

**Episode 2,410: Democrats, Republicans, and the Middle East: Plus the Biden Record and 2024**

**Guest: Dan McCarthy**

**WOODS:**  So, Dan, I just thought I would have you on for kind of a potpourri discussion of what's going on in the world these days.

And in particular, you have a few recent columns from the *New York Post* – I mean, you're not confined to the *New York Post*, but that's where I read them – that seem to lend themselves to discussion.

So, you ready?

**McCARTHY:** Thanks, Tom. I'm always happy to join you.

**WOODS:** Thank you. All right. Well, the first thing though, isn't necessarily – although you hit on this in a recent column – but, the Israel-Palestine question. I actually this week just did a debate episode on that subject.

I brought somebody on from a pro-Israeli and a pro-Palestine position, and they argued it out – and I think fairly productively. I think some people thought it couldn't be done, but it was done right here on the *Tom Woods Show*.

So, we don't need to relitigate that, but what I am interested in is what this means for, let's say, the conservative movement or the Republican Party, which is a different thing. Because certainly it's been a while since the Middle East was front and center in people's minds.

Obviously, Ukraine has been front and center for a year and a half. And I remember even thinking that all those people back 15, 20 years ago warning us about Islamo-fascism must be almost out of business at this point.

And then suddenly, boom, this happened. And I was reminded of how sometimes how the conservative movement can be when it comes to an issue that is, let's say, dear to its heart.

All of a sudden, if you try to take a measured approach to what happened – even sharing the moral outrage, but just being cautious that we don't blow up the world in the process, all kinds of names were flung at you.

It was a really weird thing to observe. Do you know what I'm talking about?

**McCARTHY:** Yeah. And I think what you've seen here is conservatives (but also people on the left and perhaps even libertarians) have all been chopped up in different ways and reassembled, with the Hamas attacks, with Israel's response to the attacks, and where things are going next.

So, among conservatives – I should say, I saw you (perhaps on Twitter) saying a few things about how conservatives were responding. And it seemed like you were characterizing them as responding all in one way. And I think that's actually a mistake.

There seem to be, to me, three conservative responses to this. One of which is basically the immediate: *Back to the Bush administration 20 years ago, Islamo-fascism.*

Exactly what you had said, that there is a certain cadre of people who have always wanted to get the United States back into a big Middle East war, and they see this as the latest opportunity to do so.

These are the same people who really painfully regret the fact that we never got full force into the Syrian conflict. Although of course, we did, in fact get into Syria in many ways, but we never went in full force the way they wanted to.

And these were the folks who thought that Iraq was going to be a cakewalk and so forth. So, you certainly have that segment.

You have others (and I think Ron DeSantis falls into this category) who have very strong senses of support for Israel, who are eager to see Israel deal with Hamas once and for all, and who are willing to accept a very high price for that in terms of perhaps Palestinian civilian casualties and other collateral damage.

So, you have that segment, which is generally, in other respects, perhaps less interested in getting us into the Ukraine conflict, less interested in other kinds of foreign policy conflicts. But this is something that is a flashpoint for them.

And then finally, you have a third segment, which I think is perhaps not perfectly personified – nothing is perfectly personified by Donald Trump other than Donald Trump himself. But you actually do have a very strong across the board non-interventionist right, as well.

And so, I think you see some commentators and even a few, perhaps, members of Congress who are saying: What's happened in Israel is an atrocity. Israel is going to deal with that.

Israel is probably going to deal with it just as we did after 9/11, in a way that goes overboard and actually brings more blowback.

But this is all a situation for Israel to handle, and for Israel and Palestine and that region to handle. It's something that America really can't get deeply involved in. So, I think you see those three different segments among conservatives.

What's really interesting me is to see the fragmentation, really the crack-up, of the Joe Biden coalition over this. Because Biden is very much eager – of course, he went over there himself and got directly involved in this conflict.

And a lot of the Democratic base – not only that, a little bit of the antiwar left (what survives of it) has actually come alive as a result of this. But of course, you then also have a genuine, I think, anti-Semitic or anti-Israel left as well. And that, of course, is very much opposed to Joe Biden's foreign policy here.

So, on the left, I think you have an even nastier situation than you have on the right. Where you definitely do have divisions, but they're not quite as fundamental as some of the divisions you see with the Democrats.

**WOODS:** Yeah, I was thinking exactly the same thing, because obviously the so-called "squad" versus Joe Biden is a much wider chasm than we see, even among the extreme ends of the Republican Party.

Vivek Ramaswamy has been trying, I think, to take some kind of a different position from everybody else on this. I mean, I think what he's found is that it's kind of like in the early centuries of Christianity, when the doctrine of the Trinity was being developed.

I don't know if it was Augustine. Who was it who said something like, that almost no matter what you tried to say about the Trinity turned out to be a heresy. Everything you tried to say about it turned out to be wrong in some way.

And I think Vivek is finding that on the Israel question. That sometimes he'll say, obviously, very, very – these would be very minor dissents from the overall consensus.

Like, for example, he took a position that the dum-dums at Harvard who signed up for student groups that then issued statements blaming Israel alone for civilian attacks on Israelis, that maybe these dumb kids shouldn't necessarily have their entire lives ruined over this.

I mean, okay, that's at least debatable, Dan. It's at least debatable. And he was like – Megyn Kelly and the whole crew of them wanted to take his head off. And yet, in general, I think he falls into the Donald Trump category that you described.

That his view would be, this is a matter for Israel to deal with, but the US has absolutely got to stay out. And even Israel should probably – regardless of what it believes itself to be morally entitled to do, nevertheless, sometimes you're morally entitled to do something that could lead to such bad consequences it's better not to do it.

That's the sense I'm getting from him. The problem is how much of a constituency in the Republican Party is there for that?

**McCARTHY:** Well, what I think Vivek Ramaswami is doing is – I mean, he's shooting from the hip and he's relying on instinct. So, one of the sort of canards that is often leveled against him is: *Well, you're an outsider. You have no political experience. You don't know anything about foreign policy.*

But frankly, knowing nothing about foreign policy is better than getting everything wrong. Which is what the experts, of course, have done since basically 9/11, really – and in fact, even before that.

So, Vivek, on the one hand, I might criticize him for not fully thinking through his propositions before he voices them.

On the other hand, again, he's bringing some fresh air into all of this, which otherwise would be totally absent. So, he's no Ron Paul, but he is in fact, helping to just break up the absolute monotony of this caricature.

It's almost like professional wrestling, right? Where you have a staged fight between one side and another.

With the way our media talks about conflict in the Middle East, it tends to be these staged conflicts between these extreme positions of either that civilian casualties don't matter in Palestine, or that Israel is a settler colonial state and it can be denounced overall.

So, you have this kind of cartoonish tendency among the supposed intelligent mainstream people in the media. And Vivek, even though he's not an expert and he perhaps hasn't thought extremely carefully about this, he's actually less caricatured in most respects than many of the so-called experts.

**WOODS:** You mentioned internal division, certainly among the Democrats, and being more intense on this particular issue than the division among Republicans. But how about in general?

Not just the Israel-Palestine question, but in general, as a party, would you say the Democrats or the Republicans right now are suffering more from internal strife? And what would be examples of manifestations of that?

**McCARTHY:** You know, I actually think the internal strife is largely exaggerated in both parties, or was until this Israel-Palestine issue blew up. So, on the Republican side, the media wants to see Republicans tear one another to pieces, and so you always get this endless coverage of any kind of factionalism.

Of course, none of this was happening 20 years ago. So, when those of us who were supporters of Pat Buchanan, for example, were criticizing the neocons, you never saw your establishment liberal organs going out there and saying: *Oh, look how divided the Republicans are. Look at this Pat Buchanan position, which is being cast aside.*

No, no, they didn't even take notice of Pat Buchanan or the *American Conservative* and what they were saying about the Iraq War. They presented the conservative movement as being one seamless garment of interventionism.

Well, right now they can't do the same thing because, of course, Donald Trump has completely shaken up the Republican Party. But what they're doing is they're playing the opposite of the narrative from 20 years ago.

They're now saying: *Oh, look, you've got David Frum, Bill Kristol, and a half dozen other ex-Republicans who are criticizing Donald Trump or supporting other candidates or whatever. Therefore, the Republican Party is totally fractured right down to the very foundations, and it's having a civil war and so forth.*

That's not really what you see. And if you actually look at, for example, the Republican primary polling, it certainly suggests an overwhelming degree of support for Donald Trump. He's polling almost as well as you would expect an incumbent to pull.

Obviously, Donald Trump, he has a certain amount of baggage, so it's not surprising to me that he's getting numbers in the 50s or in the 60s, as opposed to getting numbers in the 70s or the 80s. But he's still overwhelmingly the choice of most Republican primary voters.

So, even if you have a handful of media people on the right (or supposed right) in Washington, DC or New York who hate Donald Trump, that's not really representative of any kind of division on the right in a serious way.

That's not to discount the fact that you do have maybe 10% of people now who support Ron DeSantis, who have some degree of fortified support for Nikki Haley, perhaps, coming from people who want to take her sort of very interventionist position after what's happening in the Middle East.

So, you do see some degree of differentiation among factions on the right, but really, it's overwhelmingly still the party of Donald Trump. And don't think the shenanigans happening in the House of Representatives right now for the speaker, I don't think that really changes things very much in terms of the actual party.

What's happening in the House is really a matter of the fact that you only have an extremely thin margin of control for the Republicans. Which means that any amount of personality differences, any amount of even minor ideological shades, can disrupt the easy transition from one speaker to the next among the Republicans.

And of course, we've seen even when the Republicans had much larger majorities, there was a lot of friction between people like Paul Ryan and the Freedom Caucus, or people like John Boehner and various groups in the party. So, all that is not changed.

On the Democratic side, Democrats, they did everything possible to shut out alternative voices like RFK, who's now had to leave the Democratic Party. He's now going to run as an independent. Cornel West has come in for a remarkable amount of criticism from left-wing outlets which previously would never have had anything negative to say about him.

Now they say: *Look, Cornel West hasn't paid some of his taxes or whatever, or hasn't paid some of his alimony*. That's kind of interesting, to see a hero of progressivism like Cornel West instantly cast aside because he's posing any kind of challenge to Joe Biden.

So, Democrats, certainly at the elite level, but even at the popular level, they have this sense that they have to hang together, or they will all hang separately. And that if they don't back Joe Biden to the fullest, they're going to be defeated by Donald Trump.

And of course, Trump has been outpolling Biden in recent surveys anyway. Now, the Israel-Palestine thing, I think, has shattered that. Because you have a hard left, which really does have some very ugly, violent views, and they celebrate anti-colonial violence.

That's what they stand for. You have Joe Biden, who really wants to be kind of Joe Lieberman Democrat, if he could get away with it, but he can't.

And then in the middle, you have a lot of people who really say: *Wait a minute. If we staged riots in 2000 based on the treatment of George Floyd in America, how should we react based on Israel's treatment of Palestinians in Gaza or the West Bank or anywhere else?*

If you have that mentality, that riots are easily justified and that police excesses in America are bad, you're going to look at Israel, which has a much tougher situation to deal with, and you're going to take some conclusions there, which are going to lead you to go out and protest in the streets in America and all across the world.

So, I think the left is existentially, philosophically divided over what's happening in Israel and Palestine. Whereas with the right, I think the difference is just between, again, interventionist and non-interventionist. And in general, the non-interventionists are the prevailing side here.

And there is some gray area as to, is there an exception for Israel where you do have more interventionism there? But in general, I don't think it's changing the map on the right the way it is on the left.

**WOODS:** Can we say something about RFK running as an independent? There's all kinds of speculation, and I guess maybe some polling data, on the question of, does he "take more votes" from the Republicans and the Democrats, from a Trump than from a Biden?

That's an interesting question. But also, the kind of Democratic Party that he's appealing to – the question is, to what extent does that still exist, even in a dissipated form of people who feel politically homeless out there but would like to be part of the Democratic Party, but they're just as disillusioned with it as RFK is?

Are there enough disillusioned Democrats? Are there enough who are so disillusioned with a Democratic Party that has Joe Biden more or less as its head, that they would be willing to vote independent for him? What do you think?

**McCARTHY:** Yeah, that was my initial thought about RFK challenging Joe Biden in the Democratic primary. So, Biden, I think, is still trading on the fact that he looks and tries to sound like a Democrat of an older generation.

At a time when the party was the party of Irish Catholics and Italian Catholics, and the party of a lot of people who thought of themselves as being mainstream Americans, they wanted to join the American mainstream.

And Joe Biden, they can think of him as – maybe he's an older version of Bill Clinton, or an older version even of JFK. And when RFK entered the primary, he was going to challenge Biden, then you see someone who actually is an heir to the Kennedy dynasty challenging Joe Biden for this sort of mantle as the figurehead of this older Democratic Party.

So, one question was, in the challenge between the two of them, who would get the mantle? Who would get to be sort of carry on the legacy of that kind of Democratic party? And the second question (as you've just asked) was, does that Democratic Party even exist to such a degree that fighting over that mantle matters?

I think what we've seen is that, first of all, it largely doesn't exist, which is why RFK really didn't catch fire in the Democratic primaries. He was doing okay. He was getting 10% or so, but that seemed to be his ceiling. If not for Biden and others trying to prevent him from having a forum, he might have done a little bit better.

But I still think probably not so well as to take the Democratic Party back to the era of the older Kennedys. And Biden, he's been trying to have it both ways. Biden has been trying to be, on the one hand, the kind of reassuring, avuncular, middle-American kind of figure, while also playing to the most radical cultural left and identitarian left as well.

And ultimately, it's clear that the future of the Democratic Party (and even the present of the Democratic Party) it lies in that culturally radical and identitarian party direction. It is not going to become the party of JFK or FDR again in the future.

But I don't believe, however, that that RFK is going to take more votes from Trump in a general election than he would take from Biden. And here's why. Because as we discussed a few minutes ago, I think the Republican coalition is actually relatively strong and glued together quite firmly.

And I think there are fewer Republicans who are unhappy with Donald Trump and are willing to dissent from Donald Trump than there are people on the left who are willing to descend from Joe Biden.

And you may not see that in the early polling right now when it's all an abstract question. But I think come November of 2024, Republicans are generally going to be very strongly united. And in fact, they're going to come out in huge numbers for Donald Trump.

Donald Trump is great for Republican turnout. Whereas with Joe Biden, I think people are going to say: Wait a minute. We elected Joe Biden thinking he could be the best of both worlds, that he could be progressive while also being a memory of this older Democratic Party.

And also that he would be competent, he'd be a return to the relative placidity of the days of Barack Obama. And in fact, all of that, all of those illusions about Joe Biden have been dispelled over the past three years. Joe Biden is not a return to placid times under Barack Obama.

Joe Biden is not progressive enough or left-wing enough for the left wing of the party, and he's also not middle-American enough for the old (now, basically evaporated) center of the party, or for independents who might just want to vote for someone that they think reminds them of their grandpa or their uncle or whatever.

So, there too, I think RFK is going to wind up hurting Joe Biden much more than he'll hurt Donald Trump.

**WOODS:** It may just be a trivial effect – because we do have to remember that Twitter, as I insist on continuing to call it, is not, in fact, real life.

But there was an RFK thread in which, after he learned of what Hamas had done in Israel, he more or less, despite the maverick reputation, reverted immediately to the standard boilerplate that I could have heard from Lamar Alexander or Mitt Romney (or Hillary Clinton, for that matter) on the subject of Israel.

And in that thread, it was one person after another saying: I thought you were going to introduce at least some kind of nuance to this question because you're the great maverick who's going to shake things up.

And you sound exactly like Joe Biden, so forget it. And it was just one person after another saying: Forget it, forget it, forget it, forget it, forget it. And maybe that's nothing. But it was all but unanimous, the response to him.

I don't know if that has any lasting effect, or that matters, or what. But there isn't, I don't think, a gigantic voting bloc around that particular issue taking that position. But it impressed me – let's say it left an impression on me, let's say, just how vocal the frustration with him over that issue was.

**McCARTHY:** Yeah, I think a lot of people who are looking for a maverick in the race and who want to see RFK as that kind of maverick, were going to be disappointed sooner or later. And this issue was probably the most obvious thing for them to be disappointed about.

But in general, RFK is mostly a conventional liberal. Now, not so much when it comes to vaccines, perhaps. There may be a few other issues. But on the whole bulk of things, he really isn't that much different from a typical progressive Democrat.

And in fact, he actually played an important role in getting Barack Obama to run for the White House back in 2008. So, RFK's maverick tendencies are largely a new phenomenon. Not entirely. He's always, you know, in terms of personality, been willing to stand out a little bit from other Democrats.

And that's why he has some friction with his own family. But really, people have wanted to project onto RFK a lot of things that just have never been there. That said, it does seem to me that – and we'll see how this works out in terms of ballot access.

But Cornel West is giving progressives someone who is firmly to the left of RFK and Joe Biden, especially on foreign policy. So, I actually think Cornel West is going to be an important player here. I guess with Cornel West, it's a question of, it seems like he's abandoned a bid for the Green Party nomination.

So, if he's going as a total independent, that may be difficult for ballot access. He and RFK may be competing for ballot lines in some places. But I think Cornel West is a factor in this election. And when we think about third parties, not only is RFK going to be something we have to think about, but also Cornell.

Well, he matters, in particular, because we've entered a period of American history in which sometimes razor-thin margins in particular states are going to determine the outcome. And he could amount to that razor-thin margin.

I don't follow him closely. Of course, I've known who he is for quite some time, but I didn't know he had abandoned going for the Green Party nomination. You would think for ballot access alone he would do that. I wonder what the dynamics are there.

**McCARTHY:** That was the last thing I heard. Now, I have not followed developments in the last 2 or 3 weeks here. What I heard a couple of weeks ago was that because it looked like RFK might go for that line and that Cornel West was thinking about not going for it?

Now, subsequently, it seems like perhaps RFK wants to be an independent, maybe won't be going for the Green Party line, in which case maybe Cornell will. So, all of that, I think, is still rather up in the air.

And don't want to give a kind of authoritative account here, because my own information is based just on what I was hearing about two weeks ago. Yeah. So, I just looked it up and it says that he's left the Green Party.

He's no longer running under the Green Party banner, he's going to run as an independent. But I don't get a whole lot of explanation exactly as to why that is. But as you say, obviously, if there was a chance RFK was going to go for it, then he's got to establish himself somewhere else.

But who even knows what RFK is exactly going to do? I still think that's somewhat up in the air, believe it or not. But all the same, let's change the subject a little bit and talk about a much, much less interesting person.

And I'm talking about Gavin Newsom. You had a column on the ambitions of Gavin Newsom. And I think he sees an opportunity, given that obviously Joe Biden's old, we can all see that he struggles from time to time. I don't make fun of him for that, but we can all see it.

And whereas, like it or not, Gavin Newsom is telegenic, and he's quick on his feet. And it looks like he's an ambitious guy who sees an opportunity to fill what is going to be a void once there's no longer a Joe Biden.

So, what do you think it is that – I heard that he actually took a trip to Israel. He was planning to go to Israel to indicate California's support for Israel. Well, obviously, that's a presidential – or at least future presidential candidate kind of thing to do.

So, what does he want to do? How does Gavin Newsom fit into the Democratic Party in the future?

**McCARTHY:** Well, he wants to run as soon as possible. And if he gets the opportunity to knock off Biden and Harris, he will take it. The question is whether he can get that opportunity. So, Biden is a very smart, old-fashioned politician.

So, even though it's transparently obvious to voters (mainstream voters, Democratic voters, everyone) that Joe Biden is not really capable, first of all, of fulfilling his duties as president. And second, there used to be this claim that was made: *Well, the only person who can lose to Joe Biden is Donald Trump.*

It's actually the case that maybe – I wouldn't say the only Democrat who can lose to Donald Trump is Joe Biden, but the polling data recent months is pretty clear. Joe Biden looks like a loser fighting against Donald Trump in 2024.

Democrats know this, but because Biden is a smart internal operator when it comes to politics, Biden and his team have basically lined up the Democratic Party nomination. They changed the order of the primaries.

They have plenty of internal support from black leaders in South Carolina, for example, which really saved Joe Biden's bacon back in 2020. Having Kamala Harris on the ticket also as a way of cementing – identity politics is a real criterion for the Democrats.

So, even though they know Kamala Harris is even less electable than Joe Biden, the fact is, you can't get rid of that heir apparent or heir presumptive because she checks the right boxes. She's a woman and she's black.

Of course, her ancestry is actually rather interesting and complicated because she has this kind of West Indian background and whatnot. It's all quite interesting. But in any case, she's a person of color, so she checks that box. And she's a woman, so she checks that box.

And so, you can't just have a white man like Gavin Newsom come in and say: *Well, but she's unelectable, so when we get rid of Joe Biden, we can't just automatically go to Kamala Harris.* We actually have to get rid of the whole Biden-Harris ticket.

That's a lot of friction to overcome between now and the Democratic nomination in the summer of 2024. So, I think Gavin Newsom is opportunistic. He's waiting. If an opportunity arises, he will pounce.

But he's also smart enough to know, right now he can't just waltz in and get the nomination. So, he's probably waiting for 2024.

**WOODS:**  You mean 2028.

**McCARTHY:** 2028. That's right. Yeah. Time is getting ahead of us. Yes, he's waiting for 2028. Of course, he's got this problem where on the one hand, if you wanted to create out of central casting out of Hollywood a somewhat charismatic, visually appealing Democratic candidate for the 21st century – again, he doesn't check the right racial and sexual boxes or whatever.

But otherwise he looks like someone that Americans would be happy to see on their television screens. But then, he's got this problem, which is he's governor of California. And I think most Americans in most states do not want their state to become like California.

I think an increasing number of Californians don't want to be like California either, which is why they're leaving California in droves and the state is losing population.

I think it's continually lost population for the last 3 or 4 years, which is remarkable. That hasn't happened in modern California history.

**WOODS:** Sometimes you hear stories about this or that place in the US that, upon closer examination, turn out to have been exaggerated. But when you talk about the condition of some of the cities in California, that's not an exaggeration.

You can visit Los Angeles and walk around downtown LA at night, and you will see many, many utterly lost souls wandering those streets. And it became even more striking to me, actually, when I was in Reykjavik a few weeks ago, because I don't think we saw any homeless people the entire time we were there.

Maybe one, but that was it. Nothing. Now Reykjavik is a much smaller city. What's it got? 170,000 people? I understand, but then, okay, it should have X percent of the homeless population of California. And it just doesn't have any.

Now there are there are a lot of potential explanations to why that is. But my point is that it was so striking because it just called to mind how – I wouldn't say apocalyptic, it seems walking around LA at night, but how utterly disheartening and tragic it is. And that is replicated in other places too.

And yet the astonishing thing is that there's really no outcry about it. Certainly, among progressives, there's really no outcry of: *My gosh, Gavin Newsom has failed us.* Or: *The mayor of LA has failed us.* It's like there's just no interest in it at all.

Unless I'm missing it, Dan, it seems like the only people complaining are Republicans trying to score points.

**McCARTHY:** Well, there are actually a few ex-progressives who have noticed what's going on and write about it on Twitter. And of course, they receive very little coverage from the mainstream media, which prefers to not talk about this very much.

And the *LA Times* can't completely turn a blind eye. It has to admit some of this. But of course, it doesn't draw any conclusions as to the competence of the mayors and governor in the state of California as a result of what's happened in LA.

It's also happened, of course, in San Francisco and many other locations there. But even beyond the obvious crime, drugs, homelessness, shoplifting, shops just destroyed, the loss of entire business communities and segments.

Even beyond all of that apocalyptic road warrior stuff – which is a reality, unfortunately, for many American cities, especially in California. The other thing about California is it's just too darn expensive to live there.

So, California's middle class is just feeling an incredible squeeze. You've got taxes, you've got regulations. It really is kind of the worst – everything that all of our Reaganite friends say about big government and its cost, that is embodied in Gavin Newsom's California.

And so, as a result, middle -lass people who may still be living in places that are relatively orderly, they don't have the kinds of problems San Francisco or Los Angeles have, at least not on those scales. They still can't afford to buy a home, and they can't afford to educate their children.

So, they're leaving and they're going to Texas, where land is a lot cheaper, where jobs are plentiful. Or they're going to Florida, they're going to these red states, Republican states, where cost of living is manageable, which it is not in California.

**WOODS:**  Now, I understand that there's a debate scheduled between Newsom and DeSantis? Did I get that right?

**McCARTHY:** Yes, I forget exactly when the date is going to be, but that's coming up.

**WOODS:** I think it's the end of November. So, did Newsom challenge DeSantis to a debate? Or was it the other way around? Or do you remember?

**McCARTHY:** I don't remember.

**WOODS:** I suppose the idea of this is that – and it's possible, by the way, that the idea was floated back when DeSantis seemed to be more likely to have, let's say, more polling success than he's actually had.

And maybe the idea of it (even if it wasn't Newsom's idea, at least the idea of accepting the challenge to debate him) was to position himself as a leader of his party, as a leader on the progressive left. That: *I'm the natural person to be the stand in for our ideas against Ron DeSantis.*

So, do you have any comments about this? I don't know if anything like this has ever happened in American history before. I mean, like, Newsom's not running for anything.

**McCARTHY:** You know, I think it has happened a few times. There's a famous debate that Ronald Reagan and Bobby Kennedy Sr had, I want to say around '67 or so, maybe even earlier. So, it was before Bobby Kennedy was actually running for president, if I recall.

But it was clearly, here are two leading figures of the next generation of leadership in the Republican Party and in the Democratic Party having a debate. Which was actually a very smart debate.

It was very interesting to hear Reagan and RFK Sr talking about, for example, Vietnam War protesters and their views on protests and on free speech rights.

Actually, a lot of that conversation would be a good conversation for today. And a lot smarter than most of what we're hearing from so many politicians and outlets right now.

But in any case, certainly you have leaders of two of the marquee biggest states in the nation, banner-carrying leaders of the Republican Party and the Democratic Party in the states having this quasi-presidential debate.

I mean, you're exactly right. That's obviously what it's setting up for both of them. In the case of DeSantis, I think he's probably made a miscalculation in taking this debate on.

**WOODS:** Really? Why?

**McCARTHY:** Oh, yeah. Well, first of all, DeSantis actually is running for president and Newsom is not. So, there is this sense that DeSantis is sub-presidential in doing this, that he's kind of desperate for attention in a way.

Newsom, he's just getting more attention. He's going from being a California governor to being a national figure.

**WOODS:** I don't know that I accept that, though, Dan. Because I could imagine there are a lot of us out there who want to see somebody debate Newsom.

**McCARTHY:** Oh, it'd be fun. Yeah. That's right. But think about this. I mean, how is the media going to cover this debate? Is there any scenario in which they say: *Wow! Ron DeSantis wins*. No. So, the coverage coming from the usual suspects is going to be pro-Newsom, anti-DeSantis.

There's also the fact, I think, Newsom is the more telegenic of the two of them. I think he's going to be the one that people who know nothing about politics – people who watched the 1960 television debate between JFK and Richard Nixon.

Nixon blows JFK out of the water in terms of intelligence, in terms of experience and so forth. But JFK was better looking. And so, certainly the conventional wisdom is that JFK won that debate, not based on his performance, but simply based on his appearance.

I think that's probably going to work in Gavin Newsom's favor. And I think in general, DeSantis has had a problem, first of all, projecting himself as something more than just the governor of Florida.

And second, projecting himself as more than just a champion for the Republican right. And a relatively narrow band of the Republican right, at that.

So, going into the Republican primary race, the main things is that people identified DeSantis with were Covid and trans issues. That's still basically what he's – and Disney, which is wrapped in with the whole trans and gay stuff. I think that's still how people identify Ron DeSantis.

When they think about, what's the great Ron DeSantis economic plan? Well, he can point to the fact that you've got a great economy in Florida, and that's wonderful. But again, that says: *Okay. Florida man, gays, trans, and Covid.*

And there's a strong segment of the Republican Party that prioritizes that. But that's not going to win you the 2024 election. It's probably not even going to get you very far in terms of getting the Republican nomination.

So, I think that DeSantis, even when I used to hear him before he was running for president – so, before he won re-election in Florida I heard him talk at the National Conservatism Conference maybe two years ago, a couple of things like that.

He was a very impressive speaker. But the thing I noticed was he wasn't a happy warrior. His speech was mostly red meat directed towards a conservative audience. And it was excellent in that regard, but I would come out of those speeches wondering, what is his range?

Can you expand beyond locking up the right-wing support? And can he get a more general, first of all, Republican, and sort of less, perhaps, focused on a couple of issues conservatives, more general conservatives?

And second, can he appeal to independents and crossover voters and whatnot. Donald Trump found lots of ways to do that.

And he did it often by, in some ways, making conservatives very angry, but nonetheless, he was intelligent about it. Ron DeSantis, I think, has cast most of his fortunes in the direction of: *Conservatives are going to come out for me in force and that's going to win the nomination.*

And unfortunately, that's kind of the strategy that a lot of people tried in 2016. Ted Cruz wanted to be the savior of movement conservatism. That didn't work. So, I think DeSantis has miscalculated there.

If he goes into a debate with Newsom and he focuses on his typical red meat for the right-wing points, again, I think Newsome is not only going to get the media's favor (which is to be taken for granted).

But a lot of ordinary Americans might say: *Oh, Newsom perhaps seems more relatable than this guy who's talking about issues that may seem Florida-specific or that may seem social conservative specific.*

**WOODS:** Well, I guess as I think about it, I haven't watched Newsom a lot because I can't bear to and I have no reason to. But he does seem very much at ease. He seems in command when he's engaged in public speaking.

And not that DeSantis isn't. He does come across as kind of wooden at times, or he comes across as annoyed and angry. Whereas I think the apparent effortlessness with which Newsom expresses himself can – again, to a voter who isn't necessarily tied to either side, can sway that person.

Because remember, a lot of times people decide who wins a debate, not on the basis of evaluating the data presented by both sides, but the one who seems more confident and in command.

And even though I know DeSantis knows, like, the Covid numbers inside and out, and he should be able to steamroll Newsom on an issue like that, he can't, I think, do it with humor and grace.

And he doesn't seem debonair, and unfortunately, this is human nature. And so, so that's too bad, because on paper I would like to see – but the thing is, you know that Newsom will be prepared for obvious things DeSantis is going to say.

So, he's going to say that it was a mistake to close schools. I'm sure he's got some crazy answer, but he's got an answer. But more than that, I'm sure DeSantis is going to say: *People have been leaving your state to come live in mine.*

He has to be ready for that. So, I'm not saying he's got a super persuasive answer, but I have this concern that what I assume will be natural home runs for DeSantis might only be a single or a ground rule double, maybe.

And that's not enough. That's not enough. He's got to decisively win this thing.

**McCARTHY:** Yeah, I will say that I think the upside for DeSantis on this debate (and in fact, with his presidential campaign, which I think has been a disappointment to him and to his supporters) is that you do need this practice.

And the fact is, you don't know your strengths and weaknesses until you're actually put to the test. And once you know your weaknesses and you know where your strengths are lacking, you can actually go out there and improve.

And when DeSantis was thinking about getting in the race, I wrote a column pointing out several reasons why he probably shouldn't. But the advantage is, even if you lose the race, you've still raised your profile and you have learned something about your own strengths and weaknesses that you can apply to 2028.

So, this could be a very important debate even if DeSantis winds up coming out of it the worst in terms of perceptions. This could still be a very important debate for what it sets up for 2028, where it's entirely possible that both of those men will be the nominees of their parties.

**WOODS:** Yeah. So, obviously DeSantis is busy right now, but I would prepare for this the way presidential candidates normally prepare for debates. Like, when David Stockman stood in for both John Anderson and Jimmy Carter to get Ronald Reagan up to speed.

I think he should find a really, really good Gavin Newsom. And that can have a tremendous effect. David Stockman tells the story on my show of, at the beginning of the week, they would be doing these mock debates, and Stockman would make a point and Reagan would say: *All right, what's the answer?*

But by the end of the week, he knew everything. He was ready to go. It was absolutely worth doing. One other thing. You wrote a column not long ago about Joe Biden and inflation.

Now, whether or not we can say that the inflation is necessarily Joe Biden's personal responsibility, nevertheless, the person who's in office – people are going to associate rising prices with that person. That whatever the rights and the wrongs of it are, they're going to be associated with Joe Biden.

Now, we have seen Paul Krugman say: *Well, as long as we don't include all the things people spend a lot of their money on, inflation is fine.* I think that's a very, very lame response.

Because even if the increase in the rate of inflation has slowed, those are the things – I mean, literally, feeding your family is the thing that you're particularly concerned about. And how you're going to live? Are you actually going to have living space and be able to make those payments?

This is a big, big deal for a lot of people. The issue is – I mean, to me that this has got to be killing Joe Biden. Because yeah, everybody wants to say: *I don't like Donald Trump, and good thing we voted for Joe Biden.*

But in their heart of hearts, some of them have to be saying: *My paycheck just doesn't go as far, and there's no debating that.* So, this has to hurt. It has to keep hurting, though, all the way through into November of 2024.

If it doesn't, then what are the – I mean, yeah, maybe Biden has a position on trans issues that some Democrats, deep-down old-fashioned Democrats aren't comfortable with, but that's not going to change their vote.

Is there any other issue that is likely to seriously hurt him, do you think, other than inflation?

**McCARTHY:** Yeah. Also crime, which I talk about in that same column. So, I mean, with inflation there's the damage of rising prices at the supermarket, and for all the things that people buy.

And there's also the problem that when you have to get inflation under control, you have the Fed raise interest rates and you generally take some austerity measures. And those are also unpopular.

So, high interest rates as well as high prices in the supermarket are both things that are unpopular. And there's probably – I think there is – a transition point where people are still feeling the sort of harm of inflation, the burden of inflation, while they're also feeling the pain of the medicine that is treating the inflation.

So, who knows, between now and November of 2024, maybe both the pain of the disease and the pain of the cure will have gone away by then, but I wouldn't bet on that. One of the things that I wrote this column about is that I realized there's a delay in terms of ordinary voters' sensibilities.

So, back in 2020, I thought things were going very badly for Donald Trump for a lot of reasons. But the one thing I thought that Donald Trump might have in his favor was that you obviously had skyrocketing crime rates, you had riots and so forth.

And you would think in that kind of environment, how can people possibly vote for Democrats who are going to make things worse, Democrats who are going to perpetuate the problem?

And when voters didn't, in fact respond to crime in 2020, and then in 2022, in last year's midterm elections, when a lot of us were really complacent and thought Republicans were going to do really well in the House and in the Senate.

Simply because inflation was out of control, and you still had high crime, therefore, voters would respond to these sort of most basic fundamental quality of life issues by throwing out the party that they blamed for them, the party in power and putting in the alternative, which is going to be the Republicans.

And that didn't happen. So, after 2022, I started thinking, gee, do ordinary voters just not care about muggings and murders? Do they not care about prices at the supermarket? Do they not care about gasoline prices?

And all of these sort of conventional, bedrock assumptions about voter psychology and how politics works, maybe they're all wrong.

Maybe people are so brainwashed by progressive propaganda that they're willing to forget about their checkbook and forget about the safety of their family in the streets, and maybe they're just going to vote for the woke party.

And think I was wrong about that. I think that was the wrong conclusion for me to draw. That basically, people just have a delayed reaction.

Because people who are not soaked in politics the way that even we are, to say nothing of political professionals and campaign consultants and whatnot, they're not thinking about inflation in quite as immediate a way, I think.

They're thinking: *Oh, this is terrible. But they're willing to give the system a chance to kind of get it under control.*

And when they realize after a year or two: *Wait a minute, this is not going away. Even if it's even if Paul Krugman says it's moderating, this is not bringing prices down. This is just meaning they're rising a little bit less fast.*

Well, people realize that this is horrible. This is a lot worse than it was four years ago. I think similarly, when they look at crime, they say: *Wait a minute, this is not just about George Floyd. This is not just about a blip. This is now the normal condition of America's cities*.

And it's a condition that America's other localities could descend into at any moment if you do to the police what has been done to the police in the major cities. New York, of course, is actually an exception to that.

You sometimes get these people who think that New York is the crime capital, but it really isn't. That's partly because the New York City police is still a very powerful department, and they still keep a very high degree of order. But in some of these other cities, it's lawless now.

**WOODS:** If I were somebody like Trump who has high negatives in this situation, I think I'd make an ad along the lines of: *Look, I know a lot of people don't like me, but I bet there's something you like even less.*

And then I would just show prices of things that are wild. Or I'd show rioting. I'd show evidence of crime, headlines, whatever. And say: *Okay, I'm not winning a popularity contest among some people. But I think we can agree, nobody wants to live like this.*

Like, you don't have to want to have dinner with me. You don't have to play racquetball with me. But I'll tell you, I'll fix these problems for you. And you don't have to tell anybody you voted for me. I mean, I would even do it kind of tongue-in-cheek like that.

But, like, we all know in our heart of hearts, this can't go on. Nobody wants this. You want this even less than you want me. I don't think this is Trump's personality, but honestly, this would be front and center. Just relentlessly pound away at it.

And maybe even resurrect the old, *"Are you better off now than you were four years ago?"* line. That was a very, very effective line in the '80s.

**McCARTHY:** Yeah, I would definitely resurrect that. And I think that is an easy metric for ordinary voters who don't even want to think about the candidates. They just want to think about their own quality of life. That's an easy win for Trump and the GOP.

One of the columns I wrote recently is about this kind of paradox you get with Donald Trump. Donald Trump is very good for Republican turnout. He will get Republicans to the polls that otherwise would stay home.

But, of course, he's also very good for polarizing the electorate and bringing out a lot of Democrats as well. And that has non-symmetrical effects, because Democrats and their voters are concentrated in the cities.

Now, that means if you have a state where the gubernatorial or the Senate race is going to tip, depending on the turnout in the cities or tip depending on the turnout outside of the cities, the Donald Trump effect of maximizing turnout on both sides could affect things one way or the other.

So, there are some states where Donald Trump will – he's good for Republicans in the House in general, because the House is relatively less representative of urban districts than it is of diffuse districts.

If you pile all your voters into one congressional district, yeah, you win one congressman, but that's it. So, having voters that are more spread out is the advantageous thing in House races. So, Donald Trump is good for House Republicans, and I expect they'll do quite well next year.

The Senate, it depends. It's a coin toss, depending on whether maximizing the GOP turnout in a state or maximizing the urban turnout in a state is going to affect those statewide races. And then at the presidential level, of course, what it actually is is 50 statewide races, not one national race.

So, really what happens is the presidential level is going to reflect what happens at those gubernatorial and senatorial levels in terms of who benefits from the maximum turnout. But then going back to the beginning of our conversation, I think the Republicans really are more unified here than Democrats are going to be going into 2020.

Not just Democrats, but Democrat-leaning voters. A lot of people who gave Joe Biden a chance back in 2020 and who thought there were a lot of things going wrong in 2020. Donald Trump was in charge, and they said: *Okay, this must be Donald Trump's fault*.

Now they see that those same things (and in many cases, maybe even worse things) are also going wrong with Joe Biden in charge.

And they're going to say: *Well, look, Joe Biden's not only not the fix to this, he's also just way too old to be president. And a lot of things have gone to hell in foreign policy and other things while Joe Biden's been in charge that were never screwed up when Donald Trump was in charge.*

I think people are going to give Trump the benefit of the doubt rather than Biden.

**WOODS:** All right, Dan, so the link for *Modern Age,* which is a periodical smart people read is ModernAgeJournal.com. So I'll put that in the description of the video and on our show notes page, TomWoods.com/2410.

And I'll also put a link to your archive of columns. You're a syndicated columnist, but as I say, I read them on the *New York Post* because I follow them on Twitter. And that's just the easiest way for me to find them.

So, I'll put your archive up there as well. Is there anything else I should do?

**McCARTHY:** No, I think that covers it. I've written some recent pieces for the *New Criterion* and for a new sort of libertarian-ish publication called *Fusion*. But those are farther afield than most of the topics we've discussed today.

**WOODS:** Okay, well, those will be the links. I'll have them down below, and at TomWoods.com/2410. Thanks so much for your time today, Dan. Always appreciated.

**McCARTHY:** Thanks, Tom.