



Episode 1,802: Jeff Deist on the 2020 Fiasco, and Whether There's a Case for Hope

Guest: Jeff Deist

WOODS: Happy New Year to you. You are rounding out 2020 You are the last thing anyone will remember about *The Tom Woods Show* in 2020, for better or worse.

DEIST: Well, I'm told that the 2,000th episode is planned for some time in 2021, is that correct?

WOODS: That is correct. Early October, I should have the date pretty darn soon in Orlando. So be there. It's going to be bigger and better than the 1,000th episode, where you were present. I may have something I want, with your consent, that you may want to do as part of it. We'll talk about that off the air, but it's going to be an absolute blast, I'm telling you.

DEIST: Okay, I'll look forward to that.

WOODS: And it doesn't cost anything. Like people can attend, and it doesn't cost them a thing. They get an evening's worth of free entertainment. I was at dinner the other night with two world-class marketers, who know me sort of, and they know my markets sort of, and I told them I was doing this event and that I wasn't charging anything to get in. And they were ripping their hair out at what a stupid decision that was. And I could not get across to them that sometimes I do want to do something as a gesture of goodwill, and I want to have as many people there as possible. And that wouldn't make me enough money to be worth the trouble of charging in the first place. Like that's not how I want to make my living. I don't want to charge people for my 2,000th episode. So that's what I've got. I don't care if the marketing gods say it's a mistake. It's not a mistake. I'm right about this.

All right, that's my battle. Let's talk about other things. Let's start with where we are as the year comes to an end. We'll try – I say we'll try not to talk exclusively about the virus, because my gosh, have I said almost everything that seems like there is to say about that. But let's say a little something about Joe Biden and what's likely to come. I keep seeing a graphic popping up in my social media, to the effect that the Black Lives Matter movement is very unhappy with the Biden-Harris ticket, because they say, we went out of our way to endorse them and vote for them, and now it's been X days, 30-something days, and they still have refused to meet with us. So assuming that that is true, that that's an accurate graphic, my sense of that is BLM just met the two-party system. And in particular, they met one of the parties, the Democrats, but a particular kind of Democrat, namely the Biden wing. What do you make of that?

DEIST: Well, it's to be expected. I mean, that's what politicians do. In other words, you're supposed to be able to take your base for granted, and that's exactly what Democrats do. They expect to get 90+% of black votes, and in general, they do. Now, this time around, they are freaking out, and perhaps with some justification, over the fact that it appears Trump made some pretty significant inroads, both with black and Hispanic voters in terms of their numbers.

And this is a story that the mainstream media won't touch, because they don't want to create a narrative or create any snowball effect, like that Republicans are becoming the working class party, which happens to include a lot of black folks. They'll never write that story, because they know perfectly well that they're in the business of crafting narratives, not reporting news.

So the idea that BLM isn't being heard by the Biden administration, I mean, let's face it, BLM is not a rank-and-file black folks movement. It's not an urban movement. It is a movement of academic and media types. So it's not some sort of grassroots thing.

But look, this is what happened. I mean, Biden, he is what he is. He's a very, very mediocre creature. If you were to go back 30 or 40 years ago and ask US senators, do you think this new guy in the senate, Biden, will ever be president? They would laugh their asses off, because he was always a mediocrity, a lightweight. And frankly, the Senate used to be a significant cut above the US House. In other words, senators tended to be wealthier. They tended to have more Ivy League pedigrees. They tended to be smarter. They tended to come from ritzier backgrounds, let's just say, and there was a real difference. There was sort of patrician air to the Senate.

And that lasted at least through Watergate, probably, perhaps even beyond. Even my time working with Dr. Paul, when I got there in the early 2000s, there was still a difference. People like Michele Bachmann weren't in the Senate. People like Bernie Sanders weren't in the Senate at that time. Obviously, Michele Bachmann was never a senator, but I mean, the kind of people who have gone on from the House to the Senate, that was very, very rare back then. It just wasn't a thing.

And so if you look at Biden, do you think was he really ever Senate material in the old-school sense? I think not. Delaware is a tiny state, basically a glorified county. The DuPont family basically ran it politically for some time, so he obtained their blessing. He's always been a hack. He's always been a fraud. He's a plagiarist. He's dumb. He's incurious. He is wrong on virtually every issue. I've never heard him say anything good on any issue, really. I mean, I guess maybe he's okay on marijuana or something. I'm not sure. I take pains to not study him. He's going to be in our faces for the next few years, at least until he dies. And I think the BLM people deserve to have the football pulled away from them, like Lucy, for supporting this chump. And I have absolutely zero sympathy.

WOODS: Well, understood. Now, I want to, by contrast, ask a happier question, let's say. How would you say the Mises Institute came through 2020?

DEIST: Well, it was a very tough year. We're one of the few organizations which continued to have events, live events, in-person events throughout the year. We didn't board up our windows and go home and tell everybody to work from home. We had events safely. We had events without COVID. And we had tremendous turnout at those events, because people were

so sick of being cooped up and so sick of not being around likeminded people and seeing faces and just having that social interaction, that we really had to turn people away from some of the venues.

And we had to change some of those venues, because certain states and certain hotels were no longer taking people. We had to work around that. And that was okay. We certainly respect and appreciate the venues that did have us, and we certainly respect and appreciate people who don't want to come out and don't think we should be holding events because of COVID. Those people are welcome to stay home. Those people are welcome to watch live or anything. So we had a great schedule of events.

Obviously, our focus was shifted somewhat when the COVID crisis hit back in February and March, because we had to sort of go to the ramparts to oppose any sort of government lockdowns, and I won't speak for everyone at the Mises Institute, but certainly what I consider a deranged and unhinged overreaction to a very survivable virus. Viruses are part of human existence. We've always dealt with them. We've always continued to go to work, continued to produce goods and services, so that was a big part of our year, coming out strongly back in March against the lockdowns.

And from a fundraising perspective, we're very, very fortunate to be robust. And overall, it was a terrible year for America and we certainly felt that pain, but you just kind of soldier on. And I think that COVID, with respect to the Mises Institute, was one of those things like the Patriot Act or the invasion of Iraq, where you have to oppose it lock, stock, and barrel. By opposing it, I mean the government reaction to it. And you're going to burn a little bit of political capital with your fans and your donors. That's just part of it. There are certain things where they're so core to the Mises Institute's mission that we say, hey, some people are going to disagree and say ,no, no, no, these lockdowns are justified and there's a public health problem here and your exhalations can theoretically be a form of aggression against others and yada, yada. We've heard all these arguments ad nauseum, but we disagree. And so we just focused on the lockdowns for a while.

But of course, far more importantly was the money issue, which is always there, always lurking behind everything this depraved federal government of ours does. And it's never shown its ugly fangs more than this year. I mean, this is completely untenable, the notion that we can have, what, 75% of people sitting at home not producing any goods or services, and somehow we can bounce back from that in a V-shaped recovery? I mean, Tom, some of these states are down 40% or more in their tax revenue, okay? 40%. So if you think they're not going to be coming to Uncle Joe Biden for a bailout, you are crazy. And where's that money going to come from? We all know where it's going to come from. It's not going to come from taxation. It's not going to come from some V-shaped bounce-back of these newly hyper productive companies.

But what's really shocking is one of this sort of great untold stories of 2020, which I hope the Mises Institute can help somewhat tell in 2021, is how companies found out that they can have almost as good bottom line with not nearly as good top line. So what I mean by that is a lot of companies cut costs. As you can imagine, a lot of companies tried to shed debt if they could. A lot of companies lamented the lack of cash on their balance sheet from stock purchases over the last few years, that sort of thing. And so what we found is in certain industries, that by cutting your expenses, even though your top line gross revenue went down, your bottom line net profit maybe didn't go down very much.

And so that tells you that there's a real restructuring of the economy going on out there. And a lot of people, a lot of people in lower skilled jobs, a lot of people in service industries, a lot of people who are more vulnerable financially are going to find themselves I think not being snapped back up in the new economy of 2021, which is going to be more of a techie distribution-type economy. So that's very frightening.

And the fact that governments were complicit at, if not cheering these lockdowns, that so many people in politics and government were behind this, and that so many people in politics and government have allowed basically the financialized economy, which is utterly dependent on the Fed in many respects, to create winners out of already these huge companies with distribution chains like Amazon and Walmart, and to do so much damage to mom-and-pop, especially in the restaurant business. I mean, folks, drive around your town, and wow, for my little college town of 75,000 people, we've lost tens and dozens of restaurants. And are they going to come back? I mean, what, with a PPP loan? With 1,200 bucks? With masks and 50% dining and take out? No, restaurants barely make it with 100% capacity and lots and lots of people inside drinking, because alcohol is where they make their margins.

So we really haven't grasp the enormity of the situation at all, because everyone was so focused on Trump versus Biden and COVID and the dangers of COVID. So we haven't really grasped what we've done. And so now in the cold, hard, winter light of 2021, we are going to start to feel it. And honestly, Trump may be far better off not being president. This may be the greatest thing that ever happened to him. He can go down to Mar a Lago and pontificate and not have to deal with what appears to be coming.

And so all Joe Biden knows how to do his tax and spend and print. I mean, this is this is a guy who, by his proposed appointment of Janet Yellen to Treasury, is just flashing *More of the Some*. Okay, they're out of ideas. They're out of ammo, and I think it's going to be ugly. I really do.

So that's hopefully where the Mises Institute continues to fill a role. It is gratifying to me to get emails from people saying thank you for X, Y, and Z, for explaining this, for sending me this book, for holding this event. You guys make me feel sane, etc. But it's not enough. And clearly money is going to be one of the big stories of the 21st century, and people better wake up to that and stop thinking it's some back-burner, snoozy issue for monetary wonks or something like that. It's not. It's coming soon to attend to you in the form of inflation. And I'm not just some cranky, Austrian permabear saying that. Ray Dalio is saying that. Jerome Powell is warning about that. So this is coming home, Tom.

WOODS: Well, let me follow up with that, because it seems like the appropriate time to ask, with a question that Daniel McAdams and I handled on a panel that we did at the Mises Institute symposium with Ron Paul back in early November, but that I'm not sure you yourself answered, and I wanted to get your answer. There have been so far two theories as to what 2021 holds for us under a President Biden in particular. One is that, because this is a crisis and governments never want to give up powers they get in a crisis, they're just going to double down and it's going to be locked downs and masks for as far as the eye can see.

The other theory is that suddenly the PCR testing gets reformed, and we start getting a more accurate picture of what's happening. The vaccine or vaccines come into play and that it serves as a fig leaf for them. But that, in general, what Biden does are some cosmetic things at the beginning, and he's surrounded himself by people in white coats, and then after a

certain number of months, he declares victory when the thing naturally goes the way it was going to go. I am very, very, very much inclined in the second direction, but I'm curious about your opinion.

DEIST: I guess I would say yes, because even if they didn't have all the activities planned and the vaccines and all that, I think herd immunity would probably be starting to develop anyway. And as the one physician out of Stanford tells us, herd immunity is not an approach to dealing with COVID; it's just a reality. It's just something that happens with all viruses. So it's not something where that's the government's plan, is to create herd immunity. It happens whether you plan it or not. So that's sort of an allegory for the marketplace itself.

Now, on the radio this morning, I heard an epidemiologist talking about how you need two rounds of this vaccine, but by let's say, June or July, if something like 70% of Americans have had the two rounds, then that's sufficient and we'll be a-okay and this pandemic will be over. So I guess that's possible, and certainly Joe Biden will take credit for this.

But whatever happens, again, this is about perception. Politics is always about perception. And that's why Joe Biden didn't win the election, he prevailed. Two different things. Regardless of who got the most votes – I have no idea what happened in some of those disputed states. I mean, who knows? And let's say he did win. Let's say he won both the popular and electoral college votes. Fine. But that's not really the vote. The vote is public perception. And that is a multi-pronged form of warfare, where you've got media, you've got social media, you've got state parties, you've got so many people involved. And on multiple fronts, Biden won the war. He won the war of perception. He had his lawyers lined up, he had the media lined up, he created that phony office of the president-elect, he had press conferences talking about who he's going to appoint. So all that led to a sense of Biden had won, and thus he won, because politics is perception. That's all it is.

So when it comes to COVID and treating it and curing it, or however you want to view it, and Biden taking the credit, of course, that's all a matter of perception, not fact. I mean, the fact might be that if we had just done nothing, that we might be far better off than we are today. I mean, that's certainly possible. I mean, if we didn't have 24-hour cable news, and we didn't have social media and the media landscape was something more like 1985, we may never even really have heard much about this. We may have read something on the back of *The New York Times*, you know, *There's a big outbreak of a nasty flu in China*. And then we might have fast forward a month, and *This flu that developed in China appears to have affected some cities in Italy*. And then two months later, a month later, whatever, *New York City and New Jersey are having a particularly bad flu season and hospitals jammed*. And that might have been it, and think how different our perception would be.

And you notice, amazingly, now there's no flu cases. Pharmacies across the country in the United States are reporting virtually no prescribing of Tamiflu. I mean, Tamiflu is the cheap, generic go-to for most doctors come November, December through the winter for flu. And the idea that there's no flu in America, flu has been eradicated – no, flu has not been eradicated. What's happening is that COVID is sort of a layering type diagnosis, which is going onto all kinds of things, so you're seeing people with flu plus COVID, or obesity plus COVID, or whatever kind of comorbidity is all being dragged into a big bucket of COVID diagnoses so that we can juice these numbers and create perception.

So trying to circle back to my point, this is about perception. And Joe Biden is going to have a hell of a lot easier time winning the battle of perception, because the media wants to help him. I mean, this is obvious that the media is totally in the bag for this clown, this mediocrity.

But they're also looking to push him out. I can't recall an election in my lifetime or even historically, perhaps, where so many people really expected the vice president to become president in the first term, either through incapacitation or death of Mr. Biden. So that's unusual. And this is a woman, Kamala Harris, who did very poorly in the primaries. Nobody voted for this woman. Nobody wanted her. If you recall, Klobuchar did better than her. Tulsi did better than her. Pocahontas did better than her. So no Democrats voted for her and no Republicans voted for her, and yet she's probably, at least 50% likely to be the next president without an election. What do you think of that?

WOODS: Yeah, that's the really astonishing thing. Even if you put aside all the silliness about democracy, that really is the classic case. Now, I'm looking right now at a chart from Germany. This chart shows the daily death trends since March. And in this chart, we see a small hill in late March, going through April, and continuing a little bit into May, but not overwhelming. And then it's pretty quiet for a while. And everybody says, well, Germany did exactly the right thing. That's why. It's because they behave themselves and they wore masks and they complied. Whatever. That's the explanation. There's no need to investigate. We already know a priori, that it must be because they all complied.

And then by an interesting coincidence, Jeff, after eight months of mask wearing, all of a sudden at the beginning of November, everybody in Germany at the same time decided to stop complying all at once. So that now there's a much larger hill on the graph. And instead of the top day of deaths being about 300 or so, the top day is over 800. Now, this won't cause anyone to go back and say – you know, because you're talking about perception, if we were somehow in charge of perception creation, that is to say by having influence over what graphs the public saw, well, the perception there would be, hmm, this seems to be a pretty big outbreak, despite the fact that they've done everything they were asked to do. Maybe there's no connection between these things at all. Maybe when we look at the Midwest around Thanksgiving and the graphs all look the same, state after state, no matter what the policy was, maybe something else is going on here.

It's incredible to me, that you could look at a graph like this – and this could be replicated time and again – that you could look at this and say, this just means they need to stay home harder. Put three masks on. That would be the conclusion. Instead of saying, maybe I misunderstood what happened in the first wave of this. Maybe I misunderstood this, because clearly this can't be explained by lack of compliance. That's all they can think of, is lack of compliance. We didn't do it enough.

It is exactly like Keynesianism. It's never *the whole thing is juvenile and makes no sense*. It's always *we haven't done enough of it*. I don't even know what I expect of you from this, and I don't want to dwell too much on this more than is necessary. But when you were talking about politics as perception, I just couldn't help thinking about, I'm surrounded by charts that undermine everything they're telling us, and they've still bamboozled half the public.

DEIST: Well, I suspect it in those 800 daily deaths, some of those are there – they're playing fast and loose with whether that's actually COVID that is the cause of that, so who knows? But

nonetheless, when it comes to people whose reflexive attitude is for government to act and act more, to do more, to do something, they'll simply never accept an explanation at variance with that, because it's just ingrained in them that the reason something good is happening is because government did something. The reason something bad is happening is because government didn't do something it should have done, because the West is in the thrall of libertarian policy, which a lot of folks on the left believe.

A lot of people think that the Kochs [laughing] have sort of turned America into this dog-eat-dog, predatory, libertarian dystopia out of an Ayn Rand novel, where we're all fighting each other for the scraps of capitalism. I mean, there's plenty of people who believe that, and so you have to look at things through that lens. And so the perception game is easy for our friends on the left when they've had little kids in their clutches since they were five years old.

WOODS: Let me ask you one other thing. I think you actually did a whole episode with our friend Pete Quinones on this. At the — I guess it was the Ron Paul talk where — is that where you did the talk of the imposed and the imposed upon, or was that at Jekyll Island?

DEIST: It was at Jekyll Island. It's a theme I've just been writing about and developing a little bit, because I think there's a big disconnect on that score.

WOODS: Yeah, and you're making a small book out of this can. Can you just run down the thesis of that? Because it's something that in a way we know, but the way you explain it, it just seems to illuminate so much.

DEIST: Well, I think you start with the premise that progressives won the 20th century in the West. It was a rout. It wasn't even close. The Old Right, which is the political movement with which identify, lost in terms of property and freedom. Okay, so if you look at the 20th century, you find things like two horrific world wars, you find our quagmires in Vietnam in Korea, you find the imposition in the United States of a new central bank, you find the imposition of an income tax, you find New Deal programs in the 1930s, including social security and retirement insurance, you find Great Society programs in the 1960s, and really sweeping changes from the Supreme Court, in terms of our understanding of all kinds of things in some of the key cases from the 1960s.

So you put all this in a blender, and what comes out is that you had, from in my opinion, a very illiberal century, in terms of the Misesian understanding of what liberalism is, which starts with property, and spreads out from that through to peace and non-interventionism and even self-determination in the form of secession, to allow for a safety valve for democratic minorities or political minorities of whatever type in any society. So what passes for 20th-century liberalism in the West, in our sort of modern mainstream conception today, is very different than what we might call the 19th-century Misesian conception of liberalism.

So I think that's a huge split, even amongst — I hate to use this term — but amongst libertarian circles is, was the 20th century in the West illiberal triumph, or was it an illiberal disaster? That's a pretty serious question to answer, I think. And I would argue that in terms of our great grandparents' understanding of property and freedom, that it was not a liberal century. The progressives won. They won all those things I mentioned.

So today, because we don't understand that, progressives – and there are right progressives, too. Don't get me wrong. I'm not necessarily saying *progressive* means *left*. But a progressive is someone who believes that history has an arc, that there's a deterministic or inevitability to all this – and who used to say that, by the way? Socialists – that things are deterministic, and that what human beings need to do is just get with the program and be a little more malleable and perfect themselves, because they're getting in the way of this arc when they do stupid things like vote for Brexit or don't elect Hillary Clinton.

So because progressives believe this so thoroughly, they also have been able to twist things, I would argue, in media, in academia, in the public mind, that somehow they are the imposed upon. In other words, that people have been pushing, pushing, pushing, pushing, pushing, pushing, pushing throughout the 20th century. Anytime they receive a little bit of pushback, they say, *Oh, my God, look at these reactionaries. Look at these oppressive forces. Look at the right. Look at* – whatever it might be.

And so you have this split in America. And there's a lot of ways we could look at it the recent brouhaha over calling Jill Biden doctor, and certainly educational doctorate shouldn't be – I know you and I might differ a little bit on the PhD designation, because there's a lot of PhDs who are nobodies. There's MDs who are nobodies, too of course. But this, this idea that Jill Biden, who has had a privileged and just absolutely unbelievable life, okay, a life which she didn't really add much in terms of goods or services to the Western world –

WOODS: [laughing] All right, I was trying to get right back here.

DEIST: Yeah, so nonetheless, she got some PhD or what they call a PhD in education, and apparently her dissertation was a rambling mess. Okay, so now there's this idea that somehow she is oppressed or put upon because this patriarchal West or whatever or this sexist America doesn't want to call her doctor, doesn't want to recognize her vast achievements. It's like, come on, she was married to another guy and then a US Senator, and she hitched her star to a guy who happened to become president. I mean, she is in no way oppressed. But the story unraveled on social media and other places, like this is still a really sexist society and that's why Dr. Jill Biden, her critics won't call her doctor and won't give her her due and this.

Well, that's all absurd. That's a small example of the oppressors – in other words, progressives like Jill Biden, who have had their way – acting like the victims. All this goes beyond government policy. We're not just talking about state action; we're talking about media and perception and all kinds of things, which are, in theory, voluntary.

But I would say the larger example, that's maybe the most important example of this, for these lousy culture wars that we're suffering through right now, because so much is decided in Washington, DC, unfortunately, is the secularists versus the religious. I mean, along with those other things I mentioned in the 20th century, especially since the 1960s, there has been an absolute rout of secularism in the West. An absolute rout, both in the public square and in the private sphere, in terms of people not going to church, not being religious, not attending, all that sort of thing. I mean, basically, Christianity went from being almost a centerpiece of American cultural and social life to being almost a footnote in American cultural and social life. Maybe that's overstating it a bit, but nonetheless, I mean, if you talk to 20-somethings, okay, they're not very religious. It's just the truth.

So religious people in the United States, particularly Christians, feel put upon. They feel set upon by political correctness, by academia, by media, by a secular environment in pop music, and movies, and literature and magazines, in fashion, in the performing arts, in theater. And they feel like they they're losing – and they are – they're losing the Christian part of society, and that there's this secular juggernaut, which is pushing and pushing and pushing them. And whenever they try to fight back, like let's get Amy Coney Barrett on the Supreme Court because she'll vote our way on abortion or some like that, they consider that pushing back. They consider that self-defense, we might say, in the broad cultural way.

But you introduce somebody like Amy Coney Barrett into the conversation, and the left media reacts as though they're the oppressed. They say, Oh, my gosh, these Christian theocrats are attempting to oppose their views on the rest of us and ban abortion. And here, they've got this crazy Catholic woman who has seven or eight kids – ho, ho, ho – how dare they bring up this radical fundamentalist Catholic and try to put her on the Supreme Court to take away our rights?

So the left is exceedingly skillful. In the midst of a secular rout, Amy Coney Barrett is going to do zip. Zippity doo dah day;. I mean, nothing, okay? If you're counting on Amy Coney Barrett – I know a couple people who had her as students when they went to Notre Dame Law. They had her for constitutional law there. They said she's a very nice woman, a very smart woman, obviously brilliant, capable, etc. There's no argument there. But they said that she's not going to rock the boat on the Supreme Court, was their opinion, versus a Clarence Thomas, let's say. So she's not going to do anything.

But think of how skillful the left is in making it seems like they're the imposed upon, that the Mike Huckabees of the world are just one Supreme Court Justice away from imposing their Christian theocracy on us, unless we fight back. We're the imposed upon, and we need to apply self-defense to keep America democratic and secular.

So there's this clash there. Who are the imposers, and who are they imposed-upon? Now, I would argue in this sense, Christian America is the imposed upon, and the secular people are the imposers. Now, they would argue otherwise. But it seems to me that's an important thing to figure out. That's important to understand. Don't you agree, Tom, that that if we understand that better, that ought to guide how we view the political landscape and the broader public landscape? I mean, who's pushing and who's just playing defensive and trying to push back? That seems to me a fundamental question that's underlying everything we talk about, whether in libertarianism or otherwise.

WOODS: Well, just look at the political landscape or cultural landscape over the past 50 years. Ask which side has made gains and which side has retreated. You don't even have to look in the aggregate. You could look at individual cases. You could look at the forest *and* the trees. And I think it's like zero for one side and entirely for the other. Now, there'll be people on that other side who are unhappy because this is not the progressivism that I believe in, or whatever kind of nitpicking. But it's pretty clear which way the wind is blowing in the US. And you're right. They've got everything they could ask for. And everything they demand, they get within three years, and everyone retreats and doesn't want to look like a bad person for opposing whatever it is. And then they continue to act as if they're put upon by overwhelming oppression. Yeah, that's real, and it's bizarre. It's crazy, because not only is it untrue, but I think it has the effect of making people wonder if they're crazy.

DEIST: Right, and it's also why I have zero time for libertarians who refuse to acknowledge or grasp this.

WOODS: Yes. What a waste of time. Absolute waste of time.

DEIST: But okay, let me play t devil's advocate. There are plenty of people on the left, if you go read *Jacobin* magazine, which I do, who would say ,no, no, no, there has been a conservative revolution and a libertarian conservative revolution in America. Back in the '40s and '50s, we had stronger unions, we had far more equal pay scales between CEOs and average workers. Yes, blacks and women had it horrible, but we fixed that a little bit in the 60s. And so what's happened is there's been a right-wing revolution from the Reagan-Thatcher era, which decimated unions and hurt pay, and minimum wage hasn't kept up. And we've got these radicals like Scalia on the Supreme Court, and the Republican Party has moved way to the right. And I mean, they would say that and they believe that. So I mean, let's just put that out there.

WOODS: Yeah, I hear that. And I guess that would probably be the best example of devil's advocate. But I think that one's trickier to answer, because some of those things are due not to any concerted policy on anybody's part, but because of the dropping of trade barriers – which I suppose that is a policy, but not a domestic policy, really, an international policy, of more free trade, more international competition. You're not going to be able to keep your crazy union scale in that kind of environment. That's just impossible. You wouldn't be able to compete. But the on the other hand of that, you have a dramatic increase in the supply of goods available and whatever. So I mean, I could come back with that.

But I guess I would say: how many of you people on the left feel like your career is in danger if you speak out about the decline in unions? Probably not at all. It would never even occur to you that would be an issue. Whereas if we say the wrong thing about the virus, that's it. That's the end of our YouTube channel. Or if I refuse to comply with whatever the latest crazy demand is of me at work, maybe I get fired. In other words, they're not acknowledging that the average person with perfectly normal, defensible views is constantly having to ask whether he should say or even think a certain thing. They themselves never have to ask that question. So as terrible as they claim the situation is and that there's actually been a right-wing backlash, it must be an awfully mild right-wing backlash if the ones perpetrating it are the ones who have to watch their mouths and the alleged victims can blab about anything they want.

DEIST: Well, and the reactionary slur, which is common out there, okay, but if we look at all the things I mentioned in the 20th century, central banking, income tax, Great Society programs, yeah, I'm against those things. So I'm reacting to those in a negative way. So to be someone who cares about political liberty, I think, is to simply have to deal with this slur of *reactionary*. Because as Murray Rothbard put it, and I'm paraphrasing him, the left engineers the great leaps forward, and the Republicans consolidate the gains. So this choo-choo train is going one way. It's going fast and it's going it's heavy, and it's hard to slow, much less stop. So that's certainly the way I see things today.

WOODS: Well, I don't know how to conclude this, because I like to go into – you know, I read Mises Institute literature. It's very upbeat and positive about what can be done by people with the right ideas. But then sometimes I'll talk to one of our folks on the podcast who just see seems very dreary and unhappy. And here we are at the end of, indeed, rather an unhappy

year, and I want to go out on the highest possible note we can. Are you up to that challenge, Jeff Deist?

DEIST: Well, let me throw this out there, and really an incredibly upbeat thing to consider. I have gotten to know — I wouldn't have friends with, but I'm acquainted with Amity Shlaes, the great historian who lives in Washington, DC, but also up in Plymouth Notch, Vermont, because she heads up the Calvin Coolidge Foundation up there. And she does some great work with high school students there. She requires them to debate in an on-your-feet oral format, and this and that. And so, she's certainly not someone who views the state the way you and I do, but I really am fascinated by her history and reading her work on Coolidge and the Great Society. She's got a great book on the '60s, which she views as far more revolutionary than the '30s, by the way, because of what Supreme Court did.

But she made a point earlier this year, during the midst of COVID, she said imagine how great our economy is when we still have grocery stores and gas stations and ATMs and hardware stores and all these other things full of goods and the goods and services we need, even when our crazy government is just doing insane things. I mean, that we have such a widespread distribution network of goods and services in this country, that even when government just attempts to blow it up and roll a hand grenade into the proceedings, I mean, this stuff still gets to us. And so there is a remarkable buoyancy to our economy, because Americans expect a level of material comfort.

In other words, people talk about entitled Americans, and that's true, but it's also good. When we're at the grocery and you're standing in their six lines, and one of them is long, and everyone's getting fidgety and kind of looking around you, the grocery store rushes and opens up a new lane because everyone's getting POed. Okay, well, 40 years ago in Russia, when you were waiting in line at the grocery, nobody opened up a new line. That just wasn't how it was.

So we still have this underlying optimism in this country, I guess, for lack of a better term. We still have an entrepreneurial energy that you just don't find in Europe. You just don't. And is it dying? Yeah, it probably has suffered. It's probably had some injuries in 2020 with COVID, because now we're creating this mentality where we all sit home and get a check from the government. But it's still there. And there are people starting companies and making money in 2020 in just incredible ways, because necessity is the mother of invention. Maybe they were laid off. Maybe their business plummeted. All kinds of things.

So there's a strong case to be made that no matter what government does, as long as we have at least certain freedoms, we work our way around it, the markets find a way, which is to say human beings go out and do innovative things to work around it. And so you can view government as just another impediment, like a hurricane comes along or something.

So it was really interesting when she said that. I mean, what a country where we still go to the grocery, and we still have the amount of choice we have, and someone who makes, let's say, \$12 an hour at a basic service job in this country, if they were frugal, could easily eat a full day's worth of calories on that one hour of wages. Talk about you could buy cheaper stuff at the grocery, rice and beans, you can buy a little bit of meat, eggs, that sort of thing. I mean, that is an incredible testament to the power of markets and to their natural tendency, their natural evolution towards deflation, which is that deflation and civilization go hand in hand.

More and more goods and services which were once only available to the wealthiest folks trickle down and become available to middle class and even poor folks. The poorest people in your town have a cell phone in their hands, which has basically the sum of human knowledge in it as long as they pay their bill. So let's cheer deflation, the natural process of people getting richer, and let's fight government spending and deficits and especially the Fed, which are the enemies of deflation, which are the inflationary forces in society. And let's take good cheer from what Amity Shlaes said.

WOODS: Wow, okay, well, you rose to the occasion, Jeff. Thank you very much. I have to end on a on a good note after all the sour ones of this year. And I'm so sick of people talking about how terrible a year it is, even though that's all I do all the time. But I am hopeful for 2021. And you know where I live, I have tickets to see Rob Schneider, the comedian at the King Center in Melbourne, which is a regular thing I've been to many times. I have two concerts I bought tickets for already. Going on a couple of major trips. So I'm acting like nothing's changed., but I hope that the kinds of things that I'm able to experience in the relatively free state of Florida get extended to everywhere throughout 2021, including Alabama, Jeff, including Alabama.

DEIST: Well, I'll just wish you and Jenna and your girls a great new year.

WOODS: Thank you, Jeff, and to you and Paula and your kids as well, and I look forward to a terrific 2021 for the Mises Institute. Thanks a lot.