may have committed or any crimes he could be charged with in the future.

N Rodgers: A future pardon.

J Aughenbaugh.: Yeah. Okay.

N Rodgers: "Here's your get out of jail free card."

J Aughenbaugh.: Yeah. And Ford got a lot of criticism at that time, a majority of the public was against what he did. He actually did something rather extraordinary. He accepted a request from both houses of Congress to testify as to why he did it. Because there were some members of Congress who thought that there was an explicit quid pro quo. Nixon would only resign if his vice president Ford was willing to grant him a pardon and Ford was very explicit. "I didn't make that promise." And moreover, as a member of his justice department explained to Nixon, "If you accept the pardon, okay, you are explicitly acknowledging you may have committed crime."

N Rodgers: Right?

J Aughenbaugh.: Yes.

N Rodgers: You're basically saying, "I'm guilty because I need a pardon."

J Aughenbaugh.: Yeah.

N Rodgers: Well, I know that Ford at the time was saying things like, "We need to heal the country. This is a big deal."

J Aughenbaugh.: Yeah, I mean-

N Rodgers: People think, everybody who lives through a time of something horrible thinks it's the worst time ever that something has happened. I really think that that's true. I think that humans tend to say, "I'm in this horrible moment and this is the most horrible it's ever been." That was pretty horrible for the country. That was a huge shift in oh, presidential behaviors and finding things out that presidents are doing. Because previously the press and the presidents had had kind of agreements about, "I'm not really going to tell all that you're doing. You're not really going to... And then you give me access and..."

J Aughenbaugh.: Yeah you give me access, you don't lie to the press, et cetera. But there were some things that were considered off limits that the press would not go ahead and report.

N Rodgers: Women.

J Aughenbaugh.: Okay.

N Rodgers: There were often affairs that were not reported. They were-

J Aughenbaugh.: How bad a president's health or medical conditions were.

N Rodgers: Oh Roosevelt with the wheelchair.

J Aughenbaugh.: That's right. I mean he was-

N Rodgers: They didn't take pictures of him in his wheelchair.

J Aughenbaugh.: Yeah. Many in the press for instance, knew that president Kennedy had a myriad of health conditions, that he was taking a wider range of medications, some of which today we would be like, "Is he addicted to opiates?" Okay.

N Rodgers: Right? Back pain drugs.

J Aughenbaugh.: Yeah, because his back pain was so bad, right? But the explicit, if you will, agreement between the press and the presidents were, "But then you don't lie to us."

N Rodgers: Right?

J Aughenbaugh.: But then if you think about what happened in the late '60s, in the early 1970s, a whole bunch of Americans trust in government and in explicit government institutions really began to wane. Okay. Really began to wane. And thus the skepticism has to why Ford would go ahead and do this. And Ford's approach was... And he was consistent in until he died, "I did not do this..."

N Rodgers: To get him to resign.

J Aughenbaugh.: Resign. "I did this because I thought this would be best for the nation, that we had to move on, that somebody had to go ahead and say, we had a president who did something wrong, who did something bad and the system worked and we now need to move forward."

N Rodgers: Yeah. Because that whole... And we're going to keep dragging it down in vengeance and seeking all that sort of retribution type stuff, while that is emotionally satisfying on one



level, it also keeps the thing alive, which there is an argument to be made of. This just needs to stop. This just needs to die so that we can stop talking about it.

J Aughenbaugh.: Yeah. You actually talked about the process. For most presidents and I'm not entirely sure how the Trump administration, that's applications for pardons and clemencies. But most presidents basically follow a pretty well established process. You have to make a request and then there's usually folks both within the justice department or the white house legal counsel's office who look at it legally. But then there are people in the white house, the West Wing, if you will, the executive office of the president who vet it politically. Okay.

N Rodgers: Oh yeah. If you let this person out, but this person had done something pretty horrific, there might be-

J Aughenbaugh.: Yeah. I mean, the legal folks might go ahead and say, "They've already served 15 years, you could go ahead and say that they're no longer a danger or threat. On the other hand, politically, you know, would there be a cost."

N Rodgers: Charles Manson.

J Aughenbaugh.: Yeah.

N Rodgers: Charles Manson's unlikely at his age to be able to commit the horrific crimes that he committed before, but letting him out of prison would be politically bonkers for some people.

J Aughenbaugh.: Yeah.

N Rodgers: Like, "Really? What are you doing? This is one of the..."

J Aughenbaugh.: Yeah. So for instance, Bill Clinton in his last wave of pardons, a couple of them were huge donors to the democratic party.

N Rodgers: That can't look good.

J Aughenbaugh.: Yeah. So the complaint by Republicans were-

N Rodgers: You can pay your way out.

J Aughenbaugh.: Yeah. You can buy your way out. Obama went ahead and pretty much told the nation and Congress, what he thought about the war on drugs. Because he granted a whole bunch of people who were charged, convicted and received punishment as first time drug offenders with no violence attached to the crime. He just-

N Rodgers: Oh that's right.

J Aughenbaugh.: That was his commentary.

N Rodgers: Multiple.

J Aughenbaugh.: Yeah, multiple. Right? He was just like, "I cannot convince Congress." Okay. And by the way, a few members of his own party in Congress too, to go ahead and support legislation that decriminalizes a whole bunch of drug crime. "But I have my pardon power and I'm going to use it this way." Okay?

N Rodgers: Quick. Somebody give me a pen.

J Aughenbaugh.: Yeah.

N Rodgers: So in clemency means you just get out of prison?

J Aughenbaugh.: Yes.

N Rodgers: But, but the crime doesn't go away.

J Aughenbaugh.: Yes.

N Rodgers: Which means that all of those things that happen, like you can't vote, you can't carry a gun, you can't do things like that. If you've committed certain crimes-

J Aughenbaugh.: Yeah, those conditions are still attached.

N Rodgers: But if you're pardoned those conditions no longer apply. Right?

J Aughenbaugh.: That's correct.

N Rodgers: It's a clean slate.

J Aughenbaugh.: Yeah.

N Rodgers: Okay. So it is better to get a pardon than clemency. But it's better to get clemency than be in prison.

J Aughenbaugh.: That's right.

N Rodgers: So you take what you can get.

J Aughenbaugh.: Yeah. I mean, if you're rank ordering this, okay? You want pardon, you can't get pardon, clemency. Okay.

N Rodgers: If you can't get that, you want them to produce your sentence as much as possible.

J Aughenbaugh.: As possible, yeah, it's a time served, right? Okay?

N Rodgers: Okay.

J Aughenbaugh.: But let's get back to turkeys, I mean, because this is utterly fascinating to me.

N Rodgers: Yes.

J Aughenbaugh.: Because I know you have more questions about turkeys.

N Rodgers: I do. So they pardon one every Thanksgiving? A president pardons a turkey every Thanksgiving?

J Aughenbaugh.: That's correct.

N Rodgers: What happens to the turkey?

J Aughenbaugh.: Well basically, in the last few years they've been going to a particular park, animal park in Northern Virginia.

N Rodgers: So they're not dinner?

J Aughenbaugh.: No.

N Rodgers: Okay.

J Aughenbaugh.: Yes, okay.

N Rodgers: Right, because pardoned, they're not dinner, they're never dinner.

J Aughenbaugh.: Yeah. But it's really fascinating and actually went to their website, the Turkey Federation. Okay. Which is the trade association for turkey farmers.

N Rodgers: I love America, because that's the kind of thing we have. We have a turkey association, to fight for the rights of turkeys everywhere.

J Aughenbaugh.: Okay. They actually have on their website. Okay. A discussion of where some of these pardoned turkeys have gone.

N Rodgers: Oh, okay.

J Aughenbaugh.: Okay.

N Rodgers: We'll link that on the research guide.

J Aughenbaugh.: Yeah. Okay. So I mean, so for some of them, okay, they've gone to this animal park. Others have gone to petting zoos. For a while, they actually had an arrangement with either Disneyland or Disney world or where the pardoned turkey-

N Rodgers: "Come to Disney, meet the pardoned turkey."

J Aughenbaugh.: Right. Okay.

N Rodgers: Although there's worse things than living out your life in a Disney. I'm just saying that Disney world is... I've never been to... Oh no, I happen to Disneyland but and they're both lovely. So it would not be a terrible place to live out your life. Do they live long lives post this-

J Aughenbaugh.: No. I mean, because these are turkeys that are basically bred to be meals.

N Rodgers: Oh so they're breeding a whole bunch and then they pick the one that's really pretty and they send that one to the white house, because they don't know it's going to be pretty while they're breeding them all.

J Aughenbaugh.: Yes. Okay. Because you want a good looking bird for the photo op.

N Rodgers: Right. You don't want some scraggly, no feathers and one eye-

J Aughenbaugh.: Yeah, you want a robust chest. Okay. With some really-

N Rodgers: And you want its tail to be able to go foof. Right?

J Aughenbaugh.: Yeah. You want some really nice plumage and again, I looked all this up. Okay, because-

N Rodgers: Because when you buy it from the store or in the wrapping, they don't look anything like that. Right?

J Aughenbaugh.: Like that. They don't have a wide array of colors in their plumage. Right? I actually had to look up that word too. Word for the day. Plumage. Okay. But nevertheless, okay. So they typically only live another two to three years. Okay.

N Rodgers: Okay. So you're pardoned, but it's not all that helpful.

J Aughenbaugh.: Yeah. But I mean, hey, it's much like-

N Rodgers: But it's two. Anybody will take any amount of time generally, you can get.

J Aughenbaugh.: Yeah. I mean, think if you're a human being.

N Rodgers: If somebody said to you, "I'm just going to let live for another day." You'd be like, "Great."

J Aughenbaugh.: Yeah. Because think about humans who are in jail or prison and they get a pardon, I mean, they don't know how much longer they have to live. All they know is they no longer have to live those years behind bars.

N Rodgers: That's true.

J Aughenbaugh.: Okay. So yes, that's where they go. Okay. Yeah.

N Rodgers: Okay. So when did it start? Pardoning turkeys. Have we always pardoned turkeys?

J Aughenbaugh.: Well, now, no.

N Rodgers: Did George Washington pardon turkeys?

J Aughenbaugh.: There is no evidence of that, for scholars, actually there's-

N Rodgers: Oh my gosh. Are there turkey pardoning scholars?

J Aughenbaugh.: No, there's not.

N Rodgers: Because I want to meet one.

J Aughenbaugh.: Okay. There isn't. But there are a host of presidential scholars, who have looked at various presidential administrations and you know, and historians are trying to find interesting tidbits about whatever president they are studying. Okay. Most scholars will agree that the first president to pardon a turkey was Lincoln and he did so because a turkey was delivered to the white house for Thanksgiving dinner. But his son grew fond of the turkey and Lincoln just didn't have the heart to go ahead and kill.

N Rodgers: That's awesome.

J Aughenbaugh.: Right? Yeah. We also know that Lincoln was an animal lover in general-

N Rodgers: And he was also very devoted to his son.

J Aughenbaugh.: Oh, yeah.

N Rodgers: His son died I think, relatively shortly thereafter.

J Aughenbaugh.: After. Yeah. So Lincoln-

N Rodgers: So it touched all of his heartstrings, everything. Animals, his kid.

J Aughenbaugh.: Yeah.

N Rodgers: So I wonder what they ate. They just ate mashed potatoes. They just had all the sides but all the sides, but no turkey.

J Aughenbaugh.: Well, I mean, hey, Thanksgiving with or without a turkey is one of my favorite meals. Okay.

N Rodgers: Well, it's carbolicious.

J Aughenbaugh.: It's got everything that one could ever want in a massive spread. Right? I don't understand people who don't like these big holiday dinners. Right? I mean, because for me, basically the holiday in part is saying that you get to sit down and like gorge yourself nonstop for multiple, if you will, servings for multiple hours.

N Rodgers: So it suspends the sins, the deadly sins, right? Gluttony goes away the holiday. The next day it's back in play. But not-

J Aughenbaugh.: Yeah. Right? Okay. But even still, I mean, if you've had turkey-

N Rodgers: So sloth, gluttony that's what the holidays are. The holidays are basically-

J Aughenbaugh.: It's a respite. Okay.

N Rodgers: Right. If you have the right family.

J Aughenbaugh.: Okay. For the seven deadly sins. Right? Come on. Right? We have discussed this in the podcast. Okay. About my-

N Rodgers: I envy your mashed potatoes.

J Aughenbaugh.: Yeah, my Catholic upbringing. Right? Okay. Any reason to go ahead and have our respite.

N Rodgers: That's all.

J Aughenbaugh.: Okay.

N Rodgers: That's a good of viewing.

J Aughenbaugh.: Okay. So even if you have to put up with family members who you generally don't like, okay, to me-

N Rodgers: Happy thanksgiving.

J Aughenbaugh.: To me it's unnecessary cost for all the benefit.

N Rodgers: I see.

J Aughenbaugh.: Yes. Okay. But back to a pardoning turkeys. So we have some evidence Lincoln did this. We also have extensive evidence that there were turkey farmers who were providing turkeys for the white house Thanksgiving spread, from the late 1800s, up to including Woodrow Wilson. We don't know why Wilson at some point stopped accepting turkeys. Okay.

N Rodgers: Can I ask a question about that?

J Aughenbaugh.: Yeah.

N Rodgers: So presidents can accept gifts and I'm going to ask you about that in another episode, because I really want to talk to you about the whole gift giving and who owns things and whatever.

J Aughenbaugh.: The infamous emoluments clause.

N Rodgers: Yeah. But could it be that maybe Wilson thought that there was some sort of, this might not be a good thing for the president to accept or do you think you just didn't like turkey? Maybe he just didn't like turkey. Maybe he was like, "I want a nice brisket."

J Aughenbaugh.: There is no evidence that I've been able to uncover that suggest that Wilson was concerned about the emoluments clause.

N Rodgers: Okay.

J Aughenbaugh.: Okay. I mean, because let's face it, there are all kinds of gifts, goodies, et cetera, that are bestowed to the white house on a regular basis.

N Rodgers: Oh yeah, if you invited me to the white house, I'd bring probably a bottle of wine and some flowers. I mean, because I was raised by people who say, "When you go to somebody's house, you take a gift."

J Aughenbaugh.: Sure.

N Rodgers: I would take something, because come on.

J Aughenbaugh.: I mean, and think about all the various interests or interest groups, who get invited to the white house or have an opportunity to go ahead and have the white house use and display something that they made, grew, farmed.

N Rodgers: Look, it's a McDonald's spread for one of the NCAA teams, I think.

J Aughenbaugh.: Yeah, right.

N Rodgers: Hey, you guys are athletes, why don't you eat a bunch of McDonald's? Although there could be an argument made that the occasional treat is not bad.

J Aughenbaugh.: Okay. And it's not like McDonald's went ahead and turned down all the free publicity it received, right?

N Rodgers: Right. I mean, big boxes all over the front of the table and stuff like that.

J Aughenbaugh.: Yeah. So we don't know why Wilson stopped, but there is nothing to suggest that he was concerned about the receiving of gifts. I mean, understand this, presidents received gifts from foreign leaders all the time. It's just protocol to go ahead and register it with the state department. Okay. And then determine whether or not, this was an effort or an attempt to go ahead and bribe the president or bribed somebody within the executive branch. Members of Congress even have to go ahead and declare gifts that they receive when they do one of their overseas junkets. Okay.

N Rodgers: Right.

J Aughenbaugh.: Okay. They receive gifts, they have to go-

N Rodgers: Which I mean, make sense, because when you have dignitaries come to your country, of course you want to give them something that represents your country to them, right?

J Aughenbaugh.: Sure.

N Rodgers: So they have a memorial something from your country. But I could also see where, "Here's this giant diamond necklace from this Prince of something something." I could see where that would be, "Oh, that might actually be quid pro quo." So I could see where you would want to have somebody cross check that just to make sure.

J Aughenbaugh.: Yeah.



N Rodgers: And I'm assured the department of state says, "Okay, that thing is relatively valuable. It has to be part of the government." Versus, "That thing is not so valuable." Or, "It's very personal."

J Aughenbaugh.: Yeah.

N Rodgers: It was intended for you as a personal thing and it is not a quid pro quo. Like there's nothing you can do in Congress to change this country's oil reserves or whatever. So go ahead and take this-

J Aughenbaugh.: Yeah, they're not going to receive any more aid from the United States, whether or not you went ahead and received-

N Rodgers: A little statue of a cat.

J Aughenbaugh.: Yeah, right? If you've ever been to the Smithsonian, they occasionally we'll have exhibits of gifts received by elected officials in the United.

N Rodgers: Oh, do they? Oh, I have to watch for that, because that would be marvelous.

J Aughenbaugh.: Yeah. So what we do know is that Truman was the next president who "officially pardoned" a turkey. But there's also evidence that it was a rather short-lived pardon? As in the bird may have ended up being served at the white house for dinner. Yes. Okay.

N Rodgers: Oh, that's like a faux pardon.

J Aughenbaugh.: Yes.

N Rodgers: That's a take back. You can't do that.

J Aughenbaugh.: So you had the photo op-

N Rodgers: Right, I pardon you for about five minutes.

J Aughenbaugh.: Yes.

N Rodgers: Oh, that's not okay. That's funny. I mean, Truman was practical. He probably was like-

J Aughenbaugh.: Yeah, we can't let this bird.

N Rodgers: It's going to die in a couple of years anyway. Let's just go ahead and eat it. We'll be fine.

J Aughenbaugh.: Yeah. He was from the show me state. Okay. Show me the bird. It looks good for dinner. So anyways, I digress. But then you had a series of presidents, Kennedy,

Johnson, Nixon, Ford. We don't have any evidence about Carter actually pardoning turkeys. Reagan did. In fact there's actually a pretty cool photo of the bird that was being pardoned one year, for Reagan. Kind of decided that it wanted to move around during the photo op.

N Rodgers: So it just took a walk?

J Aughenbaugh.: Yeah.

N Rodgers: Well, I mean, how are you going to stop a bird from doing it's 35 pounds. It's like they're not-

J Aughenbaugh.: Yes. Okay.

N Rodgers: No, they're not 35. Are they? I guess some are.

J Aughenbaugh.: I mean, some can be that big. I mean, the biggest one I've ever cooked was 25 pounds. Okay.

N Rodgers: So that's not small bird.

J Aughenbaugh.: And that easily fed like 15, 16 people.

N Rodgers: Okay.

J Aughenbaugh.: This was one of those graduate students potluck Thanksgiving deals-

N Rodgers: Oh. And you were in charge of the turkey?

J Aughenbaugh.: I was in charge of the bird.

N Rodgers: Okay.

J Aughenbaugh.: And I'm pleased to report nobody got sick. Okay.

N Rodgers: Yay. So you did it right.

J Aughenbaugh.: Yeah, I did it right.

N Rodgers: You didn't give everybody chickenosis or whatever. I don't think that's it, but it's something like that.

J Aughenbaugh.: Yeah. They even remarked that the meat, even the white meat was moist.

N Rodgers: Look at you. Again, sorry to the vegetarians.

J Aughenbaugh.: Yes. But where this becomes official is with the first president Bush.

N Rodgers: Wait, official as in this is now a Thing. Big T.

J Aughenbaugh.: Yes, he officially pardoned a turkey. Okay. And every president since. Okay.

N Rodgers: Can I just say I love that it was 41.

J Aughenbaugh.: Yes.

N Rodgers: Because he's seen as so humorless by a lot of people.

J Aughenbaugh.: Right.

N Rodgers: He's seen as very serious.

J Aughenbaugh.: Oh yeah, particularly when he was in the office.

N Rodgers: He's the great generation. He's very serious. He served in the military. He's very... And for it to be him, to be the one of, "We're going to make this thing official."

J Aughenbaugh.: Yeah. We're going to do this.

N Rodgers: Wow. That just-

J Aughenbaugh.: Okay. It was an official proclamation.

N Rodgers: Okay. That's awesome. But that's also really recent, relatively speaking.

J Aughenbaugh.: Yeah. Okay.

N Rodgers: That's what '88 or '89? Somewhere along in there.

J Aughenbaugh.: This was '89. Yeah, okay.

N Rodgers: Okay.

J Aughenbaugh.: Then every successor president, Clinton, Bush two, Obama, even Trump. Okay.

N Rodgers: Did he pardon a turkey last year.

J Aughenbaugh.: Yes he did.

N Rodgers: Okay.

J Aughenbaugh.: Yes he did. Okay. Seeing the photos. Okay.

N Rodgers: I know this is going to sound like a stretch, but I wonder if part of that is all of those presidents had children. You know what I mean? I don't know, it's kind of a neat thing to do with your kids too. Because I know that with the Obamas, I think that their daughters were there when they were pardoned and I think that-

J Aughenbaugh.: Bush two.

N Rodgers: Hillary Clinton was, excuse me, Chelsea Clinton was there.

J Aughenbaugh.: Chelsea. The first president Bush 41-

N Rodgers: Oh, his kids would have been older.

J Aughenbaugh.: Yeah. But I mean, they-

N Rodgers: Oh but he would have had grandkids.

J Aughenbaugh.: He had grandkids and they all showed up. I mean, that was one of the things about his white house. Right? Okay.

N Rodgers: They are very family oriented-

J Aughenbaugh.: Family oriented and... But anyways, let's get back to birds. What else? What else do you want to know about turkeys?

N Rodgers: There's so much, there's so much to ask about turkeys.

J Aughenbaugh.: Okay.

N Rodgers: But that's neither here nor there with the pardon. So the turkey gets pardoned, right? There's a photo op, the turkey gets gently taken away to Disneyland. "I'm going to Disney world." Right? Wasn't that one of the things they used on the commercials? They used to have like sports, "You've won the super bowl."

J Aughenbaugh.: Yeah. The quarterback for the winning team-

N Rodgers: "What are you going to do now?"

J Aughenbaugh.: What are you going to do next? I'm going to Disney. Right? And then they would go ahead and pocket a nice chunk of jade. Right? And the turkey doesn't. Okay.

N Rodgers: Yeah. I'm sure that the-

J Aughenbaugh.: Yes. So my final question for you about pardoning, right?

N Rodgers: Yeah.

J Aughenbaugh.: Is about parking turkeys. Sorry, not about pardoning humans. I have lots of questions about that. We'll get to that some other time. Is, so, I know this is going to sound bonkers, but the turkeys, do they come from a specific... Is there a-

N Rodgers: Is there a contract? Is there a presidential turkey farm somewhere?

J Aughenbaugh.: No.

N Rodgers: Like, "Yes, that's my turkey farm." Where they raise a bunch of turkeys and I mean like not that the president would earn money from it or anything or anything like it.

J Aughenbaugh.: No. I mean, basically what you have and it's very similar to what we're going to end up discussing about Christmas trees at the white house. Okay. You basically have turkey farms who respond to a call from usually the Turkey Federation. Okay. Is anybody interested or are you interested in having one of your turkeys pardoned by the United States white house.

N Rodgers: Oh, okay. So, oh please tell me that the start of that call is-

J Aughenbaugh.: That I do not know.

N Rodgers: Because that would be hilarious.

J Aughenbaugh.: Yes.

N Rodgers: Okay. So then like a bunch of people put in turkeys. I'm assuming they say, "I have a handsome turkey, that I want put in."

J Aughenbaugh.: Yes.

N Rodgers: And then someone vets the turkeys along the lines of what CJ did

J Aughenbaugh.: Yes.

N Rodgers: Somebody vets your turkeys and then one gets presented to the president. I'm assuming the president doesn't actively... "I have things to do people. Just bring me the turkey when it's time."

J Aughenbaugh.: This is one of those tasks that gets assigned to somebody in the West Wing. Okay. The executive office of the president. Right? We've discussed this before.

N Rodgers: It's probably a hot potato. I did it last year. Somebody else has to do it this year.

J Aughenbaugh.: Other duties to be assigned, right?

N Rodgers: (Investigating turkeys).

J Aughenbaugh.: Okay. I can imagine, the white house communication staff, I mean, much like the West Wing episode where CJ, who was the president's press secretary. Okay. The main interface with the press Corps that covers the white house might have some sort of role or input on this. But I mean it could be assigned to the deputy chief of staff, simply because the deputy chief of staff is on the crap list of the chief of staff. Right? Okay.

N Rodgers: Even though, I guess what you get to do-

J Aughenbaugh.: You get to do. You get to pick which of these three birds, okay, is going to get pardoned by the president. Okay. And the chief of staff secretly hopes you grow fond of the other two so that you have a dilemma. Right? Okay. I mean, this is the kind of thing that goes on, goes on in small group organizations. "You know this, I know this." Right?

N Rodgers: Yeah. There's a little bit of pettiness involved in some of these. I will agree that in some groups there is a little bit of pettiness involved.

J Aughenbaugh.: Yeah. I mean, I know this within academic departments, right? You get on-

N Rodgers: You get on the wrong side of the chair and then the next thing you're in charge of the party committee for next year.

J Aughenbaugh.: For next year. And you're like, "Oh man." Or they come to you and say, "Augie, you haven't taught this class in a long, long time." And that's when I say, "And there's a reason for that." And they're like, "Yeah, that reason doesn't work anymore. You're going to be teaching in next semester." And you're like, "Oh man, this just boomeranged on me big time." Right?

N Rodgers: That swish sound by the... That's you not dodging a bullet.

J Aughenbaugh.: Yeah, right?

N Rodgers: Yeah.

J Aughenbaugh.: Yeah. So I mean, but again, this is a huge coup for whatever turkey farmer, right?

N Rodgers: Oh yeah. Because I guess, they get pressed, right?

J Aughenbaugh.: They get pressed. I mean-

N Rodgers: Where did the turkey come from?

J Aughenbaugh.: It came from this farm in Northern Virginia or upstate Pennsylvania or-

N Rodgers: And then all those people who want to have a turkey from the same farm as the white house. Oh.

J Aughenbaugh.: Yeah.

N Rodgers: So the society mavens and all those ladies who would want to-

J Aughenbaugh.: Yes. Hey, by the way, we're digging into a bird from the same farm that the president and their family is digging into. Don't you feel good?

N Rodgers: Yeah, I can see where that can be a-

J Aughenbaugh.: Yeah. I mean, hey.

N Rodgers: That would be a selling point.

J Aughenbaugh.: Yeah. Okay. And again, for those who are listening who aren't really into industry or marketing, et cetera, you're like, "What the hell is the big deal?" Okay. "We're eating a bird from the same turkey farm."

N Rodgers: Right, exactly. Thank you so much for talking to me about-

J Aughenbaugh.: Turkeys.

N Rodgers: Well and when I think of as these sort of public rituals, that's part of what this is, is the public ritual that the president reflects the sort of national standard of a public ritual. It's like the Easter egg rolling thing, right? That happens at the white house.

J Aughenbaugh.: Yes, the Easter egg contest.

N Rodgers: Whether you are a person of faith or not, that is a tradition that is generally an American, lots of people do that. And so when the president does it and the president's family, then it's kind of a nice carry through for everyone in the country. "Oh yeah. We're all having Thanksgiving dinner this week. We may not be having that dinner. We might not all be having turkey. Some of us don't eat turkey. Maybe we're having spaghetti, maybe we're having pizza, but we're doing a ritualized thing together."

J Aughenbaugh.: Yeah.

N Rodgers: There's power in that.

J Aughenbaugh.: It's what scholars refer to as symbolic politics. Okay. There isn't meaningful governing going on when the president-

N Rodgers: Pardons a turkey.

J Aughenbaugh.: Is pardoning a turkey. On the other hand, okay, it is part of the ritual. It's part of the tradition and it kind of sort of sets a culture or behavioral norm for the rest of the country. This is Thanksgiving and even the president and the president's family is engaging in a tradition. Right?

N Rodgers: Right. And it's not the tradition of standing the store waiting for the doors to open at five o'clock. It's a familial social tradition that other families, regardless of their financial standing can engage at least in some way, generally.

J Aughenbaugh.: And there's some humor to it. Okay. And I-

N Rodgers: It is nice when the president shows humor.

J Aughenbaugh.: And again, we apologize for vegans okay, who don't believe in the killing and eating of animals. Okay. But I mean, think about your own family or friend holiday traditions you have. Some elements, probably won't make all that much sense to others or if others viewed them, they would view them as, "Oh, that's funny." Okay. And that's again, part of the, if you will, the holiday, the process. Right? It's like certain snippets of conversation that you know you're going to have at a family holiday meal, even though you've heard them countless times before, but you know it's going to happen. You don't know when-

N Rodgers: Oh, yeah. "You remember that time your grandpa went out and got that turkey from blah, blah, blah."

J Aughenbaugh.: Yeah, right?

N Rodgers: And yes, I know because you've told this story, every Thanksgiving.



J Aughenbaugh.: Yes. Right?

N Rodgers: Since I was a little kid or whatever.

J Aughenbaugh.: And in my family, uh, there was an infamous Thanksgiving dinner where my mom went and a Turkey from a butcher. Okay. Which we never understood why she wanted to go to the butcher to get a Turkey. Okay. Because my mom usually just got a Turkey from a grocery store. Right? But she did something wrong in cooking it. Okay. And it just wasn't good. Right? So when we sit down and we dig into the turkey and it tastes good, inevitably somebody at the table says, "Oh, this is a heck of a lot better than that damn bird you got from the butcher." And of course my mom has to go in and take it. Right?

N Rodgers: Right.

J Aughenbaugh.: Because she knows she screwed up, but it's a shared experience. It's a common, if you will, the language of where, "Hey mom, we appreciate what you did. We didn't necessarily appreciate all that much you going to the butcher to get a Turkey." But nevertheless, okay, we appreciate the fact that every Thanksgiving, okay, no matter where your kids are or which family member is in town, okay, if they let you know ahead of time, there's going to be enough food for not only the seven or eight people who show up, but apparently the army platoon who's doing maneuvers in my small hometown. Because that's how many extra mashed potatoes, turkey, gravy stuffing.

N Rodgers: Yeah. What if people are still hungry? Like, "Mom, that's not possible."

J Aughenbaugh.: Right.

N Rodgers: But yeah. Oh no. I know. There's rules about this.

J Aughenbaugh.: And again, I'm the one who goes in and says, "Hey mom, who is showing up for dinner?" And of course my mom will read off the... We'll go ahead and speak to seven or eight names and I'm like, "Okay." And there's actually an army reserve building down the street. And I'm like, "And which members of the army reserve are showing up?" "Ha ha. You always say that." "Because you always make enough for the army reserve platoon."

N Rodgers: Yeah.

J Aughenbaugh.: Right? But again-

N Rodgers: But it's tradition.

J Aughenbaugh.: Yes, it is.

N Rodgers: She's expecting for you to rag on her about that.

J Aughenbaugh.: But yes. Right?

N Rodgers: And so you fulfill your role and she fulfills her role.

J Aughenbaugh.: Fulfills her role. Yes.

N Rodgers: And that's part of what the president's doing.

J Aughenbaugh.: And part of my role is to go ahead and eat a whole bunch of food. Okay.

N Rodgers: Well, yeah.

J Aughenbaugh.: Yes. Okay.

N Rodgers: And then take some home with you.

J Aughenbaugh.: Yes.

N Rodgers: Because what if you're hungry later.

J Aughenbaugh.: Because according to my mom and my grandmother, no matter what my weight is, no matter how healthy my doctor says-

N Rodgers: It's not enough.

J Aughenbaugh.: Their favorite expression is, "Son or grandson. You look gaunt." Okay. I haven't looked gaunt-

N Rodgers: I was going to say for listeners, Dr. Aughenbaugh is not gaunt. I mean, he's fit.

J Aughenbaugh.: Okay.

N Rodgers: So I think it's amazing that they-

J Aughenbaugh.: Yes, okay.

N Rodgers: But you know what, that's part of also family love. "Oh you look thin, you look peaky. Here, eat something. You're a little pale, here, eat something." Because that's-

J Aughenbaugh.: That's what-

N Rodgers: That's how you show love. You walked in the door, you could walk in the door holding a sandwich and they would say, "Do you want something to eat?" You're like, "I've got a sandwich in my hand." But it's love.

J Aughenbaugh.: Yes. Right. So you mean to go ahead and see a president? Okay.

N Rodgers: Showing love in that way.

J Aughenbaugh.: In saying these semi-official word, and I've watched, I've seen a number of them. I've seen the photos and by the way, you really do got to check out the West Wing episode. It's hilarious.

N Rodgers: I think it's love of country, is part of it.

J Aughenbaugh.: Sure.

N Rodgers: Right? Is that sort of heart warming... This is something we do that's not particularly controversial and I mean obviously, for some folks it's controversial, but for the most part it's not seen as controversial and it's seen as something that's every man.

J Aughenbaugh.: Yeah. All right, I'm glad you ask about pardoning the turkeys. I got to admit podcast listeners, when Nia and I discussed what we will talk about on future episodes, part of the joy of working with Nia is getting her list of potential topics because I think she's playing a game in her mind. Can I actually stump Aughenbaugh? Can I actually find a topic-

N Rodgers: I have to admit there is a little bit of that.

J Aughenbaugh.: Okay. Where Aughenbaugh says either one, "I'm not going to do that." Or two, "I know nothing about it." So when I saw the, yeah, I want to talk about pardoning turkeys and I said, "Yeah, sure." I can only imagine the look of kind of, sort of semi disappointment on Nia's face.

N Rodgers: Yeah.

J Aughenbaugh.: Like, "Really, Aughenbaugh is going to go there with me."

N Rodgers: But in fairness to me and to defend myself by saying, I have yet to ask you about something that you didn't feel comfortable talking about.

J Aughenbaugh.: That's true. Yeah.

N Rodgers: So I feel I'm very lucky that I have what I think of as a resource that doesn't, that explain things to me, doesn't make me feel dumb and encourages me to think through the

topic. We've had private conversations that we didn't record. I know that's shocking to everybody who's listening. We don't record everything that it made me think about later. Like, "Oh, I need to think that through a little bit."

J Aughenbaugh.: Yeah.

N Rodgers: So I appreciate that and I appreciate also, and I do... There are cases. I was like, "Who owns the animals in the zoo?" He's like, "Oh, well." And he starts to talk of them, I'm like, "No, you cannot know this. How can you know this off the top of your head?"

J Aughenbaugh.: I read everything.

N Rodgers: I know, you read everything and you retain everything, so it's amazing. But thank you.

J Aughenbaugh.: Anyways, yeah.

N Rodgers: Thank you for this. And I appreciate you being about the whole, is the West Wing really real? And so it turns out the West Wing was well-researched in this area.

J Aughenbaugh.: Yeah. What was her name? She was a press secretary. Dee Dee Myers was a consultant for that show, the first couple of years.

N Rodgers: Okay.

J Aughenbaugh.: And you can definitely see either she came up with story ideas or things-

N Rodgers: Or things actually happened in that-

J Aughenbaugh.: They may have.

N Rodgers: I want to believe that this actually happened, because-

J Aughenbaugh.: Even if just a part of it was true, okay, I would have loved-

N Rodgers: The thing where she has the flashes and she's trying to see which one is gonna flinch from the flat, it's hilarious.

J Aughenbaugh.: Okay.

N Rodgers: All right. We will link to that and we will talk again another time.

J Aughenbaugh.: All right. Thanks Nia.

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