

Welcome to Civil Discourse. This podcast will use government documents to illuminate the workings of the American Government and offer contexts around the effects of government agencies in your everyday life. Now your hosts, Nia Rodgers, Public Affairs Librarian and Dr. John Aughenbaugh, Political Science Professor.

**N. Rodgers:** Hi Aughie.

**J. Aughenbaugh:** Hi Nia, How are you?

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

**J. Aughenbaugh:** I'm good.

**N. Rodgers:** We have a guest with us today. Yeah, special guest. We have Dr. Judy Twigg, who is in the Poli-Sci department at Virginia Commonwealth University. She has a couple of specialties which are touching on things we want to talk about right now. Global health, and specifically Russia, and all things Russia and all things global health, which I think is a lovely or not lovely combination depending on how one thinks about these sorts of things. She doesn't know that my tendency is to world domination, but I think we should introduce her to this concept, don't you?

**J. Aughenbaugh:** So some of our listeners are well aware, Nia, at various points in our podcast episodes has wanted to become president of either the United States or pretty much of the world, space force, etc. One of the things that we were thinking is, is there a model of behavior for Nia out there amongst the international community? One of our thoughts was, well, sure, Vladimir Putin in Russia. As my colleague, Judy Twigg, is well aware, I like to punctuate many of my jokes with what's going on in the United States with how does this compare to Russia and Vladimir Putin. Thus, the reason why we extended an invitation to Judy so she can go ahead and clarify all the ways that either Nia can aspire to be like Vladimir Putin or not, depending on the situation.

**J. Twigg:** Is it too late for me to rethink my accepting the invitation to appear on this podcast?

**N. Rodgers:** Well, so hello Judy. Thank you so much for coming. Aughie's role has generally been to advise me against things. So feel free to advise me against behaviors that you think might have me ending up, oh, I don't know, invading Ukraine or doing something else that might be deemed not so good by the rest of the world. So you're not here necessarily to tell me how to do it so that I can be dictator of the world, but maybe warn me off if there are downsides to this dictator thing, and also in a society. So I don't know much about Russia except that I called Putin as the winner of his first election when my roommates were all taking bets back then because he was the one they hadn't heard of. I'm like, "Yeah, it's always the dangerous one, like the quiet one who comes out of the Ex-KGB." He was in Germany and I think stationed in Germany. So he was this quiet dude off to the side and I'm like, "Oh, that's the guy, he's going to win." He did and he's been president since, which is what going on about 400 years now?

**J. Twigg:** Yeah. So I mean, you're digging way far back into the post-Soviet Russian political history. But what happened was that at the end of the 1990s when Boris Yeltsin, remember him?

**N. Rodgers:** Yes.

**J. Twigg:** When he was the first really and truly democratically elected president of the Russian Federation. Toward the end of, well, what would have been Yeltsin's second term as president, which was at the turn of the millennium, it was pretty clear that he was sick. To be quite straightforward, drunk most of the time. A couple of pretty embarrassing incidents where clearly he wasn't in command of his faculties in public appearances. So Russia went through a series of people in the prime minister position that was clearly intended to be something of a testing ground for someone who would be sober, and stable, and in command as a logical, probable successor to Yeltsin. A pretty good handful of those people failed for various reasons, and this was for years and in the late 1990s. So Yeltsin pulls out of relative obscurity, I mean Putin wasn't completely obscure. He was head of the state security services, the infamous KGB, at the time that he was appointed as prime minister, which was clearly making him the obvious favored poster child of good governance. He was the anointed candidate to succeed Yeltsin. But he had vaulted up the ranks very quickly in order to become head of the KGB. He was, as you say, a relatively normal functionary of the KGB at a pretty miserable outpost in Dresden, Germany as the Cold War ended. He came back into a city government position in St. Petersburg as the Soviet Union collapsed and all of those or at least all that we knew of, KGB agents got pulled back in from their positions and he rose fairly quickly up the ranks. There's a security services just in like '98, '99. But at the time that he stood for election as president of Russia in the year 2000, he was already Yeltsin's chosen successor and was serving as prime minister.

**N. Rodgers:** Was he just uber charismatic? Is that how he vaulted to those ranks?

**J. Twigg:** No, not at all.

**N. Rodgers:** Or did he have dirt on people?

**J. Twigg:** Probably had dirt on people because he was head of the KGB even for just a little while. He was young, sober, I keep coming back to that word, sober, and was to perceive to be a lot of the things that at that point Yeltsin was not, and Yeltsin was lacking. One other really key thing that Putin brought was clearly a behind-the-scenes agreement that as president, he would not reach back and prosecute Yeltsin or any members of Yeltsin's family. Crimes that Yeltsin may have committed.

**N. Rodgers:** Okay.

**J. Twigg:** So that was important. So fast-forward. Putin serves a first four-year term from 2000-2004. He's reelected to a second four-year term from 2004-2008. He's the only game in town at that point. He's gone pretty far toward establishing a political system that's become known as the power vertical, where he and back then a bunch of rich private sector oligarchs control the system from the top down. The system is so heavily oriented around this one guy at that point. This one guy's co-opting of the private sector oligarch community, that there's no clear alternative that would offer the country

continued stability. Really no obvious alternative that's going to get votes in an election. So what do they do? They do what's become known as the castling maneuver.

**N. Rodgers:** Is that Medvedev?

**J. Twigg:** Yes, where they pay the Prime Minister Medvedev, moved him into the presidency in what's clearly a rigged election. Putin assumes the prime minister position in 2008. Everybody assumes that they'll go forward with that, adhering to the constitutional provision that you can't be president for more than two consecutive terms.

**J. Aughenbaugh:** Terms. Yeah.

**J. Twigg:** That if you take a four-year term off, then you can come back. So what happened in 2012 was what everybody knew was going to happen, which is that Putin stands for elections for another term in 2012. Now, an interesting thing here is that Medvedev walked a tight rope during his presidency from 2008 through 2012, where he actually struck out a little bit on his own in a number of different areas, but managed also not to do so many things that he would look threatening enough to Putin that Putin would feel inspired to boot him out.

**N. Rodgers:** Okay.

**J. Twigg:** Medvedev has ruined his own political career in a handful of other ways in the last couple of years since then.

**N. Rodgers:** But he's still alive.

**J. Twigg:** He's still alive.

**N. Rodgers:** So he wins at some level.

**J. Twigg:** Which is not something you can say about people who have pissed Putin off in major ways over the last 10 or 15 years. I'm trying to go through a lot of ground relatively quickly here. So the 25 words or less version is that Putin gets re-elected to the presidency in 2012, and they changed the constitution so that terms of the presidency are for six years at that point, but there's still a two consecutive terms provision. So now, you've got Putin in office from 2012 through 2018. He stands reelection in 2018.

**N. Rodgers:** Shockingly, he wins.

**J. Twigg:** Shockingly he wins and there is plenty of video footage of ballot boxes being stuffed. There's clearly messing around going on, but to be fair to Putin, in defense of Putin's skill as a manipulator of public opinion and that political system, I don't think he needed to do that. I think he would have won fairly suddenly without any kind of manipulation. The numbers wouldn't have been as skewed in his favor as they were, but he's still through 2018 into 2019 could have won a free and fair election.

**N. Rodgers:** Is he just that beloved that people in Russia, or is it more like better the devil you know than the devil you don't? Or we don't like him, but he's stable.

**J. Twigg:** Beloved is a weird word in the Russian context. So until recently, beloved by many, respected.

**J. Aughenbaugh:** Feared.

**J. Twigg:** Feared yeah, so I was about to go to feared, maybe not, but back to that point about the power vertical that I made earlier. He has made himself, he's constructed a political system in which he is so indispensable. He is the only game in town and he has successfully maintained that situation such that outside of a relatively small but vocal political opposition community in Moscow and St. Petersburg, he's all that's there. Now he has complete control of state-run media and state-run media is just about all the media that there is. So he's managed to manipulate the perception of himself such that he is competent, masculine, successful, think about all of the calendar-esque photos you've seen.

**N. Rodgers:** Yes.

**J. Twigg:** Get back on the horse, wrestling a tiger, doing the under seas archaeological dive.

**N. Rodgers:** Karate, he did something with judo or something.

**J. Twigg:** He's actually a world ranked judo expert. He was a little wiry bullied kid as a child and did not come from a privileged background, grew up on a mean streets of what was then Leningrad and clearly got into a lot of fights as a kid. I think that's where the judo thing came from, it's the martial arts as a means to strengthen his own capacity for self-defense and exist in that environment and it's where the desire I think to have a career as a thug comes from. There are stories that are pretty widely accepted to be true, that as a teenager, he just walked into the local KGB office and said, "Hi, I want to work for you guys when I grow up." They apparently patted him on the head and said, "That's nice son, go off to college and get your degree and do these other handful of things that would qualify you and then come back and we'll talk then." So yeah, he has a long and interesting personal background, but he's been self grooming for exactly this kind of situation for forever.

**N. Rodgers:** So in 2024, when the next election rolls around, will there be a casting or at that point will the constitution be changed? Okay. Wait, no. So you've let us up to, I'm getting ahead of myself, aren't I?

**J. Twigg:** Oh, you just suck as a dictator, Nia. They're already way out ahead of you on this, you're not nearly as manipulative and malicious as the people at the top of Russia's political system are.

**N. Rodgers:** Yay for me I think. So I think I'm getting ahead of myself though because earlier this year, didn't he do something like everybody goes away now and it's just me or something like that?

**J. Twigg:** Yes. He didn't come out front and do it himself. People in the parliament, the State Duma back in January, started to make proposals that we need to, in the interest of national stability, blah, blah,

blah, we need to amend the constitution again. Constitution has to be amended such that basically the current occupant or actually it's not just the current document, it's anyone who has ever held the presidency. So it technically includes Medvedev as well. Although, that's totally like an accidental side consequence in all this. This is all linked to Putin. Anyone who's currently in the job or has held the job is not term-limited anymore.

**N. Rodgers:** But only those people.

**J. Twigg:** Right.

**N. Rodgers:** So if they lost an election-.

**J. Twigg:** It followed up the possibility for Putin to run for two more six year terms after the expiration of his current term in 2024. So basically, it's setting himself up for the possibility of re-election that would keep him in office until the year 2036.

**N. Rodgers:** Or until he dies, whichever. Because in 2036, there's no reason he can't get-.

**J. Twigg:** Technically, that would be the end of his eligibility according to the terms of the constitution. He gets more terms after the current term. At that point, I can't remember the math, I can't remember how old he'll be at that point.

**J. Aughenbaugh:** He's 67 right now.

**J. Twigg:** He's 67 right now. So we're taking him well past male Russian life expectancy, well past male Russian life expectancy by the time we get to that point. So all of these constitutional changes, with the change in his eligibility for term in office and this doesn't keep him in automatically, it just let's him run for re-election two more times.

**N. Rodgers:** But if he owns the media.

**J. Twigg:** So let's come back to that because he owns all the state-run media, but he doesn't own the Internet, at least not yet. So let's talk about where young people are getting their news in Russia and the extent to which people are starting to search for alternatives beyond state-run media, because that's a really interesting and important question. Let's talk about what's happened to his popularity since really the summer of 2018 when he changed pensions.

**N. Rodgers:** It always comes down to money, doesn't it?

**J. Twigg:** Oh, absolutely, yeah. That had been a political third rail for forever and he touched it and took ownership of it. I mean to his credit. Yeah, he did-.

**J. Aughenbaugh:** Credit?

**N. Rodgers:** I saw air quotes from both of you.

**J. Twigg:** [inaudible] what's happening to somebody else, but his popularity has taken a hit since the summer of 2018 and then there's a pandemic now and will definitely want to come back to the way he has been weirdly passive in his ownership of the government response to the coronavirus.

**N. Rodgers:** Okay.

**J. Twigg:** But before we do that, let's talk about a couple of other things that happened back in January with all this talk about the constitutional changes.

**N. Rodgers:** I have a question. So there are two Houses of Duma. Like regular parliaments, or is it like a House of Lords and the House of Commons or?

**J. Twigg:** Kind of like the House and Senate. There's one House-type representational by geography system and then there's an upper chamber that's basically representation among the country's regions by the regional.

**N. Rodgers:** Okay. Those are elected positions, right?

**J. Twigg:** The House equivalent is elected, the Senate equivalent used to be elected, but they changed it at a handful of years ago to be largely appointed.

**N. Rodgers:** Oh, okay. So it's appointed by for instance, just giving me a rough idea, the governor of Virginia could appoint two senators instead of electing them, so is it something like that?

**J. Twigg:** More or less. Yeah.

**N. Rodgers:** So these are the people who were agitating for all these constitutional changes?

**J. Twigg:** That's the mouthpiece that's being used to propose these constitutional changes, that lower house, the Duma, roughly equivalent to our House of Representatives.

**N. Rodgers:** They all have, well, not all of them obviously, but a lot of them probably have relationships with Putin.

**J. Twigg:** Oh, absolutely.

**N. Rodgers:** Well, Putin's power they go to.

**J. Twigg:** So Putin has a political party, the United Russia Party. He also has a couple of opposition parties that are clearly just nominal opposition. Behind the scenes, they take their marching orders from Putin and the Kremlin, but they exist to make it look like there's an opposition.

**N. Rodgers:** So I need to hire an opposition.

**J. Twigg:** Yes.

**N. Rodgers:** It's not really an opposition.

**J. Twigg:** Then there's a relatively small number of people, who actually get elected from opposition parties. But all of that having been said, for a very long time, that legislature has been a rubber stamp. It's had no actual power whatsoever. It just exists to make it look like there's a balance of power.

**N. Rodgers:** To make it look western, like a democracy. Sorry, Aughie.

**J. Aughenbaugh:** Because in part, that's what allows Putin to say, internationally, we still have a viable democracy. For the opposition parties, we have a legislative body that theoretically could hold the president accountable.

**J. Twigg:** A judicial system that access the court.

**J. Aughenbaugh:** They have a judicial system.

**N. Rodgers:** Except they don't have a free press, which is the key to a democracy really, isn't it?

**J. Twigg:** I'm not going to argue with you there, yes.

**J. Aughenbaugh:** But if you think about the Russian judicial system, when the proposed constitutional changes were put in front of it, what do they call it? The [inaudible] Constitutional Court

**J. Twigg:** Constitutional court, yeah.

**J. Aughenbaugh:** They went ahead and ratified the changes.

**J. Twigg:** Yeah. Everyone was waiting to see what that opinion was going to look like because there was so much question about whether or not they were going to approve it. Now [inaudible] see the sarcasm in my voice?

**N. Rodgers:** Really? Still question or no? Oh, I'm sorry.

**J. Twigg:** An enormous amount of sarcasm [inaudible] . By time everybody knew that the Constitutional Court was just going to rubber stamp.

**N. Rodgers:** So what he does is basically he takes people to dinner and he says, "Okay, this is what I'm going to need you to say. Well, not him, but minions of him." Take people to dinner, "This is what I'm going to need you to say, and when you do that, this is what I'll give you for your re-election campaign.

I'll give you airtime, I'll give you money. I'll give you my approval, which theoretically carries weight." People say, "All right, I'll do what you need me to do because that's the way a party works."

**J. Twigg:** A couple of the moments of that summary though make that system seem more like our system than they really are. First of all, campaign money, I mean, again, they don't need it because elections are already set up, to begin with, and so the idea that campaigns actually matter and campaign contributions actually matter. If your media is all state-run, then the party and power dominates the media, there's no money to buy airtime, that's a huge factor. The second thing is the idea that Putin or his immediate cronies would need to have dinner with anybody behind the scenes, and tell them what they're supposed to do. They don't really need to do that because everybody already knows what's expected of them. So these conversations are happening behind the scenes, but basically, it's a system where everything and everyone answers to Putin, and Putin has multiple clans, competing lines of authority that he exercises. It's almost Stalin ask in the way he keeps various centers of power, all competing with one another for his attention and for control over resources so that none of them ever gets to dominate, and certainly, none of them ever reaches a point where they could possibly challenge him for power or authority.

**N. Rodgers:** So he is super smart in the sense of the way that you dictate and manipulate this kind of thing. He's really good at this.

**J. Twigg:** He's super smart. Really good at this. I mean, he could have been doing it successfully for this long if he weren't. He's also super lucky because his time in office back in the 2000s coincides with international prices for the only thing Russia has, which is oil and natural gas. Those prices started to go through the ceiling back in 2005, 2006. So Putin's time in office starts to coincide with Russia all of a sudden becoming a rich country. So he's got money to use.

**N. Rodgers:** He's got resources. So he's got some leverage.

**J. Twigg:** Yeah, it's not resources. He's the luckiest guy in the world because of the timing of when he's been in office.

**J. Aughenbaugh:** Speaking of that Judy to the extent where we go with the next set of questions. So let's pivot to the fact that in this year alone, oil and gas prices have plummeted in part because of the pandemic. But even before the pandemic, oil prices around the world were dropping significantly. So how is this affecting, if you will, Putin or support for Putin? Because a lot of the public comments that were made by members of the Russian Parliament for why they needed constitutional changes, emphasize the word stability over and over and over again. Even Putin's coy remarks in response to questions of, "Would you run for reelection again?" "Well, I would do it if it promoted stability because stability is so important in Russian society, culture, history, etc." So how are these economic changes in regards to their pretty much their only significant natural resource, how's that affecting, for instance, his popularity or his ability to go ahead and pull these puppet strings that he's done so successfully?

**J. Twigg:** So a couple of points there. One is that Russia was taking an economic hit even before oil prices went down because of sanctions. They got to invade Ukraine illegally annex's Crimea starts a war



that is still ongoing, even in the middle of an infectious disease pandemic. In the eastern part of Ukraine and the Western community quite rightly puts heavy sanctions on Russia. Russia has tried to respond to that with pretty aggressive import substitution policy, some of which had been in place even before the sanctioned regime. Those import-substitution policies, counter-sanctions have helped, but clearly, Russia took an economic hit because of the sanctions, exacerbated by falling oil prices. That is all part of the stability equation, and one more really important factor here is that Putin has used his control of the media to spin any blame for all of the economic pain that they felt in the last five or six years, as the fault of evil western enemies. So it's hard for us to imagine sitting here watching the wide array of diverse media options that we have here in the United States, it's hard to imagine the extent to which a huge percentage of the Russian media-consuming audience has bought in to this overwhelming narrative that's been spun by the Kremlin, that Russia is surrounded by enemies in the West that want to weaken it, that want to overtake it. The whole revolution and situation in Ukraine was all part of the West's aggression toward Russia, and so only by sticking with the stilled competent, back to Aughie's words, stable leadership provided by Putin, can we maintain Russia's strength against this external enemy. It's alarming the extent to which even my pro United States, well-educated, seemingly liberal Russian friends, have bought into at least some of this line of argument.

**N. Rodgers:** I would say that that's hard for us to imagine except that some people in the United States do that too. They get their news from one source, and so that's the source that they carry forward. One side or the other is evil and out to destroy the United States as we know and love it. So I guess it's that but on steroids. It's that, but to an extreme level of the only voice you ever hear. You don't get your cousins arguing with you over at the Thanksgiving table, and that's not true. Everybody in the room is saying, "Yes, that's true."

**J. Aughenbaugh:** Yeah, because the media is controlled by the state.

**N. Rodgers:** Right.

**J. Aughenbaugh:** Sometimes I will go ahead and have people say, "Well, we have issues with the press in the United States because it is controlled by large corporations, and what we have a better media if it was controlled by the government."

**N. Rodgers:** Gosh, no. Even I know that's a bad idea and I want to take over the world. I mean, come on, that's a terrible idea. It's a terrible idea because then you could end up with a dictator like Putin, but you could also just end up with a president like Murdoch. If your president was president Rupert Murdoch, can you imagine how that would go? That's terrifying.

**J. Aughenbaugh:** Know that one of the basic ideas behind a free press is you actually have competition.

**N. Rodgers:** Right.

**J. Aughenbaugh:** So you can choose. Many Americans, as you point out, still select. They'll only watch Fox, or they'll only watch MSNBC, or they'll only read the New York Times, or they'll only read the Wall Street Journal, or whatever the case may be. But theoretically they still have choice.

**N. Rodgers:** They could read something else. They don't. But also they can be exposed, and they are often exposed to ideas around the edges of their beliefs that make it not quite so 100 percent ironed, which is what Judy's talking about, I think, is that if everybody in your world was repeating the same.

**J. Aughenbaugh:** Think how difficult it would be for you to go ahead to think differently.

**N. Rodgers:** To think outside of that, yeah. So Judy, Can I ask a question and if you say to me "No, I'm not going to answer that because it will throw us off." I totally understand, but is Crimea the land of magic and Xanadu? What's the deal with Crimea being so important that Putin is willing to have a war over it? People are willing for this to be a thing?

**J. Twigg:** Has really nice beaches.

**N. Rodgers:** So it's like Myrtle Beach. It's like us fighting over Myrtle Beach with maybe Canada or something?

**J. Twigg:** It has naval bases in the Black Sea, headquarters for the Black Sea fleet.

**N. Rodgers:** Okay.

**J. Twigg:** There's also historical argument over whether Crimea should belong to Russia or Ukraine?

**N. Rodgers:** Yeah, somebody gave it back to somebody?

**J. Twigg:** It's flipped back and forth a handful of times, going back over a couple of centuries of history. It is true that the farther East you go in Ukraine, the more heavily the population becomes ethnically Russian, and the more Russian speaking, rather than Ukrainian speaking, the population becomes.

**N. Rodgers:** Okay.

**J. Twigg:** That having been said, there are norms of state sovereignty and territorial integrity. I mean, yeah, it is part of Ukraine, and the United States and the Western civilized world have done absolutely the right thing by not recognizing Russia's illegal violation of Ukraine's territorial sovereignty and illegal annexation of Ukraine, and I will die on this hill. This happened because Ukraine was leaning toward the rest on leaning toward relationships with the European Union and NATO that Russia was clearly not happy with. Russia does not want an open, democratic Ukraine right on its doorstep, and so it acted accordingly, and it acted illegally. But you might be able to tell that I feel really strongly about this. Ukraine with all its issues, and obviously in United States political context, we've heard about corruption in Ukraine. Ukraine has gotten awful PR in the United States because of what's happened with the Trump narrative coming out of there. But I've spent time in Ukraine fairly recently and done a lot of work on Ukraine and with Ukrainian counterparts recently, and the drive for democracy in Ukraine, the strength of an incredibly young, talented, vibrant civil society in Ukraine is just overwhelming. Ukraine is the frontline in the battle for democracy and Western civilization right now.

**N. Rodgers:** Wow.

**J. Twigg:** We need to be holding fast in our defense of Ukraine and the democratic forces there.

**N. Rodgers:** Okay. Yay.

**J. Twigg:** So soapbox. Okay, I'm done now.

**N. Rodgers:** No, it's important for us to have context. Because everything, as we've discussed on this podcast about a zillion times, everything is nuanced and about context. So what you're saying is that Ukraine's potential future democracy threatens Putin's control over Russia because of its proximity, and I assume its size. It's quite large relative to lots of other countries in Europe, which apparently are [inaudible]. Then it threatens him in some way that he feels is worth the sanctions, is worth the disapproval of the rest of the world.

**J. Twigg:** Because the disapproval of the rest of the world hiked Putin's approval rating at home through the ceiling, right? When [inaudible] was enormously popular inside Russia. Again, defending Russia's great power status [inaudible]

**N. Rodgers:** It was ours to begin with.

**J. Twigg:** [inaudible] Crimea is ours [inaudible] all over the place.

**N. Rodgers:** They speak Russian, we're looking out for our cousins.

**J. Twigg:** Yeah, exactly. Yeah.

**J. Aughenbaugh:** [inaudible], the number of times Judy has said to me, Crimea is almost like Putin's wag the dog moment.

**J. Twigg:** Yes.

**J. Aughenbaugh:** Okay. Even if it didn't have historical, cultural, political, economic value, if nothing else, it allowed Putin to go ahead and say, "We can have this on our doorstep, and even with all the other stuff that may be wrong in Russian society, we need to go ahead and defend our brothers, our sisters, our cousins, etc., in the Ukraine."

**J. Twigg:** Yeah.

**J. Aughenbaugh:** If you've ever watched the movie Wag The Dog.

**N. Rodgers:** Yeah, you've to find a war for a distraction and to build your base at home. So if he's in another trough, can we look forward to another invasion somewhere?

**J. Twigg:** No, they're not going to have the money.

**N. Rodgers:** Okay.

**J. Twigg:** Not to be fair, but let's not pivot quite yet, I am in no way defending Putin here, but to give some longer scale historical context. Russia's felt surrounded by enemies for a very long time. It has really long land borders with historically hostile powers on both sides, on all sides. The only thing that saved it from Germany in World War II was winter.

**N. Rodgers:** Right.

**J. Twigg:** But the memory of World War II, it's called the Great Patriotic War in the Russian context is sacred. They lost tens of millions of soldiers and civilians in that war. We can't begin to understand what they went through during World War II. You go back even further than that, back to the Mongol hordes. You go back a very long time in understanding Russia's feelings of being surrounded by enemies and needing to build up geographic buffer zones.

**N. Rodgers:** Right.

**J. Twigg:** So at the end of World War II, why did the Soviet Union, why did Stalin gobble up so much of Eastern Europe?

**N. Rodgers:** Iron curtain.

**J. Twigg:** Geographic buffer zone against what it saw as a hostile western alliance. So it's not unreasonable to paint what Putin is doing now with that brush. Although having said that, I also want to make clear that that doesn't excuse it, it just creates a context.

**N. Rodgers:** Right. It's easy for us to say because we only have two countries, neither of which are particularly hostile and neither of which pose a particular threat to us even if they were.

**J. Twigg:** We've got giant oceans on both sides, we we're completely in a different geographic place. This is like national security 101, that matters, geography matters.

**N. Rodgers:** Yeah. So if Canada decided to invade us, the three of us could probably repel them, and I'm terribly out of shape. But I'm saying I like our chances. But they've got China. I see where that could be a pressure a bit, and I agree with you that it's not right to go around invading people because of that. But by the same token, it made sense after World War II, it made sense that they would want a buffer between them and Germany because Germany was so hostile, and almost won several of those big invasion-type things. Hitler should have learned from Napoleon about the whole cold thing, but still that's a lot of lost Russians and I can see where that would be something that would be carried in the genetic memory.

**J. Twigg:** Yeah, that's a very good thing.

**N. Rodgers:** Not just in your personal memory but also in your cultural memory. So fast forward us now to the beginning of this year. So they changed the constitution and they're like, "You can serve for a thousand years. We love you so much." Big hugs and kisses, and then COVID breaks out.

**J. Twigg:** Yeah.

**N. Rodgers:** I mean, I don't think any leader looks particularly good right now. Maybe Boris Johnson looks good because he's unconscious, but I don't think the rest of them are looking good right now.

**J. Twigg:** I don't want to speak ill of the moderately-to-severely Coronavirus infected, but he bangled UK's response in a major way, in a lot of ways that are very similar to what Donald Trump did here.

**N. Rodgers:** Italy doesn't look good. Nobody looks good right now.

**J. Twigg:** A hand full of young female prime ministers look good.

**J. Aughenbaugh:** Yeah.

**N. Rodgers:** That's true. New Zealand, she looks pretty good.

**J. Twigg:** Does it, yeah.

**J. Aughenbaugh:** Yeah, New Zealand.

**N. Rodgers:** Sweden, no, Norway.

**J. Twigg:** Sweden has done some really stupid things.

**N. Rodgers:** No, it's Norway. She's got I think an entire female cabinet and staff, and you're not hearing anything from them the way you are right with the Swedes who are like, "Go ahead and give everybody a hug," which is weird because Swedes aren't generally like that, but whatever. So how is COVID affecting Russia? I know that they offer medical equipment relatively recently to some countries or something.

**J. Twigg:** Yeah. So a couple of things about that. You talked earlier about using Putin as a role model for your world dictatorial aspirations?

**N. Rodgers:** Yeah, except apparently I have to kill the Internet and I can't let anybody look at any media.

**J. Twigg:** Yeah.

**N. Rodgers:** So I'm going to have to have more control than I currently have.

**J. Twigg:** Yeah. Well, one person who clearly is consistently not just in the COVID response but for years has been using Putin as his role model is Donald Trump. So a fair amount of what Putin has done in the initial phases of response to Coronavirus is there's a lot of similarities between Trump and Putin. They closed borders early, so Russia's got a 4,300 kilometer land border with China, they closed that immediately. Smart move

**N. Rodgers:** Can they actually do that? I mean, is their border secure enough? Like if we said, "We're closing the Canadian border." I mean, we have said that and I don't know that it's actually technically closed.

**J. Twigg:** So this is tangential epidemic talk here. I was just looking at case numbers in Russia's Far East today. The breakout in China was mostly in the central part of China and the southern part of China, so the northern parts that border Russia have cases of Coronavirus but not China's heavy caseload.

**N. Rodgers:** Okay.

**J. Twigg:** But yeah, Russia lockdown public transportation fairly quickly. But one of the things that China is worried about now is the number of people who were infected in Moscow, who have gotten on flights to Vladivostok, which is Russia's biggest city in the Far East, and now are taking private cars and buses from Russia into China. So China is now closing border posts with Russia in order to avoid infection coming into China from Russia.

**N. Rodgers:** Are those Russians going to China or are those Chinese citizens going home?

**J. Twigg:** They're Chinese trying to get home.

**N. Rodgers:** Okay.

**J. Twigg:** I mean, you raise a great question about cross-border traffic between Russia and China because there's so much shuttle trade going on in those border towns and cities with Chinese people selling lots of stuff into Russia. A lot of intermarriage across the border in the last decade or so. Like I said, I'm keeping an eye on the numbers that are being reported out of those regions. So far, those aren't big numbers being reported by Russia, but I'm not sure how much we should be believing many of the numbers that are being reported out of Russia right now.

**N. Rodgers:** That was another question I was going to ask you. So thank you for bringing it up because I was hoping you could tell me. I don't hold a whole lot of faith in the CDC's numbers for the United States because we're not doing adequate testing to really know how many cases we have, and I'm not saying that to slam the CDC, it's just a fact. If we were testing, we would probably have a lot more numbers.

**J. Twigg:** The CDC says that.

**N. Rodgers:** Right.

**J. Twigg:** There's nobody except maybe people with political motivations to say something different. But the public health professionals in the United States are saying, "Yes, actual case numbers are far above what we're able to report right now because of shortcomings in our testing regime."

**N. Rodgers:** Are they saying that in Russia? Wait, so let me back up for just a second. What plays over in my head whenever anybody talks about these numbers and releasing the numbers from a country for a variety of things is when Iran looked to the world in the face and said, "We don't have any gay people here." I'm like, "Yeah, you do, because mathematically there are gay people in Iran. They may be terrified to be there and not be public." So I'm always like, "I'm a little sketched out by whatever number comes along." Do we think there's adequate reporting of what they do know in Russia?

**J. Twigg:** This is one where I think they are being straightforward in terms of what they do know.

**N. Rodgers:** Okay. That's good.

**J. Twigg:** I don't think that the Kremlin is sitting there with secret reporting of the real numbers that they're hiding, and then they're presenting to the rest of the world a set of fake numbers.

**N. Rodgers:** Okay.

**J. Twigg:** I don't think that's happening.

**J. Aughenbaugh:** But what about the testing regime?

**J. Twigg:** The testing regime has issues, so we can talk about what those are, but let's fold that back into where we were maybe five minutes ago, and talk about how Russia has responded to Coronavirus.

**J. Aughenbaugh:** Exactly.

**J. Twigg:** They closed the borders, they shut down flights, they did a lot of the kinds of things that we did here early on in the United States. Then just like we did here in the United States, we squandered the time that we could have bought with those border closures by thinking that that was probably enough. So we didn't do a lot of the prep that we should have done over the subsequent couple of weeks of lead time that those border closing should have bought us.

**N. Rodgers:** Medical supplies, quarantine, stay away from each other, social distancing, is that what you mean by those are the things we should have been doing?

**J. Twigg:** We didn't want to risk that because we were afraid of the economic hit that that was going to cost. So we traded off public health for economic health in ways that in the long-term will cause everybody who went down that path to take a bigger economic hit in the long-term.

**N. Rodgers:** So all it's doing is pushing the pain further down the road, it's not helping?

**J. Twigg:** Right, and probably increasing the amount of people that will have to suffer. Yeah. So there weren't signs that Putin was really taken this seriously until March 24th and March 25th.

**N. Rodgers:** That late?

**J. Twigg:** Yes. When it looks very much like he got the briefing that scared the pants off him. So it was back then when we saw him don the big yellow protective suit and go visit the big Coronavirus hospital that they were doing emergency construction of right outside Moscow. Then he gave a national address on March 25th where he seemed weirdly relaxed and passive. He talked about economic measures, support for the health sector, support for small businesses. He talked very little about quarantine, he talked very little about mitigation. Like his physical position, he was sitting relaxed with one arm propped up on his desk, it was just a really strange presentation.

**J. Aughenbaugh:** Well, typically, of course, somebody like Putin, who is, again, very assertive, very aggressive, he portrayed as a doer not a responder.

**N. Rodgers:** Well, and if he was sitting at his desk, isn't that slightly unusual for him? Usually, he is standing at a podium or at least when I've seen him.

**J. Twigg:** In fact, he walks down a long red carpet, like of all the circumstances ceremony.

**N. Rodgers:** Yeah.

**J. Twigg:** Yes. So a couple of things about this. One is that the next day on March 26th, in this pretty rapid progression of events that make it look like he starts to get it, he has a televised video conference with regional leaders because at this point he's social distancing. So he's in his office by himself and he's got them all on the big Zoom screen in front of him and he gives this extraordinary speech, where he gives them a set of marching orders about what they need to do to contain the spread of the virus and mitigate the health and economic impact of the virus. But numerous times during that speech he says things like, "Guys, this time we need for you to actually do the things that I'm telling you to do. I need real reports, not just on paper. I need you to take action for real and not just tell me that you're taking action." It was one of the most extraordinary speeches I've ever heard a leader give in what it revealed about the way the system usually works. Everybody is so afraid of being the bearer of bad news that they lie to each other all the time about what's really going on and about what they're really achieving and about what's really happening. That's an echo of the way the entire Soviet economy function. It's why the Soviet Union fell apart. Because they all lie to each other all the time about whether they were fulfilling their annual plan and their five-year plan targets because none of them wanted to get blamed for things going wrong. So that's where Russia had gotten now, to the point that Putin had to actually say, "This time it's serious guys. Don't lie to me anymore. I want to hear what's really going on and I want you to actually do the stuff I'm telling you to do instead of just going through the motions." It's remarkable.



**N. Rodgers:** Wow. That's what we've heard out of one of the problems with China was, was that people didn't even report up the numbers, they didn't want to report up the deaths, they didn't want to do any of that because they thought that it would reflect badly on them. So you're saying that the Russian system has been similar and he's like, "No, this time is legit, we have to actually have legit numbers because I assume we need to know where to send supplies, how to help people."

**J. Twigg:** In a public health emergency, you need two things more than anything else. You need real data about what's happening, just like you say, so that you know where to allocate resources and how to allocate resources. You also need communications. You need crystal clear, effective, strategic communication about what everybody needs to do, what all your institutions need to do, what people need to be doing, and how they need to be doing it.

**J. Aughenbaugh:** Then if people are afraid to go ahead and report the data, that communication problem only exasperate first problem because you don't know.

**J. Twigg:** Absolutely.

**N. Rodgers:** Were Russians being told now to self quarantine, to stay off the street, and are they doing it?

**J. Twigg:** Yes. It's before we get off what happened in Russia and China thing, observing that something similar happened here in the United States, where it took us a while to even begin to get our act together. So a couple of points about that. One is that it's really tempting to try to make generalizations about whether democracies or authoritarian systems have the capacity to respond better to situations like this. Fundamentally, I don't think you can draw any conclusions like that based on what's happened with this pandemic. The key thing seems to have been competence, not the type of political system you have. Everywhere though in big countries, the key seems to have been whether or not local and regional leaders have stepped up where national leadership has failed. So look at what's happening in the United States and the difference between, I don't know, California, where the governor of California is now coordinating the response for the entire western part of the United States. Look at how effective Andrew Cuomo has been in making New York response happens since things got bad there. Compare that to most of the southern governors, the governor of Florida who took forever to shut down the beaches and spring break. So we're really seeing an illustration, I think, of how, where there's a national leadership vacuum, local leadership matters in a major way. That's been true in Russia also. So this gets us back to what's been going on to Putin. As Putin has been weirdly passive and relaxed, there are two people that have stepped up and are now forming with Putin a triumvirate of leadership against the pandemic. One is the new prime minister who got put in place as a part of the whole proposal for constitutional changes back in January. So Medvedev was out. For a lot of reasons he's been the subject of a couple of really hard-hitting independent YouTube videos made by independent political activists in Russia over the last couple of years, slamming him for having really big fancy lavishes estates and a lavish lifestyle. So Medvedev's reputation has taken a hit over the last, say year or two. So it is easy for Putin to edge him out as part of the whole constitutional shakeup in January and bring in a new prime minister, a guy name Mishustin, who was their chief tax inspector, came out of nowhere. Imagine that the head of the IRS was all of a sudden named to the cabinet in the United States. That's roughly the

equivalent of what happened here. He has been a pretty competent technocrat, directing the economic part of Russia's response. But the face of Russia's response has been Sergey Sobyenin, the Mayor of Moscow. If you're thinking about Putin's carefully constructed, very successfully constructed public image over the last almost two decades, this is the first time you've had someone who's looked a little bit like an equal, not necessarily a challenger, but in equal. Sobyenin has been an effective communicator, he's been a forceful communicator, and he locked Moscow down way earlier than the rest of the country got locked down. Then the rest of the country in an uneven and staggering way, but has been following the lead that Moscow has taken. So really interesting political dynamics here where people are starting to talk about Sobyenin now as a logical successor to Putin.

**J. Aughenbaugh:** Okay.

**J. Twigg:** So right now they're in the middle of a pandemic, so I'll be hugely surprised that there's any kind of political shakeup anytime soon. Stability is the thing, but Sobyenin is in a longer term danger zone in that he's really looking very effective as a political leader.

**N. Rodgers:** So he may turn up in a river with cement shoes at some point, or maybe not if he's so well known and so popular.

**J. Twigg:** But he may find that there are measures taken to decrease his visibility, how about that? They won't bump him off the way they've bumped off journalists and opposition figures who have been living in Western countries. I don't anticipate his accidental fall from a five-story window.

**N. Rodgers:** Or the injection of plutonium or whatever. It's not plutonium, but you know what I mean? They're trying to make them X-Men and then stay there, kill them. Or maybe, Putin will realize if he grooms this guy and he keeps him within a certain range, he can use him reaching out to young people, reaching out to people who may be looking for change and saying, "See, I don't destroy my enemies." I don't know.

**J. Twigg:** People are starting to make jokes about Putin now. More liberal, Western-oriented opposition figures have had Putin jokes for a long time, but now ordinary people are starting to make Putin jokes based on him being perceived, not any more as the in-control father of the country, but kind of the out of touch grandfather of the country. With his visit to the hospital facility in the big yellow moon suit, people are just laughing at that now. They're perceiving him as being removed, out of touch. Again, [inaudible] and Sobyenin are the guys that are perceived to be in control. So if you are a Sobyenin at this point, presumably you're being pretty careful about your relationship with Putin because you don't want Putin to see you as threatening. Right?

**N. Rodgers:** Right.

**J. Twigg:** You want to make sure that you're walking that tight rope really carefully.

**N. Rodgers:** It must be exhausting though to be a dictator.

**J. Twigg:** Yeah.

**N. Rodgers:** In the sense that you're constantly fretting about other people's popularity and whether the people are getting tired of you. I would think that after a while, after 20 years, which has been pretty close to that. It's not quite, I think, but pretty close, that seems like you'd be exhausted. It would make sense to me to make a deal with that person, not unlike the deal that Yeltsin made with Putin, which is, if you just leave me alone in my retirement, I shall take all the money that I've skimmed off the top because I feel certain that there's money skimmed off in various places.

**J. Twigg:** Putin is the richest guy in the world.

**N. Rodgers:** Yeah. So if you took your money and you went and sat in your [inaudible] by the ocean, and people left you alone, it might not be a bad way to end your last few years.

**J. Twigg:** Yeah. That's not going to happen anytime soon. Again, because of the whole crisis that we bet. It appears to me that Putin still perceives himself as the essential ingredient. It's not just Putin, I think there are also key elite groups, private sector elites, other political elites, the siloviki. The Russian word for force or power is sil, and so the siloviki are the people in the power ministries, the security services, the military, the armed forces. People in those power bases who now have some say over what's going to happen here. So there's probably a lot of conversation about what those power dynamics are likely to be between Putin and Sobyenin, and others going forward. I'm sure it's [inaudible] and complicated. But your point here about how exhausting this must be for a dictator, it's exhausting for any politician anywhere, right? [inaudible] applied to authoritarians.

**N. Rodgers:** Our presidents look terrible after they've been president. That's just four to eight years. They look like they've aged 50 years. I imagine that constantly being worried about your back in addition to everything else would just be like how you get out of bed every day.

**J. Twigg:** The other complication for Russia, circling back to a much earlier point that we made, is that they're going to run out of money. One of the things that they very smartly did because they've had really smart, competent central bankers for 15 years now, is they've used all that oil and gas money that they accrued when oil and gas prices were high to build up ginormous stabilization funds of various kinds. So literally billions of billions of dollars in the bank for this very kind of rainy day. This was quite a rainy that we're facing right now. But the combination of lower oil prices, and just today, they reached a deal with Saudi Arabia on balancing reduction cuts with oil price setting so that they're managing as best they can what's happening. But they know that stabilizing the economy through this pandemic is going to run them out of money in pretty short order. That's interesting for all the reasons that it's obviously interesting. It's also interesting because over the last couple of years as sanctions and decreased oil prices have chipped away at Russian's economy. One of the things that Putin has done is start spending a lot on social programs in something that looks like it's very much akin to a social contract. You let me keep doing my political soft authoritarian thing, and I will improve your health care, improve your education, improve your basic social support structure in fundamental ways. If Putin can't keep doing that because of the hit that this pandemic has made on the economy, it's going to be interesting to see what the political fallout of that will be.

**J. Aughenbaugh:** Yeah, because the Western example is once you create those social welfare programs, then you have stakeholders.

**J. Twigg:** Yeah.

**J. Aughenbaugh:** You begin to go ahead and expect the entitlement or the benefit, or benefits, and when they could get it, that's when they frequently get restless. They begin to distrust their institutions and the leaders of those institutions.

**J. Twigg:** That's already starting to happen, so back to the pension thing.

**N. Rodgers:** Yeah, I was going to ask you about that. I know we're running low on time, so I don't want to keep you but you mentioned pensions and I'm like, "Oh, you can't mess with old people."

**J. Twigg:** Right.

**J. Aughenbaugh:** It felt real, right?

**J. Twigg:** Yeah, it felt real, and Russia's old people actually marched in the streets back about a decade ago when they tried monetizing a lot of non-monetary benefits to pensioners had, like free public transportation, stuff like that. Putin is primary electoral block. I mean, he's got an advantage among all age cohorts, but boy, old people love him more than anybody else, right? So dealing with the pension burden is a problem. But Russia is a heavily aging population and the pension fund was running into deficit in a huge way. Russia's retirement age until the summer of 2018 was 55 for women, and 60 for men.

**N. Rodgers:** That's young.

**J. Twigg:** It's one of the lowest of the low, right?

**N. Rodgers:** Yeah, that's really young. Wait, what's your life expectancy in Russia?

**J. Twigg:** At the height of their demographic crisis in the 1990s, for men, it was lower than that. So there's a whole other ball or what, but it's a vicious circle. Why is that life expectancy is so low for men? It's because they're drinking so much, and why are they drinking so much? Because if they're not even going to live long enough to retire, why not have a good time while they're here? How do you get yourself out of that vicious circle? The answer is that they did a lot of really pretty smart public health moves to restrict access to alcohol and tobacco throughout the late 2000s over the last 10-12 years. That's a completely different story, but they've tackled a lot of that premature mortality, they still have it. But they've tackled it in pretty impressive ways over the last 10 or 15 years. But still, this is a fiscal problem. If you correct your problem with reduced life expectancy, then people live long enough to draw their pensions. So at one point, the minister of finance actually said, "Let's stop doing all those great alcohol and tobacco control measures because we can't afford to pay their pensions."

**N. Rodgers:** Holy cow.

**J. Twigg:** Yeah.

**N. Rodgers:** Let's let people drink bathtub vodka because we don't want to pay them when they're old, that's terrifying.

**J. Twigg:** Not just bathtub vodka but, when they started to increase the excise taxes on vodka, cologne, cough syrup, industrial lubricants. There's a whole category of stuff called surrogate alcohols that they were and to a lesser extent are drinking in a major way. So anyway, big tangent. So the pension burden was huge. If you run the numbers on that, all you have to do is increase the pension age by a relatively small amount in order to make a pretty big dent in that fiscal burden. Because most of the people who are drawing pensions are your relatively young, retired people, before they start to die off. So in a summer of 2018, they announced a phase in over the next two decades. It's a very gradual phase in of an increase of the retirement age. That didn't go over very well.

**J. Aughenbaugh:** Yeah.

**J. Twigg:** So the hit on Putin's popularity actually started back then, and it coincided with a wave of street protests, not just in your big cities, Moscow and St. Petersburg, but all over the country among primarily young people against a whole lot of different stuff; fraudulent elections, corruption was a big theme in these protests, environmental degradation. Toxic garbage dumps were a big theme of a lot of these protests. A lot of these protests were being driven by young people who were getting their news off the Internet from a fair number of really skilled Russian YouTube vloggers. So you've got this preexisting kind of tableau of pension age increases having made people mad starting back in December of 2018, protest action that started back in 2018, 2019, that was already making the leadership nervous., and now they have a global pandemic to deal with. Again, wrapping up the summary statement here, I don't think we should expect to see any kind of changes or instability anytime soon. Because stability, again, back to these first comment an hour ago, stability is baked into the Russian soul, and it's going to be a watchword as they deal with that, with the impact of the pandemic. But those constitutional changes that were initiated back in January, there was a reason they were doing that; it was to fend off potential sources of instability moving forward. Now they've had to postpone the referendum that they were going to have on April 22nd to approve these constitutional changes. They're not going to have that now, because pandemic. So that's pushed off now into the future. There are a whole lot of question marks about the shape of Russian politics is going to be, and I don't think those question marks are going to be resolved in the near term, but I think that there are plenty of open questions coming down.

**N. Rodgers:** So when we look back 10 years from now or 20 years from now, will this be the start of change in Russia? Will this be the start of the end of the Putin era and the beginning of a different era?

**J. Twigg:** It would not surprise me if that were the case, although we'd want to put an asterisk in that. The fertile ground started to be created just a little bit earlier.

**N. Rodgers:** Right.

**J. Twigg:** So these kinds of changes, but sort of popping up a level of analysis, I think that all of the people who have been talking about global health security for a very long time and have been advocating for better preparation for exactly the kind of thing that's happening right now. The work that those people have been doing for a very long time, tells us that it's not just Russian politics that will change as a result of this pandemic. That we are likely to see political shifts in lots of different countries around the world and if we're smart, we're going to see changes in the global political architecture as well. We need to, if we're going to come up with ways to make sure that something like this doesn't happen again.

**N. Rodgers:** We obviously and clearly need to work on public health as a centralized World property. The idea that a country can be isolated somehow in this situation when we know that the World is only gotten tinier and tinier, I mentioned to Aughie earlier that, I can mail something to Germany and it arrives in two days, like the idea that countries are separate anymore, it just doesn't exist.

**J. Twigg:** There's an important sort of counter argument to that. That I think we're going to hear a lot. Absolutely, take your point. Microbes don't respect International border lines.

**N. Rodgers:** They can't read. Let's just be fair to them. They can't read.

**J. Twigg:** Viruses are brilliant, insidious little things. So they're going to go wherever they can. So that is an important and fundamental point that is foundational to everything we've known for a long time, about infectious disease control. But that having been said, my fear is that, the lesson that the Donald Trumps of the world will take from this, is that national borders do matter and can matter. That the way you deal with the threat posed by this globalized world, is to close your borders, become more self-sufficient, become more autarchic. Make sure that you have the capacity to seal yourself off for the rest of the world and have to rely only on yourself in situations like this.

**J. Aughenbaugh:** Yes.

**J. Twigg:** I think that's a gigantically dangerous game, going to hold down the reasons.

**N. Rodgers:** I'm going to choose my Pollyanna view of the world because I don't want to live in a world where people say, we will just close our borders and we'll close out, that's so not scientific. It's not appreciating the reality of human interaction. Like you were saying about China and Russia, people are married across the border. Would that it were so simple, that you could say, "Okay, we're just going to put up the great big wall and nobody will ever get in or out." But that's just not humans. It's not taking humans into account. That's not how we work.

**J. Twigg:** I'll get up on a parallel soapbox to my Ukrainian soapbox and that has to do with the World Health Organization. Let me just offer the fact here that, under the radar, while everybody has been focused on a coronavirus pandemic. The Ebola outbreak in the Democratic Republic of Congo has

stopped. The reason that it has stopped is because the World Health Organization made that happen. Lots of other people contributed to it but it's been WHO leadership that has quashed a deadly Ebola pandemic in Democratic Republic of Congo and surrounding areas. So WHO has its issues. China lied for political reasons. WHO had to finesse the way it dealt with China at the beginning of this pandemic. But under its current leadership, WHO has become an enormously effective, vital organization. This is not the time to be talking about cutting off WHO, we ought to be doing, what we can to support global leadership and coordination not kill it.

**N. Rodgers:** What's good to know Judy, is that Aughie has many times informed me that while Donald Trump can say he's going to cut off money to a variety of things. Including, I'm going to cut off all the water to Richmond and I'm going to scoop out the ocean with a teacup. He has to have the Congress actually pay to get that done or enact in some way to get that done. So I'm happy for him to talk his talk. But fortunately, I don't believe that, even if tomorrow we decided to cut off funding, that it would be that fast or that simple because there's lots of opposition to that. So I live in the optimistic world of you can flap your lips but that's not actually how the US government works. It's just further notice that, you haven't been paying attention to any of Aughie civics lessons.

**J. Twigg:** The good news is that, support for global health has enjoyed strong bipartisan support in Congress for a very long time. Mitch McConnell is a polio survivor. He's been one of those supporters of global campaign to eradicate polio. Although, I will admit that, one of the few things that has literally brought me to tears as a part of this coronavirus pandemic, has been the news, two weeks ago, that the global polio eradication campaign has had to be suspended because of the pandemic.

**J. Aughenbaugh:** Yes.

**J. Twigg:** So close. Polio will expand where it can and without aggressive vaccination campaigns to fight it, we're going to have to, maybe not start from square one but we're going to get setback a few really important steps on that one.

**N. Rodgers:** So there's always a cost to everything.

**J. Twigg:** Yes.

**J. Aughenbaugh:** Yes.

**N. Rodgers:** I guess that cost-benefit analysis that is horrible to have to make. I'm sure that there are countries that while they're old stars are some of the people who are more likely to die from COVID, so that may relieve some of that pressure on their retirement and pension systems, not just in Russia but in Italy. That's a heck of a price to pay for that. So I get that it's complicated. It always comes back to the idea that there's no one string, it's a bunch of strings and when you yank on one, something else gets pulled too.

**J. Twigg:** [inaudible] you do not anticipate?

**N. Rodgers:** Yes. Exactly. The law of unintended consequences. Thank you so much for coming today and talking to us about this. You've made so many things, so much clearer for me. I have lots of other questions but we'll ask you those another time, if you don't mind coming back.

**J. Twigg:** My pleasure.

**N. Rodgers:** But this has been wonderful. Thank you so much.

**J. Twigg:** Sure. Thank you Aughie. Thanks Nia.

**J. Aughenbaugh:** Thanks Judy.

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