

**Episode 2,385: Is the Old GOP Dead?**

**Guest: Tho Bishop**

**WOODS:**  So, we're going to talk about this debate that was minus Trump. I guess we'll – in fact, let me make a note of that. I think we're going to talk about "minus Trump" later. But I want to talk about the candidates who were there.

And of course, after it was all over, everybody was talking about Vivek Ramaswamy. That was the new thing. My sense is that a lot of his support was coming from the Internet.

Because he made some terrific videos, he'd be out in front of a courthouse where Trump was going to be, stuff like that. And that got a lot of people's attention.

But if you're 75 years old (and that is a big, big constituency of the Republican Party) you probably did not see his Twitter videos.

So, you turn on this debate and there's this young Vivek Ramaswamy standing right in the middle because of the way they organize the candidates by polling numbers, right in the middle with Ron DeSantis. So, he got everybody's attention.

And in a way, I think because everybody was attacking him, I think that took a lot of the limelight away from DeSantis that he would otherwise have had.

**BISHOP:** Oh, I agree. I was kind of surprised that there weren't more shots directed at DeSantis, particularly from Vivek.

**WOODS:** Were there any?

**BISHOP:** Vivek had one line about how there were rehearsed lines from a $300 million super PAC.

**WOODS:** Oh, well, yeah, yeah, okay. There were attacks on other people coming from Vivek, but I don't think there were any attacks on anybody except on him by any of the other candidates.

I don't think anybody said: *Ron DeSantis is a bum and he did a lousy job in Florida.* I think they just ignored him.

**BISHOP:** There was one line with Nikki Haley. Which, it was surprising because it was a good line. I did not expect Nikki Haley to go this route where she attacked Pence, she attacked DeSantis, and she attacked Tim Scott for raising the debt ceilings and some of the fiscal stuff.

**WOODS:** Oh, okay. Okay. You're right.

**BISHOP:** Which was it was a minor attack, but but it was interesting to see her try to take up that sort of Trump mantle of kind of bashing the national Republican Party. I think it's very smart. I think it's very cynical coming from Jeb Bush in heels, but I paid attention to that.

But yeah, this really was The Vivek Show. And it's clear that he's really gotten under the skin – now he came off in a very aggressive manner. He's calling everybody a bunch of crooks up there.

**WOODS:** I would scale that back a little. I would scale that back. And I think he sounds – I mean, look, it's easy to be a Monday morning quarterback on stuff like this. And it's like saying: *Trump should have done X in 2016 when he got elected, and he didn't.*

So, it's very easy after the fact. But I would scale it back a little. And I would be careful not to be speaking when the audience is cheering. I don't think he realizes that it was impossible for some of his best lines to be heard because he was trying to speak over them.

He should wait and then speak. But then the other thing is, I think he sounds too rehearsed. And again, that's an easy criticism to make when you're not the one who has to stand up there and summarize where you stand in 30 seconds.

I realize that that is very difficult to do. But if you're not a politician and that's one of your strengths, then you've got to take that all the way and not sound like a politician, not sound like a guy who's memorized every word and focus-grouped everything.

So, that, I thought could be worked on. But in general, he seemed fearless. And the fact that they were all attacking him obviously only elevates his stature.

**BISHOP:** Right. That candidness, I think it really came across at the beginning. He had that weird allusion to Barack Obama about: *Everyone's asking what's a skinny kid with a weird last name doing up here on the stage.*

Which, I don't know if he was making fun of Obama. That line was just – I would stay away from, kind of, direct Obama comparisons, since those are going to kind of manufacture themselves anyway because of his style and presentation.

But I thought Christie had a good jab making him out to be the ChatGPT candidate. And to a certain extent – and this is what I find fascinating about Ramaswamy. It's because he's obviously a very intelligent guy.

He has been the most aggressive, the most radical of proposals, he is talking about ending the FBI. When he was at the Young Americans for Liberty event recently in Orlando, he was going after the Federal Reserve.

I'm not going to fully endorse everything that he had to say about monetary policy, but you had that classic Ron Paul, *"End the Fed!"* cheer. And it was off the cuff. He said: *I don't want to end the Fed. I want to kill the Fed. You guys are too nice for my tastes.*

He definitely kind of leans into that. And I thought in the second half of the debate where you only have so much prepared material, that one-off line on Nikki Haley, that: *I look forward to you becoming a lobbyist for Raytheon and Lockheed Martin.*

I thought that was a nice little line, things like that. But I think that the image that I think personifies this "everyone but Trump" dynamic in this race was when the question came up about Ukraine, and DeSantis kind of put his hand up halfway and then Vivek had it all the way.

And I think that dynamic where everything that DeSantis wants to try to position him to be "Trumpism without Trump", Vivek is just going to the next step over. He's a lot more charismatic, he's a lot more comfortable on a podcast, he's utilizing all these sorts of platforms.

And so, I think this dynamic of "old versus new – and it's funny because, I mean, Donald Trump seems to be inevitable to be the Republican nominee. He is the oldest Republican nominee of all time. He still counts in the "new" camp just because of his uniqueness and style.

But this dynamic of the old GOP versus the new GOP, I think was on full stage last night. And I think that dynamic of Fox News versus Tucker on X or whatever it is, that dynamic, I think is the most interesting aspect of this entire primary.

And just seeing someone like Mike Pence just evoke this sort of Reaganite creed, acting offended when Vivek is talking about kind of this hopelessness dynamic that's going on in this country, the lack of spirituality and the like.

And Mike Pence was just offended, like: *How dare you suggest that Americans are a lot less God-fearing they used to be?* It's like, Mike Pence, what world are you living in? This isn't 1980.

**WOODS:** That was a great moment, where Vivek said to him: *I know you and people like you want to get up here and give it's a "It's morning in America." speech. But the thing is, Mike, it's not morning in America.* *How out of touch can you be?*

In effect, he's saying: *You can't just get up here and repeat slogans from 1988. The world has changed. America has changed*. And every time he would say – or even DeSantis would try to suggest that what the United States can accomplish is limited, and it's foolish to think: *Well, we can remake the world and create a great society for ourselves.*

And Pence was saying: *You can do both.* Maybe you can. I think that's doubtful. Maybe you can. But the point is we haven't. Maybe you can, but we haven't. And nothing Pence is going to do is going to change anything about that.

You mentioned the jab that Chris Christie landed about Vivek sounding like ChatGPT. I think I would have come back with: Well, if that means I'm really quick on my feet and I think faster than anybody else, I'll take that as a compliment.

I can also say that at least one person I know for a fact has been briefing Vivek on the economy is somebody who would make our people very happy. But just leave it there. But you're right, the Ukraine thing was the central issue.

Because I believe it was in the context of that, that again, Vivek had a great line. But it was a line that he uttered at the wrong moment, which was he said to Nikki Haley: *I wish you the best in your future career as a lobbyist for Lockheed or Raytheon.* [laughing] Like, what?

**BISHOP:** You know, it's a new GOP. And you see this reflected within the polling. And we can complain about Trump all we want – a lot of valid reasons to doing so.

The reality is that 80% of the polling going into this debate, which is why DeSantis and Vivek were in the main stage, are products of 2016 America First style Republican Party politics.

And it's interesting, starting off the show, you talked about how you're not sure how many 70-year-old Republican voters were familiar with Vivek. Dealing with a lot of the rank-and-file Republicans in my own county – many of which tend to skew older.

It's just kind of the reality of the situation. It's been fascinating to see how many of them come to me and talk about the podcast that they're listening to or the Rumble video.

**WOODS:** Maybe I'm underestimating some of them.

**BISHOP:** There has really been this entire shift in the content that they're consuming. You see this reflected in Fox News's numbers. You see this play out. I mean, I'm active in my local county party. We had a debate watch party.

We had people that didn't want to come to the debate because they were going to go watch Trump on Twitter instead. And so, this dynamic of people really tuning out the mainstream media, I think this is the most important element that's feeding into these voter patterns, is that they're just not consuming news the way they were, even with older demographics.

And again, it's fascinating just how out of touch – I mean, again, you expect it from someone like Asa Hutchinson, right? Asa Hutchinson is a testament to the fact that you can have a 40-year career in government and can be completely mediocre in everything.

I mean, this guy is just absolutely awful. He doesn't know the room he's in. I don't know how he made the debate stage, but it's fine, whatever. We're used to those sort of people. Then folks like Mike Pence, and even Tim Scott to a certain extent, where there's just no substance there.

There's no "there" there, in terms of the way they're engaging. And these are supposed to be relatively serious Republicans, and they have no idea where the base is. And you saw with some of the applause lines, obviously always you're dealing with a controlled audience there.

It's a bunch of sycophants for the various politicians in there or various RNC members, or whatever. But even the energy in the crowd, where, like, just how much applauding you had with Vivek on some of the lines, the boos over some of the foreign policy conversation.

I wish we had more on that foreign policy divide because that's where the most obvious rift lies. Everyone's going to say: Oh, we spend too much. Everyone's going to say: Oh, school choice is great. Everyone's going to take a swipe at California or some of the crazy woke stuff.

But it's that foreign policy debate where things are really, I think, the most interesting. And that's where the Republican Party, as the majority of the candidates in that field – again, two out of the eight saying that they're skeptical of more foreign aid to Ukraine.

That's the biggest dynamic. Just so many Republicans, politicians in DC, are completely blind to, still.

**WOODS:** And it showed in Mike Pence's tone how frustrated and exasperated he was that he felt like he should even have to debate these things: *We're the Republican Party. We're the party of world empire. What do you young whippersnappers not understand about that?*

And by the way, it is not a dunk on somebody to say: You're a young man. I mean, in this day and age, I think some people are thinking: *We could probably stand a young man at this point*.

But that was actually one of the things: *We can't have somebody who's too old.* He said: *But we also can't have anybody who's too young.* Well, who's that?

**BISHOP:** Right. The depth of knowledge that Vivek is able to talk about – again, it's valid to have concerns about Vivek perhaps being overly opportunistic, cynical, right? Disingenuous.

He has written stuff in the past, whether it's January 6th and the way he described that in 2021, then the way he talks about on the campaign trail now. He was dealing with, I believe, Covid restrictive measures in Ohio. He was on an advisory force there. Now he's anti-Fauci.

I understand, perhaps, concerns about sincerity on some of this sort of stuff. But there's very few people on that stage that have any leg to stand on when it comes to the sincerity issue. And again, Vivek's, just, depth of knowledge, the way that he can talk – he's gone out on these podcast platforms.

He's offered – you can disagree with him, but he's offered attempts to solve a variety of issues from something that goes beyond a bumper sticker. And so, yeah, dismissing that as just youth and inexperience and things like that, it certainly didn't resonate with the people that I was watching with.

And I asked, you know, normal Republican voters that showed up there who they thought performed the best afterwards. And only two candidates got any sort of response. And it was Vivek that slightly outperformed DeSantis with our audience in terms of who they thought was best on stage.

**WOODS:** Well, not to mention he knows who his audience is whenever he's speaking, and he matches the level of his analysis to that audience. So, he can speak to the everyman, which is a very rare thing.

Because I'm sure you and I know some really smart people who nevertheless struggle to connect with the average Joe, but he is able to talk to them in ways that make sense to them. But at the same time, you can get him on a podcast about, let's say, a few months ago about Silicon Valley Bank.

And he knows all the ins and outs of the regulatory apparatus and what the correct approach is. And he will take a hard core free market position against everybody, with people saying to him: *Vivek, these are the kinds of people (the kinds of people who have interests in Silicon Valley Bank) that you're going to need to attract for your campaign.*

And he said: *Look, I'd rather lose them than make bad arguments to win them*. And again, I don't quote – because as soon as you start saying something favorable about a politician, people will say: *He worships him.*

I don't worship anybody running for president. Never have. I didn't worship Ron Paul either. But I'm saying that regardless of what he might have said three years ago, what I'm saying is, I'm analyzing the debate right now.

And I'm saying that in this debate, the significant thing is that somebody whose voice is uttering these sorts of things, which are absolute anathema to the Republican Party of eight years ago, is nevertheless getting tremendous attention and energy and interest.

That's newsworthy. Regardless of who he is or what his background is, that's newsworthy and that says something. But at the same time, Tho, now let's think about – let's spin different scenarios here.

It's very possible that things could happen between now and when the nominee is decided for the Republicans, that Trump is just taken out of the picture.

And they could have to do with his legal problems. Now, I wrote in my newsletter about Alan Dershowitz saying: Look, generally these cases are all going to be – even if he gets convicted, they'll all be overturned on appeal.

He says: *But the prosecutors are so cynical, they don't care if they're going to be overturned on appeal, because by the time the appeal comes, the election will be over.*

So, we can deplore (so to speak) that situation and say, he's being railroaded, it's a politicized Department of Justice, all this, all day long. The fact is, Karen doesn't like felons. That's just a fact. It's very, very hard to overcome that.

Let's suppose there's a scenario in which Trump takes himself out of the situation. Now, in terms of heirs apparent, you really are left only with Vivek and DeSantis. But you have against them the combined forces of a lot of the old guard.

You have Pence, you have Haley, people you thought were out of it for good. But if Trump leaves the picture, maybe that means that the old guard of the party is able to reorganize and combine their resources against the two semi-outsiders.

What do you think happens there?

**BISHOP:** So, I'm more optimistic in terms of how effective that old guard could be in changing the dynamics of the race afterwards. But I do think it's a very real possibility. You're already starting to see the trial balloon out there.

Right now, it's starting with California, about them invalidating Trump as a candidate. Beyond the actual convictions of, say, the federal felonies or things like that in terms of documents and that sort of stuff, but using the insurrectionist label as a means to keep him off the ballot at the state level.

Now, that's not going to be a national element, right? But if California does it, then, okay, fine, it's California. He's not going to win there anyway. You know, that really doesn't have a big effect in the Electoral College.

But then you think about some of these states that Republicans have lost in recent years. And the first one that comes to mind, in particular, is Arizona, where, again, all sorts of funny shenanigans within there.

Abe Hamadeh, who should have won that attorney general race, it seems very clearly, to me. Like, the most obvious example of, just, a fraudulent electoral outcome there. I mean, you still have hundreds of ballots that have not been fully taken into account of.

He lost by, I think, just over 100 votes. A Ron Paul baby in his own right. I was following that campaign closely. But you have no – so you have the attorney general that's a Democrat, secretary of state, a Democrat, the governor's a Democrat.

 It wouldn't be at all surprising to see Arizona take Trump off the table. And then all of a sudden you think about Wisconsin, you think about Michigan, you think about Pennsylvania. Georgia is a different situation.

Trump, just from a practical standpoint, is going to have an issue with Georgia because of the Kemp/Trump dynamic there.

But if you take Trump off the board in Arizona or Wisconsin or some of these states, then from a practical standpoint, how that ends up adjusting the process, where it doesn't matter if your outrage is: *Trump's getting screwed*.

It doesn't matter the emotional element there. If he can't be on the ballot in some of these states, then at some point Republicans have to really take that seriously.

Now, I don't think the party itself – and if the party does it, then that's probably the death of the Republican Party. Like, they will not forgive that betrayal there. But at some point, I wonder when the self-interest of Trump comes in here.

Because, again, if the Democrats win in 2024, the likelihood of him actually facing serious jail time goes up significantly.

And so, in that situation where Trump is taken off the board, right now, given how much animosity that Trump has directed towards DeSantis, where you have Trump people repeating absolutely insane lines, right?

Like: *Cuomo was better than DeSantis on Covid.* And that's sort of thing. The insane vitriol that has been placed on DeSantis's lap – I think utterly unfairly. I think this is a great example of the absurdity of the entire process.

**WOODS:** I agree.

**BISHOP:** DeSantis has plenty of faults, but he wasn't having affairs with underage girls when he was a student, like Trump's alleged in the past, and all that sort of absurdity. Vivek right now is in a very interesting dynamic where if you're a Trump guy – I mean, Trump seems to like Vivek.

There's been very kid gloves, even by Trump influencing on the sidelines that have been so malicious against DeSantis. It's DeSantis people that are going after Vivek. All the attacks on Vivek are coming outside (for the most part) of Trump world.

And so, the potential for an error there in that situation, Vivek, is in exactly the position I'd want to be in given the choice between anyone that's not Trump. And it's very fascinating. This is someone who I thought was – I thought Vivek would kind of be like a Yang sort of figure for the Democrats last time around.

Like, okay, he's interesting. He's going to utilize social media. He might have an issue here or there where he brings it into the mainstream, like the UBI issue and the Yang Bucks that Yang was pushing for. But outside of that, he's going to be a flash in the pan, never get above 5% or whatever.

But he has really taken on this life of his own. That is, to me, the story going forward, is that this is effectively a two-man race beyond the shadow of Trump. Christie is going to have his role to play. He's going to be the attack dog against Trump.

I have a feeling that he'll continue to be on the debate stage because of factors that will support it. Pence probably isn't going anywhere soon. But there's just no energy – you see in people like Nikki Haley, who you would think would have that old guard support, right?

Where that would have made her more viable candidate, particularly in South Carolina. Someone like Tim Scott, who doesn't have a lot of enemies. Nikki Haley has a lot more enemies than Tim Scott does, I think, with your average Trump voter.

Like, the average Trump voter thinks Tim Scott is a nice guy. They don't hate him. He still has not gotten any traction. So, I don't know which of those other old guard candidates could end up trying to make that play should you have that void created by Trump.

I think eventually all the Trump candidates – should you get that dynamic, I think they'll end up being split, Desantis versus Vivek. States will end up playing a big role there, organizations and things like that.

I have no idea what a Vivek organization looks like in an Iowa or in New Hampshire. But yeah, waiting for that shoe to drop is going to be interesting.

**WOODS:** Well, I wonder what Iowan voters – they're not going to come out and say it, but I wonder what they think about the fact that he's Hindu. Are they going to cast their vote? Are they going to caucus for him? On that issue alone, I wonder.

**BISHOP:** And you see him being very conscious, I think, about that. Because the way he talks, right? "We all believe in God." Right? He said it twice during the campaign. It's something that he resonates – it's a main part of his stump speech.

Where he doesn't ignore the religion issue entirely, so he tries to ground himself within a sincere belief in faith. He just dances around exactly what faith that is. And so, it's interesting to see that obviously he's very aware of it.

He's not trying to ignore that elephant in the room. But I will be interested, particularly when you consider some of what is going on within the right, where you have Christian nationalism in online circles as kind of, I think, a lot more of an assertive sort of dynamic.

I mean, I had a young person, an 18-year-old, that came out to watch the debate with us. And he was talking about your religious issues in the way that going to Ron Paul rallies and talking to 18-year-olds back in 2008, 2012, it's been a very different change.

Again, all of this goes back to, I think, the most interesting element, which is the impact that social media and podcasts and these alternative media outlets are changing the average conversation out there. Ron Paul was ahead of the curve on this.

This is now shaping the way that – it's gone from being the niche autodidactic "us nerds" to being the way that everyone is consuming it. And so, that's going to end up having very different calculations in the way that people consider something like Vivek's faith.

**WOODS:** We should say something about DeSantis. Even though he obviously was overshadowed by what was going on – because of course, the rules of the debate say if a particular candidate gets mentioned in another candidate's remarks, then that candidate who's mentioned gets a 30 second response.

So, if Vivek keeps getting attacked, he keeps getting an opportunity to respond. And so, that's very much at the expense of DeSantis, who is who was not really getting attacked all that much. But I would say that if we could set aside the Vivek show for a minute, Desantis still did pretty well.

For one thing, I think it was a very deliberate decision on his part, not really to engage with the other candidates – he engaged a little bit with Mike Pence.

But really, just to speak to the viewing audience, and feeling like that would make him presidential: *I'm not here to bicker with these people. I'm here to talk to you.* So, I think that's what he sought to do, and he did do that.

And secondly, he was able to say, credibly, that: *Other people on this stage may say, "I'm going to do X and Y." But I've actually done X and Y.* And the thing that really gets me is – again, I understand all the weaknesses of every one of the people we're talking about.

I already know that. I don't need commenters to point them all out to me. I know what all of them are. But all the same, if you are a conservative, let's say, which most of the people voting in the Republican primary will be, Ron DeSantis gave you a perpetual Christmas gift.

He was doing everything – and above and beyond anything you could expect a governor to do, he did. From appointing Joseph Ladipo as his surgeon general, all the way down to all the legislation that he signed, it was like a dream.

If you would come up with a list of things that you hoped some Republican governor would do, it would be that list of things. And you would say: No Republican governor will ever do it. He did it. And a year ago, all these people who think he's the worst guy in the world, they all loved him.

Exactly the same people. And then Trump says he's a bad guy and he's "Ron DeSanctimonious", and suddenly exactly the same people, even though nothing has changed in the interim, can't stand him. So, yeah, if I were DeSantis, I don't think I'd be able to restrain myself.

I would almost be willing to say: *Look, I have to just denounce these people and drop out. Because I have to denounce these people. You people are out of your minds*.

You might say: *Look, on balance, we know Trump has actually been in there. He knows what he's up against. He's got executive experience*. Whatever you want to say: *I think he's more trustworthy. He speaks to my heart more*. Whatever you want to say, go ahead and say that.

But you do not have to say that I'm basically no different from George Soros or something like that. I mean, this was ridiculous. It's to his credit that he really hasn't done that.

**BISHOP:** Yeah, it's such a difficult environment to be in. Because there's this insane double standard, hypocrisy is hierarchy, whatever. You know, I get it. I mean, we're talking about politics. War by other means. There's no crying in baseball. I get it.

But it's this dynamic where the way that Trump people attack DeSantis. I see them attacking him for not going far enough on, like, certain things they wanted to see done in terms of medical freedom issues.

Like, don't get me wrong, I would love to have seen those things too. I get it.

**WOODS:** Yeah I agree.

**BISHOP:** But, like, to be a Trump fan and your complaint is: Oh, DeSantis didn't go far enough in rolling back the environment that Trump created, it's extremely frustrating. And I think the most important issue – and it doesn't get brought up nearly enough – is what DeSantis is continuing to do in higher education circles.

I mean, the new college thing, that to me is something that could pay dividends in the long run in creating an environment where colleges don't have to destroy the intelligence of bright kids. I mean, that's an incredible thing.

And to your point, I do think – again, I'm surprised that you didn't have more Vivek/DeSantis conflict. I thought that was going to be Vivek's big play all night.

DeSantis did escape, I think, relatively unscathed from all the polls that I've seen afterwards, he was there, right neck-and-neck with Ramaswamy in terms of the way that people liked the performance there.

And so, he just has to survive to live another day. Because eventually you're going to have the consolidation of the stage. Eventually he's going to have more time to be able to go directly after the differences between him and someone like Vivek.

And so, I'm really surprised that he wasn't the bigger center of attention. But his campaign, I don't think, has helped. They ran a very controlled narrative around him. Like, I think they were overcompensating for his awkwardness, and so they would only give him airtime on very sort of controlled, monitored, favorable environments.

Like, he should've been out there like RFK Jr was, going into the weeds on his understandings of Covid. He's a smart guy. He should be in a position to show that off.

**WOODS:** He is. He's not a dummy. I mean, when I started watching those round tables he would do with these public health and medical professionals, he held his own with them. He knew the studies off the top of his head.

The Iceland contact tracing study early on in 2020. He knew that off the top of his head. I was very impressed with that. He's not some dumb jock that, I'll admit, I used to assume that that's kind of who he was. And I was wrong about that, and I apologize for thinking that. I was wrong.

He actually is a very impressive guy. But I think I disagree with you a little bit here. If I were this unknown candidate, and I'm kind of appealing to the same sort of people DeSantis is appealing to, I'm not necessarily going to go right after him because maybe I'll just irritate those people.

Instead, let me see if I can do a better job than DeSantis does against everybody else on this stage that they can't stand, and maybe I might be able to win them. Sometimes you win more with honey than with vinegar. I think that was actually a sensible approach for him to take. Maybe that wasn't the reasoning behind it, but that makes sense to me.

**BISHOP:** And I think it definitely worked out, in either case. And if the two can avoid kind of destroying themselves, I think the stage will eventually shrink to the two of them. Haley – I hate everything about Nikki Haley. I would not vote for Nikki Haley for anything.

But just objectively, I thought she was the next strongest candidate. If you want a Bush era foreign policy and you want the projection of competency, she had some good lines there.

Again, she went after – and again, this is something I wish DeSantis would have gone after for months now, is attacking the competency of the National Republican Party for failing on a variety of things.

She took up that mantle. And so, it wouldn't at all surprise me to see her going to take up whatever is remaining between the Pence and the Tim Scotts and that old guard. I think she did very well there in spite of all the differences.

But when the stage starts to shrink and you have less of the gadflies just trying desperately to get attention, I'm interested to see that real conflict in ideas between Vivek and DeSantis, trying to play towards a very similar dynamic.

Iowa itself is going to be such a fascinating battlefield, because this is where you would think that with the cultural conservatism that is baked in within what's always defined Iowa Republican politics, nobody has more scalps on the wall in terms of culture wars than DeSantis.

And it's easy to talk – I know Vivek talks a great game about anti-woke stuff. But those things should really matter. And so, the way that the calendar has played out. Again, I was just up in New Hampshire for a Medical Freedom Summit that the *Mises Institute* had with Dr. Peter McCullough and Aaron Kheriaty – incredible, incredible figures.

And it was interesting talking with Mises fans in New Hampshire, a lot of which, they had seen DeSantis. He's been doing a lot more campaign stops up there. He was impressing some people that otherwise are not easily impressed by Republican politicians.

So, the campaign is still – we're still very much in the early stages. It is such a weird campaign, though, because I can't think of the – it's the last time you had a former president actively running in a primary. Correct me if I'm wrong, but I'd assume it'd be Teddy Roosevelt in the 1912 campaign.

That whole dynamic of the way that incumbency advantage playing within a primary like this is such a fascinating change. So, how much of this early Trump support is obviously fueled by the prosecutions, the indictments and all that. I get that element.

And I feel that as well, when you just see just the extent to which the regime wants to destroy. And Trump, as imperfect as he is, that really helps. Nothing sells him more so than that icon of revenge, which has always been as big a selling point.

But I'm interested to see, now that we're really in – the game is really on now I think after that first primary. How this continues to play off, whether Trump continues to ignore the primary circuit, which it wouldn't surprise me. I expect that to happen.

 When does Trump have to really start taking notice of this process? And it's very possible he could just continue to run away with it. But I think it'd be incorrect to count out DeSantis at this point. But ultimately, though, his campaign has to continue to improve from what it's been so far.

Because that's been my biggest concern from the get-go with DeSantis. As someone who saw firsthand his campaigns in 2018 and 2022, I know that he won by a big number in 2022. The infrastructure was never particularly great. It was just coasting off of his reputation as governor.

That scaling on a national scale, we see that this is not that easy. Scott Walker, a great testament to this, back in 2016, whether or not he's able to learn some of these lessons and to get some of that energy. I think the debate did not hurt him in that regard, but it also wasn't a move that's going to, I think, catapult him further to where he is right now.

I think he succeeded at not hurting himself. In the short term, that's probably a win.

**WOODS:** Let's say a little something about Trump. I did not see the interview with Tucker, even though I have been consuming a lot of Tucker's material on "X" – I'm never calling it that. I'm sorry. I'm going to be 107, still calling it "Twitter".

But anyway, I didn't actually watch that. But of course, you can't fail to notice that there's no Trump at that debate. What is your thought about that? And I mean, I guess it was probably a fairly softball interview from Tucker.

What are your thoughts about that?

**BISHOP:** Honestly, I'm a big Tucker fan. But it was a very non-Tucker type of interview, to be honest. It was a total puff piece. He asked some questions that he's not going to get elsewhere. Like he asked him: *Do they think Jeffrey Epstein killed himself?* He asked him about: *Do you fear being assassinated?*

Trump kind of ignored both those questions. But it was a total softball interview, which was very disappointing from someone like Tucker, where he's so good at really holding people to the fire of having sort of no fear to him.

And that bothers me a little bit. Now, I get to a certain extent – obviously, one of the big issues that we'd want to grill Trump on is Covid.

And I get where Tucker might not be the person to push him on that since he was the one going to Mar-a-Lago saying: *This is a major issue. You need to treat this seriously. Stop ignoring it.*

So, I get why there's a built-in counterpunch from Trump on that particular issue that Tucker is not going to be the guy to hit. There's a variety of other issues when it comes to staffing – which Trump brings up. And of course, then he gets treated with kid gloves with Tucker.

And I get, obviously, there's always an aspect of playing a game there, but what made Tucker great on Fox was his willingness to not play by the rules that you expect to get on *Fox News*. This was much more – again, I'm not trying to be – this is a step too far, and I get it.

This was a lot more like a Sean Hannity style interview than it was a traditional Tucker Carlson interview. And I was interested to see the way that Tucker Carlson is going to try to interject himself within this primary.

I thought he did a great job, for the most part, when he was with the *Blaze*. And at the summit they had a few weeks ago, he was Tucker of old. But if he ends up in this dynamic where – I think DeSantis has helped create this problem.

I think Tucker does not trust DeSantis on Russia/Ukraine. And that is something that DeSantis has created in his own right. He gave a great statement to Tucker. He backtracked it when donors got mad. I think that broke a lot of confidence there.

And that's a major, major loss for DeSantis. But if Tucker is coddling Trump – perhaps out of a very rational desire, of: This is the only chance we have of avoiding further escalation and disaster. I get that impulse. But we need more from Tucker in terms of holding Trump accountable.

Because ultimately, again, if he is the nominee, if he is the president, Trump only reacts to a firm pushback from the base and from people that he wants to be liked by. And so, I would have liked to see more from Tucker in that regard.

**WOODS:** Yeah, that's disappointing then, because that's not good for anybody. It's not good for Tucker. Because I think that, of course the base will still like him. And I suppose I still like him for all the good things he does, but it undermines him in some way, of what it is that he is ultimately trying to be.

But so, having said all that, do you know off the top of your head when the next one of these is?

**BISHOP:** I do not. I was looking for the schedule recently. I think they're more spaced out than – I remember the Democrat cycle, it seemed like there was a debate every other week. So, I'm not sure that the next one, but I'm interested to see how they change the rules.

So, hopefully they'll restrict it. We don't need any more – I like the North Dakota governor out there giving good old small-town values. I respect that until he's opening up his mouth on foreign policy.

We don't need any more Asa Hutchinson on television anymore. Just ban it outright. Hopefully we'll have a smaller stage.

**WOODS:** Yeah, absolutely agree. What I'm going to be interested to see is, what are the new polls are going to say? And maybe by the time this recording comes out, there will have been some. Not so much polls on, who do you think won the debate? But which candidate are you supporting now?

I'm going to be very interested to see the reshuffling of the candidates. And where's Vivek in the pack now? Is he solidifying his number two status behind Trump? I would be surprised if it weren't that way.

**BISHOP:** Yeah, his numbers fluctuate significantly. The RealClear polling average has him at 7%. There's obviously polling out there that shows him neck-and-neck with DeSantis. And of course, that leads to another question about the credibility of the polls and that sort of stuff.

Fine, whatever. But we're going to deal with averages here. Right now, he's about 7% rank. I wouldn't at all be surprised to see that go up. Again, does that come at the expense of DeSantis? Is there a little movement on the edges of Trump world?

Are there more people that are the diehard Trump fan that says: *Okay, well, obviously I like Trump, but this Vivek guy, it satisfies some concerns I might have about electability and things like that.*

Who he takes away from relative to the rest of the pack – Desantis has plenty of critics out there that don't like what he did with Disney and some of these other things.

Maybe some of those people move into the Vivek camp as seeing him as the best non-Trump, non-DeSantis candidate. But who he pulls away from – because I do think we'll continue to see him rise. Again, at whose expense, is going to be interesting.

**WOODS:** Yeah. And he could be pulling from the undecideds, too, of whom surely there are many. Well, I wonder actually, now that I say that. In a primary season that has Trump in it, chances are you've probably decided one way or another.

**BISHOP:** Unfortunately, politics is nonstop these days.

**WOODS:** Yeah. Oh, geez, is it ever. All right. So, obviously everybody watching this, if you don't know what the *Mises Institute* is, I don't know what to tell you. But Tho Bishop has some role that he mentioned to us at the beginning that by the time we talk next time I'll need to ask him about it again.

But Mises.org is the website. You'll see what Tho is up to, Mises.org. But more directly, you can follow Tho on Twitter. "Twitter" is what we are calling it, @ThoBishop, as I do. I follow though very closely on Twitter.

So, thank you Tho. We'll do this again. Maybe we'll get one or two more commentators on next time, to talk about the next one. But thanks so much for doing this today.

**BISHOP:** And can I mention just two events that we've got coming up?

**WOODS:** Oh, please. Absolutely mention them. Yes.

**BISHOP:** One, on September 23rd, we've got a great event, Against Our Limitless Regime: An Empire of Lies, which is going to have Dr. Michael Rectenwald, Ted Carpenter (who was fired from Cato for being antiwar on the Ukraine/Russia situation) and Jonathan Newman.

We've got a great discount code for Tom Woods listeners, "WOODS50" at the registration there. You get about half off. And then we also have an event in Naples with the great Murray Sabrin that's going to be on the White House, the Fed, and the economy.

And that's going to be in November. So, if you're in the Fort Myers area, then come – nothing like a Mises event. Not only do we have great speakers, but the ability to talk in person with people that speak the same language. Always a good time, and I think your listeners will really enjoy this.

**WOODS:** Well, you know, I live in Florida like Murray, and I never get to see him. So, if I'm in town at that point, maybe I'll head on over to Fort Myers. So, you can always find out more about these things at mises.org/events.

And remember, for the one in Nashville, use code WOODS50. And because you're smart enough to be consuming content from the old man here, you get yourself a nice discount. Thanks again, Tho. Appreciate it.

**BISHOP:** Thank you for having me, Tom.