



Who's a Real Conservative?

Guest: Daniel McCarthy

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[This interview was originally broadcast during one of Tom's guest-host slots on the [Peter Schiff Show](#), and then appeared on Tom's podcast.]

WOODS: I want to talk about Jeb Bush, and I know you thought we were going to talk about really intellectual things. We will get to that. But I want to play for you Andrea Mitchell reporting about Jeb Bush considering running for president, but saying that he's going to have a hard time with today's Republican Party. Can we play cut 16, please?

ANDREA MITCHELL: Although conservative, Bush is often at odds with his party's base. He endorsed the Obama Administration's Common Core education curriculum, and he's passionate about the human side of immigration reform. So how seriously is Jeb Bush considering a run?

COMMENTATOR: I think he's open to the idea of running now. I still think there are very high hurdles that he has to clear in order to run. He said he wants to run joyfully, and in today's Republican primaries that's pretty tough to do.

WOODS: Yeah, when I think of the family name Bush, I think joyful. That's my first thought. They run joyful campaigns. Now, the reason I play this for you is I think you're a pretty good observer of the political scene and the Republican Party. I find it very interesting that Andrea Mitchell would think this would be a problem for Jeb Bush, given that the past nominees by and large have favored No Child Left Behind, they have favored centralization of education. That hasn't stopped the Republican faithful from putting up billboards with Bush's face on it, saying, "Miss me yet?" I don't see that Jeb Bush would be all that different from people they consider to be perfectly respectable. Even Tea Party people will say things like, "Well, I treat your president with the same respect or lack thereof that you treated my president." They think of George W. Bush as "my president." In what way would Jeb Bush have a difficulty with this Republican Party? She's living in a dream world, don't you think?

MCCARTHY: Well, I think you're half right, Tom. You're right that the fact that Andrea Mitchell is upset about this or thinks that there's something shocking here is itself a bigger story than

anything Jeb Bush is saying. I think you're seeing a lot of panic on the part both in the mainstream media and of the neoconservative press about the idea that they don't have a 100 percent grip on the Republican Party anymore. Now, they may still have 55 or 60 or 75 percent, but they want 100 percent, and if they don't have that, they are really worried. Because any kind of dissent, any amount of competition whatsoever, is a threat to them. Because everything they have is built on lies, and they are simply afraid that as soon as the truth starts getting out there, they are going to lose everything.

WOODS: Now, on the other hand, of course, anytime you talk about the Republican Party, Rand Paul is always implicitly in the conversation, because he's in some ways the elephant in the living room for some of these people. He's a wild card for them. They don't exactly know what would happen with him.

Everybody knows that he's going to run for president. I don't think there's any secret about that. I think he couldn't be more obvious about it. But it's an open question: is he going to attract his father's support? Is he going to be able to reach beyond that? Are the grassroots going to go for him? Are they going to go for Cruz? There are a lot of big question marks there. When I hear Rand Paul speak, part of me likes him, and I have never had a problem with him, and yet the other part of me thinks he's trying too hard to be acceptable to everybody. Sometimes I will hear him say, well, some people say we should be at war everywhere, and other people say we should never be at war anywhere, and I think we have to be reasonable. I suppose I can see why he does that, but that's certainly not going to light people on fire. He'll probably get a lot of his father's support, but it's not going to be the excitement that we saw in the past. What is your take on Rand in light of what I just said?

McCARTHY: Well, I think you've got to remember that Rand is fairly new, both as a professional politician and also just as someone who is in the business of expressing his ideas. People like you and I, we've been writing for over 10 years. Rand Paul was basically a private citizen as recently as four years ago. So in terms of being able to articulate where he is coming from, he's still working on it. There's a certain process of trial and error here, and he's trying to communicate his ideas in a way that is going to reach the Republican base as a whole. It's not just going to reach his father's supporters—which are vitally important, and of course, you're right: that's where the excitement and the energy comes from. But that also needs to reach a wider base in order to be something that can actually effectively win the nomination and win the White House. So that's not to say that the way Rand Paul expresses himself is perfect, or isn't in need of improvement, but I do think we have to understand that there's a certain amount of trial and error here, and that what we want to see is basically a positive trajectory, not necessarily getting it right straight out of the gate, but whether or not things are going to constantly be getting refined in a better and more encouraging way. Now maybe that's not happening, and I think that would be a big cause for concern, and there I think, however, it's worth pointing out that Rand Paul is someone who is getting advice from a lot of different angles, a lot of different perspectives, and it's vitally, vitally important that people of a strong,

non-interventionist and traditional sort of Robert Taft conservative perspective be in communication with Rand Paul and constantly reinforce the best elements of his thinking.

WOODS: Part of me, again, I am mixed here because I thought the Ron Paul campaigns were so thrilling because of the fact that he was so plain spoken. They were so thrilling. Every day he was busting another taboo, and every day he was gaining more supporters. Now, I know that's not the textbook way that you run a campaign, but I had given up on politics in 1996. Clinton versus Dole was the last straw for me. That was it. I dropped out for a while, but I jumped back in with Ron, and I just don't know: I can be persuaded, but it's going to take a little bit more persuading.

I want to shift gears a bit here because I want to make people aware of something exciting that's going on this summer. It so happens, Dan, by an interesting coincidence that our next guest on the program today is Mark Skousen, and Mark Skousen is the organizer of FreedomFest, which takes place every July in Las Vegas. Peter Schiff speaks there, if not every year then pretty darn close. And I have spoken there a number of times, and it's always a great time, but it's such a diverse crowd at Freedom Fest. On the one hand you have anarcho-capitalist youngsters, and the other hand, you have people in their late 60s who think they are being cheeky because they supported Mitt Romney. And they are all together at this same event.

You're going to be involved in a foreign policy debate with Dinesh D'Souza, and I find this incredibly exciting. But first of all, let's clear away what might seem to be a misconception. You edit *The American Conservative* magazine. That makes you a conservative. What could you possibly have to disagree with Dinesh D'Souza about in foreign policy?

McCARTHY: Well, the exact title of our debate on foreign policy is "U.S. Foreign Policy on Trial: Is Big Brother Here"?

WOODS: Whoa! Good!

McCARTHY: As you can tell, conservatives—first of all, there is a very strong civil libertarian and non-interventionist tradition among conservatives, which has really been disguised and discarded by neoconservatives, who are actually interlopers from the left who have tried to move us in a hyper-militaristic direction and turns us into a sort of world empire, and that, of course, is the farthest thing from what the Founding Fathers actually wanted. They wanted us not to go abroad in search of monsters to destroy. So a traditional constitutionalist foreign policy and a traditional conservative foreign policy is actually not about getting into, you know, being the world's police or getting into battles all across the planet, and this is what we're going to bring out or what I am going to bring out in the debate with Dinesh D'Souza. Dinesh D'Souza is a nice guy, but I think he's been a little bit sort of brainwashed or taken in by the imperialists and the neoconservatives here.

WOODS: How would you compare Rand Paul and Robert Taft?

McCARTHY: Well, you know, Robert Taft, he's one of the great legendary, early conservatives from the 1940s and '50s who really was the person that people rallied around before Barry Goldwater. People think of this kind of line of succession from Goldwater to Reagan. But Taft was actually before Goldwater in many ways and was a rallying point for an older kind of constitutionalist conservatism as well. But Robert Taft, he wouldn't be someone who libertarians today, for example, would agree with in every respect. He was someone who favored certain kinds of housing subsidies, for example. He was someone who thought that the U.S. should avoid land wars in Asia, but he wasn't necessarily against, for example, supporting Taiwan or doing other things which go farther than some of today's pure non-interventionists would want to go. So I think Rand Paul is actually broadly within the tradition of Robert Taft, that there's a realist tradition here which is not necessarily the pure, Rothbardian anarcho-capitalist approach to having no engagement whatsoever in military or diplomatic terms overseas, but that is very, very limited, and it really has a very narrow idea of what the U.S. national interest is, and most importantly focuses on the idea that we get our ideas across, and we get our power across not by stupid military wars which wind up costing lives both for us and for civilians overseas. It's actually through our ideals and through our economic power that we persuade the rest of the world to move in our direction. And we certainly saw that during the Cold War, I think.

WOODS: Dan, we're just about to take a break, but that's an interesting answer because my thinking is that strictly speaking Rand Paul is superior to Robert Taft. And that doesn't necessarily make him a great guy, maybe it does, but the point is that I think a lot of Ron Paul people identify themselves with the Taft wing, and they respect Robert Taft, and yet, if they had observed Robert Taft in action, they would have been deeply disappointed in him, and I think Rand has said and done things that Robert Taft would never have said or done.

McCARTHY: That's absolutely true, and politics involves personalities as well as principles. There is necessarily always going to be a degree of disagreement with anyone you admire in politics, anyone you support, so the fact that Robert Taft is not identical to Rand Paul and Rand Paul is not identical to Ron Paul, none of that necessarily should be disillusioning. I think all these things have to be taken for what they actually are. And you have to look at the complex mixture of good and bad, and generally I think all three of these figures in different ways and to different degrees are very promising and are the right direction, and clearly, they are better than any kind of Bush, Jeb or George.

WOODS: Dan, you I think it's fair to say represent a version of conservatism that is more or less at odds with a lot of what passes as conservatism and a lot of what the general public thinks about as conservatism, and it's a conservatism that I am deeply sympathetic to. Whereas I am not sympathetic at all to the kind that's represented by Sean Hannity and the fluff books that he releases. So can you say something other than foreign policy that might differentiate yourself and *The American Conservative* from the rest of them?

McCARTHY: Well, I think the kind of traditionalist conservatism that I represent has a very strong commitment to federalism and to localism and the idea that most policies should be enacted at the very local level. But you can have a certain amount of deference to the culture of the community. So if a local community doesn't want to have pornographic magazines in the 7-Eleven or something like that, that's an appropriate decision to be made at the local level. Whereas it's not a matter of trying to federalize every battle, which I think is a problem that many movement conservatives fall into. They get manipulated by people like a Richard Nixon or a George Bush into thinking that everything has to be a national crusade when, in fact, really virtue is something that has to be built up at the very local level.

WOODS: If you were to say, here are the classic works that somebody who wants to be acquainted with a pre-Hannity kind of conservatism maybe ought to look into—if you had to name three, I know I am putting you on the spot, but pick out a few. What do you think would be ones that would help people understand this?

McCARTHY: You know what? Really the greatest conservative classics from the 1950s when the conservative movement got going had it exactly right. So I would very much recommend Robert Nisbet's book *The Quest for Community*, which is actually fantastic.

WOODS: Let me interject here: despite the fact that the title makes it sound like you would never in a million years want to read it—*The Quest for Community* is a terrible title—but that book by Robert Nisbet is an absolutely mind-blowing, graduate course in political thought. It's fantastic.

McCARTHY: Absolutely! And, in fact, pretty much everything that Nisbet wrote. He had a book called *The Twilight of Authority*. He had another one called *Conservatism: Dream and Reality*. All of them are very, very worth checking out. So Robert Nisbet, practically anything you can get by him is going to be worthwhile. Another thinker who I know Tom also very much agrees with and finds very useful is Richard Weaver, who wrote a book called *Ideas Have Consequences*. This is a title that people often will cite or quote without really having read the book. The book itself is fascinating because it talks about how a loss of principle, a loss of philosophy, and a loss of a sense of chivalry has led us towards a world of total war and total statism. And *Ideas Have Consequences* was written around 1947. But you will find that it seems to be as relevant today as the day it came off the presses.

WOODS: Now, give me your thoughts in the remaining minutes we have about the Tea Party movement and where it stands now. I actually am headlining the Minnesota Tea Party Alliance's quarterly event on June 19. I have spoken to groups where there have been Tea Party supporters or a Tea Party group has been a sponsor of the event, but I have never actually been a headliner at a specifically Tea Party event. What do you think about this movement? Did it have promise? Does it still have promise? Is it just a bunch of Republicans? What are your thoughts?

McCARTHY: Well, it's all of those things. I think that the Tea Party is the conservative grassroots. Now, that means that it involves a lot of people who are kind of just regular Republicans or a lot of people who quite rightly simply are reacting against the Obama administration but haven't necessarily gone to the trouble of trying to form a very coherent worldview, a positive worldview. So the Tea Party is something that's a little bit inchoate. It's a little bit unshaped. But I think that's why it's very promising that someone like you is addressing this meeting. The Tea Party has tremendous potential. What it needs is a lot of feedback, a sense of not everything that's simply a reaction against what the Democrats do is necessarily conservative or in line with liberty. We have to be able to stake out a positive sense of what we stand for economically in terms of civil liberties, in terms of foreign policy and not simply be defined by our feelings of what the present administration is like.

WOODS: Dan, on my own program I had Matt Kibbe on, and I know Peter had Matt on not too long ago as well, and I had never met Matt before. I had never spoken to him before. And I'll be honest with you: there's part of me that expected that maybe I would dislike him because he runs a D.C. organization. That's just my instinct. And it turned out he studied under Hans Sennholz at Grove City College. He quotes Rothbard in his book. He is against the entire federal welfare state. He seemed like a really good guy, and then I asked him, "What is your line in the sand? What is your thing that if a politician did it, there just ain't no chance you could possibly support that person?" And he immediately started talking about the bailouts starting in 2008, and I said, "Ding, ding, ding. You are singing in my choir with this answer." And that to me was what I liked about the Tea Party, was that they were willing to stand up against an economic policy that all the so-called respectables endorsed. That kind of spirit—that they don't care that they are non-respectable—we need to embrace that if we're going to make any progress.