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SPEAKERS

Vic Roych, Josh, NPR promo, Jodi R Netzer, Michael Dauphinais, Woody Emanuel, Gene Orth, Norma Comer, Nicole Cox, Richard Carmona, Barrett Marson, Christopher Conover, molly kent

M Michael Dauphinais 00:00
Following is an azpm original production.

C Christopher Conover 00:09
Welcome to The Buzz. I'm Christopher Conover this week, bringing civility back to politics. The 2024 election is days away, and for many it can't come soon enough. Ramped up rhetoric from all sides talks about this as an election with America in the balance, pitting one side as the nation's savior and the other as its downfall. Candidates throw around terms like fascist, socialist, enemy, others, and some which we can't say here without risking a fine by the FCC. So what effect is this intense rhetoric having on voters? AZPM hosted an event Tuesday evening aimed at educating people about the election system, we asked AZPM's Tony Paniagua, to see how people feel about our country's current political divisions. Gene Orth says he's been voting since the 1970s and has never seen anything like this year.

G Gene Orth 01:16
I've never experienced anything to this degree of animosity and anxiety and and hatred towards those who are of different bent than you. I I'm nervous as hell. I've never been so anxious about an election in my life, and I feel I'm on the verge of losing what's left of what I've considered American democracy and the things that have made our country great.

C Christopher Conover 01:43
Norma Comer says it's about candidates not being held accountable when they say inflammatory remarks

N Norma Comer 01:51
And then to turn around and say, No, I never said that when it's on tape. I've seen it, you know, but I don't like the tit for tat either. I wish people could rise above it, because it doesn't help. You know. it iust. it iust fuels the fire.

C Christopher Conover 02:09

A voter who only gave us his first name, Josh, says the state of discourse and civility has unfortunately declined.

J Josh 02:18

I think the last normal election we had was the one between Mitt Romney and Barack Obama, where policy discussions were still the main focal point, instead of the focus on personalities. That seems to be the state of politics today. So I hope that this can be reversed.

C Christopher Conover 02:37

So how do we restore civility, as many people want we decided to ask that question of two political figures, one from each side of the aisle. Barrett Marson is a Republican political strategist and CEO of Marson Media. We started our conversation about a recent appearance he made on Phoenix NPR station, KJZZ, where he brought up the topic of civility in politics.

B Barrett Marson 03:04

You know, I was just talking to my wife about this, actually. I have never seen a time in American politics where, you know, someone could be wearing the red MAGA hat, and you just think of that person as that guy's an idiot, right? And I think they feel the same way about someone who supports Kamala Harris. We are so polarized, and each side raises the temperature, whether it's Democrats calling Trump fascist or, you know, akin to Hitler. You know, his Madison Square Garden event last week was reminiscent of the Nazi event at the old Madison Square Garden. Or, you know, whether it's Trump and his acolytes, you know, talking about Harris as a communist socialist, those type of words, and you know, they're a danger to America. The left is a danger to America. So each side really does ratchet up the political temperature and creates an atmosphere for violence. And I've not seen this in other polarized times. I mean, obviously during the Bill Clinton years, you know, Republicans seethed at Bill and Hillary Clinton, but there was never that inkling of violence in their rhetoric. And now we've just embraced that we can call each other fascists and socialists and in plain people, and we see the consequences of that in Butler, Pennsylvania or Tempe, Arizona, where people on both sides are taking shots at both candidates or their offices. And at some point this we have to come together as a country and be able to disagree without breaking out the guns.

C Christopher Conover 05:03

So you're a strategist now. You worked in communications in the Republican controlled legislature. Have you seen, you know, from the inside on the Republican side, have you seen a slow change, or was this a sudden change? And as you said, both sides are hurling their fair share of really, really nasty rhetoric.

B

Barrett Marson 05:33

Yeah, it obviously is a change that has come along since 2016 you know, I hate to blame one person. But the rhetoric changed significantly post 2016. And there was talk of enemies of America within America, just sometimes normal citizens who voice their displeasure with the leadership, which is something that we are allowed to do, but now we are seeing violent talk coming from, frankly, both sides.

C

Christopher Conover 06:07

Right when the whole incident in Pennsylvania with Trump being shot at i i heard people on the Democratic side say the only problem was the shooter missed. And absolutely, that's a very different change.

B

Barrett Marson 06:26

That is, I mean, you saw a lot of that, quite frankly, that if only he was a better shot, then that is, you know, I haven't voted for Donald Trump, but I certainly don't wish to see him assassinated. I think that would be a horrendous thing for the country.

C

Christopher Conover 06:41

So you were a reporter down here at the Star in Tucson and the East Valley Tribune. Do you think the way the news industry has changed is helping push this, again, rhetoric and anger on both sides.

B

Barrett Marson 07:01

Yeah, look, no offense to your industry and my former profession. The media likes to cover these, you know, bombastic statements. There's not a lot of media coverage of long winded policy statements, and so I hate to blame the media, but the media helps spread the message, because it knows people will watch those incendiary comments, and that's a problem. I felt like, you know, the vice presidential debate was pretty chock full of policy discussion, much more than, say, the presidential debate. Maybe because it was the vice presidential debate, but a day later, you know, all we were talking about was, oh, it was, you know, Midwest nice and, and then they moved on, right. But that was a very policy centric debate that no one really wanted to hear. They wanted to hear, Oh, that, you know, Trump called Harris this, and Harris called Trump that, or the media highlights that more. Take a look at the Madison Square Garden event, you know, quite frankly, you almost I have not seen very many clips of what Donald Trump said, but boy, you see a lot of clips of this totally unheard of comedian talking about Puerto Rico and it being an island of garbage. So and you know, now all we're hearing about is whether Joe Biden called Republicans who back Trump garbage, or this one comedian garbage, which totally overshadows Harris's speech from the ellipse last night. So the media likes to highlight these statements, and I'm not saying it's not news, but it does indeed go overboard.

C Christopher Conover 08:45

You and I have talked about all kinds of things for, oh my gosh, a whole lot of years. We won't give a number, because that might out both of us age wise. But how do we fix this? You know, Barrett is king for a day, at least

B Barrett Marson 09:01

if only.

C Christopher Conover 09:02

How do we fix all this hyper partisanship? Or is it just too late? Has that bird flown the coupe?

B Barrett Marson 09:08

Well, I don't know if it's flown the coupe, but it takes a willingness from parties on both sides to self police, to start talking to the American people as if we're adults and as if we can understand some policy issues and talk about the differences between us without making the other person a bad guy. Politicians have made it and the media has amplified. If you and I have a disagreement on politics, one of us hates America, that just isn't the case. We have passionate disagreements. We sometimes protest in the streets over policies, and that does not make those Americans hate this country, or show that the other side, not in the streets, not demanding change, hate this country. We should be able to acknowledge we all love this country, we just see it in a different way, and be able to talk about those differences. Unfortunately, right now, we can't, and I'm not sure win or lose, at some point Donald Trump will go away, you know, either in one week or four years, because Donald Trump is a singular figure, and nobody can replicate. They can try to imitate, but nobody can replicate what he has done over the last nine years. And so I wonder if some of that rhetoric disappears whenever, eventually he disappears.

C Christopher Conover 10:39

It was interesting to me that you brought up, it reminded me of something John McCain said when he was running against Barack Obama, that the two of them both love America. They just had different ways of approaching how to solve the country's problems. Early on, when Harris got into the race. There was a narrative running through parts of the Democratic Party that they were trying to take the American flag back. The Democrats were because it had become a symbol of the right, but not of the country.

B Barrett Marson 11:16

I think a lot of times you see someone foisting the American flag on their car, and you immediately just equate that with a Trump supporter. And I would say the vast majority of people who support Kamala Harris also love this country. and they just also believe that

America can be better, whereas Trump people want to go back to some unspecified time in American history when it was great. I guess it's a little bit of perspective, but I would say that each side does indeed love America. It's just one wants to improve America and one wants to look back to some glory days. It believes that America is passed.

C Christopher Conover 12:01

All right well, we are in the closing week of the voting portion of this election. Then we'll get to the lawsuit portion so but thanks for taking a little time to chat with us.

B Barrett Marson 12:14

Absolutely anytime. Man,

C Christopher Conover 12:16

that was Republican strategist Barrett Marson, you're listening to The Buzz. After the break, we hear from more voters and a well known Democrat. Stay with us,

N NPR promo 12:27

no matter what happens in Washington, the NPR politics podcast is here for you. For the latest news, insights and analysis the election and beyond, listen to the NPR politics podcast.

C Christopher Conover 12:41

Welcome back to The Buzz. I'm Christopher Conover. We're looking at civility in politics and elections this week, we now head back to our Tuesday night event to hear from a few more voters. Molly Kent would rather see discussion of legislating than rhetoric.

M molly kent 12:59

I think people can say and should say, what their policy proposals are, what their plans are, and I don't think we should be engaging in name calling and diminishing of ethnicity, race, LGBTQ status, religious status, and there's way too much of that. It's very ugly.

C Christopher Conover 13:25

Vic Roych says he thinks the issue is a focus on symbolism and quick fix solutions to complex problems.



V Vic Roych 13:34

We need people who really think through the issues and act on them, instead of just coming up with sound bites and symbolism, and we too much, too much focus on symbolic representation.

C Christopher Conover 13:52

Jodi R Netzer says she worries about high tension and anxiety around elections.

J Jodi R Netzer 13:58

I feel that it is not useful to tell people they're stupid or ignorant. People are just going to react. We need to approach this more from a place of curiosity. What really concerns people on a deeper level? And then let's tie them together with what are the common threads there,

C Christopher Conover 14:22

Crossing the aisle was an early step in the political career of Dr RICHARD CARMONA. He was the United States Surgeon General under President George W Bush, and would go on to run an unsuccessful US Senate campaign as a Democrat against Jeff Flake in 2012. He has since held a variety of appointed positions in government and contemplated running for governor in 2014. We started our conversation talking about how politics has changed since he ran for office 12 years ago.

R Richard Carmona 14:55

I think that it certainly has changed significantly. Certainly in '12, I had no political aspirations, but the President of the United States called me and said, Would you consider? As you know me for many years, I'm kind of a radical centrist. I kind of am unhappy with both parties, and I can be supportive of nobody sometimes, and I can be critical at the different times, okay, based on the facts not on political affiliation, and the facts from me is, what are you doing to make our community better because that's what you were elected for. But the President called and made the case that you know you've been Surgeon General, and people know you, they trust you. Can you run? I finally gave in, and the people I spoke to were both Republicans and Democrats who I trust, and are more or less non hyper partisan, but centrist people. And they all told me the same thing. Rich, it's a privilege to serve, but be true to what your values and ideals are, et cetera, et cetera. Well, as you know, it's not that simple. And so I ran, but I had a very short runway. I mean, I'm running against a candidate who had been in politics for years, had and he had an organizational structure and money and so on. And with eight or nine months before an election, I said okay. I learned a lot about the dysfunctionality of the process. And so I'm grateful that I had the opportunity. In a lot of ways I'm grateful that I lost I learned a lot from the process. I like the old metaphorical you may like sausage, but you don't want to see how it was made. It was a very painful experience because give you an example, Chris, when I first was recruited, they said, you know, there's a seat for Democrats that's open. I could've easily gone to been a Republican, because it's to me, it's more about what are the issues, not the not which tribe you belong to. They, they fill my head with all these great things. Look, you've been a soldier, you're a combat veteran, you're Hispanic, you've been a police

officer, you meet a perfect candidate. We'd love your independence and everything. So I say yes, and then I have to go to Washington, I meet all the senatorial committees and everything, and they give me a book. And I said, What's this? They said, Oh, it's the answer to your questions. When they when they talk to you about things, I said, well, well, what what do you mean? So, well, this is our party platform, I said, but what I thought I was being asked to serve for my independence? Yeah, but you know, and then I find out it's the same on the other side of the aisle. It's about fitting into the tribe. These are the things that are important. And so where I got myself into trouble, often was speaking truth to power.

C

Christopher Conover 17:23

You know, it's interesting when you talk about that run, you're talking about internal tribalism, but what you're not talking about is calling your opponent in that race, who became Senator Flake, eventually became Ambassador Flake. You're not talking about him. You're not calling him names. You're not calling the other party names. They weren't calling you names that I remember because I covered that race. What changed in such a short period of time? That was 2012

R

Richard Carmona 17:57

Yeah, yeah, the vitriol. Oh, well, basically it, you know, it became a very toxic environment. In fact, I knew Jeff Lake. I'd met him before and and, you know, we were very cordial to one another. It was very close. We didn't know until that night, you know, that who was going to win. But I called him and I said, Congratulations, you know. And I said to him, there's anything I can do to help you. Let me know. Okay, it's the people's will. That's okay. We there was never any harsh words. It was always talking about policy. It was always talking about what's important to you, what's important to him? I left better informed about how difficult sometimes corrupt the process is, and how money becomes a surrogate for how successful you are in any party, you know. And to me, that's not the way democracy should be. In a perfect world, I would hope that there wouldn't be these fundraisers and with the funny money that comes in disguise and and like my first day I remember, and now I'm not going to use the Senator's name, but he was in charge of the new Senate candidates. And he says, Well, we're going to need you every day, six hours or more a day, on the phone. And they called it, dialing for dollars. We need a list of all of your friends and family. I said, Oh no, I'm not going to do that. I said. They said, why I Well, no, these are people that will give money. I said, they'll give me money if I ask them for it, but I don't want their names out there. So that was the first barrier I hit. And then they wanted all my contacts and all my business contacts and all my academic contacts. I said, No, I don't I'm very uncomfortable with that. They said, but you have to raise the money. If you don't raise the money, you're not going to be able to win. So these are bipartisan remarks, but I start thinking, I don't like this. And the senator sat down with me the first day in the senatorial conference room in in the capital, and he started making calls with me, and he looked at me and he said, Isn't this great? I said, Senator, it sucks. To me, it's the antithesis of democracy. Yeah. He said, But Rich to get your message out, these people give you money. You we by the time. And you go tell your story, I'm saying, Yeah, but should, should our democracy be predicated on dialing for dollars? To me, it just bothered me a great deal, and still to this day. So I, I did it, but I did it painfully, and and then they have a script that, when they they give you a list of people to call, and they give you a script and say, here's the points you have to make, but all of them were about how bad the other guy was and how good

I'm going to be. And on the other side, he's got his script and he's saying how bad I am and how good he's going to be okay. What's different today, Chris is there was not not misinformation or disinformation. It was mostly discourse about what I think was important to move forward and what they thought was important to move forward. Today, misinformation, disinformation and an internet that's much more robust today, fake everything on the internet, so the public is being fueled with bad information. And I can't tell you how many times I've had people say, Did you see what they said today about this candidate? I said that's a lie that you know, but they make it up. And of course, when you can manipulate images and manipulate voices, it looks real and to the unsuspecting public, public, if you saw it or heard it on the internet, it must be okay.

C Christopher Conover 21:16

So as you mentioned, you were a Surgeon General, but you were Surgeon General in the George W Bush White House that you then ran as a Democrat for Senate, and you in this interview, branded yourself as a radical centrist. Yes. Did you ever get the feeling back in the early 2000s when you were working in the White House and even in '12 when you were running for Senate, that people were turning their back on you because of your party or who you were working for? Oh, he's crossed over. Oh, we don't want to talk to him anymore. That's funny. Chris, you know, it's an interesting one, because I remember when I became Surgeon General and the Democrats, would say how could you work with those people? Because it was a Republican, because, yet, the senator that chaired my nomination committee was Teddy Kennedy, and we became best friends. Okay, I work with him all the time on health, because he was probably the smartest guy in health in the Senate. Okay, you may disagree with him as far as policy, but he was somebody you have to talk to because he really understood the complexities of the federal government and health. Okay, but on the other hand, when I ran for the Senate, because there was an open seat, and the President of the United States asked me to consider running, and it's a democratic seat, the Rs then said, How could you do that? Because you're abandoning us. I said, No, I'm an American. It's a privilege to serve. I shouldn't be co opted by either party and free, not free to express what I thought was the best path forward in the job I will have, whether to Senator or Surgeon General. Okay, because I know good leaders welcome the difference of opinion. Good leaders crowd source information. They ultimately have the authority to make the decision, but you don't want to hear it only from Republicans or Democrats. You want to hear it because you represent the totality of society. And so you know, and I would tell you when, when I was Surgeon General, a lot of people I knew were mad at me. I know President Bush. I've worked with him personally. I said he's a good man. You may disagree with some of his policies, but I've never seen him do anything or say anything that wasn't what he thought was in the best interest of America. Okay, now that's okay to disagree, but that's what democracy is about. But the fact of the matter is, you already started to see the tribalism that you're you're automatically assumed to be good or bad by the other party based on the tribe you're in, and yet I rejected that thesis, and many of the policies that I supported the Democrats liked, and some of them the Republicans like, but my job was to give the best information, and then I don't make the decision. The decision is made by those people that you gave the privilege to serve in an elected office. If the President called today and said, Richard Carmona, we want you to run for office. Or maybe a former student of yours comes and says, the President called today and they want me to run for office. With the climate we have now. Would you do it? Or would you advise somebody who came to seek your mentorship and advice on it, would you advise somebody to get into the system with the world we're in now?

R

Richard Carmona 24:29

Yes, Chris, I would say, if given the opportunity, I would say, yes, but arm now with more information, I would brief that student or use the information myself to understand the evolution that we've come from a better balanced democracy, even though with tensions back then to one now that it is embarrassing with the statements that are made by people that are in elected office, the positions they take. And it's like, where's the truth? You know, let's have a discussion. Let's air it out. Let's make the case before the public about what the issue is, why I believe this, and why they believe that, and somewhere in the middle is probably where we need to be. And really, that's what the Founding Fathers saw. They didn't want a kingdom. They didn't want one person entrusted with all of the decision making. They wanted this to be a country by the people and for the people, and they recognized it would be painful. They recognized that there would be tough discourse, but ultimately, people with integrity, people with dignity, people with character and good values coming together, never forgetting that they alone have the privilege to serve those fellow citizens. If you can do that honestly, the founding fathers knew the democracy can flourish, but if you depart and you lie and you don't have character and you don't have values, the democracy fails. So I would advise that student stay true to your values. Stay true to your idea. Listen to those that you represent. Don't make false promises that you can't keep, but make sure that they understand that you will always represent them with the best information, and in some cases, it'll be contrary to what some of your constituents want. But you're thinking of the bigger picture,

C

Christopher Conover 26:19

All right. Well, thanks for sitting down with us.

R

Richard Carmona 26:22

Oh, Chris, it's a pleasure to see you and I thank you for what you do to be the honest brokers of complex issues.

C

Christopher Conover 26:30

That was Dr Richard Carmona, we conclude with one more voter from our event, Woody Emanuel,

W

Woody Emanuel 26:37

I think a solution would be to come out of your comfort zone, even though it is hard and it can be intimidating, because if we don't, that division is going to get further away and we're going to get further apart as as citizens.

C

Christopher Conover 26:59

And that's the hope for this week. Join us next week as we look at early election results. You can

And that's the buzz for this week. Join us next week as we look at early election results. You can find all our episodes online at azpm.org and subscribe to our show wherever you get your podcasts, just search for the buzz Arizona. We're also on the NPR app. Zac Ziegler is our producer, with production help from Deserae Tucker, Our music is by Enter the Haggis. I'm Christopher Conover, thanks for listening.



Nicole Cox 27:35

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