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Task Force: 2026 Midterm Elections and a Look Toward 2028

Moderators: Jonathan Swan and Maggie Haberman. Panel: Dan Senor, Morris Katz, David Urban, David Axelrod, Alyssa Farah Griffin, Stacey Abrams · 79 min · **Watch the video →**

> Transcript by Myles Marino. Transcribed by machine from the public video, then cleaned up: timestamps and filler removed, speakers labeled, misheard names fixed. The wording is otherwise as spoken. **[inaudible]** marks audio that could not be recovered. Check the video before you quote anything that matters. All twelve talks: mylesmarino.com/posts/dealbook-2026.

SWAN: So we're here at the DealBook Summit for a panel on the 2026 midterm elections and a look toward 2028. I'm Jonathan Swan, White House reporter at The New York Times, and this is my colleague Maggie Haberman, also White House reporter at The New York Times. We have a fantastic panel here today. Dan Senor. Dan hosts the popular podcast *Call Me Back* and co-authored the books *The Genius of Israel: The Surprising Resilience of a Divided Nation in a Turbulent World* and *Start-Up Nation: The Story of Israel's Economic Miracle*. Senor is a partner at Elliott Investment Management, and during the George W. Bush administration he served in senior roles.

HABERMAN: We also have Morris Katz. He's become a bit of a legendary figure in Democratic politics. Young man, is it 27?

KATZ: Twenty-seven years old.

HABERMAN: Twenty-seven years old. There you go. He's a partner at Fight Agency and senior political strategist for Mayor Zohran Mamdani. Some of you might have heard of him. And in the general election this year, he had a lot of different races. We'll talk about some of them today. Next to me we have David Urban, Republican strategist, senior political contributor at CNN. David is a lobbyist, lawyer, strategic consultant, political strategist, board member, managing director at BGR Group, many other things that I'm not going to inflict upon you. But he did serve as senior advisor to the 2016 Trump presidential campaign. He's been with Donald Trump for a long time, and we're looking forward to his insights today. To our right, we have a strategist some of you might have heard of, but I'm not sure. David Axelrod, little known. He used to be a young legend. Founding director of the University of Chicago Institute of Politics, CNN chief political analyst, has worked on a number of presidential campaigns, was instrumental in President Obama's 2008 and 2012 races, also instrumental in a lesser-known race but important in New York City, which was the Fernando Ferrer campaign of 2001, the [inaudible] race, where I first met him. I just had to put that out there, sorry. Next we have Alyssa Farah Griffin, co-host of ABC's *The View* and a CNN political contributor. She previously served as White House communications director in the first Trump administration, as well as press secretary to Vice President Mike Pence and press secretary for the United States Department of Defense. She is the only person to have served as the top spokesperson for the president, vice

president and secretary of defense in one administration. Before that, she was a senior aide on Capitol Hill, working for Republican members of Congress, and I think most people are also familiar with her [inaudible]. And finally, last but definitely not least, we have Stacey Abrams, who is an author, entrepreneur and political leader. She served as minority leader in the Georgia House of Representatives. She was the first Black woman to become a gubernatorial nominee for a major party in United States history, and that was in Georgia. Abrams has devoted her career to democracy protection, voting rights and effective public policy. She has also co-founded multiple companies, including a financial services firm, an energy and infrastructure consulting firm, and the media company Sage Works Productions, and was fairly early on seeing the possibility of Georgia turning bluish, if not blue entirely. So why don't we get started? Jonathan's going to kick us off.

SWAN: So, David Urban, the hot take after 2024 was that Trump had assembled this new coalition. And then in 2026, all those voters just went and voted Democrat. So was this MAGA coalition just fool's gold?

URBAN: No. Look, I think he did assemble a great coalition. He just stopped caring about the coalition. He gets elected campaigning and speaking to those members of the coalition, going out and talking to young African Americans in barbershops in North Philadelphia and bodegas in the Bronx, and bringing a message that Morris may find kind of resonant, right? That same economic populist message, and he campaigned on it really well. Then he gets into office and he seemingly forgot how he got there. And I submit that he's not able to run for another term. He was always looking forward. When I was working for him in 2016 and 2020 and 2024, he was always running, right? He was always traveling to Pennsylvania. He was always making the case. So now he gets in the White House and he kind of forgot who brung him to the dance. And it turns out that when you promise people economic prosperity and no foreign wars and you do the exact opposite, they don't like it. That's what you saw: the party splintered. It turns out the cash register and the gas pump did what January 6 couldn't do. It splintered the MAGA coalition.

SWAN: Morris, how do you see it, specifically when it comes to young men?

KATZ: I agree with a lot of that assessment. You can't promise to end forever wars and start a new forever war. You can't promise to bring down costs and then impose a tariff battle. And I also think the corruption was blatant so far in the second term. On top of breaking his promises, you see what seems to be a president more focused on a ballroom than on the American people. Young men, I think, were frustrated by that. They swung one way, and now they've swung the other way. And the important thing for Democrats now is to understand that I don't think we received a mandate last Tuesday. I think Republicans received an ultimate rejection. But you also saw a lot of young people come out who have not voted before. And I think our mayor here in New York showed, a year ago now, that it's possible when you run a campaign targeting young people, where you meet them where they are, they can show up. And particularly across the South, you saw folks in places like South Carolina and Mississippi believe and see a competitive election, see that their votes could matter, and meet that moment.

SWAN: Alyssa, you were warning about this before the election. I don't think anyone listened to you, apparently. But what's the big lesson for Republicans?

FARAH GRIFFIN: My mom might have listened. Listen, this election was a wholesale repudiation of Donald Trump's presidency, but also his policies. On the political side, we could get into how he endorsed bad candidates and meddled in races he didn't need to: Tillis and Joni Ernst retiring, Ken Paxton in Texas, Lindsey Graham in South Carolina. But on policy, three major policies stand out to me. Tariffs. We did not do widespread tariffs in the first Trump term. That is one of the large reasons you saw red America turning blue. It posed just extraordinary costs to farmers, to the agricultural sector, to the manufacturing sector. Then you look at ICE and border enforcement. Great. Overly aggressive ICE enforcement undid the gains that Donald Trump made with Latino voters across the board. I also think it hurt with young voters. And then the war in Iran. He promised no new wars, and then that skyrocketed gas prices. I've spent a lot of time in the middle of the country. If you're in Texas and diesel costs what it was costing, you can't get to and from work. So it was a policy failure. But I also think he just kind of lost touch with what he had run on and what he promised. He seems completely caught up in his side projects, his renovations, crypto schemes, whatever it may be. He really lost focus. And I just want to highlight where you started with Urban. He was elected in 2024. I took a step back and was like, whoa, I was wrong. The country wants Donald Trump. He created a coalition that rivaled the Obama coalition. He lost all of those gains and more in the span of just two years.

HABERMAN: So, David Axelrod, to pick up from that. This was an astonishingly good year for Democrats. As Morris said, Democrats flipped a number of young voters, and not just Republicans but Republican-leaning independents. Mississippi flipped. How do Democrats avoid making the same mistakes that Trump and Republicans made, by not immediately pissing off these voters? And to do a two-part here in terms of what Alyssa just said: is there a mistake being made in how each party is viewing its coalition, in terms of durability?

AXELROD: Well, listen, I lived through a period in 2008 and after 2008 when people talked about the coalition of the ascendant, that Democrats were going to be dominant for a generation and so on. And that was wrong. Voters are dynamic and they are watching, and don't assume anything. One of the problems for Democrats in 2024 was that they assumed certain things about Hispanic voters. They assumed certain things about African American voters, and they assumed, frankly, some things about working-class voters. I think that lesson was learned. I'm not so sure that Trump built this great coalition. I think that was a rejection as well. That vote in 2024 was anger at the Biden administration. I think these Hispanic voters went where they went because they are working class in the main. They are small business people. They were getting punished in the economy, and they thought Donald Trump would give them a better shot because he told them that he would, and there was some residue from his earlier administration. And so they felt betrayed. Democrats need to approach this result with humility. They've gotten an opportunity. They haven't gotten a long-term lease on these voters, and I think these voters will just as easily leave them if they don't follow through on some of the commitments that they've made.

HABERMAN: I'll ask Stacey Abrams the same question. You've spent a lot of time thinking about how Democrats can make inroads in Southern states in particular. Is this new coalition, particularly in Georgia, durable going forward, and what are the mistakes you think Democrats need to avoid?

ABRAMS: We borrow voters. I think that's what David said about leasing. We borrow voters, and voters do not care about our politics. They care about their lives. To the extent we build policy and elections around a set of political narratives that we cook up in a cauldron, they're going to tell us whether they like it or not. Part of the challenge is that we try to predict what people want instead of asking them what they need. And if you want democracy to succeed, people have to believe that they have agency and that their actions will translate into actual results. A lot of the work we did in Georgia, that we did in Mississippi, that we've been doing across the South, has been about helping people understand the mechanics of government, because when people know whose fault it is, they're more willing to do something about it. And I would say, tying together what David Urban said and what Axelrod said and certainly Alyssa, people finally saw the mechanics of how democracy worked because it was broken so aggressively. Yes, there were tariffs that broke access to the economy. You had mass armed paramilitary roaming the streets of our communities, called ICE, kidnapping people. You had Americans murdered. If you were a person of color, with the *Callais* decision, it wasn't just the president. It was also the courts that were supposed to protect you, eviscerating your rights. So across the board, people finally could put a name to the sort of inchoate distaste with government. There was a very specific set of policies, and I think it is a dangerous thing to decide that there was a single cause. It wasn't just pricing, because in the South we've been broke for a while. In particular communities of color that showed up in droves, it was not simply the pricing. It was the fact that they were being told their voices were no longer going to be allowed to be heard. And one of the misreadings is the notion that participation in an election eliminates the discrimination that preceded it. For Republicans, this idea that we've now solved race because more people of color turned out is deeply dangerous. For Democrats, the danger is presuming that the outrage and the fear that drove action is going to be enough to keep people coming out for two years. Because if their lives do not improve, they return to the question of who broke it and whose fault it is. If we do not give either a better villain or a better solution, we lose those voters who showed up, but we also instigate, I think, another round of pendulum swings. So our real opportunity is to show people what can be done, and that's why I think a lot of the focus has to shift from Congress to state and local politics.

HABERMAN: It's interesting listening to all of you. I think you could probably identify five or six threads: tariffs, the Iran war, gerrymandering, suppression of votes, corruption, the ballroom.

AXELROD: Also, real quickly, I think Republicans ran the '24 playbook in '26, thinking that the woke agenda was still relevant. You saw the cultural world. You saw the vice president. You saw the attacks on Talarico and others, and they didn't land like they did in '24. Remember the ad that ran famously, maybe on a couple of football games, "She's for they/them, we're for you." That was a big ad. They tried that again this time. It didn't stick. There was no stickiness to it whatsoever.

SWAN: I just want to ask Dan something, because it's interesting hearing all of this. The vice president boiled it down really to one issue. When he analyzed the election after the election, he said it's Iran. The Iran war was a catastrophe. I'm just curious what you made of that analysis, and also the trends we're seeing with Israel becoming more and more of a political liability, or seen as one anyway, on both sides.

SENOR: First of all, I think it's important to interpret what happened. If you look at the three presidencies before President Trump's first term, those were three back-to-back two-term presidencies. So we lived through a period of stability. We are now in the equivalent of three back-to-back one-term presidencies, right? Trump, Biden, Trump. So it could just be that we are in this period of incredible volatility, and whoever gets in and gets to govern gets thrown out, whether they're in the White House or in Congress. Obviously there are policy trends to analyze, but I think it's also important to take a step back and see that we are living through some very volatile times. President Trump himself seems, according to the reporting in your paper today, to disagree with the analysis that it was Iran, or Iran alone. And interestingly, President Trump has said he would do it again if presented with this dilemma. I think the entire issue of Israel is not a normal foreign policy issue. It has huge cultural implications inside this country that go beyond geopolitical analysis. And what we are seeing right now is that the Democrats are about to take over the House and the Senate with these extraordinary majorities, huge cushions. A number of these Democrats were elected on an agenda not only to break the U.S.-Israel relationship, but to advance policies that I think make huge swaths of the Jewish community in this country, and not only the Jewish community, uncomfortable and nervous. You have Democrat after Democrat who ran, who's going to show up in the House and even in the Senate, who, after October 7th, you would think would have been disgusted with Hamas's massacre of Jews. What they actually expressed, in the days of October 7th and even in the fall of this year, is disgust with Jews for objecting to being massacred. They ran on that agenda. They are now going to be in a caucus led by Hakeem Jeffries and Majority Leader Schumer. And there will be a real question that all of us will be watching heading into 2028: does the Democratic Party look more like the party of Barack Obama or the party of Hasan Piker? Hasan Piker was the singular most influential endorser in Democratic primaries in this past cycle. He's a force of nature. Now, I don't want to overstate the significance of Piker, but he cannot be ignored as a measure or proxy of what the leadership in the House and the Senate are going to have to deal with in managing their respective caucuses.

SWAN: Morris?

KATZ: As someone who won a lot of these Democratic primaries, I think the driving force was not Hasan Piker. I think we saw the same thing among Republicans this cycle. The president said he was going to put America first, and I think the average voter does not interpret unconditional aid going to fund another foreign war, and a pretty lopsided one at that, as putting America first. Across Democratic primary voters and swing voters in conservative states, at the heart of the issue is a feeling that Israel gets to play by a different set of rules than other countries, and a frustration with AIPAC and the influence of AIPAC in American electoral politics. What led to that coalition, what those candidates believe across elected Democrats, is that we should hold Netanyahu accountable. We

should hold the Israeli government accountable. U.S. taxpayer dollars should not fund human rights violations. And the American voters agreed. I also think you can't undersell what it looked like at the start of the Trump administration, when there was not a break from what the Biden administration's policies had been. A lot of people blamed Kamala for not distancing herself more from that, for that contributing to her loss. The president made no difference on that, and I think that cost people. I think the Democratic Party should absolutely seize the mantle of saying we're the party that's not going to be bullied by AIPAC and special interests. We're the party that's not going to pay for bombs for another country. We're the party that's going to put those dollars to use here at home.

FARAH GRIFFIN: Can I chime in on that? Stepping back and actually looking at the votes as they came in, I still think the top five issues are economy, safety in communities, tariffs, the war. Israel-Gaza very much is a third-tier issue. And as somebody who has spent a lot of time studying how our adversaries try to influence our political discourse and try to amplify things that divide us as a nation, I am not convinced that the median voter turned out because of Israel or Gaza. Even today we saw in the House, Hakeem Jeffries, soon-to-be Speaker Hakeem Jeffries, won pretty handily in the closed-door conference. The only real objection to Hakeem Jeffries on the left was that he's previously been a supporter of Israel. It seems to me this is a fight within the Democratic Party that could really hurt you guys ahead of 2028, just candidly, but it also feels overstated in terms of what voters actually turned out to care about. It's not to say that it's not an animating issue. It certainly is. But I do think there is an outsized influence from the algorithm and how much it's getting brought up that is detached from the values.

AXELROD: I'm just a little bit confused, Dan, about your depiction of what happened, because when you look at the huge number of people who were elected to the House and the Senate, this wasn't central to their campaigns in any way. I understand, look, I'm Jewish, right? I understand the anxieties that people have expressed. To me, I'm one who believes you could be horrified about October 7th and still weep for the children of Gaza. I think most Jews actually feel that way. But most of these people in these primaries are center-left. Israel was not even part of their discussion. I will say there is a sentiment in the country, as Morris said, and this follows twenty years of war, that we don't want to invest abroad, we want to invest at home. That has affected views of Israel, not just how Israel prosecuted the war in Gaza, but the sense that this is money we should be spending at home.

SENOR: If we were talking about these issues the way you and Morris are talking about them right now, I would disagree with both of you, but we would have a good discussion. It would be a good debate. That is not the way the candidates I'm talking about are talking about these issues. You had a candidate in Colorado, Kiros, who literally said October 7th and 9/11 were inevitable. She rationalized the violence. She blamed the victims rather than blaming the terrorists. Abdul El-Sayed, same thing: he rationalized the terrorist attack that hit the temple in West Bloomfield, Michigan. "Hurt people hurt people." I'll give you example after example. So if you guys, hold on, let me finish. If you guys want to have a conversation about whether there should be foreign aid and foreign assistance programs and support for military cooperation between the U.S. and Israel, that's an interesting discussion. But that

is not the conversation happening in Democratic primaries. And I think the leadership of both caucuses, the Senate and the House Democratic caucuses, are going to have to figure out how to deal with that now.

AXELROD: What I'm saying to you is that that wasn't the conversation in the vast majority of Democratic primaries. To depict that as the central thing is...

SENOR: I think it's the energy. I think it's where the energy is in the party.

HABERMAN: Stacey, and then Morris.

ABRAMS: I think there's a tendency in political speak to be extraordinarily reductive about complicated issues that can have multiple dimensions. Something Alyssa said I think is incredibly important. You referenced safety, and safety was an issue for people. We vote on values. People want to know that the people they're electing reflect their values. And there is a value embedded in genocide, or when someone is silent about the deaths of children, which is not about the question of whether you support the Jewish community. It is a question of, as someone asking for a vote, are you willing to express your values? And people were listening to values. I agree with you, Alyssa, that most people did not go to the polls thinking about Israel as a specific issue. What they thought about was, please let me finish, I did not interrupt you. When people were voting in primaries and in general elections, they were asking the question, who is expressing a set of values that resonate with the fear that I feel, because I know that my neighbor could be kidnapped here in the United States? When the Supreme Court of the United States, through Brett Kavanaugh, said that your race and your language and your accent could be a predicate for your being taken by ICE, that has a value attached to it. When this Congress passed a law to strip people of their access to health care and to food. I think it is incredibly reductive to take one or two issues and say that this is now speaking to the whole of the Democratic caucus. We will have lots of fights as Democrats and as Americans, but I think it's incredibly important, as we head into this next interregnum, that we have conversations about what values were being expressed. I'm not disagreeing with you about what any one person said or didn't say, but if we're going to have a legitimate conversation about what happens in this country, we must not reduce people to a sound bite. The one that you just used from Abdul El-Sayed is not what he said. What he said was in a larger context, but it has been pulled out and misappropriated, and it undermines what should be a legitimate set of debates that we have about foreign policy, and it is dangerous for us to do anything else.

SENOR: First of all, I'm far from needing to defend Abdul El-Sayed, but he himself said he shouldn't have said what he said, so it wasn't taken out of context. It can't be true that it's taken out of context and that then, after people like you take it out of context and make a whole discourse around it, he wishes he had used different words and addressed something differently. He said that this was a damaged person, that he was hurt, and therefore damaged people...

ABRAMS: Dan, let me just ask you a question.

SENOR: We shouldn't get too deep in the hole here.

ABRAMS: I just want to follow up on one thing, because he said it in the same statement in which he condemned, in very strong terms, what happened there. He did not stand up and justify what happened. He condemned what happened. That has been omitted from the accounts of what he said. He said it was inappropriate, in that moment, to join those two thoughts at a time when people were grieving and shaken by what happened. But this is what we do in politics. We take short bites out of longer statements in order to facilitate what essentially is a negative-ad argument, and that's not a serious argument. Let's look at the whole context and judge that.

SENOR: Morris said that Israel has a Netanyahu problem and that it is appropriate for congressional Democrats to respond to Israel's Netanyahu problem and the implications it's having for the U.S.-Israel relationship. That's fair. The problem is, if you listen to Abdul El-Sayed, he doesn't say Israel has a Netanyahu problem. He says Israel has an Israel problem. I'm not taking anything out of context.

KATZ: That's true, but can I also say that people often ask why do we spend so much time talking about Israel? We're now on minute thirty of talking about Israel in this conference, and I think the American people hear that and think, wow, the political class has an Israel problem. Why can't people move on faster from the biggest historic midterm swing in recent political history to spending more time on what Abdul said or didn't say at a presser about Israel? That rubs voters the wrong way and seems out of touch. There are Americans who think the problem around Israel is Netanyahu. There are Americans who think one-state solution is the answer, or two-state solution is the answer. I think Stacey put it incredibly well. They're saying it is about values. A lot of people across the ideological spectrum can make values-oriented statements, and there is room for that in the Democratic Party. I think what we saw was a broad, wide-scale rejection of the current actions of the Israeli government, of what I would say is the apartheid taking place there, and of the corruption in the political system that allows it to take place.

SENOR: It's a little unnerving to hear you blame the Jews for making Israel a topic.

KATZ: I'm Jewish. Jews can do that too.

SENOR: You're basically saying it's the Jews' fault for making this such a primary issue. You know as well as I do that after October 7th the Israel issue became an explosive issue in this country, and it certainly wasn't just because Jews were feeling under siege.

KATZ: I have worked for two different high-profile Muslim elected officials. If you think Abdul and Zohran Mamdani wake up in the morning thinking, "I can't wait to get asked thirty questions about Israel," then you're not on the planet.

SENOR: Can I just finish one thought?

HABERMAN: Yes, and then we'll move on.

SENOR: Jews represent about 2% of this population. They represent somewhere north of 60% of the hate crimes. There's something in this environment right now where the language has gotten toxic for Jews. Just take a seven-week period in spring of 2025. Governor Shapiro in Pennsylvania, his house is

burned down. The attack in Boulder, Colorado, where members of the local Jewish community were protesting on behalf of the hostages, a Molotov cocktail attack, an elderly woman gets killed. In Washington, D.C., at the Capital Jewish Museum, those two young Jews were gunned down. Let me just finish the thought. In every one of those situations, the perpetrators of those attacks were blaming Israel and Jews for complicity in genocide. So I'm saying the language in this environment has gotten pretty hot. I agree with Morris. I think we've missed the main narrative here of what happened in this election.

AXELROD: I just want to say this. I am the son of a refugee from the pogroms. My father grew up stepping over dead bodies. His home was blown up. They fled, and they came to America, and I'm so grateful. I'm the most grateful American you can imagine for what this country has meant to them. But even as a grateful American, I never say my country right or wrong. And as a Jew, I never say Israel right or wrong. One of the things we have to get away from is the conflation of anti-Zionism with anti-Semitism. That's happened on the left, but it's also fanned by this. When we look at Michigan, and this is the last point I'll make, there was an ad that was released that was deeply anti-Semitic and offensive. I said so then, and I was very disturbed by it. There were also millions of dollars of ads run against El-Sayed calling him essentially a terrorist, saying he was promoting Sharia law, that he was a jihadist. That was hateful too. We ought to all step back and say that when hate's on the march, that's not good for anyone, and particularly not for minorities. So I just want to make that point.

HABERMAN: We're moving on. David Urban, the AI industry spent tens of millions this cycle, but support for AI and data centers became a massive political liability. You will hear the Trump administration say it was a messaging issue, then a reality issue. I will leave that to you to answer. How will the politics of AI play out in the lead-up to 2028, in both primaries and the general?

URBAN: Thank goodness for me. Look, I liken this a little bit to fracking. If you look at my home state of Pennsylvania, you have the same issue. Nobody spent a nickel talking about fracking until they had sunk wells, and then it was a long path to market. You spend money before you put a shovel in the ground. You go around, you try to convince people of the benefits, the economic benefits. Senator McCormick and others had this summit for AI in Pennsylvania. They did a little bit of the sales pitch on the front end, of what a boom it's going to be for Pennsylvania. But they didn't answer the question of what it's going to mean for people's utility rates or the water usage. Nobody really got into the granularity of it. And so it became a big NIMBY issue. I don't want a giant humming factory in my backyard, whether it's a Ford factory or an AI data factory. That was one part of it. The second part is kind of the repulsion against the tech bros, right? A little bit of "this is the Epstein class." There are two sets of government: a government that works for the landed gentry, and a government that doesn't work for me. And this is part of the problem for the Trump administration. They promised the government works for the folks in western Pennsylvania where I grew up, and then they didn't deliver. Then they see there's going to be a big data center built, that they're somehow paying for with tax breaks, and their power bill is going to go up, their water bill is going to go up, and nobody explained it. So now you're trying to dig out of a hole you're already in, and it's going to take a lot of explaining. I mean, at the end of the day, with some of the things you're seeing most recently, whether they're

cyberattacks or not, you could point to the lack of superintelligence, as the president likes to call it, and say we're behind, and this is the Chinese or the Iranians flexing their ability. We'd better wake people up to get on this train and do a better job of explaining, because right now it's a very tough sell in Pennsylvania. You're going to have to really explain to people how it's an economic benefit to them, or they're not going to vote for a tax break for some rich company someplace else.

HABERMAN: Morris, to that end, David is describing the Republicans' challenge here. Do Democrats, as they face this, need to name the enemy?

KATZ: I think it's the easiest political winner possible, and I hope we seize the moment on this. It's right that Republicans and pro-AI folks did not do a great job explaining it. But also, when you're explaining, you're losing. And I think you're going to have a really hard time explaining why Elon Musk and Sam Altman should have more power in the current economy. People don't like normal billionaires. Now we have taken the least likable billionaires on the planet, one of the least likable political groups you could possibly have, going around saying the dumbest things anyone could possibly say. "Yes, you are not going to have a job." "No, we don't think your lives matter." And then you have elected officials saying, "We welcome your data centers into our ground." I think the data center issue in particular was a physical manifestation of all of the AI anxieties. But we should all look at that and say this is just the start of where we're going. I pray to God that the Republican Party decides to be the party of AI. They can be the ones welcoming AI into their communities, and we can be the ones who stand up, protect our communities and fight back.

AXELROD: To feed a little off of what you said, Morris, I do think the data center issue is a surrogate for a larger issue, which is that people feel a loss of control in their lives. They feel that these data centers were imposed on them. There has been an arrogance among the tech bros in declaring that this is the future and, you know, live with it. Those guys have to be reined in some. But it's about a lot of things. This loss-of-control issue is not just about the physical manifestation. It's about how it's going to affect their kids and how it's going to affect their jobs. This isn't just a task for those guys. It's for leaders as well, to explain. You're talking about it as a political consultant and the power of that issue. The fact is, AI is here. AI is going to happen. And the question is, do we harness the power of it and limit the damage it can do, or are we simply flotsam on this?

FARAH GRIFFIN: That was the point I wanted to make. Republicans totally dropped the ball. The president basically tweeted, more or less, if you don't like data centers, you want to be poor. That was the extent of his messaging. He didn't talk about it lowering property taxes, the fact that they exist in many communities right now, the fact that they could arguably be the reindustrialization of America and lead to next-generation jobs for young people. He didn't try to sell them. But there's a disingenuous moment that we're in. Democrats use AI just as much as Republicans do. We do have to be able to power that AI. It's such a good bogeyman right now to be anti-data center, but heading into the next election, I think the conversation becomes something a little more advanced. It's about reining in the next-generation frontier models, the ones everyone's terrified of, the ones we're being warned could wipe out humanity in a span of ten years. Who's going to take the leadership on that?

Because I think the toothpaste is out of the tube at this point. It's ingrained in all of our lives. You can demonize the tech bros, but I saw a tweet that said in 2032, AOC is going to be begging for a data center in an underrepresented, vulnerable community. It is a reality that every single industry is going to need the power behind it. So you have to find those narrow lanes. What does reining in AI look like without hurting the economic benefits that it drives? That's where Republicans should be.

SENOR: The bigger question is who pays for it. That's the nub of this.

ABRAMS: And I think that's part of where Democrats have an opportunity. It's not just being anti-data center. It is looking at how you do what Congress is refusing to do. I think Democrats in the next two years have to acknowledge that congressional action, while important, will often be thwarted by a president who intends to veto anything that looks like it might benefit Democrats. But at the state and local level, where you flipped so many chambers, where you have trifectas, this is the opportunity to do two things. One, to return to the people, as David said, the sense of agency and ownership over the decisions being made about their land, their water, their energy. And I say that to both Davids. But it's also the ability to talk about what it means next. I work with a couple of programs where we're training low-income communities on how AI works. Right now, data centers are scary because nobody knows what it means. They don't know what compute power is. I wrote a novel called *Code to Justice* because I want people to understand why AI exists, what it can do, what it can't do. And yes, it's a dangerous thing to have AI with a God complex and apparently the ability to travel through our universe and our refrigerators and kill us all. That's problematic. But we can also elect officials who are willing to regulate this. I think that's a real opportunity for Democrats, because it's not just anti-AI. It is who's in charge and which questions we are asking. When Democrats really assert ourselves as the people who are willing to ask the questions that people need asked, and actually solve the problem of who's paying for it, and not underestimate, as Alyssa said, the intelligence of communities that want access to this power. They just want to know what it costs, who controls it, and what they can get from it. If Democrats understand that trifecta, I think we have a real opportunity to have a conversation not only in '28, but in '32.

AXELROD: I also think that when the president meets with all the leaders of the industry and is asked what they're going to do to ameliorate the downside risks of AI, he says we're going to rely on the moral sense of the people who run the industry. That is not reassuring to the American people. I think that was a factor, and it underscored in some ways the corruption issue that coursed through a lot of this campaign. But it's symptomatic of what I was talking about earlier, the volatility. It's all in sync with the volatility of our politics.

SENOR: In early 2024, there were forty of these data center groups that had popped up around the country. Today there are over 800. And if we blink, there are going to be 8,000 of them when the Democrats are going through the presidential primaries as we head into 2028. I agree with Morris that it's a juicy political target for Democrats this past midterm, but now they're going to be in a governing role. When I ask congressional Democrats, okay, I get that the data centers were this juicy target, what do you do now? You now have the reins. And I can't get an answer out of any of them.

FARAH GRIFFIN: Can I say one thing quickly? A big swing vote, obviously, from 2024 to 2026 was young, white, male, non-college-educated voters. Young voters in particular swung from Republicans, Trump in '24, to Democrats in '26. Young people in particular are terrified of AI. Even people of my generation, and I'm not that young anymore. There is this fear that what you studied is going to be obsolete, that these jobs are going away. Whoever can speak to the future workforce, and communicate what it looks like, and make them feel they're planning ahead and getting ahead of that, I think that's incredibly palpable, because that vote is very much up for grabs between the two parties.

SWAN: Morris?

KATZ: I am curious, and there are a lot of smart people at this table, and I haven't necessarily heard a good answer on this. Everyone says some version of "it's here, it's coming, we need to figure out how to usher it in." And I'm worried, to both of your points, about the God complex of AI, and I'm worried about the God complex of the billionaires who control it. Why do we not just say, let's stop it where it is now? We talk about it as if we've never had a government. Isn't it government's job to say, hey, there's a dangerous thing happening, we're going to say no more?

FARAH GRIFFIN: If our adversaries are going to do it... But you make a great point, which is that Senator Klobuchar and Ted Cruz...

SWAN: Just to challenge it. Everyone says that about China. I haven't heard someone articulate why. You talk to people in the U.S. intelligence community and they'll say, actually, the Chinese are kind of okay with us leading the frontier, because they've got their own concerns about this stuff. They've got a system that needs to be...

FARAH GRIFFIN: Well, they're a much more repressive government.

SWAN: They don't really want these models going totally wild.

SENOR: I don't know about that.

KATZ: I actually very much agree with that, because the argument generally is that adversaries and allies alike are going to be moving forward, so we can't stop here. But on China, this is not a free market where Xi just lets everyone compete and lets the billionaires go crazy. There are a lot more regulations in place on AI development there. Quickly, on things that could get done in a lame duck: Ted Cruz and Amy Klobuchar have a bill that simply limits these frontier models, these self-learning, I'm using the wrong terminology, the most advanced AI models that seem like the riskiest. To me that seems like a no-brainer. That seems like something that should get a veto-proof majority. I don't know that it will, but Ted Cruz is hardly somebody trying to stifle national security advancements.

AXELROD: To Morris's point, though, your assumption is that if we in America say we're just going to say no more, the rest of the world is not going to develop it, and that the things developed elsewhere will envelop everyone. It's not just us. I think America could be a leader in laying down some

guidelines as to how this moves forward. But I think what you're reacting to is a bunch of people getting very, very rich off of this industry and imposing it on us. And when I say it's here, I mean it's going to be developed. It's developing itself. The question is, what do we do about that?

SWAN: Do you think we're going full pitchforks in this next election cycle?

ABRAMS: I think it could happen if we don't understand it. There's an economic argument about AI, which is the billionaires who are stealing our information. I'm in the Anthropic settlement. I have eight books that they owe me some money for, because they used them to build an LLM that may or may not benefit me at some point. That's a problem. So there's the economics of AI. There's also the science of AI. And that's the place where it's dangerous to say "just stop," because you've got Mistral in France. Not everyone building frontier models lives in the U.S. or China. The challenge is that we do not have an international governmental agency that can stop advancement. So I think part of our responsibility is, yes, the U.S. can put in place and promote a stance of "do not do this." That is absolutely necessary. Number two, we have to not wait for Congress to start this regulatory scheme. I'm glad that Amy Klobuchar is now the governor of Minnesota. She can now stop it. But the next piece is that AI actually serves purposes. It can help solve problems, particularly for low-income communities, for communities of color. I do not want to choke off an opportunity to finally be able to fully participate because we are afraid. One of the ways we stop it from being pitchforks is making certain that the people who are most likely to be harmed by it actually understand it. Where AI benefits the greatest, and where the frontier models benefit, they scare us with our ignorance. Our responsibility is to fill that vacuum with knowledge.

HABERMAN: Dan Senor, I have a question for you on that issue. Right now, Nvidia, which I don't know if any of you know is in the news a bit, obviously holds a significant portion of chips and basically has a stranglehold on development here because of that. Putting aside all other questions, was it a mistake for the Trump administration not to try to build up other chip makers, to try to create market competition as opposed to just going all in?

SENOR: This thing is being reported out in real time, so obviously I don't know exactly what happened. But where Nvidia really took off was basically in the last three years, when these frontier models took off. So this is all fast-moving. Nvidia's rocket-like surge was totally in line with OpenAI and Anthropic, which were raising early rounds of private venture capital three and four years ago, and now are going to be the largest IPOs in the history of the world. So the idea that Nvidia is so important to turbocharging this AI revolution, and that the government should have thought through, "Hey, we've got to build in some redundancy, we've got to build in some alternative sources of power." Over time, sure. But do I fault any government, when it's happened in the last thirty-six months? I just think it's a hard thing.

HABERMAN: It's moving too fast.

SENOR: Yes. And to Jonathan's point about China, I think you're right that the Communist Party would never tolerate a libertarian-like model in China for access to their data and their frontier models. But as we know from TikTok, which is a very good case study, they're more than happy to build up their models and have them proliferate around the world, including in the United States. So I'm not very reassured by the fact that the Chinese leadership says, "We don't like going full freight for our own citizens," because that has never stopped them from using these technologies for geopolitical reach. I think that is the big risk. And to Stacey's point earlier, think about medical research and the role AI is going to have in the future of medical research, national security, and our own ability to defend ourselves from some very creative attacks where adversaries will be using artificial intelligence. The idea that we can just say "stop" and freeze it, we've got to come up with something a little more nuanced than that.

HABERMAN: Just so long as it doesn't kill us all first.

SENOR: Right.

URBAN: To your point, Maggie, about encouraging other entrants: you saw Palmer Luckey talking up there. Anduril is so successful because the government is doing exactly that. They're funding disruptive technologies in the DOD space. They're not going with the primes. They're saying no more Lockheed, no more RTX, we want new people who iterate faster. They're encouraging that kind of development. So why not in the chip space is, I think, the appropriate question to ask.

HABERMAN: I want to ask, because we don't have that much time, we're looking ahead to this next two-year period, and investigations are going to be a big part of it. Morris, some of the new Democrats coming into Congress have been saying things like, quote, "We're going to toss out subpoenas like Mardi Gras beads." I think it's fair to say that past periods of Democratic investigations of Donald Trump have not been a resounding political success. I think that's pretty empirical. What would your advice be to them? They're all high on, "We won! Mardi Gras beads, candy, subpoenas. Lawyer up."

KATZ: Everyone's hitting the hopium very hard. What I think is that there is a constitutional responsibility for oversight, and we are looking at one of the most corrupt administrations.

HABERMAN: And you think that Mardi Gras beads is someone who's really devoted to soberly considering their constitutional responsibility?

KATZ: Who knows. I like flavorful language sometimes too. What I think is important, to David's point, is that corruption courses through all of these issues. People have an innate understanding that whether it be the war, whether it be the failures of appropriations, whether it be costs, corruption is at the heart of what is making everything feel so much worse. And think about how crazy it is how much corruption we know about from the Trump administration, and like half of it is from people who text one of you guys. And now we have subpoena power.

HABERMAN: We don't use text messages. We use Signal.

KATZ: Now we have subpoena power to find out. I think where we have a responsibility to act on oversight is to show clearly the ways in which corruption is contributing to higher costs, the ways in which corruption is contributing to a crisis in quality of life, the ways in which corruption is a big part of this horrible war that isn't ending. I don't think we should spend two years running against Donald Trump, who's not going to be on the ballot.

HABERMAN: But you might know a few people who will be. That's the party check, right? Can you make people believe that the investigations into Eric and Donald and the Witkoffs are driving up the price at the pump? That's the connection you have to make. Dan, I'm curious what you're hearing from friends of yours, acquaintances who might have gone a little all-in on MAGA in the corporate world last year, and now maybe they're thinking they need to reposition a little bit. How do you see that playing out?

SENOR: Friends of mine are not sitting there thinking about their hedges. But the reality is that much of the corporate world's view is, you deal with who's in power. The Trump administration had the executive branch and Republican majorities, and they were dealing with them. I'm sure they will start dealing with the congressional majorities, with the Democrats.

HABERMAN: I'm just saying, the way they dealt with him was not typical. Are there people who are now regretting coming to the Oval Office with a golden tribute and giving $25 million to the ballroom?

SENOR: I think the real question for the congressional Democrats will be, can they identify where these donations were made and what was given in return? What was the transaction around it?

HABERMAN: But that doesn't apply to everyone they're going to throw Mardi Gras beads at. I want to ask you this, though, because you were very involved in campaigns when campaign finance laws were very different than they are now. Are congressional Democrats even going to be able to trace where donations are coming from, given that everybody has a C4? Walk us through what you think this is.

AXELROD: Well, I think that's part of it, but there are certain things that don't have anything to do with campaign donations. When the spy chief of the UAE buys 49% of the Trump family's crypto company, and shortly thereafter we transfer sensitive chips to the UAE that had been kept from them because of concerns that they would end up in China, that needs to be looked at. How this Nvidia thing went down needs to be looked at. It just cries out for that. Here's the challenge. I think there are very legitimate things to look at and a responsibility to do it. You can't let that overwhelm the other things you're doing that actually address the day-to-day concerns of people. One of the reasons Donald Trump lost was because he promised to focus on the economy, and instead we got vanity projects and vengeance. If Democrats make the mistake of being seen as going down the vengeance lane to the exclusion of these other things, then it would be the same Donald Trump...

FARAH GRIFFIN: Having done some oversight during the Obama administration, listen, oversight can be, yes, a constitutional duty, but it also should be uniquely tied to things that impact the American public. I am not a fan of going after the family, even though there is blatant corruption with Eric and Don Jr. You could look into stuff with Jared. I think he has a little more of a legitimate role in this

administration. But look at the DOGE cuts. Look at what that may have led to, when congressionally authorized funds were cut, and what the results were. I want to look at HHS cuts, congressionally appropriated funds, and the impact that had on public health and on research. I would say a lot of oversight around the Iran war and how we're conducting it. And then Nvidia is actually huge. We don't know sitting here right now if the Commerce Department signed off on these chips going to China or going to a third-party country. Those are things that impact us, and if that's where Democrats are able to focus their oversight, while also having a proactive agenda, I think that works. One prediction, or warning: this White House is already telegraphing that they're not going to comply with congressional subpoenas, or they want them all to run through the White House. We could run into a real constitutional question if these agencies, these cabinet secretaries, these White House officials just purely decline to abide by congressional subpoenas. Peter Navarro, who's in the White House now, literally went to jail for doing that at a previous time. So we might be heading into some fairly rocky territory.

SENOR: Everyone has their favorite. "We've got to do HHS, we've got to hit this." This is probably reflective of the conversation among many incoming chairs of these congressional committees that are going to have subpoena power. They are going to have the gavel, and each has their favorite thing. "We should go after this, and this is the outrage." By the way, I'm not saying any of these are more legitimate or less legitimate than the others. But if it's about everything, it's going to be about nothing.

FARAH GRIFFIN: One caveat is that his family getting wealthy, while gross and makes me uncomfortable, and I think pisses people off, doesn't necessarily directly impact the American people the way some of these other scandals do, in my opinion.

URBAN: Hunter Biden would have some words to say about that.

FARAH GRIFFIN: By the way, I thought it was ridiculous for Republicans to make him a focus.

HABERMAN: Stacey Abrams, I do want to get to this, because it relates to the conversation we're having right now about what gets done and what doesn't. One of the people who has found a way to work, at least on the margins, with Donald Trump is Mayor Mamdani, Morris's candidate slash mayor, all of our mayor in the city. Morris helped elect him. If the cost of achieving certain priorities, particularly in a world where Stephen Miller isn't chief of staff, so I'm putting that aside, or assuming that he isn't the last word in Trump's ear on immigration reform, and the president repeatedly comes back to something like comprehensive immigration reform, then walks off of it. I don't know that he necessarily knows what he means when he says it. But regardless, if there is a window for getting something done, or at least getting the president to change a certain policy on the margins, as we have seen Mayor Mamdani do in certain respects, is it worth the cost for Democrats of saying, as Abdul El-Sayed said, we'll call it whatever, we'll call it Trump health care, we'll rename subsidies, or I forget the precise thing he said? Is it worth doing something like that, which is not the golden tributes into the Oval Office, but is something more like Trump Accounts or Trump cards?

ABRAMS: I think it's the wrong question, which I know is a dangerous thing to say to Maggie Haberman. But what I would say is this: people want their lives to be better. That means they want accountability for what broke their lives. They want to know who caused harm. And while I appreciate Dan's concern about the scope of investigation, different people had different parts of their lives harmed by it. They're not watching C-SPAN 24/7. They want to know who broke this thing that is hurting my family. If the solution set includes being nice to the architect, or at least the avatar, of what harmed me, and it creates a solution, Democrats' job is not to be angry that he's part of it. It's to make sure that he doesn't get credit for it. And that can happen the day after you get what you need. They've been very good at that. He's been very, very effective at taking credit for things he had nothing to do with. So our responsibility is to get what people need and then make certain that we get credit for how it got done. When I was minority leader, I would tell people, they give you "leader" to make you feel good. They put "minority" in front of it so you never forget your place. But the job was always to find ways to deliver for people. Americans are in pain, and there's the opportunity to get the current occupant of the White House to roll back the cuts to SNAP benefits, to make certain that health care for 20 million people gets restored. They will absolutely want that to happen. If Democrats say, "We got your money back, and we let him for a moment take credit for it," I think everyone will remember who got it for them, not whose name was on it. Because they're not going to read that.

SWAN: Let me ask you a follow-up to that, and then David Axelrod. If that meant putting aside investigations into the family, for instance, or Donald Trump Jr.'s wedding party paid for by a Russian oligarch, would that be worth it?

ABRAMS: No. We heard the reference to the last two sets of impeachments, and I'm not suggesting impeachment, but I want to take us back to post-Civil War. Ava DuVernay has a remarkable documentary that comes out on December 4th. One of the challenges of the 14th was that there was never responsibility. There was a jump to reconciliation. We wanted things to be fixed, and we never assigned responsibility. When there is a lack of accountability, there is a permission structure to do it again. There should be no permission for anyone to steal from America and from the American people and to ransom our future for their profitability. I don't think the American people aren't smart enough to understand that we can do both. And if we have to sell our current to get our future, I think most Americans would say, do not ransom me. What they will say is, let's figure out how to get it done. And we've got a two-year period of time to make that happen.

SWAN: David Axelrod.

AXELROD: On the question that you asked, I was out in Denver for that Majority Democrats conference. Senator-elect Talarico said, "We can't wait two years for progress. If we have to deal with President Trump, we should try to make his last two years the most productive there are." A lot of people in the room gasped, half clapped, because it was confusing. But I think most Americans want stuff to get done. They're voting about their lives. If you have an opportunity to get something done... I think the great fear of a lot of Republicans is that Donald Trump really isn't particularly philosophical or ideological. If a deal comes along that will make him look good, I always say he's not a populist, he's

a popularist. If a deal comes along that he can sign, he may just do it. So I think Democrats would be punished if they passed on an opportunity to get something done. When he said on *60 Minutes* that they were maybe too harsh on immigration and we ought to come to comprehensive immigration reform, my thing is: fine, we may disagree on 90% of stuff, but if you're serious about that, we'll pass a bill, let's do it. I think that's what people are looking for from this new Democratic Congress.

URBAN: I would just say this real quickly. We talk about a lot of things, but if it's about everything, it's about nothing. This comes back to putting some jingle in people's pockets at the end of the day. You put your hand in your pocket and pull that $20 bill out. The dad or the mom going home, you put some gas in their tank, get their kid a pizza. They can't do that anymore. Until we stretch that twenty bucks back out, whoever stretches that twenty is going to get credit. So I keep asking my Democratic colleagues, what's H.R. 1? What's H.R. 2? What are the things you put up first, the bills that signal to the voters, "Hey, we get it," right? Because I think that's really important. You have a short period of time. If you're getting into these investigations, you kind of lose the lead. People are going to want to see how you're going to put more jingle in my pocket right away.

ABRAMS: But it's not just the money. I think it's important for us to recognize that this was not a single-cause election. It wasn't just money. For a lot of people, it was also whether or not they were able to be full participants in this country, whether they were going to be victims of the very people who should be protecting them. That is not about the money in your pocket. It's about the quality of your life. I don't disagree with you that we have to have that conversation, but we have to be able to do multiple things, because this is a nation of 330 million people.

URBAN: Okay, Stacey, what's H.R. 1 then?

AXELROD: And by the way, just as a practical matter, and I keep saying this when I talk to members of Congress: you've got an Oversight Committee, you've got a Judiciary Committee. Let those deal with investigations. If you're on Appropriations or the Homeland Security Committee, deal with those issues.

FARAH GRIFFIN: I can just say we know Donald Trump well. You guys know him probably even better. He is not deeply ideological. There are a few things he really, really deeply cares about, but he can be swayed by the most persuasive voice in the room. And I do think Mamdani has worked this masterfully with him. He opposes him adamantly when he's not with him, but he will find that one narrow area where he can work with him. I said it to Senator-elect Abdul El-Sayed when he was on *The View*, I said it off air: come up with what the ask is, tell him you'll put him on Mount Rushmore if he signs it, and you might actually get it through.

HABERMAN: But you still have Stephen Miller, deputy chief of staff at the White House, right? That's the biggest obstacle. Who will be the last and loudest voice in the room?

FARAH GRIFFIN: That is true.

HABERMAN: We are going to talk about 2028 more than we have. But before we get there, I do want to ask a question.

SWAN: Morris, I think you've got the taste of blood in your mouth a little bit. You're almost back in power, you guys. And Trump has expanded executive power dramatically in the last two years. One question is, when a Democrat gets into power, Trump has opened an aperture. Since Watergate, we had an independent DOJ where the president did not order them to investigate named individuals. There was a wall. Trump has knocked down that wall. Trump has used government power to squeeze ideological enemies, whether it be law firms he doesn't like, universities, corporations. That could be quite appealing to a leftist, I would think. Would you advocate, if you were advising President AOC, to use some of these powers for leftist priorities, even if, all things considered, most people might think they were taking other branches' prerogatives?

KATZ: I think one of the things President Trump got right in both of his campaigns was that the American people are not interested in someone running for office telling them all the things they can't do to make their lives better. He had a mandate to use every tool at his disposal. Now, I think he has misused those tools in massive ways. I am interested in seeing a Democratic president use the tools that he has had to hold the billionaire class to account, to hold corporations to account, to end foreign wars, to pass new health care programs, to reinvest in the social safety net, and particularly we should usher in a golden age of trust-busting and break up monopolies. We were told, in what I believe became a lie for a long time, that the American people don't like big government.

SWAN: So you wouldn't get squeamish if President AOC directed her attorney general to prosecute Jeff Bezos?

KATZ: I think if Jeff Bezos broke the law, Jeff Bezos should be prosecuted. We have had big government for the 1% for a long time. They have gotten a government that was willing to intervene to keep them out of legal trouble. They've gotten a government that's willing to intervene to give them handouts. I think we should have big government, and we should not be apologetic.

AXELROD: You're melding a few things here. The question is, should we have the rule of law? Yes, we should have the rule of law. Because that has been shuttered. That just kind of chilled me. I would have asked what you were going to ask. I actually think that this election was like the '74 election post-Watergate, and the presidential election, I'm giving you a segue, will be like the '76 election. Part of it is a cleansing. Part of it is they want to give Washington an angioplasty. And part of that is restoring the rule of law. I'm stunned, as someone who served in the White House, at the abuse of the Justice Department, in ways that would have made Richard Nixon blush. And I don't think we should take from that, "Well, here's a new tool we can use to get our stuff done." And I don't think that's what you meant either.

KATZ: No.

SWAN: I would like to know what you meant before.

HABERMAN: So would I.

KATZ: What I meant is that you see Democrats take power, and it feels like the first thing we do is open a 2,000-page rulebook and flip through it. Then once we're done reading it, we maybe get to work on passing some kind of legislation. No one can comprehend it when we're on page 1,100, and it's something that will make people's lives better in seven years. Donald Trump says, "I'm going to take on government waste," and by day four DOGE is emptying people's offices. Now, the execution of that was awful. But what does it look like if that kind of aggressiveness and belief in the force of government is applied instead to restaffing agencies, to expanding HHS, to saying on day one, look at a data center moratorium? I would hope that a Democratic president would sign a data center moratorium on day one, rather than the way Washington tends to work, where you have years and years of studies and committees and nothing actually gets done.

SWAN: Let me ask a quick follow-up, because we do need to move on in our remaining time. Although I will say this has been one of the most clarifying...

HABERMAN: I'm going to ask another clarifying question on that front. President Biden, for all of the criticisms of his presidency, and there are many valid ones, did try reverting to norms, one of which was DOJ independence. Do you think the next Democratic president should follow that path?

KATZ: Yes, I believe DOJ should be independent.

HABERMAN: But then, to go back to what you said about Bezos: there's a distinction between "if Bezos broke the law, he should be prosecuted" and President AOC saying, "Go investigate Bezos and see if he broke any laws."

KATZ: Yes, I think that's the difference. It's the rule of law.

SWAN: So you would object to something like that? There's a contradiction, because what you're essentially saying is that this fussy old rulebook holds us back, all these old laws. What Trump does is he acts, and then the system has to scramble to catch up. He doesn't care about whether it's legal or not. He just does the thing. And you're floating between one and the other.

KATZ: What I'm floating between, I believe, is this. All of this is in the eye of the beholder. But when government is using its forces for evil, when it is partisan, when it's violating the rule of law, that is bad. I think there's a difference between that and believing that the federal government has the authority to act boldly. Some of this, I think, is the difference between decorum and law. I think we should follow the laws, but we should reject the decorum of, I would say, the Biden era.

HABERMAN: Stacey.

ABRAMS: You just said it. There's a difference between practice and rules. The rules say here's what you can and cannot do. The practice has become, we're not going to do it because we don't necessarily know what we can do. I think what Morris is alluding to is that there is a calcification that has happened on the Democratic side, that because we haven't seen it before, we don't think we can.

There's an entrepreneurial approach we can take that should always respect the rule of law, but should not be cordoned off because it's not the norm. Because the problem is the norms we have, that's what hollowed out government and made it susceptible to the rise of authoritarianism. The use of democratic institutions to achieve this authoritarian and autocratic use of power is exactly the problem. Not everything that Donald Trump has done that is vile is illegal, and we have to understand the difference. That means, Jonathan, to your question, we have to assess which things were done in violation of the law and which things were done in violation of decorum. But if you understand now what it exposed, how do you leverage it for the benefit of others? That should never run afoul of being constitutional, being legal and being moral, but being entrepreneurial is absolutely the thing that the next Democratic president has to be.

HABERMAN: Let me segue to 2028 from that question of decorum versus not. Do you think Chuck Schumer should be replaced as leader?

ABRAMS: Having served as a Democratic leader, I will say it this way. I have the deepest respect for Chuck Schumer. I helped him recruit folks in Georgia, and we had a lot of success together. I have a great deal of affection and respect for Chris Van Hollen. He was a guest on my podcast, and his willingness to speak up against genocide and to push for accountability matters. But as someone who was in the legislative body, I respect the legislators who have to decide who they want to follow. So I do not think that's the right question.

HABERMAN: You still have the old muscle memory.

ABRAMS: I know.

SWAN: David Axelrod, I want to do a bit of a '28 question here. You've famously talked about authenticity as one of the most important features in a candidate, about being comfortable in their own skin. When you survey the likely candidates on the Republican side and the Democratic side, who is strongest on that score and who flunks?

AXELROD: Oh man, that's a tough question. Now I need my old muscle memory to evade.

SWAN: Come on. I bet you can do it.

AXELROD: I do think authenticity is more important now even than it has been in the past, because of the nature of our media environment. You have to be able to communicate authentically and in many different ways. We've seen people able to make great speeches, but you can't just do the classical music. You have to do jazz as well. You have to know how to improvise within the tune of what you're trying to express. I want to see a campaign. I want to see how these people get out there and get tested. But the bigger thing I've said is that we never choose the replica. We choose the remedy. And the question is, what are the qualities of Donald Trump that people most want a remedy for? I think a lot of them fit under one rubric, which is character and decency. So: humility, empathy, integrity. There's a number of those. People who over-index on those qualities, as well as people who have a vision of

what to build and not just what to restore, are going to do best in this. I just want to see them out there. I haven't seen enough of them to say this one or that one. Morris, are you going to help me more?

KATZ: I will. Look at the landscape of some of the states we're talking about, the swing states now: Texas, South Carolina, the states across the South. I wanted to say earlier, waves don't happen by accident. They happen with a lot of years of work. And I don't think we flip any of those states without Stacey Abrams.

AXELROD: Yes. Amen.

KATZ: Because we're looking at a different electoral map when we're looking at these contenders. I think on the Republican side, Rubio is a more talented politician. He's gotten a lot better than he was the last time he ran. I watched some of his speeches the other day. He's worked his muscle a little bit. J.D. Vance has an incredibly compelling story, and when he was in the Senate, he flashed more interesting policy openness that could have been more interesting. I think he has been such a disaster as vice president and looks like he has all the baggage of Donald Trump with none of the charisma, and is awkward, and I don't think could withstand a rigorous presidential campaign. On the Democratic side, I think it's the most interesting thing. I can't remember if we've talked about this, David, but I feel like we just had a version of our Tea Party 2010 moment. In 2012, the nominees hadn't caught up yet. So Mitt Romney was nominated. He didn't embody the new Republican Party. When I look at a lot of the names being recycled, they don't feel like the people who are this incredible slate we just elected. And I wonder if we're on a lag. I think Jon Ossoff, AOC, J.B. Pritzker, Pop is maybe the most meeting this moment. But I'm happy we have a campaign.

HABERMAN: You were shaking your head.

SENOR: Listen, I'll throw out a couple of Republicans. I've hosted Marco Rubio at my house. I know most of these folks individually, personally. I agree with you. I've told the vice president, channel *Hillbilly Elegy* J.D. more than the finance-bro J.D. He was very authentic. He's got his stories. I would have liked him to channel a little more finance bro today. But remember, after Charlie Kirk got assassinated, Spencer Cox came onto the scene, right? People thought, he's very refreshing. He's, to David's point, authentic. He brings people together. He has empathy. He's a decent person. So does somebody like that emerge, where people say, this is who we want to lead our party?

AXELROD: I know we're running out of time here. I would bet the field against Vance. And if I were advising J.D. Vance, I'd say, first of all, you should talk to Kamala Harris about what it's like to be the vice president of an unpopular president running right after that president. Secondly, we've only elected two vice presidents succeeding their president in the last 150 years, George H.W. Bush and Martin Van Buren, and even I wasn't around for that. So I suspect there'll be a robust primary on the Republican side.

SENOR: I actually don't think there will be. I think the Republican primary will be boring. And I'm grateful, because I think all the action is going to be on the Democratic side. I'm going to tell you why. Compared to the characters that are going to emerge in the Democratic primary, both candidates who got elected this cycle in '26 who may run or wind up becoming a running mate, or candidates Morris mentioned from the last couple of cycles, I think everyone's going to run. The Democratic nomination is going to be worth a lot in 2028. I think you could get fifteen or sixteen candidates.

HABERMAN: Are you saying Vance is going to be the candidate?

SENOR: No, no. I'm saying it's boring. I think you could have fifteen or sixteen Democrats running for president. Some of them are new characters on the scene. People have not seen them. It's going to be exciting.

AXELROD: I respectfully disagree. I think there will be a wide Republican field as well. There's going to be people from the before times, the pre-Trump times, the Trump times, and those who are just not related. I'd be interested if a Brian Kemp gets in. Does a Glenn Youngkin? Does your friend Dave McCormick? There are some people. It's going to be this discussion: is Trump the future, or is it something different? I think we'll have a crowded field.

HABERMAN: We have to stop here, although I do want to say that Morris's point about 2010, and the fact that this was a 2012-style election, is something we have been talking about a lot.

SWAN: Maggie's going to say we're not done, and we're going to continue, because I'm just curious. I want to ask one more question for everyone. It's only a one-word answer, no explanation. It's October 28th, a month before Election Day. Who are the nominees?

FARAH GRIFFIN: Oh, that's a good one. I have no idea.

SWAN: Come on, throw them out.

FARAH GRIFFIN: No.

SWAN: No? Alyssa?

FARAH GRIFFIN: Rubio, Ossoff.

SWAN: Wow. You won't do it?

SENOR: No, I want to see that. Have fun. Newsom and Rubio.

SWAN: Morris?

KATZ: I'm going to have a rare moment of discipline in the audience.

SWAN: Wow.

SWAN: [inaudible]

KATZ: I'll say it. [inaudible] He's too green.

HABERMAN: All right. That's it. I hope we reconvene after that election. I hope Dan will sit right there. 2010 is an important reminder that there actually was a before time to the one we discussed now, and there will be afterwards. We want to thank all of you for being here. We know this was a huge block of time, but a pretty cool theater to be in. We appreciate it, and thank you. And also, we're both print reporters, so we're not good at this. Thanks for being patient. We especially thank the audience.

SWAN: Thank you very much. Take care.