



UNIVERSITY OF DELAWARE
NATIONAL AGENDA 2022
“Politics by the Numbers”

Pearce Godwin
“*The Value of Listening*”

HOSTED BY University of Delaware –
Center for Political Communication

PARTICIPANTS

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Pearce Godwin Founder and CEO of the **Listen First Project**, founded in 2013, Pearce Godwin is working to reverse extreme partisanship and demonization across differences and is described as a national voice for bridging divides in America. His organization built a coalition of more than 400 organizations including retail corporations, mass media companies and universities. **The Listen First Project** and its partners have hosted thousands of conversations through the annual America Talks and National Week of Conversation reaching more than 50 million people. Godwin has testified about civil discourse before Congress; he writes for USA Today, and has been interviewed by Fox News, MSNBC, PBS, and the Wall Street Journal. A graduate of Duke University, Godwin worked in the U.S. Senate and as a national political consultant for presidential and statewide campaigns. He holds a M.B.A. degree from the University of North Carolina, Chapel Hill.

Transcript of Event

Date: September 21, 2022

Place: Gore Recital Hall
Newark, DE



[Musical interlude to 0:00:40.6]

UNIDENTIFIED SPEAKER:

Please welcome, your host for this evening, Dr. Lindsay Hoffman.

AUDIENCE: [Applause.]

DR. HOFFMAN: Hello. Good evening, everyone. It's great to welcome you to the Twelfth Annual National Agenda Speaker Series here at Gore Recital Hall at the University of Delaware. I am also pleased to welcome our virtual audiences, those who are live streaming as well as those at the Osher Lifelong Learning Institute; one of the earliest and the largest lifelong learning programs in the country for adults 50 and over. We're here thanks to UD's Center for Political Communication as well as the College of Arts and Sciences. Thank you for your support. This year's theme is "Politics by the Numbers." So, we're talking about polling, we're talking about all kinds of things related to midterm elections and you may be wondering why tonight we're talking about listening as part as "Politics by the Numbers." But I think you'll discover that a lot of Americans are really divided by party and by other issues and sometimes it just comes down to learning how to listen to each other. So, as usual, we will be inviting audience participation but I'd like to remind our audience that civil dialogue is vital to the success of National Agenda. So let's agree to be candid but also courteous of each other's views. When I open it up for Q&A around 8:30 simply raise your hand and I'll ask our student volunteers to bring the microphone to you then direct you back to your seat. We will also field questions both in-house and from the Osher students during the Q&A at the end of this conversation. So I'll be keeping my eye up on the booth to see if there are questions coming in from the



Zoom meeting. Tonight, did you know that according to a September 2019 Pew Research Poll of nearly 10,000 Americans most people agree that they disagree with each other. In fact, 73 percent of the public not only disagrees over plans and policies but also cannot agree on the basic facts. And that was pre-Covid [chuckle]. As the founder and CEO of the Listen First Project, Pearce Godwin is working to reverse extreme partisanship and demonization across differences. Described as a national voice for bridging divides in America, Godwin founded the Listen First Project in 2013. His organization has now built a coalition of more than 400 organizations including retail and mass media corporations, as well as universities. The Listen First Project and its partners have had thousands of conversations through the annual America Talks and National Week of Conversation reaching more than 50 million people. Godwin has even testified before Congress about civil discourse. He writes for *USA Today*, has been interviewed by Fox News, MSNBC, PBS and the *Wall Street Journal*. After graduating from Duke University in North Carolina he spent five years working in the U.S. Senate and as a national political consultant; then earned an MBA from the University of North Carolina, Chapel Hill in 2018. You can talk to him about the Duke – UNC thing later if you want. Please welcome to the stage the Listen First Project’s founder and CEO; please give him a big Blue Hen welcome, Pearce Godwin.

AUDIENCE: [Applause.]

PEARCE GODWIN: Thank you so much, Dr. Hoffman. Thank you for having me.

DR. HOFFMAN: So, I know you want to give a little bit of a talk before we get into our conversation, so have at it.

PEARCE GODWIN: All right. So, on a recent cross-country road trip I repeatedly encountered the breathtaking beauty and the majesty of the place that we call home. The peaks and the plains of these United States awakened my patriotism. You know, the personal pain and the national fear that today seems so prevalent seemed then kind of far away. But I know that for many of us it's hitting close to home. This, this toxic polarization; the way we demonize each other across differences is causing breakdown from the dinner table to family vacations, from worship services to work places, perhaps even here at UD as well. So let me ask you all a couple of questions that we posed in a recent national survey. When you talk about issues in society with people with whom you disagree, which of the following is closest to how you generally find the experience to be? Your options are going to be interesting and informative, stressful and frustrating, or boring and pointless. For whom do you find these experiences to be interesting and informative? All right. How about stressful and frustrating? Um-hum –

DR. HOFFMAN: [Indiscernible] , Oh.

PEARCE GODWIN: – don't be shy.

DR. HOFFMAN: [Chuckle.]

PEARCE GODWIN: Boring and pointless? Yeah. So, a lot of stress and frustration. Nationally 54 percent told us that they find those kind of conversations stressful and frustrating. One more. When discussing issues with people with whom you disagree do you generally find that others are opening, open to listening to your views or quick to attack them? Who often finds that folks are open to listening to your views?

DR. HOFFMAN: No hands are raised [chuckle].

PEARCE GODWIN: I think we're in trouble.

DR. HOFFMAN: One hand.

PEARCE GODWIN: All right –

DR. HOFFMAN: [Chuckle.]

PEARCE GODWIN: All right. Great experiences back there. How about quick to attack them? Who's run into that? Wow. Job security.

AUDIENCE: [Laughter.]

PEARCE GODWIN: Nationally 66 percent said that folks are quick to attack them. This is "Politics by the Numbers" so let me give you a few more; 62 percent of Americans today say that the political climate is preventing them from saying what they believe. That's some of ya'll, as I have, have censored yourselves in that way. 32 percent say the division has made it difficult to get along with friends or family. It doesn't feel good to lose family, friends, loved ones, neighbors because we see the world differently. It doesn't matter what side you're on. Now even as I was on that cross-country road trip and transfixed by America's natural beauty I did find the serenity punctured a number of times by antagonistic signs. There was one on a tree, on a truck, in the middle of a field. Now unlike the many flags I saw proclaiming love of country these particular signs proclaimed what their owners were against. They were beacons of fear instead of hope, hate instead of love, judgment instead of grace. It really struck me how sad juxtaposed against that beauty the state of our union is today. Abraham Lincoln, quoting Jesus, said "a house divided against itself cannot stand." And they weren't playing. More than half of us, 54 percent, now say that our fellow Americans pose the greatest risk to the country. This toxic polarization has been described as a singularly virulent and dangerous phenomenon as our

greatest national security vulnerability. Nearly all of us, including, I think, most everyone in this room, recognize the threat; 87 percent say they do, 71 percent, in my humble opinion, rightly conclude that our democracy itself is in danger, 35 percent of partisans now believe that violence could be justified to advance their political goals, 61 percent say they are concerned that we could face another civil war in this country, 43 percent believe it's at least somewhat likely in the next decade, And 14 percent of our fellow Americans think it's very likely that in the next ten years we'll see another civil war – brother against brother, sister against sister. Today they of course are our enemies. They are a serious threat. They are downright evil. One of the ways we measure this affected polarization is with a 100 point so called feeling thermometer. This thing is deployed every four years by the American National Election Studies and also by Pew and other researchers. Let's take a little walk through history. In 1978 Democrats rated Republicans a 48 on a zero to one hundred point scale. Republicans rated Democrats a 46. All right. We're around the midpoint, zero to a hundred. Not so bad? Even as recently as 2000 Democrats still rated Republicans a 41, Republicans rated Democrats a 38. It's getting a little chilly, you might need a jacket, but like we're all right. Most recently, in 2000, ratings from both sides had plummeted halfway to zero just over those two decades. Democrats rated Republicans a 20, Republicans rated Democrats a 16. Now it's time for the ski gear. 48 percent of Republicans gave Democrats a zero out of a hundred in terms of their warmth or coldness as it were towards those people. That's a 600 percent increase since 2000. The other side of the coin isn't much prettier; 39 percent of Democrats gave Republicans a zero, a 300 percent increase from 2000. One in five Americans say that many members of the other side "lack the

traits to be considered fully human. And, we've heard the word dehumanization but wow. And 15 percent of Republicans and 20 percent of Democrats say the country will be better off if large numbers of those people just died. Just died? Like, for real? We've got to get a grip on ourselves. When is the last time that murderous rage turned out well for anybody? Experts who've witnessed sectarian violence breakout in countries around the world are sounding the alarm right here at home. What for many of them is their own backyard where they never thought they need to apply their expertise? They're begging us to grasp what our once exceptional nation could soon become and the danger of course as you all have demonstrated is not lost on the American people. Americans across party lines and demographic groups recently say the division in the country is the most important issue facing them personally. In another poll they ranked uniting the country as the most important national priority. Yet, as warning signs about toxic polarization and calls for reconciliation grow louder I keep hearing people say, all right, but oh hell no, not with them.

AUDIENCE: [Chuckle.]

PEARCE GODWIN: I've got a line. Not those fellow Americans, not those people. There is this massive amount of distrust, of fear, of contempt that is coursing through our American veins. And I get it. That distrust, that fear, that contempt can make the very idea of engaging with those people really distasteful and even disloyal to our own tribe, to our own people, to our own values and what in fancy talk is called our in-group. But to those who reject the idea of engaging across differences I just have an earnest question. What, what is your solution? What is your endgame, all right? Let's play out this scenario where I'm saying, oh hell no, not with them. And I've actually gotten some answers which

conveniently, because I love alliteration, fit four D's; delusion, doom, duck, and dash.

AUDIENCE: [Chuckle.]

PEARCE GODWIN: Many of us behave as if one day that somehow we're just going to vanquish those people and their ideas, all right? It's going to be bliss. We're just not going to have to contend with them. They're just going to poof and somehow be gone. With all due respect, in these United States I find that delusional. Those people aren't going anywhere. Others have given up hope and think that we're, as we just looked at, irrevocably destined for another civil war. That's doom to me. Some have forsaken civic engagement of any kind and kind of just secluded themselves with those closest to us, with our friends and with our families because all of that I can't handle. We're ducking, we're ducking down. We're disengaging. And then finally, I keep running into people who, no joke, like, have a plan to leave the United States. Like, they've picked out their place, they've got a plan, they've talked about it with their loved ones. They are ready to dash. We're in big trouble. But, I'm here to tell you that there is hope. Hope is found in Americans of all backgrounds and beliefs crossing their lines of difference to spend a little time together, to see humanity in each other, to identify shared values and then to work together to fix things they broadly agree are broken. All those things that whatever your perspective, whatever your passion, are stuck right now because of this toxic polarization. Now, the muscle memory that we've all practiced and gotten so good at of pointing our fingers out to blame them – picking out my "them's" in the audience – is so strong but there's only one actor in the American story who I can control. I dare say that the same may be true for each of you as well; it's myself. We Americans at our best are

not passive. We're not weak victims, helpless to determine our fate. No, we are free. We are empowered. We are heroes in the arc of history that must bend towards our nation's founding ideals and promise. Now, if today I'm a little too optimistic, if that's not who we are; if we're too angry, too afraid to turn down the heat and find a way forward together, America will fail. I mean, it's just that simple. The experiment doesn't work when we're at war against ourselves. And we'll have no one to blame but ourselves. Now, of course, in case it's not already clear, our elected leaders are not going to lead the way out of this. As I heard in church once, salvation will not arrive on Air Force One.

AUDIENCE: [Laughter.]

PEARCE GODWIN: We, the people, have an urgent choice to make. Are we going to continue fighting against our fellow Americans or are we going to fight for America? Are we going to continue fighting or are we going to fight back against social media and politicians dividing us? Are we going to take our power back as the people, as one team? My friends that are beyond conflict identify the quality of social relations as the number one driver of sustainable peace. These are some of the folks I was talking about who have spent their whole careers in those places where we see it hit the fan and now they're seeing it here. They point to the norms and structures shaping the dialogue environment as a key factor. Now, we can all agree, we've got a lot of politicians in the audience, that our Democratic republic requires some basic level of trust in and acceptance of those different from ourselves. It thrives when despite our differences we feel that we're in it together, that each of us belong, when our shared identity as Americans is subordinate rises above, transcends those competing tribal identities. Now, on the other hand, when this affective polarization escalates to

sectarianism our democratic republic, as I would argue it is now, is in peril. So, I'm with the 79 percent of Americans who tell us that creating more opportunities for people to talk with those that have different values and views would be effective in reducing divisiveness. That's why I'm here. It's called contact theory. 42 percent say they're up for joining a conversation with another American of different beliefs. And I love this one, that when they're assured that they'll actually be listened to respectfully, Americans are four times more likely to say, yeah, I can do that. I can come together with somebody who might think different or look different than I do. Listening with curiosity is the key, in my mind, to a successful conversation across difference. Thus, the name, the mantra and the hash tag of our Listen First coalition, of organizations who are bringing Americans together across differences. In July 2013 I was on an overnight bus ride across Africa, after spending six months there on development projects. Yeah, after years in Washington, D.C. as you heard when I was working on the Hill or working on voter micro targeting for national campaigns I'd gone over there to get a fresh perspective on life. I didn't expect to get such a fresh perspective on America. I was deeply troubled by news of this most materially prosperous nation in the world was being gripped by relational poverty. Exactly the opposite of what I experienced in that other part of the world. So unable to sleep, all stirred up on this bus ride, I wrote what I thought was a blog post. It was called "It's Time to Listen." That message ended up being printed in dozens of major newspapers across the United States and ultimately launched the "Listen First Project." Importantly, I soon discovered that it wasn't just little old me in Raleigh-Durham, North Carolina that even back in the quaint days of 2013 was concerned about this. There are a lot of efforts to bring people together

across differences. I like having friends and believe that the best way to make an impact was by working together. So I launched the “Listen First Coalition” with four organizations in 2017 and today there are 500. The coalition is organizations that bring Americans together across differences to listen, to understand each other and to discover common interests. Some of those organizations focus on dialogue around personal experiences to build relationships, while others focus on deliberation on particular issues, some work in local communities while others engage Americans coast to coast. Some convene Americans in person while others, especially recently, convene virtually. Some engage a broad audience while others like some that you all are working with target a particular population such as students, policy makers, people of faith or other segments. Some engage everyday Americans directly while others have high profile conversations and produce multimedia to model for and inspire the rest of us. Finally, some engage via conversations while others get to work. When I was talking about fixing things we agree are broken they’re working on tangible projects together. In 2018, that one small Listen First coalition came alive by co-creating the first annual National Week of Conversation. The coalition is powered, INWOC (sic), as we call it, every year since, now five annually. And it kicks off as was mentioned with galvanizing event called America Talks in partnership with *USA Today* and other partners. Now, things are getting bad quick so we’re trying to speed up our own mission to ultimately engage millions of Americans of all backgrounds and beliefs to turn down the heat and find a way forward together. I’m now working on a project called Meeting of America which as I’ve discussed with some of ya’ll is piloting in the central and eastern Kentucky area. After months of executing a quiet

relationship driven trust building ground game to ensure balanced representation which got to be honest, doesn't typically exist in this work of bringing others together across differences, we spent that time to build trust. We're all so skeptical aren't we? We're looking for the agenda. We're looking for right but what and who is really behind this? It takes time. I told ya'll earlier, trust doesn't scale. I've been trying all year to speed it up. Spoiler alert – you can't. Building those relationships to gain the trust even to get over that fear and have a little bit of courage to come to the conversation is required. So I've been focused on the ground game. And now we've just launched Fair Game, as I like to call it, with a press conference, with mayors and other local leaders. The earned media, thankfully, has exceeded our expectations. Every local television station covered it. It turns out you don't really have to convince anybody of the problem these days. We all feel it. As I said, it's hitting close to home. We partnered with a local baseball teams, we've got billboards and bus ads and radio ads. We're trying to hit that surround sound marketing so that those of us who are feeling the personal pain or the national fear understand that there is a way out. Meeting of America would be the first opportunity to achieve scale and balance to achieve the mission that the bridging field has been working on for so long. We're building on everything that my many partners have learned over decades of work. It's serving as well as the ultimate laboratory for this bridging where we're testing, we're refining, we're measuring what is happening, if it works, and how it works best. We've forged partnerships with some of America's most influential brands from Wal-Mart to Target to McDonald's Harley Davidson, Boston Beer, Dick's Sporting Goods, iHeart Media. A few more numbers, since this is "Politics by the Numbers", on how it works. Scientific measurement of the impact on

these hundreds of pilot participants found particularly strong improvement on affective polarization. That's simply dislike of those other people on anger and on empathy. One hundred percent of participants told us that they felt heard; 82 percent said it made them more interested in having conversations across differences; 86 percent want to be part of the ongoing community working together to fix what's broken. This one's my favorite: 79 percent of the pilot participants said it gave them more hope for America and 97 percent were excited to invite others to participate. We're executing now a goals and measures program for the bridging movement out of Listen First Project; we're focused on field capacity, strengthening this field, mobilization, mobilizing target sectors and audiences; building up all the way to societal health where we can shift those social norms because that, as we talked about earlier, is what can truly scale. Two-thirds of Americans do still agree that in the end we're all Americans, and three-quarters believe that it is still possible for the U.S. to achieve the ideal of our national motto, E Pluribus Unum, from many people, one. But we've got to match that hope with action before it's too late. America's warning lights are blinking red. The question now is what will you do about it. Thankfully, 79 percent say that given the opportunity that would play a part in reducing social division in America. Will you? As I said earlier, I think we each have an urgent choice to make with nothing short of our society and our country on the line. Will we continue fighting against our fellow Americans or will we fight for America? Will you show up for each other and for the country we love? It starts with bringing your voice to the conversation and listening. Thanks for doing so tonight.

DR. HOFFMAN: Thank you very much. Thank you.

AUDIENCE: [Applause.]

DR. HOFFMAN: So, you talked about all of this personal experience we all have. We had a great class meeting today, a great dinner with students about how we've all encountered this situation where we've been with people who disagree with us and who might discount us. I have a couple of questions from my students today about your personal experience and how you came to this, this place that you are. Do you think that this – Meghan asks – do you think that this lack of listening we're facing in America today has always been present and if not what do you consider – I like this wording – the beginning of the end of listening?

PEARCE GODWIN: Ooh. That's good. I, I told someone earlier that there are more explanations for this problem than you can shake a stick at. I mean, like, a hundred different ones. The thing is they're all right. But none of them are the whole problem. As we saw from that data, data from the Feeling Thermometer from Pew and others the last 20 years have been really, really rough. There are so many things that have happened that I think have thrown us all a, a little off kilter, led us all to grasp for some sort of security, some sort of belonging, that which for millennia us humans have, have deeply desired. The problem is that for so many reasons, of course the easy ones are our social media but you also have this polarization of the parties themselves in which our ideology within party has really become strictly aligned and homogeneous. You used to have both at the elected official level and with us as voters, not uncommon at all for folks to have some views that might fit in this camp and other views that, that fit in that camp, but as the toxicity, as the demonization, as that fear and feeling of threat has increased – as some of us were talking about walking over here – I might not

actually believe all the things that my side believes but now sticking with and being loyal to my side it seems in many cases is more important than my own individual and natural ideological beliefs. Another fun one, again there's so many explanations, but, but one that, that I like because I think it's example of unintended consequences. If you look at the level of, of Congress, when Speaker Newt Gingrich came in, in 1994 in what's called the Republican Revolution he had the idea that members of Congress ought to spend more time in their districts. Makes sense to me. Let's spend more time with the people and less time in Washington being away from our constituents. But, what I, I would assume was an unintended consequence is that the folks serving us in Washington today, they don't know each other. They're kids aren't on soccer teams together, their partners aren't going out and having dinner together. Like, they honestly don't know each other. And there's a great quote about hard it is to hate up close. So, if I'm on the other side of the aisle and on the other side of, you know, the warring screens on cable news, I can vilify the mess out of you because I don't know you, I don't know your family. I'm just going to go ahead and demonize you. So that's just one example for our elected officials of, of the lack of relationships. You've also got you know geographic segregation, the big sort, you know, [indiscernible] the '90's but that idea that it's increasingly likely that I am living and working and, and just spending all my time around people who are probably of my generally same background and belief. All those things have compounded. And again just because it's a cliché we might want to skip over social media, certainly that has ratcheted up the temperature and allowed us to say things that, God help us I hope we never say face to face with somebody –

DR. HOFFMAN: Um-hum.

PEARCE GODWIN: – right? So, that has all just gotten us to a fever pitch that has stirred us up in a positive feedback loop going in the wrong direction. And, you know, from people a lot smarter than I am in this space who have done this work overseas, you know, I, I, I’m certainly striking notes of hope but something has got to break us out of this. And the question and the fear is how bad does it have to get before enough of us say that’s it. Somebody had a, a great saying for it earlier today, like, when are we going to put our shovels down and stop digging the hole?

DR. HOFFMAN: Um-hum.

PEARCE GODWIN: I, I think it’ll happen because again this just doesn’t feel good –

DR. HOFFMAN: Um-hum.

PEARCE GODWIN: – to any of us but it hasn’t happened yet. One more thing, Listen First guy likes to talk –

DR. HOFFMAN: [Chuckle.]

PEARCE GODWIN: One, one more thing. What we found –

DR. HOFFMAN: I thought we talked about the value of shut up and listen, right?

PEARCE GODWIN: [Indiscernible] shut up and – we, we would have some nominations for that. Right. [Chuckle.] Um, but [chuckle] one, one more thing. The times we’ve seen America kind of rally around together had been times of external threat, right? Times of war. I don’t care what you think about President George W. Bush; right after 9/11 the man’s approval rating hit 91 percent in Gallup.

DR. HOFFMAN: Um-hum.

PEARCE GODWIN: How unfathomable is that today? We rallied together. One might say that the pandemic gave us that opportunity, right? It was an external threat. That's not exactly how that played out in case you haven't been paying attention.

DR. HOFFMAN: [Chuckle.]

PEARCE GODWIN: But, really kind of depressing because that was an opportunity. That was an opportunity –

DR. HOFFMAN: Um-hum.

PEARCE GODWIN: – for us to, to rally together. So I hope it doesn't take war but historically that is the kind of thing – it's called asteroid theory, John Haidt's idea that when there's an asteroid coming I don't care who you voted for. We are shoulder to shoulder and we are trying to survive this thing together.

DR. HOFFMAN: And, and we'll come back to 9/11 and, and Covid for sure, and social media.

PEARCE GODWIN: Um-hum.

DR. HOFFMAN: I really want to spend some time on that. But I want to point to, there's a graphic I just pulled up from, also from the Pew Research Center, that demonstrates how the parties have increasingly identified over the past two decades, in particular have held very unfavorable hateful positions –

PEARCE GODWIN: Um-hum.

DR. HOFFMAN: – towards the other party. And, we have an increasing media environment where people are falling into echo chambers; they're listening to people who only think like themselves. If you give me a moment, I'm just going to talk about a few instance of, instances of violence.

PEARCE GODWIN: Hum.

DR. HOFFMAN: Lauren, one of my students, pointed out that toxic [indiscernible] has led to increased violence in the U.S. Just over a week ago a 53-year-old Michigan man shot and murdered his wife and their dog as a result of falling down a conspiracy theory rabbit hole from, from QAnon.

PEARCE GODWIN: Um-hum.

DR. HOFFMAN: His 25-year-old daughter was also injured in the shooting. A December poll by NPR and Ipsos found that 17 percent of Americans believe the core falsehood of QAnon that, this is a quote, “a group of Satan worshipping elites who run a child sex ring are trying to control our politics and media was true. And then we just had over the weekend former President Trump appearing in my, one of my home states of Ohio, in Youngstown playing a song at a political rally that prompted attendees to respond with a salute in reference to the cult-like QAnon conspiracy theories theme song. He delivered a dark address about the decline of America, music that was all but identical to a song called “WG, WWG1WGA” – which we can elaborate on what that is – it’s an abbreviation from the QAnon slogan: Where We Go 1 We Go All. As Mr. Trump spoke scores of people in the crowd raised their fingers in the air in an apparent reference to the “One” in what they thought was the songs title. I’m not going to use that gesture but I think you can imagine what that looks like when people are all pointing their hands up in a direction with the, their first finger. My question for you, and a lot of students had this question too, is how do you listen to people who wholeheartedly believe conspiracy theories like QAnon? People who believe that some politicians are actually lizards, designed, disguised as human beings. Shouldn’t there be some ground rules for listening across these divides?

PEARCE GODWIN: Each one of the people that holds beliefs that we may find loony, abhorrent, whatever, they're our fellow Americans. They are human. And that's where I would start. I've had really interesting conversations I shared with, with ya'll just recently and some folks who believe some of, some of those things, some tenets of, of what's broadly characterized as the QAnon belief system. I'm talking to someone who is a part of my family and, and, and honestly I, I was really trying to practice what I preach and, and really as, as some of us were talking about extend grace and not judgment and be genuinely curious. And I learned a lot. It, it, it truly gave me a tremendous degree of, of empathy and understanding even if it's not something that I would agree with. And in that particular case the, the person said "you know I was never that political; I was never looking into this kind of thing and then Covid hit and I just felt my freedoms being taken away. I didn't really like how the government was telling me that I needed to wear a mask, or how my employer was telling me that I needed to get a vaccine." Now, some of us may have different views and, and not necessarily follow or relate to where that path led for that individual but gosh, you feel like you're losing your freedoms? That's scary. That's something I think we can relate to. That's something I think we can begin to have a conversation about. And taking it out of that anecdote and more towards the aggregate, you know, I want to be honest and, and true and have integrity in extending that grace and listening with curiosity and connecting with respect. But even if that's asking too much I'll go back to my four D's. Its math, right? We're in a United States that call it what you like – melting pot, salad bowl, whatever – I personally think it's awesome and it is [chuckle] truly exceptional when you look around the world at the kind of different backgrounds that are represented here and oh, by the way,

it's never really been tried before. I don't have to get all the way into the data but you know where a democracy goes from a majority becoming a minority it's literally never happened. No wonder we're having such a hard time. So the, the greatness of the experiment of this country makes it really freaking hard [chuckle] to do it, right, for this pluralism thing to work. But again, with my friends for whom – and trust me, I get it – who whatever and there's, there's examples across the board but like that thing feels beyond the pale. That thing I can't entertain. I can't, you know, cater or in any way validate that by even having a conversation. Like, sorry to be trite but good luck with that because the whole point of some of the data that Doc Hoff over here has shared is that it's not a tiny share of our fellow Americans. It is not a, a, a small share. And again, I'm not picking on the group, you know, you raised or any other group, I'm just saying if there were a, a really small percentage of our Americans who, you know, in, like – none of us can be objective but let's just, you know, stick with me – if we could genuinely identify some finite very carefully – it would never happen, stick with me – very [chuckle] carefully identify people who are like truly malicious, like they really are out to destroy this country. They really are bad actors and that's like a few percentage points. All right. There, there might be a conversation to be had about; about you know thriving as a society without the, the active engagement of those fellow Americans. But across the board, again, not just the group that we started with here but plenty of other groups that other, that other, you know, Americans would point to as examples of the violence, as examples of the vitriol, they're all way too big [chuckle] for us to marginalize. They're all way too big for us to write off. It won't work. So whether it's kind of the, the principle and, and of, of, you know, if you want to go to a, to a Christian background of loving your

neighbor like yourself, of treating others like you want to be treated, whether that or whether it's just pragmatism that we can't – I, I love telling my friends who, you know, loathe the former President when he was in office we don't mend the frayed fabric of America with the 60 percent who don't support President Trump. It's not how math works. You don't have to agree with people but those are our fellow Americans, those are humans and we've got to move forward together.

DR. HOFFMAN: So it's about finding some common ground.

PEARCE GODWIN: Make it personal. Make it about their values, their hopes, their fears, their aspirations. Not about positions. Get past the talking points.

What's your story? And you tell yours –

DR. HOFFMAN: It's a –

PEARCE GODWIN: – in that conversation.

DR. HOFFMAN: Give us your – you gave us some three really critical strategies for talking about differences.

PEARCE GODWIN: Um-hum.

DR. HOFFMAN: Particularly across differences – I know a lot of my students are like, well how can I talk to someone who I, they're just not looking at truth, they're not looking at fact. What are some ways that you could help them to be open to having these conversations –

PEARCE GODWIN: Um-hum.

DR. HOFFMAN: – and letting people who may be down a rabbit hole and so far in that they're, they're not talking to anyone who has disagreeing opinions.

PEARCE GODWIN: Um-hum.

DR. HOFFMAN: What are those three core principles you talked about with us today?

PEARCE GODWIN: Yeah. My, my three favorites of everything I've seen boil down to listen with curiosity, speak from your own experience and connect with respect. I think that really covers it. How am I going to listen? It's going to be with curiosity, not with judgment, not with, you know, seven habits of highly effective people to understand not to respond. How am I going to speak? That's what I was just talking about, from my own experience because that's how we get out of the food fight. That's how we have an actual human connection instead of ripping and warring on behalf of the tribe, the community that we feel a part of. And finally, we're going to connect with respect. And to the point of, you know, seeing folks who in our mind may be don't look at truth, don't look at facts; they're down a rabbit hole. Well, don't talk about truth and facts. Talk about who that person is. What are their values? What are their life experiences? And, again, I, I like to, to kind of give both the pure and honorable and noble if I myself could, could be that noble. My girlfriend would be happier.

DR. HOFFMAN: [Chuckle.]

PEARCE GODWIN: But, but we all want to try to be that. But you can also just look at it practically. I told ya'll that coming at people; we've experienced this, with facts and figures – spoiler –

DR. HOFFMAN: [Indiscernible.]

PEARCE GODWIN: – alert.

DR. HOFFMAN: No.

PEARCE GODWIN: It doesn't work.

DR. HOFFMAN: No, no.

PEARCE GODWIN: It's called –

DR. HOFFMAN: No.

PEARCE GODWIN: – backfire effects. You come at me like that I am digging my heels in. You're not persuading me of anything. So, whether it's because you actually want to be effective and not waste your time or because you truly do see the dignity in that fellow American. Make it personal. Make it human.

DR. HOFFMAN: I think that's terrific advice. And I think that sometimes we see each other as these ideologues when we're all really just human beings who are trying to figure this whole thing out that we're in. We're going to switch an open Q&A in about 15 minutes. We're going to start with the audience here in the Gore Recital Hall at the Roselle Center for the Arts here at University of Delaware. But we do, as I mentioned, have this community at the Osher Lifelong Learning Institute that I'm hoping will Zoom some questions in. And I'll be looking for our production booth for questions from them. But I think I really want to discuss what's happening in Washington, D.C. And what's happening specifically in the White House. President Biden held a summit to discuss violence and hate in the country last week. Some voters say he's come up short on his pledge to try to heal as he described it the soul of the nation, according to one of our previous National Agenda speakers, NPR White House correspondent Asma Khalid – shout out to Asma. So a couple of questions; one comes from Kelly. I'll give you a two-parter. Do you feel that the Biden Administration has made any progress in bridging the gaps between Democrats and Republicans? And, what advice would you have for this UD alum, this Fightin' Blue Hen, that is now the President in the White House?

PEARCE GODWIN: I don't know President Biden personally. I've watched him over the years and my own, you know, personal impression has been that, you know, he is a man who wants to find a way forward, right? When he was Vice

President he was always the one deployed to negotiate with Mitch McConnell. Again, I, I don't know him but, but I have always taken at face value that he's somebody who wants to find common ground, who would rather not demonize folks, who would rather see the humanity. So, I, I've got to admit, I'm extremely disappointed in President Biden right now. We've had leaders who didn't seem to even care about unifying the country. It wasn't a priority to them. And, and I understand that. We've had leaders who seemed to really lean in to a strategy of fomenting our most base instincts in turning us against each other. But, with President Biden I thought we might have somebody in office who would really follow through on that campaign pledge and his refrain to heal the soul of the nation. And unfortunately, especially in recent weeks, I, I've seen the President talk on the one hand about healing the soul of the nation and then in the very next breath or tweet say that those people – which we've talked about the stats, he's not talking about a couple of people – he's talking about a massive share of our fellow Americans –

DR. HOFFMAN: And you're referring to MAGA?

PEARCE GODWIN: What he calls MAGA Republicans.

DR. HOFFMAN: Um-hum.

PEARCE GODWIN: Right. That, that MAGA Republicans are quote in his tweet, "a threat to the very soul of the country." Something's not connecting for me there. I don't see how you heal the soul of the nation by dividing us against each other. So, I, I'm very disappointed. I, I had some hope and the President's rhetoric in recent weeks, even while holding a summit that in part of its title was united we stand, has delivered remarks that seemed the very antithesis of healing the soul of the nation, of bridging divides. And that's why, as I said, it's

up to us. Our leaders have a lot of incentives. They have a lot of voices in their ears. Even if a person at their core and in their heart wants to be one way, there are things about our system and the environment right now that compel far too many of them to choose a different direction, to choose what I believe is a destructive direction. And I regret that he seems to have done that.

DR. HOFFMAN: But if you had President Biden's ear. If you were, if, pretend I'm Joe Biden sitting here, which I think he probably has sat here at some point in, in his career at the University of Delaware, what's one or two pieces of advice you might offer to say how we can get away from the divides and bring people together?

PEARCE GODWIN: There is such an appetite right now for a way out, right? There is such an appetite to get out of this toxicity, to get out of demonizing each other across differences. So, it's easy to think that, well, you know, its, its principle and, and heart and best intentions versus politics well to win. And, look, I'm not naïve. I worked in Washington for five years – I am pretty naïve – but I still worked [chuckle] in Washington for five years and it's true that pitting us against each other, creating contrast between candidates, between fellow Americans has proven to be affective in many ways. But right now, we're all so freaking tired of it. I believe that not only could we evoke the better angels of our nature, as President Biden has, has sought to do in a number of his speeches over the years, not only do I think that's the only way this country survives but I think there's a real constituency for it.

DR. HOFFMAN: Um-hum.

PEARCE GODWIN: I think there's a real constituency for a candidate who refuses to stay in that toxic cycle, in that doom loop, and says you know what, I'm

going to be different. Now, when I'll really be impressed is when a candidate does that even if it does cost them politically –

DR. HOFFMAN: Um-hum.

PEARCE GODWIN: – because perhaps the future of this nation and the American experiment is more important than the next election.

DR. HOFFMAN: Well, let me talk a little bit about – we've got some good questions related to the structure of American democracy, thinking about the two party system. So, Anna had a question that says; do you believe that the two party system that rules American politics is partially responsible for the division that we see today? And then I'm going to follow-up with a question from Megan that is, is partisanship profitable? Is listening first and bridging divides –

PEARCE GODWIN: Um-hum.

DR. HOFFMAN: – possible in a capitalist democracy or does our system encourage this divisiveness and polarization?

PEARCE GODWIN: Great –

DR. HOFFMAN: [Laughter.]

PEARCE GODWIN: – questions. Where did you find these –

DR. HOFFMAN: Please answer those.

PEARCE GODWIN: – where'd you find these students?

DR. HOFFMAN: [Laughter.]

AUDIENCE: [Laughter.]

PEARCE GODWIN: Um –

DR. HOFFMAN: Tell us [Laughter.]

PEARCE GODWIN: [Chuckle.] So, certainly I think things about our political structure – we talked a little bit over dinner about the, you know, using fancy Poli

Sci language – kind of the first past the poll voting, the single member districts, the primaries who of course. Look, we mentioned earlier, all of these people are human. Like, I am not going to stand here and castigate those people on Washington. Like, I'm looking in the mirror –

DR. HOFFMAN: Um-hum.

PEARCE GODWIN: – and I would encourage all of us to look in the mirror. So, they are operating with the incentives of their system. Politicians are a survivalist species. I get that. I actually have a lot of, of empathy for that. I think still a lot of folks are there for the right reasons. But I do think that the, the system, the fact that in 92 percent of our congressional districts these days there is nothing to worry about in the general election unless you're Eric Cantor and maybe shouldn't have been having a steak dinner that night instead of campaigning. But anyway, unless [chuckle] in very rare cases like the primary is what matters. And –

DR. HOFFMAN: Um-hum.

PEARCE GODWIN: – that is going to pull us towards the interest of those voters.

DR. HOFFMAN: Because the most extremely partisan voters vote in the primaries.

PEARCE GODWIN: Exactly. And, and, and a narrower slice of the electorate. So it is just further and further polarizing. But to the point, I absolutely think that that some reform such as you know one some of my friends advocate for whether its rank choice voting, or multimember districts or things around the influence of money in politics. I think these are all important. I do think they would make a big difference. I am a conservative and I'm all about the free

market and competition and for those reasons love it, love some of these ideas. Again, I keep going with ya'll to the practical as long as we're this toxically divided I don't see too many of those reforms passing because sometimes in the short term it seems it would favor Republicans sometimes Democrats. Regardless, those who would feel that they would be hurt in the short term by these kind of reforms are going to, you know, block and, and, and resist tooth and nail. So, do I think it would help? Absolutely. Do I think it's the whole answer? No. Do I think it'll happen anytime soon? Unfortunately not until we are able to take that longer view or able to have that perspective and not be so convinced that if our side loses the next election all is lost for our culture, for our values, for our family, everything. That existential threat makes those kind of longer term systemic reforms darn near impossible.

DR. HOFFMAN: So your call is, is not necessarily on our legislatures or our elected representatives because they're going to fall subject to the, the system itself but to us as citizens to learn better ways for communicating with each other and listening to each other. All right. Lovely. I have two other topics – I have many topics I wanted to –

PEARCE GODWIN: [Chuckle.]

DR. HOFFMAN: – talk you about but two that I want to get to before we open it up for our Q&A. First is about campus climate –

PEARCE GODWIN: Um-hum.

DR. HOFFMAN: – and, and conversations on the campus and the second one I want to get to is how technology and misinformation transmitted through technology has added to this problem. So, first I'll start with Kate; just a very general question my student Kate asks; how can we as undergrads in college

begin to bridge differences on our campus?

PEARCE GODWIN: Um-hum. Great question. Let me first make sure that I honored one of the earlier questions that was posed in terms of is it possible, is it profitable, right? And I want to touch on that briefly. Big fan of business, you know? I, I like economics. I'm into that kind of thing. I'm into the market. Guess what's profitable? What we demand, right? So whether we're talking about our elected leaders or our cable news executives or anybody else that had been called the entrepreneurs of division, or the division profiteers, these people are responding to us. They're not stupid. They're responding to the incentives we give them. Many of them aren't even malicious. They're responding to the incentives we give them. So do I think it's possible? Yeah, if we the consumers change our demand. Now, on campus so many partners in our Listen First Coalition focus on campus. We've already talked tonight about Bridge USA, about Braver Angels, about Free Intelligent Conversations doing incredible work. If you can engage with one of those groups, terrific, wonderful. It's not required. Totally endorse it. Like, by all means start a chapter of your favorite student focused in, initiative that is bridging divides. But, you don't need to be a part of an organization to listen with curiosity, to speak from your own experience, and to connect with respect. Let's practice it. And ya'll, I'm not like trying to make this sound easy. It is scarier and harder every single day. That's why we've got to start now. So, I would encourage you to step outside that comfort zone. If you know that person in class or that person in my residence hall is somebody who I may not see eye-to-eye with – they seem like they're coming from a different place – let me get to know them.

DR. HOFFMAN: Um-hum.

PEARCE GODWIN: Okay, let's work on that muscle, right? I talked about the muscle that goes like this [illustrative arm movement], woo, that muscle is ready to roll.

DR. HOFFMAN: [Indiscernible.]

PEARCE GODWIN: And it's ready to roll the abominable those people. Let's practice some other muscles. And I'll, I'll throw in you know a fun quote that never doubt that a few people can change the world. Indeed, it's the only thing that ever has. So, do it, where you are, in our own little small spaces. Let's set a different tone and let the ripples flow out and see if we can't set a different tone for the country at large.

DR. HOFFMAN: Well, and building on that, I'll rap up with a, a question about technology. Thirty-three percent of Tik Tok users now say they regularly get their news on that social, on that app, up from just 22 percent two years ago. Meanwhile, nearly every other social media saw declines across the same metric – this also comes from Pew Research Center; I'm a big fan.

PEARCE GODWIN: Same.

DR. HOFFMAN: [Chuckle.] At Facebook where now only 44 percent of its users report really getting their news from there down from 54 percent just two years ago. The age group most likely to get news from Tik Tok is 18 to 29 year olds. What advice do you have for this age group as they navigate the complex media landscape especially as they're looking for news on apps like Tik Tok in a couple of minutes.

PEARCE GODWIN: Yeah. Um, we've got to burst our bubbles and get outside of our echo chambers if at all possible. And look, we're busy. I don't practice what I preach on this nearly as well as I should but there's some great tools out

there. My friends at All Sides do an incredible job of curating stuff from the left, right and center; give those perspectives even if it's just tapping a couple of different icons on your phone. I don't need to tell you who's right and who's left. But, but especially when, when big stuff's happening I really do like going to my Fox News app versus my CNN app versus my MSNBC app. Same thing with papers. That's, that's what you got to do is, is expose yourself to a perspective that is not necessarily validating what you already believe. I like being validated as much as the next person but if we're watching something or consuming something that is just making us go, yeah, yeah, their fault, their fault. Like, maybe there's another side to the story. Maybe there's some perspective that we're missing and I wish it weren't this way. I wish our media and our technology ecosystem wasn't so Balkanized but it is and so it becomes incumbent on us to challenge our thinking, to complicate the narrative, as Amanda Ripley says, and to not just kind of allow ourselves to be spoon-fed and accept uncritically the information we're given especially if it's telling us to hate those people.

DR. HOFFMAN: Um-hum. All right, well, let's see, I want to; I think my next slide is, yes, National Week of Conversation. This is in April typically.

PEARCE GODWIN: Yes, ma'am.

DR. HOFFMAN: We had our fifth year this, earlier this April. I was one of the participants on our campus. We engaged in free intelligent conversations on this campus. Please visit cpc.udel.edu to hear more about all these initiatives that, that Pearce has talked about. But what is, when, when are we going to see National Week of Conversation in 2023? And, where can people go to engage in this conversation. So that's the question I'm going to ask you as we get some questions loaded up in the online queue. If you in the audience here have

questions be ready to raise your hand. I will call on Suzie and Andrew in just a few minutes to be our mic marshals. We've got two microphones on either side. They will assist you in asking your question. But let's transition to the Q&A by talking about this National Week of Conversation.

PEARCE GODWIN: Great. Indeed, the sixth annual will be again this spring and these dates we're kicking it off with that galvanizing America Talks event in partnership with USA Today and others. So, this is a showcase. It's a showcase of all the unbelievable work that people across the Listen First Coalition and this growing bridging movement are doing. So partners will be doing what they do across that week. It's a great opportunity to kind of get exposed to conversations across difference. I, I, I tell you what, what I'm finding again and again, and we talked about using some of the Free Intelligent conversations over dinner, one of the questions is, is what have you heard recently that's kind of stuck with you? And for me it was patience is perseverance. So in that vein, it's really hard ya'll. It's really hard for any of us to be willing to, to sit down and expose ourselves to what to many us – you mentioned campus climate – have found to be a, a really kind of uncomfortable situation. You know, many folks, especially conservatives these days feel attacked, judged, condescended upon. Who wants to show up for that? So, we've really scarred each other on the idea of coming together in conversation. But there are some easy entry points during National Week of Conversation put on by all of our partners as well as America Talks as one galvanizing event to get thousands of Americans taking that first step, that entry point. Those will all be on Americatalks.us. To stay apprised of the movement and all of the opportunities offered by our coalition partners between now and then and beyond, you can go to Listenfirstproject.org and sign the Listen First

pledge. Really straight forward: I will listen first to understand. And I fall short every day but we're going to do our best to listen first to understand. Do that and then I also want to be accessible, you know, to you all who believe in this mission and who want to be a part of it. Who want to be part of that change, part of turning down the heat and finding a way forward together? So feel free to email me, Pearce, P E A R C E at listenfirstproject.org.

DR. HOFFMAN: One of the most accessible speakers I've ever invited –

PEARCE GODWIN: [Chuckle.]

DR. HOFFMAN: – to campus. I'm like, Pearce you must be getting emails from everyone every day.

PEARCE GODWIN: [Laughter.]

DR. HOFFMAN: It's interesting how some people want to kind of close themselves off. This is a person who's asking you to contact him and to open up. So, I, I have a few more – I have many more questions I would love to ask you and my students have many more questions as well but I think I want to open it up to the audience as we begin our Q&A. Again, I'd like to welcome our virtual audience at the Osher Lifelong Learning Institute. Again, one of the earliest and largest lifelong learning programs in the country for adults 50 years and older. So, let's first take a question from the audience in-house if Suzie and Andrew can take one of those microphones on each side of the room here. It looks like we have a question, Suzie, way in the back, is that, yes. Kind of in the middle. We'll take the question from both students and community members. So it looks like this is a question from a student.

Q: [Indiscernible] and also a CPC intern. My question –

DR. HOFFMAN: Gina, I'm sorry, your mic was off for a little bit before.

Q: Yeah, okay, I've got you. Gina Concenza, CPC intern and Com 337 student; my question is how did you overcome any bias to be able to listen to the other side and how has that changed your outlook on this country as a whole?

PEARCE GODWIN: I'm working on it.

AUDIENCE: [Laughter.]

DR. HOFFMAN: [Laughter.]

PEARCE GODWIN: Right? I'm not [chuckle] even going to pretend with ya'll that, that I do a great job practicing what I preach. But, but I will say that as I've tried to have some level of integrity in the, the mission that I'm fording, one thing it's done is, is, is really wipe away any stridents or conviction I had on most issues because once you understand where people are coming from, even on diametrically opposed issues like, well, darn, I can kind of see that and, and argue from various positions. So, it's certainly complicated my own thinking on some of the national issues. It's, it's given me a window as I meet Americans unlike myself and to the experiences and the values that I may never agree with them; I may still think they're wildly misguided. But I kind of get that.

DR. HOFFMAN: Um-hum.

PEARCE GODWIN: I kind of have an understanding g of where they're coming from. So, you know, if anybody says I have overcome my bias, they're lying –

DR. HOFFMAN: Um-hum.

PEARCE GODWIN: – because we all have these biases and these backgrounds. But simply opening myself up, pushing myself, making myself really uncomfortable. Like, I can't stress this enough. I do not have this figured out. [Laughter.] Right? But, making myself uncomfortable, talking to folks I

wouldn't usually talk to has just broadened my perspective in a way that I think is really helpful. Just –

DR. HOFFMAN: Well –

PEARCE GODWIN: – just as I navigate the world.

DR. HOFFMAN: Yeah, and I think for those of you who, who were here for Paul Kane's talk, the congressional reporter who was on the Capitol on January 6th, 2021, I remember we were sitting in the back, talking in the back of this room as we were getting ready to leave and he was telling my students take as many electives as you can because once you – I don't think we talked about this –

PEARCE GODWIN: Um-um.

DR. HOFFMAN: – once, once you graduate there are no more electives.

There –

PEARCE GODWIN: That's good.

DR. HOFFMAN: – there are no more ways to sort of challenge yourself to, other than coming to National Agenda; okay free advertisement –

PEARCE GODWIN: [Laughter.]

DR. HOFFMAN: – to really challenge yourself to think about things in new ways. And I think that's absolutely right. So one thing that I would say to those college students who are asking what can we do is to take courses outside of your field; to take courses where you might not understand it to be just genuinely intellectually curious about what is going on around you. And there's something profoundly more satisfying and optimistic about being curious than being solidly familiar with your own beliefs. Like there's something about like – it, it's sort of frees up like, oh, I don't have to be diligently this kind of conservative or this kind of liberal or this kind of prochoice or pro, whatever it is, it's like I can be kind of

like oh, okay, that's your opinion tell me more about that.

PEARCE GODWIN: It's empowering right?

DR. HOFFMAN: It really is.

PEARCE GODWIN: It's empowering. Like be an individual, don't just be you know robot within whatever tribe you're, you find yourself most often a part of and perhaps some people are trying to further entrench in whatever that tribe is. Be an individual. Be curious. This is going back a little bit. Some of my older friends in the audience will, will know what I'm talking about, but Larry King had a great quote, you know, quintessential prominent talk show host. He said I never learned anything by talking.

DR. HOFFMAN: [Chuckle.] That's great. All right. Let's open it up to another question from the audience. Andrew, it looks like we've got one right kind of smack dab in the middle here. And I'm seeing we have questions coming in from our Osher Lifelong Learning Institute folks. So we'll get to them after we have a few questions from our in-house audience.

Q: Hi Pearce. Thanks for coming tonight. My name's Jeff. I'm a Civil Discourse student leader with the Biden Institute.

PEARCE GODWIN: Awesome.

Q: I wanted to ask you for more clarification on what you meant by don't talk about truth or facts. I guess it seems to me that if we want to make progress on any important social history we need to have a, like a sort of shared understanding of what the problem is. And sort of as an example, if we were both in a conversation trying to talk about how to fix polarization in our country and I disagree that it was a problem I, I'd assume you'd appeal to many of the statistics you brought up earlier in the conversation it does sort of lay the

groundwork of, of facts that we can then use as a launching point to solve the problem. So.

PEARCE GODWIN: Yeah.

DR. HOFFMAN: Great question.

PEARCE GODWIN: Right.

DR. HOFFMAN: Thank you.

PEARCE GODWIN: Thank you for that pushback, Jeff, and –

DR. HOFFMAN: [Chuckle.]

PEARCE GODWIN: – and the opportunity to, to say more. When I said, you know, don't talk about facts and truth I was thinking about that one on one conversation, right? Where, where it's you and another human being.

Everything Jeff said is so true. How on earth, and this, this is one of the things that has struck me in some of the events of the last couple of years, is I knew like we're demonizing each other, right? I got that. I got that we think each other's a threat. What I didn't fully comprehend, and depending on your side you can like pretend I'm thinking whatever. I'm not going to tell you which things I'm thinking about. But, we live in a, like, different universes in terms of facts and what I humbly might consider truth. For the record –

DR. HOFFMAN: [Indiscernible.]

PEARCE GODWIN: – I do –

DR. HOFFMAN: Oh –

PEARCE GODWIN: – believe there's truth. I'm not, you know –

DR. HOFFMAN: A book title; Republicans are from Mars, Democrats are from Venus.

PEARCE GODWIN: There you go –

DR. HOFFMAN: [Laughter.]

PEARCE GODWIN: There you go. And that is terrifying. I mean, Jeff, you're so right. How on earth do we do this thing I talked about, find a way forward together if we can't even agree on basic facts. We got to get there but based on the backfire effects I talked about, going at people with that facts and truth is going to do the opposite of what you want it to do. And you're absolutely right in your point about me. If, if you are like Pearce it's not a problem. No, it is a problem. Let me tell you about the feeling thermometer. I would totally go there because it's who I am and guess what, it wouldn't work.

DR. HOFFMAN: Um-hum.

PEARCE GODWIN: You would dig in and say, whoa, whoa, now I'm being attacked; now I feel stupid, now you're just condescending me and I'm going to dig in further. So it is quite the conundrum. I know this is an unsatisfactory answer because you're right; we've got to get to truth. We can't live and occupy this same space, lines on a map as I like to say, if nothing else we are stuck between some lines on a map. We've got to get to a common understanding. But there's some steps before that that are humanity and listening or else we might as well forget getting to a shared truth. So, I want to be clear, truth matters –

DR. HOFFMAN: Um-hum.

PEARCE GODWIN: – facts matter but nobody cares about your truth or your facts until they believe that you respect them.

DR. HOFFMAN: Absolutely.

PEARCE GODWIN: They believe that you see them as belonging.

DR. HOFFMAN: Absolutely. There's a, a famous study in political science

which looked at Republicans response to the arguments about WMD's being found in Iraq.

PEARCE GODWIN: Um-hum.

DR. HOFFMAN: And, that when people were primed with an explanation of why WMD's were not exactly in Iraq to begin with, which was the justification for going to war, they dug their heels in even more and were like, yes, there were. Yes, there were. And so much of politics I think that we, we like to think of ourselves as, as evolved –

PEARCE GODWIN: Rational –

DR. HOFFMAN: Rational human beings who –

PEARCE GODWIN: Oh, I love a joke.

DR. HOFFMAN: [Chuckle.] – and so much of it is just emotional reactions.

PEARCE GODWIN: Um-hum.

DR. HOFFMAN: My students are all – I can see them looking at me right now –

PEARCE GODWIN: [Chuckle.]

DR. HOFFMAN: – they're reading Jonathan Haidt's, *The Righteous Mind*, which is a great book about how so much of what we do when it comes to political decision making is emotional. It's about reacting in the moment.

PEARCE GODWIN: The elephant and the rider.

DR. HOFFMAN: The elephant and the rider. Look at them, yeah. They're all –

PEARCE GODWIN: [Laughter.]

DR. HOFFMAN: – guess –

PEARCE GODWIN: You better nod. She's like [laughter.]

AUDIENCE: [Laughter.]

DR. HOFFMAN: So, I, I do want to, we do have some questions from our online audience so I'd like to go ahead and open it up. It looks like we're going to have a question that's going to come up on the screen here from our online audience at the Osher Lifelong Learning Institute. How can local communities encourage conversation across differences?

PEARCE GODWIN: Thanks for the question, Diane. I would go to, and this isn't even like a shameless plug because I'm pointing you to everybody else, but on listenfirstproject.org if you click on the coalition you're going to see a number of different groups that, that do terrific work. Some of them are geographically based, others like Braver Angels, Living Room Conversations do work all over the country, have methodologies that you can take. In the case of Living Room Conversations and do yourself with a couple of friends – in your bible study, in your book club whatever. So I, I, you know, major hat tip we used some of their prompts earlier in class to my friends at Living Room Conversations there's a whole spectrum. I went through it a little bit, the different ways that partners engage folks in local communities. So, as, as the very first step I would send you to Living Room Conversations. They've got literally over a hundred guides on all sorts of different topics. Print one off and do it. Like, if you want to get all trained up, knock yourself out. But, I'm a big fan and this; this doesn't work if we've all got to get like facilitator training, right? We just need to exist as humans, and I gave you three tips. I really think they work. I don't think they work, I know they work. What we've seen time and time again is –

DR. HOFFMAN: Have you done the research though [indiscernible] –

PEARCE GODWIN: Yes, we have. I, I, I cut that because I didn't want to give

too, get you guys with too much stuff. But they, they, they work. And when we, when folks have that experience, whether it's your own that you do yourself – it's not hard I promise – or whether it's a more organized event like we do at America Talks or like we do with [indiscernible] America. When folks come to the table they're blown away. I told you, they're more hopeful and they say oh my gosh, this, this can happen and boy was it interesting. But we're all kind of scared to come to the table. So, yeah, Diane, I would, I would point you to Living Room Conversations. Print one out if you want to do it yourself.

DR. HOFFMAN: Um-hum.

PEARCE GODWIN: I will point you to Braver Angels. They've got alliances in all fifty states now. And a number of other organizations that you'll find on the Listen First Coalition web page that have terrific tools for you to leverage in your community. And, again, just to reiterate, go for it. Do it yourself. Like, I love my 500 partners but if we're relying on the members who are like actually attached and really engaged we're not going to get there. We've got to have people out there doing it on your own volition in your own spaces and you can.

DR. HOFFMAN: And, I think it's, you, you underestimate how simple it is to just print off this moderated conversation guide from for example, Living Room Conversations. And I've had discussions with my students about abortion, about gun control and gun rights and do we devolve into some sort of crazy like argument? No, because honestly most of us are curious about other people's perspectives. And, it's, it's really freeing –

PEARCE GODWIN: Um-hum.

DR. HOFFMAN: – to sort of say, I'm curious why you feel that way. I, I do want to get to – it looks like we don't have any more questions from the Osher

Lifelong Learning Institute although there are a few minutes left if you do have a question that you want to direct to us. But, I often describe to my students that the way that I came to this space in terms of wanting to understand different perspectives was having parents from totally different ends of the ideological political spectrum. I don't think we got to talk about this too much –

PEARCE GODWIN: Um-um.

DR. HOFFMAN: – but, but to have, you know, a, a, one parent who lives in a, a community in Florida that watches, you know, Fox News, and one parent who literally moved to Canada when George W. Bush was elected and of course, I joke, they're divorced. That should be obvious.

AUDIENCE: [Laughter.]

DR. HOFFMAN: But like, how did we get that way. How did we get so divided to the point where we can't see each other as fellow human beings? And I think that there's, there's a real value to this just genuine curiosity –

PEARCE GODWIN: Un-hum.

DR. HOFFMAN: – for people who disagree with you and who you just kind of want to hear where they're coming from. So, it looks like we have one more question from the Osher Lifelong Learning Institute folks. So let's go ahead and pull that up on the slide now that we have another moment to hear from them.

So, what do you think the impact of race –

PEARCE GODWIN: Hum.

DR. HOFFMAN: – and gender may have in being able to engage people who may have had, may have different views? Do you have suggestions for how that might be considered – can you help me out?

AUDIENCE: [Laughter.]

DR. HOFFMAN: – considered an opening a – here we go, screen number two –

AUDIENCE: [Chuckle.]

DR. HOFFMAN: – hopefully. Or just go back and we can answer the first question about race and gender? Technology; what are you going to do?

PEARCE GODWIN: [Laughter.]

AUDIENCE: [Chuckle.]

DR. HOFFMAN: Well, maybe you can go ahead and –

PEARCE GODWIN: Sure.

DR. HOFFMAN: – answer that first question.

PEARCE GODWIN: Sure. You know, those are certainly some of the most salient and I mean just to be really practical, visually obvious chasms or differences considered in opening a conversation, that, that we have.

DR. HOFFMAN: Um-hum.

PEARCE GODWIN: – in, in this, in this diverse population. I mean, I, I am, I am not a scholar of race and gender issues but, but you know as you heard me say all different backgrounds and beliefs. That's who we need as part of the conversation. Every one of our fellow Americans of any such race, gender, disposition, whatever it may be have to be there. I, I definitely think, you know, going right at some of those issues – we talked earlier in, in the class about one way to connect with respect is naming differences. Right? Not shying away from. You, you had mentioned Dr. Hoffman, you know, how empowering it is to be curious and be that individual person. Similarly it's empowering to not shy away and say oh, you're this kind of person; I don't want to say the wrong thing. Oh, you're that kind of person. Let's just say, look, I'm a this, you're a that,

obviously we're all going to be respectful but just you know making it that kind of welcoming conducive secure environment that these things are not taboo. They don't have to be right? We always want to be respectful, don't get me wrong. But when we are suspending judgment and extending grace we don't need to concern ourselves with whether we're using, you know, the, the, the most politically correct term that might have changed in the last seven minutes, we can just have a conversation. We can just be humans. And I certainly think, Jennifer, that, that, that ensuring that we are crossing lines of difference in terms of race, in terms of gender is critically important and don't shy away from what those differences mean. Be curious. We keep saying the same thing but I mean truly once you're in that space and, and one thing I've always, I've noticed, like I'm a huge fan of those three tips. Like, write them down, go for it. But what I've realized over time is it almost doesn't matter what specific tips you use. Living Room Conversations you'll find has six. You know, some people have ten. But when you ground the conversation as you intimated in that, that tone, everybody just kind of like gets what we're doing here.

DR. HOFFMAN: Um-hum.

PEARCE GODWIN: If you ask them 30 minutes later what were the tips. Hell if I know.

DR. HOFFMAN: Um-hum.

PEARCE GODWIN: But I understood that we weren't going to do what we do on social media.

DR. HOFFMAN: Yeah –

PEARCE GODWIN: I understood that we aren't going to do what we see on cable news. We're going to have a respectful conversation in which we are

listening with curiosity; we're suspending judgment and extending grace. That's what we're doing here.

DR. HOFFMAN: Um-hum. Yeah, there's, its, its um, having done some research over the last semester, using Living Room Conversations as a guide, it, you're right, you go through these kind of ground rules but once you get over that people are just kind of like, it's almost like people are like, huh, thank God.

[Laughter.] Like, [indiscernible] I don't have to defend my point of view; I don't have to be ideological. I can just be like, yeah, what do you think about that?

PEARCE GODWIN: Um-hum.

DR. HOFFMAN: It's, its really empowering. So, I do want to wrap things up. I want to thank Andrew and Suzie for being our mic marshals here in the room. Let's give them a big round of applause.

AUDIENCE: [Applause.]

DR. HOFFMAN: And before we depart I do want to announce a few things. Our upcoming speakers, we usually are on kind of a two week delay. We have actually speakers next week, right here in this room at this time; two artists, one graphic designer, one fine art photographer. We're going to talk about how you balance art and politics. So, Denise Lu is part of a project at the New York Times that created a – whoa.

PEARCE GODWIN: That's cool. I like what –

DR. HOFFMAN: Whoa.

PEARCE GODWIN: – you got going on here with the UD.

DR. HOFFMAN: All right. Yeah, this is exciting.

PEARCE GODWIN: Anybody got a strobe light?

DR. HOFFMAN: In, in dark.

AUDIENCE: [Laughter.]

PEARCE GODWIN: Maybe a disco ball?

DR. HOFFMAN: I'll keep talking. Denise helped her team at the New York Times create a gerrymandering game. So if you understand what gerrymandering is, good for you, there probably two of you?

PEARCE GODWIN: [Laughter.]

DR. HOFFMAN: Gerrymandering is a really difficult concept to understand in terms of how representatives and, and people in the state legislatures define Congressional Districts. So, Denise Lu created a gerrymandering game. SO, I encourage you before you come back next week go look up gerrymandering game, the New York Times, and look at how you can create your own gerrymandered district. And then Tailyr Irvine is an indigenous photographer from western Montana who looks at how Native Americans are having to make decisions about which tribal communities they belong to by how much literally a fraction of their blood belongs to different tribal communities. Making decisions about who they marry, whether they have children. So, again, I'm, I'm very much into the numbers this semester. We also have October 20th, our Delaware debates. So, you can watch that; you can find out more information at cpc.udel.edu/delawaredebates. For our Osher folks, Ralph Begleiter will be moderating those debates, our wonderful founding director of the Center for Political Communication. These will be just live streamed. They will not be a live audience. Whoops. I pressed the wrong button. I, yesterday was National Voter Registration Day. For those of you who, who showed up, thank you. We had quite a few students register to vote. I've got a QR code up here if you want to learn more about ways to get involved. We have, the University has a



subscription to Turbo Vote which lets students register to vote and then get alerts for where your polling locations are, how to get an absentee ballot, how to vote by mail, etcetera. We also subscribe to a new service called Issue Voter where students can sign up to identify which issues they care the most about; say climate change, or abortion what, what have you. And Issue Voter will notify you, hey, your state representative or your federal representative is voting on this bill today about this issue that you care about; here's how you call them, here's how you email them, here's how you send them a letter. So it really gives you an, an avenue for really holding your elected officials accountable. And then I want to announce our, our, this year's Voices of UD Audio/Video Essay Competition. This year we're asking you to consider if you are more than a number. America is experiencing an historic era of polarization, as we've talked about, spanning social, political, racial, economic issues. Increasing numbers of citizens are taking to the streets to protest things like police brutality, election fraud, immigration, gun violence and the June 2022 Supreme Court decision to overturn Roe v. Wade. So, we ask students to submit audio or video essays and if you can go to cpc.udel.edu/voices – I'm looking at my confidence monitor, that's what I call that, so I'm confident that I know what I'm talking about –

PEARCE GODWIN: [Chuckle.]

DR. HOFFMAN: – so I don't have to go like this [illustrative arm movement] – cpc.udel.edu/voices. It'll give you some suggestions for how to get resources to create these, these essays. And we encourage the community at large to submit these as well. You don't have to submit them to the competition if you just want your voice to be heard. It's been amazing. We started this in 2017 and we've heard such amazing stories from students and from community members

about their experiences with, with these different themes. So I really encourage you to apply. If you do want to submit to the competition, hey, guess what, first prize \$500. Nothing to sneeze at, right? I'm going to end on a couple of other final notes as we wrap up here. We mentioned free intelligent conversation here. I'm a huge fan of, of this nonprofit organization that if you are a student on campus take a look around – I'm looking at my students in the front row. Raise your hand if you're on that team whose going to be asking people for Free Intelligent Conversations. So if you see a student holding a sign that looks like this –

PEARCE GODWIN: [Chuckle.]

DR. HOFFMAN: – go up and talk to them and see what they have to say, see what questions you might answer. It's a way of, of, of building community and I think especially post- Covid at the University with they're, we all are seeking ways to find connections with one another. So, please make sure you reach out to them. And then finally, I'm very excited to announce, this is the first official announcement, of, that the college debates and discourse program, an alliance between Braver Angels, ACTA the American Council of Trustees and Alumni, and Bridge USA which Pearce mentioned, has been awarded a 1.2 million dollar grant from the John Templeton Foundation. The aware, funded by Templeton Grant 62358 will support a two year research project beginning in January 2023 to evaluate the effects of Braver Angels debates on students at ten colleges and universities across the U.S. I will be; I'm honored to be the principle investigator, the primary investigator of this project. UD will be a hub for research around these kinds of conversations. So, this semester we're going to launch our first Braver Angels debate. I'm going to do one in our classroom and we're going to



do one University-wide. And, please be on the lookout for these and more information will be coming. So, I'm very excited to announce that officially tonight particularly as I invite Pearce here because he's part of the same bridging movement, how do we find ways to bridge our divides. So, I will end by saying thank you so much, Pearce, for being here. It's been wonderful to meet you. Please visit cpc.udel.edu for all of our programming. And be sure you follow us on social media. Good night and I'll see you back here in one week.

AUDIENCE: [Applause.]

PEARCE GODWIN: Thank you.

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