



Episode 1,069: Trump's 2017: A Review

Guest: Dan McCarthy

WOODS: Well, you've had a major change since the last time you were on. Instead of being with *The American Conservative*, you're now with *Modern Age*, which has a rather distinguished pedigree in the history of conservatism.

MCCARTHY: That's right. *Modern Age* dates back to 1957, and it was founded by Russell Kirk.

WOODS: Yeah, so how about that? And Dan McCarthy is now — is it — the official title is editor?

MCCARTHY: That's correct. It's as simple as that, and that's the top of the masthead.

WOODS: That is really, really great. All right, I think we'll maybe talk about that a little bit later, but people are salivating at the prospect — I don't know. I'm speculating at the salivating — about our discussion of Trump and the year 2017. And there have been a lot of retrospectives, especially because this was a — this has been a presidency that people have not been able to pigeonhole and they didn't know what to expect or who would be appointed or what was going to happen, so there's a lot of talk after this first year. Now, I have this running bet going with David Stockman, who's coming on next week, who believes that Trump will not survive 2018.

MCCARTHY: Hmm.

WOODS: And his whole rationale for this — I am rather more sanguine about his prospects, but I wonder, instead of beginning with a retrospective, if we might start there. Do you have any opinion on this?

MCCARTHY: Oh, I think he's going to be around, certainly until 2020. And the question in many people's minds right now is whether Donald Trump is going to run for reelection. There is a lot of speculation and a lot of background chatter that he simply doesn't like being in the White House. And if he doesn't run, that obviously kind of creates a wide-open field. On the other hand, some of these rumors seem to be originating from the sort of Steve Bannon side of the universe, and Bannon right now obviously is rather at loggerheads with the administration, so those rumors may not be reliable. Or they may not even be coming from him, but right now there's sort of a lot of whispering going on in D.C.

WOODS: Now, what is the name of this — there's this book coming out early next week. Is the author's last name Wolf?

MCCARTHY: Michael Wolf is the author, and Wolf is famous for having discussions with a great many people, getting a lot of access, and kind of recreating the discussions based on what he remembers as opposed to having a transcript or having an actual recording of what's been said.

WOODS: Right.

MCCARTHY: So with Michael Wolf, you always have to take things with not just a grain of salt, but maybe a boulder of salt, oftentimes.

WOODS: Okay, fair enough about that, but if he's recreating a conversation, at least if he has some integrity as a journalist, it's going to be within a million miles of what was actually said. And given that we're hearing from these early excerpts that — I mean, I guess we had already known there was at least a possibility that Trump himself hadn't expected to win and had other plans of what he would do if he didn't win. But to actually see it spelled out that he was shocked, maybe horrified, his wife was in tears not of joy, but then he steeled his determination and decided, doggone it, I'm going to do this — if that's true, then that would affect his decision whether or not to run again.

MCCARTHY: Well, you know what —

WOODS: He didn't want to do it in the first place, if this is correct.

MCCARTHY: I don't think it's correct, though.

WOODS: Really? Okay.

MCCARTHY: I'm really skeptical of what we're hearing from Michael Wolf. Well, for one thing, one of these specifics that's already been reported from Michael Wolf's book is the idea that Donald Trump had no idea who John Boehner was, that Roger Ailes suggested Boehner as chief of staff and Donald Trump supposedly had never heard of the man.

WOODS: Right.

MCCARTHY: Well, in fact, as we've been learning over the last day or two by journalists who've actually gone back and looked at the records, not only was Donald Trump tweeting about John Boehner years and years ago, but also Boehner and Trump went and played golf together in 2013. The idea that Donald Trump didn't know who John Boehner was is just not even slightly credible.

WOODS: Ah, okay, all right. So I bet, in other words, if we were to dig around and look at some of the other particulars here, we may find other problems like this in the account.

MCCARTHY: Well, that's right. But if you're a journalist and you have exclusive interviews with sources, then it's just he-said versus she-said or he-said versus he-said, right? There's no transcript; there's no source to confirm that Bannon, for example, said what Wolf claims he

did. Now, Bannon's been very quiet recently. He hasn't come out and said one way or the other whether or not Wolf's quotations or alleged quotations are accurate. So maybe they are, but maybe they're not. Maybe they're complete fabrications. Right now, Donald Trump is threatening to sue Wolf and his publisher, saying that this is all a bunch of lies. So it will be very interesting to see what happens.

But Wolf has been attacked numerous times in the past by sources all over the map, not just by people who may be considered sympathetic to or similar to Donald Trump. I mean, he's been attacked by Andrew Sullivan; he's been attacked by people on the left, people on the right, all over the place. So Wolf is, you know, he's a go-getter. He gets interviews that no one else gets. He produces incredible quotations and stuff. The question is just whether all of it is true or whether he kind of selectively makes things up to spice up his account.

WOODS: All right, so that raises the parallel question of Steve Bannon, which is also — it's been an interesting question for over a year, but really interesting now because it looks as if Trump is — I guess Trump has also issued or his lawyers have issued a cease-and-desist order against Bannon. They say that he has relayed confidential information to Wolf for this book. And they are just going — it's outright war. Whereas up to now, since Bannon's departure from the White House, he's been claiming that he's trying to carry on the war for Trump through other means, even if he's been somewhat critical of an occasional decision here or there. But now, it's just the gloves are off and it's all-out war. What do you see — what's going on here?

MCCARTHY: Well, here too it's going to be interesting to see how things fall out and whether our first impressions wind up being correct. The president has criticized Bannon before. He said that Bannon wasn't all that he was cracked up to be. But there are also a lot of indications that, even after Bannon has been dismissed from the White House, Bannon still has a degree of contact with the president and the president still takes seriously some of his advice. So this may now be a final break, or it may be just a kind of eruption. And perhaps if Bannon comes out and starts denying that he said some of the things that Wolf attributes to him, we're going to find a repair in the relationship.

Bannon is in real trouble right now, though. There was a story in *The Wall Street Journal* just today saying that Breitbart's board of directors and their funding sources, they're all looking at the fact that Bannon is their chairman right now and they're saying, do we want this guy to stick around? Now, again, who knows? Time will tell. But Bannon has a limited number of friends, I think, and he may have been overestimating for quite some time here just how much leverage he has over everyone.

WOODS: Okay. Well, that's interesting to me that that would have happened and that Trump would have taken such a hard line against him. I really wonder — I so wish I could be behind closed doors and listen in on some of these meetings and the goings on. And you're right about Bannon. I mean, his natural base is the Trump base, so I mean, I know people in the Trump base like him and there will be some who are unhappy with Trump for his position vis-a-vis Bannon, but by and large, if it's Trump or Bannon, Bannon's coming in second place here. So who knows? But on the other hand, I just read today that he picked up a billionaire backer. So who the heck knows? Maybe he survives.

MCCARTHY: That's true. You know, it's a very fluid situation, not only with respect to the donors and the billionaire backers, but also with respect to the public. I mean, if you think about, for example, the catastrophe that we saw in Alabama, voters that might have been

expected to just follow whatever Donald Trump says in fact had minds of their own and they nominated the candidate they wanted to nominate regardless of who Donald Trump had endorsed. I think right now you're seeing a major change in American politics, and Donald Trump is part of that change, but he's not the entirety of it, and he's not necessarily the be-all and end-all. He's not necessarily the instigator. And this change is going to continue happening regardless of what happens with Trump and regardless of what happens with Bannon.

WOODS: So let's go back to 2017 then overall. I am not the oldest guy in the world, but I'm, you know, hitting middle age here. And I've seen a bunch of presidents in my day, and there's nothing that matches this. It's not hyperbole to say that there's never been anybody quite like Donald Trump in the White House. It's not even close, in terms of his style, in terms of some of the things that he's done, but also in terms of the intensity of the opposition and how widespread the opposition is. It ranges from the most radical forces in America all the way to the most crusty conservative forces in America. I mean, it includes Mitt Romney and Amy Goodman. That's an amazing coalition of opponents. And yet, somehow, he's keeping his head above water, even though he's got poll numbers under 50%. Where do you even begin in assessing this?

MCCARTHY: Well, but you know what? It actually does seem like it has a precedent to me. If you look back —

WOODS: Oh, okay. I'd love to know.

MCCARTHY: Well, yeah. You're not wrong. You're not wrong in saying that this is — you know, we haven't seen anything quite like this. But I think we do have some inklings or some sort of seedlings that resemble what we're seeing right now. If you look back at 1964, for example, Goldwater was being hit by everyone from Bill Moyers and LBJ on the left to being hit by George Romney, Mitt Romney's father, and the Rockefeller Republicans. And even some people who claimed to be supporting Barry Goldwater in '64 were in fact didn't wind up voting for him in November. So the attacks that you're seeing on Donald Trump seem to me to have a certain strong precedent in the attacks that we saw on Goldwater back in '64. There's also some precedent, not quite as strong, but some with the kinds of hysteria that met Ronald Reagan's candidacies in 1976 and in 1980.

Now, you're right that we're not talking generally about presidencies. Reagan, once he got into office, was still being attacked by the left, but generally the right and other Republicans backed off of Reagan at that point. And Goldwater of course never made it into the White House. But I do think that in the attacks that we saw on Goldwater and on Reagan as candidates we see a premonition of what we now see being leveled against Donald Trump as president, and I kind of suspect that if Barry Goldwater had somehow won the White House, you would have seen a very similar tide of sort of establishment opinion against him.

WOODS: I wonder if Goldwater had actually gotten the nomination, if there would have been —

MCCARTHY: Yeah, I think there would have been a "Never Goldwater" moment, and the sign of this is that I think it would have been basically a parallel to what we saw starting in 1972 on the Democratic side when George McGovern became the Democratic presidential nominee and a number of neoconservatives, people who basically had more hawkish foreign policy

views than McGovern had and people who thought that McGovern was kind of soft on the hard left, they became "Never McGovernites," and they wound up — some of them voted for Nixon in '72, and many of them of course drifted into the Republican Party thereafter and became the group that are now known as the neoconservatives. I think the same thing would have happened basically with the Rockefeller Republicans migrating their way out of the Republican Party if Barry Goldwater had become president.

WOODS: Where do you think today the Never Trumpers stand? Like, where do they stand in the Republican Party? They're kind of out in the cold, but then at the same time, there's a good chance that Mitt Romney's about to get elected to the Senate.

MCCARTHY: That's true, although Mitt Romney's going to get elected in the Senate not because he has credibility among national conservatives, but rather because he has credibility specifically in the state of Utah, where for religious reasons he's considered a kind of favorite hometown kid. So Mitt Romney I think can get elected in Utah, but that doesn't mean Romney has any future anywhere else. I said in an article I wrote a few months ago that you can't build a movement, a kind of national political movement if your base consists of Utah and the suburbs of Washington, D.C. And that's basically those are the two places where the Never Trump movement has even the slightest of shots.

No, I think the Never Trump movement really is a phantom. It has a few people with a lot of money who support it, and then it has a certain number of pundits and a certain number of think-tank people who like this idea of puffing themselves up as the so-called resistance and pretending as if the six of them are the only people who have any integrity and that they are bravely standing against the barbarian Donald Trump who's going to destroy the republic. And of course they get acres and acres and acres of favorable coverage from all the mainstream center-left media for doing this. But they have absolutely no standing with Republican voters, absolutely no standing with conservatives.

WOODS: Now, you have been with *The American Conservative*, you've been over here with *Modern Age* now, you've done a lot of things connected in one way or another to the conservative movement over the years. So you've seen ebbs and flows and comings and goings and trends. How would you compare the conservative movement under George W. Bush to where it is under Donald Trump?

MCCARTHY: Well, first I should say, despite — I'm still an editor-at-large with *The American Conservative*. I'm the editor, basically the editor in chief with *Modern Age*. But today, I'm speaking to you just as an individual, just as —

WOODS: Oh, right. Yes, no, I get it. And incidentally, I want to make clear I'm not implicating either of those places in anything you're saying today. I just mean in the sense that you obviously have known a lot of people and you've seen a lot of stuff. What's different now with the conservative movement under Trump as opposed to under Bush — anything?

MCCARTHY: Oh, a lot. And by the way, I mentioned that disclaimer just because, you know, publications are non-profits in this case of both *The American Conservative* and *Modern Age*, and what I'm saying just as an individual is not necessarily the official line of any publication.

WOODS: Right.

MCCARTHY: But yeah, as far as the conservative movement goes, it's much healthier right now, surprisingly enough. There is much more openness to debate. People are taking their principles seriously because a lot of the specifics are now in question, whether it comes to free trade, whether it's about our foreign policy. You now find conservatives are openly having discussions with one another and having to take seriously the idea that there is more than one perspective on issues.

Whereas, during the Bush years, there was a kind of ruthless conformity enforced and people lost their jobs if they had any doubts about what the Republican president was doing in foreign policy, especially towards Iraq. People lost their jobs if they were questioning why the Republican president was giving us the largest expansion of entitlements since the Lyndon Johnson era with Medicare Part D. People were allowed to make certain kinds of criticisms as long as it was understood that those criticisms couldn't really go anywhere, that in the end, you had to come back to affirming that George W. Bush was absolutely the greatest president, gosh darn, that we've ever had since George Washington, or at least since Abe Lincoln. There was really very, very little room for criticisms to be said that, look, not only is George W. Bush not quite perfect, not only does he not walk on water, but in fact he's actually kind of lousy. He's kind of a terrible Republican, a terrible conservative, and worst of all, a terrible president who has done awful things for us both in foreign and domestic policy.

WOODS: All right, let's take a quick look again at 2017 with Trump and what he did, not just the reactions and the factional infighting and all that, but the actual accomplishments such as they are. And we'll do that after we thank our sponsor.

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Okay, we've just had 2017 draw to a close. We can talk about domestic policy, we can talk about foreign policy. There are people who say Trump hasn't really accomplished anything. There are people who say, *I've got a list of 85 accomplishments. Why don't you look at it?* There are people say, even if he hasn't accomplished anything in a legislative sense, he's nevertheless changed the conversation. He's struck a significant blow against political correctness. Where do you come down on this?

MCCARTHY: Well, I'd really love to examine this idea that Donald Trump hasn't done anything, because for a lot of conservatives and a lot of libertarians, shouldn't that be a good thing? Do we want presidents to do all sorts of things? Do we want mountains of new legislation being generated. I think we should kind of look askance at the idea that a president who doesn't do a lot is therefore a bad president. I think actually if we had a Calvin Coolidge, that would be fantastic. And so to the extent that Donald Trump has not in fact pushed a lot of new legislation and has not been a builder of new kinds of systems of state power, for example, that's a very favorable thing.

Now, what he has done is I think he's changed sort of the relationship between the White House and between his administration and the federal bureaucracy. Donald Trump has been very critical of the federal bureaucracy. He's reined in some of its regulations. He has generally tried to hold back on appointing people to various kinds of federal offices. He's someone who seems to be very suspicious of what's called the deep state and also just very much inclined to believe that we don't need this massive regulatory apparatus and we certainly should not be increasing it and growing it.

And this I think is actually the thing that Donald Trump has done that has most alienated the Washington, D.C. establishment, and this is the thing above anything else that generates so much implacable hostility against Trump, because he's challenging the primary article of faith of our political class, which is that they are absolutely indispensable to the health of our nation, and therefore their power must always steadily increase. It can't even remain the same, right? I mean, some of the cuts Donald Trump has proposed, some of the freezes he's imposed, these things only take us back to the size of government in the Bush era. They're not massive reductions. During the Bush era, things were already much too large. But the very idea that Donald Trump would stop the perpetual growth, that is absolutely lethal, because that means that, wow, you mean Americans actually tie their shoes without having a federal regulator come in and tell them how to do it safely and how to do it without offending other neighbors and offending all the various interest groups that matter in his country?

So what Donald Trump has done just by some of the symbolic statement and moves he's made and what he's done simply by reining in some of the executive and regulatory overreach of the various departments of government has all been very healthy, and I think the idea that we need to see massive pieces of legislation tumbling out of Congress is a big fallacy.

WOODS: Well, what's also interesting about it is I have to hand to him, in spite of things that I don't like about him, that he has engaged in some substantial regulatory relief and he has done some things that do reduce the size of government. But it's true he hasn't given speeches about government and its size and the entrepreneurial spirit of the American people and all that. He hasn't given the kind of boilerplate-style speeches that American conservatives are used to. But on the other hand, he's probably done more to actually execute it than anybody who ever gave those speeches. So that to me is kind of significant. Because I know Ben Shapiro was complaining: why doesn't he give a speech about constitutionalism? Well, I don't know about you, but I'm sick and tired of speeches about constitutionalism.

MCCARTHY: [laughing] Oh, I totally agree. And in fact, I can think of someone who said that, "The era of big government is over." Wow, isn't that such an inspiring thing to hear? Of course the guy who said that was Bill Clinton —

WOODS: Right.

MCCARTHY: — just as he was going about and — You know, I mean, there was — where you saw reductions in government during the Clinton era, a lot of it was in the military, which was right and proper because the Cold War had ended, but it was not because Bill Clinton had these sort of small government ideals and that his words had any real meaning there.

WOODS: All right, but now what are some minuses? Certainly the guy has said and done things that you and I wouldn't say or do. I wouldn't be making fun of Kim Jong-un on Twitter. I just wouldn't be doing that.

MCCARTHY: Well, I certainly wouldn't be doing it either. On the other hand, you look at how ineffective our diplomacy towards North Korea has been over the last 20 years and you start to say, *Well, is Trump's approach actually going to produce worse results?* I tend to think there's a lot of hysteria right now talking about the prospect of a war, let alone a nuclear war. There are some pretty strong reasons to think that neither this administration nor Kim Jong-un himself, for that matter, really wants to get into something that's going to change

the game for both of them. So no, I mean, Trump's approach to Twitter obviously is a massive breach with the way we expected presidents to behave with decorum in the past, and that's, you know, something I feel certainly not thrilled about, not terribly about.

On the other hand, we're just so accustomed to the weasel words that come out of Washington, D.C. and sheer sort of unctuousness of all political rhetoric over the last 25 years or so that there's a side of me which says that, actually, maybe Donald Trump is doing something pretty good here by forcing us to talk in real language again and to talk in terms that, they may be simplified, but at least ordinary Americans can understand them and kind of believe them, and they're not this highfaluting, absolutely gaseous rhetoric that gets uttered or concocted by speechwriters who are working for presidents who really are setting out to bamboozle the American public. The nice thing about Trump is that he is kind of unfiltered. I think that's one of the reasons why Americans elected him, and I think it's one of the characteristics of his presidency that's a little bit mixed. It has its virtues, but it also does have its downsides.

WOODS: Isn't there a level — I'm playing devil's advocate here. Isn't there a point at which the way he treats the media — now, let's leave aside how the media treats him. The media has some power, but he is after all the president of the United States and he's got a lot of people behind him and he could do a lot of terrible things if he wanted to. Isn't there a sense in which he is intimidating the media or individual members of the media or threatening them in one way or another? Haven't there been episodes of this that might not be something that we would want to encourage? I mean, I'm trying to think of things that I hear people complaining about about Trump. Of course, I hear people complaining that he doesn't care about the environment and stuff like that, but he's never going to satisfy those people.

MCCARTHY: What Trump has done actually is to educate the American people about the real relationship between government and the media. Look at what happened during Barack Obama's presidency. Barack Obama cracked down on whistleblowers and leakers more than any previous administration, and in fact, there have been some pieces written recently in *The Intercept*, which is Glenn Greenwald's publication, of just how bad the Obama administration was. It went after James Risen, for example, who was one of the greatest national security reporters — he still is one of the greatest national security reporters that our country has. Risen was at *The New York Times* back in the Obama years, and now he's at *The Intercept*.

What Trump has done is to make it totally clear that the media and the White House are supposed to have an adversarial relationship. First of all, the media are not supposed to be buddies of government. They're supposed to be — I mean, the whole idea of a free media for Thomas Jefferson was the thought that they would counteract government. They would check government. They would report on the things that government doesn't want you to know about.

Well, we got into a system over the last century here where the media was oftentimes taking a very favorable view of our political leaders and our political system — the government itself, I should say, not the Constitution, certainly, not the system in that sense, but the way things work in Washington, D.C. And there was just this kind of sense that they all went to the same schools, they all went to Yale, they all went to other places, and they're basically friends. They're basically buddies. They have the same sort of cultural assumptions, and therefore, they were always inclined to look on the bright side of whatever government was doing. I mean, just think about the amount of trust that even the liberal media reposed in

George W. Bush after 9/11 and even years after 9/11, even going into 2003 as you approach the Iraq War. The media was not nearly as skeptical as they should have been.

And what Donald Trump is hopefully doing is restoring that skepticism and saying, Wait a minute, guys. You know what? I'm not your friend, you're not my friend, and we should actually be kind of at one another's throats. We should not have this relationship of cozying up and covering up for one another.

WOODS: Dan, I'm going to be really blunt with you here. I've known you for a long time, and you know I'm a big admirer of yours and I think you're a terrific writer and an extremely bright guy, and I don't say that to that many people who are younger than I am, and you're a whipper snapper compared to me. I'm going to — when I say this — I guess what I want to say is I'm surprised at how sympathetic you are to Trump. I'm not sure you would have been in previous years. I don't know. I mean, do you think Dan McCarthy has changed any, or do you think — Because I think my own thinking keeps on changing in response to how crazy society gets. I find myself able to overlook more and more simply because I say, but the whole society is so crazy, I only have so much contempt to go around, you know? So I don't know. Have you — because you were always a very, you know, fairly soft-spoken guy. Firm, but soft-spoken. But my gosh, you are like a bulldog all of a sudden [laughing].

MCCARTHY: Well, you know, I got into politics in the first place because I was a big fan of Pat Buchanan, and obviously he's always had a certain bulldog style. Now, not the same kind of bulldog style as Donald Trump. Pat Buchanan has actually always been very personally civil. I mean, people think of him as being an angry guy. People think of him as having hostility —

WOODS: No, just the opposite, yeah.

MCCARTHY: No, he's actually extremely nice, and people on the opposite side of him almost always have a good impression of him and a good relationship with him. So certainly Donald Trump is different from even someone like Pat Buchanan, but on the other hand, we've always needed a certain degree of conservative or right-wing combativeness in our political discourse. And for a long time, that had been replaced instead with a kind of neoconservative piety or a kind of establishment-right piety, which I thought was very damaging. And it's not that I don't like civility. On the contrary, I think very highly of people who can express forceful views in the most sort of eloquent and mannered and civil fashion.

But you know, faced with the choice between the complete humbug we've had for so long and someone who speaks as frankly, even if he speaks sometimes sort of brutally or crudely like Donald Trump, I actually think Donald Trump is doing a great service by forcing us to have a more honest conversation, even if it's in some ways a more vulgar conversation too.

WOODS: But how about somebody like Jeff Sessions, who is just — he's just everything bad about conservatism. What about an appointment like that, number one? And secondly, I know that you were telling me something through email about this whole at least apparent — but apparently perhaps only apparent — change in policy vis-a-vis states that have legalized marijuana? Because if that had turned out to be as they were reporting it, I was just going to go berserk, because I've never smoked pot, I have absolutely zero interest in it, but that is such a barbaric policy and to try to go back to that is just an outrage. And apparently the Colorado attorney general is pledging to fight back, which is a useful pedagogical moment for

America to see that that is exactly what should happen. But you're telling me that this is actually being exaggerated, what's going on?

MCCARTHY: The whole thing is a very useful pedagogical moment. So here's what happened. You had a number of states, most prominently Colorado, that had legalized recreational marijuana during the Obama years. Now, this created a problem for the Obama administration and for the Justice Department, because first of all, the Obama administration itself was not pushing to legalize marijuana. Second of all, there were actually laws on the books that had been passed by Congress relating to marijuana.

So as a result, what do you do if you're the Justice Department and you're in charge of enforcing the law and yet here you have states that are defying the law and that are choosing to do something very different? Well, the Obama Justice Department said we have to issue some kind of ruling. We have to tell our federal attorneys, our U.S. attorneys in the states how they should look at this situation. So what the Justice Department did during the Obama years was it offered an advisory. It just said, look, we understand that there is a breakdown between what the federal law says and what the state laws says. As a result, you attorneys are free to not have to prioritize prosecuting marijuana cases in the states that have legalized marijuana.

This was an advisory. This was not a directive that forced prosecutors to forego prosecuting marijuana cases. And in fact, that would have been I think pretty much impossible for the Justice Department to have issued. It would have been raising a question of who actually makes the laws. Is it Congress or is it the Justice Department? So this was an advisory, and it was an advisory that clarified things. It's not that it was completely ineffective. I think simply by clarifying for U.S. attorneys what position they might take or could take or should take, it was helpful for them. And it also gave them cover, because now it meant that a prosecutor, a U.S. attorney in a place like Colorado, he wasn't going to be out on his own if he just declined to prosecute cases now. He had the Justice Department also on his side backing him up, or at least giving him the leeway to exercise his discretion.

So what's happened now is that Jeff Sessions has rescinded these advisories that were issued during the Obama years. Well, first of all, rescinding an advisory doesn't actually change anything on the ground. Prosecutors do not have new powers to bring cases. They have the same discretion that they had before. And what it basically does is it just gets the State Department a little more breathing space with the various Americans — and there's still a lot of them — who do oppose legalizing marijuana. But it doesn't actually change the policies, and I don't think it makes it necessarily any more likely that you're actually going to see attempts of prosecution in places like California or Colorado that have legalized marijuana.

Because think about this: if you are U.S. attorney, you're a federal prosecutor, most of these people have high political ambitions, and they tend to have high political ambitions in the states that they're associated with, like California or Colorado or wherever they happen to be located. Well, if you are in those states and you decide that you want to overturn a popular referendum and you want to start prosecuting marijuana cases in a very serious way, how do you think that's going to play with voters? How do you think that's going to play with jurors, for that matter? It winds up being a politically untenable position, so I think the same incentives that existed basically before for most prosecutors to forego trying to prioritize these things in the states that have legalized marijuana still exist, and there are fundamentals that exist, and the fact that if a people in a state want to have a certain

policy, it's generally going to get that policy and it's very hard for the federal government to stop that from happening.

WOODS: Our friend Justin Raimondo tweeted out — speaking of a Twitter account that's worth following, @JustinRaimondo. He's responding to this whole news about Sessions and I think responding in a way that I was inclined to respond, because I just took it at face value and I didn't look into the details that you just gave us. But so leaving aside that whole part of it, Justin says this: "When Bush invaded Iraq, 'libertarians' were divided on the issue. When Jeff Sessions said no pot for you guys, the negative reaction was unanimous. This is what it means to be morally crippled beyond redemption."

MCCARTHY: [laughing] Justin has a great way with words, doesn't he?

WOODS: Yeah, he sure does. He sure does. And I don't even know what his personal habits are with regard to marijuana, but it doesn't matter. I think it's an interesting point. I mean, look, I want to end the drug war as much as any libertarian, but it's not my only issue and I wouldn't say that it's on par with absolutely everything. And yet, for some reason, it seems to be the only thing that you can rely on these people to really, really stand up for. Whereas the ones who are craving respectability, when it comes to something like foreign policy, oh, they'll hem and haw and tell us about American interests and this and that. It's very demoralizing.

And these are the same people who are going to lecture the world about Trump. Now, it seems to me the only people who really can lecture us about Trump would be people like me, who have been pretty consistently libertarian this whole time. I've been totally noninterventionist. I want to repeal everything. I want decentralization. And on those grounds, well, I think there are some criticisms to be made of Trump.

But at the same time — here's the worst stuff about him. The worst stuff is I think he is — even though he's not so uninformed that he doesn't know who John Boehner is — I get that — he is uninformed on a lot of things. He is not a reader, and I mean, I know — let's just say I know people who know people who confirm he's not a reader. He's not intellectually curious. And I don't need everybody to be David Gordon. I get that. I don't need the president to be David Gordon, but I need him to have an interest in how the world works and not just spout off about things.

And so that's a problem. That's a problem in foreign policy; it's a problem in domestic policy; it's a problem with the Constitution. These are problems. At the same time, he's probably going to appoint semi-decent Supreme Court nominees rather in spite of himself. But as I think about what I most was concerned about with him, one of them was the prospect of a trade war and protectionism. But as far as I can see, 97% of that has been rhetoric up to now, and I'm not sure that's even going to be changing.

MCCARTHY: It's not going to change as long as we have the Republican Congress that we have, so it's not going anywhere with Paul Ryan as Speaker or with Mitch McConnell as Senate Majority Leader. Now, I do think the Republicans are in pretty serious danger of losing certainly the House of Representatives in November of this year and possibly, even though they have a very favorable map, they could possibly lose the Senate as well.

So Donald Trump's agenda, his chance to get across anything that he wants to achieve, is basically limited to what he was doing last year and what he's doing this year. He's very likely to have Democrats to deal with in the future. Now, maybe he'll be able to triangulate. Maybe he'll come up with some clever approach the way that Bill Clinton was able to play the Republicans once Newt Gingrich and the Republicans sort of won control of Congress after the 1994 midterms. But otherwise, Trump is going to be very, very limited in what he can do starting in November, if not now.

WOODS: Well, one other thing about foreign policy. The fact that Trump has gotten — I mean, just when you thought it was not possible for the U.S. regime to be friendlier with Saudi Arabia, he proved us wrong. And then next to that, we have the matter of the U.S. embassy in Jerusalem thing. Now, these are — that's something that Republican campaigns had promised to voters for years and years and then they never did it, and he actually did do it. What was your reaction to those particular moves? Are those prudent moves?

MCCARTHY: You know, the recognition of Jerusalem as Israel's capital if, first of all, just acknowledgment of a fact. I mean, they actually do in fact use Jerusalem as their capital. And the idea that the U.S. is going to go around and decide for other countries where their capitals should be is a bit hubristic, and that's actually not really in keeping with either realism or with the libertarian idea that countries can kind of choose their own political capitals.

I think it's actually a very smart move in some ways. First of all, it removes this issue from future Republican debates. It's something that a lot of pretty sleazy Republicans always used in the past as a way of tarring any Republican who had qualms about it as being anti-Israel. So now they can't do that, because it's just an issue anymore. It's a done deal. And you know, in terms of the effect that it has on our international relations, I think it actually sends a powerful signal to a lot of Islamists that they don't get to sort of hold a veto over America's decisions here.

The Palestinians have had a raw deal for a very long time not just with the beginning of Israel, but for that matter, gee, when they were under the rule of the British and before that the rule of the Ottomans. So they've had a hard lot and they're going to continue to have a hard lot. And I don't think that simply withholding our acknowledgement of the reality that Jerusalem is Israel's capital was doing anything to help the Palestinians at all, so I really see this as being something Trump has done that's overall pretty favorable.

Now, I agree with you and I disagree with the president when it comes to relations with Saudi Arabia. I think we've done far too much to give the Saudis a blank check. The Saudis are the primary sponsors of Wahhabism, primary sponsors of Islamic radicalism as an ideology. And as a result, they bear a lot of responsibility, ultimate responsibility for the existence of groups like al-Qaeda. And it just seems to me that, to the extent that we are involving ourselves in a Shiite-Sunni civil war in the Middle East by helping out Saudi Arabia in places like Yemen, we're first of all taking part in a war that is just awful, and second of all, we are getting mixed up in something we do not understand and that will totally just draw us into a whirlpool and sink us. So we should just stay out. We should have very little to do with the Saudi regime, and we should not be trying to impose democracy or impose Sunni theocracy upon the Middle East.

WOODS: Now, having said all of this, I want to say just a brief word before we go about *Modern Age*. Again, *Modern Age* has been the flagship intellectual journal really of the conservative movement, and I mean that as a compliment. The conservative movement has often disappointed, but *Modern Age* has not. And *Modern Age* is where, for example, Bill Marina did ongoing book reviews as the volumes came out of Rothbard's *Conceived in Liberty*. And they were very, very sympathetic reviews of Rothbard's multivolume history of Colonial America. That's the kind of *Modern Age* was and is. And of course it's also the place where the famous debate that we've talked about in a previous episode between M.E. Bradford and Harry Jaffa about Lincoln and equality and whether equality is a conservative principle was played out. And that's one of the most significant debates I think we've had in the conservative movement since World War II.

And here you are the editor. Where is *Modern Age* today and where is it going? Is there life in the old intellectual conservatism yet?

MCCARTHY: Well, there most definitely is, and I'm so glad that you talked about the history of *Modern Age* there. *Modern Age* is also of course where Murray Rothbard published some very interesting perspectives and critiques of American conservatism. A very famous essay by Rothbard called "The Fusionist as Libertarian Manqué," basically saying that —

WOODS: That's right. I remember that article. That's right.

MCCARTHY: Oh, it's an article I can tell you from personal experience that's still talked about here in Washington, D.C. Anyone who talks about fusionism knows that article, and it's a vital point of reference for that discussion and that debate.

So *Modern Age*, whether it was libertarian material, whether it was traditionalist, *Modern Age* was often the place that kind of became the forum, as you mentioned with Jaffa and Bradford, for example, for these really serious, highbrow, but friendly and civil debates about what conservatism meant, what different alliances it could make, what different elements it could contain. It was really the place where conservatism was composed, in the best sense. And with people like Russell Kirk having been a founder, with Henry Regnery having also been one of its originators, it's always had this kind of intellectual depth and this kind of breadth of perspective, and that's something I want to maintain.

It's going to be a journal that will have a certain perspective of its own. It's always had a certain traditionalist side to it, and it's always I think had a certain critical distance from what we see in politics one way or the other. Those elements will be maintained, and there will also be a chance basically to bring exciting new ideas to the fore and really kind of weigh them in the scales of history and weigh them in the scales of principle and say basically what place does the nation state have for conservatives and for libertarians in the 21st century, for example.

That's a tough question. Libertarians tend to look at the role of individual rights, for example. Nation states are often transgressing against those rights. Therefore, should the nation state be abolished? Well, not if it means, for example, that you have some sort of transnational force now taking charge or a less-accountable kind of form of the state than the nation state. Similarly for the conservatives. Conservatives are very strong advocates of the family. They're strong advocates of localism and decentralism and subsidiarity in the Catholic terminology. What do they think about the nation state? Do they think it's something which is now

trampling over the sort of little platoons that Edmund Burke once referred to? Or is this a time when we have to defend the nation state because it's under attack from sort of transnational radical movements and from an abstract left that would just like to have a state that is not national at all, but that is kind of a multinational empire?

I think some of those kinds of burning theoretical questions are things that *Modern Age* is going to be tackling in a very head-on way. And Tom, I would love to feature your work in the journal at some point, and really, I'm just extremely excited to be upholding the legacy of this journal that was founded by Russell Kirk back in 1957.

WOODS: Yeah, it really is great that you're at the helm. Years ago, I had an article in it. Maybe it was a symposium article, but it was a long article about conservatism and the Old Republic that I'm particularly fond of. And I think part of my agreement to write it had to do with I just wanted to be able to say I had written for *Modern Age* [laughing]. And now I could tick that off. In the same way, I wanted to say I had coauthored an article with Walter Block. I did that, ticked that off. So you know, I'm getting through my bucket list one by one. I've got to extend that list or otherwise I don't know if I have any reason to carry on. I've got to come up with some more things. But I'm really glad it's going well for you. What's the website for *Modern Age*?

MCCARTHY: The website is ModernAgeJournal.com. So ModernAgeJournal.com. We actually have a fantastic iPhone app, so if you go on the iPhone store and you look for "Modern Age," you'll get this app that has — it's beautiful, it's elegant, you can read full issues of the journal. I really highly recommend it. It's a little-known secret, almost, and it's a free app and you can get all kinds of wonderful stuff there.

And I should stop for a moment as well and just say that I really heartily encourage people when they visit ModernAgeJournal.com or when they visit the app to go back and look at some of the archives, and especially to go back to the very beginning in 1957 and look at that first issue. I think listeners of *The Tom Woods Show* in particular will be very interested to see what was in that first issue. You can find, for example, Felix Morley, one of the great libertarians of the 1950s, writing about American foreign policy and the question of whether in the 1950s America was already facing a choice between republic and empire. We had this wonderful tradition at *Modern Age*, which I think it really has just sterling things in store for the future.

We still have poetry in the journal. We have a wonderful fellow, James Matthew Wilson, is our poetry editor. He is absolutely brilliant. He's won awards. He's very widely published himself. We just have a phenomenal team, and I really highly encourage people, if you want serious conservatism, if you don't just want sort of commentary on day-to-day things and on the controversies in the media and so forth, if you want to see conservative philosophy at its purest, I think *Modern Age* journal is the place for you.

WOODS: Wow, that is a great, great pitch. Well, I will link to ModernAgeJournal.com at TomWoods.com/1068 — oh, no, I beg your pardon. 1069. When you have so many episodes, how can you keep them all straight? 1,069 is today's episode, so that will be the show notes page for today. All right, Dan, I kept you way longer than I meant to, but congratulations on your new position with *Modern Age* and thanks for your time.

MCCARTHY: Thanks, Tom. I very much enjoyed this.