



Munk Debate on American Democracy

October 12, 2017

Rudyard Griffiths: Newt Gingrich, the former Speaker of the House and loyal Trump supporter is going to be arguing against the motion. He is will be joined by Kimberley Strassel of the *Wall Street Journal*. Their opponents, arguing in favour of the motion, “Be it resolved: American Democracy is in the worst crisis in a generation and Donald Trump is to blame,” is Andrew Sullivan of *New York* magazine, the father of the modern-day blog. He's got some hard-hitting views on Trump that he is going to share in tonight's debate. He will be joined by Brookings scholar E. J. Dionne, who is co-author of the new book *One Nation After Trump*.

So, two pairs of terrific debaters who are set to go. We are just going to let this house assemble, get these 3,000 people into their seats. And you, C-SPAN viewers, in mere moments, are going to have a terrific debate served up to you from here, downtown Toronto. A capacity crowd of 3,000 people for the Munk Debate on the crisis of American Democracy.

I'm Rudyard Griffiths, your moderator. It's my privilege to have the opportunity to organize these debates and to lasso and wrangle our debaters over the next hour and a half.

So, again, just give us a couple of moments and we'll get this crowd seated, and then we'll be starting the Munk Debate on the crisis of American Democracy, live from Toronto. Back to you momentarily. Thanks.

[opening video]

Rudyard Griffiths: Good evening, ladies and gentlemen. Well, to begin with, I want to welcome the Canada-wide audience tuning into this debate on Canadian Broadcasting Corporation and on CPAC, and across the continental United States live, right now on C-SPAN.

A warm hello also to the online audience watching this debate everywhere from Facebook Live, our exclusive social media partner, to bloomberg.com. It's great to have you as virtual participants in tonight's proceedings.

And hello to you, the over 3,000 people who have filled Roy Thomson Hall for yet another Munk Debate. We salute your interest, your commitment, and your desire for informed public discussion of the big issues of the day.

I want to take this opportunity to acknowledge that our ability year-in and year-out, debate-in and debate-out, to bring some of the world's sharpest minds, brightest thinkers, to this stage, to the City of Toronto, to debate those big issues that are on our minds, that have captured our attention, would not be possible without the public-spiritedness and the generosity of our hosts tonight. Ladies and gentlemen, Peter and Melanie Munk. Bravo, you two.

Now, I would be remiss if I did not, on behalf of a grateful city and everyone in this audience here tonight, also thank you, Peter and Melanie, for your remarkable gift to the Toronto General Hospital and its cardiac centre — a hundred-million-dollar donation to cardiac science that will save lives! A remarkable thing!

Well, we are just mere moments from getting our two debaters out here on centre stage where they are going to be tackling the resolution tonight, one that's on all of our minds: “Be it resolved:

American Democracy is in its worst crisis in a generation, and one man, Donald J. Trump, is to blame.”

Arguing in favour of the resolution is the renowned editor, the father of the modern-day blog, and celebrated social commentator ... Ladies and gentlemen, Andrew Sullivan.

Andrew's debating partner tonight is the bestselling author of numerous books. He's a scholar at the prestigious Brookings Institution, and a must-read columnist in the *Washington Post*. Ladies and gentlemen, E. J. Dionne.

Thank you. Now, one team of great debaters deserves another. So, let's welcome back to the stage a formidable debater, the former Speaker of the U.S. House of Representatives and the author of the recent bestselling book *Understanding Trump*. Ladies and gentlemen, Newt Gingrich.

Our final debater tonight, Newt Gingrich's teammate, is a celebrated *Wall Street Journal* columnist and well-known U.S. political commentator. Ladies and gentlemen, Kimberley Strassel.

Well, a few more final housekeeping details before we go to opening statements. Number one: we've got a hashtag going tonight, #munkdebate. Those of you here in the audience and those of you watching online, you can join in the conversation, join the online debate. We've also got a rolling poll. Debaters, people will be voting on your performance minute-by-minute throughout this debate at munkdebates.com/vote.

And also — my favourite part of the Munk Debates — the countdown clock. For each of the segments of this debate — opening statements, rebuttals, and closing statements — we are going to put a clock up that will count down the final minutes of each debater's presentation. When that clock reaches zero, join

me in a round of applause, and that will keep our debaters on their toes and our debate on time.

So, let's now find out how you — this audience, the 3,000 people here, coming into this debate tonight — how you voted on our resolution, “Be it resolved: American Democracy is in its worst crisis in a generation and Donald Trump is to blame.” Let's see the agree/disagree, pre-audience vote on that. Okay, 68 percent agree; 32 percent disagree. This debate is very much in play, maybe more so than some of our debaters thought, going into tonight's contest here in downtown Toronto.

Let's go to our second question, because we always want to see how fluid the debate is, how fluid people's minds are here: Could you potentially switch your vote depending on what you hear over the next hour and a half? Let's see those numbers. Is this audience in play? 80 percent, yes. A very open-minded group here tonight. This is going to be fun! I always love that second vote at the end of the evening, which will let us know which of these teams wins the debate and which does not.

Well, let's begin with opening statements. And, as is the tradition in debating, we begin with the “pro” side. We drew lots for this and, Andrew Sullivan, your six minutes start now.

Andrew Sullivan: Ladies and gentlemen, thank you for having me. I come here to tell you something that in your hearts you already know. The United States is in a state of emergency. This emergency began on January the 20th of this year. It began because we have a president uniquely unfit to hold the office that he does, who represents a threat to the core values of American democracy and the stability of the country — a threat to the national security of the United States and to the world.

Those are big words, I know. So, let me briefly tell you why I passionately and sincerely believe that statement. The first is that

this president has waged a war on the truth from the minute he took office. And throughout the campaign beforehand, for that matter. He lies and he lies and he lies. The *Washington Post* counted 1,300 falsehoods that he has uttered since he became president of the United States, none of which has he retracted — from the idiotic claim that his inauguration crowd was the biggest in history, which you can see by aerial photographs or by your own bare eyes is simply not true, to a lie so dangerous that three million people voted illegally in the last election, something that attacks the very core and the heart and the integrity of the democracy itself.

He is unfit because he has violated and wants to violate and has no respect for the rule of law. This is a president who has told the police to abuse suspects as they arrest them; who has told the military that they should torture suspects, the worse, the better. “Whether they are innocent or not, they deserve it,” he said. He's encouraged violence against people who dare to protest and heckle his crowds, and offered to pay the legal fees of those who commit crimes to assault protestors.

He is still seething with fury every day because his attorney general, Jeff Sessions, one of the most hard-core Republicans you could find, actively dared to recuse himself from an investigation into a campaign with which he was intimately involved. He asked the FBI director to declare his personal loyalty to Trump — not to the rule of law, but to Trump. And when he refused, he fired him. And after he fired him, he went on television to brag that that's why he fired the FBI director.

This is a man who has no understanding of, and indeed contempt for the Constitution of the United States, a man who despises the

First Amendment¹, a man who threatened Jeff Bezos, the owner of the *Washington Post*, with an antitrust action if his newspaper criticized the president. A man who this week said he would remove the licence of NBC because it dared report the truth about what he had said in an insane session about nuclear weapons, after which his own secretary of state called him an f-ing moron.

On national security, this is a man who taunts like a schoolyard kid, a dictator with nuclear weapons, holding the lives of hundreds of thousands of people in his hands, with the responsibility of a teenager, chatting on 4chan. This is a man who has undermined NATO, the core of our alliance. This is a man who has declared there is absolute moral equivalence between the United States and Vladimir Putin, the foul dictator. This is a man whom the Republican chairman of the Senate Foreign Relations Committee has said could drag us into World War III, a man who's described the White House as an adult daycare centre in which adults have to permanently be on shift.

This is fundamentally a man with no sense of responsibility for the power he holds and the sacred duty that he is required to uphold. He will use that power, that office, with everything that has come before it, something that hundreds of thousands of Americans have died for, in order to launch petty, vindictive attacks on private citizens, despoiling the very seat he sits in. He is a man, ladies and gentlemen, who is not in control of himself, but who is in control of us.

I wish this were not the case. There are many problems in America that predate him. There are many sins on the left in

¹ “Congress shall make no law respecting an establishment of religion, or prohibiting the free exercise thereof; or abridging the freedom of speech, or of the press; or the right of the people peaceably to assemble, and to petition the Government for a redress of grievances.”

overreacting to him. There are stupid, multicultural excesses that we can rightly excoriate. There was an elite that refused to understand the stresses that trade and mass immigration have put on the American working classes. All of that is true, and none of it is pertinent to this debate tonight.

This debate is about the worst possible response to those causes and those legitimate feelings. This is about a man who has used those feelings for one thing and one thing only, his own pathetic, self-aggrandizement. He is a disgrace to the United States of America. He should be removed by all constitutional measures as soon as possible, by the Twenty-fifth Amendment,² by those around him who know the threat that he is.

Rudyard Griffiths: Thank you. Andrew, a very strong opening statement. Kimberley Strassel, you're next.

Kimberley Strassel: Well, thank you all for having me. And at the risk of lowering the tenor of the Munk Debates, I would like to introduce a new word here tonight. I have three children. Before I left, I was telling them about this debate and the resolution and I asked them, "Help me prepare for this. Tell me why you think Donald Trump has been bad for democracy." And they had a struggle articulating an actual reason why, until finally my six-year-old used her favourite word. She said, "He's bad because he's a pooh-pooh-head."

And while Andrew did a much more eloquent version here on stage, using very fiery words, that sums up what I believe my debate opponents will say tonight. They don't like Donald

² The Twenty-fifth Amendment to the [United States Constitution](#) says that if the [President](#) becomes unable to do his job, the [Vice President](#) becomes the President. This can happen for just a little while, if the President is just [sick](#) or [disabled](#) for a short time. It could also happen until the end of the President's term (his time in office), if the President died, [resigned](#), or [lost his job](#). [NOTE: I HAVE TAKEN THIS DIRECTLY FROM WIKIPEDIA. EDITING WOULD BE REQUIRED IF IT IS DECIDED TO KEEP SUCH A NOTE. JMcW]

Trump because he is a “pooh-pooh-head.” They will claim that he is divisive. They will argue that he has violated all of the political norms. They will say that he has no respect for his office. They will say that he has undermined America's relationship with the rest of the world. And in all of that, they are largely right.

But that has nothing to do with democracy. Democracy is not just that we don't like someone. Democracy is a very formal concept. It is government for the people and by the people. And in the United States it's even something more specific in the minds. It's documents. The Declaration of Independence. Life, liberty, and the pursuit of happiness. Freedom from a tyrannical government that overtaxes and overregulates. It's the Constitution. And it's the saying that we are a government of laws and not of men; that we have a separation of powers. The Congress makes laws, the Executive enforces them, the Judiciary interprets them.

Donald Trump was elected because his predecessor violated that Constitution day after day in a lawless fashion. And the backlash that grew in the United States put him in office precisely because he ran as the law-and-order candidate. It was his predecessor who was frustrated when he couldn't name some of his people and get them confirmed through the Senate, and so he declared the Senate out of session. It took the Supreme Court, voting 9-0, to tell him that that was an egregious abuse of the separation of powers.

It was Barack Obama who came to office with agenda programs like a climate program, like immigration reform. And he acknowledged that he needed Congress to change the laws to make that happen. And when Congress wouldn't do it, he retreated to his office and began to govern by executive fiat.

It was Barack Obama who had a secretary of state who believed that she didn't have to follow the laws of public oversight the way everyone else does, set up a secret server, and destroyed her emails when people asked to see what she'd done in that office.

It was Barack Obama. This was the prior government that seized assets, civil forfeiture laws, taking some five billion dollars; that sicced its IRS on Americans and silenced the voices of tens of thousands of Americans on a witch hunt because of their political beliefs. And this was a former government that we've been talking about in the last few days and, as Andrew mentioned, saying that the president threatened to go after NBC and its licence.

Well, again, sticks and stones can break my bones, but words cannot hurt you. The president makes a lot of threats. The measure is whether or not he has actually done anything. And if you look at the policies — and, yes, he is still having some trouble with that legislative agenda. Fair enough. But the threats that he has put in there ... What Donald Trump threatened with CBS and NBC is nothing by comparison to Barack Obama, who actually had his attorney general seize and look through the emails of James Rosen³ at Fox News — an egregious violation of the First Amendment.

Donald Trump has put people in office that ran against these campaigns. They are law-and-order candidates and they are there to make sure that we restore democracy to what it was before, by getting rid of regulations that made crushing burdens on businesses, with a new tax code that doesn't reward those who can afford the best accountant and only those.

This is about fundamental change and restoration of the rule of law. And, you know what, you don't have to take my word for

³ Washington-based journalist and TV correspondent for Fox News Channel.

it. It was funny, I was looking in the newspaper just the other day and I found an article that appeared in the *Washington Post*. And the headline was “How Donald Trump Is Helping Save Our Democracy,” and it was written by E. J. Dionne. My first thought was, “Why am I flying to Canada when he's already agreed with me?”

But the point is that, even on the basis of what E. J. and Andrew would argue — that somehow this president is corrosive for our culture — they too think that there could be benefits to this. If it is causing more Americans to debate and to pay more attention, then in the end we could end up with an even stronger civil society than we have now.

But, again, this is a president who was brought to office by Americans who wanted to see a return to actual law and order. And anyone who would suggest to you that that's not happening behind the scenes is paying too much attention to a media that's only interested in all the bright and shiny things that Donald Trump says and not what his administration is actually doing behind the scenes. Thank you.

Rudyard Griffiths: Thank you, Kimberley. E. J. Dionne, your six minutes is on the clock now.

E. J. Dionne Jr.: I was standing here while Andrew was speaking and I said a little prayer of thanks for such a vigorous argument on our side of the debate. And I am very grateful to Kim for mentioning that piece I wrote, because I did indeed argue that Donald Trump could be great for our democracy. He could be great for our democracy because he is rallying so many Americans to political action to oppose the very abuses that Andrew opposed. And I ask you tonight to take that 68 percent and make it 80 percent, to send a signal to those Americans who know the threat that

Donald Trump poses to our democracy that they have friends north of the border.

I want to say it's a great honour to be a guest on this side of the longest, undefended border in the world. May it stay that way. May there be no walls between the United States and Canada. We have stood with each other, but perhaps, more importantly, we have learned from each other. Everyone wants a neighbour who embodies decency, and we Americans are very lucky to have you.

And, as you can tell from my last name, my family headed south from Quebec. Alors, il faut dire merci à vous tous.

And I do want to salute the courage of our opponents to show up tonight after the week that Donald Trump has had. They clearly have a commitment to the idea that the show must go on.

This is a week in which Donald Trump challenged the very idea of a free press. It bothered him that people can write whatever they want, which sounds like the First Amendment to me. He threatened a network he didn't like with removing their licence, which had two problems with it. One is that networks aren't licensed in the first place, and the other is that the threat of using presidential power against people you disagree with is not the mark of a democrat, but of an autocrat. And then he told our fellow citizens in Puerto Rico that he might just walk away and allow them to suffer.

So, yes, I salute the bravery of our opponents here. But I want to point out that throughout this debate they will cling to one piece of this resolution like a life raft. They will talk about all the problems the United States has had for five, ten, twenty, or thirty years. And Andrew and I will not for a moment dispute that the United States had problems before Donald Trump and will have some after him. They will try, as Kim just did, to blame

everything that's wrong on Liberals, or on Barack Obama, or on Hillary Clinton. They will do everything in their power to avoid the central issue, because deep down I think they know that so much that Donald Trump says and does is indefensible. They will blame everyone else for a crisis that Donald Trump has created.

We are talking about the danger of autocracy. We did not talk about that under George W. Bush or Barack Obama. Yes, we are talking about the collapse of the norms of democracy. We did not talk about that before Donald Trump. We are talking, as Andrew outlined, about persistent lying. We did not talk about this before Donald Trump. And, yes, we are talking about what Senator Bob Corker, an early Trump supporter, said of a president in need of an adult daycare centre. This is a crisis for our democracy. We have never had a president who, from his very first day in office, plainly showed that he had no business being president.

Andrew has spoken eloquently about President Trump's threats to our liberty. I want to just talk briefly about norms. Norms are the things that you need people to live by, because you cannot write rules for everything.

We could start with the most basic norm, which is truth-telling. Daniel Dale, the great reporter for the *Toronto Star*, just reported today that President Trump, and I quote him, "got a new personal record for the most false claims in a week." That's an amazing record. By Daniel Dale's count, he clocked in at forty. And those 1,300 lies or misleading statements that Andrew described amounted to five statements a day. That is quite a record.

Please do not let our opponents in this debate hold democracy to a lower standard. I know they hold democracy to a higher

standard, and I hope we can persuade even them tonight that it is their job to stand up for our democratic life.

Trump arouses anger, but he also arouses fear — fear about whether our institutions can survive a leader who praises strong men abroad and sees them as a model for bold leadership. The United States has not faced as grave a threat to its democratic values and its Republican institutions for many decades. Donald Trump is to blame. Thank you.

Rudyard Griffiths: Thank you, E. J. We are now ready for our last closing statement. Speaker Gingrich, we are going to put six minutes up on the clock. The stage is yours.

Newt Gingrich: Well, first of all, I thought that Andrew was spectacular. I thought that the rhythm, the litany, the pattern — it could have been a Shakespearian speech, a condemnation of the tyrant, of a vicious, unending problem. Go back and listen to that sometime, since it is available online, and just listen to the rhythm. His Oxford education gives him such an extraordinary advantage. In America, if you sound like him you have a 20-point higher IQ by the act of being able to speak.

My good friend E. J. continues the great tradition of the American elite media, which is: “They hated Trump before he ran, they hated Trump while he ran, they hated Trump when he was sworn in, and this morning they hate Trump.”

I am going to pose a problem for all of you that's a real problem for a free society. How would you know? A four-star general in the Marine Corps, retired, who lost his son in active duty, went to the press corps in Washington today and said, “So much of what you report is false that it is an enormous problem.”

Another four-star general, Chief of Staff John Kelly, retired, serving as secretary of defense, said yesterday that the media

reports about Trump wanting to have a tenfold increase in nuclear weapons are totally false.

Now, you may decide they have both been infected, as my friends would suggest. They have become Trump-ized; they no longer know the truth. Or you may decide that a great deal of what you believe is total hogwash, brought to you by a news media which is so deep into its own incestuous ideology and its own way of keeping score that it hasn't a clue what Donald Trump is doing, because it cannot allow itself to think openly and objectively. And I'll give you some examples.

His speech in Warsaw is an extraordinary document. It's comparable to Reagan. And I say that with some knowledge because Tony Dolan, who was Reagan's chief speechwriter, helped write it and said this was equal to anything Reagan ever said in defence of Western civilization. But, of course, if you are on the left, the very idea that you would defend Western civilization is probably proof that there is something wrong.

Read his United Nations speech, which has a core argument. You may disagree with the argument, but it's not trivial. He says the base of freedom starts with sovereignty. If the United Nations is a collection of sovereign countries who then reach agreements, it's useful. If, however, we're moving towards a globalization with a bureaucratic, legalistic system in which our nations are merely subordinate parts of this larger thing, then it's stunningly dangerous.

Now, I don't know about you, but I headed, along with George Mitchell, the former Democratic leader of the senate, a three-year study of the United Nations. The idea that the General Assembly should replace the Canadian Parliament or the American Congress as a source of ultimate authority is insane. Look at who belongs to it. Look at who is on the Human Rights

Commission. If you're not a tyrant or a dictator, you're not allowed on.

So, they all get together to say, "Hey, we're doing fine but, of course, Israel should be condemned." Israel is condemned a hundred times a year — "Oh, it must be Tuesday. Can we go condemn Israel." Now, you wouldn't want to condemn Venezuela or Cuba or Zimbabwe! You certainly wouldn't want to consider what the Chinese are doing to create a truly totalitarian system of information in which they are now tracking every cell phone in China! "Oh, that would be inappropriate." So, I think what Trump was saying was very profound.

You might look at what Trump is doing to deregulate. Now, you can agree or disagree, but he is returning power to the states. He is returning power to local communities. He is actually following the law. And I know from my friends over here who claim they worry about democracy that the great number of executive orders that were illegal and unconstitutional were signed by Barack Obama. They were not signed by Donald Trump.

So, there are profound differences. But there is a simple problem underway. The American people rebelled. This is not a local thing. It's happening in Austria. It happened in the City of Rome, which elected the first woman mayor in 2,500 years of history.⁴ It's happening in Catalonia. You can't blame all of these things on Trump. Angela Merkel just had the worst election since 1946 for the conservative parties in Germany. People are unhappy around the planet. Well, they were unhappy in the U.S. and they decided that the source of their unhappiness was Washington and they wanted somebody who would kick

⁴ Virginia Raggi was first elected in 2016.

over the table. And here is where we are. He's draining the swamp. The alligators are unhappy and two of the lead alligators are here tonight, defending.

Rudyard Griffiths: Okay. Let's hear from those two hungry alligators. We are now going into our rebuttals. We're going to put three minutes on the clock and we're going to hear from the "pro" side first. Andrew, let's go to you first for your rebuttal of your opponents' opening statements.

Andrew Sullivan: Yes, I am very, very glad to. I am going to take specific points that were made and attempt to address them. The first is that everything that I cited is some invention of the Liberal media. The truth is that almost everything I cited is in the public record, on television. Trump's quotes are there to track, to look at, and to examine. There is nothing here that is thin, and everything that I cited was fact.

Now, one of the things that autocrats do is mix lies with facts endlessly. They "gaslight" people. They pretend — and autocrats always do this — that a free press is the real danger to society. Well, I side with Thomas Jefferson, and not with Vladimir Putin and Donald Trump. A free press is essential. And we have a Conservative press and a Conservative media, as well as a Liberal press and a Liberal media. The facts this time are on the Liberal media's side.

I will concede that Barack Obama did commit and execute executive orders that were out of line. He did so because he was subjected from day one by the insane Republican Party's decision to do nothing but obstruct everything this man did. Even when he was inheriting the worst recession since the '30s, they didn't give him a single vote for a surplus.

Well, now, with a much greater debt, they are proposing another con to borrow more money to pay for tax cuts, not for the middle

class, but for the wealthy. And they claim once again that it will decrease the deficit rather than increase it.

I will note that, yes, when you look on paper some people can write speeches. Some people are smart in the White House, even though Stephen Miller⁵ isn't exactly your idea of Arthur Schlesinger.⁶ They can write some eloquent speeches. I also listened to the speech, the inaugural speech — a cavalcade of hatred and fear and demonization. A man who, by democracy standards, Kimberley, actually lost the popular vote.

He is rightly president because our constitutional republic has rules that require him to be president. And I accept completely his legitimacy, and have done from day one. But it's precisely those rules of a constitutional republic that he is a threat to.

Thirdly, I want to point out that Speaker Gingrich is correct, and I agree with him, that globalization has gone too far and too fast.

Rudyard Griffiths: Maybe leave that point for the moderated middle of the debate. You have run up against your three minutes. Thank you, audience, for keeping our debaters on time with your applause. E. J., you're up next — alligator number two.

E. J. Dionne Jr.: If Andrew and I are defenders of the swamp, then Mr. Gingrich is here on behalf of the Socialist International! Trump has taken the swamp and just added in many new alligators and polluted the swamp far more than it ever has been polluted before. It is Mr. Trump's Cabinet secretaries who have flown around on charter planes at taxpayer's expense when they could have taken a car or a train from Washington to Philadelphia and gotten there much more quickly.

⁵ Donald Trump's senior adviser for policy.

⁶ Prominent American historian, author, and public intellectual who served as speechwriter for past Democratic candidates and presidents.

It is Donald Trump who, uniquely among recent presidents, has refused to release his tax returns so we can know how many millions or billions this tax cut proposal he is pushing might save him. It is Donald Trump who has refused to separate himself from his businesses, unlike any president in recent memory. And we don't know what is happening in his businesses, but we do know that somehow there are more members of his golf clubs than ever, and all kinds of influential people wanting to stay in his hotels.

The ways in which the swamp is far more polluted than when Mr. Trump got there are legion. And, as Andrew pointed out, it is not the media who have made up the things we are saying about Donald Trump. Almost everything we are saying that is wrong with Donald Trump has come out of Donald Trump's own mouth.

It is Donald Trump who said that rather authoritarian-sounding thing, "I alone can fix it." It is Donald Trump who said of our American intelligence agencies that they were taking a shot at him and asked, "Are we living in Nazi Germany?" It was Donald Trump who said, "Don't worry about any of my businesses because the president can't have a conflict of interest."

It was Donald Trump who, when the courts ruled against him on his travel ban, tried to blame them for future terrorism. "If something happens, blame him," he said of one of the judges and the court system. It was Donald Trump who falsely said that President Obama had tapped his phones — he spelled it, by the way, T-A-P-P — before the election. It was Donald Trump who said he'd fired the FBI director because of the "Russia thing."

Our case is not based on propaganda. Our case is not based on falsehood. Our case is based on what Donald Trump has said and who he is.

Kimberley Strassel: I would like to rebut what E. J. just said: “Our case is based on what Donald Trump has said.” If you listen to everything that E. J. and Andrew have mentioned, they cannot name an example, a concrete example of an action that the president has taken to undermine democracy. Name a column that you have not been able to write.

Andrew writes on his blog with more adjectives than he even used up here tonight. No one has ever said he cannot do so. But this president has not interfered, and the press is right to engage and obviously to cover him and to say whatever they want, no matter how false it is. It makes me laugh. The press runs constant articles saying that Donald Trump’s approval rating is 35 percent. Isn't that horrible? Doesn't that say terrible things about our country? Do you want to know what the United States media's approval rating is? Twelve. So, they are really not in a position to lecture. And that number was there well before Donald Trump ever came to office.

Talk about anything. I defy my opponents to give an example of how Donald Trump has, in the way that Barack Obama did, trampled over the rights of the Congressional Branch, stripped their powers from it. Name for me one time that the Supreme Court has ruled 9-0 to stop one of his actions.

In fact, I noticed that E. J. just mentioned the lower courts and his travel ban. What he did not mention is that the Supreme Court ultimately upheld the main provisions of it because it was constitutional, because it was legal, by contrast to his predecessors' decision to grant far-flung immunity to illegal immigrants in the United States.

By the way, this is a problem we all have to try to overcome. We have to try to get beyond justifying illegal behaviour just because we agree with the policy. Andrew just said, “Well, why did Barack Obama continually act in a lawless way? Because he was obstructed.” Well, really? Is that your justification? I am sure everyone in this audience would be more than a little alarmed if I said that Chuck Schumer’s⁷ obstruction in the Senate now gives Donald Trump licence to do whatever he wants and justifies him in that action. That’s why we don’t like precedents like that.

I’ll give you a personal example. At the *Wall Street Journal* editorial page, I have passionately fought for years and years for the rights of Dreamers living in the United States, brought there by no fault of their own, but by their parents, to continue living in the United States and offering all the amazing contributions that they do. But, nonetheless, I opposed the way that Barack Obama did it because you don’t simply exempt entire people from the law. We are a nation of laws. Donald Trump is returning us to that. And in the end, as a result, our democracy, our institutions, our rule of law will be stronger, and that’s what we need to measure him on.

Newt Gingrich:

I did think, by the way, E. J., that it was a tactical mistake to bring up the lower court decision by a nutcake judge who was overruled, I think, 8-0 by the Supreme Court, because that’s one of the complaints of Conservatives about the judicial system. If you look at the Ninth Circuit Court, which is crazy; if you look at some of the individual judges that are out there who are crazy, they do make decisions that are crazy. And, by the way, on national security grounds — and they were just repudiated 8-0 on national security grounds — in the Constitution the president is the commander-in-chief; he has the obligation to take the steps

⁷ U.S. senator from New York, currently Senate Minority Leader.

to defend America. You can agree or disagree with him, but no judge should interpose themselves in a way that makes America more vulnerable to attack, and then be shocked if the president of the United States says, “You just made America more vulnerable to be attacked.”

Now, you said that this was somehow inappropriate; it’s not at all inappropriate. Franklin Delano Roosevelt attacked the courts. Thomas Jefferson attacked the courts. The Jeffersonians’ major campaign plank, one of them, was anti-court. And I appreciate Jefferson's appreciation of the media. You know, I have always thought the Jefferson subsidy of a newspaper to attack Hamilton while Hamilton was subsidizing a newspaper to attack Jefferson when they were both serving in the same Cabinet was an example of freedom of the press to take bribes from politicians that is worthy of being brought up by people like you. So, I appreciate your bringing up Jefferson.

I also want to remind all of you who worry about dissent in America that one of the most popular musicals of modern times is based on the vice-president of the United States shooting the secretary of the treasury. We have not had, since Hamilton, a single incident of such passion, and therefore I feel comfortable that America will endure and succeed in absorbing all of this.

But let me go a step further. Two quick things, if I have time. The first was something Andrew said that I think you should think about in terms of its viciousness and its dishonesty; that is the clever mixing together of Putin and Trump. Let's be clear, Vladimir Putin was trained by the KGB. He believes in torturing and killing people. His government routinely assassinates people. He kills reporters who write the wrong things. He has imposed in many ways a vicious dictatorship. He is involved in attacking in Eastern Ukraine. He has seized Crimea. And to suggest that there is anything in the American system

comparable to Putin is profoundly dishonest intellectually and makes it impossible to have a rational, reasonable discussion. Because now if you accept the two words in the same phrase, you're already in a crazy environment. So, I think that's bad.

Lastly, one quick example of the real hostility to freedom in America. At William & Mary College two weeks ago, Black Lives Matter surrounded an ACLU⁸ spokesperson, would not let her speak physically, and walled her off from her audience on the grounds that she had no right to be there. The most violence in America today is on the Left, not the Right.

Rudyard Griffiths: Well, thank you, debaters, for a terrific opening to this debate. You've set the table, let's now dig into some of the specific issues. I think we all agree this debate has a political dimension to it, an economic dimension, and a cultural dimension. And let me start with you, Andrew, and pick up on —

[I THINK YOU WILL LIKELY WANT TO DELETE THIS SECTION, BUT JUST IN CASE YOU WANT TO KEEP IT FOR FUN, I'VE EDITED IT. IF YOU REMOVE IT, THE TEXT SHOULD CARRY ON FROM RUDYARD'S "PICK UP ON" TO "KIMBERLEY'S POINT."]

Newt Gingrich: Before you do that, is there a meaning to your green socks?

Rudyard Griffiths: I don't know. I just thought they looked really good.

Newt Gingrich: I just think those are so cool. I feel almost embarrassed with boring black socks on. Is this kind of a Canadian thing?

Rudyard Griffiths: You and I can trade socks at the end of the evening. Kimberley —

Kimberley Strassel: It's kind of like *The Wizard of Oz*, though.

Rudyard Griffiths: Look! There is a debate here and we've got an audience. Can we please get going?

⁸ American Civil Liberties Union

Now, let me pick up on Kimberley's point, because I think it was an important one in her rebuttal, and posit it to you, Andrew, and have you answer. We disagree with many things that Trump says — many of us in this audience, viscerally, by the noises that the crowd has made. But give us a specific, concrete action that has resulted from this president that has undermined the institutions, the values, the norms of American democracy.

Andrew Sullivan: Well, let me give you a simple example that is a direct equivalent to the Obama situation. And I'm not defending Obama. I think he did abuse the executive privilege.

Kimberley Strassel: But you justified him.

Andrew Sullivan: I didn't.

Kimberley Strassel: You said it was okay because he was obstructed.

Andrew Sullivan: No. I said that was the context in which it happened. I still don't think it was defensible. But I don't think Obama's intent and the way he behaved as president is anything like as dangerous to democracy and democratic values as Donald Trump.

Here is a classic example. This is the man who has faced obstructionism in the Congress from his own party, who has been unable to construct a workable majority for any of the proposals that he has constructed. The fact that he is too incompetent to be a dictator doesn't mean his will and his intent are not there.

Kimberley Strassel: So, the example?

Andrew Sullivan: The fact that the constitutional order of the United States, which has lasted 240 years, has not collapsed after nine months is not a great achievement, despite his great efforts.

Kimberley Strassel: No, we guard it.

Andrew Sullivan: But here is how he acted. And let me take the key law that he has been trying to pass now for nine months and been incapable of doing so, and that is the health care law, the Affordable Care Act, which is the law of the land. And he is required to effectively enforce the law of the land. He has been unable to change the law of the land, so what is he doing? He is sabotaging it. He is using his office to sabotage and undermine the laws of the land at the expense of potentially millions of people's health insurance and health care. Now, that seems to me sabotaging things when he can't change them. The same thing with the Iran deal.

Rudyard Griffiths: Okay, hold on. We're going to stop there. Before we get to Iran, we'll have Kimberley respond to this. Does that meet your litmus test?

Kimberley Strassel: It's awfully hard to sabotage a law that's collapsing under its own weight.

Andrew Sullivan: There is no evidence of that whatsoever.

Kimberley Strassel: When you have entire counties across the United States that no longer have any more than one option for their health care. When people are watching their premiums triple or quadruple. When average basic business owners can no longer afford to get health care.

Andrew Sullivan: I would have no health care at all without the Obamacare, thank you.

Kimberley Strassel: Well, many people have no health care *because* of it. So, we can all agree that it's not —

Andrew Sullivan: That is absolutely false.

E. J. Dionne Jr.: That is a falsehood. Many Americans *have* health care because of Obamacare.

Kimberley Strassel: I can name members of my family who don't have health care because of it. They had it perfectly fine before Obamacare came in, but now they no longer have it. The bigger point, though, is that it's hard to sabotage it —

Andrew Sullivan: It's hard to sabotage it?

Kimberley Strassel: It's hard to sabotage something that's already failing, okay?

Andrew Sullivan: But Trump is trying, right?

Rudyard Griffiths: Hold on. Let Kimberley finish her point.

Kimberley Strassel: It's hard to sabotage something that's failing. But also, you're talking of the law of the land; this is a law that the former president unilaterally changed more than forty-two times himself. This has now become such an elastic definition of what the law is that nobody knows what it is anymore because the prior president didn't respect his own law.

Andrew Sullivan: A law does set up an institution and a mechanism with regulations. And the regulations to enforce that law are a part of the interest of the Executive Branch, to make sure that that law is properly enforced.

Kimberley Strassel: And to the extent that he kept changing the regulations, it was an abuse of his executive power.

Andrew Sullivan: The last president attempted to use his executive power to enforce that law. The current president is using his executive power to undermine that law.

Kimberley Strassel: Right. Why is it not an abuse for Obama to use that power when it is an abuse for Donald Trump?

Rudyard Griffiths: Hold on a sec. This is a debate about American democracy, not a debate about American health care.

Kimberley Strassel: That's not a concrete example.

E. J. Dionne Jr.: No, but it's about undermining the law.

I want to pick up on something Newt said, that this notion that Andrew invented the link between Vladimir Putin and Donald Trump was somehow intellectually dishonest. It was not Andrew Sullivan, it was Donald Trump who said that Vladimir Putin, the man you said was a KGB agent, was a stronger leader than Barack Obama. It was not Andrew Sullivan who said that.

Newt Gingrich: Well, that's technically true.

E. J. Dionne Jr.: It was Donald Trump who refused over and over again to say a critical word about Vladimir Putin in his campaign. You want actions Trump took? Trump fired James Comey because he got too close to the "Russia thing." That is an action that is genuinely troubling in this administration. Donald Trump upbraiding his attorney general because the attorney general refused to recuse himself from a case that he was plainly involved in.

Kimberley Strassel: But the recusal happened.

E. J. Dionne Jr.: These are intimations of autocratic behaviour.

Rudyard Griffiths: Okay. Let's pause for a second, because that is an interesting example E. J. is making of a specific action that he's alleging the president has undertaken that has directly harmed American democracy. Newt, respond to it.

Newt Gingrich: Well, I'm not sure which part of that you mean? He said, in a setting where a large number of Conservatives may agree, the term is "stronger leader." That's one thing.

Andrew Sullivan: No, no. Let me follow up with that. He was asked on television when he was actually presented with a point you just made, that Vladimir Putin is a killer.

Kimberley Strassel: How does this undermine democracy?

Andrew Sullivan: And he responded, Kimberley, he — and I know you don't want to hear this — but he responded, "Well, we are killers, too. We kill people, as well."

Kimberley Strassel: How does this undermine —

Andrew Sullivan: Now if any Democrat for a second had said such a thing, you would impeach the guy.

Newt Gingrich: We'd be unhappy.

E. J. Dionne Jr.: Jeane Kirkpatrick⁹ talked about moral equivalence. I have never heard a worse case of moral equivalence in the state.

Andrew Sullivan: But can you, Speaker Gingrich, launch an impeachment of a president because he committed perjury in a civil trial? But a president who admits obstruction of justice in public is someone you want to praise?

Newt Gingrich: He didn't obstruct justice.

Andrew Sullivan: Where is your consistency?

Newt Gingrich: No, wait a second. This is something which Andy McCarthy, as a former prosecutor for the federal government, has outlined clearly. Presidents have the authority to fire the FBI director, period. It's in the Constitution. He's the chief executive, period.

⁹ The first woman to serve as [U.S. ambassador to the United Nations](#), known for the "[Kirkpatrick Doctrine](#)," which advocated supporting [authoritarian](#) regimes around the world if they went along with Washington's aims. [TAKEN FROM WIKIPEDIA. NEEDS EDITING IF KEPT]

Andrew Sullivan: Yes, they do. But not as obstruction of justice. Not to squash an investigation into his own campaign.

Newt Gingrich: What's squashed? I just want to know — this is exactly what I'm talking about. Mueller is out there with seventeen lawyers running around with a grand jury —

Andrew Sullivan: Despite Trump, not because of him.

Newt Gingrich: But he's out there.

Andrew Sullivan: Yes, because in fact —

Kimberley Strassel: Democracy is working.

Newt Gingrich: So your argument is that Trump is such a powerful autocrat, but he's so incompetent that he can't be autocratically autocratic because he's too incompetent. So, all the things you are worried about aren't happening because he is not smart enough to stop them. Because the fact is, the investigation *is* underway. It's underway in the Senate. It's underway in the House. It's underway in the Justice Department. It's underway at the *Washington Post*. It's underway at the *New York Times*. It's underway at NBC News. But we're supposedly in danger of America losing its freedom because of an incompetent person who can't achieve any of the things that you're worried about? I just want to understand.

Andrew Sullivan: When a president openly hopes for an investigation and fires someone to obstruct an investigation under the rule of law; when he seethes with anger at an attorney general because he obeys the rule of law; when he tells police officers to break the law; when he tells U.S. service members to break the law, his words matter, Speaker Gingrich. His words are acts. And his words continually undermine the rule of law and the Constitution of the United States.

Kimberley Strassel: Okay. Look. This where we've now come. "His words are acts" because — listen closely — Andrew could not come up with anything that he has done other than that he used his executive power.

E. J. Dionne Jr.: Wait.

Kimberley Strassel: No. He used his executive power in health care in the exact same way that Barack Obama did. Somehow that's supposedly wrong?

Andrew Sullivan: No. He has not faithfully executed —

Kimberley Strassel: So now we've had to move to "words are acts." Okay, that's simply not true. And also, the entire way the media has completely changed around this Russia probe story is incredible to me. James Comey was aware that the president was not himself under investigation. The president asked several times for James Comey to clarify that. He refused to do it because James Comey was a political player in Washington like any you have ever seen.

Andrew Sullivan: No, because James Comey —

Kimberley Strassel: And now we know that he was keeping secret memos, that he leaked things to the press, that he, in general, was ... Look, everyone, if you want to talk about things that should scare people about democracy, how about that the head of the FBI was actively investigating both candidates for the presidency simultaneously with the use of a secret court and wireless warrant. That is concerning.

And now that we are attempting to exercise some oversight and find out exactly what happened there and what inspired such a probe and what actions were taken, all kinds of obstruction is happening, but not from the Trump administration. From the career bureaucrats left over from the past administration.

E. J. Dionne Jr.: I want to say a couple of things.

Rudyard Griffiths: Okay. We'll take E. J.'s comments.

E. J. Dionne Jr.: First, I think Andrew and I have already made progress because Newt conceded that Trump has not been an effective authoritarian because of incompetence. So, we have the incompetence of Donald Trump on the table already. But I think what Kim said is incredibly dangerous. What she just did, and what Trump supporters do all the time, and it is why we are frightened about the role of truth in our politics, is that she has ascribed all sorts of evil motives to James Comey, who, if we know anything about what he did, intervened in the election in a way that helped *Hillary Clinton*. And he did not come out with any information about the Donald Trump investigation that was ongoing. Comey was not willing to make a statement before the investigation was over.

We know from the Mueller investigation that they have not closed off the idea that Donald Trump was involved in this. They have not settled the matter. The attack on James Comey is of a piece with what Andrew and I are worried about. And Donald Trump was vocally upset when Sessions recused himself. And there would not be a Special Counsel if the deputy attorney general had not insisted.

And what we are concerned about, and the reason we worry about our democracy, is that we don't know what is going to happen at the end. We do not know if there will be a Saturday Night Massacre; if the equivalent of Elliot Richardson¹⁰ will be fired in this case. Donald Trump's behaviour up to now can give one no confidence that we will avoid that path this time.

¹⁰ Attorney general to Richard Nixon, who resigned rather than fire the top lawyer investigating the Watergate scandal. [AGAIN, MAINLY FROM WIKIPEDIA. WILL NEED EDITING IF KEPT]

Rudyard Griffiths: Speaker Gingrich?

Newt Gingrich: Well, let's go back and look at Comey for a minute, all right? When Comey was the number two person under Bush, he appointed a Special Counsel for what he knew was not a crime; for what involved leaking a name from the CIA, which they knew at the time was not a crime. And they knew who leaked it. And they told the person who leaked it to shut up. And they appointed a Special Counsel who tried to get Vice-President Cheney, and couldn't get him, and in the end, managed to get somebody who was a totally decent civil servant on a technical argument.

Now, this is where Mueller is going to end up going. Mueller will get somebody. You don't get seventeen high-priced lawyers, virtually all of whom voted for Hillary, virtually all of whom donated to Hillary — you don't get those kinds of lawyers in a room to change their career, come to work as part of a task force, and not get somebody.

E. J. Dionne Jr.: So, you are already trying to discredit an ongoing investigation and setting us up so that when Trump fires him you'll say this was political. That's what I'm worried about.

Newt Gingrich: No. Can I finish?

Andrew Sullivan: This attack on the possibility of neutral enforcement of the laws by career professionals, by someone whose reputation has stood up to Republican presidents, including George W. Bush, at great risk to his own career —

Newt Gingrich: Wait! Let me just finish.

Kimberley Strassel: You know when I last heard that argument? I last heard it when Comey was investigating Hillary Clinton —

Rudyard Griffiths: Woah, woah, woah. If you're all talking at once, the audience cannot hear any one of you individually. The Speaker has the floor. Newt has the floor right now.

Newt Gingrich: I was just going to bring it to the present. It is Comey who, under oath in the Senate, said, "Oh yes, I deliberately leaked a memo through a friend of mine who is a professor at Columbia," knowing the *New York Times* would publish it and it would force the appointment of a Special Counsel. Now when the —

E. J. Dionne Jr.: Because he was afraid that Trump was going to obstruct —

Newt Gingrich: I don't care why. Wait a second, E. J. I don't care what the cause is. The guy who was the director of the FBI telling you he broke the law, which he did, by leaking —

E. J. Dionne Jr.: He did not break the law. There was no law broken.

Newt Gingrich: Oh, so it's all right to leak memos for the purpose of —

E. J. Dionne Jr.: You see, there was no law broken by what Comey did

Andrew Sullivan: Notice, ladies and gentleman, how the argument has been diverted — how we are now engaged in a character assassination of one of the most honourable people who has ever served in Washington. Because an autocrat, a man who cannot tolerate any opposition, a man who resists any non-zero-sum engagement, a man who cannot tolerate the slightest criticism without acting on revenge has infected the minds, the souls, of these people so they are attacking the integrity of the very process of democracy. That's how deep the rot has gone.

Rudyard Griffiths: E. J., that deserves a response. I'm going to let Kimberley respond to that rather pointed attack.

Kimberley Strassel: I do remember that the last time I heard a group of people who were just incensed over the abuses of a career bureaucrat and the

licence he was taking with his office was the entire Left-wing establishment and press when James Comey decided to come out and criticize Hillary Clinton in public in the middle of an election.

Andrew Sullivan: Not me, Kimberley. Not me. Prove it.

Kimberley Strassel: Then you were alone in that, because everyone else was out there —

Andrew Sullivan: Well, I'm here to defend myself, not to be truncated by guilt by association.

Kimberley Strassel: So, please don't suggest that it's just Conservatives or those here on the stage that now are questioning the integrity of James Comey. We all know that people in powerful positions also need to be held to some account. It is very concerning that you have an FBI director who is now so vigorously opposing any oversight of what he did. And we have lost our way —

Rudyard Griffiths: Okay, I think we have re-litigated the Comey affair. We've got a lot of topics to cover and we've spent significant time on this. Let's all sit down for a moment, okay? Take a collective breath and move on to the next aspect of this.

I want to pick up on something that Speaker Gingrich said in his rebuttal, which is an argument that you are going to no doubt have a strong response to. And that is that the crisis of democracy in America today, according to Speaker Gingrich's camp, is a crisis of the Left, a view that identity politics in the Left — safe spaces, micro-aggressions, a whole litany of ideas about how America should be reconfigured and restructured — that these are what has precipitated this acute moment in American culture; that this crisis resides with the Left, not with the Right.

E. J. Dionne Jr.: Well, I have known Speaker Gingrich, I think, for about thirty years and, I think, in times of high unemployment or low unemployment, in times of national concord and national discord, he has always said that the problems in American politics come from the left.

Newt Gingrich: Yes.

E. J. Dionne Jr.: So, I don't think that that should surprise us in the least.

I just want to make a point about this extended discussion we had just now. It proved the central point that Andrew and I were trying to make, which is that our opponents in this debate have to keep diverting you from what Trump has actually done.

They do not want any of us talking about the fact that it is Republicans like Bob Corker who are very worried about the possibility of World War III. And it is Republicans and Congress who privately say that they are worried about many of the same aspects of Donald Trump's personality, his approach to issues, his tempestuousness, his lack of focus. Instead, we talked about a man named James Comey. It's Donald Trump who is on trial here today in this proposition.

Secondly, if we want to have a long debate over problems in the American economy, about the problems of inequality, we could have a very long debate about that, and I would welcome it. But I do not think it is the left side of American politics that is dividing us in the way Donald Trump did on the day of Charlottesville, when he tried to create a moral equivalence between Klansmen and Nazis and those who opposed him. Because many of those who were standing there in the streets opposing them were peaceful protestors trying to oppose the lies of this far-right.

And look at the lies of the far-right itself. I believe that this movement has empowered new forms of political action on the right, the far-right end of politics, that I know Kim and Newt have to oppose in their hearts and in their consciences. And I think this should worry us. And when we see these movements empowered in our country and given airing, it is not just bad for Liberals, it is bad for the entire Conservative movement.

Newt Gingrich:

Let me be clear about what E. J. was just saying. No one on the Left wants to take the student violence in Connecticut, where they actually injured a professor to stop a Conservative from speaking. Nobody on the Left wants to take the people, the ANTIFA¹¹ people at Berkeley, who have said they are eager to use violence to stop people from speaking.

Nobody on the Left wants to confront the fact that in the latest study, professors under thirty-five are by 12-1 Democrats, and the idea of your getting tenure if you're a Conservative is a joke.

No one on the Left wants to look at the kind of language I described a minute ago where Black Lives Matter — and I thought it was ironic — literally blocked an ACLU spokesperson from speaking at William & Mary, physically blocked her, and then blocked her from seeing the audience, so she couldn't even mingle with the people who came out to talk to her.

Now, nobody on the Left wants to deal with this. Nobody on the Left wants to deal with the degree to which Soros is funding network after network, which is designed to undermine

¹¹ A political movement of [autonomous](#), self-styled [anti-fascist](#) groups in the [United States](#) whose salient feature is their [opposition to fascism](#) by [direct action](#) and militant protest tactics. [SAME CAVEAT AS BEFORE]

democracy and create exactly the kind of violence I just described.

E. J. Dionne Jr.: Ah, the spectre of George Soros! We can't talk about Trump; we have got to talk about George Soros now on that —

Newt Gingrich: Wait a second ... I rest my case. You cannot talk factually about what's going on in America and have them take it seriously, because it totally discredits their case.

Rudyard Griffiths: Okay, Andrew?

Andrew Sullivan: You may know, Speaker Gingrich, and you may know, Kimberley, that I have been very vocal and consistently vocal against this poison on the left. I do it every week. I do it in venues where I am likely to get a lot of blowback. I do it at the risk of my career and my job. You're right. There is an awful poison on the left. There is a poison that is dividing this country. And it's a poison that's increasing racial divides, not ameliorating them. And there are also — E. J. is right, obviously — some foul, disgusting, far-right movements in this country.

My point is simply this, and it's about Donald Trump. He is president of the United States. It is his job, his responsibility, to attempt to bridge the divide, not to exploit it, deepen it, and make it much worse.

Kimberley Strassel: I think that if you are familiar with my work, then you also know that I have spent years now writing about the scary abuse of government power and the attempt of people to silence their political opponents using not just tactics such as Speaker Gingrich was talking about, but far more scary ones. So, I know something about abuse of government power and words like “autocrats” and “tyranny.”

Let me give you an example of something that did happen in the United States just a few years ago. In Wisconsin, a Liberal

district attorney was mad at Conservative groups that had supported a Republican governor. He launched a bogus campaign finance investigation into these thirty groups under a law in Wisconsin called the John Doe law. It allowed him to do it in secret and to impose a gag order on everyone who was being investigated. They had their financial records taken, their emails taken. There were pre-dawn raids staged on their home. In one case involving a child of one of the targets — the parents were off on a charitable fundraising trip — the police came, broke into the house, put him in a room, wouldn't allow him to call his lawyer, wouldn't allow him to call his grandparents, and as they left, said, "If you tell anyone what happened to you here this morning, you'll go to jail."

Now, that's an abuse of government power. That happened on the left. And if I saw Donald Trump engaging in anything like this, you can believe me that I would be the first person to say something about it.

But this is ridiculous. To this point we have lots of words. Autocracy, tyranny, et cetera. We do not have an example. Even the Jim Comey example. You're not making the case that it was illegal for him to do it.

Andrew Sullivan: It is illegal to obstruct justice, Kimberley.

Kimberley Strassel: And nobody has found him to have obstructed justice.

Andrew Sullivan: We are under the investigation to find out.

Kimberley Strassel: But no one has yet come up with anything to suggest that he has actually undermined any democratic institutions or laws.

Andrew Sullivan: I just did.

Kimberley Strassel: It's not proven.

E. J. Dionne Jr.: Our opponents want to swim in a sea of red herrings. I have no idea what an investigation in Wisconsin many, many years ago has to do with what's on the table tonight.

Kimberley Strassel: No, it was a few years ago. It's government abuse.

E. J. Dionne Jr.: But the pardon of Joe Arpaio, which happened this year and was done by Donald Trump, has a great deal to do with what we're talking about tonight.

Kimberley Strassel: I think that's my point, E. J. You didn't care when it was happening in Wisconsin, but now suddenly you have a very fine air about —

Andrew Sullivan: But do *you* care now?

Kimberley Strassel: About what happens with democracy?

Andrew Sullivan: Do you care now, Kimberley, about the firing, the pardoning of Joe Arpaio? Have you written about it? Don't you consider that a clear violation and abuse of his power?

Kimberley Strassel: Pardon power?

Andrew Sullivan: Yes, the pardon power.

E. J. Dionne Jr.: Let's look at Joe Arpaio.

Kimberley Strassel: Why is that a violation of the pardon power?

Andrew Sullivan: Do you think it's okay to pardon a public official — Kimberley Strassel: What about Mark Rich?¹²

¹² Indicted in the United States on federal charges of [tax evasion](#) and making controversial oil deals with Iran during the [Iran hostage crisis](#). He received a controversial [presidential pardon](#) from [U.S. President Bill Clinton](#) on the president's last day in office. [SAME CAVEAT AS BEFORE]

E. J. Dionne Jr.: Kimberley, I let you have your little excursion to Wisconsin. Let me say something.

Joe Arpaio was accused of violating the constitutional rights of people in Arizona. And Donald Trump tried, at first, to end the investigation, and he couldn't succeed in doing that. And so he pardoned a man accused of constitutional violations of the rights of minorities.

Now, this is an action. I am not making this up. This is not what Mr. Gingrich likes to call "the terrible news media." This is a fact. And when a president of the United States uses this rather unlimited pardon power to pardon someone who violates the constitutional rights of American citizens, I don't know whose constitutional rights are safe. Because you remember Martin Niemöeller's line, "first they came for these brothers and sisters of ours," and we do not know where that story ends, but it rarely ends well.

Newt Gingrich: So let me start with that. This, of course, is referring to the Nazis. My underlying point is, why did we quote somebody who is talking about the Nazis as a reference to Trump? Now, let me tell you why these guys in the end have —

E. J. Dionne Jr.: I didn't use the word "Nazi." That idea holds whether you were talking about Nazis or whether you were talking about any regime you might worry about.

Newt Gingrich: But it's about tyranny.

E. J. Dionne Jr.: I agree. I do not make Nazi metaphors because they are a mistake.

Newt Gingrich: Okay. All right. But it's about tyranny.

Kimberley Strassel: Like Wisconsin.

E. J. Dionne Jr.: Unless they are real Nazis on the streets in Charlottesville.

Newt Gingrich: But let me just suggest to all of you that in a sense, citing the Arpaio pardon is a perfect example of what we're talking about. You can make a pretty good case that it was a dumb pardon, a bad pardon — that he shouldn't have done it.

E. J. Dionne Jr.: Yeah.

Newt Gingrich: That's a policy question.

E. J. Dionne Jr.: Thank you for that.

Kimberley Strassel: That's policy.

Newt Gingrich: But you had an 85-year-old man who had spent his entire lifetime in law enforcement, who had been re-elected over and over by massive majorities.

Okay. I'm assuming those are mostly Liberals who are groaning. I understand the absence of compassion for people you don't agree with.

But just think about it from this standpoint. I am not arguing for it, I'm trying to make a deeper point. So, Trump decides that an 85-year-old former lawman probably shouldn't go to jail. Now, some of you would say, "No, by God, what a great chance to show the police nobody is above the law. Let's punish this 85-year-old who is clearly such a danger." That's not the argument we're having tonight. That's a policy argument. You can say that's a really stupid thing to do but, as a matter of the United States Constitution, there is zero question that the president of the United States can pardon anyone at any time. Zero question.

E. J. Dionne Jr.: And that's why I am so afraid that he will abuse this power — that what he did in Arpaio's case he could do in other cases.

Newt Gingrich: But, wait. He may abuse the power, but he won't have broken the power. He won't be an autocrat. He will be doing precisely what the founding fathers wrote into the Constitution to enable the president to do what they thought he should do. This was not a bunch of stupid people.

Andrew Sullivan: Did the founding fathers believe that if the president — if this turns out to be the case; it's a possibility — finds that people in his campaign broke the law by colluding with Russia in trying to distort the results of the election, and the president decides to pardon them, do you think pardoning his own people, and indeed pardoning himself, is something the founders really thought this power was supposed to be used for?

Newt Gingrich: You're making my case. What the founders would have said is that that's why you have the impeachment provision.

Kimberley Strassel: Correct.

Newt Gingrich: And if it turns out that a president were to pardon himself and the Congress were to decide that was unacceptable, they have the full power to impeach him.

But you're making my case. Everything you just complained about is totally constitutional, was totally written into the document. He did not in any way abuse his power. He may have done something that was not right in terms of policy but he did nothing that was wrong in terms of constitutional authority.

Andrew Sullivan: He is actively undermining the spirit of the Constitution, the norms and procedures that are essential to maintaining the Constitution; and he actively, every day, excoriates and exhibits contempt for the notion of a republic under law, in which he is equal, not above everybody else. He fundamentally mistakes the understanding of the presidency in the United States. And he mistakes it in ways that make one extremely nervous, Newt.

You must concede surely, let me beg you, that the rhetoric that this man has used, that his love of Putin, of Duterte — his praise of a man who has extrajudicially killed thousands of people — surely you are troubled by the rhetoric and tone of this person. Surely you are troubled by a president who tells law enforcement officers to abuse suspects. Surely there are some lines you don't want a president to cross.

Kimberley Strassel: Of course. There are some things I wish he wouldn't say every single day. Right?

Andrew Sullivan: Well, then why didn't you say that every —?

Kimberley Strassel: We do. If you read the editorial page, we do, on nearly a daily basis, point out some of the things he does which we think make him a real “pooh-pooh-head.”

But you're making it sound as though the random things that go through Trump's brain become law or become action. They do not. Have you met Ryan Zinke, the head of his Interior Department? Have you met Scott Pruitt, the head of his EPA? Have you met any of the people that he's installed in these positions, because they are the folks who are actually making the decisions and running the government? And many of them are Constitutional law professors.

Again, Scott Pruitt, before we he was put in as head of the EPA, led the charge among dozens of states to sue the Obama administration over its own overreach of its powers. These are people with a deeply felt belief in federalism and also the rule of law. *They* are running the government. And no matter what random things happen in Donald Trump's head, until you can prove to me that they have been put in action, then they are nothing more than your fears and rhetoric.

Rudyard Griffiths: Okay. I'm conscious of the time. This has been a terrific debate. I have been virtually superfluous as a moderator and that's always a great sign of a terrific conversation and important issues being tackled.

I'm conscious that we've got our closing statements coming up. We're going to put three minutes on the clock for each of you and, as is the tradition of these debates, we're going to do our closing statements in the opposite order of our opening remarks. So, Newt Gingrich, you are up first with your three-minute closing statement.

Newt Gingrich: Let me just suggest to you that, had they worded the proposal for the debate differently, it would have been impossible for us to have any arguments. If they had said that, to use your six-year-old's term, Donald Trump's a "pooh-pooh-head" and says really weird things sometimes, it would have been tough.

The objective reality is that this is the first person in American history never to have held any public office to come out of nowhere and defeat sixteen Republicans, defeat Hillary Clinton, defeat a billion-dollar campaign, defeat the elite media. He has done a hostile takeover of the Republican Party and a hostile takeover of the national government. And that kind of person probably has edges. Okay?

So, if the debate topic had been "Resolved: Donald Trump has some edges and they are a little strange," I would have refused to come up here. I would have said are you crazy? I mean, I am willing to debate in front of Canadians, even if some of them boo, because I think you are so much better than, say, a Berkeley audience.

But still, you have got to have some sense here. That's not what the question is. America has many challenges. Venezuela has many challenges. Catalonia has many challenges. Austria has

many challenges. Germany has many challenges. Britain has many challenges. We are living in a period where our culture and our economy are in turmoil. Where there are huge systems like Facebook and Google that are uncontrolled and that are changing the entire landscape, and all of us are having to adjust.

In that setting, the wording of the debate strikes me as almost impossible for them to carry. That the problems of the American democracy are Donald Trump? He's a manifestation of the problems. He was elected because a vast number of Americans are deeply uncomfortable. And they preferred taking the risk on somebody with rough edges and somebody who occasionally would say rough things, because they thought he would at least break up the system that they thought was decaying and failing the country. And I think that's what's been happening.

Now, of course, if you are in the old order, or if you've grown up in the old order and you were part of the old order, this is all horrifying. And as I said at the beginning, I fully expect that, as the swamp diminishes, the alligators will be snapping and biting and arguing and yelling "Autocrat, autocrat!" But, in fact, what's happening is that America is once again reinventing itself.

Rudyard Griffiths: E. J.

E. J. Dionne Jr.: I want to thank you all for your attentiveness. And I have to say that I salute Newt Gingrich for trying to make Donald Trump seem almost cute and eccentric at the beginning of his talk. I also appreciate his calling us alligators, because they are cute in their own way.

And I want to point out that what happened at the end of the debate is precisely what I said would happen, which is that our opponents here want to hang on a few words of this proposition and say that if you don't believe that Donald Trump caused all

the problems that the United States faces, then you really can't vote for this proposition.

We are asserting something else. We are asserting that Donald Trump *is* the crisis, *is* the problem. They say that we presented no specifics. They couldn't really answer us on Joe Arpaio. They had to go off on a long bit of character assassination to dispute what we said about James Comey — which is true — which is that Donald Trump said that he didn't like what James Comey was doing about the Russian investigation. That should be genuinely alarming.

It is Trump himself who holds himself above the norms that every other politician, I should say including Mr. Gingrich, held themselves to. He says, "I don't have to get rid of my businesses. I don't have to release my income tax returns. You don't have to know anything about me. I can do what I want." If that isn't autocratic, I don't know what is.

American democracy was never supposed to give us a leader like Donald Trump. We have had more or less ideological presidents, more or less competent presidents. We've had other presidents who have divided us, but never as consciously as Donald Trump has. We have never had a president who has aroused such grave and widespread doubts about his commitment to the institution of self-government and to the norms of democracy.

We urge you to vote for this proposition to send a message to us, meaning we Americans. Now, I believe that the United States is more tolerant than Donald Trump. We are more committed to democratic freedoms than he is. The American people are more open to progress and hope and to the future. That is why the vast majority of Americans disapprove of Donald Trump.

Yes, Donald Trump has created the worst crisis for our democracy in generations. But I want to reassure all our Canadian friends here that we shall overcome.

Kimberley Strassel: Let's think about what we have actually established here tonight. As Newt said, we have established that the president is a bit of a "pooh-pooh-head." He's a little odd, a little off. He definitely does not govern in a way that anyone else has. And he says things that many of us wish he wouldn't, all the time.

We have established that a lot of people do not agree with Donald Trump's policies, including Andrew and E. J., and are furious that he was elected, and will do what they can to discredit him in office. And that the media will do so, too. As Newt said, half of the stuff that comes out of the media, it's directly disputed by four-star generals, by others. But it doesn't stop them from writing it. So, there is an active and hostile campaign.

We've established that if you throw around lots of scary words like "autocrat," "tyranny," and "Putin," and put them in the same breath as "Donald Trump," that you can scare people and make them start thinking in an alternate reality to what's actually happening in Washington.

But here is what we have not established, because it goes to tonight's resolution. We have not established that Donald Trump has undermined or hurt in any way the actual rules and forms of democracy in the United States as we Americans view them.

They mentioned Jim Comey. The president had the right to fire him. They mentioned Joe Arpaio. He had the right to pardon him. They talk about different moves that he's taken. No one disputes that the president has the right to change regulations within health and human services, to change a president's health care law. You might not like how he's doing it. You might agree,

but with the policy of before. But you might not like that he got rid of the climate program, but he did so because it was pushed through without Congressional approval and had been immediately stayed by the Supreme Court because they recognized that it likely violated the Constitution because of the way it was put through.

No one, again, can point to anything that has undermined those basic structures that we have.

Audience Member: What about banning the LGBT from the military?

Kimberley Strassel: I didn't know we were debating that. No one is disputing that he can do that, too. I am not saying it's the right policy.

Audience Member: That's right.

Kimberley Strassel: Many people can disagree, but you don't just get to revolt if you don't like it. This is why we have elections. And I appreciate that many people in this room did not like the way this election went. For many of us on the Republican side, Donald Trump was not our first choice for the nomination either. But we had an election that was peacefully conducted. It was honestly conducted. And there is no proof otherwise. And if you think so, you are reading that press again. Wait and see what actually happens before you make your mind up.

I ask you to vote against this. Don't believe the hype. Actually base this on the facts of what he's done so far.

Andrew Sullivan: Ladies and gentlemen, I want to end with agreement with Speaker Gingrich that America is facing and the world is facing extraordinary challenges — extraordinary challenges with the economy, of technology, and the extraordinary dangers and difficulties of a multi-racial and multicultural society.

America is the first white majority country in the history of the world to become a non-white majority country. Technology is ripping people's lives apart. It is impoverishing many people and stagnating the wages of many more. It is a difficult, emotional, troubling time.

But it's precisely because we're in such a difficult moment that it is vital that the Constitution of the United States, respect for the rule of law in the United States, civility in our language and discourse are maintained in the United States. And that rules and norms and procedures that have protected our democracy for centuries be upheld.

And that is why, when we have a president who has contempt for that Constitution, who has pushed it in nine months to the breaking point, who has exhibited every capacity and instinct for authoritarian rule, who delights in dividing, whose statements divide Americans every day in completely unnecessary ways, a man who can turn the National Football League into a matter of deep division, and who acts on the international stage with a recklessness and an ignorance and a pride and a vanity, that puts all of us and our lives and our security at stake.

It is because he is absolutely the worst possible answer to these problems that he is intensifying and deepening these divisions; that he is tearing America apart emotionally, culturally, and politically; that the country is fast dividing into two warring tribes. And the one person that we need at this moment to bridge those divides, to address these problems with sincerity, is the president. And he had a chance, if he had reached out to the Democrats. If he had engaged in infrastructure. If he had withheld his vicious tongue. If he were able to control himself, he could have been a great president. But he isn't.

He is what he is. And what he is is a danger, the likes of which we haven't seen in our lifetimes. Vote for this proposition.

Rudyard Griffiths: Well, thank you. That was a terrific and hard-fought debate. And it reminds me of something Peter Munk once said on this stage, which is that it's one thing to give a speech in front of an audience of people who agree with you or disagree, but something quite different to get on a stage and engage in verbal and mental combat with your intellectual peers.

So, ladies and gentlemen, a round of applause for our debaters. Fabulous debate.

Well, we are going to have some fun now. You've got a chance to vote again on tonight's resolution. We know what it is: "Be it resolved: American Democracy is in the worst crisis in a generation and Donald Trump is to blame." Let's take a look again at how you voted at the start of tonight's debate: 32 percent of you disagreed. The rest of you were in favour of the motion.

And, again, we asked how many of you could change your minds. Upwards of 80 percent might potentially switch your vote to one side or the other. You each have a ballot in your program. There is a pencil with that ballot and there are ballot boxes on the way out. Vote once. Vote carefully. Send a message.

And, again, thank you, ladies and gentlemen, for being part of tonight's Munk Debate. We'll do it all again in the spring.

And for those of you watching online, please stay tuned because we've got a terrific set of behind-the-scenes conversations with our two teams of debaters. We're going to be hearing from Newt and Kimberley first about what they thought went well for them in this debate, the highs and the lows. We'll then bring in

separately E. J. Dionne and Andrew Sullivan for their take on the debate. We'll have these exclusive debater interviews, the after-action report for you, in just a few moments. This is exclusive to our online watching audience.

I'm Rudyard Griffiths, moderator of the Munk Debates. Hang in there and we'll be with you in two minutes with our behind-the-scenes post-debate interviews. Thanks again.

POST-DEBATE INTERVIEWS.

- Rudyard Griffiths: Again, thank you. That was a heartfelt debate. There were a few people standing up and giving you standing ovations. We rarely have that happen.
- Newt Gingrich: I think that Andrew Sullivan and E. J. Dionne are tremendous and did a great job, and I'm delighted that Kim came all the way from Alaska.
- Kimberley Strassel: Newt was my secret weapon today. We probably would have done better had I said nothing.
- Newt Gingrich: No, you were great. And all of us ended up quoting your six-year-old.
- Rudyard Griffiths: Yeah. The new star of the debate. Now, Kimberley, give us your high point of the debate and, let's say, a low point, either in your team or the on other side.
- Kimberley Strassel: Probably the high point of the day was, in fact, listening to Newt talk about the media, which I do think has played such a

debilitating role in the way Donald Trump is viewed in America. And I think in an intellectually dishonest one.

I think the low point of the debate was that obviously neither Newt nor I agrees with every single thing that this president does, including the tone of some of the things he says. So, being asked to defend that, I don't think was something that either of us necessarily came up on the stage to do.

Rudyard Griffiths: Yes. So the same question for you, Newt. Favourite moment? Maybe something you left unsaid that you wish you'd said?

Newt Gingrich: No, actually, my favourite moment was when Kim cited her six-year-old about "pooh-pooh-head," because it just captured the situation and it got us. This is my third debate here, and the thing I'll most remember is the degree to which E. J. and Andrew were so passionate that they almost couldn't contain themselves. I mean, we would poke at them and they would be lunging back into the debate.

Kimberley Strassel: The alligators.

Newt Gingrich: Yeah. The alligators thing.

Kimberley Strassel: In a nice way.

Newt Gingrich: In a nice way. But in that sense, this was far and away the most emotional of the debates that I have participated in.

Rudyard Griffiths: It was. It was quite charged. Quite charged.

Kimberley, any thoughts on how the vote is going to go? It was interesting. I was actually surprised. I thought the initial vote would be much more in favour of the motion, and that with a Toronto audience we might have 80 or 90 percent saying, "You know what? Trump is to blame."

Rudyard Griffiths: So, were you surprised by that? And then, any sense of which way this is going to go?

Kimberley Strassel: Yeah. Newt looked at me when you said that. He goes, “This is not good for us.” Because, you know, you want everyone to believe so that if you can just get a couple of people onto your side, you can pull it off. But you know, what was striking to me is that I’m not sure if we will pull that off. Because I think the depth of feeling out there in the audience is just very, very anti-Trump. And also, we were against very good debaters on the other side.

Newt Gingrich: The one thing that surprised me — if we’d had the time I would have gone back at it and tried to draw the audience in — was when Kimberley said something that was factually true about Hillary. There was a section up on the upper left who literally groaned as though it was a topic you weren't allowed to discuss.

Kimberley Strassel: Her servers.

Newt Gingrich: And I found it fascinating. I just found the immediate spontaneity and the intensity of the reaction was very interesting. I am with Kimberley in that last year you will remember when I came in we had 14 percent voting for our side, and we got it up to 20 and everybody told me what a great victory it was. So, I’m a little worried that we started at 32 and we might end up at 14. But we’ll see. It was a lot of fun.

Kimberley Strassel: Right.

Newt Gingrich: I think that if they vote their sense about Trump, we’re in trouble. If they vote the actual question, I think the other side had a very hard time winning.

Rudyard Griffiths: Okay.

Newt Gingrich: And bringing up stuff like Arpaio I think actually hurt them. But we'll see.

Rudyard Griffiths: Guys, I want to thank you both. It's courageous, again, to get out there, to debate people face-to-face. A credit to both of you for doing it.

Newt Gingrich: Well, the Munk Debates are a great national institution. And I'm so delighted you guys do it and that Peter had the wisdom to set this up.

Kimberley Strassel: This is one of the funnest things I have ever done. Thank you.

Rudyard Griffiths: Okay, let's go and celebrate.

Now let's bring our second team of debaters in here. Again, thank you both, because I'm really sincere about this. That is a difficult stage. You're in front of 3,000 people. The shots are coming in one after another and you've got to keep your wits about you and send those zingers right back, and you both did that tonight.

So, Andrew, to start with you, is there maybe something you left unsaid tonight that you'd like to use this opportunity just to round up? Or is there something your opponents said that you want to come back and put a final dot or dash on?

Andrew Sullivan: I think the one concession I want to make actually is that the Constitution has survived so far. It's been quite robust. The press have performed their duty. That the Congress have performed theirs. That although the courts have, in some cases overreacted, I think that's a good thing, not a bad thing. But I'd stress again that this man has pushed the Constitution to the limit in just nine

months, and that everything he says suggests a sort of impending violation of it.

Give us a major crisis. Give us a terror attack. Give us the launch of a war. And I am profoundly concerned about the man who will be in charge of us all, and whether he could even command the trust or belief that he must in such a situation. And we are in some ways living on borrowed time. That's why I think he must be removed as soon as possible.

Rudyard Griffiths: E. J., was there maybe something left unsaid or an argument from the other side that you thought deserves a special post-debate rebuttal, because you've got the floor.

E. J. Dionne Jr.: Well, I think that what bothered me is that no matter what Andrew and I said, Newt and Kim just said, "Well, that doesn't count." So Joe Arpaio is an actual act, and we think it really does count. That's a real thing. The firing of Comey is a real thing. And I guess I found it disturbing that I could see Speaker Gingrich building a case for eventually firing Mueller by saying, "Well, there is something illegitimate about this whole investigation; they were all Hillary people." I mean, paradoxically, that feeds right into our argument, because that is what we are worried about.

That the president will use the appearance of partisanship as an excuse to undermine the rule of the law. And, you know, we'll see what the audience made of this argument. But that disturbed me.

And the other area we probably could have spent more time on is the area opened up by Senator Corker, which is that there is something terribly wrong about a president whose aides feel they have to protect the country from him. We got at that a little bit, but I think that it's a point that if we had had another five, ten minutes, we might have hammered home.

Rudyard Griffiths: Andrew, what did you think of the audience? They were really reacting. It was great to hear the catcalling, the booing, the applauding.

Andrew Sullivan: I believe it was. I did not expect a round of applause when I defended sovereignty and then I realized, “Oh, it’s because my three minutes was up.” That was my only real shock. But they were great, you know. I mean, apart from the heckling at the end. But, you know, heckling is fine. It was incredibly — well, you know — it was very Canadian.

E. J. Dionne Jr.: And it was a heckle for a particular purpose because it was an issue that we had not raised.

Rudyard Griffiths: Yes, that’s true. The LGBT community.

E. J. Dionne Jr.: And he waited until the end and wanted to make sure that point got in.

Andrew Sullivan: But, again, that’s a legitimate policy decision by a president. What isn’t legitimate is to tell no one and to tweet it as a fiat without going through the proper chain of command. Treating the lives of these trans service members who are putting their lives and serving their country as if they are chaff in the wind, that you can manipulate and use. And it’s just not right....

E. J. Dionne Jr.: But actually, I also think it underscores the point you made, and I was really grateful that you drove this home, which is that there are divisions in the country. A president can try to heal them or he can try to deepen them. And one of the most troubling things about Donald Trump is that he wants the divisions because they serve his political purposes. And that’s not an invented charge. You simply watch his behaviour on issue after issue. Why in the world are we having a national discussion of football players of the NFL kneeling? This is because it serves his political interests to divide us.

Andrew Sullivan: Well, I think that may even be overestimating him. I think he cannot help it. I think he is devoid of any ability to control his thoughts. That he has no self-restraint. No controlling mechanism in his brain or in his gut. So, we have someone, as I said, who can't control himself who is in control of us. And that is terrifying.

Rudyard Griffiths: Finally, do you have a sense of how the vote is going to go?

E. J. Dionne Jr.: That's not a great choice. Either I'm right or you're right and neither is very good.

Rudyard Griffiths: Exactly. So, E. J., you're a student of political science. There is in essence a kind of poly-psych exercise going on right now with these people voting a second time on the motion. What's your sense of how this second vote could unfold? A lot of people were up for changing their mind. I thought that was kind of interesting — upwards of 80 percent.

E. J. Dionne Jr.: I was very curious how true the 80 percent was. It's sort of, if you are going to attend a debate you at least want to say to the people on that stage I am willing to listen.

Rudyard Griffiths: That I am open-minded.

E. J. Dionne Jr.: That I am open, yeah. I don't have a clue as to how we played. I had a sense occasionally from the applause that we were gaining some ground. But there were a couple of moments where I thought they seemed to score points.

I'd like a lot more polling information about this audience because I think it depends which message they want to send, and it will be interesting to see what choice they make. I wish there were a second question, which is: "Why did you vote on points in the debate, or did you decide you wanted to send a different message?"

Rudyard Griffiths: Andrew, your thoughts? I've done twenty of these debates now and by now I usually come out of these debates with some sense of which way it's going to go. Tonight, I'm totally flummoxed. I don't know how this is going to work out.

Andrew Sullivan: I don't know either. And happily I'm not responsible for anything anymore! So, whatever they want to say. For me, you know, that's part of the game tonight. But in reality, this is really a lot more important than a game, it seems to me.

Rudyard Griffiths: It's serious, too.

Andrew Sullivan: And I'm really grateful for the opportunity to vent and to say what I believe about it. And I know Newt said it was like a Shakespearian actor, but I said nothing I don't believe in.

E. J. Dionne Jr.: I think that was a high compliment, actually.

Andrew Sullivan: Yes, I'm sure it was. But nonetheless ... And you know, and I do think they have a point. The Constitution has held up. But everybody says that until it doesn't.

E. J. Dionne Jr.: And the other odd thing is that being in Canada is like being almost no place else. Because it is like being at a cousin's house. It's not in the same as holding this debate in a lot of other countries I can think of who are friendly to the United States.

Canada is more like family to us. Now, maybe it's literally true in my case. But I was thinking a lot about both the similarities and the differences between the United States and Canada within this closeness.

Andrew Sullivan: If you look at the polling in America, 57 percent of Republicans say there is nothing that Donald Trump could do to change their mind about him. And around 56 percent of Democrats say the same thing.

Rudyard Griffiths: Right.

Andrew Sullivan: So here it seemed that there were obviously people, like most sane people in the world, who are alarmed by what's going on in Washington. But you didn't get the sense that we get, that we are in a tribal situation.

Rudyard Griffiths: It's more fluid.

Andrew Sullivan: You can't, for example, go to a university in our country without being surrounded by the far-left, and the idea of having a dialogue there with anybody is impossible.

Rudyard Griffiths: Well, gentlemen, a well-deserved drink awaits you. So, thank you again for both coming here to do this.

E. J. Dionne Jr.: Thank you.

Andrew Sullivan: Thank you.

Rudyard Griffiths: It's a real pleasure. I very much enjoyed your contributions to this evening.

Rudyard Griffiths: Ladies and gentlemen, thank you for watching this special broadcast of the Munk Debates. For those of you who joined in C-SPAN, great to have you as part of the conversation; CPAC here in Canada, bloomberg.com, terrific to have you there, too. Globeandmail.com. And, of course, our friends at Facebook Live, our exclusive social media partner. Facebook has been a huge part of tonight and we thank them for giving us a platform to communicate to you an important discourse about the big issues, the big ideas shaping our world.

I'm Rudyard Griffiths. We're going to do this all again next spring, at our next semi-annual Munk Debate. So, please, like our Facebook page. Let us know what you thought about

tonight's debate. We thank you for your time and attention.
Good night.