

SPEAKER 1: Please take your seats now, and join me in welcoming tonight's guests and director of the Institute of Politics, Mark D. Gearan.

MARK GEARAN: Good evening, ladies and gentlemen, and welcome to tonight's forum. We have an extraordinary group of colleagues here to discuss campaign 2020. And it's about time we do that right here at the Institute of Politics. So we've put together a great panel of those-- some who have been former fellows here, and those who know politics well, Republicans and Democrats, strategists that will really animate tonight's discussion.

We start with Robby Mook with Scott Jennings here. Scott is a former resident fellow, and Robby is a visiting fellow here. They both teamed up, and they teach a course here at the Kennedy School on their perspective from having run Hillary Clinton's campaign to a Republican strategist and close advisor to Majority Leader McConnell. Really provide a great perspective. Reggie Hubbard joins us here as a strategist, Democratic strategist and grassroots strategist with Move On, and having served in the Obama-Biden world, and Sanders.

So we welcome you and Alice Stewart, who has long and deep experience in Republican politics, from Senator Santorum and Governor Romney and Michele Bachman and loads of good campaigns. And of course, many of them are known to you from their commentary on CNN as analysts. And the perfect person to moderate this is our own senior fellow here at the Institute of Politics, Dan Balz, who, of course, is the chief correspondent for the Washington Post, who has covered every campaign, presidential campaign for several, several cycles, and brings his deep experience to that. So join me in thanking our panelists for being here to talk about campaign 2020, and I'll kick it Dan with our thanks.

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DAN BALZ: Thank you, Mark. Thank all of you for being here. We really appreciate it. This is the first of what will be a number of conversations we will have here and elsewhere around the IoP about the 2020 election. It goes without saying that it's a somewhat important election in 2020. Fairly high stakes. And we will begin to try to have that conversation tonight. As Mark said, we've got a great panel of people who have deep experience in presidential and other campaigns, and bring different vantage points to talk about what we're going to be diving into tonight.

We will converse for about 40 minutes among ourselves. I'll throw some questions out and kick it off. At that point, then we want to turn it over to you for questions. There are microphones here and here, and up-- is there one up there? No. So there's three. And we will turn to that at about 6:40, and you all will have control of the conversation for the rest of the way.

This panel is called Election 2020-- Pundits, Polls, and Primaries. We obviously have the pundits here. We will talk a little bit about the polls at some point, and the primaries. But I wanted to start by stepping back a bit to try to frame this election in a little different way. And I thought,

in the spirit of the end of the semester, I would pose an essay question for the panel. It's in three parts. You can pick whichever part you want to answer.

And as they say in academia, pick that and discuss. So the three questions are the 2020 election-- or the three statements, the 2020 election is President Trump's to lose, the 2020 election is the Democrats' to lose, and the third is, that's a dumb question. Here's a better question, and here's how I would talk about it. So we will go down the line. Alice, you get to pick first what you want, which of those three you want to answer and discuss.

ALICE STEWART: I knew I should not have sat beside you. That means I have to go first. Let me just say this. That was a great question, but let's phrase it this way. Every presidential election that ever was that you have often covered, you will always hear the candidates say, this is the most monumental presidential election in your lifetime. This is the last exit ramp to get things right. This is the last opportunity we have for a course correction.

And this cycle, I think, is similar to that, in that we're seeing on the Democrat side such a large, diverse field of candidates. And that is evidence of the fact there is a lot of energy, there is a lot of enthusiasm, there is a lot of excitement, and there's a lot of frustration with the current state of play in Washington. And I think the more primary candidates we can have, the better. But I will say this. Having ran against President Trump, worked very hard-- I was with Ted Cruz's campaign, and we fought to the very end.

And just when we thought we had it in the bag and Donald Trump was down for the count, you can never underestimate Donald Trump. And there was a lot we saw in 2016 of the silent majority of people that supported him. I think we will see a lot of that in 2020. Depending on what network you listen to or what outlets you read or what blogs that you read online, you're going to get varying degrees of support for the president or disdain for the president, but I can say this.

The president has brought about energy from people that ordinarily didn't feel as though that they had a voice in the presidential process. He gave voice to the voiceless, but he also gave a more impassioned voice to people that were frustrated now with what he's doing. So I think this is an opportunity that the president has created to continue to certainly rally his base and people that support him to come out because they like what he's doing, but on the other side, he is clearly generating a lot of support for Democrats to come out and say that experiment, that trial balloon didn't float, let's go back to the way things used to be. And that's why we're seeing such a large, diverse field of candidates.

But the way I look at it, if they don't come together and look at they need to not just support a primary candidate that is a little bit more left than the rest, they need to look at their number one priority is finding a candidate or a ticket that can beat Donald Trump. And now's the time to start making that happen. And unless they do so, I can very well see another opportunity where this president is back in the White House.

DAN BALZ: Reggie.

REGGIE HUBBARD: In keeping with my love of the SAT, my answer is D, all the above. Right? President Trump has proven himself to be shameless, but also very strong. I mean, that's undeniable. Like, his base loves him. He has the bully pulpit. And he is a brilliant marketing-- he's a marketing savant. Having said that, 2018 proved that grassroots energy and people are ready for a change. Right? So A, president a strong, B, the grassroots are ready for something new. But as was discussed, there's a throughline, right? So people may be ready for something new, but what is that thing? How do we figure that out among 20 people, or 22, or whatever the number is?

So I think it's all of the above, right? I mean, the president, I think there's a certain subset of the president's voters that have buyer's remorse. We can't figure that out in a poll, right, because some people are like, I didn't sign up for this. Right? I mean, I think there's a significant number of those types of people. Similarly, I think there is an opportunity for folks, whether it be through better organizing or more voter registration, to get the type of people that want a more progressive, inclusive vision to the polls. And then that kind of knocks everything more towards the progressive side. So my answer is D, all the above.

DAN BALZ: Scott?

SCOTT JENNINGS: I will answer your question directly and specifically. This election, Dan, is Donald Trump's to lose. And I'll give you a structural reason. More often than not, incumbents, presidents in the United States win their re-election campaigns, especially in the last 100 years. It's rare for an incumbent president to lose. Why is that? They have all these structural advantages.

They can start early. The strong ones don't have primary opponents. Look at the finance numbers from this last week. Donald Trump is blitzing the field in fundraising. And by the way, over 99% of his donors are people under \$200. He has revolutionized Republican fundraising by actually introducing small-dollar fundraising into the party. It's unheard of for Republicans.

Finally, he can actually do worse in the '20 election than he did in '16 and still win. Remember, he didn't win a nailbiter in the electoral college. He could lose a couple of states that he won last time, especially in the upper Midwest, and still win the election. When you combine these structural advantages of being an incumbent with the map with the fundraising and with the economy, which is undeniably humming along, he has a, in my opinion, Dan, better than 50% chance of being re-elected.

My odds-making could be impacted depending on who the nominee is of the Democratic Party, but to Trump, it's all the same. They're all going to be branded the same. But I do think the nominee could make a difference overall in the odds-making. But right now, you know, this reminds me a lot of 2012. Trump's not in as good of shape on his job approval as Obama was, but he is in better shape than Obama was on the economy.

But on the other side, you've got a lot of fragmentation, a lot of arguments, a lot of push and pull in the other party. Meanwhile, the incumbent is just raising money and organizing. I mean, the Trump campaign is going to have all their field organization deployed by the summer, while the Democrats are still going to be a year away from having a nominee. That's exactly what happened to the Republicans in 2012. So Trump's to lose.

DAN BALZ: Robby?

ROBBY MOOK: So I guess I'm going to go with your last option, that I'm going to go with what we know and what we don't know. Some of this is recasting some of what's already been said. There's a lot we don't know. I think, given what Scott just said about the historical patterns here, Donald Trump has at least a 50% chance of winning re-election, if not more. And from my partisan Democratic perch, I think one of the worst mistakes we can make as a party is to believe that he has anything less than a 50% chance of winning. So that we know. It's at least 50%, maybe more.

Secondly, we know the economy is really important. If unemployment is the same as it is today, that maybe even ticks that 50% likelihood even higher. If unemployment gets higher, then maybe that's probably one thing that could have a significantly negative impact on the president's prospects. But I want to go back to something that Scott said. This is what worries me the most, is the reason, to put a finer point on what Scott said, the reason that incumbent presidents have a structural advantage is that they have the time to prepare a strategy, they have more money, and there's this critical period-- Scott mentioned 2012-- there's this critical period where the opposition party's nominee is emerging out of the primary.

They're kind of gasping for air. They've probably spent down close to zero financially. They've been beaten up, frankly. They've been ruffled up a little bit, and they're trying to get on their two feet and start their general election campaign. Well, you have the incumbent president come along, who has a ton of resources, has had a ton of time to think about how to frame the choice to the voters, and comes in and just sets the terms.

And that's the last thing I'd say, is that-- and Democrats forget, we all forget this all the time-- this is going to be a choice. OK? If you are looking at a poll that says Donald Trump versus a Democrat, stop looking at it. It's utterly meaningless. You know, Joe Biden used to have a line, you're either running against an angel or an alternative. We're going to have an alternative, not an angel. That's just a fact.

And so that's where the polling is deceptive. That's where our own conceptions of the race might be deceptive. And to me, the difference between winning or losing will be the ability of our party and our nominee to frame this choice on terms that set us up to be successful and push back on the president's attempt to frame it on his terms, which he will have the money, the time, and the focus, in theory, to do. And that's why I at least give him a 50% chance.

DAN BALZ: Alice, let me ask you this question. And that is, we know how the president ran in 2016 and kind of what the basis of the message was. Can he rerun that campaign again? You know, whether it's American carnage or only I can fix it or America first or those themes, given that he now has a record? Does he have to change that message in some way?

ALICE STEWART: Based on what we're seeing already with the campaign, they are going to capitalize on what they have already built. And in the president's mind, if it ain't broke, don't fix it. And we're hearing that the theme or the message will be keep America great again. Make America great again worked out well. Looked nice on the hats. He's just going to tweak it a little bit in order to move forward to 2020.

And Scott and Robby mentioned key points, and that the president has the time, he certainly has the resources to go out there and get his message, and he has the built-in power of the incumbency in order to look presidential and to use this time now to continue to work on solidifying his base. But certainly, he needs to-- one thing he has not done, Dan-- and this is the tweak that he needs to make-- is he needs to broaden on his base. And it was certainly key in his victory in 2016, but he needs to expand on that.

And whether that is really trying to work across the aisle on immigration or with health care or one of these issues where he can really bring in some independents and potentially some Democrats, he needs to show some type of ability and willingness to work across the aisle in order to get things done. And the key is now not to look at these national polls. As Robby said, don't look at a poll that says Trump versus candidate A, B, or C. These are individual races in individual states.

And you will see this president do exactly what he did, and the key to his success was running for president in the electoral college process. This is not a popular vote process. They know where to go. His team is very strong. And he is going to, in terms of the strategy-wise and running in the key states, this team is got that down solid. They are going to pull out the old playbook and execute this flawlessly, like he did, in making sure he hits the key states that gives the electoral victory that he needs, because he knows that was the key to his success.

DAN BALZ: I was going to get to this later, but the electoral college has now popped up a couple of times in looking at this. Which party has an easier path to an electoral college majority? Reggie, you want to?

REGGIE HUBBARD: I mean, I think the electoral college should be abolished, but I won't get into that personally. Which party? I mean, I think that there were certain strategic missteps in 2016 where Democrats didn't show up in, say, Michigan or Wisconsin that should more resources put into there that maybe that could have tilted. And there was a razor thin majority in Pennsylvania as well. So with adequate resources and enough organizing-- I come from the organizing space-- the party may have 20 different options, but for the progressive space, we have one option, and it's not the gentleman that's currently the occupant of the White House.

So from our perspective, with ample time and organization, we think Democrats have the advantage because it's just about getting the numbers of people to the polls. The people are there. We just have to get them registered and there into the actual electoral.

DAN BALZ: Robby, in terms of the electoral college strategy, replay a little bit of what your thinking was in 2016. But also, given what we have seen within the party, particularly with 2018, how do Democrats figure out a strategy in which they are able to maximize turnout among the core constituencies of what I call the new Democratic party, and at the same time, reach into those upper Midwestern states to get voters that you weren't able to get in 2016? How do you balance that? Where do you put your emphasis?

ROBBY MOOK: Yeah. Well, look, I would slightly disagree with Reggie inasmuch as I think sometimes resource allocation has been exaggerated because for example, we spend more money per capita in Pennsylvania than any other state and we lost. Our convention was in Pennsylvania and we lost it. And Hillary Clinton's last event of the entire campaign, and the biggest rally that any candidate held, was in Philadelphia the night before the election.

So I think this is a message contest and I think that to win these states, Democrats need to do two things. One is disqualify Donald Trump, make the argument that we need a change. But secondly, then, credential our candidate as effectively offering the right alternative.

And it's hard to get too specific because again, it just depends. Different that are running are going to bring different kind of assets to that debate and that discussion. But I do think the most important thing is going to be the ability of the Democratic candidate to drive message themselves. I think part of why we lost in 2016, and why we, in particular, lost the upper Midwest was the campaign was about a set of things that didn't speak to those voters. And the things that we were trying to say were not the things that voters heard.

And I think what Donald Trump is-- Reggie said he's a master marketer. I think part of that is he's a master news grabber. He just dominates the news. And if we're discussing every day what Donald Trump wants us to talk about, the Democrat isn't going to be in a position to frame the debate the way that we need. So I know that's an overly simplistic sounding way to do it. But if we can't get the message right, I think all the tactics and all that, it just won't matter.

DAN BALZ: So Scott, message is one of your fortes. Put on your Democratic hat for a minute.

SCOTT JENNINGS: Doesn't fit me.

DAN BALZ: What's the right message-- given what Robby just said about the inability of the Democrats to kind of frame that message as broadly as they needed to, or as fulsome as they needed to, what does that message need to be about in 2020 for a Democrat?

SCOTT JENNINGS: Well, they're going to have to find some way to unwind people's views of the economy. I mean, any way you slice it, it's better. Unemployment is one way to measure it. It's obviously good. Wages are up. We have a million more job openings than people looking for. I mean, you can slice and dice. GDP is fine. There's this political scientist I follow who has this chart about second quarter GDP in the year of the election combined with a president's net approval rating. And in the last 11 elections, he's never missed one, and he's been really close on the overall electoral votes.

And if GDP is, like, 2%, Trump can have a net negative 10 job approval in the second quarter next year and win 280 some electoral votes according to his math.

So If I were thinking of this as the Democrats, how do you unwind this view that the economy is working for everybody, because that's Trump's message, is I have supercharged this economy. That's number one. Number two, I think that after the '16 election, one thing we learned is that non-urban voters have lost connectivity with the Democratic party. It's not all just rural voters, either, suburban and exurban voters, too.

Now some of those folks came back to the Democrats in the 2018 midterm. So I would be analyzing those campaigns trying to figure out what it is that happened in those particular suburban House elections that we could apply to this. The easy answer, of course, and the one that gets talked about most often, is winning on health care. And I think that's why the president the other day sort of jumped out on a limb on that because I think his instincts are correct. They can't really run without an answer on an issue that's of vital importance to a great many people.

But I'm not, on the same token, sure that Medicare for all is the right answer to that question either, and that will depend on who the nominee is for the Democrats. So to me, it's trying to unwind people's views on the economy, trying to win on health care the way they did in the suburban House elections, and then also trying to rekindle some connectivity with people who don't live in cities or in college towns.

I mean, this is a major issue for the Democrats, this divide in our country between the urban and rural, between the people with college degrees and the people without. It's only gotten bigger since 2016, and the Democrats have to find a bridge. So I'm not a very good Democratic strategist, Dan, but that would be my advice.

And one more issue. As Robbie pointed out, the incumbent president will be working hard to define the nominee in that critical period between the end of the primary and the convention. And if they allow themselves to be defined as a socialist who's out of touch, who has unaffordable plans, who's more worried about identity politics than your job-- if they allow themselves to get sucked into that over the summer, it'd be really hard to unravel that post-Labor Day.

REGGIE HUBBARD: It's a good thing to primary. We may not have a nominee by the primaries, so the president may not have an opportunity to find anybody.

DAN BALZ: Brokered convention? Alice, in 2018 the Democrats did very well in suburban House districts. And so what does the president need to do at a time when his message has been so focused on the base? How does he get back some of those suburban voters, particularly suburban women?

ALICE STEWART: I personally feel it wouldn't hurt to tone down the rhetoric quite a bit. That would go a long way. But that's much easier said than done. That's my view. I personally feel as though the policies are critical and very important. Having success on these policies is very important. But keep in mind a lot of the successes that we had, or that the Democrats had in the midterm, it just was a microcosm of these are district-by-district races. And what might work in the heart of Chicago is not going to work where I used to live in Arkansas in a district there. Those people are concerned with very different issues.

So you have to understand in the district-by-district races, there's different issues that resonate with people. What I think the president needs to continue to do is continue to bring the Republican party together, whether we have the Trump Republicans or the conservative Republicans, the evangelicals, continue to solidify them and help to broaden the base. The challenge, in my view, with a lot of the Democrats is they are fractured right now in that you have the progressive wing of the Democrat party versus the old guard of the Democrat party, the Joe Bidens and whatnot.

And right now they're pushing against each other, Nancy Pelosi having a difficult time bringing those people on board. If they're not able to iron that out at this point, it's going to be very difficult to get them all on board and get them together as we get to the general election. So bringing the Democrat party together, I think, is one of the most important things that Tom Perez, Nancy Pelosi, and a lot of them can do in order to come out of the primary, not broke, not broken, but stronger, in order to beat Donald Trump.

DAN BALZ: How easy is that going to be, Robby?

ROBBY MOOK: I think it depends. The way the primary is probably going to go is coming out of Iowa, we'll have three, my guess would be three candidates. That probably goes down to two by the time we're getting into Super Tuesday. And I think it depends on who those two people are.

When I worked for Howard Dean-- and he was a little bit of Edwards and a few other candidates kind of going in there-- but in theory, he was the number one opponent, so to speak, to John Kerry. He endorsed a week or two after he dropped out. When I worked for Hillary Clinton, I think she endorsed Barack Obama four days afterwards. Now that was in June.

The reality is, since online fundraising has become a real thing, you don't need elites to believe in your campaign any more. You can just keep going. And then Bernie Sanders did what Hillary Clinton did in 2016. He kept going all the way until June. So we have to imagine that that number two will stay in the whole time. They'll have the resources to do that. That's just a reality nowadays.

What I think is important is that going into the convention, there's some sort of consensus around whoever has the plurality is probably the moral victor, and we just need to get behind that person. It's funny, I think anybody you would talk to on the street would say, OK, if this person has the lead in pledged delegates, they should probably be the nominee, right? But then all of a sudden when it's someone you don't like, then you're sort of thinking about all kinds of exotic scenarios to try to end run that. That's certainly what happened to Republicans last time. And I really do worry about that for the Democrats this time.

SCOTT JENNINGS: Dan, I'll give you one other technical issue that I think both parties should really think about, especially Democrats. While you don't have a nominee, one thing you can focus on and take advantage of in the environment is voter registration, voter engagement, voter interest. I mean, we're going to have a massive turnout. We had the biggest turnout in a midterm in over 100 years. We're going to have a massive turnout in 2020. People are interested.

And when you register someone to vote in the context of a presidential cycle, what does it, like 80% likelihood they actually vote. So when you don't have a nominee focusing on voter registration. On the same token, I have this theory there's going to be very little persuasion in this campaign. There's going to be a lot of turnout but very little persuasion. So if you're going to be running of a turnout kind of an operation, you just want to have more people in the pond.

And so I think the Trump campaign is going to have voter registration goals and target states, and maybe even in some states that they narrowly lost but are going to try to stretch the map on. So one tactical issue-- we can talk about all the issues all day long-- but if you could put more votes in the bank just through a voter registration process, that would be a very wise investment for, I think, both parties given the level of enthusiasm for voting right now.

ALICE STEWART: And one quick thing on that note. These rallies that we see the president holding these days, and the big one on Saturday night that's going to crash the White House Correspondents Dinner on the 27th, what many of you probably know, but it is going on behind the scenes, is the campaign is out there registering voters while they're at these rallies.

They have this phenomenal opportunity-- it is like fishing in a fish bowl-- where these people come to these rallies. They want to see the president. They want to engage. They want to get involved in the excitement of it. And while they are there, the re-elect campaign is registering voters, and they will continue to follow up with them, some for fundraising, but they want to make sure and get these people registered and motivated and work on getting out the vote.

They're doing it early. They're going to continue to do it strong and solid. So these rallies that we see, there's a lot going on behind the scenes that will be helpful.

REGGIE HUBBARD: I want to push back quickly on something that she said a minute ago. There's this prevailing narrative that it's conservative Democrats versus progressive Democrats. I'm a former civics teacher. Democracy is messy. You have an opinion. I have an opinion. We may not agree. We got to figure this out, right?

And I think that one of the things, speaking for Move On and speaking also for progressives, but I think all Democrats is that I'm for a robust conversation. I come from a family that has heated opinions. And none of us really, we have heated opinion and we still love each other on the back end. I may disagree with you. But I think that we want a person that will appeal to your vision, like what do you see?

And it's a perfect opportunity to draw a contrast with the president. So I may not agree with what you see, but I want to hear what you see. Like health care is not working. How will you fix it? Immigration's not working. How will you fix it? And we may have different ideas about that. But I think that having those ideas come together, as messy as it can be towards the end, final nominee, I think it'll be just fine.

DAN BALZ: I'm going to I'm going to come back to that in a minute. But I want to ask you and Robby this, which is I think there were a lot of Democrats who were surprised at the effectiveness of the Trump operation in turning out voters in 2016. And I think it kind of flipped perceptions of which party kind of had the secret sauce as to mobilization. And you come out of organizing. Robby, you were in the middle of that.

To what extent are the Democrats now at a disadvantage to the Republican party in this particular area, and what can the party be doing now to get ready as all the candidates are trying to win the nomination?

REGGIE HUBBARD: I want to piggyback on something you said, where I think that now it's about messaging. So one of the more interesting conversations I had during my time in Bernie Sanders' world in 2016-- in, like, Missouri and places in the Midwest, they're like, I'm going to vote for Bernie or Donald Trump. And I'm like, all right, help me out here. I come from Baltimore. I don't really understand that.

But people were like, it was about being against the system. They didn't think that the system was for them, and they thought that either Bernie or Donald Trump had their interests in terms of shaking up the system. To my comment earlier about buyer's remorse, I think there's a significant number of people who, if you're like, so is this what you want to do in 2016, I think they'd be, like, uh, I don't know. It goes to the messaging piece, partially.

And it also depends on the communities that you're looking for. I know for a fact that based on the immigration work that we do, the president's continued the demonization of immigrant

culture has led to a spike in registration for Latinx people. If you're under attack and the right message gets to you, you'll register to vote. So I think it depends on which pockets of people you're seeking to register. But I think it's messaging, but also the audiences.

ROBBY MOOK: I think, too, teeing off what Reggie said, so I came out of organizing and I believe in it. It's important work, and we invested a lot in it in 2016. So another example, I think we had twice as many staff in Michigan as Obama did in 2012. And coming out of that whole experience, where we had worked very closely with the Obama team to really try to run a better version of what they did-- and I don't mean that in a boastful way. Just we had the benefit of hindsight in learning off what they did.

I just think in retrospect Barack Obama didn't get enough credit for Barack Obama's wins.

DAN BALZ: What do you mean by that?

ROBBY MOOK: Well, I think a lot of people like me like to say, well, I did the following five tactical things. That's why we won. And in retrospect-- and I can say this partly because we were doing the same things. In many cases we were doing them better-- I don't think Barack Obama got enough credit sometimes for being the driving force behind-- he was the air that breathed into what was being done.

And that's where, again, Reggie and I are sort of going back and forth on this-- that's where the message, to me, is important, and the candidate will matter, and where Trump matters. I'll have people come up to me and say, well, your field program in Florida did this or that. I think we had 800 staff in Florida. Trump probably had 50. And that's not to discredit the work that I and our team did. They performed brilliantly. They did everything they were asked to do.

But I think our politics, particularly because of social media, that pendulum is swinging more wildly. And whereas we used to be able to be more surgical and methodical in tweaking that turnout an extra half a percent or a percent, now it's swinging bigger. Now you could argue in Michigan or Wisconsin, half a percent was all we needed. But my question is, would we have maybe lost by a percent instead of a 1/2 percent if we hadn't done some of the work we did?

And the other thing I would say on this is Donald Trump was effective at turning people out in 2016. He was effective at turning people out in 2018, too. That historic turnout was happening on both sides. And so to your point, I think we're going to see a real lift on both sides. And I agree with Scott. Turnout's going to be really important. We had big dropoff in '16 that I think will go away. My question is, will that be mitigated by the other side getting a bigger turnout too?

DAN BALZ: I mean, if you look at what happened in the Florida governor's race-- and Andrew Gillum, who's a Resident Fellow here this spring has talked about it-- he was able to increase turnout on the Democratic side significantly. And President Trump, by going in there

repeatedly, raised it on the Republican side just enough so that they carried both of those offices.

ROBBY MOOK: The famous thing with the campaign manager is you'll meet your vote goal and you'll lose just because turnout was so high. And you could argue for democracy, that's a good problem to have. You're getting high turnout. But we have to expect that this time. And I don't want us to fool ourselves by thinking we can sort of tweak the dials and get what we need.

DAN BALZ: Stacey Abrams has said that any campaign that goes into an election with a vote goal is making a mistake. Essentially, put those out the window. Scott, I want to turn to the Democrats for a minute here before we go to questions. And I want to start with the two Republicans on the panel. Scott, in terms of the Democratic race as you've watched it unfold now for the first quarter and a few weeks, what have you been impressed with? What have you been surprised by? Which candidates have struck you as doing things that you hadn't anticipated?

SCOTT JENNINGS: I've been impressed by the durability of Sanders and his chunk. In a fragmented race, having committed supporters that will give you money. Remember, there's this 15% threshold issue in the Democratic primaries the way their rules work. And right now there's only two candidates beating 15% in any national or state poll, and it's Sanders and Biden, and Biden's not in yet.

So I've been impressed with the Sanders durability. I think their experience has informed them this time. And I've really been impressed with his opposition research, oppo bombing of his opponents that they've gotten into the race. It's clear they are running an aggressive campaign that is working.

I've been impressed with Mayor Pete lately, who has come on, and I think he's got a lot of upside. He's kind of moved up to third, I think, in a lot of polling and still has less name awareness than either Biden or Sanders. So I think he's got some room to grow.

I've been surprised, frankly, that Gillibrand hasn't done better. At the beginning of all this, I thought maybe she might have something, but she just hasn't taken off. I also think Beto, in retrospect, probably wishes he had just kept running right out of Texas, and as he was out driving around and finding himself, perhaps he should have just launched his campaign instead of journaling. And what's happened? Mayor Pete's come along and I think sliced into him.

So right now I think Sanders is the most likely nominee. I don't know if he'll have enough delegates going into the convention. But he's going to have a lot of delegates, and may have the most delegates. And even if he doesn't have enough, how do you take it away from somebody who's got the most going in?

And I'll just end with this. The most amazing thing about it is the person that I think is most likely to be the Democrat nominee has the same position on health care that Donald Trump

has, that the current system of Obamacare is failing and it must be thrown out. I find this amazing, just a few years removed from Obama's presidency, that the two people most likely to be running against each other next year are both trying to get rid of his signature accomplishment.

DAN BALZ: We're going to go to questions in a minute. So if you have them, start to line up. But I want to throw it to Alice. This Democratic field has more women running than ever before. It has more people of color running than ever before. And all of a sudden the conversation is about all the Bs, Biden, Beto, Bernie, Buttigieg. What has happened? What's brought that about? And is that sustainable in a party in which the new Democratic party is much more heavily female, people of color, et cetera?

ALICE STEWART: I think we can look at the 2018 race and see that Democrats are ready, willing, and able to nominate women and to come out and vote for women of all races and of all backgrounds. So that is encouraging. I'm not someone that is big on gender politics and identity politics, but I do think that it's time that we have more women get involved in politics.

And I have been surprised. I don't think Kirsten Gillibrand has taken off quite like she thought. Kamala Harris is very impressive. So I think the good thing is that the women that they do have that are running are strong and solid. But we also have to step back and look at history. The Post puts out this great thing every morning, hashtag LedPast, and it shows who's ahead at this time in the previous elections.

REGGIE HUBBARD: Interesting.

ROBBY MOOK: That's great.

ALICE STEWART: April 16 of 2016, during that race, Jeb Bush was ahead 1.8 points. In 2008, Giuliani was ahead. Put everything in the Florida basket. So we need to sometimes sit back and put this into perspective, who's winning now-- as you know. You've written the book on this-- is that that doesn't necessarily mean you're going to be jumping out ahead in Iowa. It gives us something to talk about. It's fun to mention.

But if we're looking at the overall Democrat field, I think Mayor Pete is someone that is really shining. And he's certainly, in the latest polls, showing an upward trajectory. If he continues to do what he's doing, showing the ability to connect-- he's got a great story-- he's someone that a month ago I wouldn't have said this because I wasn't familiar with him, and I certainly couldn't even say his name. But he has been a very impressive candidate.

DAN BALZ: All right. We will go to questions now. Please state your name. If you're at the college, tell us what year you are. And the last and abiding rule here in the forum is that make the question short and end with a question mark. We'll start here.

AUDIENCE: Hi, I'm Jack [INAUDIBLE]. I'm a junior at the college, and I'm actually in Robby and Scott's class.

SCOTT JENNINGS: Extra credit.

ROBBY MOOK: Depends on what he asks.

AUDIENCE: I'm wondering, in the crowded field of Democrats, where do you spend your money and what's the first priority right now? You've talked a lot about messaging, but is it with digital strategy? Is it with TV ads? Or are we not even at that point? What's the priority? And feel free to answer, any of you.

REGGIE HUBBARD: I'll jump in. I think you first start with, so to your point, it is very, very, very early. So it's about getting into the field and meeting people and getting your die hard activists signed up and ready to get to work. If there are 17 people in the primary, and you have people who are halfway into you, that's not going to cut it. But if you get people locked in and ready to knock on doors and be small dollar donors and those sorts of things, for me, my initial strategy would be to touch my die hard folks, get them talking, talking, talking to their communities, and that hopefully translates into tangible votes in a primary.

AUDIENCE: Thank you.

ROBBY MOOK: Well, I would just say I totally agree with that. Right now it's all about building your list, building your base, so on, and that's almost entirely digital in organizing work. What's going to be really interesting to see is, most people don't know Bernie Sanders outspent Hillary on television in the 2015-2016 primary, and television was massively successful and productive for Bernie. And that's because people didn't know much about him, and it's a great medium for getting out big and giving people information very quickly.

And so digital advertising has become tremendously more important just even in the last four years. So you're going to see a lot of that, and people are going to be spending a much bigger proportion of their budget. But I think a story that hasn't been told as much is, I think there's going to be a real war for people having the money to get out in states and get on TV so that people can learn about them quickly because people don't know a lot. And I bet the first person who'd be agreeing with that would be Jeff Weaver, who ran Bernie's campaign last time. So it's counterintuitive to the narrative right now, but I think you'll see that happen.

ALICE STEWART: And one of the things-- just real quick-- digital, there's so many ways to go about that. One of the things that the Cruz campaign did very well, and others also, is at this stage of the game, you're doing digital, you're doing some polling. But a lot of the information you glean from that dictates how you spend money, where you go. It tells you should you go up online on this topic, abortion rights or Second Amendment rights? You need to go to Des Moines, Iowa. You don't need to go to this town. So a lot of the information you get digitally dictates where you should go and how you should spend your money.

AUDIENCE: Hi. Jay Gleason. What role will Israel play in the upcoming election? Historically the Democratic Party has been almost completely uncritical of Israel, whereas the Republican Party has been since, before George W. Bush, a little more skeptical.

But now the roles are starting to reverse. We're seeing, of course, the Democratic Party, voices are being raised in questioning some of Israel's policies and some of the problems that Palestinians have resulted from it, whereas Trump has given Israel not only everything it wants, but in violation, oftentimes, terms of international law and agreement. So can we start at last to see a more honest discussion about America's ironclad relationship with Israel and where that's leading us?

SCOTT JENNINGS: I'll take it. Look, I think the Trump campaign and a lot of Republicans have decided to go heavily on a strategy of trying to peel some traditional Democratic Jewish voters and donors away and bring them over. I just read last week that Sheldon Adelson is going to invest quite a bit of money in this project. I think the Republicans think they have an opening here. And when you're going after someone else's group, it's not about getting them all. It's just about getting enough to make a difference.

And so in this case, peeling off a handful in a few states could make a difference. You could say that about any sub-group or any cohort. But yeah, I think this is more of a problem for the Democrats right now than they want to admit, and I think the Republicans know it, and I think you're going to see this become a major part of their strategy for the next year and a half. Absolutely.

AUDIENCE: Hi, I'm Blake. I'm a freshman at the college. I'm also in Scott and Robby's class.

DAN BALZ: Is this mandatory tonight?

ROBBY MOOK: We have this whole thing rigged.

AUDIENCE: I was wondering that since it seems like a lot of the Democratic House gains in 2018 were built on suburban voters, many of whom are more moderate, what do you think happens to those voters if the Democrats in 2020 nominate someone as radical as Bernie Sanders?

REGGIE HUBBARD: Everyone's looking at me, right?

DAN BALZ: Reggie.

REGGIE HUBBARD: Right. Radical? So if the majority of Americans want a solution to health care, is that radical? If a majority of Americans want a solution to the immigration crisis, is that radical? And again, I come from a marketing background, too. So if we figure out a way to message appropriately to people whose lives are being impacted by the bad policy of the current administration, then people won't be seen as radical. They'll be seen as thank you for

fixing my problem. There are a lot of potholes in America's superhighway right now that just need to be fixed, and the administration is not doing it.

So I think, in a certain way, if the nominee can be seen as fixing the problems that millions of people share, then whether they're radical or not will be irrelevant because they'll be seen as fixing their problem.

DAN BALZ: Can I follow up on that for just a second? And that is the question of Trump the master brander and marketer has already played the card on socialism. Democrats are moving toward socialism or embracing socialism. Bernie Sanders doesn't run away from that label. Is that a label that Democrats can take into-- if Sanders is the nominee, can they take that label into the general election and fight it out on that basis?

ROBBY MOOK: Are you asking me?

DAN BALZ: You or Reggie.

REGGIE HUBBARD: I can answer. I've been talking all day, but go ahead, Robby.

ROBBY MOOK: I just have two thoughts, quickly, to your question. This is exactly what the primary is for.

REGGIE HUBBARD: Absolutely.

ROBBY MOOK: And I actually think the primary is going to be an even more effective mechanism to vet candidates than ever before because-- and I'm not anti-caucus by any means, but the caucuses are much lower turnout. They're much more intensive in a lot of states. But they also produce different results. We saw in Nebraska and Washington state last time, they both had a primary and a caucus, and they elected different people.

So we're going to have more primaries. That means more voters participating in the process. I have some confidence. Scott makes a good point. We may have someone who has a plurality of 30%, but I believe in the process to vet people out.

But what I worry about overall, Dan, to your question is we've got to make a case that we're on voters' sides. And if we're arguing and litigating over labels, one of the things I've been disappointed about, frankly, in our primary early on, is there were a bunch of things with names that people agreed to and they didn't even know what the policy was.

And if we're fighting over labels and brands, we're going to lose because Donald Trump is going to-- if we're fighting over whether it's good or bad to be socialist, we've already lost because the people who have trouble affording their health care, trouble affording their child care, are just trying to get their kids to school and go to work every day, they don't have the time to

worry about socialism, capitalism, Green New Deal, Medicare for all, whatever these things mean. They just want to know that you're going to lower their damn premiums.

And that's the space we need to live. And I just think sometimes there's pressure, particularly coming out of Washington, to sign on to certain things. And I just think we need to let up and let candidates get out there. And I think the primary will do that vetting for us.

DAN BALZ: Thank you.

AUDIENCE: Hi. My name's [INAUDIBLE] and I'm a Harvard alum and a grad student. So my question is I think sometimes polls have the same function that the Death Star tractor beam has. At a certain point, polls, whether the methodology is right or wrong, someone supposedly has a lead, and then that lead becomes a de facto lead. So with so many Democratic candidates in the field, and in my view, some questionable methodology about some of these supposed polls, at what point will these polls actually drive outcomes as to who is the nominee? At what point should we pay attention to the polls, and when should we just say these are actually insignificant and not important? When should polls matter in this process?

ALICE STEWART: Exit polls. Those matter. That's when you know that you've won when the exit polls show that you have won.

DAN BALZ: But not the first wave of exit polls.

[INTERPOSING VOICES]

ROBBY MOOK: Reggie and I were on the Kerry campaign when I first had my heartbreak with exit polls, and then with a lot of subsequent ones.

DAN BALZ: But that is a good question. I mean, the media is obsessed with polls. And those of you who are CNN contributors have to talk about polls when polls come out, particularly when CNN does a poll. Or if we do a poll, we have to write about it. And yet we know that at this stage, as you indicated, those polls don't mean a lot.

I remember the New Hampshire primary in 2008, when Barack Obama, by the public polls, had a substantial lead, and everybody was congratulating him on going to win Iowa, and then he was going to win New Hampshire. And it flipped in the last two days.

So let me ask this. Can I rephrase your question? What should people be looking at in terms of polls at this point, if anything?

ALICE STEWART: I just wanted to follow up on that and finish that thought. I'm sorry I didn't-- trends. You follow the trends in the polls. Oftentimes polls are a snapshot in time, and you all know this. It tells you what the temperature was at that time in that state at that particular moment.

REGGIE HUBBARD: With that subset.

ALICE STEWART: Certainly. And follow the trends. I love to go to RealClearPolitics.com and look at who was at this point last month and last week, and how are they trending? And when you see the trend line go down, then you know it's not looking very good and vice versa. So I think polls are good in that if you're able to look at them over a period of time and follow the trends.

REGGIE HUBBARD: Echoing that. Now it's just about excitement, so who's taking off or who is talking to the activists a certain way? We talked about this in the green room. Around June, when the debates started in Miami, polls will take on a different significance because there'll be a lot more scrutiny. And I'd say a December poll in Iowa is worth watching.

SCOTT JENNINGS: I'll talk about Donald Trump's polling, actually, since we're all focused on the Democrats. If I were them, and I were thinking about Trump, we do have trend lines on Trump, and he has existed in this narrow band on his approval rating from the beginning. And his disapproval is the same today as it was when he came down the escalator. He never really changes.

So now if you're in our class, you've heard us talk about this. How would that inform your strategy? To me, it argues against going out and giving in to your emotional desire to just attack this guy nonstop. You're just punching the water. It'll ripple for a few hours, and then it just evens out again.

So I think about Trump's polling and how it would inform the way I would run against him. And to me, it argues for running a non-negative campaign because you can't change it. The opinions of Donald Trump today are set. Does anyone in here know someone who's like, I don't know. Some days I like him. No, you either love him or hate him. That's not going to change.

And so I think that just internalizing that and accepting it and being zen about it would help calm nerves inside of a Democratic strategy room, in my opinion, about what you got to do.

DAN BALZ: Next.

AUDIENCE: My name is Adam. I'm a graduate student at the Business School I have a question for the CNN contributors. So I kind of have a love hate relationship with CNN. On the one hand, I like the programming. I like that they have on people from both sides. I love you guys. I like that they show these town halls. But I don't like how they make everything a soap opera and they just follow the tit for tat.

If you could design a cable network from scratch, what changes would you make to the current media landscape to make a news network that actually is best for American democracy?

ROBBY MOOK: Interesting question. I'm going to go--

SCOTT JENNINGS: Robby doesn't work for CNN.

ROBBY MOOK: I'm no longer with CNN.

SCOTT JENNINGS: He had to quit because he's working for Madam Speaker now.

ROBBY MOOK: I'm going to go kind of radical here for a second. So I think public television needs to start cable news network. And the reason I say that is that news is an economy like anything else. And that's no blame. It is what it is. And they have to appeal to their audiences. And you earn more money by keeping eyeballs on for a longer amount of time.

And so the town halls that CNN has been doing, I think, are great. They also are great for ratings. People watch them. People are really interested to see the candidates. But I do think that in the cable space, I would like an option that goes deeper and that spends time on things that maybe we need to look at and we're not necessarily going to choose to look at, do you know what I'm saying?

So for example, The New York Times has to make a decision every day. Are they going to be like Facebook where they just have an algorithm that feeds you what you're most likely to click on? Or are they going to take an editorial stand and give you stuff you think you need to see?

And that's why I'm glad we still have some print outlets that aren't just algorithm driven. But I would like to see on cable some sort of presence that has the same tempo, but has that editorial bent that says, hey, like Notre Dame Cathedral, it's heartbreaking what happened, really clicky today. But I would argue there may be some other things we need to look at, too, today. But you're just going to flip to the next channel. And someone who doesn't have to deal with those market forces would maybe create a space where we can see some other stuff.

DAN BALZ: Next.

AUDIENCE: Hi. My name's Remy, and I'm a junior here at the college. And I have heard some slights to identity politics, but I'm going to ask this question anyway. I was watching Chris Hayes and Rebecca Traister yesterday talking a little bit about the so-called B Squad of Beto, Biden, Bernie, and Buttigieg.

And I'm wondering to what extent, if at all, you think that group of candidates is polling so well and is doing so well in the polls and getting media coverage because they are all white men-- although Buttigieg is also gay, which sort of complicates that narrative-- and if you think that their identity as white men has anything to do with their success in the media and in polls.

What responsibility do pundits have to sort of work against that, because I think it's interesting that the person behind them would be Kamala Harris, who's a Black woman, as opposed to

Gillibrand, who's a white woman. So I'm just wondering if you could talk through a little bit of your thoughts on that.

DAN BALZ: Who wants to take that one?

SCOTT JENNINGS: I think the reason Sanders and Biden are getting a lot of coverage is because objectively speaking, they have been one two in the polls, and they're the only people consistently above 20. So that's driving them. Beto, I think, for a period got a lot of coverage because he was sort of a phenom coming out of 2018. I think they all had little reasons.

I actually think Kamala had a really good campaign rollout and got a lot of coverage right at the beginning. She had a nice burst when she rolled out. That's abated some as the new people have come along. This also happened to the Republicans before. Campaigns, different candidates in '16 and '12, they have little boomlets. They'll go through six to eight weeks where they're sort of the flavor of the month. And then they go away, and then someone else rises, and then they tend to dominate.

But I think that as long as you have two candidates in this primary that are overwhelmingly dominant in all the media polls, they are going to overwhelmingly dictate the coverage of this race. And whoever asked about when should we pay attention to polls and why should we care about them, the one core issue is they are going to dictate who's getting the most time.

And so that's a real issue, I think, for cable programmers right now. How do you give the other people enough oxygen to grow if you're giving all the coverage to the two people who are winning?

REGGIE HUBBARD: I think that in the instance of Joe Biden, he was the sitting vice president for eight years, and Bernie Sanders ran in 2016. So there's a level of familiarity that doesn't necessarily exist with some of the other candidates. Having said that, when these debates start, when someone makes a mistake, when someone has an amazing debate and then shoots up, then that's when there's going to be a level of volatility I think once-- is it 12? When the 12 debates start. So now I think for Biden and Bernie, I think it's specifically because they've got a track records.

ROBBY MOOK: Just really quickly, I hate to say this, and I hope it's not true in the future. I think if a 37-year-old woman who was a mayor of a city was running for president, I think people would be saying she's not prepared.

REGGIE HUBBARD: Interesting.

ROBBY MOOK: And I hope that is not true, and I hope that changes in the future. But I don't think it's a coincidence we don't see a 37-year-old woman mayor running. And I bet there aren't a lot of 37-year-old women mayors out. There aren't as many as men, I bet.

SCOTT JENNINGS: Which is really amazing, since there's never been a better time to be a female candidate than right now. I mean, look at what happened in the midterm. Democrats had all the success with these sort of interesting group of female candidates all across the country, different states, different markets. That's what makes the way this primary has developed so shocking. This party just had all the success with women, and now you have all these white guys running the place again. I find that fascinating. It may not turn out that way, but that's the way it looks right now.

ALICE STEWART: One quick anecdote on that. I feel like we've come a long way in this area. We have a long way to go. Working for Michele Bachmann in 2012, arguably, she is a phenomenal debater. And she would come out of a debate and have a very strong, solid debate, get really good headlines. And I remember the first couple debates, I would get a call from a reporter that they would ask what suit was she wearing? Who did her hair? Why does she have false eyelashes?

But constantly they would call and want to know who did her dress? And I said, well, as soon as you call all the men and ask them that, then call me back and I'll give you an answer. But it's traditionally been women are defined by their age or their record or their history or what they're wearing or their hair. Fortunately we're getting past that and we're seeing them as actual viable, credible candidates. But we still have a little work to do.

SCOTT JENNINGS: You know who's suffered from this is Klobuchar. I think she probably has been hard on some of her staff, but you can't tell me she's any harder on her people than some of these other senators who are in the race. Apologies to the Bernie people here, but how nice is he to work for? I mean, I'm sure they've had interactions, too, that were of a negative nature, but why is she the only one getting hammered?

And I just think-- I don't know. it's not like she's the only non-teddy bear running, and yet she's the one they pick on. And there's a reason for it. And it's not right, but it's indicative of the way coverage works.

ALICE STEWART: And that's where women are called the B word, and it's not Beto, Bernie, and Buttigieg.

REGGIE HUBBARD: Brilliant, right? That's your clickbait.

SCOTT JENNINGS: Let me say one more thing. This is a great question. What if a female who was considering running for president that had three kids at home got in a car and decided to drive around for two months to find themselves? Do you know what people would be saying about her?

ALICE STEWART: I can only imagine.

SCOTT JENNINGS: Terrible. But Beto gets away with it because he's a dude. It's not fair. So I think you raise a legitimate point. It's a really good question. I'm glad you brought it up.

AUDIENCE: Thank you.

DAN BALZ: We are running out of time. But since we've got three left, we'll try to do them. But if we can do them quickly. Oh, I'm sorry. We got four.

AUDIENCE: Thank you. Good evening. Daniel Sullivan, Harvard alum. In the 1980 Democratic primary, Senator Ted Kennedy challenged the incumbent president, President Carter, and caused a lot of difficulty for the president who went on to lose then President Reagan.

Last night former Massachusetts Governor Bill Weld officially announced his candidacy for the presidency to challenge the president in the Republican primary. Governor Weld is an articulate, highly educated voice of what I would call the Grand Old Party, the Republican Party of old. Is there enough Republicans of the traditionally moderate set who will be willing to eschew President Trump and support not necessarily Governor Weld, but a Senator Romney, who were to jump on and run, a John Kasich, or even a Jeb Bush, who might say, here's an opportunity to at least damage the president.

SCOTT JENNINGS: I don't mean to ruin your night. I'm just going to go ahead and tell you this ain't happening.

REGGIE HUBBARD: Not in the primary.

SCOTT JENNINGS: Here's the deal. When incumbent presidents have been challenged, and they have gone on to lose in the scenario you pointed out, it always happens when they are weak within their own party before the person challenged them. In these cases where an incumbent has faced a serious primary, gotten wounded, and then lost a general, they've already been limping. Trump is not limping. He is as strong in his party as any incumbent president ever has been, well over 90% support.

This is not going to happen. And unless something catastrophic happens to him, which I don't know what that would be at this point, he is going to be the nominee of the party, and there will not be a serious contest.

DAN BALZ: Alice, do you agree with that?

ALICE STEWART: Absolutely. And again, I hate to rain on your parade. There is zero daylight between the Trump re-elect and the RNC. They are virtually the same. And that means fundraising. That means data. That means lists. That means voter outreach. That means putting boots on the ground in these key states. And as Scott said, unless something catastrophic happened with regard to our national political scene, or heaven forbid, the Mueller Report, he will be the nominee.

And the cows will come home to roost. The Republicans that have been holding their nose will continue to support this president. And that's just the way that things have shaped up.

AUDIENCE: [INAUDIBLE]. I'm a sophomore at the college. I just had a question about foreign policy. So I was wondering, if you were the Democrats, do you think it's a better strategy to paint Trump as overly hawkish, as basically a neocon establishment Republican, given that he's been much more hawkish on Iran, given that he has bombed Syria twice? Or would you want to paint Trump as essentially a not too isolationist, too much of a retreatist president? Because I feel like you can't paint him as both. It has to be one or the other.

REGGIE HUBBARD: I'm going to borrow from my brother here's analysis. I wouldn't paint him anything. I would offer an alternative vision for foreign policy as articulated by any of the candidates. So he is who he is. Cool. As candidate, I believe that we should re-enter this-- I as a candidate want to offer my vision. And he is who he is. Why would I want to punch the water? I wouldn't do that.

SCOTT JENNINGS: I wouldn't calibrate my views on war and peace and foreign intervention based on electoral college math. I would only calibrate them based on my own personal views because you might win and you might have to govern. And you certainly don't want to govern on a foreign policy strategy that was purely political and not what you actually believed.

DAN BALZ: Next.

AUDIENCE: Hello. Hi, I'm Sharon Salomon. I am a member of the public and campaign organizer. So I am wondering in this new world, where you mentioned Abrams's comment about win numbers not really being as useful and polls-- you said trends would be useful, but polls themselves may be not as useful. How do you go about developing a field plan for any of these candidates, because even if you know of a poll trend, how do you know where to dedicate resources?

ROBBY MOOK: Well, I think Scott brought up earlier, I think there's a huge voter registration opportunity. And so a lot of that can be built organically. There's a lot of strategies for doing that. So I think that's one thing we can all do right up front.

I think the other question that campaigns need to ask themselves up front nowadays, too, is am I trying to turn people out, or am I trying to persuade people? And ideally, you do both. And in a lot of campaigns, you can. But I'm kind of where Scott is, and I think other people said it as well. I think we in 2016 had a really hard time getting volunteers to go out and actually try to persuade people to change their mind on Trump. It was really hard. And in some cases, the volunteers had a very bad experience doing that. And that makes retention a lot harder.

So I think with the kind of data we have nowadays, you can craft a very smart field plan. But I do think it's less about sort of putting together a perfect mathematical win number and more

about looking at vectors of the campaign. So we want to increase turnout. We think there are people whose minds we can change. We have an issue that when people hear about it, they look at the race differently. And look, these are people that are easy for us to get in touch with, or harder for us to get in touch with. I think when you look at those big vectors, you can kind of target a plan that way.

ALICE STEWART: And there's also a little bit of looking back-- with Abram's race being one. I'm from Georgia-- she can look back, I think, with great pride in saying, look, I may not have won, but I certainly blazed a trail. Same with Beto O'Rourke in Texas.

These are two very red, conservative states, and they did extremely well, much better than anyone thought they would do. So they opened up the trail for future Democrats to come and continue on the progress that they made. But at the end of the day, Stacey Abrams was running in a state that is just not there yet. But she campaigned strong. She campaigned hard in areas where most Democrats would not. But she certainly laid the groundwork for another Democrat.

DAN BALZ: Last question.

AUDIENCE: Hi, I'm Nancy Gold. I live down the street in Cambridge, not affiliated with Harvard. This is a quick question, I think. I'd like to know if each of you think that a gay man can get elected in the United States, could get elected president.

ROBBY MOOK: Oh, yes.

SCOTT JENNINGS: Yes.

REGGIE HUBBARD: Yes. I used to live in Denver, Colorado, and I think Jared Polis is a perfect example. If Jared Polis can win in Colorado, I think someone can win nationally.

ALICE STEWART: Absolutely. Yeah.

DAN BALZ: All right. With that, please give round of applause to the panelists.

[APPLAUSE]

[MUSIC PLAYING]