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**INTERVIEWER:** Is the Democratic Party dead? Will the Republican Party survive Trump? Is America's two-party system over? Democratic strategist Jenny Bacchus and Republican strategist Brian Jones talk about what's next in American politics and how to be friends across party lines.

Welcome, both of you.

**JENNY BACCHUS:** Thank you.

**BRIAN JONES:** Thanks.

**INTERVIEWER:** You're here at Brown today to talk about the midterm elections among other things. But let's step back for a minute and talk about the state of the parties.

I was looking at *The New York Times* magazine's cover story yesterday about the woeful disarray of the Democratic Party after Obama. And who knows how splintering or damaging Donald Trump has been to the Republican Party, and the identity? So I'm wondering if we can skip past the midterms to 2020? Are we heading toward some sort of post-Republican, post-Democratic Party America? Is the two-party system over, or is it possible to rebrand?

And both of you, as communicators, I figured you'd have something to say about that.

**JENNY BACCHUS:** It's actually really interesting right now. I mean, I guess I'm old enough, I've been around Washington enough, I've seen lots of disastrous moments. The Clinton impeachment, the collapse of John Edwards and some of the stuff on the Democratic side. The infamous Howard Dean scream. I mean, I've been around to see the death of the Democratic Party been declared several hundred times.

And there are some fundamental weaknesses inside our party and some fundamental challenges. I've also seen the Republican Party, maybe not as much as now, Democrats have always been kind of a hot mess, the Republicans are new to it, but there's definitely some underlying pressures right now in the country that I think you're seeing reflected. So I don't necessarily think the two-party system is dead.

A lot of it-- both parties are kind of defined by their standard bearers, right? And we have none

right now, so that makes us look really disorganized. And we had one that didn't really want to be a Democrat, but was an amazing president and sort of inspirational figure, but wasn't as interested in rebranding the Democratic Party in his own image. I would maybe even argue, despite all the damage they've done to the Democratic Party in some ways, the Clintons actually were fundamentally always interested in-- at least Bill was-- a sort of strong Democratic Party that could help him move his agenda forward.

But I think for the Republicans, there's kind of an existential, do you want to be a party that was George Bush one and two that was trying to move forward and expand the tent, or do you want to be a party of Trump that seems to want to go back to the 1950s McCarthy age? I think it's always premature to say that the parties are dead, but I think they are going to have to change, and are going to be defined by who leads them.

**BRIAN JONES:** And I think a lot of times these larger conversations of can the parties survive happens after you lose, and not after you win. Which I think is kind of unique about this time for the Republicans.

**JENNY BACCHUS:** That's true, that's interesting.

**BRIAN JONES:** And I do feel, and it does feel this way, certainly in Washington DC right now, that there is this kind of existential threat to the party, particularly if you come from the John McCain, Mitt Romney, George W. Bush wing of the party where you believed in limited government, strong national defense. And now some of the things that are happening with President Trump are not that, right?

So how is the party being redefined? I think people are asking, do I want to be a part of this? And is this a temporary condition that the party is in, or is this the new state of being? And I think that's, quite frankly, concerning for a lot of people within the party.

**INTERVIEWER:** Well, time will tell, I guess. We've got a few years.

**JENNY BACCHUS:** And I think it also-- yeah, and I think it is going to really depend on who sort of--

**INTERVIEWER:** Who emerges.

**JENNY BACCHUS:** Who emerges. I always used to say, the Republicans knew who they are, knew who they were. They sort of knew that-- as Brian just sort of actually recited it perfectly-- like, a party of less taxes, limited government, strong national defense. And they would use polling to figure

out how to say what they already knew they wanted to say.

When I came of age in the Democratic Party, it wasn't the party of FDR, or even Kennedy, we would use polling to figure out what to say. And I think that has been something that Bernie sort of actually did tap into [INAUDIBLE] to some extent, is that we haven't had things that we're strongly for. We've been defined a lot about what we were against. And that's something that's happening now in elections in this year and next year.

So I do think the Democrats do have some work, and it's not just tested slogans of just kind of reminding ourselves what we're for. I don't think it's as hard as some of the people are saying that it is, but I also think that we need to sort of not be afraid to be for some things. The reason why people voted for Trump was a good reason.

And if Trump wasn't disturbed and challenged person that he was, he would be much more dangerous, because people did want someone who would talk to them about them, about issues that they cared about, and sort of would make Washington work because it's kind of, if you're a regular person, the fact that no one can talk to each other and you can't pass bills is crazy, regardless of what party you are.

**BRIAN JONES:** It's a really difficult time right now. I mean, it's hard to see how we kind of come out of this a little bit. Going back to 2020, I mean, it'll be very interesting to see who emerges. I mean, Jim and I were looking at some articles last night. I think there was this one article from the Hill-- the 43 people who could be the Democratic nominee, right?

On the Republican side, I think there is a belief, maybe a fantasy among some that Trump will be primaried, and he might-- I mean the marketplace might allow for that. But the challenge I think is, as soon as he has a primary challenger, that's probably good for him, politically, because it allows him to then have a foil on the Republican side. Look, this is what I'm fighting against.

So unless it's someone particularly strong, I mean, if it's John Kasich, I think that probably might help him. If it's Jeff Flake, that actually might help him, because, again, it gives him an opponent earlier in the process than he might have otherwise.

**JENNY BACCHUS:** But it's got to be someone, I think, that hearkens back to a deep love of the country. It's going to be a defining of patriotism argument. Because Trump is trying to define patriotism in one way that I think many people, again, on both sides of the aisle, think is tearing the country

apart and is not recognizing the demographic, and economic, and moral values of what the country is today. So I think both parties, if you do have a strong candidate emerge as a Republican contender, is going to be fighting for what patriotism is and love of country. And I think for the Democrats to be successful, I haven't seen the right candidate yet.

At one point I thought it might be like Sheryl Sandberg or Zuckerberg, but post the Facebook scandals I don't think that's viable anymore.

**INTERVIEWER:** Yeah. You both have worked on campaigns before. Would you be interested in working in 2020, or is it too soon to tell?

**BRIAN JONES:** I think it's too soon to tell. I mean, I think both-- I'll speak for Jenny here, we both do consulting work now, so it's kind of nice to be more of a spectator than involved. But I think that being said, you always kind of have the itch. And if it's the right candidate talking about the right things. And I do think we're a really pivotal point in the country's evolution right now.

**JENNY BACCHUS:** In history, yeah,

**BRIAN JONES:** In history. So I think to be a part of that would be meaningful and exciting. I just don't know who that person would be right now.

**JENNY BACCHUS:** I got out of politics a while because there is an element of it there's a little bit of it is a game, or like you see the same movie, oh, I've seen this movie before. You know, you sort of know the drill. But on the other hand, like, I have been struggling, why am I not back involved in politics?

I am worried about the future of the country. And us doing this panel is like a big step for both of us in some senses, because we've both been not as involved. We sort of moved on to like we're the watchers.

**INTERVIEWER:** Going back to something you said, Jenny, about reaching across the aisle. Everyone's talking about Trump's approval rating being the lowest in modern polling history.

**JENNY BACCHUS:** Yeah, he's at a net negative 22 points right now.

**INTERVIEWER:** Oh, my gosh. OK, that's worse than what I read. And then also that people just don't trust government. It's been below 30% for a decade? But you're friends. And you're from opposite sides of the aisle as it were. And most people don't have friends, I think, anymore, in the other party.

But it wasn't always this way. So I'm wondering, are you hopeful? And do you bring that into your discourse? Would you advise someone who hires you to reach across the aisle? Is there value in that?

**BRIAN JONES:** I think there's absolutely value in it, a lot of reasons, right? One, if you're surrounding yourself with people who just think like you, I don't think it's particularly healthy. I do think, as a little side note here, that that's a little bit of a byproduct of social media, and the way that our society has evolved where you can kind of cloister off in your little communities now, and kind of talk to each other. And in the past, you wouldn't necessarily have to do that.

So I do think it's important. I think in Washington DC, actually, ironically, there still is a little bit more of that cross pollination.

**INTERVIEWER:** Than in the rest of America?

**BRIAN JONES:** Yeah, I think so. Because I mean, more than you would see-- I've lived in New York, or Seattle, or San Francisco. I mean, some of those places I think it's harder. You know what I mean? I have some people work in the tech industry, who may be Republicans who say, I can't really even talk about it, or I don't want to bring it up.

**INTERVIEWER:** Wow.

**BRIAN JONES:** One person actually works for a tech company and had a go talk to HR about the fact that they felt like they were being almost--

**INTERVIEWER:** Harassed?

**BRIAN JONES:** Harassed. You know what I mean?

**INTERVIEWER:** Yeah.

**BRIAN JONES:** So it's interesting. But I think in DC, there's plenty relationships like ours.

**INTERVIEWER:** Oh, that's so nice, that's so encouraging.

**JENNY BACCHUS:** I think that it also comes from the fact that like we all-- everyone's worked for a bad candidate, everyone's worked for a good candidate. You have common things, and it's a campaign operative so you sort of share a professional sense. I also credit working in the corporate sector and working for organization. In order to get something done in Washington, still,

although barely still, you have to be able talk to both sides of the aisle.

So when I went to Google, I had a lot of Republican friends from before that, because I just-- I mean my dad's a Republican, my mom was Democrat. So my family was kind of split. And I also-- I thought Republicans were really good at running campaigns and there were things I wanted to learn from them. And I worked for a long time for the media, putting together presidential primary debates on both sides. So I really got to know the Romney people, and the McCain people.

I got to see, like, Mike Huckabee who I completely disagree, with and Sarah Huckabee who is very different from me now, but watching her talk to the ladies that were cleaning the dressing rooms in the debate, you see like a human side to people. Romney would always stop every time he went to a presidential debate, and go talk to the kids, and thank the camera operators.

**INTERVIEWER:** That's so ironic. What you're describing is the exact opposite of what we think of the state of the country, right? We think of people in Washington as unable to talk to each other. But it's the rest of the country. And you guys have to in a way.

**JENNY BACCHUS:** You have to get stuff done. But that being said, the public posturing is kind of completely the opposite way. I mean, you're not supposed to compromise. Absolutism on either side, I think is dangerous.

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**INTERVIEWER:** In this age of not only distrust, but social media and reality TV. So in this world of fake news, and kind of headline-driven media, you're at a university, is there a role for research to play and academics to play in the public discourse?

**BRIAN JONES:** I would say absolutely. And I think we're at this phase right now where a lot of this is just so new. You look at where we are in these conversations what happened last political cycle with fake news and some of these Russian-related stories, I'm guessing a lot of research has not been done into this. I mean, it's so new, right?

So how do you begin to create a baseline now where you can go forward and study the impacts of social media on the political process? I think it'll be really important.

**INTERVIEWER:** That's a great topic.

**BRIAN JONES:** It's critical.

**INTERVIEWER:** I hope someone's doing that.

**BRIAN JONES:** Yeah.

**JENNY BACCHUS:** I used to follow the AP wire for news, now I follow Twitter. I follow reporters I trust on Twitter.

**BRIAN JONES:** I was visiting with a friend this past week out west who I hadn't seen for a long time. And he is a big Trump supporter, and he was giving me a lot of things that I'm like, we read about in Washington DC as being part of the byproduct of a fake news, and things that are kind of pushed into that world. You know what I mean? And he's a great guy, we had a great time hanging out. But in certain cases, is reciting some of that back to me.

And I was like, oh my gosh, I can't wait to tell Jenny about some of this.

**INTERVIEWER:** Wow, yeah.

**BRIAN JONES:** This is concerning. And how you begin to kind of navigate through that and find those sources to Jenny's point that are either curated, or objective in terms of trying to figure out what are we really looking at, how are we consuming this, and how is it impacting us?

**JENNY BACCHUS:** Mm-hmm. I mean, I'm going to sound actually like the Republican here. There's a great opportunity here in the marketplace, too. I mean, we still have an economic system where you could build a platform that commits to be fake news free. And I wonder how many people would switch.

**INTERVIEWER:** That's a great idea.

**JENNY BACCHUS:** I mean, look at what happened with Uber and Lyft. All the news that came out about Uber, I took Uber off my phone, and I have Lyft on my phone now. Sorry all friends at work at Uber. I made a market choice.

**BRIAN JONES:** I would say one thing on that front that was easier said than done in some cases, I think if you're someone who, look, I mean, I like looking at Facebook because it's a good chance to see what your friends are doing and look at pictures of your--

**INTERVIEWER:** Neighbor's kids, yeah.

**BRIAN JONES:** But all of a sudden to just like let it go completely due to me, because for Facebook there's not

another competitor in the marketplace. For Uber, you could say I'll go to Lyft now. Do you know what I mean?

**JENNY BACCHUS:** Yeah.

**BRIAN JONES:** But for Facebook, what else?

**JENNY BACCHUS:** Well, you could--

**BRIAN JONES:** Go Instagram, I guess?

**JENNY BACCHUS:** Or you could create another-- a new social media outlet.

**INTERVIEWER:** A new platform, yeah.

**JENNY BACCHUS:** A new sharing option.

**INTERVIEWER:** Well, speaking of Facebook. On, I think it was Halloween, lawyers from Facebook, and Google, and Twitter testified in front of the Senate Judiciary subcommittee about Russian meddling in the 2016 election. Are there policy implications from that?

**JENNY BACCHUS:** The problem that's happened with telecommunications and technology in some of these firms is that you have legislators who don't really understand how it works trying to legislate. I think there is going to have to be a change in how things are regulated, because the companies are all changing and kind of merging into the same services. So the phone company is doing some things that Google used to do, and Google's doing some things that Facebook used to do, and Apple is doing.

So all of the companies are sort of changing what they do as technology changes and as platforms change. So I think there will be some kind of comprehensive telecommunications reform at some point. I don't think it's now. I do think the companies have gotten a wake up call. What you had for a long time with these tech companies is they're all like teenagers now, is that the tech companies are growing up, and as the companies got bigger, the founders and the management paid more attention to all the shiny new objects in front of them, like driverless cars, and new ways of doing search and video, and didn't pay as much attention to the products that there were being developed on the sales side, or the controls, or lack thereof. And there was a sort of push for revenue.

Now, the companies are going to have to come back internally, and figure out how to come up

with new policies.

**INTERVIEWER:** Brian?

**BRIAN JONES:** I mean, on some level it's amazing that something hasn't happened sooner, right? When you've got a company like Facebook that has its hands into what, a billion people? You know what I mean? Who are communicating about information among themselves. At some point, inevitably, you're going to have some type of issue.

But I think that the main challenge that the tech companies have now is a political one, right? And I think if they can respond well politically, and some will probably do a better job than others, then maybe they'll be able to navigate through a potential regulatory or legislative issues. If they can't, then you could have a situation where they may go through a prolonged period being in a situation where a lot of other big companies were, whether it's telecommunications, energy companies and others, just with a constant battle or fight on their hands.

**JENNY BACCHUS:** Mm-hmm, mm-hmm.

**INTERVIEWER:** Assuming that we don't all die in a nuclear apocalypse. Can we go back to something that we before considered normal? Is there any going back from a president who colors so far outside the lines of civility and public discourse?

**JENNY BACCHUS:** Yes. I mean, there's one Donald Trump. Like, I mean, there are plenty of megalomaniacs in the world. You don't generally get one that's had \$350 million worth of free media and television shows and media coverage over the years. I think a lot of what we're seeing from him is his unique personality. That being said, he is changing the rules a little bit.

The one thing I've been a little bit disappointed in is I know a lot of Republicans. When Dole announced for president, eight Democratic senators went up to the goodbye party for him and wished him good luck. And like, when he came through Nevada, and his last 96 hours tanking in the polls, Harry Reid was there at 3:00 AM during a Kiss concert to greet him.

I've been frankly surprised that the Republican's leadership, who are generally good people, haven't stood up as more-- and that makes me sad about the country. And that's where I get worried to your point, that maybe we have crossed a line. But America has a great way of surprising you. Every presidential election is very different from the last one. And that's the

candidate that wins.

Like the candidate that goes into presidential election and tries to rerun the last one is going to lose. The one that comes in and figures out where the country is now is going to win.

**BRIAN JONES:** Candidates who win are a reaction to the candidate who came before, and maybe some elements of them that people didn't like, right? So Trump is this straight talker because Obama was intellectual and sometimes inaccessible. Obama was intellectual because President Bush was viewed sometimes as not being that way. But President Bush was honest, whereas Bill Clinton was not honest.

So I think with President Trump-- I think Jenny raised a really good point-- this is somebody who grew up in the New York media market. Years of working with the tabloid headlines. So he's I think he's a unique character when it comes to dealing with the media.

**JENNY BACCHUS:** And perhaps has created an appetite for better behavior.

**BRIAN JONES:** You would hope, you would hope.

**JENNY BACCHUS:** I think that general-- if you look at the polling, the people want better behavior. They want the government to be focused on their problems. They don't want to be scared that a bomb's coming. The man has gone through the cultural American landscape, plowing-- the NFL is in disarray, we're relitigating the Nazis. It's definitely changed. And the way to sort of think about stopping it is like having Congress come together around issues to stand up to him.

And I think the Republicans are missing a huge opportunity here. I think a Republican-- and we've missed opportunities, too, so I'm not trying to be partisan here. But if the Republicans can draw a line in the sand somewhere.

**BRIAN JONES:** I think there's two challenges there. One, some of these guys have to deal with reelections all the time. And there is a political problem for them, that I'm not saying makes it right in some districts.

**JENNY BACCHUS:** That's true.

**BRIAN JONES:** And the other is, I think what they would say is, Trump did get popularly elected. And it's not that long ago. So if you're going to make the play that Jenny's talking about, and you have to do it a moment where I think you can win that fight and not wind up getting your head handed

to you. I'm not saying--

**JENNY BACCHUS:** No, I agree. No I think that's fair.

**BRIAN JONES:** I'm not saying it shouldn't happen, and I'm not saying it's a fair conversation, and I think on some level you want to see more leadership from the Republicans. At the same time, I think they have their own little world that they're in right now, which is a difficult one to navigate though.

**INTERVIEWER:** Absolutely.

**BRIAN JONES:** Yeah.

**INTERVIEWER:** All right, we have one minute left. You have had lunch with students here on campus. What is your sense of students and their level of activism, and their level of motivation and involvement?

**JENNY BACCHUS:** Well, just historically, I have to say it's amazing. I mean, the whole department and the feeling-- that sort of commitment to policy is really grown a lot since I was-- the other thing I was really excited about was that people were sort of willing to listen to us a little bit, too. We did get some interesting questions about how could you work for something that you don't agree with 100%? But they were willing to listen to our answers, and it made me hopeful that-- you can't solve a problem if you're stuck on one side or the other side of an issue. You have to sort of come to the middle.

Or if not come to the middle, you have to find a place, or a room, or a moment, a room of your own, to quote my English concentration here, where you can go try to figure out how to solve the problem. And they're willing to do that.

**BRIAN JONES:** Now, I like the fact that there really seems to be a desire to figure out what's going on, and not necessarily saying, this is right, this is wrong, but how do we kind of get beyond this? I feel like we've got that in a number of our conversations. I think that's really important and impressive.

**INTERVIEWER:** It's been so interesting hearing you guys talk today. Thank you so much for taking the time to be on *Trending Globally*.

**JENNY BACCHUS:** Thank you.

**BRIAN JONES:** Thank you.

**INTERVIEWER:** And please come back between now and 2020.

**JENNY BACCHUS:** Oh, we have lots to talk about.

**INTERVIEWER:** Take care.

**BRIAN JONES:** Thanks.

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