



Episode 1,725: Can Trump Win?

Guest: Dan McCarthy

WOODS: I need some of your cool-headed analysis with everything that's going on in the world. You've written on this already, and the GOP convention is behind us. And I didn't really cover it, but I did finally, just for the sake of the show and out of my own curiosity, sit down and watch the President's acceptance speech. And let me share my thoughts with you on it, and I'd like to get yours as well.

Naturally, I think this kind of speech delivered from a teleprompter is not his strength. So we do have that. But having said that, and even though I think there were parts of it that may be dragged a bit, for what he's trying to go for I thought it was very effective. So when he was listing some of his accomplishments, well, I don't like all of them, but at least he's saying that I've done something. Fair enough. But he really hammered away at the violence going on in what he called Democrat-run cities. Over and over and over, he kept saying that. So I took that as an attempt finally to appeal beyond his base, because ordinary people who have no interest in politics are concerned about what's going on in the streets.

Also, I thought the way he started off by talking about people like Andrew Jackson and Teddy Roosevelt, again, not my favorite figures in American history, but I understood what he was going for, that the other side wants to tear down statues and tell you that you're terrible people, and I don't want to do that to you. I want to do the opposite. I want to honor these people, and I want to praise you for your goodness. That seems tailored naturally to the base, but also just to people who are tired of this, just enough is enough. On the one hand, you're going to tell me that America is a wonderful place, but it's shot through with systemic racism and injustice at all levels. That's a hard tightrope to navigate, and I thought he went right for it.

MCCARTHY: I would agree with that. And I also think it was important that in his remarks, he talked about the pioneers, he really gave this sense of Americans as settlers, as people who are able to take charge of their own lives and go out and build something and create something. In fact, there's a great line in there where he says, "Americans create things. They don't destroy their history." So it was reaching out to normal people who are outraged by the lawlessness in our cities. It was very much encouraging, I think, to his base.

The entire Republican convention also at various times presented a softer side of the Republican message as well, and I think that was sort of well-aimed towards suburban female voters. So overall, I think actually the convention was a success. And Donald Trump's speech at the climax of it was I think quite a big success. And it was quite a long speech, which has its drawbacks, but it also signaled that Donald Trump is someone who has the energy to stand

up there for over an hour giving a talk and listing a great many accomplishments. And it's a striking contrast with Joe Biden, who if you asked could he go for an hour and maintain that level of focus, I think everyone would have to admit he can't.

WOODS: Right, I was wondering if that was in my imagination or not, that the length of the speech may itself have been some kind of signal or if maybe I was reading too much into that. So it's interesting you got the same thing out of that.

MCCARTHY: Yeah, I was very sort of surprised at the way Joe Biden's remarks a week earlier had been received. Now, obviously, the press was going to be very flattering to Joe Biden to begin with, but it seemed to me to be an utter dud of a speech from Biden and really just quasi-plagiarized in places, recycling old lines, very uninspired. And Biden, whenever he wants to be emotional now, he just shouts. He can no longer modulate himself very well. And it was a very brief speech and it just seemed like a complete dud, whereas Donald Trump, he had some good lines, he had some laugh lines. He had plenty of invigorating imagery in history in his talk. And he talked about his accomplishments. It was a very substantive speech. So I thought the contrast not only in substance there, but also in terms of delivery and in terms of Donald Trump's ability to stand up there and really give a weighty talk over the course of over an hour, it was a pretty striking contrast between the two candidates.

WOODS: Now, you've of course heard Nancy Pelosi saying we can't validate this guy by debating him, the man who sits in the White House, currently, right? We can't validate him by – but we all know why she would say that. We all know that, because I'm sure they're all looking in horror at this man they chose as their way to prevent Bernie from getting the nomination. And I wouldn't even describe it as a case of buyer's remorse, because that indicates that they're unhappy after the fact. They were unhappy at the time they made the purchase. There is no real buyer's remorse here. But do you think he can get away with not debating, really? Two months? Trump would just kill him over this.

MCCARTHY: Well, I think there are going to be debates. And maybe one thing that Democrats are doing is trying to set expectations so low that if Biden shows up at all, they're going to declare it a victory, because hey, it turns out he's not actually sort of confined to his basement in a sort of doddering condition, but that he can sort of walk around and talk. And that's basically what we saw happen, by the way, with Biden's acceptance speech at the Democratic nomination. It was a dud of a speech, but because the Democrats and their media pall just kind of went out there and they said, *Well the Republicans said Biden's in such a bad condition he can't even read off a teleprompter. Look at this. Biden was able to read off the teleprompter and not really sort of wander and lose his train of thought.* It's like, that's it? That's what you're claiming is a great triumph from Joe Biden?

WOODS: [laughing] Yeah.

MCCARTHY: So I think what Pelosi is doing is not so much really expecting that the debates will be canceled, as it is trying to set the expectations so, so low that even Joe Biden can meet them.

WOODS: All right, I want to ask, though, also about the Democratic convention, because you've been writing about both of these, and you do commentary in *The New York Times* about things like this. So you also noted that the Democratic convention was also a Rockefeller Republican convention. It's so funny. I remember – geez, I remember back when

they were passing NAFTA and stuff like that, we were being told: look at the great thing about NAFTA. All the living secretaries of state support it, and all of this and all of that. And then we started to see in 2020: look at how many people in the foreign policy establishment who are Republicans are against Trump, and look at how many of them – And I know that I'm different from the average voter, but I look at that and say: and the problem with this is? What exactly? This is exactly what I would want. Whoever the candidate is, I would want him to be opposed by these people.

MCCARTHY: It's remarkable, especially when you have a Democratic convention and you just wonder what are Democrats getting out of this? What are Bernie Sanders voters, for example, getting out of having John Kasich and Colin Powell and Christine Todd Whitman, a former Republican governor of New Jersey, all of these not just Republicans, but really kind of past-their-prime Republicans. These are all names from the 1990s. So it gave the Democratic convention a sense not only of being a Rockefeller Republican convention, but also of being a kind of old folks home and just an exercise in nostalgia.

And it seems to be nostalgia for the year 1999. This idea that the US at that time was very wealthy and powerful and could meddle around the world in the Balkans and in the Middle East and we could just do all of this. And of course, that is who Joe Biden is. Joe Biden is a guy who's been in public office nearly 50 years. He is someone whose career includes moments in the 1990s, includes moments going back to the '80s and the '70s. But he's not someone who has any kind of forward-looking vision. And the Democrats seem to kind of just accept that and decide, you know what? Our conventions are going to be all about the idea of putting Bush Republicans and Clinton Democrats together against any kind of insurgent challenge to them.

And in the Democratic primaries, I think that's what you saw to sort of take Biden through to victory, was the fact that the Democratic establishment was entirely against Bernie Sanders. And yes, Joe Biden had support among black voters, which was very important, but I think that combined with the fact that the establishment was fully against Sanders is what made Biden successful. And now you see them want to do the same thing in the general election. They're going to try to put together the establishment in both parties in an even more dramatic way than they did in 2016, and basically make this election a battle between the deep state on the one hand and Donald Trump on the other. And they think that they're going to use Donald Trump's personality and they're going to use the COVID-19 crisis to basically make the establishment respectable again and put them back in power.

WOODS: I saw on Twitter Alex Berenson speculating out loud about something I'm not sure if it's true or not, but it seems plausible, that a vote for Trump is the kind of vote that sometimes comes just when you don't know what you're going to do, but you're standing there in the voting booth and you're thinking it all over and you say, *You know what? I think I just have to vote for him, because I'm just too scared of the alternative.* It's the kind of decision you make when everything's quiet, you're alone, you have the decision right there in front of you. It's not the kind of decision that you make when you're going to mail something in. You kind of sit there and at your leisure, you think about it. But he had the sense that the vote for Trump is a kind of visceral thing that at the last moment, you say, *Doggone it, I have to do it.* And that may be that does make a difference whether there's mail-in voting or not. Do you think there's anything there? I'm not sure I'm describing that right.

MCCARTHY: Well, that psychological apparatus is one thing, but there actually is data. There have been a number of polls which show that there is a big difference between people who intend to vote in person and people who intend to vote by mail, in terms of their attitudes towards two candidates. And what Berenson was getting at is correct. We find the people who are planning to vote by mail are leaning quite heavily towards Joe Biden, and people who intend to vote in person are leaning towards Donald Trump. And I think this is going to be a big problem, by the way, because you're going to see when you have different methods of election taking place simultaneously and different candidates performing differentially in those different methods, it really just obliterates the idea of a fair election, doesn't it? Because you have people basically playing by separate rules. So it's going to be a very nasty mess, and whoever wins is going to be sort of attacked by the other side as illegitimate.

WOODS: Right, and geez, just when you think, *Well, it can't get more hot than it's been the last four years*, no, no, it could get way, way crazier. I liked, by the way – again, just from a purely political point of view, because usually, what I find is people really right of center are not politically savvy. Pat Buchanan was politically savvy. Like he gets how it works, and he knows what to do and say. So for example, when Kristi Noem took the opportunity of the success she's had battling the virus to then make a video urging people who believe in limited government to move to South Dakota, that's highly unusually astute in our day and age for somebody right of center. So for Trump to get up there and say, *Oh, by the way anytime they want peace restored in their cities, they just have to give me a call*, oh, geez, that's a killer statement. *All you have to do is give me a call and it'll be resolved by tomorrow morning*. Oh, geez. Yikes [laughing].

MCCARTHY: I agree. It's a power move. And I mean, people look at this, and obviously, the media presents this in an entirely partisan way, where, *Oh, Donald Trump, he's running against Biden, and so he's criticizing these Democratic mayors and governors*. But you know what I mean? Put aside the politics. Put aside the 2020 election, and it's not an accident that every single one of these cities, pretty much, where you have the riots and you have police abuses being claimed and other things going drastically wrong, you have arson, you have looting, you have murder rates skyrocketing, they're all run by Democratic mayors and democratic city councils.

This is a party that has fundamentally failed, and to reward this party by getting it the presidency as well, which is then going to have an effect, by the way, on for example prosecutions of these sort of criminals – the looters, the arsonist, the murderers – it's going to have an effect on sort of not only revenue flows and how funding is allotted to the states because obviously, that's unfortunately one of the things that takes place in our system, is that the federal government takes in all this money and then redistributes it equally among the states according to political concerns, but it's just going to completely exacerbate at the federal level. You're not going to see necessarily all these dramatic sort of pro-criminal policies right away, but you put the people in office who have the sympathy for the Democratic mayors and the Democratic city councils, and you're going to get policies which are only going to accommodate these cities, that are going to actually sort of pay them for the damages and things, and will basically sort of incentivize the continuation of the failed policies.

It's going to be an utter disaster, and the only way to stop it is to, first of all, prevent the Democrats from getting more power at the federal level, and then second, ultimately, you have to elect Independent mayors or you have to elect Republican mayors, or maybe even

elect people from the whatever anti-crime wing of the Democratic Party you can find. But you have to fundamentally throw the bums out if you want to stop the violence, and you're not going to do that by putting one of their allies, Joe Biden, in office.

WOODS: Well, the other thing that I fear about if the Democrats would get in power is that the states that have been the most draconian in their locked downs of course have destroyed their economies, and they'll get bailed out, which will reward them for what they did and it will encourage them to persist in it. We just saw some so-called guidelines issued from the governor of California, according to which they'll never be able to open. Never. Life will never, ever be normal again under those conditions. And apparently California voters are perfectly content with that, to have their lives taken from them and ruined over something that has affected the tiniest sliver of the 80-or-so million people there. That would be the thing that would make me the angriest, would be to see those states bailed out. No. No, they should have to deal with their own stupidity on this.

MCCARTHY: That's right. No, they're going to be bailed out, and it's going to be transformative. I mean, it's going to change — already we have a system where the federal government does a great deal to corrupt and incentivize bad policies among the states. It's going to get far, far worse when you have the federal government bailing out states which had the most draconian COVID policies and also the most lenient policies towards rioters. I mean, it is putting the weight of the federal government behind the most failed states in the country, and you're just going to get more of it. If you incentivize that, you're going to get more of it, and I think Americans are going to suffer badly.

WOODS: Let me run by you something I told you about before we started recording. There's an article on Newsmax from August 31st, 2020, just came out, and it says, "Dems register more new voters than GOP in four key states." And they are key states: Arizona, Florida, North Carolina, and Pennsylvania. Trump won all of them in 2016, but the voter rolls have changed since that time, not in Trump's favor. And I'm hearing more and more from people that they can now envision a reelected Trump more than they could have six months ago or thereabouts. But this does seem to be a problem. What do you make of that?

MCCARTHY: It is a problem, and I think we have to be realistic that the odds are against President Trump. He does have a fighting chance. And in the battleground states, there are a lot of voters who are not fully committed to either party and, as we talked about earlier, who might in fact when they vote in person decide Donald Trump is the way they want to go. But the trends have moved against him over the last three years, not only in voter registration, but also there has been such a relentless effort to demonize Donald Trump as a Putin puppet. And generally the attacks on him from both the media and the Democrats have been relentless, and that has an effect. And Trump's margins in 2016 were pretty slender in most places, most of these key states you mentioned, Arizona, Florida, North Carolina, and Pennsylvania. And it won't take much to erase those margins. And there were a couple of states where Hillary Clinton actually had very slim margins. Minnesota was one of them. I think Maine was another. So you'll see an interesting outcome in 2020. But I think we should certainly be prepared to see Trump lose some of these battleground states, and if he loses more than a couple of them, he's going to lose the election.

WOODS: I hate to do this to you, but you know it's coming. What does your gut tell you? What do you think's going to happen in two months?

MCCARTHY: Well, it's funny, you should phrase it that way. My gut actually tells me Donald Trump will be reelected. My head tells me that Donald Trump is going to lose. So rationally, when I look at the poll numbers, when I look at things like the voter registration in those four battleground states, and I look at Donald Trump's position right now compared to where he was in 2016, the polls are sort of close, but actually Biden is doing somewhat better than Hillary Clinton. And very importantly, Biden has much stronger personal favorability ratings than Hillary Clinton had at this point in 2016. And that could very well provide the margin that Biden needs to win. So my head says all this adds up to a very likely Joe Biden victory.

But my gut says I just can't envision Joe Biden as President. I just can't see Americans looking at this guy and thinking, you know what? We want this pretty much 80-year-old politician of half a century to be President and to lead us into confronting the aftermath of COVID and the aftermath of these urban riots. It just seems to me that Joe Biden is not up to the task. And giving the Democratic Party all this power when the Democratic Party has complete power in our cities and has ruined them as a result, I have to think that Americans have enough common sense that they're going to stop and think twice about doing that.

WOODS: All right, I want to get some more generic information. Like for example, what do you think Trump's biggest weaknesses are? I'll tell you what I think they are. One I'm sure we'll agree on has been personnel choices, although in one of your columns, you say that he's gotten somewhat better at that. But I mean, you could have given him a list of people who agree with his agenda, who could have not stabbed him in the back maybe over the past four years. So there's that.

But the other the other thing I would say is — and any time you criticize Trump, people say, look, he won against all the odds, he knows better than you. That's true, but he's not infallible. And I think he has not adequately built on his base over the past four years. I think he's played way too much to it. Even though I enjoy the tweets, I enjoy the entertainment, but the average person might be turned off by some of it, and I just don't think — the speech he gave I think reaches out to them, but geez, it's been four years. And I think given that even with his base, he really barely won it. I mean, yes, the electoral result looks pretty good, but these are razor-thin margins in some places that gave him those electoral votes. And he's got to build beyond that, and I don't think he's adequately done that.

MCCARTHY: Well, I tend to agree. I think if you look at these Rust Belt states, which are the real heart of the battlegrounds right now — so Pennsylvania Wisconsin, Minnesota, Michigan — Donald Trump was given a chance by these voters back in 2016. And I think he should have been making the case over the past couple of years here, so certainly since the 2018 midterms. He should have been going in these states and really making a powerful case to them in person that he had delivered for them, and that where he's failed to deliver it's been because of the Democratic opposition or because of the Republican opposition in Congress.

But basically, I think he really needed to create a narrative over the past year that would have assured these voters that he is still fighting for them in Washington, and if they reelect him, good things are going to happen. If they fail to reelect him, they will lose any kind of representation at all in Washington, DC, because their congressmen are going to be kind of kowtowing to special interest; they're not going to be fighting for the workers. Donald Trump, for whatever reason, maybe because of impeachment and being tied down by other things, I just don't know that he was able to make that kind of a pitch to the industrial Midwest. So that's a big problem.

Beyond that, I tend to agree with you that Trump is pretty effective at communicating to his own base, and there is a sense in which he actually needs to keep doing that in a pretty intense way, because intensity, enthusiasm, getting people out to vote is going to be a big part of his fighting chance in 2020. But beyond that, he also did need to do something more to reassure suburban voters and especially suburban women. And I don't know that that took place until the Republican convention this past week. And as a result, Trump has a bit of a deficit there.

And there's a need to appeal to voters with different personalities as well as different interests, and in general, I think Donald Trump appeals to your kind of your most hard-charging and combative personalities, which is important and good. But there's a need to have a broader outreach as well. And maybe Melania, maybe Ivanka, maybe other sort of women in Donald Trump's circle, not just as family members, could have helped with that, but in any case, I think that was a bit of a loss.

If you think back to 2017 when Donald Trump first came into office, that was one of the things that seemed kind of promising you had people like Steve Bannon who were there for the hardline populist approach, but then you had this idea that maybe people like Ivanka Trump were also going to represent kind of a softer side of the Trump project, and that that would appeal to voters and to Americans who didn't feel represented at all by the Steve Bannon side. And instead, what you've wound up with is Bannon of course left. Trump himself had a very hard-charging approach. And the influence of Ivanka and Jared Kushner has tended to be something that irritated the hard-charging sort of Donald Trump base, the populists, without actually bringing in the suburbanites that they should have been able to appeal to.

WOODS: Let me run by you an idea that I had on a previous episode involving social media. I hesitate to use the word *censorship*, but you know what I mean, that they do prevent people from saying what they want to say, sometimes they block or remove people, and we all know about that. And even Trump has had to deal with that himself. So, in response, I've heard him say we're going to make sure that they allow free speech and this and that. But I wonder: there are numerous competitors to the major social media platforms like Facebook and Twitter. And they're all smallish. Some are bigger than others. Some have better features than others. But they are just one presidential endorsement away from absolutely taking off and building up that network effect. All Trump has to do is say, you know what? I'm going to be posting over on this site now, and I urge people who believe in free speech to join me, and there'd be 10 million people on that thing tomorrow, and we'd be off to the races. Now, some people say he wouldn't do that, because he's not the type to, to run away from a fight. But he doesn't have to run away. He can keep tweeting on Twitter. But he's going to say I'm going to be using this platform, and I hope liberty-loving Americans will do the same thing. Is that a bad idea?

MCCARTHY: It's a high-risk strategy, because of course, if people don't join the —

WOODS: Oh, then it's a loss for him.

MCCARTHY: Right, yeah. And because of the way this would work, right — so I mean, you see this right now in the way they talk about the TV ratings. So Fox News absolutely crushes all of its opposition. It far outclasses MSNBC and CNN. It gets many more viewers. But what the left says is that, well, okay, maybe Fox News can beat any one of its competitors, but if you add them all up, the mainstream media still has more viewers than Fox News does. They'll say

exactly the same thing if Donald Trump endorses Parler or endorses some other platform. They'll say, okay, yeah, all the Republicans are there, maybe that's impressive, but you know what? You still have more numbers on Facebook or Twitter or on Facebook and Twitter combined. They'll spin it in such a way as to completely sort of make it look as if Donald Trump is dramatically losing and doesn't have the kind of sway that people might think.

Now, I do think that the scenario you've outlined is something that is very likely to happen if Donald Trump loses, because of course, Donald Trump won't be president anymore, but he'll still have an enormous social media following and he will be a big player in terms of the social media's future, right? So if he decides to endorse or not endorse some company or feature within the social media environment, that's going to have big cultural effects. And I think a Donald Trump who loses may be much more open to the idea of maybe endorsing more television networks like Fox News, maybe it's endorsing more alternative social networks, but he's going to have a heck of a lot of have sort of private sector power, which he'll be able to wield.

WOODS: I agree with that. I think that is actually a good analysis, because when he is out of office, well, no reasonable person would expect him to be able to completely transform the social media landscape with one statement, so if he accomplishes anything at all, that will be considered a victory for him.

Now, also, one last thing, just something about Mike Pence. When Pence's name came out in 2016, I think a lot of people said, well, this is a sop to the establishment wing of the party, or at least to a wing of the party that most Republicans would recognize as Republican. And he's got to do something for those people, so he brought on Mike Pence. And early on, you had the impression that Pence, maybe he was a leaker, maybe he was undermining Trump in one way or another. Trump's style was certainly not Pence's. But yet, now I have this feeling that Pence is more on Team Trump than I thought or maybe then he was earlier on. Is that in my imagination? What's your impression?

MCCARTHY: No, I think that's right, and I watched Mike Pence's remarks at the Republican convention kind of carefully, and I didn't catch any kind of undertow of anti-Trumpism seeded in there. Mike Pence is a very different kind of Republican than Donald Trump, and I think a President Pence would, unfortunately, pursue some very un-Trumpian policies, especially in foreign policy. However, Pence has been a quite loyal Vice President, at least in terms of his own commitment to getting the president reelected, and his speech I thought reflected that.

Now, I will say I thought it was a bad sign that on the final night of the Republican convention – so Pence had spoken on Wednesday, Donald Trump was going to speak on Thursday, the final night of the convention is Thursday. And in that final night, you had included a lot of sort of washed-up, old guard Republicans, including Mitch McConnell, including Rudy Giuliani and Tom Cotton, who is not a washed-up old Republican, but he certainly in terms of his ideology is pretty close to the neocons. All of these people were given pretty prominent slots in the final night of the convention. And it just seemed to me that somebody's programming the convention was kind of slipping in the message to viewers who are clued in that the neocons are still here and they still want to have a seat at the table. And the Republican establishment is still there and wants to have a seat at the table.

And so I was kind of discouraged, actually, by a lot of the final night's programming until you got to President Trump, whereas I'd been pleasantly surprised on Wednesday night because

that was kind of the Mike Pence night. And Pence himself I thought was much more solid than expected.

WOODS: Well, on the show notes page for today, TomWoods.com/1725, I'll have links to several of Dan's recent columns trying to make sense of everything going on right now. And I always enjoy reading Dan's columns. I feel like I understand things better after I read them. So that's where you can find them, TomWoods.com/1725. And I will also of course, as always, be linking ModernAgeJournal.com. Remember, *Modern Age* is the venerable journal dating back to the '50s and Russell Kirk. It's like another world almost to compare that America to today's. And Dan has the honor of being the editor of that venerable journal, which it's true, doesn't have quite the tone of a Trump speech. It's more cerebral, but I think this intellectual audience will enjoy it. So check that out as well. Dan, thanks for your time today.

MCCARTHY: Thanks, Tom.