



## Episode 587: The Screwed Up GOP

Guest: Matt Lewis

**WOODS:** We were just saying before we started that I've been on your show, and I've used that appearance as an episode of this show, so I'll link that. If people just can't get enough of the Woods-Lewis rapport here, then we'll give them more of what they want at [TomWoods.com/587](http://TomWoods.com/587), where I'll link to the chat that I used as an episode of my own show.

**LEWIS:** Awesome. No, I just want to say, not to suck up, but I'm a huge fan of the show. Love the history. I mean, you can learn from it, and the fact that you can have civil and smart discussions and not get mad at people if you don't 100% agree, it's so rare and so appreciated.

**WOODS:** Well, I appreciate that. That's very kind. All right, let's talk about your book *Too Dumb to Fail*. First of all, I don't quite understand the title. Explain yourself.

**LEWIS:** So this is the phenomenon whereby if a candidate or a pundit says or does something stupid or crazy, they actually go up in the polls. And it's also an allusion to the Andrew Ross Sorkin book *Too Big to Fail* about the financial crisis. In that case, you had these perverse incentives where financial institutions took on risks, and collectively we all ended up having to pick up the tab.

And I see the same thing happening in the Republican primary, where you have these perverse incentives. If I'm a politician, I have an incentive to say or do something stupid; I'll go up in the polls, even though collectively I think conservatism and the Republican Party suffers. It's really the tragedy of the commons problem in game theory. And this is really happening with punditry. You know, when Ann Coulter calls Muslims "ragheads," you know, she does well. She sells more books; she gets buzz and attention, but collectively I think that it does harm conservatism and Republican candidates.

**WOODS:** You know, I don't like political correctness any more than the next guy, and I think it's stifling and terrible and totalitarian, but I do encounter some people, especially conservatives, who feel like just being a boorish, disgusting human being is — they're being unjustly put upon by political correctness, and so they're going to respond by just being boorish and over-the-top offensive. And I hate using the word "offensive"; it's such a girly word, frankly, but you know what I'm saying? That

phenomenon is all over conservative punditry. I mean, Ann Coulter might even be the least of the offenders. A lot of these youngsters think that they're going to show how tough and conservative they are by showing how obnoxious and boorish they can be. I don't really want to deal with people like that. Like, that's their big issue? Can I be as obnoxious as possible? Like, that's your stand for liberty?

**LEWIS:** Yeah, I couldn't agree more. I think, look, political correctness has run amok, and I hate the whole, like, word police people who are hyper sensitive, and as George Carlin used to say, they want me to call that thing in the street a "personhole cover," that is ridiculous. To me, it comes down to motives. What are your motives? If you are saying or doing something because you believe in free speech or because frankly you're just trying to communicate a message that you believe in, I'm okay with that.

My concern is I think there are a lot of people now — it's a cottage industry of people who, their motives are not pure, and actually it's selfish. They're attempting to be provocative and controversial, and if it hurts the conservative cause or the Republican Party — and by the way, you know, I am a conservative. I do have some libertarian leanings, but I am a conservative, and I think it's worth fighting for. I think it's conservatism in the tradition of Edmund Burke and even Aristotle, it has a proud intellectual tradition, and it bothers me when people I think exploit it for their own personal gain.

**WOODS:** I want to talk about how you begin the book. You give a very basic and brief overview of the history of the conservative movement in the United States, and then you get to the 1964 election. You talk about Barry Goldwater, and you say — and I'd like to hear you flesh this out — that this is where the seeds were sown for one of the problems that the conservative movement has today, which is a strain of anti-intellectualism. And you hasten to point out, this is not something Goldwater himself would have wanted. Goldwater himself was a reasonably serious thinker. So what exactly do you mean by that? How did that come out of the Goldwater campaign as far as you see it?

**LEWIS:** Right, so I admire Barry Goldwater, and if it wasn't for Barry Goldwater you don't get Ronald Reagan, so I think that conservatives and Republicans at the time, of course — and by the way, this is the interesting thing, Tom. I'm old enough to remember when the establishment were these moderate, literally Rockefeller Republican liberal types. And now the establishment I guess is the Club for Growth, somehow, you know? So things have really changed.

I do think that one of the interesting things that happened in the 1964 campaign is that Barry Goldwater runs — and if John F. Kennedy had lived, it could have been a very high-minded campaign about ideas. There was talk about Kennedy and Goldwater traveling the country together, doing these kind of Lincoln-Douglas-style debates. But instead what happens is you have JFK assassinated, and you have Lyndon Johnson become the Democratic nominee, and he ran on this scorched earth campaign. We all remember the infamous "daisy" ad where he went after Barry Goldwater and tried to cast him as this lunatic who would bring about a nuclear holocaust if he were elected.

It was a really scurrilous and just horrific example of negative campaigning against Barry Goldwater.

But what happens is after that race is over, Goldwater gets just 38% of the vote, and I think he won six states. And a lot of the activists who, you know, come out of the Goldwater movement, some of them actually disappeared. They became disenfranchised and frustrated. They left politics forever.

But some of them actually decided, well, let's try to learn from this experience. Let's learn how we can win in the future, and they basically came to the conclusion that being right isn't enough to win, that being philosophically correct isn't enough to win, and that the way to win is to study political technology. How do you knock on doors? How do you run TV ads? How do you organize and communicate? And there's nothing wrong with that. That's very — participation in democracy is very noble. And so a lot of the Goldwater folks who came out of it simply became better campaigners, better organizers. They started think tanks. They started training activists.

But I do think there was a negative message that came out of that, which is that negative politics works. It's that if they're going to accuse us of these horrific things — if they're going to bring a knife to a fight, we have to bring a fight. You know, they put one of us in the hospital, we put one of theirs in the morgue. And I think that really did sow the seeds of the sort of dumbing down of politics. It's not about ideas; it's about campaigning and organizing.

**WOODS:** Right, right. Yeah, I can see that. I can definitely see that. Now, I'm particularly sensitive about this claim about negative campaigning, because I think it really, really got started, that people really focused on negative campaigning and criticized it in the 1988 election when you had George H.W. Bush and Mike Dukakis, because Bush ran this notorious ad about Willy Horton, who was a criminal who went on to commit, I don't know, some horrific crime while he was out on furlough under Mike Dukakis' prison furlough program in Massachusetts. And this was just declared to be totally out of bounds.

But in general, I thought there wasn't enough negative candidate in the sense that I lived in Massachusetts. I knew the truth about Mike Dukakis. Nobody else seemed to, except those of us in Massachusetts. He was going around saying we had this Massachusetts miracle of economic growth, and I want to bring that to America. What he left out was he vetoed and fought against every single leg of the program that gave us that economic growth. I mean, he was an obstacle that stood in the way of every good thing that had gone on in Massachusetts, and we wanted people to know that. How are you going to convey that without a negative ad?

**LEWIS:** Oh totally, and you know — what's the alternative? Banning negative ads and stifling free speech and free expression? I mean, that would be the worst backlash. And as you know, negative campaigning's been around forever. You go back and look at what John Adams and Thomas Jefferson said about each other. In some cases it makes today's politics look tame in comparison.

But having said that, I do think it's part of the story about what happened to conservatism. I mean, there was a time when conservatism was actually considered to be too intellectual, too full of these — you know, whether it was Bill Buckley or Hayek or Russell Kirk — too populated by these intellectuals who were removed from Joe Sixpack, you know? And I think this is the beginning of the story, at least of the modern story of how we go from the movement of Edmund Burke and the party of Ronald Reagan to Sarah Palin endorsing Donald Trump and giving that crazy endorsement speech about this is for holy rollers and rock and rollers. I think that's part of the story as to how we got to where we are today.

**WOODS:** But at the same time, I think — even though I think *National Review* has fallen to a much lower level than it used to be — I mean, imagine a magazine — whether you agree with these people or not, imagine a magazine featuring James Burnham, Russell Kirk, Frank Meyer, people like this on a regular basis. And I just don't think there's even a comparison to what they have today.

But yet, the Trump phenomenon is clearly a rebuke of the conservative movement. It is a — which I think some people still view as still being too intellectual. It still has its think tanks; it still has its highbrow magazines. But we are here in the heartland, and we're connecting to this regular — well, regular guy — multibillionaire. But we're connecting to somebody who just is plain spoken and just doesn't give us the same old Mitt Romney talking points that we keep getting from you people every four years.

I mean, I don't think we can just say, well, anti-intellectualism swept the board inexplicably, and now what are we going to do. I mean, these people are to blame. The product the conservative movement is serving up to the general public is not an impressive one.

**LEWIS:** Yeah, I think there's a whole bunch of factors that have culminated that help explain the rise of Donald Trump, some of which I think is Barack Obama's disastrous presidency. Some of it I think is, you know, nominating people like Mitt Romney, who — my dad was a prison guard. My dad would have probably held his nose and voted for Mitt Romney, but — who was it? Mike Huckabee said something about — I'm paraphrasing here, but it was like Romney doesn't remind you of your dad; he reminds you of the guy who fired your dad.

**WOODS:** That's a good one.

**LEWIS:** (laughing) I think I'm slightly off with the paraphrase, but it was somewhere in there and it was pretty astute. So I think there are a lot of people to blame. Look, I love the fact that — and I write about this in the book — the Frank Meyer fusionism and the way that conservatism sort of came together and infused traditionalists and libertarians, and it was very diverse. And it's become I think less diverse, probably more of a neoconservative consensus, at least on foreign policy. And I think that's certainly part of the story.

I do think that Donald Trump is tapping into an anger and a frustration out there, mainly among working class white Americans who believe the American dream has left them behind. You used to be able to graduate from high school, get a factory job, make \$15 an hour, provide a middle class lifestyle for your family. Those days are gone. You can blame automation. You can blame capitalism if you're on the Bernie Sanders left. You can blame immigration. You can blame, you know, all sorts of things – globalization. There are a lot of boogeymen here that I think are partly responsible.

But you know, Tom, I've been listening to your podcast, and one of – I share a lot of your concerns about Trump, even though I'm respectful of a lot of the good Americans – and by the way, even the best of families have Donald Trump supporters. I have a brother-in-law, for example, who's a Trump supporter. A great guy, a smart guy. I think misguided. I would say, among the many concerns I have for Trump, I think I share with you the concern that he has these authoritarian tendencies that I find pretty troubling.

**WOODS:** Well, I think it's part of his personality. It is very much – I think the Teddy Roosevelt comparison is quite apt, because his personality was very much that of the dominating figure who cast himself as the personification of the will of the people, so why should I honor in any way any institution that's standing in the way of me and the implementation of the will of the people? So I see some of that in Trump, but you know, I have to say, Matt, I am having trouble getting as agitated about Trump as other people are, simply because my question is always what's the alternative. What's the alternative that's being presented to me in the race? Now, there is Ted Cruz, but Cruz and Trump are by and large struggling for the same block of voters, and that as – I had Dan McCarthy on the show a couple of days ago talking about exactly that and saying that that's what's opening the door for Rubio.

**LEWIS:** Yeah.

**WOODS:** Rubio has the rest of the field. He's got the establishment; he's got neoconservatives; he's got people who are just uncomfortable with Trump and Cruz. He's got that whole field almost to himself, and probably in a matter of days from now, you know, just for all practical purposes, to himself. And when I look at Rubio, I just panic, because I see another George W. Bush. I see a guy not particularly bright who's going to be dominated by almost certainly the very bad people he's going to put around himself. And if I'm somebody who's supposed to respect Edmund Burke, then I just cannot imagine what the compatibility is between that and the idea that the United States was created to be a global democracy spreading human rights. I don't see that those are compatible.

**LEWIS:** Well, I would say that when it comes to foreign policy, I probably shake out most in the Ted Cruz camp. I'm somewhere in the middle. I think it's a Reagan space actually, and I don't mean it be a cop out, but on one hand I do believe that it's important for America to be this, you know, beacon of hope and to have a place in the world. On the other hand, I think that spreading democracy and adventurism is very

dangerous, and there's really not much of a doubt that we're worse off now as a result of Iraq.

I actually think Rubio — there is a lot that I like about Rubio. I think he has a chance to actually — he's incredibly eloquent. I love his story about the American dream, you know? When he talks about how his dad was a bartender, and he says that journey from behind that bar to behind this podium is the essence of the American dream. I think it's powerful; I think he's eloquent; I think it really resonates with a lot of Americans who aren't traditionally Republican or conservative. And I think that Rubio, if he were the nominee and if he were the president even, has the potential to win over 21st century voters who I think might otherwise think of themselves as liberals, just sort of default liberals.

And I'll tell you why. It's something that I talk about a lot when I talk about the book, but you know, the lady who gets on her smartphone and orders an Uber and goes some place and gets on the smartphone and now orders a StubHub, she should be a conservative, because she obviously doesn't like onerous governmental regulation. She's entrepreneurial. She's probably managing her own stock portfolio. I find it hard to believe she's going to trust a big, bloated bureaucracy to manage her retirement funds. So she should be conservative, and I think she will be as long as her idea of what a conservative is isn't this cultural shortcut of Boss Hogg with a rebel flag flying in the pickup truck.

And I think Rubio appeals to these kinds of Americans, and I think Rubio can make the argument that, look, what Hillary Clinton's selling is a 20th century, command and control-style, assembly line version of liberalism. I think he's really kind of uniquely positioned to make that argument. I do share your concerns, however, and it's not a small thing. I do share your concerns about his foreign policy and his penchant for wanting to be involved in pretty much any skirmish. I would like to see maybe a Rand Paul in the administration whispering in his ear.

**WOODS:** All right, let's pause for a brief message and come right back.

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All right, we're talking about your book *Too Dumb to Fail*, and you've got in here quite a few criticisms of different conservatives and different strains of conservatism and different I think what you consider to be dead ends in conservatism that are holding back its success. So pick one of those, and let's talk about it.

**LEWIS:** Well, so much to talk about. I will say I started about five years ago, is when I started noticing the dumbing down of conservatism, and it was when you had, like, Sarah Palin, whom I originally kind of liked, went rogue, and you had Christine O'Donnell and Sharron Angle running, and they were playing this what I would call identity politics card, and they were playing this victim card. You know, like, woe is me; the establishment's keeping us down. And really that cuts against what I think of as a conservative, a rugged individual, somebody who finds a way to succeed. And to

me that's sort of this dumbing down problem. I am concerned about — what's happened is we've lost sight of what real conservatism is, and what we have is these cultural shortcuts and what we think a conservative is. And we think it's somebody who is, whether it's rural or whether it's somebody who lives in a McMansion, somebody who has the rebel flag in their pickup truck or whatever.

I'll just tell you one thing that I wrote about in the book that's a weird departure maybe, but I think your audience would like it is, is new urbanism. And even though I don't love that term, I am a fan of this sort of Russell Kirk — you know, he talked about the car being the mechanical Jacobin, and this notion where if you're a conservative you don't have to live in a McMansion in the suburbs. One of the things that I enjoy is living in a walkable community where you can walk to church, walk to bars, walk to schools, walk to restaurants. And this is an idea that I really got turned onto by Rod Dreher in his book *Crunchy Cons*. So I know that's a lot of stuff to unpack, and this maybe gives you a sense of how kind of far-reaching and I hope interesting this book is.

**WOODS:** Well, it is an interesting book, and I have to say I find a lot to disagree with in it, but I also find a lot to agree with, and I think in many cases the same annoying people annoy both you and me. So that's a very important thing to have in common. Yeah, I mean, that stuff about the new urbanism is fine with me. I read about it in the *The American Conservative* magazine, for example. They have representatives of that in there, and that's fine with me. I think the conservatism is really, though — it is supposed to be fundamentally something that emerges that's small and local.

**LEWIS:** Right, exactly.

**WOODS:** So that's an expression of that, that you think about the actual neighborhood that I live in.

**LEWIS:** But the interesting point is if you don't have a conservative worldview and if you're not familiar with that sort of Burkean, the little platoons form of conservatism, you believe — what is conservatism? Well, it's listening to Rush Limbaugh. It's driving a big SUV. It's throwing your McDonald's wrapper out the window when you're done or whatever the negative stereotype is. And I guess the point I'm making here is sort of illustrating that real conservatism in a Burkean sense is really quite a departure.

So when people — and this hasn't happened much. I've actually been really happy by the response to this book. It's been really well received by a lot of conservatives. I'm very happy with that. But the people who might say, well, Matt's a liberal or a RINO because he wants to live in a walkable — you know, I don't want to tell anybody what to do. I don't think government needs to tell people where to live. But because I'm advocating these local community values, somehow that makes me a liberal, that just shows how far removed we are from actual, like, knowing what conservatism is.

**WOODS:** Let's talk about Ted Cruz for a minute if we might, because it's interesting that you mentioned an affinity for him in terms of foreign policy, because I would say

that Cruz is an example of — I mean, he's an example of a populist in a way, because he does make a direct appeal over the heads of the party leadership right to the public. So he has the populist streak, but he's not one of these ignorant hayseeds that seem to drive you crazy, because there's nobody, even his worst enemy, who denies that he's very, very smart. He really knows what he's talking about. But he still has a populist style. So is it the populist style that offends you or is it the populist style that has no substance behind it?

**LEWIS:** I would say the latter, but let me unpack this a bit, because there's a bunch of stuff to know. So first, I'm from a really rural community. When people said in school, "What do you want to be when you grow up?" kids raised their hands, the number one answer was farmer. The number two answer was truck driver. My dad was a prison guard in Hagerstown, Maryland. That's kind of where I come from. And the reason that I don't like the Donald Trump thing is honestly I feel like it's exploiting a lot of the good, hard working, rural Americans that I grew up with, so it sort of viscerally bothers me, maybe in a way that if I were more cosmopolitan or Ivy League-educated it might not. I went to a little college in West Virginia. So these things hit us differently.

I should probably also disclose that my wife was actually Ted Cruz's national fundraiser when he ran for U.S. Senate against David Dewhurst back in 2012. So I'll just throw that out there for the sake of full disclosure. Look, I have mixed feelings about Ted Cruz. You cannot deny he's a legitimate conservative. So unlike Donald Trump, I have no doubt that Ted Cruz truly is a movement conservative. I also think he's sanctimonious and, you know, in many cases has done things to sort of advance his ambition that have actually hurt conservatism. So look, if it weren't for Donald Trump, maybe Ted Cruz would be the villain in my book *Too Dumb to Fail*. But in comparison to Donald Trump, Ted Cruz looks like this really smart, eloquent, reasonable conservative, so I think my opinion of Cruz has probably gotten better in comparison to Donald Trump's candidacy.

**WOODS:** Let's talk about pundits in the conservative movement, because you have a subheading in one of your chapters: "How to Succeed as a Pundit (Without Really Knowing Anything)." Ah yes, I remember — and I feel like I shouldn't say the name, because I almost feel bad saying it, but there was a time in the past few years that I was watching TV. There was a conservative pundit on who was so ignorant, so shockingly ignorant that I actually opened up my computer and I said I have to look up this person. I have to know what in the world got this person on television. So I know there must be plenty of others. In fact, it surprised me.

I was still naive; back I guess about a dozen years ago, I was on TV with Sean Hannity, and he had never before heard the argument that the New Deal may have retarded the recovery from the Depression. Now, I know that's not the mainstream historical opinion of it, but it's not like there are no proponents of this view. This is the conservative view, and this was completely news to Sean Hannity. So it seems like — and I'm sure this is not exclusive to conservatism and we can find a lot of left liberals who are this way. I personally think libertarians tend to be more informed about this



stuff, because they're less fixated on politics all the time. I think people like Hannity feel like they're really well informed if they know the poll numbers and they know what the candidates are doing, but he didn't know any of this stuff, and that just blows my mind that that's our pundit class.

**LEWIS:** Yeah. It's amazing; I won't mention a name here, but I was on a different network, and during a commercial break I was talking to one of the other panelists, and I mentioned Schumpeter and creative destruction.

**WOODS:** Oh yeah, you may as well have been talking about quantum physics.

**LEWIS:** The host had no idea what we were talking about. And here's the scary part, Tom: I've actually found that, in a way, the more you know the worse you are on TV. Like having a lot of information and nuanced opinions actually makes it harder to talk in sound bites that you need to do on TV. And I actually feel like if you were to chart my career as a TV pundit, I actually started off I think pretty good because I didn't know anything, and then I actually went through a period where I wasn't nearly as good on TV because I knew too much. And now I think I've finally figured out how to sort of incorporate what I know but not talk too much.

But look, this is why podcasts are so awesome. This is why I have my own podcast; this is why I listen to your podcast, because we can have this like long-form, interesting discussions that you could never have on TV even on the most — I mean, maybe if it was like Charlie Rose or something like that, but there are very few shows where you could actually have a really deep conversation, which frankly, I have to say as an author it is so nourishing to the soul to actually get to talk about the book, you know? It's so rare sometimes.

**WOODS:** You know, I agree with what you're saying about when you know a lot, you feel sometimes the need to insert so much nuance: well, but don't forget this small point, and then there's this, and I don't want to overstate that. That's something you just have to train yourself out of when you're on TV. Peter Schiff is very good at that. He's very smart. He can give you all kinds of detailed — he can give you a great hour-and-a-half lecture off the top of his head, which he did at the Mises Institute. He walked in, he looked at the topic for the first time, and then he just talked for an hour and a half, and everybody was completely spellbound. But he can go on TV, and he's got these brilliant analogies that are just perfect, and he can do it in sound bites, and he makes it look easy. But as you point out, it's actually really not particularly easy to do that.

**LEWIS:** Yeah.

**WOODS:** So it's something you have to train yourself to do.

**LEWIS:** It is ironic. It's almost like an inverse relationship between how much you know and how good you are on TV sometimes.

**WOODS:** Well, and I think partly when you have political candidates who have memorized a lot of good one-liners, it makes them seem better than they really are, seem like they have greater depth than they really have. But I still say that it can be done. You can have smart people who are — I thought, even though I didn't agree with Bill Buckley all the time, I thought he had an excellent TV presence, and I thought he was pretty quick on his feet. I think Pat Buchanan is brilliant, and I think he can slice and dice you pretty well in 30 seconds. So there are exceptions to the rule, but unfortunately it seems to be a pretty persistent rule.

All right, so let's say it's a lightning round now, and you've got to just tell me — give me four problems or four mistakes that see conservatives making and that if they corrected those mistakes their fortunes would improve.

**LEWIS:** All right, so I don't even know if I can get through four, but I'll give you a few. One, I think it's a mistake to double down on the populist thing. Right now there is a real temptation to — because there is a niche out there. There's an audience for somebody who will play what I call working class, white identity politics and to feed the anger and, in some cases, understandable anger and frustration out there. But actually, a lot of the Donald Trump fans are really, if you look at the crosstabs, not really that conservative. They're for protectionism. They're for, you know, all sorts of things that are really unconservative. I think, number one, we have to resist this urge to immediately satisfy this demand, which I think in the short term might work; in the long term I think would be disastrous.

Number two, I think it's incumbent upon us, those of us who are blessed to have a platform and a megaphone to accept a certain, you know, with great power comes great responsibility, and just because we have the ability to be provocative for the sake of being provocative and to be controversial, I think we owe it to — look, this isn't sports commentary. I mean, there are consequences to political rhetoric. Again, I'm not an advocate of political correctness at all, but I do think we need to be responsible and to have our motives be pure. So that's sort of summoning politicians and pundits hopefully to our better angels. Those are two of the things that I would strongly urge, is to resist the perverse incentives out there. It's a quick fix, but we have to be better than that.

**WOODS:** Let me say a quick thing about things being unconservative. The trouble that I keep identifying on the show here, about the trouble with conservatism, is that because it's not an ideology, and therefore because it's not like a set of hard and fast rules that every society in the world has to conform to, there are benefits to that, but the disadvantage is it's harder to say, well, this person's not a real conservative because X, Y, or Z. In terms of protectionism, I think of all kinds of people who have been cited as conservative heroes who favored protective tariffs. Everybody from Abraham Lincoln to Teddy Roosevelt to the presidents in the 1920s, which were supposed to be the most free market —

**LEWIS:** Yeah, Calvin Coolidge.

**WOODS:** And even Ronald Reagan himself. I mean, 100% tariff on some Japanese products. So I think it's hard to say that's just unconservative. I think you have to say —

**LEWIS:** Well, Tom, this is where my libertarian strain comes in. I'm a free market —

**WOODS:** Okay, but then you have to say those people, maybe they are being conservative and they ought to be libertarian.

**LEWIS:** No, you're absolutely right. It becomes a game of semantics. I believe that, maybe it's my brand of — and you're right. It's hard to define, because there's not a dogma, and it makes it harder. I moderated a debate a year or so ago at Cato between the Cato interns and the Heritage Institute interns, and they don't declare a winner, but I can just tell you the Cato interns won. And I think it was because it was just easier for them to have a sort of a black and white position on this is what we believe, this is — you couldn't sort of say, yeah, but what if this happened or this — would you make an exception to this. I think the libertarian interns had a much clearer line as to what they believed in and what they didn't, and there was a lot more nuance. It goes back to what I was saying before about the problem of nuance in a debate.

But no, you make a valid point. I clearly have some libertarian leanings. I'm a free marketer. I'm actually pro immigration reform. I believe things like we can grow the pie, that more people equals more prosperity. And that version of conservatism, my version, I believe is really the best for human flourishing. I think that it will lift more people out of poverty and make more people more prosperous, more happy, more joyful. I do not think it contradicts the definition on conservatism, which says that we are to conserve the good things about Western civilization. But no, you make a valid point that it's hard to define conservatism and in some cases it's in the eye of the beholder.

**WOODS:** All right, a couple quick things before we wrap up here. In terms of more people means more prosperity, that certainly was the Julian Simon argument, that human beings shouldn't be thought of as burdens, because look what's in that skull up there, right? They've got the potential to do extraordinary things. They should be thought of as a resource, not as a burden. But at the same time, it kind of depends on who the people are, because it's certainly theoretically conceivable that we could be talking about people who consume more than they produce, and if people consume more than they produce, how is more people going to produce more prosperity? So I don't think it can just be arbitrarily stated that, well, more people are going to produce — it's not necessarily the case. There are plenty of places in the world where more people is not producing more prosperity.

Secondly would be, what about Pat Buchanan? Now, he was a populist in the 1990s, and he ran a couple of memorable campaigns. I mean, he ran against a sitting president in 1992, a sitting Republican president, and then he ran in '96 and he won the New Hampshire primary, and he was clearly running a populist kind of campaign. Yes, he was a protectionist and I don't agree with that, but you know, there are — it's funny the Cato Institute people condemn you all day long for being a protectionist.

They don't mind cozying up to central bankers and warmongers and whatever, so I'm not going to let them lecture me about my support for Pat Buchanan.

I like Pat, and I actually do think he wanted to slash government, I mean, way more than these fake movement conservatives say. They just want to raise money with their fundraising letters. I think he really wanted to do it. And I frankly loved his style, where he just slashed and burned. I mean, he had a good mine. He could give you a good intellectual argument. But he could also give the establishment a black eye. Why should I not find that thrilling? Why should I instead say, well, I wish he had written a 10,000-word essay for *National Review*? Explain that.

**LEWIS:** Well, I guess first let me just start by saying I like Pat Buchanan a lot personally. And just to share — I don't want to betray any trust here, but I've been around places where Pat has worked and done TV commentary, and if you ask the makeup artists and the drivers, the sort of regular people who make TV shows happen, who's the nicest to you, it's Pat Buchanan.

**WOODS:** Yeah, I've heard that so many times.

**LEWIS:** It is — one story, he asked — there was a company who was doing some sort of service, without giving it away, for one of the networks, and Pat sent at Christmas a check to every single — a Christmas card and I think it was a \$500 check to every single person who worked at this company. And this is a very, you know, racially diverse company, and these are hard working Americans who might think that Pat Buchanan's this horrible, Fascist, evil, old white guy. Whereas a lot of the liberals you'll hear — I'm not going to mention any names, but you'll hear that they're not always so nice to working people. Pat has a well-deserved, great reputation for being a super nice guy. I also think he's really good on TV, and I have to say, I don't know if it shows through, but there are probably like two or three people that I've tried to look to and, I don't want to say mimic, but model my TV commentary on. And Pat — it was probably like Tucker Carlson, my boss; Pat Buchanan; and P.J. O'Rourke are like three of the people that I think really in very different ways I admire and do it well.

Having said that, as much as I admire Pat, and he's been on my podcast, you know, we just disagree in terms of our worldview. There's no doubt he's a solid conservative, that he fits well within the Reagan umbrella of what constitutes a conservative in good standing. We just happen to be on very different ends. I'm sort of a libertarian, free market guy. That's what I believe brings most prosperity. I don't think we can build a wall and basically stop globalization and protect the so-called good ol' days, when, in the wake of World War II after all of our competition had been destroyed, where we can go back to those days where the \$15-an-hour factory job is viable. I think that if you look — I think a lot of the sort of glamorization of those sort of halcyon days are actually misleading as well. I've heard — I don't know if you've ever listened to Russ Roberts' podcast, which is great —

**WOODS:** Yeah, once in a while.

**LEWIS:** — EconTalk, a lot of the numbers are misleading. Our ability today to buy really good products at a cheaper rate because of free trade, you know, David Ricardo's comparative advantage, that helps make us all more prosperous. In many ways, the numbers are skewed. There's a perception that we were so much better off somehow in like the 1960s and '70s, and in many ways, we're better off today than we were back then.

**WOODS:** All right, tell people what your website is.

**LEWIS:** Well, I have a little website of my own, [MattKLewis.com](http://MattKLewis.com), but I'm actually a writer for *The Daily Caller*, and I contribute at a lot of places, including *The London Telegraph*, *Roll Call*, *The Daily Beast*, *TheWeek.com*. But if you want to listen to my podcast, it's called *Matt Lewis and the News*, and I've had great guests, including Thomas E. Woods and Patrick J. Buchanan.

**WOODS:** And they can find the podcast also at [MattKLewis.com](http://MattKLewis.com)?

**LEWIS:** Yep, [MattKLewis.com](http://MattKLewis.com) and/or on iTunes.

**WOODS:** Now I, being an oldster like you, I get the "Matt Lewis and the News" reference. I assume this is a play on Huey Lewis and the News, which my listeners won't even know who that is?

**LEWIS:** Yeah, the scary thing is we are now getting to an age where people have no idea what the reference is.

**WOODS:** You don't know who Huey Lewis is? Come on (laughing).

**LEWIS:** I gotta tell you, that *Sports* album with "The Heart of Rock & Roll" on it and then "Power of Love," you know, the *Back to the Future* theme song, I challenge you, listen to those lyrics. It's a very uplifting and positive song.

**WOODS:** Oh, that was like the soundtrack of our childhood, those songs, right?

**LEWIS:** Yeah, I know you're a prog rock fan.

**WOODS:** Yeah, but this stuff, I mean, my kids'll tell you that when I'm in the car and I don't have the iPod on, we have SiriusXM; I've got it on 80s on Eight all the time. My kids haven't got the slightest idea what music is being produced today. They are never exposed to it. They never had a chance. You know, the other kids are talking to them about stuff they've never even heard of, and in a way that's kind of the way I like it (laughing).

**LEWIS:** Yeah, just keep them away from Taylor Swift and keep them listening to Huey Lewis, and they'll probably grow up with some good values.

**WOODS:** Yeah, they're doing okay. So far, so good. All right, Matt, I appreciate your time today. Best of luck. The book once again is *Too Dumb to Fail: How the GOP Betrayed the Reagan Revolution to Win Elections and How it Can Reclaim Its Conservative Roots*. Always fun talking, Matt, thanks.

**LEWIS:** Thanks, Tom.