

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: Hey, Aughie.

J. Aughenbaugh: Morning, Nia. How are you?

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

J. Aughenbaugh: I'm lovely. Thank you.

N. Rodgers: I don't know if anybody's noticed that there's an election happening in Virginia right now, or there's going to be an election November 2nd, which just as a reminder for the folks who listen, who haven't heard my reminders enough. Excuse me, the first Tuesday after the first Monday in November, which in this case happens to be November 2nd, because November 1st is Monday is election day. In Virginia, it's always a bit, there's always an election in Virginia. I don't think there's like in some places they have off years where nobody gets elected to anything and you don't have to go vote. We don't have that here. Do we? We have a rather continuous election cycle.

J. Aughenbaugh: Yeah, and many of my students complain about this and I'm like, that's fine. By the way, voting behavior scholars have identified that one of the reasons why turnout for US elections comparatively is lower than in most western democracies. One of the main reasons why that is, is we have so many elections.

N. Rodgers: Election fatigue.

J. Aughenbaugh: Yeah, election voter fatigue. And that's particularly the case for listeners in the Commonwealth of Virginia. Because in the Commonwealth of Virginia, they hold statewide elections the year after presidential elections. There are some Virginia politics and governments scholars who argue that Virginia went to that system as a way to actually suppress voter turnout.

N. Rodgers: Wow.

J. Aughenbaugh: Because historically, we know this in the United States. Who tends to vote the most? Elites, those with education, those who are already, shall we say, who are efficacious, they believe in the system. They get in the habit of voting

N. Rodgers: Older folks and retired folks. They have more time on their hands as it were.

J. Aughenbaugh: Those are already in the habit. Believe in the system, "societal elites" always show up. But to your point, Nia, we have statewide elections in Virginia on November 2nd.

N. Rodgers: I'm just going to say would not be so exhausting if they didn't start three years in advance. By the time we get around to it, I'm so tired. I'm like, I don't care about either one of you anymore. Which is a terrible feeling for me to have. I wish that there was some rule that you could not start running. Like you mentioned a few episodes ago about Justin Trudeau calling an election and then 10 weeks later having one. He just said you know what? In a few weeks, we're going to have an election and the whole of Canada somehow managed to only have a 10-week election window, and yet they all managed to get out and vote. I don't believe that there is any requirement that the presidential election starts the month after the election finishes for the previous presidential election. It's just ridiculous. It's too long. You start to lose track of who said what, and I don't think it's necessary. I think we have a lot of drama which adds to the fatigue it adds to if you see ads for an election over and over and over again for those people who watch television and there aren't that many anymore, but it's still out there.

J. Aughenbaugh: Hey, wait. Again, you've heard me make this complaint. I am somebody who watches, shall we say, a fair amount of sports on TV.

N. Rodgers: [LAUGHTER] Right.

J. Aughenbaugh: It is the background shall we say music or noise to my late-night work efforts. I got to tell you, I am getting tired of seeing advertisements, for the Virginia elections that are in-between endings for my major league baseball playoff games or hockey just started and I'm a huge professional hockey fan. There were advertisements for both political parties, gubernatorial candidates, lieutenant governor candidates, attorney general.

N. Rodgers: It's just exhausting. Then you get robocalls and you get the mailers.

J. Aughenbaugh: Yes.

N. Rodgers: I'm like, well, the recycling world loves you because that's what I'm doing with all this stuff but it's [LAUGHTER] just exhausting, but it's not, we are ever so lucky in Virginia, but it happens to us all the time. But the midterms that are coming up, which is not this year. That's 2021 and that's the odd year out. Thank you, Virginia, for being weird. Then in 2022, we have it even worse because we're going to have a billion more ads. Because isn't the entirety of Congress turning over something like we're going to see all 400,000 ads. Help me Aughie, it's going to be terrible.

J. Aughenbaugh: Listeners, what Nia is referring to is the phenomenon known as midterm elections. These are the national elections halfway through a presidential term.

N. Rodgers: When president Biden was elected in 2020. There'll be a 2022 midterm and then another 2024 presidential election.

J. Aughenbaugh: Yes. With the midterm elections, every seat in the House of Representatives will be contested. Because again, the term for US House of Representatives members is two years and that was by design. The house is supposed to be the "people's chamber of our Congress"

N. Rodgers: Significantly more responsive than the Senate?

J. Aughenbaugh: Yes and the thought is with a two-year term, if you're a House of Representatives member, you're going to want to get stuff done because you will be held accountable, perhaps in two years. [LAUGHTER]

N. Rodgers: Tell that to some of the people who had been there for 150 years, like go away. In my ideal world, all 435 seats would turnover.

J. Aughenbaugh: [LAUGHTER] It would not be ideal Nia.

N. Rodgers: It would be fabulous the confusion, the chaos, the drama.

J. Aughenbaugh: But there is a downside when you have that kind of turnover think about how that affects productivity and you know this in your own job when there is a lot of turnovers. At the VCU library. Does it affect the library's productivity and effectiveness?

N. Rodgers: Yes. But I'm going to counter your argument with if a body is ineffective anyway, then why not just wipe it out and start over? Get your big eraser and go [NOISE] until they're all gone. Don't kill people. I'm not suggesting killing people. That is not what I'm saying. I'm saying retire them like you do. Find thoroughbreds, put them out to pasture, and then, and get 435 new people and say this is how it's going to work. You all are going to get along. Or in two years, we're going to wipe you out and try again. We'll keep doing that until people learn to get along. I'm just saying, we'd only have to do that four or five times. Yes, I know the intervening 10 years would be horrific. [LAUGHTER] I get that. [OVERLAPPING] You didn't because your face was like, are you kidding Nia? Yeah. But I'm just saying.

J. Aughenbaugh: This is one of the downsides to a podcast because listeners don't get the go-ahead and see our facials.

N. Rodgers: Like when I say, let's just restart the government every two years for 10 years. His face did a whole thing like, Are you insane? But not only are all 435 US representatives up but isn't it some measure of the Senate is also?

J. Aughenbaugh: One third. What we're talking about is 34 members of the Senate.

N. Rodgers: I was going to ask you if it's one-third, there's 100 of them, that would mean 33 and a third I want to know the third is?

J. Aughenbaugh: In 2022 34 members of the Senate their seats will be contested. Again, that's by design, that's in the constitution. Again, that fits the structural purpose of the Senate. The Senate is on six-year terms and they stagger, if you will, the replacement of senators. Because in part, the Senate was designed to be a slower, more moderate chamber in United States Congress.

N. Rodgers: They're more deliberative and the house is supposed to be more reactive.

J. Aughenbaugh: Now that's right.

N. Rodgers: In the ideal world, the house would be reacting to conditions on the ground. Or the Senate would be saying, what's the long-term effective of doing a thing.

J. Aughenbaugh: Yes.

N. Rodgers: Although I'm not entirely certain that's actually how it works, but I think that's how it was intended to work.

J. Aughenbaugh: Well, let me think about this Nia. In the current United States Congress, the House of Representatives, a number of the majority party in the house have complained that the Senate is too deliberative. In fact, they point to two of their own party members in the Senate. The senator from Arizona. Kristen, what's her last name? Simeon?

N. Rodgers: Look at us. We can't remember and Joe Manchin, right?

J. Aughenbaugh: Yeah, Joe Manchin who is from West Virginia and Arizona.

N. Rodgers: Sinema, S-I-N-E-M-A.

J. Aughenbaugh: Yeah.

N. Rodgers: Or Sinema. I can't remember if it Simema or Sinema.

J. Aughenbaugh: I think it's Simema.

N. Rodgers: But yeah, they're ultra deliberative one might argue.

J. Aughenbaugh: Yes.

N. Rodgers: But they are also endangered. They're from two places where Democrats are not the majority, so they have to work a very fine line locally.

J. Aughenbaugh: Arizona recently has become a battleground state, because the cities and suburban areas of Arizona Democrats have done well in but the rest of the state is very rural, tends to be very Republican. Sinema has a seat that used to be occupied, I believe, by John McCain. She's very cognizant of that.

N. Rodgers: Right. She has to be a really very moderate Democrat in order to stay in her position and same with Joe Manchin. He's from West Virginia.

J. Aughenbaugh: Well, Manchin chore is even more difficult. West Virginia has gone overwhelmingly Republican. I mean, Donald Trump won West Virginia in 2020 by over 20 percentage points. 2016, I think nearly 20 percentage points. I mean, basically, Joe Manchin is a dying breed in West Virginia, a statewide Democrat. For him to continue to get reelected in that state, he can't go.

N. Rodgers: Describe is the purpose of any politicians life.

J. Aughenbaugh: Yeah. I mean, they want to win elections.

N. Rodgers: Is reelection?

J. Aughenbaugh: Yeah. But anyways, back to the midterms. The difficulty for the majority. Go ahead.

N. Rodgers: Wait. How many Democrats are there in the house?

J. Aughenbaugh: Currently, there's 220, 224 if you include the four non-voting delegates.

N. Rodgers: Are the non-voting delegates like DC and places like that?

J. Aughenbaugh: Yes.

N. Rodgers: Then how many Republicans?

J. Aughenbaugh: 214.

N. Rodgers: There's only a 10 vote difference.

J. Aughenbaugh: Yeah, well, in an effectively needs, it's even fewer. Because if you took away five Democratic seats, and you made them a Republican, the Republican Party would have the majority. Think about it.

N. Rodgers: I see right.

J. Aughenbaugh: Yeah. If the Republican Party wanted to be on the safe side, it's only six.

N. Rodgers: They've only got a flip six races.

J. Aughenbaugh: Yes.

N. Rodgers: That's tight. Then I know that the Senate is like 50-50; isn't it?

J. Aughenbaugh: Yeah, there are 50 Republicans, 48 Democrats, two independents but both of those independents vote with the Democrats, so it's a 50, 50 split. By Senate rule who cast the tie-breaking vote?

N. Rodgers: Vice president.

J. Aughenbaugh: Vice president, who is a Democrat, Kamala Harris.

N. Rodgers: But if there's 51 to 49.

J. Aughenbaugh: Yes.

N. Rodgers: That changes that math entirely.

J. Aughenbaugh: Yeah.

N. Rodgers: This is not an insignificant election.

J. Aughenbaugh: It is not.

N. Rodgers: Sometimes we've seen those two bodies so heavily skewed in one direction or the other that the midterm doesn't actually affect the changing of who's the majority and who is the minority. We've seen those elections, but this is not one of those elections. This is an election where literally every vote is going to count and every seat turned one way or another, flipped one way or another is going to matter.

J. Aughenbaugh: Yes.

N. Rodgers: Who is that guy who does the thing on MSNBC with the big wall?

J. Aughenbaugh: Steve.

N. Rodgers: Steve Kaneki.

J. Aughenbaugh: Kaneki.

N. Rodgers: Oh my gosh, he's not going to get any sleep on November of 2020, it should be November 3rd, I guess.

J. Aughenbaugh: Yes.

N. Rodgers: He's just going to be his mystic and straight out and he's going to look like a maniac because.

J. Aughenbaugh: His sport jacket will be somewhere on a floor. His shirts will be rolled up. His tie will be loose. There will be sweat stains on the armpits.

N. Rodgers: He's going to have a rough one.

J. Aughenbaugh: His hair will be so disheveled and uncombed. It will look like he has been consuming red bowls for about a month.

N. Rodgers: Now, what's interesting in this particular election is it's likely that Joe Biden's going to look pretty close to that as well. There's not a great love for them during the midterm elections anyway, right?

J. Aughenbaugh: Yes. Typically, if you're talking about modern midterm elections, so basically since 1900, on average, the President's party has lost a combined 30 seats in the House in Senate every midterm.

N. Rodgers: Which would make, in this case both of those parties, Republican majority?

J. Aughenbaugh: Republican, yes. The president's domestic policy agenda would be effectively DOA, dead on arrival. Particularly with how hyperpartisan things are in the Congress. I mean, we've seen this with multiple presidents in the 21st century.

N. Rodgers: Why do presidents party's takes such a beating? I know in part the President's party takes a beating in part because the President is the head of the party, right?

J. Aughenbaugh: Yeah.

N. Rodgers: But why? What did Obama call it as shellac, which is a great word.

J. Aughenbaugh: Yeah.

N. Rodgers: Why is that such a thing?

J. Aughenbaugh: Well, political scientists have come up with a number of explanations. One is the coattails effect. When presidents get elected, particularly if they win in a landslide, they bring in to Congress, perhaps candidates who might not have otherwise won the election.

N. Rodgers: Okay. We love this guy because right now we love the head guy and we love everyone who loves him.

J. Aughenbaugh: Yeah.

N. Rodgers: We love everybody. Then they get to know you and they're like, you suck.

J. Aughenbaugh: Yeah, right. We've seen this for instance, with a number of presidential elections like FDR second and third elections in 1936, and the 1940. We saw this with LBJ in 64. You want to talk about

a shellac, Barry Goldwater got shellac, as the Republican Party nominee. LBJ brought in a lot of Democrats.

N. Rodgers: Did both of those have midterm problems solved after the independence?

J. Aughenbaugh: Yeah.

N. Rodgers: The coattails effect doesn't last very long?

J. Aughenbaugh: Well not with FDR. FDR's first midterm, the number of Democrats in the majority actually went up. But as the new deal lost traction and the depression continued, the Democratic majorities in both houses of Congress shrank in 1938. But you saw that with Reagan. Reagan in 1984, just absolutely devastated Walter Mondale.

N. Rodgers: I was embarrassed for Mondale when I was very young.

J. Aughenbaugh: But that was in 1984. In 1986, on the other hand, Republicans lost seats in both houses of Congress.

N. Rodgers: Even though Reagan was popular.

J. Aughenbaugh: Even though Reagan was popular, he was popular.

N. Rodgers: Are those two things separated?

J. Aughenbaugh: Yeah, because in part.

N. Rodgers: The popularity of the president doesn't necessarily mean that he still won't get shellac.

J. Aughenbaugh: Yes. In here, some of the explanations. One is voter apathy. Those who got excited in the presidential election, and we talked about this at the beginning of this episode. There were excited when the president got elected. Then after watching congress and the president tried to govern for a year and a half to a year and three quarters, they get apathetic. Part of it is, I was excited for the previous election. Now I'm not or I get frustrated because they didn't do anything.

N. Rodgers: Yeah. Same poop, different day.

J. Aughenbaugh: Yeah.

N. Rodgers: I mean, that idea of just whatever. I thought there was going to be change and there isn't. In part that's I would think has to do with people's expectations. Sometimes people think that the government can change faster than it can, mean if you think of it in terms of a ship, that's me turning a rowboat versus me turning the Titanic. It's just harder to do because the government is so big.

J. Aughenbaugh: Yeah. I mean, with your metaphor, you've gone on cruises.

N. Rodgers: Yes.

J. Aughenbaugh: Think about how difficult it is, to go ahead and navigate a cruise ship. That's the US Federal Government. You're not going to turn it around in a year and a half. Now, and if you have the expectation that the government will change in a year and a half, you will be disappointed. For a lot of voters, that disappointment leads them to not continue their political participation.

N. Rodgers: The system is related to heck with it. I'm not going to do this again.

J. Aughenbaugh: Yeah.

N. Rodgers: I find other things to do. I don't need to go vote. Please don't say that, please people. If you're listening, please vote.

J. Aughenbaugh: Another explanation offered by political scientists, it's called the presidential penalty. The tendency of some voters who were angry when their presidential candidate lost to exact revenge two years later. In other words, excuse the expression. They're still pissed off about what happened in the presidential election. They're more motivated.

N. Rodgers: We might see some of that in this election.

J. Aughenbaugh: Yes.

N. Rodgers: Considering the response to Donald Trump's loss in some quarters has been taken very much hard.

J. Aughenbaugh: Yeah, think about the number of Trump supporters who still contend that the 2020 presidential election was rigged. There was fraud.

N. Rodgers: For them, there is nothing to do except to go vote and try to fix it.

J. Aughenbaugh: Yeah. They have a lot of pent up energy, shall we say, anger ? They may exact, if you will, a penalty on the Democratic Party.

N. Rodgers: Okay.

J. Aughenbaugh: But then there's retrospective voting. Retrospective voting is when a voter goes ahead and says, okay, how is my life, my family's life, my friends' lives, better or worse since the previous election?

N. Rodgers: I voted for that John Aughenbaugh, and my taxes went up and my salary went down. I have giant medical bills.

J. Aughenbaugh: My spouse lost her job. My kid's student loan terms and conditions were worse.

N. Rodgers: Heck with him, I'm voting the opposite party.

J. Aughenbaugh: Yes. It's retrospective voting.

N. Rodgers: Okay.

J. Aughenbaugh: They do a comparison of where they are, when they go to vote compared to when they last voted.

N. Rodgers: I mean, on the flip of that could also be true. I am in the roses. Things are fabulous. I'm making more money. I don't know, I just bought a new boat or whatever. I'm so flush. I'm going to go vote for the president's party because I love that guy.

J. Aughenbaugh: Yes.

N. Rodgers: That could go either way depending on how you feel your position is changed.

J. Aughenbaugh: Yeah. For instance, I'm just going to give two examples. On one hand, there are going to be plenty of Americans who are like Joe Biden ran for office and said that he was going to be the president that lead us out of the pandemic. It's 2022 and there are.

N. Rodgers: We're still wearing masks.

J. Aughenbaugh: Mask, and we have to get booster shots every six months. Whatever the case may be, you might take it out on the president. Or what if the congress passes an infrastructure deal? What if, think about the employment situation?

N. Rodgers: Your roads get better, and your kid gets a job.

J. Aughenbaugh: Job, or think about, for instance, the unemployment situation. Where so many employers are looking, are in dire need and you change jobs. You go from making \$40,000 a year to 52,000.

N. Rodgers: That feels pretty good.

J. Aughenbaugh: Fees pretty good.

N. Rodgers: Okay.

J. Aughenbaugh: Your kids back in school. Nobody in your family has COVID. Retrospective voting cuts both ways. The difficulty right now for president Biden and the democrats is that, there was an initial

legislative success. That was the immediate paycheck, your tax relief, etc. Vaccines did get into many Americans arms. We had a decline in COVID cases in the summer. But then the Delta variant hit. The United States Congress has not really acted on the rest of Biden's legislative agenda. For good measure, the Supreme Court has basically gone ahead and eviscerated his eviction moratorium. There have been some setbacks in foreign relations. See for instance, the troop withdrawal in Afghanistan. There are some strong headwinds against the Democratic Party going into the midterms next year. But we're doing this podcast episode a year before.

N. Rodgers: Right, and who knows what will change-

J. Aughenbaugh: Yes.

N. Rodgers: In the next year if it spins in a different direction. Do you think that, I can't remember his name was, Carville?

J. Aughenbaugh: James Carville, he's a [inaudible 00:29:28] strategist for the Democratic Party.

N. Rodgers: When he says, it's the economy stupid, do you think that that did a huge amount of how people vote is where they feel economically?

J. Aughenbaugh: In regards to voters who do retrospective voting, yes.

N. Rodgers: Okay.

J. Aughenbaugh: Retrospective voters typically tend to focus on, again, economics and economic well-being for themselves, their family, their friends, et cetera. That's again, going to be part of the difficulty for the Democratic Party because even if President Biden's infrastructure program does get passed. Even if the \$3.5 trillion budget proposal gets passed in some manner or the other, as you and I've talked in previous podcast episodes, there's always a lag time between a law passed by Congress and when it gets implemented by the executive branch. In some of the elements of both of those domestic policy, if you will, programs, have a lot of moving parts.

N. Rodgers: You have to hire people there has to be. If you're building infrastructure, there's engineering that has to happen early and there's all these other thing. You don't just walk up and start building a bridge, that's not how-

J. Aughenbaugh: And a lot of that money is going to get allocated to state, local governments and it's going to take time.

N. Rodgers: Well, as we saw with the rent relief program.

J. Aughenbaugh: Yes.

N. Rodgers: It's taken the states a lot of time to get those dollars into hands that need them.

J. Aughenbaugh: Or thinking back to the Bush 43 and Obama administration's bail-outs during the Great Recession of 2007-2009. The Obama bailout focused on, if you will, energizing the American economy. But in most cases, it took two to three years for that money to actually lead to ditches being built, roads being built, et cetera. It takes time. If you're the Democratic Party and you're looking at the 2022 midterm elections-

N. Rodgers: You don't have a lot of time.

J. Aughenbaugh: - you don't have a lot of time.

N. Rodgers: If you're the Republicans, the smart thing to do is stonewall.

J. Aughenbaugh: Yes.

N. Rodgers: Even if you know that eventually something is going to be passed, if you can stonewall it down to the absolute last minute, then you can keep the Democrats from taking advantage of that.

J. Aughenbaugh: That's right.

N. Rodgers: As a selling point for themselves.

J. Aughenbaugh: Because when they are running for re-election next summer and next fall, the material benefits of whatever policies do get passed won't be readily apparent. Though they won't be able to go in and say, I was a member of the United States Congress, I got this bridge fixed.

N. Rodgers: Or they created 10 trillion jobs.

J. Aughenbaugh: They won't be able to say that. Again, I understand many listeners are going to be like, well, the Republican Party then is working against the benefit of their voters. Well, wait a minute here. They have a fundamental ideological disagreement with what is the appropriate role or purpose of government. The only way they get to enact that ideological perspective is if they regained control of what? The Congress. Winning elections mean you get to control positions of authority. When you're in positions of authority, then you might be able to do what you want to do in your party.

N. Rodgers: Well, sadly, we lack a lot of compromise.

J. Aughenbaugh: Yes.

N. Rodgers: We lack a lot of working together and trying to find the middle ground between you guys spend too much, you guys don't spend enough. It should be spent by the states, it should be spent by the federal government. All of those questions should be worked on as a group and come to some agreement and we are so polarized that I think that that's getting harder and harder to do. It's getting

harder and harder for members of Congress to agree that the bunnies are fluffy and that kids like chocolate.

J. Aughenbaugh: The lack of agreement, the lack of willingness to go ahead and accept the fact that people of the opposition party are not the enemy is pretty stunning right now. I tell my students this with some regularity, Nia. I'm like, if you guys want the federal government to do stuff, it is structured to require compromise and consensus. Unless your party has an overwhelming majority in both houses of Congress and the occupant of the presidency is of that party, you're going to have to get compromised.

N. Rodgers: Right.

J. Aughenbaugh: You're going to have to get a compromise.

N. Rodgers: Compromise just looks like it's harder and harder and harder to get. It's weird.

J. Aughenbaugh: Many Americans Nia believe that compromise is the equivalent of deal-making and deal-making is bad.

N. Rodgers: Or they believe it's caving.

J. Aughenbaugh: Yes.

N. Rodgers: Right. You're caving from your side and so you don't stand up for what we believe in, blah blah blah. Yeah I do, but I'm also cognizant of the fact that we need to get something done. We can't just stand around saying no forever and not do anything that's not productive and it's not helpful.

J. Aughenbaugh: Yeah, I mean, because it goes back to the old question in politics. To what extent do you go ahead and maintain your principles? If maintaining your principles means you you don't govern.

N. Rodgers: Right.

J. Aughenbaugh: Okay.

N. Rodgers: I'm just going to throw out there that if I was as uncompromising as our Congress is, my boss would fire me. That's not how people in real jobs get to work. You don't get to work and say, I'm just never going to do that. I'm never going to help a student at the front desk ever again and my boss would say, "Really? Well, then I hope you find a good job somewhere that's not here because that's not what we do." So that's the other thing is it irritates me that people say we can't hold Congress accountable. I'm sure we can, we can vote them out. The problem is we don't. On a regular basis, we don't vote them out. We don't force them. We don't say, and we don't say as in electorate, the reason we're voting you out is because you're being intractable and it's unacceptable.

J. Aughenbaugh: Well, I mean, you make a good point because again, I've said to friends, family member, students, I'm like, if you want Congress to actually do more, then look at who the parties are nominating and who you are voting for.

N. Rodgers: Right.

J. Aughenbaugh: If you are voting for people, again, who indicate that it's their party or the highway that they're not willing to compromise, then you are contributing to the fact that the Congress is not getting stuff done.

N. Rodgers: You also need to work it from the inside out. Sometimes where that change is going to come is young people who start to work in the party to change things. I know that they are a bit, a lot of young people wanted Bernie Sanders to win. They had real problems with Hillary Clinton and how the candidates were chosen and which candidate was, because they thought that Bernie could have beaten Donald Trump and [inaudible 00:38:58] and that's an argument for another day and over copious amounts of adult beverages. But I put to you that from the inside out of that party, you would have had a better chance of getting Bernie. You would have had a better chance if you had worked to the party in both directions, both as activists but also from within. If the parties are constantly controlled by old school politicians Mitch McConnell, Nancy Pelosi. People who've been doing this for a long time. They're going to get their way and they're going to get their candidates because they know how to work the system.

J. Aughenbaugh: Yes.

N. Rodgers: You need to get in. Start at your local level if you really want to change the world. One of our VCU students, previous VCU students just ran for city council and he's a young man. He did not win, but he got in there and fought the good fight and I have deep admiration for that.

J. Aughenbaugh: If you want to change the system, chances are you're going to have to be in the system to change it.

N. Rodgers: Right.

J. Aughenbaugh: Okay.

N. Rodgers: Exactly. It just is not going to respond to outside forces. Can we talk briefly about, because I know we could talk about this for weeks. Tell me now, can we talk about the Senate and how tight the Senate races.

J. Aughenbaugh: Yeah.

N. Rodgers: Are going to be, because aren't they going to be awfully tight?

J. Aughenbaugh: Okay, so of the 34 Senate seats that will be contested in 2020. The Republican Party has more of those seats to defend.

N. Rodgers: Oh, really?

J. Aughenbaugh: Yeah, meaning right now of those 34, 20 of the 34 are held by Republicans, okay?

N. Rodgers: Okay.

J. Aughenbaugh: Five of those 20 seats, the Republican incumbent has already announced they are not running for re-election. You're talking about from your home state of North Carolina, Richard Burr has announced that he's not running for re-election.

N. Rodgers: I don't know what he's going to do with himself. He's been in Senate forever.

J. Aughenbaugh: But to me from my home state of Pennsylvania. Rob Portman in Ohio.

N. Rodgers: Rob Portman is young, isn't he to be retiring?

J. Aughenbaugh: He's been in elected office for multiple decades. But it was somewhat surprising because by all accounts his health is good.

N. Rodgers: Because Burr to me had been around since God was a boy. They've been around a long time, right?

J. Aughenbaugh: Okay. Well, in the last two of the five or even older, Dick Shelby from Alabama. He's been in the Senate forever and a day.

N. Rodgers: Yeah. I'm pretty sure he fought in the Civil War.

J. Aughenbaugh: Roy Blunt from Missouri.

N. Rodgers: Roy Blunt.

J. Aughenbaugh: He has such a fine head of hair, right?

N. Rodgers: He really does.

J. Aughenbaugh: I mean that you really can't go ahead and say that about many US senators, male or female.

N. Rodgers: Especially at their ages.

J. Aughenbaugh: Okay. But Roy Blunt, I'm rather envious.

N. Rodgers: If I'm remembering correctly, he is very fond of posters, of having giant images to point to when he's talking to what is more or less an empty floor. But he's playing for C-SPAN.

J. Aughenbaugh: He does like a whiteboard on the stand.

N. Rodgers: On the easel.

J. Aughenbaugh: On the easel, yeah.

N. Rodgers: But of all those guys, Portland's the youngest by a fair bit, I think, isn't he?

J. Aughenbaugh: That I don't know. But three of those seats are safe Republican seats. I mean, if you think about Ohio, Alabama, Missouri.

N. Rodgers: I was going to say Alabama and Missouri aren't going anywhere.

J. Aughenbaugh: Okay. Unless the Republican party nominates really poor candidates, okay? They will probably stay Republican. North Carolina and Pennsylvania, however, those are going to be toss up.

N. Rodgers: Yet North Carolina's purple these days.

J. Aughenbaugh: In Pennsylvania, with the exception of voting for Donald Trump in 2016. Statewide, okay, they generally have been picking democrats. Okay.

N. Rodgers: Just for listeners I quick look this up. Rob Portman is 65. Now that tells you what my perception of youth in the Senate. But I'm just saying that's a problem. I mean, like Portman, isn't he young, relatively speaking. Relative to the other guys he is, but I mean, people in the Senate.

J. Aughenbaugh: Well particularly, I mean, if you think about how a couple weeks ago, Chuck Grassley, who was a senator from Iowa.

N. Rodgers: Who's like 964 years old. I'm pretty sure he sailed on the Mayflower.

J. Aughenbaugh: He's in his late '80s and he announced that he is running for another term next year.

N. Rodgers: He is 88.

J. Aughenbaugh: Yes.

N. Rodgers: You know what, he runs five miles every day or something like that or every other day.

J. Aughenbaugh: He's is in remarkably good health.

N. Rodgers: Yeah. I mean, I guess as long as you stay in good health.

J. Aughenbaugh: I mean, by all accounts, he still has his mental faculties.

N. Rodgers: So yeah, no term limits are elections people if you want somebody who's going to be 94 at their next election to not run this time, then that's how you. Although Chuck Grassley is enormously popular and he is beloved. I'm surprised he never ran for president.

J. Aughenbaugh: I think rationally figured out early on in his Senate career what made him popular in Iowa would not necessarily sell for the rest of the country. Okay. It's what my colleague, Chris Eldina refers to as college football and basketball coach. Wonder lost problems. Okay. Just because you're a really good coach at a small to medium-sized school doesn't mean that you will be a really good coach at, for instance, the University of Alabama football program.

N. Rodgers: Which chews up coaches and spits them out like gracile.

J. Aughenbaugh: Nick Sabin has had a long run there and he's been remarkably successful. But he can handle the pressure. Right?

N. Rodgers: Right.

J. Aughenbaugh: He knows what's going to work there. Right? Just because you're really popular from Iowa, doesn't mean that East and West Coast elites, I'm going to talk to you. Okay.

N. Rodgers: Yeah.

J. Aughenbaugh: The grass is not always greener.

N. Rodgers: Not that everybody can be Bear Bryant.

J. Aughenbaugh: Yeah. Now, before we conclude this episode, Nia, I do want to talk about something and this is going to segue to an upcoming podcast episode where we do a second deeper dive into the census results.

N. Rodgers: Are we going to talk about redistricting?

J. Aughenbaugh: I am and that's what I wanted to go to next. Okay?

N. Rodgers: Okay. Wait. How many house members are going to turn over? Are retiring or quitting or giving up or throwing in the towel or whatever you want to call it.

J. Aughenbaugh: At the time, we are recording this podcast. Okay.

N. Rodgers: Which is a year and a bit out.

J. Aughenbaugh: Yeah, there may be other retirements before the election, but right now, there are 19 House members who already announced they're not running for reelection, 10 Democrats and 9 Republicans. From what I was able to figure out, of those 19, easily two-thirds of those have figured out that their districts, either as they're currently constructed or will more than likely be reconstructed during redistricting will probably be difficult to win.

N. Rodgers: This is where we get your redistricting?

J. Aughenbaugh: Yes.

N. Rodgers: Okay. Wait.

J. Aughenbaugh: Yes.

N. Rodgers: The reason we redistrict is because the census counts everybody. Figures out where the populations have moved in the last 10 years. By the way, everybody has moved to Texas. Because like Elon Musk is now moving all of his operations to Texas and all these people have moved to Texas, but the people who haven't moved to Texas get counted. Then each state sets up some districting or redistricting thing. In Virginia, it's a commission that just got set up an apparently immediately declared defeat. But whatever bunch of whiners. But it's either done by the state or it's done by something where you have to figure out. Because what we're trying to do is balance the number of people represented by a representative in Congress. It's only in the House of Representatives for redistricting because of course, state gets two senators regardless of how many people move there or leave their. Hence why Montana and Texas have the same number of senators. Because nobody cares that it's eight billion per senator in Texas and it's four per senator in Montana because I guess we don't care about that. Historical constitutional reasons, we don't care about that, the redistricting is for house seats.

J. Aughenbaugh: Yes, because each state's number of representatives in the House is based on population.

N. Rodgers: Can not go below one.

J. Aughenbaugh: Correct.

N. Rodgers: If you only have four people in Montana, they still get a representative.

J. Aughenbaugh: They do get a representative. As Nia just pointed out listeners, the electoral maps, the district maps are drawn at the state level. That's in the US Constitution. As Nia pointed out, there are at this point 10 states that have either commissions or non partisan, if you will groups that redraw the congressional district maps. As Nia just pointed out, Virginia is one of the most recent states to come up with a commission. That commission has already announced that they will fail to do is draw the state legislative districts. As we are reporting, they are making a last ditch effort to draw the congressional

district map in Virginia. Though, I got to admit, if I was a betting person, I would not be betting that they will successfully do so.

N. Rodgers: Right, agreed.

J. Aughenbaugh: What this basically means is that the other roughly 40 states use politicians, typically, their state legislatures draw the maps. Now, this process, at this time broadly favors the Republican Party. Why? Because Republicans control redistricting in 20 states for a total post-census, 187 congressional districts. Now, can the Republican Party basically draw congressional districts so that no Democratic candidate has a chance to win? No, they can't do that. Well, theoretically they probably could, but they can't practically.

N. Rodgers: Well, and there are some SCOTUS rulings that prevent you from doing that by race or by other demographic.

J. Aughenbaugh: Well, the main demographic is race. But what the Supreme Court has said is one person, one vote. You can't privilege world voters compared to urban voters. You can't privilege Caucasian voters versus people of color voters. Those are the two main rules. Now, Democrats, by contrast have control of eight states with 75 districts.

N. Rodgers: One hundred eighty seven to 75.

J. Aughenbaugh: Then state use independent commissions, as I mentioned and then there are six other states where the state legislatures are balanced between the Democrats and the Republicans. Though, on the surface, it looks like redistricting might give a few more seats to the Republican Party. What we're talking about here is a process called gerrymandering. Where you create Safe House of Representatives districts for either your party or particular candidates. Both political parties do this, right?

N. Rodgers: Gerrymandering is not a Republican feature or a Democratic feature, it's a political feature.

J. Aughenbaugh: Yes.

N. Rodgers: Whoever's in charge writes it to their best advantage. That's why it's so important who's in charge of a state when the census rolls out and the districts get redistricted. It doesn't matter if you're in charge of the state in the middle years, who cares? What you need to be in charge of a state is at the census year. You need to be at the census when the census is done and then when the census material comes out so that you can control the district for the next time. Frankly, the Republicans had been playing the long game on this. Much more than the Democrats have.

J. Aughenbaugh: Yes.

N. Rodgers: Which is why you see the gap between 20 states that are Republican and what is it, nine states that are Democrat. That's why there's such an enormous gap.

J. Aughenbaugh: Yeah, I mean, it's part of the reason why Republicans do have so much control at the state level, because they control state legislative district map drawing. But it also reflects what Nia just described. The Democratic Party in general has focused on national elections.

N. Rodgers: Maybe all politics are local.

J. Aughenbaugh: In this millennium, the Republican Party has tended to focus more on state wide elections. Where this really bears fruit as Nia just pointed out, is the year after the census results get released because that's when redistricting occurs. If a party is smart long-term, they can set up the districts for an entire decade, to benefit their party.

N. Rodgers: Which then leads to the next decade.

J. Aughenbaugh: Yes.

N. Rodgers: That's a centuries long program, if you think about it that far ahead. That you can make it so that it is really hard for another party. I'm not trying to accuse Republicans of doing anything underhanded. They are playing the system exactly the way the system is built. They're just following the rules. The rules are if you're in charge, the year after the census, you get to draw the maps.

J. Aughenbaugh: The Supreme Court has said recently in the last couple of years in a case from North Carolina that redistricting for partisan purposes is not unconstitutional. It is a political question that should be addressed by the states. Some states have addressed it by coming up with non-partisan commissions. Other states, they are continuing with the process that they've used in some cases for almost two centuries.

N. Rodgers: Can I just throw out here that I agree with SCOTUS in the sense that this is not a constitutional question, it's an ethical question. Ethical questions should be dealt with by the political branches. That's why we have the political branches, they deal with the ethical questions of how do we fairly do this so that we have fair and free elections. I have a faint worry in my heart that at some point we're going to have to have the UN in here to watch our elections. You know what I mean?

J. Aughenbaugh: Yeah.

N. Rodgers: I'd like us to not get to that point if we could possibly help it.

J. Aughenbaugh: What Nia is referring to listeners is the fact that for decades the United Nations has had special unit of that international governing organization that basically goes around the world and monitors democratic elections. For the longest time, one of the delegates was one of our former President, Jimmy Carter. That's what he became known for after he was no longer president was his role in being part of these delegations to make sure that elections, particularly in developed countries. But I mean to Neal's point, you want the UN to come in and monitor elections when you're considered by many scholars as one of the world's dominant powers. That's what you want to have happened, right?

N. Rodgers: It's embarrassing, is what it would be. In fact, I think that may be what Jimmy Carter and part won his Nobel Prize for. Also negotiating, he's done a lot of negotiating over the years, like hey, why don't we sit down and talk about this rather than just kill each other.

J. Aughenbaugh: One last thing before we go.

N. Rodgers: Okay.

J. Aughenbaugh: Though, you and I have established that on the surface, it looks like the Republican Party as an advantage in setting up House District maps for the next decade. But as we will discuss when we take our second cut at the census results, Republican Party needs to be smart about this if they want to get the maximum benefit out of the redistricting process. Now they could go ahead and draw saved seats that might win them the majority in the 2022 and 2024 midterms. But they need to think about how the US population is changing and because, for instance, in some states, the population increase was among groups that don't historically or recently support the Republican Party. So how do you go ahead and draw up those districts to make sure that what you think are safe seats now, by 2026 or 2028, or 2030 becomes safe seats for the other party?

N. Rodgers: Right. You have to be careful of taking into account at least communities of color because that's something SCOTUS can bounce like that's a lawsuit worthy-

J. Aughenbaugh: Yes.

N. Rodgers: Redistricting. If they do it such that it's based on sort of racial lines or whatever where they think that that's going to advantage them in the short term, it may in one election cycle. But by the time it makes it to the Supreme and comes back down as, no, you can't do that, then you've lost that advantage in the next cycle.

J. Aughenbaugh: Yeah.

N. Rodgers: Who knows who's drawing the maps at that point.

J. Aughenbaugh: So, it can't be a potent tool to benefit a political party. I mean, again, as Neal pointed out, we both pointed out both political parties do this, right?

N. Rodgers: Right.

J. Aughenbaugh: I mean, I've read the news accounts of how Maryland, which is a pretty strong democratic state, is considering a congressional redistricting map that would basically remove the last Republican seat in that state.

N. Rodgers: See, that's a dangerous game to play. You know what I mean? It's not fair play. Like winning, gerrymandering is, I mean, I don't say it's fine because I don't like it, but I think that I understand it. But

there's also a point at which you force the voters hands by saying, okay, but nobody ever represents me in this state.

J. Aughenbaugh: Well, yeah. I mean, again, part of the issue for me as a political scientist is you have candidates picking the voters instead of voters picking their candidate.

N. Rodgers: Which is not okay.

J. Aughenbaugh: We know this in terms of turnout. In non competitive elections, people don't turnout and that's bad for democracy.

N. Rodgers: It's also bad for the upstream candidates. It's bad when nobody turns out to vote for governor or to vote for president, or if you gerrymander those districts to, I'm sorry, I cut you off but it made me excitable there for a minute.

J. Aughenbaugh: No, no, no. Go ahead.

N. Rodgers: When you cut those districts in such a way that people say it doesn't matter whether I go vote or not, you're not just hurting your local politics, you're also hurting all the upstream candidates who are missing out on those votes. So it's a dangerous game to play. If you decide you're going to cut out every Republican voice in Maryland, well then, republicans aren't going to turn out to vote in the presidential elections and that's a dangerous thing to have. I like that you pointed out that it hurts Democracy. That's not the point, we should want to vote, we should want to have something to vote for or against. It should be an engaging act.

J. Aughenbaugh: Well, let's just say for instance, and I'll use Maryland in Republicans. If there's a very little chance that a candidate that they're liking will ever represent them, they might stop paying attention to politics.

N. Rodgers: Which is worse.

J. Aughenbaugh: They might stop paying attention or caring about what's going on in their community. Or they will vote with their feet, which means-

N. Rodgers: They'll move to Texas.

J. Aughenbaugh: Yes.

N. Rodgers: Then when the next census comes around, see how you like that, Maryland.

J. Aughenbaugh: Okay. This has repercussions. It only has repercussions in terms of population, in census. The census and population. But federal government programs are oftentimes based on the population within a state. Let's just move beyond government. If people start leaving your state, you are

losing their talents, their skills, what they might contribute to that state or that locality in terms of contributions.

N. Rodgers: Right, or brain drain.

J. Aughenbaugh: That becomes dangerous for states and if you don't think that is, look at what has happened in the Rust Belt States.

N. Rodgers: I was just going to say in the Rust Belt, when people went south for jobs.

J. Aughenbaugh: Yeah. I mean, think about, New York, Ohio, Pennsylvania, Michigan, Indiana, Illinois. States that used to be much more heavily populated than they are today but they were the economic engines of the country.

N. Rodgers: Right. They were thriving.

J. Aughenbaugh: Okay. Now many of their citizens, particularly their youngest, most talented, have left or are leaving and they won't come back. It doesn't matter if mom, grandparents still live there, they're not coming back. You've lost them. There are repercussions. There are ripple effects to basically treating voters as though they are just assets for you to win elections.

N. Rodgers: Right. Or pawns on the board. You can't sacrifice the pawn too often or you lose the game.

J. Aughenbaugh: Yes.

N. Rodgers: Well, this has been a lovely preview. I imagine that what we'll do is get together again next year and do it much closer to the election when we can actually have a stronger prediction about who else is going to retire, who else might throw their hat in the ring. I want to know whether Matthew McConaughey is going to run for governor of Texas because I know he is being courted and I think that would be hilarious.

J. Aughenbaugh: All right. All right.

N. Rodgers: Exactly. So we get together and do it again next year?

J. Aughenbaugh: Yeah, I think it would be great. I mean, let's face it. In the three years we've been doing this podcast, things have happened in the world and politically, we have a completely changed what has been going on. So any predictions or projections that we may have stated in this particular episode are non-binding.

N. Rodgers: Are non-binding. Is it when you sign a treaty, but you don't really sign a treaty. You say it's non-binding. I like your treaty, but I'm not all in.

J. Aughenbaugh: It's like that fine print in a contract. You know, the act of God.

N. Rodgers: Or the last thing in your work contract that says or other duties as assigned. Wait, what does that mean? Well, I might need you to do some landscaping.

J. Aughenbaugh: I may need you to go out on some scaffolding and clean the windows on the tenth floor.

N. Rodgers: Wait, I'm afraid of heights.

J. Aughenbaugh: I guess we can't hire you.

N. Rodgers: Exactly. It's in your job description, sorry. Yeah. I mean, who knew when we started this podcast, we'd have a pandemic. So things on the ground can change awfully quickly, but as it stands where we see it right now, it's going to be squeaky all the way across the board. I think it's going to be squeaky.

J. Aughenbaugh: Yeah.

N. Rodgers: The numbers are going to be really tight. I don't think there's going to be some giant, huge change. But then again, if a comet hits the Earth, it could all be moved. I'm just saying.

J. Aughenbaugh: Yeah. The major takeaway is guys, the word of the day shellacking.

N. Rodgers: Right. Somebody's going to get us shellacking.

J. Aughenbaugh: President Barack Obama, the day after the midterms in 2010, went ahead and said, his party took a shellacking.

N. Rodgers: All right. Thanks, Aughie.

J. Aughenbaugh: Thank you, Neal.

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