

NBA Newsmaker Breakfast

Saturday, February 15, 2025
San Francisco, California, USA

Kathy Behrens

Stephanie Ruhle

David Brooks

Thomas Friedman

Rashida Jones

Andy Kessler

Commissioner Adam Silver

KATHY BEHRENS: Good morning. Good morning. Good morning, everybody. Good morning. I'll let everybody take their seats.

I'm Kathy Behrens. I'm the NBA's president of Social Responsibility and Player Programs. Is my mic not working? Did you not hear that?

(Laughter and applause.)

I mean, it's bad when you have to ask for applause at the Newsmaker Breakfast.

Good morning, everybody. It's great to see you all this morning. As I think you know, the last time we were in the Bay Area for All-Star was February 2000. And so a lot has changed since then. There have been a number of championships for the Warriors. The Golden State Valkyries will be taking the floor this year.

But one thing has remained the same, and that is that there's no event like NBA All-Star in San Francisco. And we have already had a fantastic week. The NBA family has given back so meaningfully to the community over the past few days.

For those of you who participated in yesterday's 17th Annual Day of Service, you know that we had legacy projects in both Oakland and San Francisco, and we helped pack food for tens of thousands of families in the Bay Area. Thank you, those of you who helped us make a difference.



(Applause.)

And we aren't done finding ways to give back. Today we have our HBCU Classic featuring Morehouse and Tuskegee.

(Applause.)

Thousands of young people will continue to learn the great game of basketball as part of our Junior NBA/Junior WNBA program. And tomorrow we have our first-ever Community and Family Walk to reinforce the importance of healthy habits for the body and mind as part of our new Total Health program with Evernorth Health Services.

And then the best is yet to come as the greatest players in the world gather for All-Star Saturday Night tonight and then for the All-Star Game as we celebrate basketball's special ability to bring people together.

This morning, as we always try to do, we take a step back from the frenzy of the weekend to listen, learn, and understand more about the issues of the day. And I'm not sure there has been a time when we needed today's conversation more.

We have assembled a panel of people who have each had unique and amazing journeys. And one common thread for them all is that they have all found ways to communicate and share their experience with others. So hopefully today we can leave here with some lessons to improve the way we respect different points of view.

Getting the best out of our panel is the dynamic host of MSNBC's 11th Hour and the senior business analyst for NBC News, please welcome Stephanie Ruhle.

(Applause.)

STEPHANIE RUHLE: All right, let's get started. Thank you all so much for being here. Thank you for inviting me to participate. This is such an amazing weekend every year, but especially this conversation.

We're going to talk about something that we need to care



more about: respect, decency, civil conversations in these really divided times. And it's funny because one of the few things that brings people together, and we especially have seen it in a post-COVID world, are sports. I mean, unless you're an Eagles fan and you'll beat up anyone.

(Laughter.)

People come together for sporting events. And so what we want to do with this esteemed panel who have all worked in different areas in the news industry for decades and decades, how do we reconnect?

Because in these divided times and in this room of people of influence, people who care about the country and care about our future, each one of us is a stakeholder into bringing respect and decency back. And we're going to discuss how we're going to do that.

Our team needs no introduction. We have David Brooks with us, we have Tom Friedman with us, we have Andy Kessler from "The New York Times" and "The Wall Street Journal," respectively. They have written all the bestselling books, even before having a "New York Times" bestseller. Even before you could game the system, they had the number ones. And the outgoing president of MSNBC, my boss and dear friend, Rashida Jones. So thank you all for being here.

(Applause.)

David, let's start with you. But it's an open forum. How do you describe the moment that we're in?

DAVID BROOKS: Sucky.

STEPHANIE RUHLE: Oh.

(Laughter.)

I told you he was a great writer. Great writer.

(Laughter.)

DAVID BROOKS: That's civility.

Yeah, I guess there are two crises I think we're in the middle of deep down underneath. The first is some sort of relational and spiritual crisis. And so if you ask America, you know, the rising mental health rates, 30 percent rise in suicide. The number of people who say they have no close personal friends is up fourfold since 2000. The number of people who rate themselves in the lowest happiness category is up by 50 percent since 2000. 45 percent of high school seniors say they are persistently

hopeless and despondent.

And so we've just become sadder as a society. And when you get sad, you get mean. Because if you feel yourself invisible, you see it as an indignity, and you lash out.

And so I won't give you all the meanness statistics. The one that gets me is that a generation ago, two thirds of Americans gave to charity, and now fewer than 50 percent give to charity.

So we've just gotten sadder.

STEPHANIE RUHLE: Do we know why?

DAVID BROOKS: Yeah, I have a lot of reasons. I mean, one of my favorite sayings from psychology is that all of life is a series of daring explorations from a secure base.

STEPHANIE RUHLE: Say that again.

DAVID BROOKS: All of life is a series of daring explorations from a secure base.

So we need a secure base. And for many of us, it's our families, but it's also our towns. It's a sense that as countrymen we look out for each other.

And also it's a sense of a moral order. If we're going to have trust in society, you have to agree on what one ought to do. You have to have shared values. You have to have shared norms.

And I'm afraid, over the last 60 years, we've sort of privatized morality. We've said everybody come up with your own.

There's a historian named George Marsden who said that what gave Martin Luther King's rhetoric its power was the sense that there's a moral order woven into the fabric of the universe; that if slavery is not wrong, nothing is wrong. If segregation is not wrong, nothing wrong.

And so that idea that we're all joined by a common moral order, we've begun to shred that. Even back in 1955, a great journalist named Walter Lippmann said, "If what is right and wrong is what each individual gets to choose based on their feelings, we are outside the bounds of civilization."

And so, to me, we're a little out there.

STEPHANIE RUHLE: Andy, how do you assess this moment?

ANDY KESSLER: Well, you know, the premise here is that we're in an increasingly divided world. And, you know, I happen to believe that divisions are good. Divisions are where great ideas emerge from. You know, if the role of this is we're all going to agree at the end, I don't think that's going to happen.

I also think that this is nothing new. This has been going on forever. You may not know, but Samuel Clemens, Mark Twain, was an opinion columnist. And he worked out of Virginia City, Nevada, and he would spew venom on his competitors and everyone else around. He took down the San Francisco police force, called them wax figures.

In 1971, Saul Alinsky wrote the book "Rules for Radicals," and I can never memorize the quote, but he talked about pick the target, freeze it, personalize it, and polarize it.

"Rules for Radicals" was the bible for the Obama administration, and therefore -- I'm sorry, the Obama administration, and therefore the Biden administration.

Rule No. 5: Ridicule is man's most potent weapon. There is no defense. Okay?

Then we moved on to where some large portion of our youth got their news from, "The Daily Show," the Comedy Central, from Jon Stewart. And that leads us to President Trump today, who I don't think read "Rules for Radicals," because he's clearly not a reader, but he learned --

(Laughter.)

He learned it from "The Apprentice," from being on TV, and, you know, the governor, Justin Trudeau, you know, he learned Rule No. 5.

So I think as a society division is good, ad hominem attacks are not good, and we need to smooth that out. But I don't think we should dampen discussions and arguments. I think that's always going to be a part of our society.

STEPHANIE RUHLE: All right. Well, I want to circle back to that because you're going to need to help us. You're going to need to give us a prescription of how we have those conversations because we've -- we can't even get to zero at this point.

Rashida, how do you assess this moment?

RASHIDA JONES: So I think everything that you heard is accurate on some level. It's sucky. It's polarized. It's divided. But when I think about this moment, I think about the cause for purpose.

We can't sit in this suckiness. We can't sit in this period of divide and just let it happen to us. And I think if there was ever a time where we were called for purpose, where we were called to inform and educate, where we were called to find causes that were important to us and get involved, it's this time.

And I think while glass half empty, we can think about all of the terrible things that are happening around us and to us in some categories, and because of the change that we've seen and the division that we've seen, we can sit and wallow in that.

But I think in this moment, it requires all of us to not be passive, to be active, to be involved, to be educated, to be informed. And I think when I think about the moment, it's that call to service and how we all want to show up in this in this type of moment.

STEPHANIE RUHLE: How much harder has it gotten in news, though? Because to David's earlier point, people are extraordinarily isolated and lonely.

RASHIDA JONES: Yep.

STEPHANIE RUHLE: And they've turned to news, and they look at news like we did traditional television. They talk about it like "my shows," right? Like the way our grandmothers would talk about watching "my shows," that's how people view news.

RASHIDA JONES: Yeah.

STEPHANIE RUHLE: And when they hear from the news that they watch, things they don't like, they're mad at that news organization. They don't want to hear the truth. They want to hear the things that they like over and over.

And that ends up unintentionally starting to shape things. What do you do with that?

RASHIDA JONES: Well, I think it's the combination of the news that you're aligned with finding you, whether it's through algorithms, whether it's through curated sources. But people are also gravitating towards sources or outlets that will reaffirm their point of view.

You know, that is a, I think, symptom of the polarization. You know, the polarization is happening because people are looking for their comfort zone, for their safe spaces.

I think the other piece of that also is how we define news. You know, we're all old enough to remember when news meant three, four, five, six television networks. It means so

much more now.

My children get zero news from a television set. They get it from TikTok. They get it from their from their social media platforms. And not just that generation, but even slightly older generations.

And so the combination of fragmented news sources with the broadened definition of news and where people can find it, I think, has just created that separation and that divide.

It doesn't mean we can't find some commonality, some common ground. And I like your point about this common morality point, I think, is everything blooms from that.

STEPHANIE RUHLE: Tom, how do you assess this moment?

THOMAS FRIEDMAN: Well, I've been working on a book, Stephanie, for a while, and I tend to see this in big structural terms, what's behind this, that I think we're going through what I call a Promethean moment. Prometheus, the Greek god who steals fire from a closet on Mount Olympus and gives it to humans to build civilization.

We know what these Promethean moments are. They're the printing press, the scientific revolution, the ag revolution, the industrial revolution, and this moment. Something really big is happening.

STEPHANIE RUHLE: What is it now?

THOMAS FRIEDMAN: Well, you know, some monk was alive during the printing press revolution, and he turned to some priest and said, "That printing press, now that is really cool. Okay? You mean I don't have to write these bibles out longhand anymore?"

So we're in a similar kind of moment. So our moment, though, is different from previous Promethean moments in two ways. One, it's not built on a single device, like a printing press or a combustion engine. It's actually built on a super cycle of technology, the ability to sense, digitize, connect, process, learn, share, act, all amplified by AI.

And we're putting that into everything, from your watch, to your toaster, to your F-15. And it has positive feedback loops. So it just goes faster and faster.

Second, though, it's different from all the others, it's paralleled by climate super cycle -- emissions, warming, ice melt, change in ocean currents, change in wind patterns, extreme weather. It's also driven by feedback loops.

And the two together, I argue, they blew up the political structure that was the response to the previous Promethean moment. So what was that structure? It was called the welfare state. Everyone had one. China had one. Russia had one. East Europe had one. We had one. We called it the New Deal.

The welfare state was a set of walls, ceilings and floors that enabled workers and entrepreneurs to get the best and cushion the worst from this explosion, destabilizing explosion of the Industrial Revolution.

And left-right politics was a debate about how high the wall should be -- left said high walls, right said low walls; how thick the floor, the safety net should be -- left said thick floor, right said thin floor; how tight the ceiling should be and low -- left said low ceiling on incomes and the pace of change, right said no ceiling.

Seventy-five years, we have the same parties, same left-right debate.

And then suddenly, kaboom, an energy source is released, which is these two super cycles. It blows off the ceiling, blows down the walls and crashes through the floor. And suddenly the old left-right framework doesn't work anymore.

I'll just give you a very quick, simple example. I'm in Israel in 2019. I run into Amnon Shashua. He's the founder of Mobileye, the Israeli autonomous driving company that was sold to Intel for \$14 billion.

He says to me, Tom, have you ever driven in a self-driving car?

I said, Amnon, I was just at Google. I drove all over Mountain View in Waymo.

He said, Mountain View. That's a grid. Try driving in a self-driving car in Jerusalem where there are no two parallel streets.

So I go up to Jerusalem. I ride around in his car.

STEPHANIE RUHLE: And survived.

THOMAS FRIEDMAN: And up, down, around, donkeys, camels, Jews, Arabs. Nobody's driving, okay?

(Laughter.)

But we get done, and he tells me a really important story. He says, Tom, to test a self-driving car in Jerusalem, you

actually need an insurance protocol that determines what constitutes safe self-driving. Otherwise, anyone you hit or anyone hits you, you get sued.

Well, that was a little deep, Stephanie, for the rabbis who run Jerusalem. So Amnon had to convene what I call a complex adaptive coalition of Volkswagen, his car supplier, mobilized engineers, the rabbis who run Jerusalem, and the Israeli Ministry of Transportation. Together, they wrote the law.

It was so good that Yandex, Russia's Google, now tests their self-driving cars in Israel. And China took the whole Israeli law, translated it into Chinese and made it their law.

One question: Who is left and who is right in that story. There is no left and there is no right anymore. There's a completely new set of problems driven by a different Promethean moment.

STEPHANIE RUHLE: But didn't all the participants in that share the goal that they wanted?

THOMAS FRIEDMAN: Safe self-driving, yes.

STEPHANIE RUHLE: A self-driving car on the road?

THOMAS FRIEDMAN: Yeah. But ultimately how you get it didn't come from some libertarian point of view or some Marxist point of view. It came from a very simple ideology: What works.

STEPHANIE RUHLE: But, David, isn't the problem there are huge factions in society right now that don't want it to work or that are so angry with the other side they are unwilling to hear one single positive thing, they're looking for destruction?

DAVID BROOKS: Yeah, it's funny. Tom and I come at the same place all the time, and we think totally differently.

THOMAS FRIEDMAN: It's really true.

DAVID BROOKS: Tom's a technical determinist. I'm a cultural determinist.

THOMAS FRIEDMAN: That's exactly right.

STEPHANIE RUHLE: But it doesn't mean that you hate one another, which is the state of the world right now.

DAVID BROOKS: Oh, we totally hate each other.

(Laughter.)

THOMAS FRIEDMAN: How did you put me on this panel with him?

(Laughter.)

DAVID BROOKS: You know, I'm a I'm a philosophical conservative. When I was hired at "The New York Times," my editor said, You're as conservative as we think our readers can stand.

(Laughter.)

And I used to joke that being a conservative at "The New York Times" is like being the chief rabbi in Mecca. Not a lot of company there.

(Laughter.)

And so, you know, being conservative, I believe, A, moral norms are really important. I also believe institutions really matter.

And forget what you think about what Trump is trying to do, what the agenda is supposed to be. I happen to think Trump is the wrong answer to the right question. There's a lot of very real reasons that he's adjusting to that we, frankly, in the educated class, we're blind to.

But so you're -- you want to reform NIH, the health research center, you talk to people at NIH: Where's the flaws? Where's the inefficiencies? Let's walk this through.

You don't send a tweet on Friday night saying you're all going to be fired on Monday. Like, that is not institutional reform. That's just iconoclasm. It's just tearing it apart.

And the same is true with USAID. Sure, it has problems. But I was in Africa before USAID, before PEPFAR, and I went to those hospitals in Namibia, Botswana, South Africa, watching people die. And then I went back after PEPFAR was created by George W. Bush, and it was like going to the CVS. People were taking pills and living.

And when you eviscerate that, to me, you're eviscerating, basically, frankly, the Christian obligation to love your neighbor. And you're also, in my view, degrading what's happening in America, to our soul.

And so I am totally accepting of the chance for reform, what Elon Musk is trying to do. But, you know, they're firing people and not realizing they're running the nuclear codes because they just haven't done their homework.

So, to me, it's like handing the keys to our nuclear arsenal to Sam Bankman-Fried, and bad things are going to

happen.

STEPHANIE RUHLE: He might get out of jail.

But what do we do with that? Because that tweet on Friday night didn't go out by accident. The chaos isn't by accident. This is by design. And what do you do?

And I'm not attacking the president. There's groups all over the place who are saying: I don't like this system. I want it torn down. Right?

So are we running a fool's errand thinking, like, how are we going to bring decency back and just be nice to each other again, when forces greater than us are saying, no, we're here to blow it up?

DAVID BROOKS: You know, I ask people, What made you who you are? No one has ever answered and said, You know, I went on this wonderful vacation in Hawaii, and that totally changed my character. No one has ever said that to me.

People talk about hard times. And growth, it's a process. It's no merry ride. It's going through hard times.

And that's true for us personally. I can tell you the times I've been through divorce, through hard times, you learn a lot about yourself.

There's a guy, Paul Tillich, a theologian, who says: Moments of suffering interrupt your life and remind you you're not the person you thought you were. They carve through the floor of the basement of your soul, and they reveal depths that you never understood.

And that's true for an individual, and it's true for a country. And when you're going through hard times, you can either be broken or broken open. And broken people shrivel, and broken-open people grow more vulnerable to each other.

And so what gives me hope is that we've grown as a nation through a series of crises: the 1770s, the Revolutionary period. The 1830s, Andrew Jackson. We had to blow up a system in the 1830s that was overly East Coast establishment. Andrew Jackson came in and blows it up. Obviously, Abraham Lincoln. Tom was talking about the 1890s. We were failing at industrialization.

And so we had to go through a brutal hard time, but out of it grew a civic renaissance, the creation of the Boy Scouts, the Girl Scouts, the Boys Clubs, the Girls Clubs, the NAACP, the environmental movement, the settlement house movement.

Brutal time, country gets creative. We did in the 1960s. There were assassinations, bombings. There were 4,000 bombings on American college campuses in 1971. Brutal time.

By 1974, they're all into Crystal and EST and New Age. Like, the culture adapts. And so that's going to happen again here. We're in the middle of a process of adapting.

We've had a very individualistic era for 60 years. The social justice movement is one form of community. MAGA is another form of community. We're having a big argument about what kind of community we want. But we're edging our way toward community.

So I am not despairing at all. We just -- we grow through hard times.

RASHIDA JONES: I think the other important part of that, too, and you've kind of referenced it, is this is also a moment in time, but it's a short moment in time.

We're talking about the MAGA movement and some of the changes of the current administration. It's been four weeks. It's been four weeks. We have a long period to go.

But in the course of history, that is a short moment in time for us. And so I do think adding some perspective there also helps us figure out what is the path forward.

STEPHANIE RUHLE: Andy, when we keep talking about trust, right, I think it was six or seven years ago, I remember, maybe longer, Mark Zuckerberg did a walking tour. He went to all 50 states.

And his takeaway was people don't trust information, they trust relationships. Right? And this goes to Rashida's earlier point that where people get their news, right? They watch the news like their shows. They like a TikTok influencer. They like a podcaster.

How do we balance the two, of giving people content that they can trust from people they can trust or people they like and making sure that's actually accurate information?

ANDY KESSLER: Well, first of all, we're in a period of change. I mean, Tom referenced the digital change, which I find more libertarian than not left or right because it allows for individualism to decide where they get their news from.

But change is constant. But change is like a virus, and then the antibodies come out to try to kill that change. It happens every time.

I think we're making progress. I mean, someone from "The



Wall Street Journal" is sitting on the same panel as people from "The New York Times" and MSNBC. I mean, it's dogs and cats living together.

(Laughter.)

I feel like Scott Jennings of CNN.

(Laughter.)

But, you know, I've been -- we probably all on this panel have been attacked by those antibodies.

I wrote a piece that some people in this room can relate to about wealth taxes. And, you know, Bernie Sanders and Elizabeth Warren had suggested wealth taxes, and I said, you know, not only is it unconstitutional, but I'd rather the wealthy invest in that change, in new enterprises and entrepreneurs, rather than big government.

And on Twitter, which I've called a cesspool of snark --

STEPHANIE RUHLE: But we still use it.

ANDY KESSLER: No, I call it a cesspool of snark, and I actually enjoy Twitter because of that.

STEPHANIE RUHLE: Well, that's because you're twisted.

ANDY KESSLER: Well, thank you.

On Twitter, after writing about wealth taxes, every response, almost every response, was either an animation or a video of a guillotine, right? You know, eat the rich, off with their heads.

And, you know, I could have taken that personally, but I found it amusing. And I've written about the homeless, and I've been in some solutions for the homeless problem, and I have been attacked personally and physical harm. I've written about diversity and have -- I've been called a white supremacist. I've been called every name in the book.

And so you can either get angry about that or you can get used to it and just say that's part of the world that we live in and that there are -- you know, the one nice thing about Twitter and TikTok and other forums, rather than mainstream media that we all here seem to represent, is it allows for every voice in the book. And you have to take the good and the bad. Some people are going to agree with you; some people are going to disagree with you.

I think the ad hominem tax, as I said before, we should figure out a way to do away with, with transparency. There's a lot of solutions for that. But it's part of this new

era.

RASHIDA JONES: Just one very quick point I'd like to make there because I think your point about having, you know, a town square for everyone to kind of share their good, bad, and ugly is valuable to have if those platforms were not manipulated by algorithms and messaging that they want you to see. Half of those, those posts you saw of the guillotine or whatever, half of them are probably bots.

And so I think we do need a place where we're not necessarily the filter. You know, we're all mainstream media, absolutely, but we also can't have an environment where the messaging, the narrative, the points of view are synthetically created to either push a certain narrative, push a certain point, reinforce what you're saying or challenge what you're saying that's not necessarily representative of the people reading or listening because a lot of it is just manipulated.

STEPHANIE RUHLE: Okay. But then Tom is the perfect person on this because for decades what you do is have conversations with people, and then you write about it.

But we keep talking about, oh, I heard this on Twitter or a conversation on Twitter. But when you click through, the snark that -- I would bet that more than 50 percent of the people posting the guillotine didn't have their name or their face.

And the way people behave, even if it's not a bot, the way people behave on social media are not the conversations that Tom has been having for decades. There are people hiding, sitting in their house. Whether they're driven by the algorithm or fear of missing out or whatever it may be, they don't have to show their name or their face. They behave in a way that they wouldn't even if someone -- if a pollster called them.

So how do you who specialize -- right? I feel like so much of the magic of what you've written about for decades is when you speak to people, you find the humanity, you find the commonality, and you pull from there.

But how do you do that in this universe that's not even real? And Rashida knows this because she's had scores of employees crying in her office for the last four years of all the hate they get. And she can say ignore it, but it's in the psyche.

RASHIDA JONES: Or what I always tell you, it's not real. It's not a real place, but...

THOMAS FRIEDMAN: Yeah. I would start by the fact, I've

 . . . when all is said, we're done.®

said it a million times, I've actually never looked at Twitter, I have never looked at Facebook, and I've never smoked a cigarette. And my plan is to die saying all three. Okay?

STEPHANIE RUHLE: Oh, sister, I'd be absent on all those, but good for you.

THOMAS FRIEDMAN: So because of that -- this is true -- I use Twitter as a broadcast platform. My assistant does it. I don't even know the password. I've never looked at any of them.

STEPHANIE RUHLE: It loves you. Everyone on Twitter thinks you're amazing.

THOMAS FRIEDMAN: Actually, because I've never looked at any of them, Stephanie, in my world, everybody likes me.

STEPHANIE RUHLE: They do, they do, they do.

THOMAS FRIEDMAN: So I never show up at work and say, Did you see what was written about me? I don't care because I don't see it. And when you don't see it, it doesn't exist.

So I would start by saying I'm working on a new book now. The tentative title is "What You Say When You Listen."

STEPHANIE RUHLE: Say that again.

THOMAS FRIEDMAN: "What you say when you listen."

Okay. So I was a freaky kid from Minnesota who wanted to cover the Arab Muslim world in the 1970s.

STEPHANIE RUHLE: Totally popular.

THOMAS FRIEDMAN: Yeah, right. It was not a natural thing. Okay? And at the time "The New York Times" had a rule. You couldn't be Jewish and go to Beirut or Jerusalem. Okay? And I broke both those. And I didn't do it by going out there saying, You're all great, you're all wonderful, it's all the other guys' fault. I mean, if you read my stuff, you know I'm in everybody's face.

But my survival mechanism was to learn to be a good listener because two things happen, I discovered, when you listen. One is what you learn when you listen. It turns out all the stories I got wrong were because I was talking when I should have been listening.

But much more important is what you say when you listen because listening is a sign of respect. And it was amazing to me, I learned, what people would let me say to and

about them if they thought I respected them. And if they didn't think you respected them, you couldn't tell them the sun was shining.

So I could go into a room with 30 young Arab college students in Qatar, they've got my columns printed out, they're ready to carve me up. And you spend an hour listening to them, deep listening, but also not just agreeing, but deep listening, at the end of that hour, everyone's got their cell phone out and they want a selfie with you.

So, so many people just want to be heard. And that's why in 2015 I changed my business card without asking "The New York Times." It used to say Thomas L. Friedman, "New York Times" foreign affairs columnist. I've got one here if you want. It says "New York Times" humiliation and dignity columnist.

Because I realized I had basically spent my entire career covering people acting out on their sense of being humiliated and questing for dignity. Whether it was Israelis versus Palestinian, Muslim youth in Europe versus a Christian majority, Putin after the collapse of the Soviet Union, China after a century of humiliation.

All I really do is cover people acting out on their feelings of humiliation and questing for dignity. And the way you unlock that, first and foremost, is by being a good listener.

STEPHANIE RUHLE: The root of that, though, was you went into all of those places from a place of respect, genuine curiosity, and caring. And right now people are winning by battling, right?

With all of the separate platforms that we have, right, for all of the independent voices, they have figured out my voice will be lifted if I become a firebrand, if I say and do outrageous things for the sake of it. And that's the best way to monetize it, right? Like, in this world of short-termism, that works.

THOMAS FRIEDMAN: And I'll just say one thing about that, and I'm sure David has had the same experience. So I have colleagues will say, you know, You got lit up on Twitter, you know, the other day.

To which I say, How many were there?

Oh, God, it must be, I don't know, 10 or 15.

10 or 15 stop me at the F'ing airport to say how much they like my column, okay?

(Laughter.)

I mean, is anybody counting them? You know what I mean? It's like who -- I don't believe it.

STEPHANIE RUHLE: And people ignore the nice comments.

THOMAS FRIEDMAN: That's right.

STEPHANIE RUHLE: You ignore the nice comments.

THOMAS FRIEDMAN: It's not a real place, folks. Okay? And the minute you sort of come to terms with that, your life becomes so much healthier.

DAVID BROOKS: Can I just say one thing about that? One of the things is the need to show respect, to lead with respect. The other is just basic social skills.

I feel like we've gone a couple of generations without teaching people the basic social skills of how to critique with care, how to listen well. Like, nobody ever taught me how to end a conversation gracefully.

So I remember I went to my high school reunion, and my only out to end the conversation was, I'm going to the bar to get another drink. And so after 20 minutes, I'm so drunk, I have to leave my high school reunion because that's my only out.

(Laughter.)

So I actually asked conversation experts, like, how do you get good at this? And they said things like treat attention as an on-off switch, not a dimmer. Like, pay a hundred percent attention or zero percent, but not 60/40. Be a loud listener.

I got a buddy when you're talking to him, it's like talking to a Pentecostal/Charismatic church. He's like: Yes, yes. Amen, Amen. Preach that, brother. Preach that, brother.

(Laughter.)

DAVID BROOKS: Love talking to that guy.

Another one is don't be a topper; that if you say to me, Oh, I had this horrible flight, I was sitting on the tarmac for two hours --

STEPHANIE RUHLE: I was sitting on it for three.

DAVID BROOKS: Right. My instinct is to say, yeah, I know what you went through. I was on for six hours.

And it sounds like I'm trying to relate. What I'm really trying

to say is let's pay less attention to your inferior set of experiences and more to mine.

And then the final thing I'll say, and I learned this from a Talmudic scholar in Israel, find the disagreement under the disagreement. If you're arguing about politics or anything like that, what's the philosophical reason deep down you're really arguing? Rather than just shouting at each other, you can go on an exploration into your philosophic bases, and that's just a lot more fun.

So just teaching basic skills of how to sit with someone who's grieving. Like, these are skills. And that's the easiest thing we could do to teach these.

STEPHANIE RUHLE: Do you know it's funny that you say this? Because in the last 24 hours, there was this leaked audio of Jamie Dimon, where people were angry because he's sort of demanding that his employees come back to work.

But if you actually listen to what he's saying, he's not asking them to come back to work to punish them. He's asking them to come back to work because he wants to connect with them. He's saying, I don't want to be in a Zoom meeting with you because I see you texting the whole time or folding your laundry or looking out the window.

But we're so quick to say Jamie Dimon wants to punish his employees and force them back to the office. And what he's really saying is, I actually want to collaborate and build and care with you rather than Fred Flintstone it and punch a time code.

THOMAS FRIEDMAN: So I'm a newsroom rat. You know, I started out as a wire service reporter. I love newsrooms. I love being in there. I love people shouting and throwing things and getting angry. You know what?

RASHIDEA JONES: We don't throw anymore.

(Laughter.)

THOMAS FRIEDMAN: Yeah, I don't do that anymore. So "The New York Times," like so many places after COVID, we have no newsroom anymore.

So about a year and a half ago, I was invited to the Oval Office to interview President Biden. Friday afternoon, 4:00 o'clock. I go in, I see him. I spend an hour with him. I come back. I walk back to "The New York Times" bureau, and the only one there was the cleaning lady.

And I wanted to say to her, Ma'am, I just interviewed the

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President of the United States. Would you like to know what he said? Nobody here for me to tell. Okay?

(Laughter.)

And I literally had to text people and say, Hey, I just saw the President. Would you like to know what he said?

And that is a real loss. I used to literally walk every day over to my colleague Mark Landler's desk, who covered the State Department, and we'd riff about things. I'd even invite him into my office, read my column.

I am a columnist because my mentor, Bill Safire, I used to sit at his feet at 5:00 o'clock every day. And we have completely lost that. I'm lucky if I see David -- I love talking to David, but occasionally, like twice a year, he happens to be there when I'm there. And it's all gone, and it's a terrible loss.

ANDY KESSLER: But there is a generation now that doesn't communicate face to face, that communicates digitally.

STEPHANIE RUHLE: But why do they necessarily know better?

ANDY KESSLER: It doesn't matter whether they know better. That's the next generation. That's how they operate, right.

And so, you know, and I want to correct you, the people who tweet aren't sitting at home. They're in their parents' basement in their pajamas. So let's just make sure we get that right.

(Laughter.)

But to bring it back to the NBA, which is always kind of fun, is, you know, the NBA is a meritocracy, right? The best rise to the top. But it's also been democratized over the last decades. There are players of -- they're mostly tall, but of every size and shape and country and continent. I mean, it is amazing to see the makeup of the NBA today.

And the same thing is happening in media, is Twitter allows a platform for the democratization of voices. It's not just from the mainstream media, it's from the person in their parents' basement. And you may argue the most flammable or inflammatory of those rise to the top, but really it's a meritocracy as well.

Yes, there's algorithms, but algorithms don't rise those that just grunt and things on Twitter. It's really a platform that spreads ideas, that there are discussions, there are

arguments.

And I think the mainstream media has a credibility problem, which may be the answer to your question of, you know, how does this next generation know? It's because they're smart and they listen and they see. And the mainstream media got caught cheerleading things, whether it was the immigration or lockdowns in the pandemic and other things, and has lost a lot of credibility.

And therefore Barron Trump had to point out to his father: Go on Joe Rogan's podcast and you'll reach a whole 'nother generation. And Donald Trump had already figured out via Twitter, less so his Truth Social, that there are a lot of people that will have and engage in conversations well beyond, you know, watching TV or reading newspapers.

And it's sad for perhaps those on this panel, but that's the new reality. That's where a whole 'nother generation is getting their ideas.

RASHIDA JONES: I have a couple of thoughts there. There were lots of points that you made.

STEPHANIE RUHLE: That she didn't like.

RASHIDA JONES: Not that I didn't like, that I have thoughts about.

(Laughter.)

STEPHANIE RUHLE: I'm just letting you know.

RASHIDA JONES: I made my point about Twitter. We can agree to disagree on whether it is a town square of civil discourse. Period.

I think your point about the media and credibility is an important one. I think we collectively have work to do to continue to improve how we're serving our various audiences.

I also think the media has been weaponized and that distrust has been compounded because it's been weaponized. If you are told over and over and over again they are lying to you, they're trying to get something out of you, they're misleading you, whether you truly believe it or not, it adds some sense of doubt.

There is no back room where we're all collectively saying how do we go get those guys? How do we get them to believe something that we don't believe is true? That's just not true.

We have a lot of work to do to continue to restore our place

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in providing truth to power, to being a public service, all of those things. But it was artificially compounded on when you're being told that what we're doing is not in your best interest. I do think we have to weigh that.

There is no intention of the media to mislead the audience. There's no intention to drive certain narratives over others for the sake of manipulation and control. And I think we have to address both. We have work to do, but also the art of storytelling, the art of news gathering, the art of the mission of public service has also been weaponized over the last few years.

STEPHANIE RUHLE: I know we have to go to Q&A, but to that, Tom, when we talk about the new place where people get news, right, the social media platforms, for example, big business has figured out the only thing that sells better than sex is rage.

And the algorithm has figured out. They know all of your data. They know everything that annoys you. They know everything that infuriates you. They know what you love. And so they are feeding you more and more and more content that immediately triggers you, triggers you, triggers you.

So how can you be a purveyor of truth and thoughtful conversation when it's long and complicated and nuanced and doesn't fit in a push notification? Because that is the actual challenge of we're trying to help inform, right? Every person should be socially free, financially safe, physically secure. People don't want different things. They want that.

And in trying to inform people, you're now competing against just bomb throwing. And many people who run those platforms are looking to destroy that media because they've got an alternative that is filled with, as Kellyanne Conway likes to put it, alternative facts, which is another word for lies.

THOMAS FRIEDMAN: So, you know, I'm a big fan of Jonathan Haidt's work.

STEPHANIE RUHLE: Me too.

THOMAS FRIEDMAN: And he's shown us lots of data on this. Our society became meaner and nastier in the early 2010s for two reasons: Facebook added the Share button -- or Like button, sorry, excuse me, and Twitter added the Share button.

He said it's the equivalent of giving every American a dart gun. Share. Like. You know? And you just take every one of these things that reinforces your anger, or whatever, and you weaponize it. And so I don't think there's an

accident of what has happened here.

And I just feel that if I had one -- if a genie showed up and gave me one wish, it would be to tell people to get out of Facebook and into somebody's face, okay, and sit down and actually engage somebody, okay?

(Applause.)

And by the way, what are my reading habits? My reading habits is I wake up every morning, one of the first, I look at "The New York Times," "The Wall Street Journal," "Washington Post." I like to read everybody. But I also go to RealClearPolitics because I really want -- I want to see the edges. I want to see the left edge and the right edge. I'm very curious.

STEPHANIE RUHLE: How much time do you spend reading?

THOMAS FRIEDMAN: I spend a lot of time reading, but I spend more time interviewing people because this is how I learn, you know, what we're doing. Because I just think there's so much more serendipity in it, in the two of us engaging.

And so that's how I -- I go places. I'm a big believer if you don't go, you don't know, okay? Now, going doesn't guarantee knowing, but it reduces the odds that you get it wrong, you know.

And when you go, you have -- I was in China last year, and I was at a conference. So I was met at the airport by a college intern, a young woman. And while we were waiting for my bag, she said to me, you know, Mr. Friedman, I have to ask you a question. Is the world still flat?

And I said to her, Actually, it's flatter than ever, in the way I meant it, which is that more people in more places can now compete, connect, and collaborate on more things, in more ways, on more days, for less money, from more places than ever before.

So she thought about that for a second. I could see she didn't really buy it, you know. And then about ten minutes went by, we started talking about something else. And at one point she says, Mr. Friedman, I used ChatGPT last weekend.

I said, You used ChatGPT on a VPN from Beijing, and you're asking me if the world is flat?

(Laughter.)

And so if you don't go, you don't know.

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STEPHANIE RUHLE: I know we have to move on, but I know David -- I will. I know David wants to say something. But doesn't this go back to this problem in Washington, right? If you go, you know.

Twenty, thirty years ago, people on the right and left side of the aisle moved to Washington. They lived there. They lived there with their children and their spouses. So when they went to work every day and battled on the Hill, then at night they'd be at the same youth sporting events. They'd see each other at the grocery store.

Now no one lives in Washington. So they don't know anyone. So it's easy to have an enemy and never look anyone in the eye if you never see them.

THOMAS FRIEDMAN: Ten years ago Kay Bailey Hutchison, Bob Dole, Alan Simpson used to invite me up once a year to meet just with the Republican caucus. That was a decade ago. Never happened again.

RASHIDA JONES: And it won't.

STEPHANIE RUHLE: But it could.

THOMAS FRIEDMAN: Yeah.

STEPHANIE RUHLE: We shouldn't say it won't. It could.

DAVID BROOKS: I was just thinking about the NBA perspective. Like, being a columnist is a little like being in the NBA. No, I'm just kidding.

(Laughter.)

Minus 18 inches and actual talent.

But I'm a big consumer of sports media. And I remember Michael Schmidt, who was a third baseman of the Phillies years ago, said, I experienced the thrill of victory and the agony of reading about it the next day.

And so when you play in the NBA or any professional team, you do your thing, and then the sports radio and the podcasters, they rip you to shreds the next day. That's just part of the job.

And the way we fight is the way we communicate and the way we unify. That may sound too Jewish. But so you're arguing -- like, I'm a big baseball fan, but nobody brings this city together, New York together, like the Knicks. There's something about the fact when the Knicks are riding high, which has been a while until this year, last couple years, but I remember back in the Ewing-Oakley

era, the Starks era, nothing brought the city together like that team.

And so we're going to rip each other to shreds. But the thing that touches us at our heart, which, frankly, is our sports teams, as much as anything, that's going to be an ultimate source of unity.

I'll let you go to questions.

STEPHANIE RUHLE: But can't we -- right, that's a mutual love of sport. Isn't there a way that engaged, educated people of influence can say in a love of sport, we all share a love of country. Because none of us would be here, right?

Think about the opportunities afforded to us. But somehow we're forgetting that. Can't we find a thread, that thread that love of sport brings people together? Why can't we do that with love of country?

DAVID BROOKS: Because loving is hard. Loving is vulnerable. You have to be emotionally open. You have to be willing to be emotionally open to somebody who may hate you. That's just hard.

STEPHANIE RUHLE: Well, if loving is wrong, I don't want to be right.

(Laughter.)

We have to open up for Q&A because I'm going to get thrown off the stage. They're going to kill me at any second.

But the person in my ear is going to have to tell me where to go for this Q&A. This is where we're going?

ROLAND MARTIN: Here we go. Roland Martin, Black Star Network. You talked about sports and how it brings us together. But we act as if there isn't a world before we went there and after.

So we love Joe Louis fighting the German, but Joe Louis wasn't loved by America after the fight is over. And so how do we confront the reality of identity in this country? Because that's also a fundamental aspect the media keeps missing, the identity, racial identity. Attacking Haitians moving in, but they also were buying houses, taking jobs.

So mainstream media does really not pay a lot of attention to that. How do we confront that moving forward? Because it's showing up in every facet of our society, identity, racial identity, and this fear of America becoming a more multicultural country. How does mainstream confront

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that honestly?

RASHIDA JONES: I'll jump in with a thought. Good morning, Roland. I think when you are deciding what stories to tell, deciding who tells those stories, those stories, the subjects of those stories, and the people who bring you those stories have to look like America.

I think it's an imperative to understanding America in all assets, in all factions, in all demographics. The only way to truly understand what is driving the identity politics, as you discussed, is bringing those voices to the table. And I think that's the only way to accurately and authentically address some of those issues.

ANDY KESSLER: What was the popular vote in the last election, what Trump won, had 50 --

THOMAS FRIEDMAN: 49.8 or something like that.

ANDY KESSLER: Okay. So we're a center country politically. There's center left, there's center right. Now, who we hear from are progressives and far right, and because they make the most noise.

But the reality of it is, in conversations with people, at cocktail parties, whatever else, for the most part, we disagree, but we disagree from the center, not from the extremes.

STEPHANIE RUHLE: But, Andy, here's the challenge. Oftentimes, people who are in the center are really comfortable. They're living really good lives. So they're choosing to disengage.

And so while we are swinging far to the right and swinging far to the left, and then people are going: The majority of the country is in the middle. Why don't we reflect that?

It's because the majority of those people in the middle who are living good lives have the privilege of not being engaged. And if you want the country to be in the middle, then the middle has to stand up and demand it.

(Laughter.)

ANDY KESSLER: Fair enough. I agree.

STEPHANIE RUHLE: Sorry, I'm the moderator.

ANDY KESSLER: They disengage, but disengage from what? They get their news from alternate sources. No different than when radio came along and then TV came along and then cable and social networks. It fragments. It's harder to reach that middle, but it's there.

STEPHANIE RUHLE: But extreme voices become the loudest because those who are in the middle are saying: I don't want to get in this battle. I don't want to get canceled. I don't want to get called this.

So they stop talking. And if they stop talking, then a vacuum is created for the people on the edges to be the only voice.

ANDY KESSLER: But they still vote.

THOMAS FRIEDMAN: So one way I try to address your question is use my column to tell different stories. So if you ask me what is my -- I've been doing this -- I've been a columnist since 1995. What is my all-time favorite column that if I -- when they put me away, you know, just throw this one in?

It's 2018, and Dave Goldfein, the head of the U.S. Air Force -- whenever I'm depressed, I travel with the U.S. military, okay? So Dave Goldfein invited me --

STEPHANIE RUHLE: You are so weird. "When I'm totally depressed, I just, like, travel with the military."

THOMAS FRIEDMAN: Yeah, and I'll tell you why.

STEPHANIE RUHLE: Who'd ever say that?

THOMAS FRIEDMAN: So in 2018, Dave invites me to go with him to visit every U.S. air base in the Middle East at the height of the ISIS war, okay? So we fly from Washington to Ramstein in Germany, Ramstein to Al Udeid Air Base in Qatar, okay?

And I'm a Tuesday for Wednesday columnist. And sometimes as a columnist you're in the right place at the right time. Sometimes, Stephanie, you're in the wrong place at the wrong time.

Because I landed in Al Udeid Air Base, opened up my computer, and Charlottesville had just happened. And I thought, let's see, Charlottesville's happened, everyone's talking about Charlottesville, and your columnist at "The New York Times" is in Al Udeid Air Base in Doha, Qatar.

So sometimes I feel like I have an avatar on my shoulder, and he's saying, I wonder what he's gonna write, okay? And so I looked at my screen, and then the column became obvious to me.

I wrote a column about our traveling party. I said, I'm out here with Dave Goldfein, head of the U.S. Air Force. He's Jewish. I'm here with Heather Wilson. She's the Air Force

secretary. She's a woman. I'm here with Heather's chief executive officer. She's an African-American woman, Air Force lieutenant colonel. Her aide is named Sayzar.

We just had a briefing from the base commander who's Armenian-American. His deputy is a Lebanese-American. And we ended the day with an intelligence briefing from Captain Yang: Mr. President, which part of this sentence don't you understand? That is what makes America great and different from the Middle East.

And when I see Pete Hegseth say, you know, the worst sentence is that diversity is our strength, well, diversity is our -- is not our -- he was saying diversity is not our strength. It is our strength, but we do have to make, out of many, one.

And the beauty of the U.S. military --

STEPHANIE RUHLE: Say that last part again.

THOMAS FRIEDMAN: We have to make, out of many, one. I think it's on the dollar bill, okay, or somewhere.

(Laughter.)

And it's that no one does that better than the U.S. military. And for that knucklehead to come in and make the first message to a room of African-American, white, Hispanic, Asian-Americans, and God knows who, that that is not the source of our strength, let me take you to Beirut, Lebanon, where my wife and I lived for five years and saw what happens when you have diversity without anyone trying to make, out of many, one.

(Applause.)

MIMI ROCAH: Hi. My name is Mimi Rocah. I'm a former federal prosecutor from the Southern District of New York, which you may have heard about lately.

(Applause.)

I'll get to that in a second. Former MSNBC legal analyst. Hi, Stephanie. Hi, Rashida. And a former DA.

The past 36 hours, we've seen something that was kind of unthinkable, actually. We saw courage. We saw people standing up for the rule of law and principle when at least seven prosecutors, both in the Southern District and from main justice, resigned rather than carry out what they felt, appropriately so, was essentially an illegal, corrupt order.

And we've seen almost every mainstream news organization cover it largely the same. I mean, even Fox

News. "The Wall Street Journal," "The New York Times," MSNBC, CNN, I mean, the coverage has been quite uniform.

And that's for a couple of reasons. One is the people who resigned, two of them, at least, are staunch federalist legal conservatives. And also because it really has been about the rule of law and not political.

So my question is this is like a big moment. I mean, I think it's a really big moment that we have something that happened that people were able to find common ground on. This was wrong, and they did the right thing, and they stood up. I'm not saying there's no critics of them. But, overall, this has been a unifying moment.

How do we make that not go away? I mean, by tomorrow, everyone's going to forget. It's been the story for 36 hours. And part of the problem is how do we keep something like that -- how do you guys, but how do we help keep that in the public eye? Because it's not just a story. It's like a really motivating common-ground moment.

THOMAS FRIEDMAN: Can I just say one quick thing about that?

(Applause.)

I think -- I wish I could see you, but the podium is in the way. People have been asking for the last three weeks: What are Democrats going to do?

It's the wrong question. It's what are people of principle going to do? And that's what speaks to me about what that person did.

(Applause.)

Because people of principle, right, left, and center, that was an act of principle based on the feeling that the Constitution is the bedrock of our society, and if we lose that bedrock of truth and trust, everything goes.

Stephanie, there's one thing I've learned traveling the world. There are a lot of ways to make a country poor. There's only one way to make a country rich: strong, healthy institutions.

STEPHANIE RUHLE: Marty?

GENERAL MARTIN DEMPSEY: Thanks very much, and it's good to see you, Tom.

THOMAS FRIEDMAN: You too, Marty.



GENERAL MARTIN DEMPSEY: And thanks, all of you, for being on this panel.

THOMAS FRIEDMAN: Former Chairman of the Joint Chiefs of Staff, for those of you who don't know.

(Applause.)

GENERAL MARTIN DEMPSEY: And thanks for the way you described the military. That's actually the way that -- that's the thing I was most proud of, actually, is that we represented the country we served, all of it.

But the conversation to now has been largely focused inward on us. And I do take the point that has been made that chaos can actually create innovation. It's the place where you find serendipity. Somebody used that term, serendipity.

When I was born, there were just less than 3 billion people in the world. I think there's more than 8 billion now. You got to figure that that extra 5 billion has done something to change the nature of the globe on which we live.

My question is, and especially because the NBA, as we all well know, is not just a domestic enterprise, it's global, so does the chaos imperative that seems to be domestically prominent now, how does that play out globally?

Because the institutions that we have worked since World War II to put in place are eroding. At least the trust in them is eroding. Not just -- we talk about our erosion of trust domestically. It's eroding globally. And the question I have is how do we -- what's going to take its place?

And, Tom, let me start with you because I know you've written about this extensively.

THOMAS FRIEDMAN: So first of all, thanks, Marty. I think one of the paradoxes of technology that we've learned over the last 20 years -- by "technology," I say from social media to a facial recognition to AI -- is these technologies in the aggregate, what they're doing is they're actually making inefficient authoritarians more efficient -- Sisi in Egypt -- they make efficient authoritarians super efficient -- China -- and they make democracies ungovernable.

That's the paradox of technology today. And the Chinese, for instance, have figured that out. They would never allow TikTok in China, yet it's the -- they have a version of it, but it's nowhere near as open as the one that we have here.

And that's what really worries me. I spent a lot of time in China. Because you can love the Chinese or you can hate the Chinese, and on days I feel both, very often. But these

are serious people. These are serious people.

You know, last time I was in China, two years ago, Xiaomi was a phone company. I came back and it was a car company. Okay? So their companies wake up every day and meet with the government, and the government says, How can I help you. Okay?

Look what's going on at Ford Motor and General Motors today. Okay? Both have made huge investments in EVs and autonomous vehicles, and the new president comes in and is just crushing them so much so that Jim Farley, the head of Ford, said two days ago, or yesterday: If you do this, these tariffs on Canada and Mexico, because all our parts just go back and forth between them, you're going to crush our industry.

So if we are not serious in a world of serious people, eventually that's going to really affect our standard of living.

STEPHANIE RUHLE: This chaos that's being created, and I know lots of people from the business community like the idea, like we're in Silicon Valley, move fast and break things, but government is wildly different than business. And while we want government to be far more efficient than it is, we also don't want it to operate like a business.

ANDY KESSLER: Well, I wouldn't mind if it did operate a little bit like a business. I mean, it would be nice if there were metrics at a number of departments and agencies that we have.

Because what happens is, via earmarks and everything else, the government just keeps growing and growing and growing. And a lot of the difference between left and right or MAGA and progressives is about the size of government.

And so there's a lot of complaints about Elon Musk and President Musk, he's called, and dismantling the government, but you see from some of the Obama folks who said, We wanted to make government efficient, and now they're saying, Oh, my goodness, someone is actually doing that.

STEPHANIE RUHLE: But how do we know that he's doing that? How do we know anything that he's doing? He hasn't had any security clearance. He hasn't had one ounce of transparency.

And this isn't a business that we can forget about. This is a country of 330 million people.

(Applause.)

You want to clean up the government, have at it. But let's see your work, big boy.

ANDY KESSLER: First of all, I believe it will end up being one of the more transparent agencies, DOGE or the Digital Services, whatever you want to call it. You're going to see -- I suggest, I don't know, but you'll see more transparency in what they're doing.

A lot of things that he's pointed out, how come we didn't know that before, right? That's sort of one of the great questions.

STEPHANIE RUHLE: Like what? Like what?

ANDY KESSLER: Well, some of the programs for USAID and --

STEPHANIE RUHLE: Which one?

ANDY KESSLER: Well, I don't know. I'm just saying. Some of them.

STEPHANIE RUHLE: Let's move on.

(Applause.)

ANDY KESSLER: I feel like I'm on MSNBC getting grilled. Go ahead.

STEPHANIE RUHLE: No, hold on. You know what? You're not. I want to have an honest conversation with you. So please have one with me. And what I don't want to do is have this room end with think about all the programs he said that were wasteful. Great. Tell me what they are.

ANDY KESSLER: Well, if you would like --

(Applause.)

They took my phone away, but I'll pull up the DOGE.gov site and we'll look. But you can't just say everything that he's cutting is bad.

STEPHANIE RUHLE: No one's saying that. No one's saying everything he's -- this is a bad idea and we have to save everyone.

We need to clean up. We have too much waste. There are way too many people who work in the government.

ANDY KESSLER: Good. I agree.

STEPHANIE RUHLE: But let's see what he's actually

doing, not tell us by a random tweet about condoms that were sent to Gaza that weren't, and let's actually together rebuild.

ANDY KESSLER: Couldn't agree more.

STEPHANIE RUHLE: Because what you're talking about is just throwing flames.

(Applause.)

QUESTION: Love you, Stephanie. Just love you so much.

(Laughter.)

Look, when we were talking about DEI, and Tom spoke about it earlier, the fundamental truth is we're talking about adjudicating competing claims of what's true or righteous or good in an enlightened society where conversation is valued, where the partner I engage, my interlocutor, thinks I have sufficient intelligence to contribute to the conversation so that we can work toward a specific goal, what David Brooks has been speaking about and Rashida as well.

The problem is with the anti-DEI, it acts as if mediocrity is the province of color. I teach at Vanderbilt, mostly white students, trust and belief that mediocrity -- not my students, but others that I see -- is something that spreads like a virus as well. Few of them are very brilliant, most of them are average, some of them not so much.

But to connect that exclusively and primarily to color, when we have a president who is proud to be unmolested by enlightenment and whose radical anti-intellectualism feeds a network of white supremacy, Elon Musk bringing an ethic of South African apartheid to America, to reinforce --

(Applause.)

-- to reinforce the inherent value of white supremacy here. Never forget, Hitler sent folk to Jim Crow to teach him how to engage in Nazism within that culture.

My point is that what does the mainstream media have to bravely say about the white supremacist ethic at the heart of this culture that is ruining, as Martin Luther King Jr. said, white brothers and sisters themselves.

And at the end, I'll say this. Extremism, he said, Martin Luther King Jr., who was seen as an extremist when he was alive, we forget this now that he is an American hero, and he said: I'd rather be an extremist for love and for justice and for democracy.



How can we have open-ended conversations that value our interlocutors in a world where the head of our government has in an unseemly fashion undermined the capacity of human beings to lay claim to the dignity of their democratic ideals?

(Applause.)

RASHIDA JONES: The only thing I would say to that -- I think it's a great point, is how can we afford not to? I mean, we don't have the luxury to say we're going to tap out of demanding that these conversations happen, of ensuring that some of these perspectives are brought to the table, of making it an imperative that some of these topics are kind of opened and face head on.

I think, you know, I'm going to go back to, in some ways, where we started here, glass half full. Like, we can't afford to be passive in this moment. We can't afford not to engage. We can't afford to not have civil discourse. I think we have to do all of these things. We can't tap out of America for a couple of years and hope on the other side it's all better.

If we want to get to this point where there's a moral common ground, where we can have disagreements without being disagreeable, I think we just can't afford to step back and let it happen around us, we have to address it.

STEPHANIE RUHLE: Then, David, isn't something we can challenge the room is not to be holed up in a political ideology or not to activate, but simply say let's all be informed, right? Because it's easy for people to say, I'm going to tune out.

But right now, if we just challenged ourselves to say, great, we're auditing the government, let's be open to Elon Musk, let's be open to President Trump won, and let's be open to his ideas but at the same time hold him to account and say, We want to understand what you're doing.

Because everyone in this room, right, we're all part of a social chain where we know lies are being passed on and tweets are being passed on.

But if we just said to everyone, we know you care about this country, we know you care about the future, let's just get informed, isn't that a way to unite rather than divide, but lift up where we are?

DAVID BROOKS: Well, I'm in the information business, so yes. But I think a lot of our political problems flow, as I said at the very start, from sociological and psychological and relational problems.

And so if I'm on an airplane, I'm the kind of guy who puts his headphones in, even if there's no music. And so I've learned, like, okay, when there's an hour left in the flight, I'm going to start the conversation with my neighbor. Not two hours, that's too long.

(Laughter.)

But then you have to have skills at it. And so if I'm sitting next to you or your gentleman's question about identity, I'm going to want to know first about you as the unique individual you are, unlike every other human being that's ever been.

I also want to know about you as a Black man. I don't see you if I don't see that element of your nature.

I also want to know about you and your social location. We're all embedded in a certain spot in the power structure. And so we have to be wise enough to understand people on all three levels of reality.

Like, I don't have to walk into a room and say what version of myself can this room handle? I never have to ask that question. And so you have to be -- that takes a level of intellectual subtlety to actually have those conversations.

I was at a diner with a -- I was having breakfast with a 93-year-old lady named LaRue Dorsey in Waco, Texas. And she presents herself to me as a strict drill sergeant disciplinarian. She'd been a teacher. And she said, I loved my students enough to discipline them.

And I'm a little intimidated by this formidable lady. A mutual friend of ours, a pastor, comes in. Seeing he knows us both, he comes to our table. And he grabs Mrs. Dorsey by the shoulders, and he shakes her way harder than you should ever shake a 93-year-old.

And he says to her, Mrs. Dorsey, Mrs. Dorsey, you're the best. You're the best. I love you. I love you. And that burst turned her from a drill sergeant to a bright-eye-shining nine-year-old girl.

And so it was the act of his gaze. It was warm, warmer than I'm capable of doing. But also, he's a pastor. He pastors to the homeless. And so when he sees somebody, anybody, he sees someone made in the image of God. He sees someone with a soul of infinite value and dignity.

And you can be Christian, Jewish, Muslim, atheist, whatever. But seeing somebody with that level of reverence and respect is a precondition for seeing them well.



STEPHANIE RUHLE: That is such a beautiful sentiment.

(Applause.)

Andy, this takes me back to what you were saying earlier that, you know, young people, they live differently. They get their information differently.

And we shouldn't say to them we know better, but the world that they're living in, getting on that plane and putting the earbuds in and immediately just being on their phone, they're missing that chance for that human connection, which is the same thing people who don't want to go back to the office are missing. They're just completing tasks, and they're not connecting.

How do we say to a next generation that's saying I know better, I have it all here, and even though they believe they know better, they're very disconnected and they're built in this fear-of-missing-out world? How do we get them to care about this human connection again? Because actually seeing someone is the magic.

ANDY KESSLER: I agree. There is nothing better than face to face. However, those online, and I find this true for myself, can keep in touch with 10x or 100x more people than you can individually. It's Metcalfe's law, n times n minus 1. The value of the network grows by the number of participants. Now, I have a lot of Facebook friends who I don't even know who they are, but I find out little snippets about them.

And I think that's the MO of the next generation, is they will argue to you that they are more in touch with people than any individual can be face to face, and so therefore they get their news and everything else through that network or through those kinds of networks.

Going back to what you said before, I'm a big believer in transparency. I don't think there's enough transparency. I don't think our government has -- and our media, to be honest, have been transparent about what actually is going on.

STEPHANIE RUHLE: That's why people welcome the idea.

ANDY KESSLER: And, you know, I'm a big believer in free markets. You know, the way that the stock market works is it's not complete information, but there's enough people plugging into it that at the end of the day prices tend to be somewhat realistic, not always, but because of the value of that network. And I think the mainstream media is starting to learn the value of those digital networks.

Tom, I'm going to -- sorry, I'm going to disagree with someone from "The New York Times," just slightly, is that you said that, you know, digital technology makes autocrats stronger. And there is something to that, but it also empowers individuals, individuals worldwide.

You know, Apple has sold however many billion iPhones, and Androids add on to that. And so there are more people in those countries -- there's someone in China that uses ChatGPT on a VPN.

THOMAS FRIEDMAN: There's someone in the government who is monitoring them.

ANDY KESSLER: Who is trying for them not to, or it's hard to get a VPN in China. And my point is, is that there's -- instead of just the elite being empowered with information, there's global masses that are empowered with information.

And it's in our best interest as the media to feed them fair and -- I was about to say fair and balanced, but I don't want to say that, that's a Fox thing. But, you know, feed them legitimate, non-censored information.

And it's important for the mainstream media and media in general, whether it's social networks or not, to push the government for more transparency, more transparency, more transparency.

I think it's happening. We'll see. It's early in this. In the Biden administration, we got some, but we also got censorship of social networks, of Facebook and others, especially when it had to do with COVID.

So it's in everyone's best interest in the media to push for transparency again and again and again.

STEPHANIE RUHLE: Can I just ask one tiny question on the "we'll see"? Here's the thing about, like, let's shake things up and we'll see. We can all "we'll see" because we're on top of the pyramid. And where do we put the "we'll see" when everything gets broken for the people who need the support network?

ANDY KESSLER: Yeah. No, it's a great question. So the woman -- the former prosecutor --

STEPHANIE RUHLE: Mimi Rocah.

ANDY KESSLER: -- had asked the question about what do we do? How do we make this more than a 18 hour news cycle?



And the answer is write an op ed, submit it to "The New York Times" and "Wall Street Journal." But if not, put it on media. Put it on Substack. Put it on Facebook. Do a TikTok video. You're empowered to do that more today than you ever have.

STEPHANIE RUHLE: All right. I know we're out of time, Adam. Thank you all so, so, so much. Thank you, the audience.

ADAM SILVER: Thank you, Stephanie. Thank you, everyone. You know, first of all, Tom and I ran into each other last summer, and it was his idea that we all get together and have this panel today. So thank you very much for that panel, Tom -- that idea, Tom.

I also want to say, you know, Tom, I was thinking about your comment before about what you do when you're sad. I just want to say when I'm sad, I watch a basketball game.

(Laughter.)

And, David, you talked about what gives you hope. And I think I speak on behalf of everyone in this room. What gives us hope is hearing a group like all of you hash out these ideas. I think it just reminds us all what this country is about and truly gives me optimism.

I mean, and I'd also just add I appreciate, you know, the comments about sports. It's interesting that this Newsmaker Breakfast, which was actually started by David Stern's wife, Dianne, many years ago, this regular practice of coming together and not talking about sports, but at the same time it's come to remind me of what is so special about sports, about the unity that you've all talked about; that there are very few things that where people I -- you know, just like all of you, I travel, I meet with people for a living and sit in arenas all over the country, increasingly globally.

And it's wonderful to see the impact that sports has on people's lives. And they really do park, you know, various disputes. But at the same time, they're willing to talk about those things in the greater context of sports.

And I just say, lastly, and I've learned so much from reading all of your columns and knowing all of you, that I think we're trying to use this platform, frankly, to teach people how to listen. I think that's what you all have pointed out, that it's a skill. It's not necessarily intuitive to engage with people, to listen.

And even, you know, so much discussion now, you know -- you mentioned Jamie Dimon, sort of, you know, slamming his fist down, saying get back in the office. You know,

what we're trying to teach at the NBA, it's less about being in the office. Mine is an out-of-the-home policy.

I say it's like -- it's not so important to me that you sit at a cubicle at NBA headquarters, it's that you leave your apartments, once you leave your home, and you get out and about. We have 30 NBA teams, you know. We have a growing number of WNBA teams, G League teams, and a league in Africa. We're doing more in Europe.

What I'm trying to persuade all my colleagues is you got to get out and about. You got to listen to these people. So, yes, come together in the office as well, but that's what's so critically important.

So, you know, speaking of that, thank all of you for being in this community.

I'd say one more thing that gives me optimism, and that's what's happening here in the Bay Area. I've had the opportunity over the last few days to spend time with Daniel Lurie, the new mayor here, who spent much of yesterday in Oakland.

And, you know, Andy, you are of this community. It feels like there's a real spirit of optimism here, and there's a spirit that this is -- not just this city, but the Bay Area, I mean, one of the most beautiful cities.

I have good fortune of traveling all over. Every time I get here, I'm reminded just how incredibly beautiful this place is. All the geography, the natural aspects of just what makes this country so special.

And there's enormous optimism here now that, you know -- and sometimes it's not -- I get the sense from Mayor Lurie, I want to be careful because I don't know enough about the local politics, and we wouldn't have had this All-Star Game here without London Breed, who stepped up to really help our organization. So I want to thank her as well.

But my sense is that people are just trying to do their jobs in an apolitical way and say, yes, we have differences, but there are certain things we know we need to fix.

And I think all of you were a really interesting blend. I think, Andy, you're the newest to the NBA family, so welcome. But love your column as well in "The Wall Street Journal," and I think your love of free markets and love of entrepreneurship and innovation also is what this league stands for.

So, again, it's such a privilege to be in this job, to be around all of you, and I hope that you take advantage then sort of over the next couple of days to engage in these

 . . . when all is said, we're done.®

conversations.

It's not inconsistent with sports. You know, as you're sitting next to people, as you're going to our events and talking to people, we encourage you to use this as a platform and learn from all of these folks, you know, Rashida, et cetera. And thank you. Thank you all so much for your willingness to sit here and expose yourselves to everybody.

Really enjoy the rest of the weekend. Thank you very much.

(Applause.)

ADAM SILVER: I'm sorry, I was asked to say one more thing.

STEPHANIE RUHLE: David and Tom's latest book.

ADAM SILVER: Stephanie said they're for sale outside. They're not for sale. They're a gift from us for all of you. You know, Tom's latest book is "Thank You for Being Late," and David Brooks, "How to Know a Person." I shortened their titles.

And, Andy, for your next book, we owe you. We have the information of everybody in this room. Stephanie, Rashida, when you're ready to write books, they're going to be sent out to everybody.

So please take a copy of their books on your way out as well. So thank you again.

(Applause.)

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