

CHRIS: All right – looking forward to this discussion with the one and only Rachel Maddow. It'll be a fun discussion. I think you'll enjoy it. Rachel is obviously a well-known public figure. Her political coverage in the media from early days in “Air America,” the radio network to her self-titled “The Rachel Maddow Show” on MSNBC.

She has been a voice in the political sphere really in her own space for years now. I mean, it's hard to think of anyone that's done that much for that many years in the way that Rachel has. But she's an exceptionally well-rounded person. We've been friends for years now. I connected with her as I was getting out of the military nearly a decade ago. She does a lot of advocacy work and just is heavily invested in military efforts causes for supporting veterans, et cetera, behind the scenes that most don't know about or hear about and have gotten to know her as just a deep thinker.

She's a Rhodes Scholar. You know, if you ever watch her show, you know she's an incredibly smart person, but also deeply thoughtful about topics that extend well beyond what she would cover on any given night on her show. And some of that we try to get into here on the *No Turning Back* discussion today: her view on leadership, being in her position and spending years just studying the political landscape, political leaders, immersing yourself in that world, which she does, you know, as we'll talk about towards the end of the show, most days of the week. She tries to give herself some time off, but for years, you know, she has been immersed 16 hours a day, seven days a week in this world. She has an ability to think through stuff and connect dots in a way that very few people I know can do. And a key aspect of that is her analysis of leadership in that space: what does it look like? What do we need right now? Do we over-invest in the importance of the leader or is it more about what's going on in the world?

We just have a really well-rounded discussion here with Rachel, and we're appreciative of her for making the time. So, sit back, enjoy the discussion, with a voice that is, regardless of your politics, a critical position in today's conversation. And so, we're grateful that she was willing to give us some of her time. So now over to Rachel Maddow.

STAN: Well, Rachel, let me add my thanks. And I'll just start. We're excited to hear from you today because you are doing something that Chris and I back in our old counter-terrorist days would call the “unblinking stare.”

You've been watching leadership for many years. You've been thinking about it. You've been writing about it. You've been talking about it. You've been shaping people's thoughts about it. And so, after all of that, what I want to ask is a pretty tough question. What does right look like if the perfect leader walked into the room, she or he, what would they look like? What would they act like? Give us a sense of what you hope leadership will be in today's world.

RACHEL: I think it's a little bit... circumstances specific. Like I'm not sure that the right leader for February 2021 is exactly the same thing as the right leader for, you know, September 2008 when the start of their financial crisis or even March 2020 with the full flowering of the pandemic. I feel like there's different moments for different types of leadership, but I feel like the crisis that we've just gone through over the last four years with a president who I think was really

dangerous to the country and in some ways remains so, is that I think charisma and leadership have to be disentangled in a way. That there is a certain, you know, messianic gleam that you can inspire that you can use to inspire people, to do all sorts of things in service of yourself.

But the thing that I think we missed the most, in the past four years, I think the big hole at the center of leadership in the Trump years that I think Biden is trying to fill in [the] presidency is the idea that a leader serves the people. The idea that a leader, in running an organization, gets to know the people in the organization, know what their strengths are, builds things in such a way that it gets the most out of them, and they're supported and protected by their leader.

The leader who wants you to serve him or her - maybe there's a useful time for that? It's certainly great for building a cult, but we need less of that and more of the "I am here to make manifest in the world your best capabilities and the things that you most want for yourselves." If that sort of makes sense? So, it's not exactly top-down, bottom-up, but it is something about serving yourself versus serving your people.

CHRIS: I think it's an important point. And to tease it out a bit: you'd often say over the last few years, "watch this scene like a silent movie," right. Watch what they do, not what they say. But extending that more broadly and maybe tying it to what you just said, Stan and I, we debate this or think about this regularly. Do we over-weight the value of the leader - that one personality at the cost of forgetting, you know, losing the forest for the trees, so to speak?

And there are certainly times in history, we could say the role in charisma and particular personality was less important than what was going on in the environment. That's been up and down, but it seems like we're certainly at a peak of it's all about the personality, regardless of party, all the way down to, you know, we have members of Congress who have this amazing position.

Would you agree that that sort of pedaling back and forth and are we over investing right now in the role of that particular person?

RACHEL: I think we are in over-investing in it, but it's more because I think we're struggling right now as a country. And again, I'm thinking specifically about politics and not necessarily thinking about running smaller organizations than that.

As a country, I think we're struggling with who we are and what our values are. And the reason that we are putting so much emphasis on who is the leader, who is the president, who is at the top of that pyramid in terms of public leadership, is because we think of that person as the projection of our values as a country.

And so, who do we want to epitomize and sort of anthropomorphize, what we think we should be as a country? Do we want to be, you know, swaggering, take-no-prisoners, us versus everyone, us before everyone? Or do we want to be civic minded and thinking about leadership through a sort of cooperative sense of bringing people along to our way of seeing things by the power of our example? Those are two very different yens that we have as a country.

And I actually, I feel like I have a little bit of both of those yens in me, in terms of who I want to think of myself as a citizen, how I want to envision my country in my time in the world. I mean, when, when Mike Pompeo went to the State Department... I think he was a terrible Secretary of State, but when he went there and he put the sort of branding effort on what he did, and he said, "I want to bring our swagger back." Like it was gross in the way that it manifested, because what he did is hollowed out the State Department and have them just serve his own political preferences. It didn't work. But the idea of that was... there's something in there that's appealing.

And so, I mean, maybe leadership has always been this way. Maybe it's always been epitomizing values and good branding and good slogans and good public image management. I think that's why we focus so much on who's at the top. I mean, you think about the challenges right now. I'm really, really, really happy that Ron Klain is the White House Chief of Staff, which is not a hugely high-profile job, but he's running the White House Staff process at a time when we are trying to dig ourselves out from this pandemic, having successfully managed the Ebola crisis. Fricking awesome!

I don't need Ron Klain to embody my values as an American, but I'm very happy organizationally that he's there. I am happy, to a certain extent, that Biden is the one who has replaced Trump as a projection of values in terms of inclusivity, decency, empathy. Those are values that I feel like we need to kind of overcompensate for the lack of them in the last four years.

So, different leaders at different levels, I think we need different things from, but at the top, a lot of it is who we think they are and how that makes us think of ourselves.

STAN: Rachel, I was a Ranger Company Commander in 1987. And I remember I was pretty narrowly focused on what I did, but I was politically aware, and I remember a candidate, Gary Hart, who was very interested in policy and very interested, particularly in defense. He actually was quite a policy wonk on defense issues and his campaign imploded for largely personal conduct reasons. And there's been a movie made about it and books written, but it really brings out this idea of what do we want for our leaders and what are we willing to dismiss or ignore so that we get the good parts, realizing that nobody's perfect? How does that affect us now?

RACHEL: I've been thinking about that too, with some of the good Churchill biographies that have come out in the past few years, including some that have been really popular, which is exciting to me because I feel like it'd be cool to have a big, national discussion about Churchillian leadership, and the sort of the myth and the man and ... rising to meet the moment and also some sort of personal disasters and failures and weaknesses that, you know, either make the leader more relatable or are things that must be ignored about the leader in order for us to continue respecting them, depending on your views on these things.

The story of Gary Hart, I think those of us in the news business have made that a story about the news business in a lot of ways. That his... more or less daring the media to follow him around and see if any of these scandalous rumors about him were true, sort of taken literally by the news

media and turned out to be hugely consequential, turned out to sort of end his career as a national figure and as a statesman. I think there's actually been a lot of soul searching about that in the media, because I think, you know, as citizens, those of us in the news business, look back at the experience of Gary Hart and think he was actually somebody who could have contributed a ton to public life, had this experience of uncovering his personal foibles not happened.

But part of the other story there, I mean, there is a media ethics part of that. But part of the other story is how he handled it. You know, I mean, it's one thing to not be a perfect person or to behave in ways in your private life that aren't necessarily harmful or predatory but are not in keeping with the sort of public image that you want to project. But it's another thing to be super cocky about it.

There's a sort of personal ethics of humility around those things, too, that I think ended up actually being a real thing about the Gary Hart scandal. He wasn't campaigning on his family values I don't care who he was sleeping with. But the sort of cockiness about like, "I'm untouchable come and get me, you'll never nail me down on this," that that's a character issue that might be relevant in terms of recklessness and self-regard as a leader. So, it does feel like a real mixed bag.

I mean, as a person in the media, I feel like my personal guidelines on covering stuff like that is that if a politician has campaigned on the basis of the strength of their personal relations and the excellence of his or her family values and the way his or her personal life epitomizes what he has to offer the country, then yes, you know, failings from that should be documented as part of understanding who you are as a person - you've put it on the table. In the same way, if a politician wants to put his or her family members in government positions or have them running his or her campaign or some other in some other way, contributing to his or her public image, then yeah, then the behavior of your family members is going to be part of how we scrutinize you in public life. But if your family is just your family, and what you're offering the country politically has nothing to do with how you are living privately, then anything short of criminal behavior in terms of your private life, I think is off-limits.

STAN: What about if we take that into policy issues? I've struggled with this for years as I've studied it. I was a great believer in Robert E. Lee in my youth, where I'm talking to you from now is about 75 feet from Robert E. Lee's boyhood home where he left to go to West Point. I lived in Lee Barracks at West Point, took the same oath he did, and for many years, you know, just absolutely idolized him. But then I hit a point in life when I realized what he was trying to do was antithetical to the values that were most important to me, the idea of the nation and the idea of equality and whatnot. So how do we come down on leaders like Woodrow Wilson, who in many ways was a tremendous president, in other ways was a notable racist and push back racial equality. How do we come down to judge them? Do we sand the edges off of them for the purposes of history to pick out the good and ignore the rest? Do we get up close? What's your thinking?

RACHEL: I don't generally give speeches because there's a lot of rules around NBC standards where I sort of can't most of the time. But also, it turns out that I give weird speeches. And so, I

disappoint people who hire me, who were expecting me to do something like I do on TV. And one of the last really weird speeches that I gave was a commencement address at Smith College, which was about people having bad dreams - not dreams when you're asleep, but like having bad dreams of themselves and what they wanted to do in their lives.

So, I talked about some of the Prohibition crusaders and some of the other people who over the course of their life, like took on an impossible task and with incredible grit and determination and a work ethic like you can't believe, and organizational genius and incredible charisma and leadership mastery, they were able to accomplish an incredible thing, which was a terrible thing.

Carrie Nation, you know, took an ax to saloons and got America to make alcohol illegal. She was incredible at what she did, what she did was totally terrible and stupid and set the country back a very long time. And so, I gave a commencement address, which was like, don't follow your dreams, which is not, probably a good choice by me.

I was trying to say that your values in what you pursue are worth holding up against the test of history, as much as your skill in pursuing those things. And so not only do you need to figure out what you're good at and what your passion is and what you can self-actualize, you know, by putting your all into, but you do need to test your aims as well. And you know, I mean, if the people who are geniuses at predatory lending, you know, or geniuses at building and maintaining monopolistic drug cartels, it doesn't mean that they're not genius, but it does mean, you know, those folks should be caught and go to prison. I mean, again, judging one another ... gets pretty religious, pretty fast in terms of what any of our role is, but I don't have any illusions about the idea that being good at something or being a strong character or being indeed genius about something, is inseparable from what it is you're trying to do.

It's hard though. I mean, you're talking your own experience with Lee there. That's I mean, that's got to have kind of split you in two a little bit when you came to that revelation.

STAN: Absolutely. As Chris knows, my wife had given me a painting of Robert Lee when I was a Lieutenant. I kept it for 40 years. And then after the Charlottesville incident in 2017, I took it off the wall and threw it in the garbage.

RACHEL: Wow.

STAN: That was an emotional moment.

RACHEL: Yeah. And do you feel at that point, like you need to build something else up that you hadn't previously recognized as heroic, in order to sort of fill that hole? Or does it make you cynical about ... assessing anything as heroic ever again.

STAN: Yeah. I think ... I needed to look for more heroes, which I found some additional ones, but also, I needed to realize that Robert E. Lee wasn't good or bad, he wasn't evil. He was wrong and I've been wrong before. And so, we've got to be realistic about that. And we have to be willing to sometimes look ourselves in the mirror and say is what we're doing really right?

RACHEL: And course correction is something that takes expertise as well, because it's one thing to recognize you're wrong and bury your past and deny it and pretend that you never were on that wrong course. It's another thing to course correct in a way that has dignity and accountability in it in a way that helps other people turn from the same wrong course.

CHRIS: Yeah. And I think that's one of the key indicators of a lifelong leader, regardless of sector that they're in versus a zealot that creates followership. To that point about how what's inside of you, and not dreams should be followed, in his book *Leaders*, Stan profiled Abu Musab al-Zarqawi as a really effective leader. I mean, we hunted him for years, right. And I remember asking Stan, if you think of Zarqawi was writing a book, would he profile you? The answer was probably not.

But a really effective individual. And you do have to step back and say, you know, it's not just about accomplishing your goal. Is there a good or bad inside of that?

Going back to the... and I'm just using Hart as a, maybe a turning point around how we viewed leaders, not just in political space, but so the opening up. Do you think that was a chapter? Like we turn the page and okay now here are the new rules. And was that inevitable? Like was there that going to happen plus or minus in that three-year range, given the way society was trending? Or do you think, Hart, for some reason, brought it on faster than it would have eventually?

RACHEL: He may have been a sort of watershed moment where it got easier to treat politicians and all public figures that way thereafter. But you see, you see that at work well ahead of Hart's downfall. I mean, I've been interested in the sort of radicalism on the right that proceeded the assassination of JFK. The John Birch Society, General Edwin Walker stuff that was going on in advance of Kennedy's assassination. Part of the obsession on the very hard conspiratorial, right with Kennedy was very much about him as a man and his personal life and this idea that was celebrated in pop culture, and among those who hurt those who supported JFK, that there was Camelot and that there was all of a sudden, you know, you've gone from a sort of Eisenhower era White House, which was, you know, very much like a sort of "Midwestern farmhouse feel" to this incredible elegance and celebrities and musicians and actors and glamor and fashion, all being centered on the White House. That interest, that sort of Camelot thing about the White House and the obsession on the right with JFK somehow being personally secretly evil, and his philandering and everything being central to whether or not he should be president, there's some interplay there in terms of recognizing political leaders as public figures in the same way that we might see somebody who's famous for some other reason. Those things go together, I think.

I also think that in the Watergate era, one thing that we forget about the Watergate Tapes is that I think in shorthand, when we look back at that lack, that we're like, oh, Nixon got caught on the Watergate Tapes, trying to use the CIA to intervene, to stop the investigation into the Watergate burglaries, which was going to expose him, and therefore he had to go because he got caught red-handed you know, it was evidence of a crime. Publicly the way that played was okay, evidence of a crime, but you listen to the supposedly smoking gun tape right now, it doesn't read



like an issue of *Dragnet*. You know what I mean? Like it's not like a super dramatic criminal reveal.

The public impact of those tapes was hearing Nixon, be a swearing, occasionally drunk, profane, petty schemer, in the White House, in the Oval Office while he was talking with his top leadership. And the idea that Nixon was a disgusting person, and everybody could hear it, including the racist slurs and the curse words and all the rest of it, changed the idea of the president in public, in his public persona in a way that further cracked that open. I don't think it's a mistake or I don't think it's an accident that we ended up with Jimmy Carter, who was seen as being so personally pious and upstanding in 1976, whatever else you think about Jimmy Carter's presidency, part of what was going on there was like, here's a guy who wears a cardigan and loves his wife and, you know, has a peanut farm.

Why was it a scandal when Jimmy Carter said he had committed lust in his heart? He wasn't confessing to an affair. He said like once he had a feeling, and he went and prayed about it and it went away and that was like a disastrous moment for Jimmy Carter and his presidency because his personal upstandingness was so important as a corrective to what we'd been through with Nixon. So, something happened in the 60s and into the 70s that put the personal lives of our political leaders on the table in a way that was much more emotionally connected to how we could relate to them as leaders and you know, I'm sure that you can find examples of that going back in history, but in the modern era, that combined with mass media, I think did change how we see them forever.

I mean, that said the last president, why didn't any of his followers care about his personal life, character flaws? They didn't! People who were critics of Trump cared about those things. People who were supporters of Trump didn't care about those things one wit and that's a mystery I still don't understand.

CHRIS: Well, that's an area that I personally... I've been thinking about it a lot in last few years. And there's other examples. I mean, there's an acute one, obviously, with the way Trump's private life married up or became somewhat irrelevant.

But for years, I would've thought, I did think, one of the knock-on effects of this complete exposure is we're going to put nothing, but, you know, Boy Scouts from age 10 into public office, or in these perfect women who have been thoughtful and guarded and everything they did. There's certainly examples of that. But now I think maybe the bigger risk is you get people that just don't care, who can create a fellowship regardless of personal ethos. And it comes to like, where do you draw that character line to your earlier point? Because that ultimately comes down to a personal view on what's acceptable and not, and what not.

I know for me, some of the most interesting, not great, but interesting debates I've had in the last few years have been people on that in support of the president saying, tell me what you don't like about him, and don't talk about his character. Like, okay, well, where do I start? I mean, to me, that's foundational given my background in the military, et cetera.

But if you take that completely out of the mix, you run this other massive risk, right?

RACHEL: Yeah. Well, why do we care about character in leaders? I mean, and why do we care about the personal lives of our leaders? I mean, ideally, I suppose what you're going for is a prediction of future behavior that we think that character shows when times are difficult and when stress is high and when individual decision-making has critical life and death consequences for large numbers of other people, like we think that's when your inherent goodness or badness and strength or weakness becomes operative.

That's oversimplifying it, but I think that's why we care. There is, like I was saying earlier, I think there is something else about projecting our values and wanting to feel proud of who we're putting forward as the best of us, but operationally what you want from a president is somebody is going to do a good job and there's some disconnect between what President Trump's supporters saw, in things that could only be described as character weaknesses. I mean, like working with the mob to screw over the cement workers on your building projects, you know, like screwing over your bank because you didn't ever intend to pay anything back, and when they tried to get you to pay it back, you sued them "*neener, neener*."

I mean, you know, underpaying the smallest contractors on your core businesses, because they're the ones who are least able to fight back with you when you try to sue them into the ground? I mean, the people who want to overlook those things in supporting Trump and knowing this about them... I don't think there's a way to turn any of those things into virtues. I don't think there's a way to say like, yeah, that's a guy who really knows how to get things done? Otherwise then how do you explain why all the bankruptcies and all that other stuff? And so, there's something about the like amoral chutzpah that becomes a substitute for wanting to believe for a straightforward character assessment that you want to believe in.

And I find that very dark, very, very dark. I mean, there is a certain proud amorality of the kind of fascist inclination, which is, you know, violence for violence's sake, right? It's the cathartic effect of spilling of blood and all this stuff that is that's the very dark underside of what we're talking about here as the things you look for in leaders and the things that you value in leaders. And I do think some of that was operational in the Trump phenomenon. And I do think that like, as we're all looking at the indictments and everything, all the people that participated in the violent attack on the government on January 6th, you look at the writings that the FBI is putting in their affidavits in support of those indictments. and you look at what people are posting on social media. And it's bloodlust, right? The QAnon conspiracy theory is a conspiracy theory that isn't just about what's wrong with the imagined bad people in the world. It's a fantasy about mass public gory executions of them. And that sort of darkness, that like "kill them all, let God sort it out" stuff in politics, I think goes with the sort of desire for an amoral or indeed evil leader. And apparently that's an, our national character too. And I didn't, you know, I sort of didn't think that would happen here, but I think we, I think we got very dark there and a lot of that is still around.

STAN: But we have gotten dark. So, for just a moment, I'm going to pull the conversation back to a different time that you mentioned: Jimmy Carter's presidency. During the campaign, you



remember his brother, Billy, had a filling station in Plains, Georgia. You could go to Plains, Georgia and buy a six pack of Billy Beer, which of course I did.

And that was sort of the greatest weakness Jimmy Carter's character side had. But now let me get back dark again, because I think we're in something really important here. When Chris and I were in the counterterrorist fight, there was always this pull that pulls you down to the level of your enemy - meaning if they are torturing people, if they are assassinating people, there is a desire to take the gloves off. A whole nation went through that mindset right after 9/11, and then in the Special Operations world, what we found was, there was this idea: we're going to go get rough men, and we're going to take care of this problem in the night, in a way that it's got to be. It's kind of like hiring the Godfather.

Now, what we've found is that's not the reality of what you need. You actually need those organizations that have extraordinary capability and power at their hands need to have a higher moral plane, because there's not the same level of tight control on them. And this gets to the issue here that we used to struggle with the military.

You say, well, that person gets things done. Even though they lie cheat and steal, they're a good soldier. And I heard that when I was younger and I said, well, my problem is if they will lie to their spouse or they will lie to someone else, how do I flatter myself to think they will not lie to me?

RACHEL: Exactly.

STAN: And I know I can't. So, as we go into this, how do we teach ourselves how to get this right? The yin and the yang of people who can get things done with people that we trust, we trust in big ways. Do you have any thoughts on how does a nation move that direction?

RACHEL: I mean, honestly, I feel like it's accountability. It's basic accountability. When people lie, cheat and steal, they get fired. Maybe they get shamed by people like me... if they're public figures. And if it's in defiance of the criminal code, they get prosecuted. I mean, there is something that is... For example, here's a relatively small thing, but the previous president had this "Build the Wall" thing and his former campaign manager, Steve Bannon, and some other folks, created this "We build the wall" thing, which was a scam to separate Trump supporters who were in favor of building a southern border wall from their money, and Bannon and his co-defendants, according to prosecutors, used that money, which all came in in small dollar increments, you know, from people who didn't have a lot to give, but had a lot of passion on the subject, had a lot of belief. They use the money for themselves to buy cars and, you know, support their lifestyles.

And Mr. Bannon and his alleged co-conspirators were arrested and were charged federally. And then President Trump pardoned Bannon. And there's all sorts of interesting things now about whether Bannon's alleged co-conspirators are going to go to jail now for what Bannon also did, but he was excused.

There's questions about what Bannon traded Trump in order to get that pardon. But the idea that Bannon himself won't be punished for having scammed people in that way, using this supposed value statement from the president about what was most important and patriotic that he could offer the country, that was this main policy proposal for why he should be president, that he would build a wall between us and Mexico. To use something like that, and to say, doing that in a criminal way, well, he was going to get the wall built anyway, he was going to get something done. He was also just going to buy himself a yacht along the way and you know, and defraud all these little old ladies so he could con into giving him five bucks for it. There's something like more than just criminally wrong with the Barton, with the ... pardon.

And I say there's like some open questions here because he now sort of loses his Fifth Amendment, right? Not to testify in a way that might incriminate himself. His co-conspirators may end up going to prison or whatever but excusing that was deeply wrong. That pardon, I think was just morally, deeply, deeply wrong in terms of what lesson we are telling people about who we are as Americans and what we value. And for Trump to have done that on what was supposedly his noble offering to the country to say, actually a scam on that is fine. I don't know how you correct that other than to try to shame it and to never do it again.

And maybe you need to reform the pardon process or something like that can't happen. But that to me gets right at that issue of core values as to, you know, lying and cheating and stealing to get what you want and lying, cheating, and stealing being wrong and ought to be something that's punished as very simple.

Again, we're sort of back to very biblical concepts here, but that, almost more than anything else Trump did in his last few days, just fired me up in a sort of civic minded way.

CHRIS: Before we wrap up, do any historic analogs running around your head because as a student of history, I'm sure you're looking back through time. And when you're at this, when society is at this peak of, you know, we've had now 12 years of real powerful charisma in the White House, does a resetting to norms require historically, I just don't know, another charismatic figure or can it be a ground-up from society? Or was Carter an example of that, look this is ground-up. We just need a guy like that in the office.

Or do you need like, the modern-day Saladin that can unite the tribes and say, okay, we've got to get our act together here.

RACHEL: I feel like I have charisma overdose this point, you know, like I'm not ready to like have people's like individual political leaders names on flags for a while.

I don't know. I mean, part of me thinks that for this moment where really what we've got to do as a country is stop having a half million Americans die per year with this coronavirus pandemic. And we've got to lead in such a way that everybody in the world gets vaccinated to an extent that we are not continuing to manufacture new and more deadly variants of this virus that remedy our natural immunity and our vaccine immunity powerless so that we don't have a permanent

coronavirus pandemic on earth that just keeps rolling over us as new variants emerge from unvaccinated parts of the world.

I mean, we need technocratic, good government here with consistent messaging and rational leadership. And we need America to have a constructive role in the world in leading what has to be a global response to a problem that will kill us if we don't fix it worldwide.

And for that, I don't think we need someone to worship. For that, I think we need government that is doing good work in quiet ways, in ways that we don't have to think about every day. Like, I know that a lot of people joked about like, let's bring back boring, but like, yeah, let's bring back boring.

The better your government is the less it should be on your mind every day, because it should be helping you in a free country. It should be helping you, by taking care of the things that need to be taken care of in terms of safety, law, and order, so that you can pursue things on your own terms in a way that benefits you and your family and the things that you're trying to achieve for your country, without you hurting other people and other people hurting you.

Like that's, we need some of that. We need faith in the nation state again. I mean, Chris, one of the things that I know you and I have talked about is the idea of countries starting to feel like porous concepts, and whether or not we need... whether or not there's a sort of anti-nationalism that we need to be cognizant of too, in terms of whether or not people believe in governance anymore.

I think we need to believe in governance. I think we need to believe in technocratic skill. So, I'm hoping that some of that is what we're about to get. On this COVID stuff, I do feel like most of the... if I were in charge, most of the people that I would have put in charge on COVID are the people who actually have been picked.

I wouldn't have picked this exact roster, but it would have a lot of overlap with who's actually in the government trying to run this thing. That gives me great comfort, maybe I'm wrong, but those are the folks who I would have tapped too. I don't know. I'm hoping that our political passions can get more connected to the idea of policy and things working for the American people.

Like we can have a big drawn out, dragged down, drag out fight in Congress about the size of the child tax credit. That'd be freaking fantastic, you know, rather than us being like, are you the Satanist or are you the Satanist? Like, nobody's a freaking Satanist. Let's talk about a child tax credit. I'm looking forward to that kind of a shift, which hopefully will render people like me less useful.

CHRIS: In closing, thanks for the time and just one sort of semi-personal view. Because I think it's valuable for people to hear. One of the things I tell friends that are still in the military is you'll be impressed when you get out and start meeting a broader range of folks outside of uniform, how many equally focused, dedicated, relentless people that are ours as we get accustomed to in the service. You're certainly one of those friends that I've come to know that I think of like that.

You've been running this pace for years, like non-stop immersed intellectually and putting yourself literally on stage every night under a great personal pressure, that's you talking to this group?

How do you maintain that? What's the approach you've developed? And I know it's very ad hoc, but like, what are the variables that you think are so critical to that?

RACHEL: Well, first of all, it's very nice of you to say that. You know me well enough Chris to know that I don't do a great job of keeping it up. I mean, I do need to take better care of myself, both my brain and my body in terms of being able to do this. This is year 13 of me doing this, five days a week, 50 weeks a year, usually 12 hours a day. And so I, you know, I'm actually only 24, but this is what I look like. This is terrible. I'm not doing a great job taking care of myself.

I do have good other things in my life. I try to compartmentalize. I try to not work on weekend days if I don't have to work on weekend days. I have a partner who is the most important thing in my life. And if she said, one day, I want you to stop doing this, and we're moving to Kazakhstan and starting a chicken farm, like I would move to Kazakhstan and start a chicken farm. I would do whatever she wanted to do.

And having that sort of ... that other pole in my life that's not just work, and that's much more important to me than work - that I think has been a grounding thing. But I have a friend who's a professor who I saw this week and I went ice fishing with her and she was like, "people say [that] what you do is a little bit like teaching, but you'd never get a sabbatical."

I was like "A sabbatical! That is a fantastic idea!" I do feel like I need like six months off to reset. I don't know, you guys are pretty good.

CHRIS: You have hundreds of thousands of students complaining about their grade, I guess.

RACHEL: That's right. I mean, the thing that I wish I could learn from you guys is the, like, "I've stopped moving for the moment within 30 seconds, I'm going to be asleep."

Like taking advantage of every possible respite, of every possible opportunity to turn off even if you only have a few minutes to do it, I've seen you guys do that. And I wish that I had that kind of internal regulation so that I could do it too.

CHRIS: I think it's a matter of IQ. You're just too smart to turn off. Well, this is great. We really appreciate the time. I'll turn it over to Stan.

STAN: Yeah. I just want to add my thanks. You know, Chris and I are looking to invest in a chicken farm in Kazakhstan, so if that idea comes to fruition let us know.

RACHEL: I'm going to put my name on a flag. It's going to be kind of a cult. There's definitely going to be a bloodlust component. So, I'll have my people get in touch with your people.

STAN: Thanks so much, Rachel.

RACHEL: Thanks, you guys. Thank you.

CHRIS: So, not surprisingly, just a really interesting discussion with Rachel who, as was clear on the show, you and I both have known her for a while, and just aside from her TV personality, a deep thinker. One of the things that jumped out [at] me in this discussion and reminded me of our previous conversation with Brian Kilmeade is, you know, there's this, obviously this TV perception of folks in that, in that role, but when you ask them thoughtful questions, they will give you thoughtful answers, right. That both of them, and Rachel has just evidenced, they just have been staring at this stuff: the political landscape, the leaders that are there for years in a minute-by-minute way that most people wouldn't have the endurance for. So that, that struck me as just a reminder of people that are immersed in an arena for an extended period, which really isn't the norm in today's society, as we all sort of move from opportunity, opportunity to quickly. A reminder of what that can do for the way someone looks at a market at an industry, at politics, et cetera.

STAN: I found it fascinating. You remember when we talked to Brian Kilmeade, we asked him what leader we needed now from history. And he said, James Monroe and most Americans have a vague memory that James Monroe was a president. And that's about it. A Rachel Maddow is very similar. She's got a historical framework and so she can compare things she sees now with things that have come before. Part of that, as you say, is from being a day-by-day observer of this and a commentator on it. And part of it is studying the craft, studying the art of leadership, the necessity of leadership. She talked about Richard Nixon and the effect of the tapes coming out, the Watergate tapes coming out as though she'd been in the room and she's way too young, but she has that context.

CHRIS: I mean, I think you would say yes, but what's the lesson there for us to learn now? Is this generation of leaders... because to your point, right... I loved when Kilmeade had said James Monroe, because I had to remember like why James Monroe? To Rachel's discussion, I mean, we brought up the Gary Hart thing as an example, and she knows the facts of the case left and right off the top of her head, because that's her area of expertise, similar to the Nixon example. And you lived in one space inside the fighting counterterrorism for five years ... deployed in that domain.

Do you think we're missing something today? The way we talk about leadership, by not saying, "Hey, you should really think about just becoming an expert in something for 10 years, 15 years."

STAN: I think so. If you think about this idea that a leader is effective in a moment, is charismatic, or is lucky, or you name it - and they get a high level of celebrity and they get a fair amount of credibility, but it's not really based on a strong foundation.

I go back to remembering you as a younger SEAL. And what we were doing in Iraq was rough, dangerous, and very nuanced business. And to explain to the SEALs that you lead, why they

needed to conduct themselves a certain way in the very near term didn't make sense. Why don't we take off the gloves and fight exactly like al Qaeda in Iraq does, because that's what this calls for.

And yet your perspective in the time, which was exceptional for your age, was no, you have to put it in the sweep of history. If we are not conducting ourselves in a way that stands the test of time, then our cause won't stand the test of time. And so, I think if we're going to focus on anything, whether it's leadership, it's our conduct, I think having a framework that we use to look at things is really valuable.

CHRIS: Yeah. And in a way it's... I was just listening to our interview with General Saltzman and Space Force. And when we talked to him about like who's going to come into Space Force, he was describing the future recruit and sort of said, "I want people who have studied history. I want people who are, you know, reading science magazines, but reading philosophy." Right. I need these well-rounded thinkers because we don't know where this is going to go, but I'm looking more than anything for the intellectual curiosity to help us get there.

I thought it was, just an interesting parallel. Here's two leaders in the media space between Brian and Rachel - opposite ends of the spectrum. But you could put them in the same room and they'd have (maybe) a thoughtful discussion, right. Because they are students of this.

It's interesting to think of how polarizing... the people in those positions are leveraged to create polarization, but when you really talk to them, their thoughts are deep and rich and well-informed.

STAN: It's very interesting because I think back to what I was taught about the German General Staff in the 19th century, when they first started the Staff College, and the goal of the Staff College was if you gave two trained officers the same information, they would produce exactly the same answer to the problem.

And yet here we have, if we take Kilmeade and Maddow, both very well-educated, thoughtful people, yet you give them roughly the same information that's in today's world, but they are drawing different conclusions. And I don't think that's wrong. I think that shows us that smart informed people can draw different conclusions, can have opposing perspectives.

CHRIS: No, that's right. And it sort of ties to another part of the discussion we had there with her... which came up pretty spontaneous around how much are we over-investing in the leader as the savior on the white horse. Are there historic analogs to that? Is that just sort of a human nature sort of thing, when in times of crisis you need rescuing?

And I'd be curious [for] your thoughts on that. Do you think we're at a new level of that or has that an historic trend as far as how we individually and then society-wide are looking at what we expect from an individual leader?



STAN: It's funny because my wife, Annie, and I talk about this all the time, because I don't have a lot of heroes.

I have some ideas that I like, and I have some people who did some things that I admire, and I generally admire some people, but I almost have no one up on a pedestal. We joke, I wouldn't walk across the street to go get an autograph, take a selfie, or meet anyone. I can't think of a single living person that I would walk across the street that wasn't already a friend of mine that I just have to meet because I have that hero worship with them.

And I'm not sure whether that's a personality quirk of mine, or it's just a reality that none of us are all that good. And very few of us are all that bad. And so, you know, if you think of that way, I think the short answer to your question, I think we as a society probably are looking for someone who's all that good.

CHRIS: Yeah. And it's sort of hardwired into maybe how we look at ourselves as a society, but I'm laughing when you shared that. I've never told you this anecdote, but years ago I was at some conference that, you know, you get pulled into, and Tom Brady was there. He had this new book on his sort of diet and his physical practice, et cetera.

And somebody I knew was like, "Oh, come meet Tom Brady." As you know, one of my great flaws is I don't pay attention to professional sports, but surely know who Tom Brady is. So, he took one of his books inside it to my son, Thorpe. You know, "Thorpe, workout hard," or whatever. And so, I gave it to Thorpe and Thorpe knows more about football than I do.

But then eight months later, one of our parent friends at school called me and said, "Hey, did you give your son a signed book by from Tom Brady?" I was like, "Yeah!" I thought he was talking about it at school.

He says, "Yeah, he just traded it with my son for a Pokemon card." So, I'm going to go ahead and swap that back.

So. I think it's genetic, maybe it just passes down. You're not too interested in hero worship.

STAN: That's funny. Just kid stories. My oldest granddaughter, Emmy Lou, who, you know well, came home from school yesterday, talking all about Harriet Tubman and Annie had picked her up from school and on the ride back, as Emmy loud is talking the story of Harriet Tubman, Annie goes, "Well, you know, your grandfather wrote a book about her." And that didn't impress my granddaughter much at all. Okay.

CHRIS: So what? He wasn't in class today.

STAN: Exactly.

CHRIS: Well, great, great discussion, not surprisingly. And as busy as she is, we're really appreciative to Rachel and her team for making the time.

STAN: Now I'm going to find out the people who've been trading our book for Pokemon cards.

CHRIS: I'm sure it's if it's worth the Pokemon card, I'd be happy. Thanks everyone for joining us.