

**Episode 2,360: Vivek on Assange, Ukraine and Supreme Court**

**Guest: Vivek Ramaswamy**

**WOODS:**  I'm calling an audible a little bit. We have a few things that we want to discuss later, but there's been a big, big item in the news. And of course, that is the Supreme Court's decision in a case involving Harvard and UNC and their affirmative action policies.

And I have to say, I was surprised to see the court take such a hard line against them, but they certainly did. And you and I are both Harvard people. I'm on their mailing list. You probably are too.

We got an email from them the other day that more or less from my reading sounded like they were saying: *We're going to put our heads together and figure out a way around this somehow.*

**RAMASWAMY:** Yeah, they already are, basically. So, in preparation for this decision, it looks like what a lot of elite universities have been doing is saying they're looking for the second-best way to still stop what they view (and they're deathly frightened of it) an influx of, to borrow the parlance of the left (which I despise), people who look like me.

Really, I think, is what they're solving for: Asian-Americans. And then secondarily, white people flooding Harvard's admissions ranks, that's what they're deathly afraid of. And so, they're already starting to deprioritize test scores. They're already starting to deprioritize any quantitative metrics.

I think they're already looking at zip codes and other ways of having proxies of what they'll call "geographic diversity". So, this is a cat and mouse game. But I think this was a step in the right direction, it's not a destination.

To the contrary, affirmative action pervades nearly every sphere of American life. One of the things I've said is that as US president – I said this on day one, actually, of my presidential campaign. This issue is near and dear to my heart.

It's different. It's at a different level of how personal this is to me as somebody in America whose achievement was my ticket to get ahead. I grew up in southwest Ohio as the kid of immigrants who came to this country with not a lot of money.

Yeah, we went through our own version of hardships, so I don't have a ton of patience to hear about somebody who looks like somebody to whom a bad thing once happened that feels entitled to a race-based quota system in a society that is codified in an anti-meritocratic way.

I think America is founded on merit and I'll fight for that. I've said I would rescind Lyndon Johnson's Executive Order 11246 which created affirmative action in the private sector. That's an executive order that effectively requires you, if you're a government contractor, to adopt race-based quota systems.

That's 20% of the US workforce right there. So, I view the Supreme Court decision as a first step. Things I'll need to do as US President, instruct the Department of Justice to actually make sure that these universities are following the law rather than finding workarounds which are effectively illegal disguised behaviors to achieve the same racially motivated results.

And then also take this ruling and its core contention to other spheres of American life that interface with the US government as well, like the government contractors that are bound by those same constraints that come from the federal government.

And I think that this will be a step to reviving our national identity, centered on merit itself. Some people push back on this idea: What is merit? And so, I prefer to define it. Merit, to me, is a system where anybody – you, me, anybody else – is free to achieve our own God-given potential.

Whatever that is, maybe it's in music, maybe it's on a sports field, maybe it's in a classroom. To achieve the maximum of your God-given potential without any other human being or manmade system getting in your way. That's meritocracy. And to me, that's part of the heart of what it means to be American.

**WOODS:** What about – I had a daughter who said: *Couldn't they devise a program that might give a leg up, let's say, to somebody for financial reasons. If we substitute class for race, what would be the objection to a program like that? Or, why don't we have that kind of program?*

And I said: *Well, regardless of the merits of that program, I think the reason we don't have it is that the system we have now is designed to be a spoils system. The people who advocate it use a lot of flowery language about opportunity, but they don't really mean that. They mean, “My group should get more.”*

**RAMASWAMY:** That's right.

**WOODS:** And that's why they're not thinking this way. But you say you came from – so you're not only a racial minority, but you came from some financial hardship. Would you favor some kind of thing whereby people coming from a hard luck kind of background might be given some kind of leg up?

**RAMASWAMY:** If it was a binary choice in a two choice, multiple choice option, I would certainly choose that over race-based quota systems because I think it's inherently less divisive. However, I stand in the favor of merit.

Allow, actually, whoever they are to achieve their maximum God-given potential without letting any manmade system stand in the way. We do have other manmade systems that do stand in the way of poor Americans, but that's not at the level of college.

That's at the level of K through 12 education, starting at a very young age. That's why I favor universal school choice programs and other measures to dismantle the monopoly that public teachers' unions fundamentally have over our kids.

So, I'm a fervent advocate of true equality of opportunity in this country, and there are many ways where we have room for improvement. But the way we fix that should not be on the back end where we put a racial Band-Aid on it on the back end.

And the funny thing is, if you double click on it, the system is doubly senseless because there's actually (at least as of 2004) a Henry Louis Gates Jr (who is a professor at Harvard at the time that you and I were both there) found that a majority, up to potentially two thirds of black Americans who Harvard admitted, were not descendants of slaves.

Which was supposedly the justification for the corrections to systemic racism rooted in slavery, that affirmative action was supposed to correct for. They were descendants of immigrants, people like my parents as well.

But the way we actually solved for it is literally it's a system that says: *You look like someone to whom a bad thing once happened, so we'll reward you. And you look like someone who once did a bad thing and therefore will penalize you.*

If you go in that direction, the possibilities are endless. There's about a million European slaves who were enslaved by Barbary pirates. That is not quite as many as passed the transatlantic trade, but even more who did pass the slave trade into the Middle East.

And so, Chinese-Americans who laid railroads as forced labor in this country, Japanese-Americans who were interned, Jewish-Americans who have been discriminated against by many institutions ranging from Harvard.

We then enter the oppression Olympics, the victimhood Olympics. And think there is no winner in America's victimhood Olympics. America loses in the end. Maybe China wins, you could argue, because they don't play these games over there.

But the reality is, restoring colorblind merit is absolutely the way that we thrive as a society. And then, restore equality of opportunity starting at a young age through equal access to high quality early education.

**WOODS:** I heard that last week you appeared at a rather unusual, but yet 20 year strong, libertarian event called PorcFest. And so, I do want to talk a little bit about the sorts of things you said there. But do you want to just share your frank appraisal of that event?

**RAMASWAMY:** I felt like I was at home, to be honest. I was a libertarian, actually, back when I was at Harvard. It's an era I've left behind me where I said I was a libertarian rapper.

But I used to go to spoken word and a bunch of other open mic nights at Harvard. And I would usually bring my libertarian verses with me.

And so, for me, this is a familiar audience. For a lot of conservatives, it's like: Wait, you're saying the market can do what unto itself? These aren't unfamiliar arguments. These are deeply familiar arguments.

The main reason I call myself a conservative (and I am a conservative) today is that I care more about than just the relationship between the state and the individual. On most questions, I have quite strong libertarian leaning instincts.

But I also, independently of the state, do care about culture, the cultivation of virtue – things that, by the way, Adam Smith or even Ron Paul do care about deeply as well. But for whatever reason, I think the categorizations – I think labels are confining.

But I would more call myself a conservative today than a libertarian, even though I share a lot of the instincts in common.

So, the positions that I have with respect to ending the war in Ukraine, for example, I think resonate more with the PorcFest and libertarian audience more than they do even with the classic Republican Party or Democrat Party of today.

I'm not a classic partisan person who grew up in partisan politics. I'm a citizen who thinks independently and I'm in this race to actually bring a fresh, yes, pro-American perspective. I think the Republican Party is the best vehicle I can use to advance that to actually win the presidency and lead a national revival.

But PorcFest wasn't some foreign experience to me. I actually felt pretty much at home for most of the day and we had a good time.

**WOODS:** That's good. Well, I'm living proof that you can be a libertarian and worry about things other than just the individual and the state. We're not trying to put forth a full philosophy of life. It's just, don't use violence with people.

Then you can have your views on aesthetics and culture and whatever separately, which is exactly what I do. Now, while you were there, you talked about, or you made mention of, several controversial individuals, people the establishment on both sides considers to be radioactive.

But yet you, I think, alone of the candidates, have made it clear that you would pardon Julian Assange and Edward Snowden.

**RAMASWAMY:** Yes.

**WOODS:** Is there another person in the race who has pledged to do that?

**RAMASWAMY:** No, there is not. There are other people who have occasionally been asked and pay lip service and say rosy things. But I'm at a place where I've studied the cases. I've reflected deeply on the law.

I think it's an injustice to have two tiers of justice in this country. That's fundamentally what we have today. And this is part of a broader vision for me of restoring one rule of law applied equally to all Americans.

And I think that Edward Snowden and Julian Assange should be free men. So, specifically, I would call it a commutation of sentence. They will be free men is what I will say. In the Snowden case there's legal technicalities of what you call a pardon versus not. But clemency for all of them.

Ross Ulbricht falls in the same category. There's others I could put on the list. Douglass Mackey I'd put in that category. Donald Trump, who's my competitor in this race, I would put in that category if he's convicted on either of the two charges that he's been indicted on.

And I think that the reason why is that America is not a country – should not, at least, be a country, I should say – where the party in power uses police force to arrest disfavored political opponents, be that Eugene Debs, be that protesters of a different political persuasion during the McCarthy era, be that Martin Luther King, who was threatened to commit suicide by politicized FBI under J. Edgar Hoover, be it the individuals that we mentioned today.

That's not what America should be. And I'm proud to be a president with the spine to say that I will issue pardons accordingly. I will grant clemency accordingly. I will make sure that we have one rule of law in this country.

**WOODS:** The pressure on you not to do that would be overwhelming. Because I heard through the grapevine that Trump may have been inclined to at least grant clemency, to Ross Ulbricht as an example.

And then it didn't happen because the Justice Department basically just told him: *There's no way you can do that*. So, Donald Trump is Donald Trump. I mean, he's supped in happy concord with world leaders and billionaires and whatever.

Why are you going to be a tougher nut for them to crack than Donald Trump?

**RAMASWAMY:** I'm grounded in first principles and moral authority more than just vengeance and grievance. And I think we go further when we're grounded in a principled foundation. I've met Ross's mom twice now.

The first time I met her I knew enough about the case, she educated me further. I didn't make a commitment at our first meeting. Studied up on it, but by the time I met with her more recently, it was at PorcFest.

It was a separate side room we set up for me to sit down with her. I looked her in the eye. I made a promise. I said that he would be a free man on January 20th, 2025, when I take office. I can only keep that promise if I do take office.

But if I do take office on that date, I don't wait for the back end to avoid the politicized consequences for me. I've said that Julian Assange, Edward Snowden, Ross Ulbricht, and the other names I've mentioned and more we will add to that list, are free men on that date.

That's what it means to set a national tone for this country. If we're going to unite this country, we have to open our eyes to what we've done wrong. I'm not a kumbaya, let's get along, hold hands and ignore the past and move to the future guy.

I think we have to see the past with clear eyes. I think we have to own up to that past. And then I think we set the best foundation we possibly can for actually then moving forward and looking to the future.

So, I'm not moved by grievance, but I am moved by a commitment to justice grounded in first principles. And I think that we go further with our own agenda, even our stated agenda, even our stated America first agenda, then if we're just moved by personal grievance.

**WOODS:** You also in this context commented on the Espionage Act and what your posture is in connection with that. So, can you take a minute to talk about that?

**RAMASWAMY:** Yeah, this is one of the most un-American statutes ever passed. It was in 1917, passed and signed into law by Woodrow Wilson, the Godfather, I will call him, of the administrative state. A lot of people don't know that.

It was a law literally passed to silence political dissent, specifically antiwar dissent during World War One. It was used to round up hundreds of antiwar activists who were imprisoned. Eugene Debs was put into prison for criticizing the Espionage Act itself.

Keep in mind, this is the same statute that is now being used to lock up political opponents of a different persuasion. I mean, Julian Assange has suffered at the hands of this statute. Now it's Donald Trump suffering at the hands of this statute.

What I've said is that I would demand that Congress repeal it. And in the meantime, one of the things about my presidential candidacy is I won't make any promises that are contingent on Congress acting.

The promises that I make, the commitments that I make, the efforts will be best efforts to use my authority as an executive to do what an executive is already legally empowered to do. What's the executive legally empowered to do?

I will instruct the Department of Justice not to enforce the Espionage Act, which I view as unconstitutional as it exists today.

So, that gives you a taste of how I think about restoring justice in the Department of Injustice, which is what it is today. To actually turn it into a name that befits it, the Department of Justice itself.

**WOODS:**  Back in my Harvard days, I did something kind of interesting. I applied for a program at the Kennedy School of Government whereby three people (it would be somebody playing Ross Perot, somebody playing George H.W. Bush and somebody playing Bill Clinton) would go to local schools and hold mock debates.

So, I was George H.W. Bush. And at the end of these debates, the other two people debating with me said: You are a better Bush by far than the actual Bush. And I said: *Yeah, I'm making the arguments he should make, but he won't make them*.

And so, along those lines, I want to know, what do you think is an issue that is a clear winner for Republicans, but yet they run away from.

**RAMASWAMY:** I think ending the war in Ukraine on terms that actually advance American interests. Most of the Republican Party is on the other side of this. What I explain to people is, listen, you want to spend $200 billion abroad or you want to spend it actually advancing American interests at home.

And if you're going to end the Ukraine war, let's do it in a way that deters another war, potentially the need for conflict over Taiwan and China. So, here's how I would do it.

End the Ukraine war on terms that require – in return for freezing the current lines of control, in return for guaranteeing NATO would never admit Ukraine, require Putin to exit his military alliance with China.

That forces Xi Jinping to have to think twice before he invades Taiwan, which is how you actually deter Xi from going after Taiwan without going to war over Taiwan.

It's part of a broader foreign policy vision that I have of restoring a trilateral international order rather than the bilateral one we have today that's more likely to take us to war with China.

That's how we achieve peace. That's how we actually look ourselves, and as parents of children, in the eye and say that we're not going to send them to wars that don't advance the American interest, but instead deter wars in a way that actually do advance the American interest.

I think it's a clear winner, if explained properly. They're shying away from it. I think the other thing that Republicans shy away from a little bit is crony capitalism when it comes to banking. It's shameful that not more of the Republican Party could not stand up with me and say that the intervention in the case of the Silicon Valley Bank depositors was absolutely a form of government overreach.

And there's other presidential candidates, one of whom is one of the top two contenders who had his presidential campaign launched in a conversation with one of his mega donors who happens to be one of the biggest proponents of that bank bailout.

It's not a criticism of anyone. It's just a statement of facts as to why the Republican Party behaves the way it does. Many of those large donors said they weren't going to donate to me – as though they were threatening me to change my position.

I kept my position. I don't believe in crony capitalism. It's not even capitalism. I won't dignify it by calling it that. It's just raw cronyism.

And so, I think on issues ranging from bank bailouts and corporate welfare to electric vehicle subsidies, to exiting the war in Ukraine, this is low hanging political fruit if you're actually independent of your donor master class.

The day we're literally talking right now, it's either right now or yesterday or whenever it was, I put another $5 million check into our campaign, after the $10+ million dollars that we put in initially. I've lived the full American dream.

I believe in meritocracy for a reason. I did it on my own efforts and hard work and dedication, and I won't apologize for that.

But that allows me to actually declare independence of that donor class, that actually is a little bit of a donor class that's bipartisan in nature, that does constrain what Republicans can say on Ukraine or bank bailouts or other issues where I've been dismantling the administrative state, where I've been as vocal as I have been.

**WOODS:** By the way, I'm going to tell you something I don't think I've told you before. But I have a supporters program, supportinglisteners.com, where people can support the show and they get little benefits in return.

It's like Patreon, but it's my own thing, and that's how I prefer to do it. And the super, top, elite people who support me get something in the physical mail from me every month.

And one month I mailed out about 35 copies of *Woke Inc* because I thought: *This is an interesting thing.* I didn't know anything about you. I didn't know that I was ever going to interview you. I didn't know you were going to run for president.

And I just thought: *Well, isn't this kind of an interesting coincidence that it happened to turn out that way?*

**RAMASWAMY:** I appreciate that.

**WOODS:** Now, anyway, getting the flattery out of the way. I just thought that was an interesting coincidence.

So, let's go back to the Harvard thing for just a minute. Because some people are saying that this decision was made possible by Trump Supreme Court appointees, and that that made the difference and that that's made the difference time and again, and that it'll make the difference in future cases.

Maybe there'll be other cases relating to affirmative action in places other than education. So, you, if you were president of the United States, would have to nominate Supreme Court justices. How would you decide? Where would you get the names from?

**RAMASWAMY:** By the end of this summer, I will be publishing our list of potential nominees both to the Supreme Court as well as to appellate court positions. It's something that people need to know. I'm not going to keep them in the dark.

So, I believe in transparency. I've already begun the process. I am actively vetting. Literally, there was one round of names begun to be presented to me yesterday. I'm actively vetting who will fill those seats.

**WOODS:** Okay. Good, good, good.

**RAMASWAMY:** It's a committee of law professors of independent societies. It's not just the Federalist Society, but we've been in conversations with many different bodies to think about scoring systems to get their input. Who's spoken at their conferences? What have they said?

We're being comprehensive, and by the end of the summer, I will publish the list.

**WOODS:** Okay. Well, now, having said all that, a few weeks ago I had David Stockman on my show, and he was the head of the Office of Management and Budget under Ronald Reagan. But he was a young whippersnapper in those days, and he's still alive and kicking.

And I asked him how he would have negotiated with Joe Biden? If he had been Kevin McCarthy, how would he have negotiated with Joe Biden when it came to the budget and the debt ceiling?

And I said, it's hard, though, for me to get interested or care about this issue because I know what's going to happen. Every time we have one of these, we know what's going to happen. Nobody is in suspense.

They'll end up raising the debt limit. The Republicans will cave. We know every single thing that's going to happen. And a large part of it is that discretionary spending is such a small sliver of the overall federal budget that it seems hopeless to ever really get that seriously under control.

Do you think there really is any way to ever get it under control?

**RAMASWAMY:** Yes, there is. I'm going to be a realist here. I think we are actually lacking a political consensus in the country itself.

So, it's not just a dysfunction of Washington issue here, although that's part of it. I mean, shutting down the administrative state is part of it, because the administrative state is the invisible hand that guides Congress to behave in the way they do. That's something that I, as US president, have the capability to shut down.

And Tom, I don't like to boast about a lot of things, but one thing I will say is, I think I'm the single presidential candidate who's probably run in the last generation who has the deepest understanding of how to actually shut down the administrative state on strong constitutional and statutory authority.

So, that's part of how we get spending under control. 5 USC 3302 empowers the US President to set the regulations governing the Office of Personnel Management (OPM), the HR Department of the Federal Government.

Get rid of the collective bargaining agreements. Get rid of a lot of the civil service protections as applied to mass layoffs. Those only apply (the law) to individual firings. But we're talking about mass layoffs, as I've planned to bring to the federal government.

Reduce the federal employee headcount by over 75% by the end of my first term. I'm aiming to get to over 50% by the end of year one. That's a big part of how we also rein in federal expenditures. It's not just their headcount costs.

When you have people that regularly show up to work in the federal government that shouldn't have had that job, they find things to do. Most of those involve spending money, which then show up in the appropriations that go to Congress.

So, that's a big root cause of this. But I think the other realist factor is we need to do this and build consensus in the country by delivering economic growth first. There's a chicken and egg problem. Lower spending means lower taxes, which spurs economic growth.

But there's other ways to spur economic growth right now that are easy too. We've grown at less than 1% GDP growth this past year. That's what we're slated to deliver.

We've grown at over 4% for most of our national history. I think we get back from 1% to 4% by unlocking American energy, drill, frack, burn coal, embrace nuclear, put people back to work.

How? Don't pay them more to stay at home. And then third is reform of the US Fed. I will restore a single mandate of dollar stability to the US Federal Reserve. None of this playing God from on high, trying to hit two targets with one arrow of inflation and unemployment. Abandoned the Phillips curve mythology and restore stability to the US dollar against a basket of commodities, gold, silver, nickel, agriculture and farm commodities.

We have the commodity basket set. That's how you unlock GDP growth in the country. Once we're then growing at 4% (or even close to it) we then have national consensus to rein in a lot of that excess spending on entitlements and other areas.

So, that's a realistic vision of how to do it. And that's why for me, it's more than a talking point. I've built businesses. I'm outside of politics. I actually am serious about getting this done. That's how we do it.

**WOODS:** Just one more thing. And it has to do with something you said about energy policy. Now, I have a lot of friends who will, regardless of whether they liked Trump or whether they thought he was too abrasive or whatever, they all agree that his energy policy was one of his strengths.

And you just made mention of energy policy. Now, if I were to try to speak to Greta Thunberg, for example, who really, honestly, truly appears to believe that a climate catastrophe is looming. No matter what evidence I bring to the table, I'm not going to make any progress.

So, people who are true believers are very, very difficult to reach. But there are a lot of people who are persuadable, who are in the middle, who realize that if you engage in some of these draconian policies, it's going to mean much, much higher bills for people, a lot of avoidable suffering.

But they keep getting told that catastrophe will strike. And they're waiting for somebody to give them a persuasive sounding answer that seems reasonably in line with scientific fact. So, how would you speak to those people?

So, you have Trump people – they already know, they're already on board with you. How do you speak to those persuadable people?

**RAMASWAMY:** So, I think it's, as you said, grounded in facts and science. Let's talk about some facts. Our global surface temperature is going up. They appear to be by a little bit. Is that man-made? It appears to be, at least in part (though slightly more debatably) to carbon dioxide, to man-made causes.

However, let me share some other facts. I do not believe this is an existential risk for humanity. Carbon dioxide in the atmosphere is actually close to at an all-time low relative to most of human history. As recently as the 1970s, the belief was we were more likely to enter an ice age.

That was actually the climate change concern as recently as the '70s. Today it's global warming. The Earth today is covered by more green surface area coverage then it was just a century ago. Why? Because carbon is plant food.

Carbon dioxide is plant food, and they tend to grow in actually warmer climates. So, that's an equilibrating self-healing mechanism. The Earth has built in, as it always has, self-corrective mechanisms for increases in slight changes in the global atmosphere.

Now let's talk about the right plan to fight it. Eight times as many people die of cold temperatures as warm ones. And the right answer to all temperature related deaths is, of course, more plentiful access and reliable access to fossil fuels. You want to look at the last century.

Again, these are just hard facts, indisputable facts. I don't think you're going to find an educated person on any side of this debate that's going to press back on me on this. The number of climate related disasters in 1920 – for every 100 people that died, two died today.

A 98% reduction in the climate disaster related death rate. And by the way, why is that? Advances powered by fossil fuels. So, I think we need to stop measuring the impact and start measuring human flourishing. The anti-impact framework I think is particularly wrong.

And where does the Greta Thunberg piece come in? It's a religious cult, actually, that has less to do with the climate and more to do with global equity, letting the rest of the world catch up.

Because if we're about anything else, people would worry equally about carbon emissions that we shift from the West to places like China. But they don't. And last time they checked, it was supposed to be "global" warming.

Otherwise, the same people who are opposed to carbon emissions wouldn't also be opposed to nuclear energy, the best known form of carbon-free energy production known to mankind. Why? Because nuclear energy might be too good at actually solving that problem.

It has nothing to do with the climate – little to do with the climate, I would say, at least, and everything to do with letting the rest of the world catch up. And once you see that with clear eyes, I say let's all measure human flourishing, human prosperity.

Alex Epstein has been great on this issue.

**WOODS:** I was just going to ask. You sound like you've been influenced by him.

**RAMASWAMY:** I've been influenced by him. I think that a lot of what I'm saying also reflects conclusions from Koonin, from Bjorn Lomborg, from my own independent reading of the primary sources.

But Alex Epstein has been spot on and excellent on this. The human flourishing point in particular comes from Alex Epstein and his great book, *Fossil Future*, which I largely agree with.

That's what truth is founded on. Our campaign slogan is one word: *Truth*. America was founded on the truth. I'm speaking the truth in the open in this campaign. That's how I think we will win this in a landslide election in 2024, like Reagan did in 1980.

That's how we unify the country and unite the country. And I'm going to need my libertarians to come along with me. If you need to hold your nose, then hold your nose, but still vote in the Republican primary. You won't agree with 100%, but you'll probably agree with 90 plus percent of what I say.

And I'm not in this to make a point. I'm in this to actually deliver a national revival. Donald Trump, I'm ahead of where he was in June of 2015, actually, apples to apples. The latest *Fox News* poll as of 24 hours ago from when we're talking now, I'm in third place with still low name ID.

Most of the country still doesn't know who I am. It's a distant third, but I'm polling at third in some of these polls already. We haven't even had the first debate. I'm in this to actually win. And so, even if your libertarian-inclined, I'm a one-time libertarian.

We agree on 90% of things. I need your help. Show up for the Republican primary. Honestly, give a dollar, give whatever you can at Vivek2024.com. If you guys do your part, I promise you I'll do mine.

**WOODS:** All right. So, the website once again, Vivek2024.com. Check that out everybody. Thank you Vivek. And thank you ladies and gentlemen.

**RAMASWAMY:** I appreciate it, Tom Thank you.