

Preserving a United Nation: Moving Forward Together Despite Our Differences (A Conversation With John C. Danforth)

September 9, 2017

Emerson Auditorium in Knight Hall at Washington University in St. Louis

Chancellor Mark Wrighton:

Good evening everyone, I'm Mark Wrighton, Chancellor of Washington University. Welcome to this special event, coordinated by the John C. Danforth Center on Religion and Politics. Tonight we have a conversation with John C. Danforth. The theme is "Preserving a United Nation: Moving Forward Together Despite Our Differences." In a few minutes, I'll invite forward the Senator and Dr. Marie Griffith, our director of the John C. Danforth Center on Religion and Politics. But first, just a few words about the start up of our academic year. Just two weeks ago we welcomed a truly outstanding group of undergraduates to join us as the class of 2021. This class is arguably our strongest and most diverse ever and we have been very pleased with our start up so far. We had tremendously beautiful St. Louis weather that made all of the students, all of our team, and the parents and family members of the students so pleased to be here. It's obviously a tense time to drop off a 17 or 18 year old and then leave, but everything went beautifully.

But in our country, there have been some very serious problems that even the class of 2021 is considering and there's a degree of anxiety, there's some tension, and I believe that the country is fragile. So, this evening's discussion should be very important and timely. We here in Missouri have the NAACP of the country having issued a travel advisory against coming to Missouri. We had the terrible events in Charlottesville. We've had the challenge of dealing with DACA. So we have our hands full on a number of important issues but though there are challenges, there are some really bright spots beyond the good weather. This morning, I had a very pleasant conversation with Senator Roy Blunt and he shared with me the mark up of the bill that affects funding for the National Institutes of Health and he shared with me that the bill will have a plus up of 2 billion dollars. Obviously Washington University's School of Medicine and other members of our faculty here on the Danforth Campus compete very effectively for the funding that's available. One of the big increases is in the area of Alzheimer's disease research, that bill calls for an increase in approximately 420 million dollars. Under Senator Blunt's leadership, the NIH funding has increased by about 20% in the last three years. So this is good news for us. We have an important objective here in our School of Medicine to improve human health and with resources like that I know we can make additional progress.

This evening, our program has been coordinated by the John C. Danforth Center on Religion and Politics. The center was founded in 2011 to foster a vibrant intellectual community that promotes rigorous scholarship, models civil dialogue and educates students and the public about the intersections of American religion and politics. We are fortunate to have the Center at Washington University and are grateful to the many people who made that happen and continue its good work. Including the two key participants this evening.

Professor Marie Griffith is the John C. Danforth Distinguished Professor in the Humanities and Director of the Center. She leads a stellar group of faculty that collectively and individually supports our community's education and understanding of religion in public life both historically and in the present time. Marie earned an undergraduate degree at the University of Virginia, so the events in Charlottesville perhaps affect her more than some others. Her degree was in political and social thought. She went on to earn the PhD from Harvard University in the area of religion. She is the editor of the Center's online journal, Religion and Politics. She has authored several publications and her forthcoming book is titled, "Moral Combat: How Sex Divided American Christians and Fractured American Politics." This will be published this December.

Senator Danforth is a great friend to Washington University and we benefit from his active presence on our campus, in our state, and in our country. I'm sure that many noticed and read the important opinion piece he wrote just last week. He served three terms representing the state of Missouri in the United States Senate after eight years of service as Missouri's Attorney General. Following his elected service, he held appointments in both republican and Democratic administrations. He was special envoy to Sedan where his focus was negotiating an end to the civil war in the south and later he became U.S. ambassador to the United Nations. He is currently a partner at Dowd-Bennett here in St. Louis. He's an ordained Episcopal priest. He co-officiated at my marriage for which I am always grateful. And he has written two important books. First, *Faith and Politics: How the Moral Values Debate Divides America and How to Move Forward Together* and the other book *The Relevance of Religion: How Faithful People Can Change Politics*. Senator Danforth and his wife Sally have been generous and most recently created the Sally D. Danforth Distinguished Professorship in Law and Religion held by Professor John Inazu. We're fortunate tonight to have Professor Griffith interviewing Senator Danforth in a conversation, *Preserving a United Nation: Moving Forward Together Despite Our Differences*. Please join me in welcoming our two key participants, Professor Griffith and Senator Danforth.

Senator John C. Danforth:

Lead the way, [Marie]. Thanks, Mark.

Professor Marie Griffith:

Thank you, Chancellor Wrighton, it's so wonderful to see all of you here in this auditorium with us. I also want to welcome those of you who are having to join us from our overflow spaces because of the wonderful crowd we have here and also those who are joining us online from home, welcome to you all. We also want to acknowledge our partner for this event. We are putting this on with the Washington University Law School's Public Interest Law and Policy Speaker Series. So it has been a pleasure to partner with them on that.

Before we get started, let me just remind all of us, especially those of us in this room and the other rooms here, to please silence your cell phones and other buzzing devices, which all of us forget to do once in a while, so don't be that person tonight.

The format of our evening is simple. I will be asking some questions of Senator Danforth, we'll have some discussion up here and we're going to open it up pretty quickly to audience questions. We want to make sure that he gets to hear from all of you here. We'll have two microphones here on either aisle of our main room so that you can ask your questions and then we will conclude by 8:30 and we invite all of you in all of these spaces here in this building to join us for a reception in the atrium just outside the room.

So without further ado, good evening, Senator.

Senator John C. Danforth:

Well I've just been thinking, there are two sure ways to get a gig at Washington University. One is to officiate at the Chancellor's wedding and the other is to get the John C. Danforth Center to invite John C. Danforth. [laughter] The fix is in.

Professor Marie Griffith:

Well we've been talking about this event for a number of months now about bringing you here and I was thinking back and I think we first talked about this around the time of President Trump's inauguration. And a lot has happened since then, as we all know, and there was no way of knowing at that time that Senator Danforth would write an explosive op-ed piece in the Washington Post that would garner so much attention. [applause] I'm sure many of you have seen Senator Danforth, you've been on the news on various shows across the networks, the radio today, St. Louis Public Radio and it's continuing on and on. So I would just like to start there and ask you to expand a bit on your thoughts there. In that op-ed you call President Trump the most divisive president in our history, you refer to him as a hateful man who has corrupted the Republican Party, and I think we want to know what you really think. [laughter] So expand a bit, why do you see him as the most divisive president in our history.

Senator John C. Danforth:

This piece was written by a republican and it was really directed at republicans. I am a republican, I've always been a republican, I've been very comfortable in the Republican Party. They call it the Grand Old Party, it has a wonderful history; its first president as everyone knows, was Abraham Lincoln; it's had a distinguished history since then. I think it's important to America today to have two strong political parties and I think it's important to have a strong Republican Party because I think to have a responsibly conservative party is really necessary, that's my view. So, I'm a republican and I was writing this to republicans and my view is that we as a party are sunk if we get identified with Donald Trump; that we don't really have a strong future. They say that Trump has maybe what 35% approval, something like that; you don't have much of a future if you have 35%. So the point of the piece was to

say, right from the beginning the Republican Party was the party of the Union and its basic theme was to hold the country together in a very, very divisive time and I think that that is at least one of the top functions of politics, of government, is to hold the country together. It was the design of our constitution to allow people of different interests to be bound together in one country: *e pluribus unum*. So along comes Trump and he's exactly the opposite and it's not just that he's different, he's the opposite of what I believed my party was about and what I believe politics should be about, should be for and I wanted to say that and I wanted to say that I think it's important for my party to disassociate itself from Donald Trump.

Professor Marie Griffith:

What do you think the election says about our country then, because our country did elect Donald Trump. How do we explain this, some people have responded to your op-ed saying, well this is the president America wanted, that's why he got elected.

Senator John C. Danforth:

You know, I thought, there's this book by J.D. Vance called *Hillbilly Elegy* and it's really worth reading and there have been other books written that have described a lot of people in the middle of the country and they're not necessarily political in their background. Some of them are from rural parts of the country, a lot of them don't have college educations. But I think there are a lot of people who feel abused and they feel abused by what they call the establishment and they feel abused by government and by politicians. I read one book and maybe this has been in more than one book but the analogy was drawn to people in America standing in a line and the line is pointed in one direction, and it's pointed in the direction of realizing the American Dream and for people stuck in the middle of the line, there are people in front of them and they turn around and there are people behind them and then along comes government, this is in their minds, and government takes people from behind and moves them in front of these people. So I think there are people who feel they have been taken advantage of and also that they've been disrespected. So this was the problem that Hilary Clinton had when she talked about "the deplorables," people feel like they've been had, that they've been disrespected. So I think they think, "well Donald Trump's a bully, but he's our bully" and that I think is a lot of it. I think there's just a lot of resentment out there of people who think they've been had. Also I think two other things I'd point out, one is that Trump certainly got a lot of votes in the primary process but he did not get 50% of the votes of republican primary voters, he just didn't. And secondly, Hilary Clinton in the minds of many, many people, was not a good candidate, was not a strong candidate. And I heard a lot of people say before the election, you know, I'd vote for anybody instead of her. So I think that was a large part of it. I don't think it was necessarily a ratification of Donald Trump or a statement by the American people that people are hateful. I think all of those factors came into play. That's just my analysis, I mean, I don't know, that's just what I think.

Professor Marie Griffith:

You've spoken also quite eloquently about really that both parties have some blame to carry on and I think people might disagree about how much blame either party might need to take on but I'd love to hear you reflect a little bit about the mistakes you've seen in your own party, what have republicans done wrong, and also reflect on where you see democrats, where liberals have gone wrong.

Senator John C. Danforth:

Okay well what we did wrong was force Donald Trump on the American people. [laughter] I mean that's what we did wrong. [applause] I mean that was, that was really a terrible thing to do and . . .

Professor Marie Griffith:

But some people want to say it goes back longer than that, right?

Senator John C. Danforth:

Yeah, it does. That's just what I was talking about, I think that there's a pent up resentment, but my view of Trump, and I said this in the piece, I'm not criticizing him on issue or even on his treatment of republicans, which he just really enjoys bashing republicans, but it was more, and in fact that piece was really exclusively criticizing his divisiveness. He is, I think the archetype of divisiveness. But he is not the only source of divisiveness and there really is a lot of blame to go around, I think both parties, I think the democrats pursued a really relentless pursuit of identity politics which emphasizes our differences, builds on resentment, is not a good thing in my view. I think that to me, the U.S. Senate where I spent 18 years of my life, is a place, was designed as a place where different points of view can come together and hopefully work things out and that is how it functioned for most of its history and certainly that's the way it functioned when I was there, but the Senate, a lot of people say, okay well who's to blame for the dysfunction in the Senate -- well it's gotta be the republicans, they've got 52 votes, okay but the democrats have 48 votes and if the 48 Democratic Senators are voting as a block, it's impossible for the Senate to work, it just can't happen. Because 40 plus votes can sustain a filibuster and so it's been very divisive in the Senate and I think there's just a lot of blame to go around and as I said at the beginning, my op-ed piece was written by a republican directed at republicans but I would be happy to direct attention at the democrats also. [laughter]

Professor Marie Griffith:

I want us to get to how we can move forward together because I know that's where your heart is right now and what a lot of people want to think about but I want to linger for another moment on the fractures. I'm very interested in learning about how these fractures came to be as you know from the title of my new book but I very much appreciate that we want to move beyond them and come together. And I guess, you're known as an Episcopal priest and as someone who has written two somewhat different books about religion and religion in politics.

I just wanted to ask you to reflect on what you see as the role of religion in dividing us, also with its potential to reunite but for a minute on the divisions, you know, we know that one of President Trump's core supporters continue to be white evangelicals. I just wonder if you have thoughts about that from your own position as a Christian, as a priest, as well as a politician.

Senator John C. Danforth:

Well religion has a long history of being very divisive, of causing wars, and the framers of our Constitution were well aware of that, they knew the history of Europe and the religious wars of Europe and they wanted to avoid that. Jefferson called it the wall of separation between church and state, they wanted to make sure that the two didn't get entangled with each other, either that the state would use religion or that religion would be coming a cause in politics. So religion has a history of being very divisive but the meaning of the word comes from the same root as ligament, it means to bind things together and I think that, St. Paul says we are supposed to be ambassadors of reconciliation and the Colossians said in Christ all things hold together, all things hang together and I think that's a really important religious message so I think holding things together is the responsibility of government and it really should also be the message of religion. Now, I think the Christian right is not as potent as it was at the time that I wrote this book called *Faith in Politics* but especially at that time the idea was to create and to hammer wedge issues in order to win support. So there were a series of these very religiously fraught wedge issues that were designed to make people mad, I mean obviously abortion, but for example, issues which you would think would not be that consequential, should prayer in schools or prayer in opening meetings, which is a recent Supreme Court case. Is that really a big deal whether prayer opens a meeting or whether the Ten Commandments are on a granite block on the Capitol grounds of the state, doesn't seem to me to be big in the scheme of things but it's something that can make people angry. So religion has been used as a wedge, it has been used for political purposes and that was the point of that book that I wrote a decade or so ago.

Professor Marie Griffith:

Well, thinking about the role of religious progressives, or religious liberals, they of course have been one of the core support groups of the Democratic Party, right, on the liberal side, and very focused on what you termed as identity politics, what they would see as social justice for racial minorities, for women, for other groups, today for immigrants, I mean the religious progressive leaders were on the steps of Capitols across the country on the DACA issue just today and I guess I wonder if you see those things as well as divisive, are there ways that these groups can work together across these lines for something that I hope everyone would agree is important, you know, racial equality, racial justice, justice for all people.

Senator John C. Danforth:

Sure, it's called the prophetic ministry. But I think that there are different ways of exercising the prophetic ministry and one is very much is in your face and that's the

style, that's the Prophet Amos, that's the style. My own view is that to also be sensitive to other people who don't necessarily share all your views. Now if it's a clear matter of justice, okay social justice, racial justice, good, that seems to me to be clear. But if it's more of a question of are you for such and such piece of legislation or is that a good idea or exactly how do you accomplish it, that's more a tactical question where good people can disagree. So I think it's important to try to be generous in viewing other people as not necessarily being the enemy. In fact, that book, *Faith and Politics*, I had a whole chapter about the twelfth chapter of the Epistle to the Romans. I love the twelfth chapter of Romans. And one thing that it says is, if your enemy, so in politics it's kind of hard to say enemy, but this is what Paul said is: if your enemy is hungry, give them something to eat. If your enemy is thirsty, give your enemy something to drink, that's in Romans 12 and then Paul says, in by so doing, you pour hot coals on your enemy's head [laughter] So let's say you had a hankering to pour hot coals on let's say, in my case, Chuck Schumer's head [laughter], so you don't have to you know, fire up your Weber and then figure out how you're going to transport, all you have to do is, give them a PB&J. And I think, I do think that if we're going to, okay so say the theme is how to move forward to unite the country, I think a generosity of spirit, and with people who you don't agree with on particular issues, not if they're hateful people, but I mean on legislation, on how to make government policy, I think a generosity of spirit, which also includes humility about yourself, I mean politics is, they say it's sausage making, it is, it's not the business of purity, it's not holiness, it's politics, it's a mess, but it's worth doing but if you're going to do it at all, it's really important I think to emphasize points of agreement rather than just always fighting as though this is a holy war.

Professor Marie Griffith:

Generosity of spirit, humility of spirit, I could not agree with you more and I'm sure a lot of other folks feel that way which is why you've got a lot of admirers across the political spectrum. Right I mean liberals, progressives, democrats as well.

Senator John C. Danforth:

Less republicans after that piece in the Washington Post [laughter].

Professor Marie Griffith:

Well, depends on how you define republican these days I think. But it does strike me I wonder if you think that generosity of spirit was shown toward Hilary Clinton, you mentioned this sort of hatred of her, and I understand a lot of the reasons for that . . .

Senator John C. Danforth:

No, again, obviously not, not toward her, crooked Hilary and all of that, not toward little Marco, you know, I mean that's the style of Donald Trump, the style of Trump is to be insulting and dismissive of people and that's what he does.

Professor Marie Griffith:

Right so that viciousness is infecting so much. I mean if we can move to this point of how do we move beyond that, there are several levels I would love to ask you to

reflect on. One is the political level that you understand so well. So I was thinking if you could imagine getting Mitch McConnell and Chuck Schumer and Paul Ryan and Nancy Pelosi in a room together and say “alright, fix this,” you know what strategies, what conversation methods, what would you advise them to do to try and . . .

Senator John C. Danforth:

Well social interaction is really important and that is something that was very real, [unclear] back, in the good old days, namely when I was around. I was just talking to Ed Finkelstein, wherever he is, there he is, about my relationship with Tom Eagleton because he was a democrat, I was a republican, he was certainly more liberal than I am on political issue and we disagreed on a lot of stuff but we also had a great relationship and a lot of it was personal. On the day that I was sworn in in the Senate, we had a family dinner and we invited Barbara and Tom Eagleton to the family dinner and he was sitting close to me and he leaned over during dinner and he said “I bet you wish your father was alive and here,” can you imagine that kind of personal touch? And it really said a lot about the relationship we had. Well now families don’t even live in Washington so they don’t know each other, they don’t have dinner in each other’s homes, they don’t know each other’s children so trying to build social relationships would be a very big thing to do. And the other thing that’s happened is that the center in American politics is gone. We really have become so polarized that the center is gone. Well when the center is gone you’re really missing a lot, you’re missing the ability to figure things out. Nobody wants to. So we’ve become very, very polarized, very ultra-partisan and the social interaction is gone and I think all of those are things to work on if we wanted to.

Professor Marie Griffith:

And I take it you mean that not only in politics but also in communities, in families, I mean most of us come from very politically divided families, just about everybody I know would have people on all ends of the spectrum, politically.

Senator John C. Danforth:

Sure, Thanksgiving dinner after the last election.

Professor Marie Griffith:

Right, and I guess, I go around and give talks on these same issues at times and people always come up at the end and say, what can we do, what can I do?

Senator John C. Danforth:

I’ve got a plan by the way.

Professor Marie Griffith:

Okay, tell us your plan.

Senator John C. Danforth:

This is very simple, this is something you can do, and everybody can do this. So, when I was first ordained, when I was in Yale divinity school and when I was first

ordained, we had, the Episcopal Bishop in this diocese was an absolutely wonderful human being named George Cadigan and when George Cadigan wrote you a letter, which he often did, he always signed the letter the same way. He said, I am your friend. I am your friend. Now, say that you found somebody who you didn't agree with on anything, just somebody who was, you think, politically, that person's off the wall, I don't agree with that person at all. Say that you made a point of going up to that person and saying, I am your friend. What would that mean? I am your friend. I am your friend, not your enemy. It's kind of like giving food and giving water and pouring hot coals [laughter]. But it's a little tactic just to make it clear that people who don't agree with you can be your friends, that was Eagleton and me and it was the case with a lot of people in the Senate. The social friends we had, it was very bipartisan. And it was wonderful and you could do stuff because if you know somebody as a friend, you could do stuff in politics, but if it's only politics, if it's only positioning yourself, then it's a stalemate and that's I think where we are right now.

Professor Marie Griffith:

It strikes me too that one of the things that's implicit or explicit in what you're saying is people need to be understood, their positions, where they're coming from. That their positions come from values rather than, that person disagrees with me or they hold a different political opinion, position therefore they're evil, which is so much of the kind political discourse we have now. That if you can show a kind of empathic understanding of where another person's coming from, even if you disagree with them, policy-wise or whatever, is that part of what you're trying to say?

Senator John C. Danforth:

Yeah sure, and I mean the values can be the same. If your values are, okay, it's really important for government to help poor people. Clearly, yes. So you're starting with some values that are the same but it may be that your tactics are different. That maybe, like for example, Medicaid expansion, that's a very hot issue with Medicaid expansion, people thought okay, this is the most important thing you can do to help poor people: expand Medicaid. That's a point of view but there's an alternative point of view and that is putting more money in the healthcare system is not necessarily the best way to help poor people, it might be the best way to inflate healthcare costs instead. So that's just a policy question, there are all kinds of policy questions and there's a lot of overlap in how people think and that really is the stuff of politics. I mean the real politics, say the big issues, the budget, spending, taxation, but all of that is kind of in the pit so figure it out, these are dollar issues, that's the sort of thing you can figure out. So yeah, I think there's a lot of room for working it out and that's what we did. When I was in the Senate that's what we did and it was bipartisan, it was always bipartisan.

Professor Marie Griffith:

You still had to be wily I'm sure at times too. Right, you still had to fight, as you say politics is a dirty business, but somehow those things went . . .

Senator John C. Danforth:

I don't know that it's dirty, it's, like say Russell Long, I just loved being with Russell Long in the Senate. He was the chairman of the finance committee; he was so wily it was unbelievable. I once had some idea, I was on the finance committee and he was the chairman of the finance committee and I had some idea about "okay we're going to have a tax credit over here" and he said "well how are we going to pay" and I said "well we're going to have a tax over there" and he said [shrugs] "we'll call that the Danforth tax" [laughter] So yeah, there's a lot of room for wiliness.

Professor Marie Griffith:

Let's open it up now. I'd love to know what some of you all are thinking about. Let's see do we have the mics? If you could raise your hand high so I can see you. Okay I see you down there.

Audience Question #1:

There's some thought that you could reduce the need to make certain kinds of decisions, I'm picking up on your allusion to helping the poor, if we could come together and raise minimum wage. Could you comment on that?

Senator John C. Danforth:

Well that would be an issue where there are different points of view. Some would say yes, some would say, you're pricing people out of getting the lowest rung of getting a job. So that's a typical type of political issue.

Audience Question #2:

Do you think the divisiveness from both sides, if you had to label media as a cause versus the social interaction that has disappeared because all the politicians leave? Would you comment on each of those factors?

Senator John C. Danforth:

Well the media and what was the other factor? [Clarification given by audience member] The social interaction is a big deal. I do believe as I said earlier I think that the lack of social interaction is a big deal. Yeah, the media, it's too much. It's too much, I mean, social media, I'm not a social media guy, but just 24 hour news is too much. It's too much. It's saying that politics is the be all and end all, it is all consuming. Breaking news! How many times, breaking news, everything is breaking news. I mean it can't be [Laughter] you know? It's too much. You have got to lighten up a little bit I think and no I do believe I think that the 24 hour news is a pest. I do believe that. I think it's a pest.

Professor Marie Griffith:

Speaking of media though there was an interesting thing. I mentioned to you that I saw you on the Lawrence O'Donnell show recently and I have seen you on there before and that's a great example right there of someone who clearly comes from a political perspective, a very progressive perspective, knows your point of view and you all can have these really terrific conversations there.

Senator John C. Danforth:

He was a Moynihan staffer in the Senate, so I knew him before he got tainted by the media, but that was, Moynihan was an absolute delight to be in the Senate with. He was really great. You know in the Senate, the desks you have on the floor of the Senate, the people who have the desk they write their names in the drawer and so I could have inherited this desk at one point in the Senate and it just had the worst people who were ever in the Senate, you know like Theodore Bilbo, you know, I mean these awful people. So I showed it to Moynihan, I said, look at this, and he said, "we need an exorcist." [Laughter] It was just a joy to be around him and I think some of that rubbed off on O'Donnell.

Professor Marie Griffith:

That's great, great. Okay, more questions? Yes, you down here. Yes, you.

Audience Question #3:

Hi, you mentioned *Hillbilly Elegy* by J. D. Vance. One of his main themes in his book is the isolation that the poor white, quote unquote, "hillbilly community" in the United States faces. Given that a lot of our political division also falls along socio-economic, social, racial, and geographic lines, and those barriers that divide us, if social interaction is the gold ticket or the key to solving that division, how do we solve those barriers.

Senator John C. Danforth:

It is worth working on. I don't know that there is an instant solution but it sure is worth working on. And it's worth working on politically, and it's worth working on on college and university campuses too. It's very, very important.

Professor Marie Griffith:

That was a great question too. Yeah, let me see, sure. [Points to audience member]

Audience Question #4:

Good evening, Senator. Do you think our nation is playing a correct role on the question of global warming?

Senator John C. Danforth:

Well, again this is fabulously debatable issue but my own view is, if it is a question, how do you resolve that question? By taking it seriously or by dismissing it? So I would take it seriously.

Professor Marie Griffith:

Okay, I need help with the hands. Yes, Taylor I see someone right over here who has had his hand up.

Audience Question #5:

I was struck by your idea that these divisions are a fairly recent thing and I think we can look back at least 25 years when Newt Gingrich instructed republicans in the House to label democrats as traitors and when Mitch McConnell eight years ago said that the great priority for the republicans in the Senate should be to make sure Obama was a one term president. Don't you think it would have been a lot better for all of us if people like you had spoken up then instead of waiting until now?
[Applause]

Senator John C. Danforth:

You think I'm sort of a johnny-come-lately to this [Laughter] No, I think that's a fair criticism, but I don't think I've been soft on my party. And I also know my party at its best and I had the privilege of serving with wonderful people who were republicans who wanted to make government work. And I would include people I served with in the Senate like Howard Baker and Bob Dole who were the two republican leaders when I was there and they really wanted government to function and they wanted to work with people right across the spectrum and then we had you know, the presidents, I was there for all of Reagan and all of Bush 41 and then I was really in the administration of George W. Bush and they're just good people. They're not angry or mean or hateful people. So can you point to instances where people did things or said things that they shouldn't have said? Sure you can. But what I'm saying is that the Donald Trump that I see has no relationship, in fact he's the opposite of the Republican Party that I was and is a part of.

Audience Question #6:

Thanks, I'm going to take a slightly opposite approach to that question. You mentioned that Trump didn't win 50% of the primary vote, he won a lot less, but neither did McCain in 2008 who you endorsed.

Senator John C. Danforth:

I'm sorry? [Asking for clarification]

Audience Question #6 cont.:

McCain in 2008 didn't win 50% of the primary vote and I believe you endorsed him then, and going off this, and I don't mean this too much as a criticism but I think it's an honest question . . .

Senator John C. Danforth:

Go ahead, that's fine. [Laughter]

Professor Marie Griffith:

He can take it. [Laughter]

Audience Question #6 cont.:

So, you know, as you kind of touched on before, you've been on a critic of the Republican Party for a long time, right? In 2015 you, you decry a lot of the

comments about Tom Schweich, in 2012 you said it was embarrassing to watch the Presidential Debates as a republican, in 2005 you said that the Republican Party was sort of subordinate to conservative Christians and that they weren't really advancing the policies they should. So my question for you is why now, regardless of what party you're on, republican, democrat, or somewhere in between, why is this different? Why should we be listening to this warning as opposed to all the other warnings?

Senator John C. Danforth:

Okay, I think, and I'm really repeating myself, I think that an important principle of government is to hold things together. That is a very consistent theme of mine. I also think that it's a religious concept to bind things together. I think that holding things together is not a new challenge. So it was the concept of writing the constitution the way it was written. This was Madison so you have all these interests, and they're all competing with each other, holding the country together. That was Henry Clay, the great compromiser, he couldn't do it, he couldn't compromise slavery, but that was the concept, holding things together. And I think that was something that has been on my mind for a very long time. It's really central to what I'm thinking. It's not a new concept for me. But I think that Donald Trump is the quintessential divider. He has created a standard of divisiveness that is new. So that to me warranted special attention when I wrote that piece.

Professor Marie Griffith:

You know it strikes me that behind that kind of question, and you got that question on the radio today too, is, you know, a concern that binding things together sometimes, or the critics would say, might require that some people's voices don't get heard in the same way. And so I think that's often the concern. How do you make sure all voices are heard, going back to the social justice point where I think a lot of these divisions really do come up. Different visions of what would constitute a real push for justice. How do we manage to bind things together in the way that you're describing that I think everyone would believe in while also holding onto this ideal for justice for all people?

Senator John C. Danforth:

Okay, justice is wonderful, very important. Trigger warnings and . . . oh what's the word I'm trying to come up with . . . about . . . sorry, not a very interesting program right now [Laughter] . . . the hypersensitivity, what is that word? [Audience suggestions] Microaggression, microaggression. I think there's a difference between championing social justice, doing it very strongly, and picking fights on say microaggression. I think that's very different. To me it's important to have some spirit of generosity and not just, it's all about me, you know, this is all about me. So I don't know that that answers the question very well but no I mean good, it's good obviously on questions of justice, but recognize you're dealing with human beings, you know? I thought at the time of Ferguson, there were a bunch of clergy and they went out to Ferguson and they went to the police station and they got in the faces of individual police officers, and said, "repent" to the individual, how do they know

who the individual police officer is? What do they know about this person? Do you want to assume that each police officer in Ferguson is just some awful person? I don't think so. So that's what I mean by generosity and I think it has to do with, okay so if you believe in a prophetic ministry, what's the model? I think right now my model would be more Hosea than Amos. It would be more lovingly stated than just in your face.

Professor Marie Griffith:

Thank you. Yes, I see you.

Audience Question #7:

Hi I'm thinking about Charlottesville and the neo-Nazi, KKK, white supremacist display there and other places around the country. How does that fit into how we hold things together, how we show generosity, how we try to work with people . . .

Senator John C. Danforth:

Well you can't on that. I mean that's evil. That's evil. You just have to say it. That was where Trump went wrong. He should have just said it very simply, very directly without any kind of equivocation at all. He just should have said this is absolutely wrong, it's evil. I don't think the KK is representative of very many people, I hope it isn't, but I don't think it is. But when that happens you just condemn it.

Audience Question #7 cont.:

[Faintly] Can we as a nation limit those demonstrations . . . ?

Senator John C. Danforth:

You know, here's what I think should happen. I think that there should be a rapid response system. A very rapid identification when something is going to come up, quick, and then I think rather than I think playing on the same battle ground as these awful people, what would happen if at exactly the same time that neo-Nazis were doing their thing, instead of people facing off right there, say a mile away in a church there were a hundred times more people with a counter message. Wouldn't that be a better way of presenting it? It's going to be very hard to pull it off, but I've thought that and I think it would be worth working on.

Professor Marie Griffith:

Yeah, just getting people to show up, or something, yeah, right?

Senator John C. Danforth:

I think people would, I think people would show up.

Professor Marie Griffith:

Okay, yes, okay *[Points to audience member]*

Audience Question #8:

My concern is more with President Trump and macroaggression. And we can all get along as best as we can and all be friendly but not if he starts or instigates a nuclear war. We'll all be gone. So I think his bullying affects each of us, republican, democrat, no matter what we believe or how we're treated here. How do we work with a president who doesn't care if he blows up the world?

Senator John C. Danforth:

Well, somebody I know wrote a piece in the Washington Post [*laughter*] which was pretty tough on Trump so I'm all for being tough on Trump, I wish more people would be tough on Trump.

Professor Marie Griffith:

Okay, yes.

Audience Question #9:

Senator, back in the forties, the Senate and the House decided that no president could run so many terms. Why can't they do that for themselves and how do you feel about term limits for the House and the Senate.

Senator John C. Danforth:

When I first ran for the Senate, I said I was for term limits [*Laughter*] and I said I was for limiting Senators to two terms of six years each and then when I ran for re-election the first time, I was asked how do you feel about term limits and I said, well, I'm about half as enthusiastic as I was before. My feeling at the time was, term limits were a way of saying that people in politics are finite and that's a pretty important message but I think that position wasn't a good one. I don't think it's worked well in our state, I don't think term limits in Jefferson City has worked well at all. And I know that I was a better Senator in my third term than I was in my first. I know that. I was better at understanding the system and getting stuff done rather than just being, you know, Don Quixote. So I don't think that term limits are a good idea.

Professor Marie Griffith:

Yes, I see you back there.

Audience Question #10:

Can you comment on President Trump's plans, and they're being whispered to him because I don't think he really knows that much, about the Johnson Amendment and getting rid of that in terms of binding us together versus sending us further apart?

Senator John C. Danforth:

Yeah, the Johnson Amendment, there's the expert right there [*Points to audience member*], John Inazu, but I think that this issue, correct me, John, if I'm wrong on this but it has to do with whether clergy can speak politically from their churches, is that what it is? [*Clarification from John Inazu in the audience*] You lose your 501(c)(3) status by participating in politics. I don't think that it is a good idea to use the

internal revenue code as a way of designing how clergy should speak. I don't think that's a good idea.

Professor Marie Griffith:

You know, Senator, it occurs to me, one of the most poll-rising issues of our time, and you mentioned it briefly, but I'd be interested, and I imagine others might be as well, interested in your thoughts on the abortion debate and all the kinds of debates that go alongside with that. That's been one of our most intractable and painful debates, I think across the political spectrum. The surveys typically show that an awful lot of people on both sides are somewhere in the middle and would be willing to have some restrictions but not all restrictions, or abortion to a certain point but not all points. I wonder, I know you've thought about this a great deal, ways of maneuvering through that very polarizing . . .

Senator John C. Danforth:

Well I think that issue is over. I think that abortion is going to be readily available for almost everybody who wants an abortion. Now I don't know the latest status of very late term abortion, that kind of thing, but you're really talking about arguments now on the edges of the abortion issue. To me, it's gotten a little bit like the signs in the . . . or like the ten commandments and it's become more like a rallying cry or a wedge cry than it is a live issue anymore, I don't think it is an issue anymore, I think it's over.

Professor Marie Griffith:

Murmurings from the audience [laughter] . . . I think access has become a particular issue that people are concerned about for sure. Okay yes, in the back.

Audience Question #11:

Good evening, I was wondering if you could speak to story telling potentially as a tool, I see this in religion and in politics, as a way of getting across difference or getting a point across. And specifically, as it relates to what I'm dealing with now, I manage a health insurance enrollment project in the state of Missouri that's funded through the Federal Navigator Grant and right now we are waiting on funding for moving forward. And so I'm really curious as to, I heard that representatives and senators on the Hill were giving stories about Navigator grants that weren't positive and I have so many stories from what we're doing and clients that I've met with that are getting health insurance for the first time or sitting down with somebody and really being able to get healthcare that's so important for them. And I'd like to really empower my staff and my team and consumers that we're meeting with to be able to share those stories. And as a senator, as somebody who's politically . . .

Senator John C. Danforth:

Don't . . . I honestly I don't know anything about the program at all. So I can't . . . I wish I could be more responsive but I just don't know that program at all.

Professor Marie Griffith:

You know, and it does occur to me, one of the points you and I brought up today, you know, Senator, had to do with, you know, the youth, and hopefulness for the youth. So here we are on a University campus, there are students all across the room here and I'm sure in our overflow rooms as well. What words, they've grown up in an extremely polarized environment and all of us want to inspire them with hope and a real sense of agency that they're the future and they can do this and I wonder if you have words that you would speak to . . .

Senator John C. Danforth:

Sure, it's a great country. It's just a great country and it is a country that tries very hard to incorporate within one country, the many. E pluribus unum, it is a country that really works on that and it's got to be the work of all of us, not just the president of the United States, not just members of Congress, but all of us. So it's worth working on but that really is the greatness of America. It is to me, if not the fundamental principle, darn close to it. So yeah, I'm hopeful, I think we've got a great country.

Professor Marie Griffith:

And are there particular places where you think students can really make a difference? I mean I hear, I feel like students want to know that the effort they're going to put into this will matter, will come . . .

Senator John C. Danforth:

Well it might not. They might lose. You know, they might say, well I'm going to support such and such a candidate for say Congress or whatever, and he might lose. I can't promise that you'll win. I even lost an election once, it was a terrible miscarriage of justice [laughter] but it happens and so I think, participate, but realize you know, you're not a dictator, you might lose, and there are other people who disagree with you. But that's what the system is; it's just a lot of people who disagree with each other.

Professor Marie Griffith:

But also that that hard work of learning to talk across these lines matters in the world too, that's something I want students to understand as well. Okay, you've got somebody over here too

Audience Question #11:

I'd like to ask you to comment, some of us have, in terms of macro- and micro-aggression, some of us have never seen a president as disrespected as was Barak Obama, mostly by white men, and it seems like Trump is obsessed with this gentleman. For many of us, we voted for him twice. And he's been harassed and blocked and disrespected almost every year of his presidency. So there's almost it seems like, a racial issue. Constantly republicans saying, "Oh Obama's playing the race card" but it seems to me the race card was played from day one by the

republicans that didn't like him, now not all republicans. And it seems to me also that after the civil rights act, Lyndon Johnson in '64, the south went republican. And their GDP of almost any social status is the lowest of all the states in the United States and there's a big racial divide. Our state here, our city is one of the fifth most segregated cities in the country; we're notorious and yet it doesn't seem to me we're making an effort to bring people together or really talking about the racism that seems to exist. And then secondly, when you were in the Senate, no one would doubt that you were a patriot or a statesman. But it seems to many of us that the quality of candidate and elected official has gone downhill. Many do not have a backbone or spine or moral compass to speak up and in the Hebrew scripture, in Ezekiel twice, God is telling the prophet to be a watchman for the house of Israel. We are supposed to stand up to injustice and we are supposed to call each other out in a good way. And then the New Testament, James, says, we are supposed to go to our brothers and sisters and tell them when they are not acting in accordance with the gospel or whatever our belief is and if we don't bring the elders in. So where is that corrective thing when we're almost looking for people now in elected offices or appointed by the president that have no experience. Anti-union, anti-Black, anti-brown, anti-Asian, and it's just ugly. [applause]

Senator John C. Danforth:

Let me say this, first of all, it is possible to be very critical of Barak Obama without being a racist. And to tar people who disagree with him or don't think he was a very good president with a racist brush is really unfair. You can't do that . . . well you can, but I don't agree with it. And I don't agree that most people are racists or most people who disagree with a particular position are therefore racist or disagree with a particular candidate are therefore racist. I don't think that's right and I think that it absolutely ends political dialogue. So if you want to be in politics to engage in the give and take of politics, the dialogue of politics, to then be tarred as, you're racist because you don't agree with me. It's just not right and it's destructive of the political process. [applause]

Audience Question #12:

Thank you, Senator and thank you, Marie. Something I'm struggling with has to do with I guess what you might call deeply held beliefs, or deeply held feelings. You pointed out Professor John Inazu, he talks about confident pluralism, and this idea of, well I'm not going to describe it, I won't do justice to it if I try to paraphrase him but . . .

Senator John C. Danforth:

Buy the book, right? buy the book

Audience Question #12 cont.:

Right, exactly, buy the book. So we talk about for example, identity politics. One man or woman's identity politics is another man or woman's standing up for their story that has been snuffed, right? Many people enter into politics because they have deeply held beliefs of righting wrongs or something like that, right? So how do

people deal with this? So I'll explain it this way. I once bought a house. The walls looked great, it was a cute little house. And then about three months, it was very clear, cracks started to show on almost every wall of the house. It was very clear that the people selling the house prior to me buying the house had painted over all of the cracks in the house. And it was very clear that there were fault lines throughout. And so if we just paper over, and wallpaper over these cracks then we are destined to end up with, well earthquakes really, right? The fault lines turn into earthquakes. So what I'm struggling with is how do we as the citizenry and those in politics deal with these deeply held beliefs without wallpapering them.

Senator John C. Danforth:

Well I think this is what Madison's idea was. He was more into economic issues I think but that in a pluralistic country you will have people who have very strong ideas, you're not asking them to pull their punches. But you're trying to create a system with some degree of being able to work things out you can function as a country. So I would never suggest anybody to pull their punches but I would hope there was a degree of, as I said, generosity to people who just, not out of meanness, but they just don't agree with you, and not assume that people who agree with you are evil and I think that's really a danger in political dialogue left and right, you certainly see it from the right, don't you? It was my criticism against the use of religious wedge issues, that it became a holy war. And it can be on both sides it can be a holy war. So I think a degree of humility is important or as Isaiah said, "my thoughts are not your thoughts, says the Lord." We are not God, we're just doing our best and we're doing our best to pursue justice as we see it. And the greatest speech ever made, I'm not talking about the Sermon on the Mount, I'm talking about political speech, Lincoln's second inaugural speech and the way it ended. And about how we have fought this terrible civil war and now we've got to bind up the nations wounds. So he said, "with malice toward none and charity for all" that's how to go about it. And I think that's really an important message for all of us. That's how we pour the hot coals on people's heads, you know? So that's just my thought. Yeah, pursue your cause, and don't pull your punches, you don't have to, but just recognize there are good people who don't agree with you. They're not evil and just try to understand them. Empathy, empathy.

Professor Marie Griffith:

I can't imagine a better place, a better note on which to end so maybe we'll go ahead and conclude and once again I invite all of you to join us and greet Senator Danforth at our reception out there. Please join me in thanking him for us. [applause]