

CENTER FOR AMERICAN PROGRESS

**THE TRAGEDY OF OKLAHOMA CITY 15 YEARS LATER
AND THE LESSONS FOR TODAY**

WELCOME:

**AL FROM,
FOUNDER,**

DEMOCRATIC LEADERSHIP COUNCIL

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**PRESIDENT AND CHIEF EXECUTIVE OFFICER,
CENTER FOR AMERICAN PROGRESS ACTION FUND**

INTRODUCTION:

MICHAEL REYES,

FORMER EMPLOYEE,

ALFRED P. MURRAH FEDERAL BUILDING

SPEAKER:

PRESIDENT WILLIAM J. CLINTON

MODERATOR:

RON BROWNSTEIN,

POLITICAL DIRECTOR,

ATLANTIC MEDIA

**PANELISTS:
REP. KENDRICK MEEK (D-FL)**

**MARVIN “MICKEY” EDWARDS (R-OK),
FORMER U.S. REPRESENTATIVE**

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**MARK POTOK,
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**BRADLEY BUCKLES,
FORMER DIRECTOR,
U.S. BUREAU OF ALOCHOL, TOBACCO AND FIREARMS**

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JOHN PODESTA: Good morning, everyone. I'm John Podesta. I'm the president of the Center for American Progress Action Fund. I want to thank you for joining us here today to remember and to reflect on the tragedy that occurred in Oklahoma City nearly 15 years ago. There are days that punctuate all our memories, collectively and as a country, and April 19, 1995 is most certainly one of them.

So despite the somberness of this occasion, I'm honored to co-host this important event today and I'm grateful to those who were affected for taking the time to share their experiences, as we look both backwards to remember what happened and forward to draw lessons. We can now see more clearly from today's vantage point. We're pleased to host this event with our co-sponsor, the Democratic Leadership Council.

I'd also like to thank President Clinton, who will be here shortly, for being with us today to reflect on this period of his presidency. He demonstrated tremendous leadership both at the time of the tragedy and the years following, during which he implemented numerous policies to improve law enforcement and public safety across the country. And for that, we are profoundly grateful. I also want to thank Al From, who founded the DLC with the unshakeable belief that ideas matter in politics, and who will be speaking to us in a few moments. I'd like to thank Michael Reyes, who was in the Murrah Building and lost his father that Tuesday morning.

I also want to thank the other panelists who you'll hear from: Congressman Kendrick Meek of Florida; former Congressman Mickey Edwards, who represented Oklahoma City for 16 years; Brad Buckles, former director of the Bureau of Alcohol, Tobacco and Firearms; Mark Potok, who directs the intelligence project at the Southern Poverty Law Center; Jamie Gorelick, the former deputy attorney general in the Clinton administration; and Michael Waldman, the executive director of the Brennan Center for Justice at NYU Law.

They'll be led in our panel discussion by Ron Brownstein from the National Journal, who will be moderating that discussion later this morning, which will both reflect on what happened in Oklahoma City and also what it means today. I'd like to say a few words and then I'd like to welcome Al From to the podium. One heartening thing, I think, that emerged from the tragedy was the broad spirit of cooperation that took root here in Washington. As he was leading the Republican Congress and helping improve efforts to combat domestic terrorism, Senator Bob Dole said that partisanship stops at evil's edge.

Then, as it would be now, Dole's statement was clear and it was courageous. The president and the congressional leaders of both parties pushed hard to move partisanship far to the sidelines and brought the parties together as Americans, rather than as Democrats or Republicans, to help the country heal. And our fellow citizens were ennobled by their example.

That experience speaks to us now. Today, it's important to remember that there are some individuals who are seized, again, by anger and fear. And the path from these intensely felt

emotions to violent action can be shorter than many of us would like to believe. In our country, there must always be a place for dissent and disappointment, even anger at things the government does. That is patriotic.

But when any leader, whether in politics or in the news media, promotes fear-mongering or distortion to advance a political agenda, it can create a climate where violence is more imaginable. And when they pose government as the enemy of the people, that can have consequences today.

There's a special responsibility of leadership that demands us to keep historical lessons in mind as public officials and politicians choose their words about their opponents' character and discuss their differing visions for the country. It's my hope that we can do much better than we're doing in this regard. History and our highest values demand that we try. So again, I want to thank you all for coming this morning and allow me to say a few words about our next speaker, Al From.

Al founded the Democratic Leadership Council in 1985 and led the organization until April, 2009. He continues to chair the board. His work and leadership have been instrumental in the implementation of landmark policies, ranging from public safety and welfare reform to national service and educational reform. Al has been at the center of American politics and progressive policies for over a quarter century and the organization he built deserves great credit for its contributions to progress in America. Welcome, Al, and thank you for joining us this morning. (Applause.)

AL FROM: Thank you very much, John, for that really wonderful introduction. I don't do this as much anymore. I'm delighted on behalf of the Democratic Leadership Council to welcome you all here. I want to thank John and CAP for really putting this forum together, the panelists who will participate and President Clinton, who will join us in a minute.

The tragedy of Oklahoma City is one that those of us who lived through it, through that period, will never forget. America at that time, as it is today, was terribly divided. Antigovernment feeling was running very high. And the bombing shows what happens and what can go wrong when extremists control dissent and when anger turns to violence. But in the aftermath of that tragedy, we also saw one of America's greatest strengths: our ability to come together in times of adversity.

President Clinton's leadership was critical to tapping that strength and in the years that followed, some of the greatest bipartisan achievements in the Clinton presidency took place: from welfare reform, to balancing the budget, to CHIPS, to advancement in law enforcement. President Clinton's presidency was devoted to bringing America together, to making politics bigger than any one party, and most importantly to being tolerant of dissent. It is just essential that if we're going to have a vibrant democracy, that we have dissent – we have often bitter dissent – but we're always tolerant of those who have other points of view.

And I think nowhere during the whole period of the Clinton presidency were his values more evident than during the aftermath of the Oklahoma City tragedy. And those are lessons

which we can heed – we need to heed today. Not long after that tragedy, while we were in the midst of another debate, my friend Jack Kemp, the late Jack Kemp, said to me: Just remember, as we're fighting out our differences, that we are political adversaries, not political enemies.

President Clinton was never one to shrink from a fight. He fought for his principles, but he was always tolerant of those who disagreed with him. And I think in the end that was instrumental to his success and to the legacy he leaves. Now, we're going to have a short video that talks about Oklahoma City and its aftermath and how the president led the country to come back together.

(Begin video segment.)

NARRATOR: About a third of the building has been blown away.

PRESIDENT WILLIAM J. CLINTON: The bombing in Oklahoma City was an attack on innocent children and defenseless citizens. It was an act of cowardice and it was evil.

MR. : The smoke and the dust and the people running out of that building, that could, and the people running to help them and the blood – and it was just very traumatic. And I called President Clinton immediately and the president made a plane available to get us out there very quickly. And we already had the disaster declaration by the president before I left.

MR. : There's no question that Bill Clinton epitomized national leadership at that time. Bill Clinton was wonderfully reassuring and not only that, but he came back and back again and back again. Anytime we needed him, he came.

PRESIDENT CLINTON: I am honored to be here today to represent the American people.

MS. : In the moments that we had, the personal moments, the private moments, you say not only a strong leader, but we really saw a man who had great compassion and whose heart was as big as you could imagine.

PRESIDENT CLINTON: Today, our nation joins with you in grief. We mourn with you.

MS. : His decision to help Oklahoma was a leadership decision, but it was a leadership decision made with a lot of emotion and compassion.

MR. : I was at home and it was about 10:00 at night, 10:30, and the phone rings. The lady on the phone says, this is the White House operator. Do you have time to speak to the president? And he didn't call to ask me for anything. He didn't call for political – he just called to see how I was doing, personally, and how the city was doing and if there was anything he could do, just to let me know that his phone was open. And I believed it.

MR. : He would take time to sit down and talk to people, put his arm around people and tell them it's going to be okay. We'll help you get through this. He was so great to work with because I knew how much he cared about people. And he always told me – he said, James Lee, if it affects people, I want to know about it. And that was the standard.

PRESIDENT CLINTON: I have relived the moments of last year many times in my mind, since I was here with you. I have wondered how you were doing and prayed for your strength. Your building was blown down and many lives were shattered, but today I saw, again, that the spirit of Oklahoma City fell not. Like the tree behind me, which has now become famous, it lost its leaves and its bark and it's still kind of ugly, but it survived and it's going to bloom again. Why is it going to bloom again? Because its roots kept it strong and standing. The survivors and the spirit of this community are blooming again because your roots kept you strong and standing.

MR. : We had a meeting of the committee that had responsible for raising funds for the scholarships for the surviving children. We went to the committee and they went outside. There were thousands upon thousands of people, nonpartisan – nobody gave a hoot about what party he belonged to, really. It was just respect and love for the country and the city and the state. And the president was there.

PRESIDENT CLINTON: There are places in our national landscape so scarred by freedom's sacrifice that they shape forever the soul of America. This place is such sacred ground.

MR. : On his birthday, after the bombing, he told the staff that he did not want any personal presents for him. And he asked that all his staff, as a birthday present to him, contribute to the scholarship fund and I think that's a brief summary of where his heart was at that time and to this day.

PRESIDENT CLINTON: In Romans it is said: The night is far spent. The day is at hand. Let us cast off the works of darkness and let us put on the armor of light. May you keep on your armor of light. May you keep your light shining on this place of hope, where memories of the lost and the meaning of America will live forever.

(Singing.)

PRESIDENT CLINTON: Time takes its toll not only on youth and beauty but also on tragedy. The tomorrows come almost against our will. And they bring healing and hope, new responsibilities and new possibilities. I remember telling you that you had lost a lot but you had not lost America. I remember saying that if people thought that love and caring and compassion had gone out of our country, they should come to Oklahoma.

Oklahoma City gave us our heart back as a country. In this way, Oklahoma City changed us all. It broke our hearts and lifted our spirits and brought us together and reminded us of what is truly important in life. Because of how you responded and what you did, you changed us all and gave us a great and enduring gift. God bless you.

(End video segment.)

MS. : Ladies and gentlemen, please welcome the survivor and family member of the Oklahoma City bombing and current deputy director working in single-family FHA, Michael Reyes. (Applause.)

MICHAEL REYES: Good morning. My name is Michael Reyes. In 1995, I worked for the Department of Housing and Urban Development on the seventh floor of the Murrah Federal Building in Oklahoma City. My father, Tony Reyes, also worked at HUD on the eighth floor. While we were both present in the building, on the morning of April 19, I managed to escape with serious, but not permanent, injuries. My father, however, did not survive. Before introducing today's speaker, I'd like to take some time this morning briefly relating my experience.

On the morning of April 19, I had just hung up my desk phone at 9:02 a.m. when the power went out. I began to hear rumbling and my desk started to shake violently. I instinctively jumped under my desk for protection, but instead of finding the floor, I found myself in freefall. I landed on the third floor, four stories beneath my former office. I saw about six people around me who appeared to be uninjured. While I was not buried in rubble, there was quite a bit of it around me. I was tangled in the metal framing of a wall and was bleeding from several injuries.

I called for help and these people came to my aid. They were employees of Health and Human Services and they helped me to my feet, leaned me against a small bookcase, while they cleared a path for us to leave the building. After they cleared a path, they helped me up onto a radiator, which was right next to where the south window would have been. I climbed out onto the remainder of the wall, which took me about six feet out above the plaza. Two men helped me down the wall and then walked me to the street corner, where I waited for an ambulance.

This is where a coworker, Sheila Schick (sp), found me. She had been on the ninth floor that morning and thankfully managed to escape the building without so much as a scratch. I asked her if she had seen my dad and she said: No, but do you realize what this building looks like? I asked her to stay with me and she did. After what seemed like a very short time later, emergency medical technicians placed me on a wooden stretcher and applied a neck brace. I had lacerations on my face, two large cuts on my back and numerous cuts and scrapes all over my body.

I was loaded onto a makeshift ambulance and we soon arrived at the hospital. I was wheeled into the emergency room, where it seemed several doctors and nurses were constantly tending to me. They X-rayed me, determined there were no broken bones and began to stitch me up. My right leg would eventually become one big bruise. I had small cuts all over my body and even my eyelids were bruised.

Meanwhile, my partner, Les Blackmore (sp), who worked at General Motors, had heard the explosion. Within 10 minutes he learned it had taken place at my building. He left work and drove toward downtown. After seeing the incredible destruction to the building, he was sure that

I was dead. He had to drive five to six miles away from downtown to find a working payphone. By the time he called my mother at her office, Sheila had notified her of my whereabouts and Les found me while I was still in the emergency room. I was discharged from the hospital the next morning.

Nine more days passed before we received the dreaded call from the Red Cross, asking us to go to the command center at the First Christian Church. We knew this to be the place where they would officially notify family members about their loved ones. It was on this call that we were warned that dad's death certificate would list the cause of death as homicide. We were told dad was identified by his wallet and his wedding ring. His body was in one piece, but not in very good shape. And so we decided that he should be cremated. At the time, I was still having a difficult time believing that any of this ever happened and the memorial service, with no casket or viewing, did not help.

I later learned that people on the north side of the building, like my father, in all likelihood – due to the force of the explosion – died a painless and instant death. I take some comfort in the belief that dad never knew what happened. As you can imagine, the grieving process has been slower than my physical healing. At the time, and even today, I actually consider myself lucky to have been wounded, as this provided me with something to focus on other than dad's death. It has been 15 years since this tragic crime and in that time, my body has completely recovered from its injuries. My heart and soul, however, remain forever scarred by this event, by the personal loss that it inflicted on me and my family, and on our American family.

A program is airing on public television this week called "When Families Grieve," in which Katie Couric and the Muppets explore the impact that death of a parent has on surviving children. While the program is targeted towards young children, much of the guidance applies to children of all ages, including the observation that children do not entirely get over the death of a parent. This is a grief that remains with them, with us. And that is okay. That is normal. It is certainly true in my case.

This does not mean that I live each day in a state of depression or incapacity. It simply means that there is no possible way to replace the loss of my dad or to make me miss him any less. In the 15 years since the bombing, I have moved from Oklahoma City. I relocated to Washington, D.C. in 2007 to work at HUD headquarters and Les and I enjoy our lives here very much. In coming together with all of you here today to remember this event, I am both comforted and honored to be joined by President Bill Clinton, whose stirring eulogy and compassionate presence have met so much both in the immediate aftermath of the bombing and in the years since.

On April 23, 1995, President Clinton attended a prayer service in Oklahoma City called "A Time of Healing." During his eulogy, he quoted from a letter sent to him in the wake of the bombing. It was from the widow of a man killed when Pan Am flight 103 exploded over Lockerbie, Scotland. I'd like to repeat the quote for you today, as these words characterize the journey I have been on these past 15 years.

She wrote: The anger you feel is valid, but you must not allow yourself to be consumed by it. The hurt you feel must not be allowed to turn into hate, but instead into the search for justice. The loss you feel must not paralyze your own lives. Instead, you must try to pay tribute to your loved ones by continuing to do all the things they have left undone, thus ensuring that they did not die in vain.

President Clinton also related how, at the suggestion of one of the surviving children from the Murrah Building's day-care center, he and Ms. Clinton had planted a dogwood tree on the White House lawn in memory of the bombing victims. That tree is likely in bloom today, a visible sign of the legacy of President Clinton's compassion for Oklahoma City and for the country.

He concluded his remarks with words that still ring true today: My fellow Americans, a tree takes a long time to grow and wounds take a long time to heal, but we must begin. Those who are lost now belong to God. Someday we will be with them, but until that happens their legacy must be our lives. I am and will always remain profoundly grateful to President Clinton for sharing these sentiments that have helped me cast this catastrophic loss into a healing perspective. And so it is my great honor and I am truly humbled and grateful for the privilege of introducing today's speaker, President Bill Clinton. (Applause.)

PRESIDENT WILLIAM J. CLINTON: Thank you, Michael, for your remarks and for your service to our country. I want to thank John Podesta and Al From for hosting this forum 15 years after Oklahoma City. I'd like to thank the panelists, Ron Brownstein, Congressman Kendrick Meek, former Congressman Mickey Edwards, Bradley Buckles, Mark Potok and Mike Waldman and Jamie Gorelick.

I must tell you, that's the first time I've seen that film and I have, as has been said, continuously gone back to Oklahoma City. I'm going back in just a few days. They're having a week-long observation of the 15th anniversary. Even now, it seems real to me as if it happened yesterday.

There was a story in The New York Times today by a reporter who's been positively – and I say that in a positive way – positively interested in this, drawing parallels to the time running up to Oklahoma City and a lot of the political discord that exists in our country today. That is a legitimate thing to do but I think it's important before we overdo that to put this in the context of what happened to try to understand what happened then and what it meant for America and what it should mean to all of us in the way that we exercise our citizenship.

Before the bombing occurred, there was a sort of fever in America in the early 1990s. First, it was a time, like now, of dramatic upheaval. A lot of old arrangements had changed. The things that anchored peoples' lives and gave a certainty to them had been unraveling. Some of them, by then, for 20 years.

Median family income began to stagnate and inequality in our country began to increase going back in the early '70s when we went off the gold standards and we developed a global financial system before we had a global economic system or any kind of a global compact or any

kind of adequate response to it. And there were huge numbers of Americans who were working longer hours for lower incomes; more and more families under enormous economic stress.

Meanwhile, the fabric of American life had been unraveling. There was a lot of violence in our cities. There was a rise of gang violence, in particular. There were people putting political spins on some of the things that the gangs were doing.

And the structure of the world we lived in where we knew who our friends and enemies were in the Cold War in a clear, bipolar world, itself, was coming to an end. Oklahoma City was a few years after the fall of the Berlin Wall. And there was no simple, bipolar world anymore. There were just a lot of fistfights around the world based on ethnic and religious and cultural and political and longstanding geographic grievances.

But it was hard to get a hold of anything. We moved from the Cold War to an interdependent world full of positive and negative forces. We moved from an industrialized economy that built the greatest middle class in history in the United States into an information age that opened vast new vistas and posed all kinds of new problems.

And there were more and more people who had a hard time figuring out where they fit in. More and more people who had a very difficult time living with confidence and optimism in the face of change. It is true that we see some of that today.

Since this country was born in reaction to abuse of power by government – if you remember, that's what the Boston Tea Party was about. It was about no taxation without representation. (Chuckles.) It was not about representation by people you didn't vote for and don't agree with but can vote out in the next election. (Laughter.)

And so a part of being an American has always been banging away at the government. When I was a young man in politics in Arkansas, any time the federal government did something we didn't agree with, we would have a standard saying that it was the only institution in America that can mess up a two-car parade. You know, everybody said stuff like that.

But in the decade of the '90s, and really beginning in the '80s, there was a run-up of much more serious demonization of the government and its employees and a whole effort to legitimize violence. It was something in my lifetime I had experienced first as a young Southerner growing up and people saying it was okay to use violence against government people who were trying to promote equal opportunity and racial integration.

And then for a brief period, and the only period in my lifetime, in the late '60s and early '70s, the idea of legitimate violence against the federal government and its employees seemed to be the province of the left, with the rise of the Weathermen and a lot of things that happened; many of you, or at least a few of you who are old enough will remember that.

But by the '80s, we began to have the rise of violence from the fringe I suppose you could call right-wing but it was basically uncritical hatred of the government and beliefs that all taxes were illegitimate.

In the 1980s, two of my personal friends were murdered in Arkansas. One was a sheriff who had been my county coordinator in a rural county in Northeast Arkansas because he was charged with working with the federal officials to lead the effort to capture a tax protestor named Gordon Kahl who had moved from Idaho, as I remember it, down to Northeast Arkansas and was extremely well-armed. And in the shootout, he killed my friend.

There was a young African-American state trooper who just by accident doing his job stopped a man in a big van who had an entire arsenal in the van and he did not want to be apprehended so he killed this young man, whom I knew.

Then as we moved into a new decade, we had – just not long before I took office, as I remember – the incident at Ruby Ridge. And then we had in '93 shortly after I took office the first World Trade Center bombing, which involved people from other countries but also some legal immigrants. And it was our first experience of international terror on our soil.

And then we had Waco, where people can argue back and forth about what the right thing to do was. I wrote about this rather extensively in my autobiography but there is no question that David Koresh believed he had the right to create an armed encampment and to use violence against the government and to do things in that encampment particularly with children that were illegal and unconscionable.

But the sense was that Waco and Ruby Ridge were somehow not the fault of those who were advocating violence and armed to the teeth and prepared to exercise it, but the government that was attempting to enforce the law. And so it became symbolic.

So this was all going on – a great uprooting in America; people feeling disoriented. I'll never forget a young woman who helped me understand this. She was a 17-year-old high school senior in New Hampshire when I ran for president. At that time, New Hampshire was one of the worst economies in the country. And she introduced me to her parents, and her father was telling me, he said, you know, I can't look into the face of my wife and children at dinner anymore because I feel like a failure.

This sense of loss, of incapacity, of impotence makes people vulnerable to the Siren songs of simple explanations – wanting the world to make sense again. And so there was this rising movement in the early '90s that was basically not just a carefully orchestrated plot by people of extreme right-wing views but one that fell into fertile soil because there were so many people for whom the world no longer made sense. They wanted a simple, clear explanation of what was an inherently complex mixed picture full of challenges that required not only changes in public policy but personal conduct and imagination about the world we were living in.

So demonizing the government and the people that worked for it sort of fit that. And there were a lot of people who were in the business back then of saying that the biggest threat to our liberty and the cause of our domestic economic problem was the federal government itself. And we have to realize that there were others who fueled this both because they agreed with it and because it was in their advantage to do so.

When I had become president – it's hard to remember this – there were only 50 sites on the World Wide Web. There've been more added than that since I've been talking. (Laughter.) But it exploded in my first term and it's continued to explode ever since. And among those who first saw its potential and made use of it were those who used the Internet to do all kinds of interesting things including share information on how to make bombs.

We didn't have blog sites back then so the instrument of carrying this forward was basically the right-wing radio talk show hosts and they understand clearly that emotion was more powerful than reason most of the time. And it happened that they got much bigger listenership and more advertisers and more commercial success if they kept people in the white heat. For 99 percent of them, it was just that: turn on the radio, listen to somebody say something you agree with, vent your anger, go on with your life and make the best of it. But it shaped the environment in which we were in.

I think another thing that needs to be reconciled or stated here that was a little different from the current situation is that when I took office, Americans were literally still divided over the issues that divided us in the 1960s and the '70s. We were still divided over how to view the civil rights revolution. We were still divided over how to view the Vietnam War. We were still divided over what the meaning and implications of the women's movement was. We were still fighting about abortion and all the other issues that flow out of it. And into that combustible mix came in the late '80s and the early '90s a fresh debate over gay rights and what that meant.

But a lot of these battles that played out that I think were symbolized by me and Speaker Gingrich but involved millions of us were basically an attempt finally to reconcile where we were going forward on all these issues.

I got a very moving letter from Robert McNamara right before I was inaugurated. And all of you know, probably even the young people here, he was President Kennedy and President Johnson's secretary of defense, a big proponent of the Vietnam War, who later changed his mind and spent the rest of his life kind of apologizing for it and trying to figure out where we should go. And he wrote me a letter that said, the Vietnam War ended with my election.

For some people, it did. I have on my wall in Harlem today a big framed case that I had on my wall in the White House of the battle medals of Vietnam veterans who gave them to me at various stops in the 1992 campaign to say that they supported the fact that I had opposed the war and they would support me.

But the war did not end with my election. It entered a new phase. And so a lot of this current uprooting was overlaid by the unresolved issues of the '60s and '70s and aggravated by the new ways people had of communicating both through the radio talk shows and the insipient Internet networks.

So in the two years after the World Trade Center bombing and before Oklahoma City, we had worked hard and largely on a bipartisan basis to begin America's effort to protect ourselves against terrorism better. And there were a number of things that were done.

And one thing that I thought had been done we learned on 9/11 wasn't. I issued an executive order requiring the FBI and the CIA to exchange senior executives and to cooperate more closely and to share information. And I didn't really know since, believe it or not, before 9/11, the president was not supposed to know what was going on in the FBI and was not supposed to talk to anybody and was supposed to stay 90 miles away from it that both agencies had essentially honored that order in the breach. They had nominally transferred people but there wasn't much cooperation, all of which is reported in the 9/11 Commission.

But a lot of other things had happened. Law enforcement officers had already succeeded in returning several terrorists to the U.S. for trial and prevented attacks at the U.N., the Holland and Lincoln Tunnels in New York and planes flying out of the Philippines to the West Coast.

In an attempt to continue this, I had sent legislation to Congress a couple of months before Oklahoma City to ask them to further strengthen our capacity to prevent and counter terrorist attacks. And it was making its way through.

Meanwhile, a young man none of us knew then named Timothy McVeigh had already made up his mind to take a different course. And on the anniversary of Waco, which has become symbolic to all of the people who see government as the problem, he drove his fertilizer truck which had been turned into a giant chemical weapon up next to the Murrah building, exploded it, and the concussive effect brought a building down.

People had just come to work for the day, and you've already heard an account of what happened but it's worth noting again that 168 innocent people were killed, people who were mothers and fathers, sons and daughters, good neighbors, good citizens.

One of them was a Secret Service agent named Al Whicher I still think about all the time. He had been on my presidential security detail. And he wanted to take his family to Oklahoma City because he thought it would be a wonderful place to raise his children out of the hustle and bustle of Washington. A safe haven of almost idyllic upbringing in America.

Three hundred buildings were damaged, 30 children lost both parents, 170 children lost one and 19 children themselves were killed. In the immediate response, there was an amazing set of acts of humanity and heroism.

A man I later recognized at the State of the Union, Richard Dean, was a 49-year-old Vietnam veteran who worked for the Social Security Administration. He was there when the bombing occurred but he got out and then he went back into that building where things were continuously falling. I think you fell three or four floors and it may have saved your life, but it did. Richard Dean went back in three times to save the lives of three women.

First-responders rushed to the scene to try to make sure nobody in the immediate area got hurt. The fire rescuers dug through the rubble to pull out survivors for days. I sent a crisis management team under the FBI and then declared Oklahoma a disaster and sent James Lee Witt of FEMA to assist, and you saw that in the film.

Then, firefighters and other people from all over America just began showing up to help. People came from New York to help. I'll never forget after 9/11 and we lost some firefighters here. I was at one of the memorial services one day and a guy came up to me from Oklahoma City, saying, I came here because they were there for us.

America stood with the people of Oklahoma City. And maybe the most important letter I got of all of the letters I got was the one that you quoted because the whole issue then was how will the city, how will the state, how will the victims and their families respond? A heartbroken nation was looking at them and pulling for them and wondering what they would do.

And essentially, the Pan Am 103 widow told them it was okay to keep on living, that the only way they could honor their lost loved ones was to reclaim life and do with life what their lost loved ones would have done. It was better than anything I could have said and she had more credibility in saying it. And I think it helped not only the victims and their families, it also helped everybody else.

So after Oklahoma City, what happened? Well, at one level, we did rational things. I went back to Congress and asked them to expedite the legislation I had sent them. Bob Dole was great. We had a real sense of bipartisan mission. We disagreed about whether chemical taggant should be put in fertilizer to chase potential victims, and it turns out that it – as a scientific matter, it's hard to do anyway. And we didn't abolish all our disagreements, but basically, there was this sense that, well, this was something we had to do together.

And that's exactly what happened. I proposed measures to increase law enforcement officials dedicated solely to fighting terror, a domesticated terrorism center to coordinate efforts. I asked for the approval of military experts, who, under the posse Comitatus law, were prohibited from involvement in domestic law enforcement, to go out and help with threats and incidents if they involved chemical, biological or nuclear weapons.

We wanted law enforcement to have greater access to financial records to track money trails, and to have the same rules that applied to organized crime figures for electronic surveillance apply to terrorists and those selling explosives for use in a terrorist incident, and for attacking members of the uniformed services or federal workers. The Congress passed this bill in seven weeks with strong bipartisan support.

And I can tell you that, while we had 9/11 and we've had a lot of problems since, and we continue to work on this, that legislation helped, in my administration and in President Bush's administration, to thwart several serious terrorist attacks. And to this day, the most important defense we have against terrorist attacks at home is the defense provided every day, ironically after Oklahoma City, by ordinary federal employees who are not known to anybody, who chase the money and chase the suspects, and try to scope out the facts.

I think it's also important to note that Oklahoma City changed the country in other ways. We didn't stop our political fights. You remember, I kept fighting when Newt Gingrich and the

Republicans shut the government down twice at the end of 1995. You know, everything didn't turn into sweetness and light. But as tough as it was, it was different.

I'll tell you an interesting, entirely personal story. You saw Gov. Keating and his wife talking there. Frank Keating is a very conservative Republican who, by coincidence of history, was the president of the College of Arts and Sciences student body at Georgetown when I was a student there, in student government. And believe it or not, we had the School of Foreign Service and the language school and the business school had an entirely separate student government.

We had been fighting for 30 years – (laughter) – over issues when that Oklahoma bombing happened. I know Mayor Norrick and had a great relationship with him. But I always liked Frank Keating because I always knew that he was honest, straightforward and believed in his positions just as strongly as I did in mine. But I thought it was – it's just something you should know. We had been involved in political conflict literally since the early 1960s – when Oklahoma City happened – since we were college students.

And I cannot say enough about the way he and his wife handled themselves, the way the mayor of Oklahoma City did, the way the people in the community and the state did. They were great. It changed something in us. We sort of got over the idea that our differences justified our demonization of one another. And I think that's really important. A couple of weeks after the legislation passed, I went to give a commencement speech at Michigan State.

And I thought it was very important, because Michigan had been the site of the rise of a lot of the militia groups – people who were drilling with weapons and who had various strategies about what it is they were supposed to do. Some of them, plainly, were sanctioning terror with their words – or violence, illegal violence – but to be fair, a lot of the militia group leaders also condemned what was done at Oklahoma City and said they wanted no part of that; it was wrong; it was illegal; the perpetrators should be punished.

So I went to Michigan State and spoke to both the students and the militia members. I thanked those who had opposed the bombing. And then I took on those who hadn't, and explained that their actions and their words had consequences for people like Timothy McVeigh. By then, it had come out that he'd had a very troubled life, that he was a profoundly alienated person, and that he was highly vulnerable to the suggestions and implications of the most militant rhetoric at the time.

Lots of other things happened after Oklahoma City. We had to put more barriers around federal buildings. Against my strong desires, I gave in to the unassailable logic that we had to close Pennsylvania Avenue, because the White House is a very old building and I saw the schematics of what would happen if Timothy McVeigh's fertilizer bomb in a pickup truck were just parked in front of the White House, which is much – you know, and that street, Pennsylvania Avenue, is farther away from the White House by a good stretch than his bomb was from the Murrah Building.

And still, because of the construction, they said it would blast out the windows in the old building and collapse the West Wing, with potentially calamitous consequences for the government. And so we restricted access to Pennsylvania Avenue. But most of the consequences of this, I think we cannot fully appreciate. I think, first of all, Oklahoma City impacted young people profoundly. Hillary and I actually did our weekly radio address together one day, and we had young people who were profoundly troubled because they'd never seen kids killed before.

And there was an enormous effort by parents, by school leaders, by religious leaders, by others to help them come to grips with this, and asked what they should do with it, and questioned what their responsibilities to one another were. These young people are now young adults. And it's very interesting how they've turned out – this generation. First of all, they're remarkable for their commitment across all party and philosophical lines to community service – to non-governmental service. They also vote in higher percentages than people just a little older than them did at their age.

They work in elections in higher percentages than people just a little older than them did at their age. They're more likely to volunteer for AmeriCorps, Teach for America, their local religious institution, the United Way or for some other purpose. It's just part of their DNA. And I think that is also extremely, extremely interesting. I know that what happened at Oklahoma City and how it affected them when they were young in their conversations with their mentors and parents, is part of the reason why. Most of them are probably not at all conscious of it. But it changed their psychology, their orientation to the rest of the world.

So what are we supposed to make of this? What are the lessons of this for today? First, we know that living with confidence in a time of change and adversity is difficult. And we are living in a time of change and adversity. So we have to be more sensitive. Before the economic crisis, which began on September the 15th, 2008, with the failure of Lehman Brothers, after inflation, median income in America was – for families – was \$2,000 a year lower than it was when I left office.

Ninety percent of the gains of the last decade went to only 10 percent of us, 43 percent to 1 percent of us. That's profoundly disorienting. Once again, where more people were working harder for less. And now, we have the highest percentage of Americans who've been out of work for six months or more we've had in decades. This is disorienting. And people are looking for anchors to make life simple and understandable, and adjustable again, and sometimes with the idea that they need to go back to an idyllic time that never existed.

That's a big part of the explanation for this anti-immigration law that Arizona just passed; or the idea that we ought to bring back Confederate month in Virginia without talking anything about slavery; or the idea that you ought to be able to pack a loaded six-gun into a Starbucks and order a cowboy latte. (Laughter.) All of this is really about, where do you feel oriented walking through the day – how to feel secure in the face of insecurity; how to feel ordered in the face of chaos.

I'm not defending the specifics of any of these; I'm just telling you that's what's going on. There is an enormous psychological disorientation today. And that is also the way it was in the early '90s. And we must not forget that when that happens, we have to pay special care both to have a raging debate, because we need to figure out what to do about this, and to do it in a way that nurtures the best in us, not the worst.

The second lesson we have to learn is that we can't let the debate veer so far into hatred that we lose focus of our common humanity. It's really important. We can't ever fudge the fact that there is a basic line dividing criticism from violence or its advocacy. And the closer you get to the line, and the more responsibility you have, the more you have to think about the echo chamber in which your words resonate.

Look, criticism is part of the lifeblood of democracy. Nobody's right all the time. But Oklahoma City proved once again that, beyond the law, there is no freedom. And there is a difference between criticizing a policy or a politician and demonizing the government that guarantees our freedom and the public servants who implement them. And the more prominence you have in politics or media or some other pillar of life, the more you have to keep that in mind.

I acknowledged that in my political career, I had, on more than one occasion, in the face of a government policy I disagreed with or a practice I thought was insensitive, referred in a disparaging way generally to federal bureaucrats, as if all of them were arrogant or insensitive or unresponsive. And I have never done it again. You could not read the stories of the lives of the people who perished at Oklahoma City and not respond in that way.

Do some people still abuse their power? Yes. Do some of them treat their customers and the people that pay their way in an inappropriate way? Yes. Does Congress sometimes do things that don't work and don't make sense, or the president? Absolutely. But our criticism should be aimed with a rifle, or preferably, with a B.B. gun, in a way designed not to demonize the institution of the government or the people who work for it. And I, too, learned that from Oklahoma City.

And I think it's worth repeating again today. As we live in another highly contentious, partisan and uncertain time. Now, I have to tell you that I had a great time fighting with Newt Gingrich and Tom Delay and Dick Armey. I loved seeing that picture of him in the Post today – the outline – Armey with his cowboy hat on. I remember when he called Hillary a socialist. (Laughter.) I remember when Newt Gingrich, shortly after becoming speaker-elect, said that Hillary and I were the enemies of normal Americans. It didn't bother me a bit. I was glad to get in and mix it up.

But what we learned from Oklahoma City is not that we should gag each other or that we should reduce our passion for the positions we hold, but that the words we use really do matter because there are – there's this vast echo chamber. And they go across space and they fall on the serious and the delirious, alike; they fall on the connected and the unhinged, alike. And I am not trying to muzzle anybody.

But one of the things that the conservatives have always brought to the table in America is a reminder that no law can replace personal responsibility. And the more power you have, and the more influence you have, the more responsibility you have. Look, I'm glad they're fighting over health care and everything else; let them have at it.

But I think that all you have to do is read the paper every day to see how many people there are who are deeply, deeply troubled. We know, now, that there are people involved in groups – these “hatriot” groups, the Oath Keepers, the Three Percenters, the others – 99 percent of them will never do anything they shouldn't do. But there are people who advocate violence and anticipate violence.

One of these guys the other day said that all politics is just a prelude to the ultimate and inevitable civil war. You know, I'm a southerner. I know what happened. We were still paying for that 100 years later when I was a kid growing up, in ways large and small. It doesn't take many people to take something like that seriously. So I don't want the whole story of this retrospective just to be about this, and trying to turn everything into politics.

And I guess that's naïve, me being in Washington and all. I still have some memory of it. (Laughter.) But I think that the point I'm trying to make is, I like the debate. This “tea party” movement can be a healthy thing if they're making us justify every penny of taxes we raised and every dollar of public money we spend. And they say they're for limited government and a balanced budget; when I left office, we had the smallest workforce since Eisenhower and we had four surpluses for the first time in 70 years.

And if the people they say should be elected had not gotten elected, we would be out of debt in just a couple of years for the first time since the 1830s. But when you get mad, sometimes you wind up producing exactly the reverse result of what you say you are for. Think about your own life; forget about politics. Every time you've made an important decision in some non-political – totally personal – way, when you were angry or frustrated or afraid, there's about a 75 percent chance you made a mistake. Isn't that right?

You know – and the older you get, the more you'll see that. It's about a – you know, doing things when you are mad is, by and large, a prescription for error. So the only thing I'm saying is, have at it, go fight, go do whatever you want. And you don't have to be nice, and you can be harsh. But you've got to be very careful not to advocate violence or cross the line.

Yes, the Boston Tea Party involved the seizure of tea in a ship because it was taxation without representation, because even the Massachusetts Bay Colony, which had been largely self-governing, had it stripped from them. This is about – this fight is about taxation by duly, honestly elected representatives that you don't happen to agree with, that you can vote out at the next election, and two years after that, and two years after that, and two years after that. That's very different. This whole thing goes right back to our country's beginnings.

When George Washington served his two terms and went home to Mount Vernon to retire and John Adams became president, he was called out of retirement one time. You know what it was? He was called out of retirement to command the Armed Forces sent to

Pennsylvania to put down the Whiskey Rebellion, because good Americans who had fought for this country crossed the line from advocating a different policy and opposing the current one to taking the law into their own hands in a violent manner.

Once in a while, over the last 200 years, we've crossed the line again. But by and large, that bright line has held, and that's why this is the longest-lasting democracy in human history. That's why there is so much free speech. That's why people can organize their groups. It may seem like fringe groups that advocate whatever the livin' Sam Hill they want to advocate. That's why. But we have to keep the bright line alive. So that's the second lesson.

The third lesson is, it's always a mistake to bet against America. What happened at Oklahoma City – something that horrible, which could have just made all those people so full of anger and hatred. And you saw that monument on that gentle slope and that beautiful pool, with those 168 empty chairs, and how they responded and how we did. And you heard the former governor, George Nigh, saying nobody remembered who was a Republican, who was a Democrat. It's always a mistake to bet against America. We tend to figure this stuff out.

And we zig and we zag, and we go up and we go down, but look, we still have a growing population with a very healthy fertility rate, which is a good thing in the 21st century. We can accommodate more. Immigrants still want to come here, notwithstanding the legislation in Arizona. It's more true today than it was when President Kennedy said at the Berlin Wall, "Freedom has many difficulties and our democracy is far from perfect, but we never had to put up a wall to keep our people in." And we can put up all the walls we want to try to keep them out, but as long as we are free and open and full of promise, people will want to come.

So by all means, keep fighting; by all means, keep arguing. But remember, words have consequences as much as actions do, and what we advocate, commensurate with our position and responsibility, we have to take responsibility for. We owe that to Oklahoma City. We owe it to keep on fighting, keep on arguing. They didn't vote for me in Oklahoma in 1996. It was still a Republican state.

But I loved them anyway, and I will till the day I die, because when this country was flat on its back mourning their loss, they rallied around the employees of the national government and they rallied around the human beings who had lost everything, and they rallied around the elemental principle that what we have in common is more important than our differences. And that's why our Constitution makes our freedoms last – because of that bright line. Thank you very much. (Applause.)

MS. : Ladies and gentlemen, we will continue the program in a few moments. Please remain seated.

RON BROWNSTEIN: We have our closing act, our panel discussion. I am Ron Brownstein, a political director for Atlantic Media and a columnist for National Journal Magazine. And John Podesta, earlier, gave you introductions so I'll try to just quickly run through our panel.

On my right, I guess your stage left, Mike Waldman, who is the executive director of the Brennan Center for Justice at the NYU School of Law. He was director of speechwriting for President Clinton from 1995 to 1999 and he's written several books, including an excellent memoir of his time in the White House called "POTUS Speaks."

On the other side of him, Mark Potok is director of the intelligence projects at the Southern Poverty Law Center, which is one of the premier – Congressman, there you are – at the Southern Poverty Law Center, which is one of the premier groups tracking extremist groups. Before that, he spent almost 20 years as a journalist – he's a reformed journalist – at publications from USA Today to the Dallas Times Herald and the Miami Herald. He had covered the siege in Waco, the Oklahoma City bombing and the trial of Timothy McVeigh.

Next to him, Congressman Kendrick Meek from Florida, currently a candidate for the U.S. Senate, member of the House Ways and Means Committee, formerly on the Homeland Security Committee and served, before any of this, as a captain in the Florida Highway Patrol – so has some direct experience.

Mickey Edwards represented Oklahoma City in Congress for 16 years, serving on the House Budget and Appropriations Committees and as a member of the House Republican leadership in another era. After leaving Congress, he taught, of course, for many years at the Kennedy School of Government at Harvard and has been affiliated as well with the Program on Law and Public Affairs at Princeton University.

On his other side, Jamie Gorelick, former general counsel at the Defense Department, Deputy Attorney General under President Clinton and now a partner at WilmerHale where she chairs the Defense, National Security and Government Contracts Practice Group. Finally, Brad Buckles was the director of ATF, Bureau of Alcohol, Tobacco and Firearms, 1999-2004; earlier, served as chief counsel, then deputy director – currently executive vice president at the Recording Industry Association of America, working on issues relating to intellectual property and music piracy.

So with those introductions, let me start, if I could, Jamie, with you – and Bradley, if you don't mind, also tackling this first question. I want to talk a little bit – obviously, we're going to talk about the implications of those events for what's going on today but let's start by trying to understand those events themselves.

As President Clinton said, Tim McVeigh was a troubled individual. But there was also a very contentious time. As you sort out the causes of something like an event of this magnitude, is it fundamentally rooted in a deeply alienated individual or is there a social context, a political context that sets it in motion? And how do you, kind of, apportion between the two in determining this kind of event?

JAMIE GORELICK: Well, as I think, Ron, the president said, I think, quite aptly, you take a troubled individual and you put him in the context of a movement that is disparaging of and dehumanizing of other people and it becomes permissible, indeed, in the mind of such a person, heroic, to kill those people. I mean the notion that you could so demonize federal

workers and indeed, their children, that you would be unremorseful in blowing them up requires both.

We had, at the time, a really rabid movement that demonized federal employees, that viewed Waco, in particular, as an assault by the federal government on freedom and a certain ideology. And you take an unhinged person like Tim McVeigh and you get Oklahoma City. I mean you could not have sat at the Justice Department – and I came into the Justice Department in 1994, so after Waco – but you could not have sat there and read the letters just that Janet Reno got and not have been worried about what was out there in the water. And Tim McVeigh drank that water.

BRADLEY BUCKLES: One of the things that we had seen, even moving into this period, is there have always been unhinged individuals with different motives for taking this action. I mean, before there was Timothy McVeigh, we had the Unabomber. We had Mr. Moody, who sent a pipe bomb to a federal circuit court judge because he was mad at the government and the court system.

But what we saw developing during this period was really moving beyond some kind of personal motive and personal agenda, to latching on to something that was a bit more frightening and providing kind of a pre-made agenda for people who were otherwise searching for a way to assert power or control over their lives. And there was a frightening number of people who were moving into this area, both in the rhetoric of talking about committing violence and sometimes not doing it, but talking it, and then those around them, like Timothy McVeigh, that took it the one step further.

MR. BROWNSTEIN: Yeah, so you're saying that really the distinction here was not just, really not just a lone individual with a kind of idiosyncratic grievance. It was someone attaching to something larger.

MR. BUCKLES: Right.

MR. BROWNSTEIN: That was pulling them in this direction. Mark, thoughts on that?

MS. GORELICK: If I could say, I mean there was what we called a sort of gun-show culture. There was a culture where the kind of literature that Tim McVeigh read and carried around with him was passed around, discussed and embraced.

MR. BROWNSTEIN: Mark, any thoughts on that? That kind of – do you agree that that is a kind of distinction? And to what extent is it perhaps relevant now?

MARK POTOK: Well, I think it's very relevant now. I mean, I think it's absolutely true that many of these people are mentally ill or really disturbed by something that relates to their personal life, but, you know, you look at a guy like Joseph Stack, the man who flew the airplane into the IRS building in Austin. You know, I think if you read his kind of final testament, his last document, he's mentally ill. I mean, he hated – he was angry at a lot of things. He was angry at unions, at corporations, at executives who got bonuses. He was angry at his ex-wives.

But, you know, this guy was out there and he came into contact early on, about '87, with a kind of radical tax protest movement – so part of the militia movement, the patriot movement – and started to focus his ideas. So I think, ultimately, you know, it's impossible to say. Would he have killed somebody else? But ultimately, his anger gets focused on the government and very specifically the IRS and, as a result, people die.

MR. BROWNSTEIN: Yeah. Congressman Edwards?

MICKEY EDWARDS: You know, I think that what's happened is that, in many different areas, people have lost sight of the way to have reasonable, intelligent discussion about differences. And that's not just with the crazies who do things like this. But one of the great dangers in a society like ours, which is so large, so diverse, and where issues are so complex, is the degree of certitude that people have: so certain that they're correct and that, therefore, if they're correct, people who disagree are just simply wrong and must be corrected.

And we find, whether it's the degree of partisanship that now exists in our political environment or it's the absolute conviction, whether you're on the left or the right, you know, that you're correct and the other people have just lost their minds – you know, that leads to things like this. People can't calibrate in the way they need to.

MR. BROWNSTEIN: Yeah. Mike?

MICHAEL WALDMAN: I think one difference between now and 1995, which the president alluded to, is that the distribution channels for what were fringe or extreme ideas or organizing have exploded – in the sense that there's always been the Turner Diaries, or the John Birch Society, or the militia movement, but now, as was said, the Internet has exploded.

There are more radio channels. There's shouted opinions nonstop on cable TV. And so the distinction between being disaffected and alienated, having an institution to be part of that's dangerous, and being in a wider soup of overheated talk, is much harder to see. And that seems to me to be something that is new and scary and we haven't really come to grips with it.

MR. POTOK: Might I add something about the views?

MR. BROWNSTEIN: Yeah, sure.

MR. POTOK: You know, it seems to me also that it's absolutely true that, back in the '90s, you had talk radio. You had the beginnings of the Internet and, you know, I absolutely agree that those have had their importance. But, you know, now we see it leaking into a much larger kind of stage, so that, you know, we have politicians who are willing to say, "the president is setting up death panels."

We have politicians who are willing to say, "criminal, illegal aliens" – quote, unquote, without any justification whatsoever – "murder or drunkenly run over and kill 25 people a day."

You know, we have people willing to say FEMA – you know, on Fox News or wherever it may be – that “FEMA may be running secret concentration camps.”

So we didn't see that. We didn't have people who had audiences of three million people saying those kinds of things, with absolutely no justification whatsoever, and they do exactly what the president talked about. They demonize particular groups of individuals: IRS workers, federal workers, Mexican immigrants. And, you know, it all seems to end with corpses.

MR. BROWNSTEIN: Let me come back to the theme, which is the relationship between political discourse and this kind of extremist behavior. But Congressman, let me bring you in because the president said – and maybe what Mark just said is irrelevant to this question – President Clinton said that Oklahoma City did change the political climate, in the sense of giving people more of a sense of the limits of how far they should go.

If that was true, has that evaporated? Has that worn off over time? Do you feel that people still feel a restraint, or do you feel that there is simply kind of this sense of almost anything goes in making charges against the other side?

REP. KENDRICK MEEK (D-FL): Well, I think now, with social networking and individuals being able to sit in their private homes and get their views out to the world, I think it's even now more open than it's ever been before. I think 15 years ago did not have the effect that 9/11 had, as relates to the politics of, in a way, policing that kind of activity and identifying it early on. There's so much of it. You know, you can find it on a Google search in a matter of seconds.

I want to agree with Mark by saying that when you have people of influence and power, and especially political power, that validates something that can be counterproductive to a safe environment for all of us. For instance, in the recent health-care debate, I saw Sergeant-at-Arms Livingston, who had this distraught look on his face. And I asked one of the gentlemen that was working with him, you know, in his office. I said, is the sergeant okay? He said: Well, the sergeant's just trying to stop the members from bringing individuals into the Capitol that should not be in the Capitol.

So when you look at it from that standpoint, and the egging on of, it's okay, take it to the next notch, it could very well bring about a political environment that can be quite unsafe. And I can tell you, with the upcoming elections, more of that is becoming more evident, that someone needs to act out – either from the left or the right – to show the movement that it's worth the fight.

MR. BROWNSTEIN: Let's go directly to the question, which is sort of looming over this, then: We have certainly seen our share of unsettling incidents in recent months. You mentioned the plane crash into the IRS office in Texas, the arrest of the militia members in Michigan, the extremist shooting police offices in Pittsburgh.

There were some reports, at least early in the administration, of a spike in threats against the president, that President Clinton alluded to. You know, kind of the battle over Starbucks and

so forth. When you look across the landscape, how does the threat of domestic terrorism now compare to what you saw in the 1990s? Do you want to start, maybe, Jamie?

MS. GORELICK: Well, let me first say this. I think that what the president observed, which is that words matter, is in part an answer to your question of did Oklahoma City change our body politic. It did for a while. And this is what you see in movements. After Oklahoma City, we asked the FBI to approach the different militias that were operating all over the country. And we said: Look, you can speak. You can exercise with your guns in the woods. But you can't kill people.

MR. POTOK: Seems reasonable. (Laughter.)

MS. GORELICK: Well, you know, when the Montana Freemen holed themselves up and the FBI surrounded their compound, they called out to the militias to come. And no one showed up. After a spate of abortion clinic bombings, there was one outside of Boston. And we went to the church and we said: You're preaching against abortion, which is fine. But could you also say that it is not proper to take a life in advancing that position? And they did.

And there was never another one in that time period. So I see these things as waves and I think we're having another wave right now. It feels that way to me and I'm hoping that there is something short of a catharsis – which, in the case of Oklahoma City and the abortion clinic bombings and others, has been death – that will stop that pendulum swing.

MR. BROWNSTEIN: Maybe everybody could – maybe, starting with Mike and coming this way, respond to what Jamie Gorelick just said. Are we in the midst of another wave, of this sort of threat? Or too early to say?

MR. WALDMAN: I don't feel I have the law-enforcement expertise to know, in a really concrete sense. The vehemence towards government, as an entity, is as strong as I've seen it since the early 1990s. I think that there are dislocations, even greater than the ones the president talked about, that are rumbling and rattling through the political system, that people in Washington, people in New York, haven't even focused on.

The president mentioned September 15 as the date Lehman Brothers fell. I think that for tens of millions of Americans, what happened then and the response, TARP, which may have been very necessary, was utterly startling, called into question their faith in the government and gave fuel and legitimacy to things that seemed extreme and irrational. I think that until we understand how the economic crisis is being felt in people's lives, we can't understand the vehemence with which people are talking about government and politics. So it certainly, atmospherically, feels very troubling.

MR. BROWNSTEIN: Mark?

MR. POTOK: I would say the same thing. I don't think there's any doubt that we're in another period very much like the run-up to Oklahoma City. You know, I agree very much with what you said, Jamie, about the idea that these things come in waves. You know, we're in the

middle of a kind of backlash. You know, we've done a recent study that shows an absolutely enormous growth in the antigovernment patriot groups and militias and so on.

On one level, maybe they're trying to be a little more moderate. When the Hutaree militiamen were arrested in this incredible plot in Michigan – planning to murder several hundred police officers and so on – a lot of militias rushed to say, that's not us. We're not like that, and so on. But, you know, the reality is that most of these groups do have a set of beliefs that leads a small minority to violence. Right?

I mean, they do really believe the government is getting ready to impose martial law, that those who resist will be thrown into concentration camps, which may or may not be run by FEMA, and ultimately, you know, the United States will be forced into a sort of Bolshevik hell – a one world government and so on.

And you know, I think the president was absolutely right in what he said about the causes and the kinds of dislocations of the time, back in the '90s. Well, you know, now we're going through a very similar period and I think the big drivers, a lot of them have been mentioned already. But one of the big things that's not much spoken about is the racially changing demographics of our country. I mean, most of the people I cover as a matter of day-to-day work have imprinted on their brains the year 2050, the year the Census Bureau says whites will lose their majority.

You know, this is something that's real and happening and it's changing political power, kind of, arrangements in state after state after state. So there's, I think, a lot of trouble, a lot of feeling about that. I think Jimmy Carter was pretty much right on when he said, behind a lot of this angst and anger and fear and frustration lies race.

The economy seems to have become, to me, just as big a driver. I don't think there's any question about it. I mean, there's a fury out there and it's connected to the idea not only of, I'm unemployed and my family's in trouble, but those sons of bitches in the banking industry and the auto industry – you know, all those executives walk off with bankrolls in their pocket, you know, while we get nothing.

And the third piece of it – if I can go on for a second longer – is the role, if think, of certain politicians and commentators who are, essentially, in my view, pandering for votes and ratings. And you know, it just stokes the fire and I don't see anything that's moving us towards any kind of calming down. You know, it's a difficult genie to get back into the bottle.

MR. BROWNSTEIN: Another wave, Congressman Meek?

REP. MEEK: Well, I mean, we also have to understand that this is America and individuals have a right to free speech and access. It's a very difficult thing to deal with, but the warning signs started very early on in the last couple of years, after the last election. There was some intensity in the country, especially online and also verbally. I mean, you watch a 24-hour news cycle and you see individuals that are very, very – going over the top as relates to their views, versus the average American.

You can see something there that is not just, I'm upset because there was a bill that passed, or that I got a letter from the IRS reminding me to pay my taxes. It's something else. And I do believe that leadership is going to have a lot to do with how we avoid future incidents. I think responsibility – I always say leadership brings about responsibility and you have to be more responsible – so I call on leaders.

They may be local leaders, they may be religious leaders – I mean, local or federally or state elected leaders, or religious leaders, getting out in front of what they may believe – it may be a movement that may be counterproductive to us all, as Americans – and saying it's wrong. And we have that and a lot of that. When we created the homeland security committee in Congress that came out of the 9/11 recommendations, it was a bipartisan commission, but it did talk about the country and the government being focused on the homeland.

It was easy: Oklahoma, homegrown terrorism. 9/11, them versus us. So it gave the political okay to start looking at these issues and having debates about PATRIOT Act, privacy, how far we go, how much we're protected. So we're still having that discourse. And I do believe that when we get out of the business of reacting to incidents and trying to prevent it from happening in the first place, I think we'll see a more safe society here in our own country, that everyone believes should be safe – but then everyone believes that individuals should have their right to free speech.

MR. BROWNSTEIN: Congressman Edwards, we're obviously in the midst of intense, passionate political debate, but do you also think that this is bleeding over into something more dangerous.

REP. MEEK: Well, there've been indications.

MR. BROWNSTEIN: No, I'm sorry, it's a question for Congressman Edwards.

(Cross talk.)

MR. EDWARDS: You know, I don't see this is a new wave in the same sense because I see it as something very different. Something very different has come into the process. There was a time when, had I been fortunate enough to serve in the House at the same time Kendrick was there, I would have certainly disagreed with him on some things and I would have, you know, respectfully disagreed with the gentleman from Florida and then we probably would have gone to lunch together and had a friendship.

But things changed dramatically not just on the outside but on the inside. A large part of it, during the Gingrich years and the idea that – see, when I first, when I ran for Congress, you know, I advocated my points of view. I advocated my party and then I was sworn in. And I stepped across this magic line and I became, you know, not this advocate and this zealot, but I became, you know, a member of the government. And I became, you know, a congressman with real serious obligations and responsibilities.

And then later in the Gingrich years it became, you ran for office to be antigovernment. You ran for office to be anti-Congress. And so we see, now, not just the people out in the community exercising their upset about whatever policies are being promoted, but you see members of Congress on the balconies, you know, egging on demonstrators outside.

You see the rhetoric on the House floor. You know, Joe Wilson: “You lie.” Or Alan Grayson: “Republicans just want people to die.” And it has become an abdication of responsibility by the people on the inside that is helping to fuel and to stir up this anger on the outside. And that’s something very different.

MR. BROWNSTEIN: And from what you’re saying, even more ominous than what was the case in the early ’90s?

MR. EDWARDS: Yeah. I think it’s very, very ominous because the people who – the Tim McVeighs of the world, you know, they were dangerous, but they were unusual. They were not part of the real mainstream. Now you have, you know, prominent members of the United States Congress stirring up all of this kind of thing. And that’s a different dimension altogether. And the danger that it can pose could be to create a lot of Timothy McVeighs. That’s what worries me.

MR. BROWNSTEIN: Brad? Do you see parallels?

MR. BUCKLES: Well, I do see parallels. And the troubling this is not the political rhetoric and the speech so much as that it only has to touch one person. Timothy McVeigh was one person. He had a few people around him, who assisted him on this, but it was really his driving force. And the most difficult thing, from a law-enforcement point of view, is trying to find that lone wolf, whether it’s Timothy McVeigh or Eric Rudolph, a few years later, with the series of bombings that he perpetrated. Not as deadly, but nonetheless terrifying to people.

And this kind of rhetoric, all it has to do is touch one or two people who are unhinged and we can see this same kind of thing blow up again. As I said, we’ve had people who had bombs before and other agendas. But the frightening thing is to give people a platform that seems to legitimize what they’re doing. And they can feel they are patriots in causing disasters and killing people, and not criminals.

MR. BROWNSTEIN: All, you know, all a pretty sobering kind of assessment. I just want to, kind of, dot the I, here. Are all of you, or are any of you, or all of you concerned that we are heading toward a serious act of violence in the next few years, potentially – or that there will be serious attempts at large-scale domestic terrorism as a result of the climate that you’re describing? Do you want to?

MR. BUCKLES: Well, I might just start. I think there are a few things going in our favor these days. You know, Timothy McVeigh’s weapon was a massive, 5,000-pound truck bomb made from fertilizer and racing fuel that he used to concoct this. A lot of these things are going to be much more difficult for someone to acquire these days, without raising the suspicion of law enforcement. There are systems in place for learning about the unusual purchases of this

kind of material. There are more controls on the purchase and safe storage of legitimate explosives, so that they're less likely to be stolen than they were before.

So I think it would be much more difficult for the Timothy McVeigh of today to successfully pull off trying to put a bomb of that size together. What remains relatively simple is, we know here in D.C., from even the D.C. sniper incident, that two people in a beat-up car and a rifle can cause a great deal of terror in our cities as well. So whether it's an Oklahoma City bombing of that catastrophe, or something less catastrophic but just as terrorizing, I think those potentials certainly are there.

MS. GORELICK: I'm not in a position to know whether we're likely to have an attack. I was merely saying that I didn't like the sounds that I was hearing in the atmosphere. And as Brad points out, the tools of mayhem and destruction are many. You don't need a large truck full of fertilizer to create either real damage or fear.

MR. BROWNSTEIN: How about the tools of law enforcement? Are we better positioned today?

MS. GORELICK: Yes. Yes, there's no question about it. There's no question about it.

MR. BROWNSTEIN: Mark, do you agree?

MS. GORELICK: You know, President Clinton proposed in 1994 and it was passed – antiterrorism tools were provided by Congress in 1995, again in 1996, and the PATRIOT Act after 9/11. And more importantly, a leaning into it by government. I can say as a former 9/11 commissioner, we looked at this and even as of 9/11 felt that we were better prepared. And certainly, since then, the resources that have gone into this, the tools that are available, are much greater than they ever were. So I, actually, from that point of view, feel much more comfort, although one wouldn't want to be sanguine.

MR. BROWNSTEIN: Congressman Meek and then Mark.

CONGRESSMAN MEEK: I can tell you, as a member of the House on the select committee and then the committee on homeland security, law enforcement is – I mean, they're just as good as the human intelligence that they receive from family members, from neighbors, from individuals who say, hey, I didn't sign up for this – I need to go tell somebody what's going on – and to be taken seriously. Unfortunately, that kind of thinking failed, you know, on the Christmas Day kind of thing, when a man's father came forth and said, hey, I'm concerned.

So I think that the attitudes of Americans have changed quite a bit, to say that I will even turn flesh and blood in if he or she is going to carry out an act against the republic. And I think you're going to see more of that. And I think law enforcement is taking it more seriously because, as a former person that wore the badge and carried the gun, I know, many times individuals come up and say: Hey, you know, I see something. I think something. They may think it's just a barking dog.

Now, it has to be taken seriously because law enforcement could very well – that individual who doesn't take it seriously could be making a career decision. And I think that's good for the country. At the same time, putting the responsibility on everyday Americans and those that live here, need it be a resident or something that's saying: It's your responsibility to keep all of us safe. And that's the reason why we have Amber Alert and all those things. And so law enforcement can only work as good as the individuals that live in this country allow it to.

MR. BROWNSTEIN: Mark, are we stronger on the other side?

MR. POTOK: I agree completely with what Jamie said and others. I mean, I think absolutely that law enforcement has more tools and they are using those tools in an effective way. I also think that Oklahoma City was obviously a huge wake-up call for law enforcement in general. I mean, there was a lot of reluctance to describe fellow Americans as terrorists. For a long time, the FBI didn't consider abortion clinic bombers to be terrorists, or the murderers of doctors and their escorts and so on, and that changed.

You know, there was a bit of a shift of focus, I think, obviously after 9/11, when once again the enemy was seen to be foreign, didn't look like us, maybe wore a turban on his head, that kind of thing. But I think that, you know, especially on the street, the men and women who work in law enforcement have a very high awareness of this. And I know that in part because we do a lot of training of people. And I'm not claiming that we're the ones, you know, teaching them that. I just think there's a very high awareness out there, but you know, at the same time we should remember.

I mean, there were, since Barack Obama became a candidate, we've seen two racist, skinhead plots to murder him, along with a lot of other people. We've seen a man found in Maine, before he was even inaugurated, found to be building a dirty bomb – a conventional bomb packed with radioactive material, which he intended to set off at the inauguration. The day after Obama was, in fact, inaugurated, a man in the Boston suburbs walked out of his house and started to murder black people. Why? Because he had been reading on white supremacist sites for six months that the white race was being subjected to a genocide in the United States.

On and on and on. June 10, of course, the Holocaust Museum shooter, who thought, you know, Obama was a tool of the Jews and so on. So, you know, my point is: I think it's certainly true that it's harder to build, you know, a huge bomb, like the nitromethane and ammonium nitrate bomb that McVeigh built. Nevertheless, it only takes one to get through and I think that's really the lesson of Timothy McVeigh.

MR. BROWNSTEIN: Let's talk for a minute about – you mentioned, earlier, the role of demographic change. Obviously, we are living through an enormous, ongoing demographic change. 2008 was the first election in our history where more than a quarter of the vote was cast by non-whites. About a third of the population is now nonwhite.

There was a poll in the New York Times, yesterday, of the Tea Party movement. And it said that more than half said his policies – of President Obama's administration – favor the poor. 25 percent think that his administration favors blacks over white. "I just feel he's getting away

from what America is,” one respondent said. “He’s a socialist and, to tell you the truth, I think he’s a Muslim and trying to head us in that direction. I don’t care what he says. He’s been in office over a year and can’t find a church to go to. That doesn’t say much for him.”

I’m just interested in thoughts. I mean, obviously this is a different country than many Americans grew up in. And not only is it more diverse, but the diversity is spreading. We did a piece in National Journal a couple months ago, Congressman Edwards: In the 1990s, one quarter of congressional districts were at least 30 percent nonwhite. Now it’s almost half. It’s about half of congressional district that are about – so places that had never seen diversity are seeing, you know, nonwhite faces on the street, in the stores – is that part of what we’re talking about here, in terms of creating these sentiments among some elements of the population?

MR. EDWARDS: Well, you know, it probably is among some elements. But, you know, I used to be a journalist and it’s easy to pick out a quote. You know, you interview thousands of people and you have an interesting quote.

MR. BROWNSTEIN: Everybody says something.

MR. EDWARDS: Yeah, I mean, I think that was a very interesting study. It surprised me a lot, for example, finding that the Tea Partiers were apparently both more affluent and better educated than the public at large. So it was really a very shocking kind of study. But, you know, sure. I think that we don’t want to try to paint with too big a brush. I actually think President Clinton was very, very good at putting all of this in perspective. There are racists out there and there are people who dislike President Obama because of the color of his skin, but that doesn’t mean that that’s where most of the anger is coming from.

It may be coming from a lot of things that the president talked about, in terms of the sense of people feeling disconnected. You know, they’re losing their homes. They don’t know what’s going to happen next from al-Qaida. You know, we’re engaged in two wars and they lose family members. And I think there’s just a lot of angst out there in the country. And what has to happen – it’s not just race. I think Jimmy Carter was certainly wrong about that. I think what has to happen is that, just like what President Clinton just did, we have to start pushing back.

You know, we have to start pushing back against the idea of demonization of people with contrary views. I think that’s the bigger problem. I think more people were worried not about the death panels, you know, but about the cost. You know, the Governor of Tennessee, a Democrat, just made this comment yesterday about what the effect is, financially, on his state. And so, you know, there’s a question of – there is real, legitimate debate and disagreement. And what we have to do is, all of us collectively, you know, make sure that we do what President Clinton said. Draw that line beyond which the debate cannot go. That’s what we have to do.

MR. BROWNSTEIN: Mike, you’re nodding.

MR. WALDMAN: Well, I think that after Oklahoma City, after the bombing, there was perhaps temporarily a coming together of the country, about what was a permissible line and what was permissible in the demonization of government. And interestingly, in the immediate

aftermath, at that point, the congressional Republicans in the House missed that moment. They were still playing the record from two years before and saying: We're going to shut the government down and everyone's going to be very happy.

You heard, you saw President Clinton – and those of us who worked in the White House at that time saw it repeatedly – the affection and respect that he had for Sen. Dole. You could see it in the way he talked about him. Sen. Dole was noteworthy in being courageous on drawing those lines within his own party, just as Democrats drew lines against the Weathermen in their party.

The real challenge is, what lines will be drawn now by people who have strong conservative views, but want to make sure that those who follow those views stay within legal bounds? You saw it just this week: Sen. Coburn praising Nancy Pelosi as a good person. Disagreeing with her, obviously – Sen. Coburn is quite conservative – getting booed by the crowd and heckled on talk radio and cable television.

The challenge is, who will stand up? Who has authority and power to say, you know what, we're going to fight this election, we're going to fight these issues but let's not go further than this? That's the missing ingredient. You heard Jamie Gorelick say that those kinds of leadership, thought leadership, really makes a difference.

MR. POTOK: Because certainly we are in the midst of an intense political debate. There are a lot of people who are genuinely activated and energized in opposition to many of the things that Obama wants to do. There's clearly a backlash, particularly among white voters, and obviously not all of that, or not even whatever portion of it, goes beyond the pale. So how do you – President Clinton was kind of wrestling with this issue himself – how do you kind of isolate the sentiment that is separatist and dangerous from legitimate expression of the political debate? It's not an easy thing to do, is it? Or is it? Congressman Meek, maybe?

REP. MEEK: Kind of feel like I should say something. Let me just say, for someone who is out in the field and has talked to individuals that agree strongly and those that disagree strongly and then those, when you walk away from the conversation, knowing, like I spoke before, that it's something else – it's something else that's there that's not a public policy question but cannot actually surface or they can't verbally say in sunlight.

I have a great deal of respect for those that will come and petition their government to do the right thing, what they believe is right. I've walked in a number of parades in my own state and at the end of it, went over to those who had issue with my presence and had some really very good conversations on public policy questions and hoping that we could come together one day on an issue.

But there are those that I think have found refuge in these organizations and groups and that's the problem. For instance, the health-care vote: I purposely walked on surface; I didn't go in through the tunnels. I did have conversations with those that were out there and I would tell you, majority of individuals who were out there just disagreed with the policy and then you had those that showed up that did agree with it and then you had those that just couldn't stop calling

me a tyrant or going and felt that they needed to make a statement about how tall I was, if you know what I mean.

But I didn't paint them with broad brushes and I believe that this is good. I think, when you look at the politics of it, from the GOP side or from the Democratic side, I think there's a question on who's going to vote in November, when you think about it. So you have to feed that kind of thinking and I think that's the reason why the leadership side of things are not really standing up.

You see candidates like John McCain and others that are having very difficult time and you see Mr. Lieberman, who's the chairman on the Homeland Security Committee, say that he's concerned. When you say, is it – is the volume higher than it was before? Absolutely. He said he's concerned about some of the left extremists that may have environmental issues, that may want to go to that next step on behalf of the movement; those that are on the right that feel that he or she needs to make a name for themselves and go to the next, even though it may not be a lot to stand on.

So the responsibility side, I hope, can rise up and that we will have leaders. I hope that we don't have to have an "incident," quote unquote, for that leadership to prevail and come out and those voices to say, stop, let's start to jog here and stop running but let's all be Americans and let's know where the stop sign is. And that's where it is. Where do we yield? Where do we stop?

I know, in my next six or seven months, I'm not going to get folks all rallied up and say, well, anyone that's walking around with Lipton tea – shout 'em down! No – let's let America be America but then let's understand that we have responsibility and that we're not like other countries.

MR. BROWNSTEIN: I'm going to bring in the audience for questions in a moment but Jamie, let me ask you: As we've been talking about responsibilities of leadership, I think the assumption has been that we're largely talking about Republican and conservative leaders having some obligation to draw boundaries among the more ardent members at the edges of their coalition.

On the other hand, as President Clinton noted, he went, in 1995, to Michigan State and spoke directly, himself, to the most disaffected elements of society. Is there a place for the president himself now to do something like that before we run through the stop sign that Congressman Meek talked about?

MS. GORELICK: I think so. I think it is harder to demonize someone who is real and right in front of you. Although it was a long time ago, our experience in dealing directly with the militia groups in the aftermath of Oklahoma City was pretty powerful. I mean, FBI agents who were the devil to a lot of those groups went right in and asked respectfully to come and see the leadership of militia groups and engaged and it worked

I would actually recommend to President Obama that he do something like that. I had actually forgotten about President Clinton doing that at Michigan which was a real hotbed. I think the harder challenge in this post-splintering of the media is that the mechanisms for the antidote of truth are fewer. Truth is an antidote. You can put a lot – you can say to a Kendrick Meek, well, you're a leader and we need you to do what Kendrick just said he was going to do.

But Michael, I thought, made a very good point which is that if people, because of the now narrow-casting of our means of communication, only hear that Kendrick is the devil, he can be as reasonable as can be in person, in one-to-one communications but he's fighting an uphill battle which is not helped by the color of his skin or the size of his person, quite frankly.

I worry about that. It is a real worry that the normative qualities of the media, that we did still have in the '90s, are pretty much gone.

MR. BROWNSTEIN: Mike – appropriate, do you think?

MR. WALDMAN: Yes. I think that what's important to remember – of course, we all know that the president is both the head of state and the head of government – and Oklahoma City – prior to Oklahoma City, President Clinton was also a partisan figure or seen as – the House minority leader called him “your president.”

In his response, in his leadership of the government in response to the tragedy, it enabled him to be seen by a much larger group of people as fusing with their patriotic aspirations as really the president of both parties coming together with Republicans in a way that he had not had the opportunity before that. The challenge, were President Obama to address this, is, first of all, right now there aren't the unifying media through which to speak. I would worry, even if there were a tragedy, would there be that kind of rallying around?

On the other hand, President Obama has been very good when he has gone straight into very difficult issues. The speech he gave in Philadelphia on race showed that he had an unusual command of how to talk in tough terms about these things and there might be value to it. I just don't think we should be under illusions that he will be heard the way President Clinton was heard right now, after Oklahoma City.

MR. BROWNSTEIN: Let me – do you want to add something?

MR. POTOK: Yeah, I just wanted to say I do think that the collapse of the traditional media is a big part of this. Everybody has a right to an opinion – you should not have a right to your own set of the facts and that is what we have seen so many times. I'm not in government and I'm sure I never will be but for us as an NGO, I feel like a big part of our role is to try and to some extent sort of name and shame people because at some point, it's got to stop and if the leaders of the parties aren't going to do that work, then it's up to other players out there.

MR. BROWNSTEIN: When you say “name and shame” people, you mean in extremist groups or in the media itself?

MR. POTOK: No, I mean Lou Dobbs suggesting that a plague of leprosy has descended on the land and that somehow immigrants are responsible and come to find out that's not even remotely true. There is no bump-up in leprosy – leprosy is a benign disease these days. It's unknown if it has any relationship at all. I'm talking about also not only some of my – yes, extremists.

Mike Vanderboegh is a leader of the Three Percenters, one of the groups, actually, President Clinton mentioned – a new, resurgent patriot group out there. Right before all those bricks were thrown through congressmen's windows and so on, Mike Vanderboegh, the Friday before that weekend, put out this furious blog item, "Break their windows! Smash their windows! Break them in the day! Break them in the nights!" And it went on and on like that and then in the next 48 hours, sure enough, bricks were thrown through windows.

I just think it's worth remembering, what if the secretary's about to go home and has her baby in the baby carriage by the window? It was widely described in the media as vandalism – it's a little beyond vandalism and I think calling out Vanderboegh is important.

MR. EDWARDS: I think the seeds of animosity bear fruit only if they fall on fertile ground and I think that our society has made some evolutionary changes that provide a lot of fertile ground.

A friend of mine, Bill Bishop, wrote a book called the "The Big Sort" which said things that I've certainly observed in my own life, and that is that we as a people have stopped talking to, meeting with, exposing ourselves to people who have different views than our own. Liberals hang out with liberals, conservatives hang out with conservatives – people live in neighborhoods made up of people who think the way they do and so we live in this big echo chamber – when you say things, it comes bouncing back at you with more resonance.

The melting pot's not melting and we are becoming these congealed lumps of people who hang together and we all watch Fox or we hang together and we all watch MSNBC and we worship at the altar of either Rush Limbaugh or Keith Olbermann. We've got to break that down somehow, to make a collective community in the way that we once were, otherwise it's going to be fertile ground for the kind of discord and then ultimately violence that we see.

MR. BROWNSTEIN: The Bill Bishop book can be summarized as, it is rare to find a Prius parked next to a pickup any more, anywhere in America, at this point. (Laughter.) Let's bring in the audience. I don't know if we have a microphone. We do have a microphone. Let's bring a few questions, then maybe I'll ask a parting question. Any questions over here in the second row, to start? Can you identify yourself?

Q: My name is – (inaudible) – Morales. I'm a Democrat from New York and we're from American University, actually. Representative Meek brought up a good point, that someone needs to push back and somebody with a lot of authority but who now has that kind of authority? Now that we see this backlash at the government, could it be the authority in the media?

And I want to know if anyone up there has an idea of who specifically can lead the backlash against extremism and be heard, because we've already seen the attacks at Fort Hood, the IRS plane crashing and earlier in the year we saw the shooting of the abortion doctor. How do we combat this and be heard in the echo chamber?

MR. BROWNSTEIN: Who has the authority to push back?

MR. EDWARDS: It has to be a collective pushback. I don't think any one person has that authority. President Obama certainly should speak out on this but he's also one of the people that the people are mad at.

In the Congress, if you had Pelosi and Boehner and McConnell and Reid together, if you had religious leaders together – this is a time for a large number of prominent Americans to stand up together to reassert our values as a community. So I don't think there is any one or two or just any few people who have that kind of credibility any more. Walter Cronkite is gone and we haven't invented another one.

MR. WALDMAN: To follow on that, in this era, even the question of what is extremism has become a source of partisan contention because you've had a number of Republicans and conservatives basically saying Democrats are trying to whip up a frenzy as a way of discrediting what is legitimate disagreement. So there's not even a consensus on defining whether there is a problem and in many ways, there are competing partisan definitions of the problem.

MR. WALDMAN: I think the vista that Congressman Edwards sketched out would be very appealing. It's also, as the election approaches, increasingly unlikely to happen in this calendar year. It's going to be an increasingly partisan time. My kids – it's very interesting. I grew up, as so many did, watching on what used to be called broadcast television. There were a few evening news programs that everyone watched and they might have been biased or they might not have been but when they presented a fact, most people who watched them more or less thought it was true.

My kids have grown up in an era where the TV set is on MSNBC more often than it's on Fox in our house and they don't see that – I see that as a change of pace. They see that as the norm. You're actually seeing a whole generation grow up without a concept of umpire, objective reality or a consensus and that is challenging. So I can't say that I know what the answer is.

MR. BROWNSTEIN: Can I ask you from the other side of this? When you think about the sort of people who have committed violent acts or may be open to committing violent acts, can they be reached by John Boehner and Mitch McConnell and Nancy Pelosi or is there limited capacity for that kind of statement, to reach those sort of people?

MR. BUCKLES: Some of this kind of crosses over the area of my current job with the music industry. I deal a lot with the Internet and what I tend to see there is much what Congressman Edwards described. You've got these little echo chambers that go on – if someone wants to hear a certain thing, they can find a Web site that looks legitimate – it looks as slick as

the Washington Post Web site or any other Web site that you'd want to look at and there's no way to evaluate whether it's true and a lot of people just want to read what they want to believe so they don't critically look at this.

I see that in all sorts of areas in my current job that can justify people violating copyright laws to how they want to think about the government because they go to some place that's going to tell them what they want to hear and you can find them on the Internet and people live on those sites and they all talk back and forth to each other saying the same thing.

MR. BROWNSTEIN: Quick comment, Jamie, and then we'll go over here in the front row.

MS. GORELICK: Yeah. I don't think the right question is whether Pelosi and Boehner can reach a potential terrorist. I think the question is can leadership, whether it's Pelosi and Boehner, whoever it might be, speaking out affects the larger conversation in the country, which then takes away the sanction of violence. It changes the way someone who is aberrational and disconnected thinks he or she will be received if he or she does something bad.

My answer to the question of who is the formers. You can almost see the sigh of relief on the faces of the people who have said, I'm resigning from Congress because they are now free not to listen to the fringes in their parties. So I would – you see it with Daschle and Dole and the Bipartisan Policy Council and you will see it, I guarantee you, with Judd Gregg or with Byron Dorgan or Evan Bayh. You're going to see that and that is my shred of a hope.

MR. BROWNSTEIN: Here in the front row, there's a question. Is it good to go?

Q: I'm Les Blackmore, I'm a near 3-year resident of Washington, D.C., prior to that, 27 years in Oklahoma City. So I really have a question, maybe, for Congressman Edwards, here, about – earlier this week, there was an issue that took place in the state legislature in Oklahoma where they almost legitimized a different militia group, not aligned with the state National Guard, but it actually got some nods from the state legislature in the state of Oklahoma about legitimizing a different militia group, a part of this tea bag organization. Where does that head and are we legitimizing yet another level, here?

MR. EDWARDS: Well, you know, Les, I got to tell you, that's happening in a lot of places. It's happening in Oklahoma, it's happening in Arizona, as the president mentioned. We have inside the institutions, not only in the Congress but inside the state legislatures, we have people who have lost all sense of responsibility. They're carrying on the most extreme kinds of rhetoric and policies and it bothers me deeply. It bothers me that it's happening in Oklahoma. I showed John Podesta this when I got here – here's my OU, Oklahoma Sooners, Southborough (ph).

To be from Oklahoma is to be from Oklahoma forever. Oklahoma City is so deeply in my heart and it bothers me when I see these things happening in my city, in your city, like that and I don't know how to root that out. It would be wonderful – I have many good friends in the Oklahoma legislature and it would be wonderful if they came together and they said, if they shot

that idea down and they said, that's not acceptable. I don't know how we make that happen. Good question and a very disturbing question.

MR. BROWNSTEIN: Any other questions? Yes, sir? No? Let me ask one or two final things, then, and we'll let you guys get back to your day. I want to ask about another way of looking at the spikes in this kind of activity because on the one hand, we are going through demographic change and on the other hand and along that same line, we do have economic strains on average families.

Median income has been strained, really, since the 1970s. But under George Bush, President Bush, the median income actually declined after rising under President Clinton. All the demographic changes were continuing then and we did not see this kind of wave as we did in the early '90s with President Clinton and the unified Democratic control of Congress and we do today with President Obama and a unified Democratic control of Congress.

So I guess I wonder to what extent is this not a long-term kind of changing-America phenomenon and to what extent is it rooted in a political reaction to a Democratic – when you have Democratic control of government and they are seeking to advance the kind of programs Democrats want to advance which inevitably – which typically, at least, involve a more assertive role for the federal government, that there are people who recoil from that and some recoil more intently than others?

Is it more a political phenomenon or a demographic and economic phenomenon? Any reactions? Mike?

MR. WALDMAN: Well, I think that the broad national debate which has gone on for two centuries over the role of government – its size, its scope and what it does – is at the heart of a lot of this. If you look at the Gallup poll, which asks people do they trust government to do the right thing, in 1994, 17% trusted government to do the right thing and now 19% trust the government to do the right thing.

When we were in the Clinton administration, we made a very concerted effort in a variety of ways to try to push that number up to, to get people to once again have faith in government as a positive force. In fact, the one time – that peaked after 2001 and then declined pretty precipitously after that. So you're always going to see this debate over government and over conservatives being mad about liberal policies being enacted.

The challenge, where the real scary part comes in, is the line beyond that and to me, the litmus test is if leaders, political leaders, are not willing to shoot down very quickly as a lie the idea that the president of the United States is not in fact a secret foreign, which is believed by tens of millions of Americans. To me, that suggests a line crossed. That is not an advocacy of violence, as the president suggested the line ought to be, but that is a delegitimization of his authority and person that goes beyond whether you think government's too big, even death panels, that kind of thing.

MR. BROWNSTEIN: Congressman Meek, is it a political phenomenon or a demographic/economic phenomenon?

REP. MEEK: Well, first of all, I'm glad to be here and I think that even post-election it'd probably be a great discussion on this topic of political or financial. I first ran for office not to file H.R. 3240. I ran for office to help folks in the community and help make cities and counties better that I represent – all of those things.

And then we get kind of caught up in this ideological battle and I think right now, I'm sitting here as a candidate in a two-way, possibly three-way race – who knows? At least that's what The New York Times said this morning. But I think that it's important that everyone understands that politics has trumped public policy throughout the country and it's going to take a real coming-together of leadership after November 2nd, November 4th or December or January of next year, on trying to reclaim the middle in all of this.

I see in my future a Republican – if we look at the first scenario – and me as considered by the National Journal one of the 60 moderates in Congress, in the House, as being – it's not going to be a lot of folks in Florida that's going to stand in the middle of the room and say, I wonder who I'm going to vote for. It's going to be about who goes out to vote. The discourse has already started about who should lead the country and who should stay in the country – and I'm just talking about within the Republican primary – and those that are pushing those views have prospered politically. So it's counterproductive to, “oh, wait a minute! I have to take responsibility because it may be against my political progress.”

So I just want to say that I think Florida and states like it are going to be – that's having this change that you're talking about. But I think Florida, the people of good will has embraced because they voted for the president – I must say that. But it's something else now and I'm hoping that it doesn't go there but I believe it's going to be the battle royal of all of statewide races, including the governor's race because you have a woman running against a man and the Senate race and you have a number of – you have Hispanics, you have an Anglo, you have me.

So it's going to be interesting. But pray for the country and we hope that Americans are able to come together and be able to know that safety is important and if things start to go over the top or we run through the stop sign, you say, I need to report that.

MR. BROWNSTEIN: We're going to close in a moment. I put the question on the table, to what extent are we seeing a political phenomenon rather than a demographic or long-term economic phenomenon. Mark, Congressman Edwards, Jamie, Brad – you can respond to that or make another closing point that you like but let me at least throw that out. What are we seeing? Mark, maybe we start with you.

MR. POTOK: It somewhat relates to the question you were asking before. I remember immediately after Oklahoma City – I was working at USA Today as a reporter at the time; we ran a poll which asked if people agreed or disagreed with the statement that the United States federal government was an imminent threat to the civil liberties of normal Americans. I remember it was shocking: At the time, it showed 39% of Americans believed that.

CNN just reran that poll about six weeks ago and the number is now 54%. It's up 15 points. So that tells you something about what's going on out there. There's a fury out there or at least a rage, a fear, frustration and so on.

I want to go quickly back to one other point which is the idea about politicians speaking out and so on. I think that even mentally ill people, even people way out on the fringes want justification for what they do. They want to feel like what they are doing is saving the world. So it's important what people say in positions of power. I don't think there's any – I don't mean to lay it all at the feet of Lou Dobbs but people like Lou Dobbs and other people who spent years demonizing Latino immigrants. Is it any surprise that in that very period, 2003 to 2007 anti-Latino hate crimes went up 40%? I think that's a real concrete effect.

I want to point out one other thing to which is that I don't think that all hate criminals are mad men or are furious or have a terrible upbringing and so on. A lot of typical hate criminals are people who view themselves as brave young men of the community standing up for the standards and morals and integrity of their community.

But if they grow up in a household that say, black men are coming to rape your sister or that Latino immigrants are coming to destroy the culture or the president is a Bolshevik or a fascist, then they are being given a kind of justification that makes them feel that they can go out and commit these crimes and not feel like I'm a common street criminal. They're the young men standing up and being brave enough to do what their parents don't have the get-up-and-go to do.

So I think that's part of understanding what criminal political violence is really about.

MR. BROWNSTEIN: Congressman Edwards, final thoughts?

MR. EDWARDS: Well, in terms of the – back to your question – in terms of the economic role, remember the health-care debate which polarized a lot of people in some very nasty ways? What was in the beginning? Before that, there was the TARP and there was the stimulus package and so the people got very concerned about what they saw happening economically in terms of the finances of the country and the national debt.

A lot of this – we're not talking about the extreme elements but we're talking about some of the numbers that Mark found. Most Americans, the majority of Americans, still prefer a more limited role of government than some people do. That's a legitimate grounds for a debate. What's really happening is the loss of civility and right now we see it – a lot of it – coming from the right. I'm a Republican conservative. I grew up hearing people on the left call Ronald Reagan a Nazi.

It is not something that is just a piece of the political puzzle but that we as a country have really seriously lost the ability to talk to somebody we disagree with. So I would like to say this is just a matter of how can you track down the people who might pull a McVeigh-kind of stunt but it's more than that. We have deeper problems with our ability to form a cohesive, collective society of people who can interact in a reasonable way.

MS. GORELICK: I would agree with that completely and just add two points. I don't think that the undercurrent of extremism and potential violence will ever go away. I mean, we've had episodes of this throughout our history. I think what – the way I would answer your question though, Ron, is that I think that economic pessimism fuels that. And if we can turn the corner in our economy and become more optimistic as a people, we can, as President Clinton said, not be counted out as a country.

And I think if – some of that righteousness that Mark referred to is well-meaning; it is people wanting to make sure that this country is great. It's misdirected, but it is in some respects well-motivated. If you can – if that can be channeled into a job building something in a community, being on the right track, I think a lot of the steam, a lot of the anger goes out. And it is replaced by something much more positive. So I would look toward that as a partial answer to the problems that we are observing here today.

MR. BROWNSTEIN: Brad, you get the last word.

MR. BUCKLES: Well, just from the law enforcement perspective, in some ways, whether it's political or social doesn't matter. It's clear that the rhetoric that's being used quite often is similar to the rhetoric that a Timothy McVeigh or an Eric Rudolph or some in the past attached to. And as Mark said, it's something that allows them to feel like they're doing the right thing and justify some abhorrent behavior because they think they are attacking a tyrant or being patriotic. So our concern is not really which it is. It's that that's out there and that there are people who will attach to that and use that as their motive for carrying out criminal acts.

All right, well, you have been a terrific panel. I would like the audience to join me in thanking you for this great presentation. Thanks to you and the audience for sticking out and I don't – are there any last words from CAP? If not, you are free to get back to your day. Thanks for joining us.

(END)