Panel: Political Polarization and National Security

**Kristofer Goldsmith**, Founder and CEO of Task Force Butler Institute, Truman Defense Council ’16
**Amy Spitalnick**, CEO of the Jewish Council for Public Affairs, Truman Political Partner ’11
**Joe Tate**, Speaker of the Michigan House of Representatives, Truman Political Partner ’17
**Amanda Ripley** (moderator), Journalist and Author

**Amanda Ripley**: Good to see you all and thank you all for being here. It's great to be with you in person in real life uh in Washington DC on a beautiful day and also to people who are watching from afar good morning. We have a lot of things we could talk about. I think the first thing I want to do is just very briefly you have the full bio somewhere else no doubt but very briefly tell you who we are lucky enough to hear from today. So starting from the end here Christopher Goldsmith is many things he's an investigator a combat veteran and the founder and CEO of task force Butler Institute which we will hear more about which is fascinating Amy spittlenick am I saying that right spatonic is the CEO of the Jewish Council for public affairs which is a recent change right but you've done many many things which we are going to hear about and then we have speaker Joe Tate who is the speaker of the Michigan House of Representatives yeah in the house and this is your third term is that right yes indeed all right so one of the things oh and I should note that everyone on stage except for me is a Truman National Security project member so awesome

I want to just dig right in and ask each of you to tell us about something you're working on right now because we're talking about polarization tell us about something that you're working on right now that is either a response to polarization or is affected in some way bipolarization maybe we'll start with You Chris

**Kris Goldsmith**: yeah so first I want to thank Truman staff and and all the members it's like my favorite part of the year so so thank you everybody who's behind this conference

So first um I kind of want to reframe this polarization talk so there is one side that believes that uh the left is coming for them, and taking away their rights and blah blah. And then there's the
other side that's Banning books and like Banning identities and banning Healthcare. These things are not the same. It's not a spectrum. Viewing this as as left and right and I've tried to remove talking about like far right from my lexicon because to call a Neo-Nazi far right provokes a reaction from the Marjorie Taylor greens of the world who say like oh you're just going after white people like you're telling on yourself first of all. um but what are we what are we working on right now? This is pride month uh someone who's got their pulse on you know all of Neo-Nazi Telegram and gab, and the rest I think that this month is going to be a little ugly, so my team right now is working with organizers of events. We're doing threat landscape analyzes and we are preventing violence um you know through letting these folks know how to protect themselves who are Bad actors in their area and what they can do to engage with law enforcement before the event so that should anything happen there's an immediate response.

Amanda Ripley: okay so I hear you saying that the word polarization is is just kind of misleading and inadequate right to to to what we're talking about. I also think it's extremely boring the word polarization, so let's just stop using it okay? So I think sometimes we're talking about different things when we talk about it right and sometimes we're talking about extremism and sometimes we're talking about. People who are caught in sort of malignant conflict which is its own kind of death spiral as we keep seeing thanks Chris Amy what what's on your mind what are you working on?

Amy Spitalnick: Well I would think I actually to go back to the point about how we're framing this discussion for me in many ways it's just a question about democracy. We say polarization but I think it's really a question of do you believe in democracy or not? And there's only one side that is actively fighting for democracy in this moment and another side that is actively mobilizing violent extremists and others through increasingly normalized bigotry to counter democracy. We need to be very clear about that and it can't be partisan to say that.

Amanda Ripley: So it might just ask. I also think we need to be clear about what is democracy exactly? If you ask 10 Americans you probably get 10 answers yeah what do you mean when you say that?

Amy Spitalnick: Well I mean there's the Democracy that I think all of us think we have and like right you know I'm the granddaughter of Holocaust Survivors. This is the country they came to after the war as a place that was supposed to be safe for Jews and other people but we also know that there's a long Legacy of systemic white supremacy in this country that never made it the inclusive multiracial democracy that it should have been so there's the Baseline that all of us sort of like felt we were living in and that for the most part we're safe in certain ways and that itself is under attack right now but there's also the aspirational inclusive multiracial democracy that we've never had um in which people's fundamental voting rights and other civil and human rights never existed in the way that they did for other parts of the population
I guess to answer your original question in my prior life until I guess only a few months ago I ran the organization that brought a lawsuit against the neo-nazis that attacked Charlottesville and when Charlottesville happened when we saw these neo-nazis chanting Jews will not replace us many of us were confused we had no idea what they were why they were saying this what this conspiracy theory was and in the nearly six years since we’ve seen that conspiracy theory go from the fringes and the dark corners of the internet to the mainstream of our political discourse and it might not be Marjorie Taylor Greene or another Republican politician saying Jews will not replace us but they're using Invasion language they're using globalist language Soros cabal they're talking about rumors and pedophiles when it comes to the lgbtq community and the ways in which these conspiracy theories are at the core of this increasingly normalized extremism that we're seeing seep into our politics and our society cuts the I think the Crux of this conversation in many ways how do you fight back against that and so in my new role at the Jewish Council for public affairs the core of our work is about building cross-community coalitions to both stand in solidarity with every Community that's under attack at this moment and there are many and to fight for the sort of inclusive multiracial democracy that we need that aspirational democracy not just the bare minimum to protect against these violent extremists and others who are actively trying to use extremism to roll back rights but to also do better than we were doing before for the long term and it's not a short-term project it's a it's a long-term project.

Amanda Ripley: Yeah. and I mean it sounds like you're saying that what happened in Charlottesville was in some ways foreshadowing or precursor for other things

Amy Spitalnick: exactly

Amanda Ripley: um can you give us just a short and we're going to come back to it but the short version of what happened with the litigation that you were part of in Charlottesville what was the outcome?

Amy Spitalnick: well it's very meaningful to be back at truecon because towards the beginning of my time doing that work I was on a panel where we were talking about this Pie in the Sky case we were bringing.

Amanda Ripley: This is 2019?

Amy Spitalnick: it was 2019 I think that panel um not very long after we first filed the lawsuit trial felt like a million years away little did we know all the things that would happen in the world since then pandemic make January 6th the ways in which it would really be a harbinger of what followed but the upshot is that what happened in Charlottesville was no accident it was planned meticulously in advance on social media down to discussions of hitting protesters with cars and then claiming self-defense and that's not an accident that's not you know free speech that's a violent racially motivated conspiracy to attack people and so Integrity first for America which is the organization Iran brought a lawsuit on behalf of nine community members who were injured
in the car attack and other violence that weekend and ultimately after many years of litigation resulted in a unanimous jury verdict finding every defendant liable for that conspiracy to the tune of multi-million dollars and so

and you know there's so much to talk about in terms of accountability and extremism and how it ties into the work Chris does and how it ties into the broader fight for democracy it speaks is involved with and I also think that the way in which Charlotte's Charlottesville really was the harbinger or the preview of the violence that's followed not just the mass acts of violence like Pittsburgh and Poway and El Paso and buffalo but these increasingly normalized conspiracy theories that have become part and parcel of our political dialogue is so important to understand and something that six years ago I don't think anyone in this room or anywhere fully anticipated.

Amanda Ripley: yeah and and it's so interesting right because there are ways in which you could see this coming and ways in which you probably have been frustrated I'm guessing by other people not seeing it coming and and then it's also I would imagine extremely heartbreaking to be to be validated in these ways but you've also learned a lot and in many ways that that case is a is a sort of template right for some of the work that you're doing Chris which we'll hear more about but speaking of precursors and foreshadowing speaker Tate Michigan in some ways was dealing with sort of extreme extremism let's say um in ways that we're probably very familiar when you saw what happened on January 6 right so can you tell us a little bit about how you've seen in your three terms things shift in Michigan and by the way we are going to start to talk about Solutions and hope so don't worry just gonna do this I know in DC we spend a lot of time admiring the problem right and looking at it from 800 different angles and lamenting it I know my colleagues in journalism spent way too much time on that but I just want to establish where we've been and where we are.

Joe Tate: Absolutely well good morning thank you all uh for for having me uh I think for us you know looking at Michigan that as you know the the past few years I think um those that aren't from uh the state of Michigan probably looked you know before uh last year's election and basically said what is going on in that in that state um you know we had everything from as you mentioned you know before January 6 there was kind of this um this trial run on on those that felt they could undermine our our institutions our state institutions with the legislature and essentially say uh to our dually elected governor that she can't lead our state and you know in April of 2020 they ended up showing up you know and hundreds with you know they're long guns and their weapon systems I served in the in the military as well and and you know you have folks that showed up like they were about to go into combat um uh and essentially in what we saw um on January 6th at the state capitol at the state at the state capitol you know also with nooses with you know with um you know all the other symbols uh swastikas and Confederate flags and coming from being in the north you're like why do you have a Confederate flag in Michigan does it make any sense but yeah so and and you saw that and then you continue to see the intimidation with you know the Wolverine militia uh Wolverine
Watchmen uh that that were planning and plotting on kidnapping our governor uh and essentially holding a separate trial um for the actions that that she was taking um and leaving leaving our state uh and then it kind of continued to follow uh with having false electors come in and try and certify um when when President Biden won the state tried to come in and even plant on sleeping in the capital like finding a way in the capital so they could come into the the chambers to try and undermine a free and fair election so that kind of sets the groundwork for for what was going on in the state of Michigan voters exercised their power last November so this is the first time in 40 years that Democrats control both the house the Senate and the governor's office and we're seeing a change there and and as we discussed earlier we're trying to make government at least my job in the house trying to make it more boring um so we can just get down to doing the work of of the people.

Amanda Ripley: yeah and it's something else right to see I mean I wonder we've seen actions like this in other countries all over the world and you served in the Marines um what was it like that day were you at the Capitol and what were your thoughts on that day you know my thoughts on that day?

Joe Tate: was um I I think it was just surprise I I I couldn't be more surprised in terms of you know our the institution that that that we had in Michigan that has served us for obviously not perfect we have more work that we need to do but for a group of individuals to basically say you know it was essentially basically having um you know piling because they don't they don't get their way so they're going to use force and intimidation to come into our capital and I have probably a few members that were here you know some former colleagues too that were that were there that day essentially them coming up to the chambers we're lucky to have our state police there and and our sergeants to make sure that that we were safe and and protected but I mean it was was definitely touch and go there to see like are they going to come through into our chamber and and you know what is going to happen and essentially what is going to happen to to our state yeah if this happened so it was uh it was it was very surprising and and just unsettling.

Amanda Ripley: deeply unsettling I can imagine yeah and I believe there was at least one veteran involved in the plot against the governor which leads me to ask both of you are veterans this is a complicated issue obviously not trying to generalize here I wonder Chris could you tell us a little bit about your own story and how you ended up focused on trying to find neo-nazis before they do harm.

Kris Goldsmith: yeah so I uh I became an investigator while I was working at Vietnam veterans America and I used to introduce myself like here in DC is the first and last investigator of any veterans organization ever people would chuckle and now I run an organization of Veteran investigators and that was because I had found a a russian-backed imposter Facebook page that was pretending to be the organization that I work for long story short two years later I
produced a 200-page report called The Troll report that catalog the 10 different ways that troops veterans and our families are targeted online by hostile foreign entities and one of the through lines through all of those things whether it was romance scams or just selling T-shirts or this Russian entity that was posting pictures of my CEO uh was racism and xenophobia and specifically pitting veterans against vulnerable populations that was you know the LGBTQ community uh immigrants uh especially refugees and they'd use these racist slogans that would divide not just veterans but pit veterans against others within the United States and I basically just followed the propaganda into its natural result which was the radicalization of people who saw those racist and xenophobic messages and it resonated with them and they the algorithm you know the more you engage with that kind of content the more Facebook puts it into your feed the more radical you get the more your version of reality shifts because Facebook and Twitter are basically serving more racism into your feed so 2020 uh I I got laid off from BBA and a buddy of mine this is a weird story betrayed calls me up and says hey Goldie I joined a Neo-Nazi organization I want you to help me take him down we had never had a previous conversation on this topic [Music] [Laughter] um but I said you know I I went from full-time student running my non-profit working for a non-profit to graduating and getting laid off um and so I went I had a lot of time so I was like all right tell me about your neo-nazis and when he first used that phrase that were Nazi I thought he was exaggerating and it wasn't until I was inside Patriot front that I came to realize that gen Z these young kids teenagers early 20s were immersing themselves in fascist propaganda like literally reading mineconf creating new content and basically taking everything that they learned growing up watching uh brand builders like Kim Kardashian and applying the ideology of of Hitler to it to build movements and do these shock in awe campaigns like Charlottesville so uh started speaking out about this getting public about doing it and a bunch of veterans would reach out to me online and be like hey put me in coach and I recognize that what I do is objectively

crazy joining Neo-Nazi organizations and militias so I couldn't just like tell vets hey join your local militia but we came up with the idea of task force Butler and most almost all of what we do is online we also spy on Nazis with drones which they sued me for um in a very interesting turn of events but we have have given these vets a new Mission a new way to reclaim patriotism reclaim our service to our country and protect democracy in speaking for myself in ways that I wasn't doing in Iraq.

Amanda Ripley: So it sounds like in some ways more Mission aligned than you were in Iraq yeah in serving the country um many many questions that I want to ask you and we will also get questions from you all so be thinking about that um before I do I do want to bring you in here Amy and ask um can you give us a sense of the template that you used in Charlottesville and how that might be used in the future because part of the solution has to be accountability and as you've also noted right it can't be the entire solution you can't litigate and prosecute your way out of this problem um so first let's talk about what you learned what is the template from Charlottesville?
Amy Spitalnick: well accountability matters I think we are living at a time when it's so easy to feel like there is no accountability because frankly there hasn't been on so many levels and that's how this extremism gets normalized so that when it happens it's all the more important and so in our case we brought a civil lawsuit under a number of federal and state statutes including a federal statute called the Ku Klux Klan act which was written over 150 years ago to protect recently freed slaves from Clan violence in the South and is sadly perfectly applicable in the 2020s as well as sort of state conspiracy laws and others and there's different federal and state laws that might apply in different cases but the Crux of this is using civil litigation to hit these extremist organizations where it hurts which is their finances and their operations and so even before trial we had neo-nazis like Richard Spencer who Circa 2017 was perhaps the most prominent Neo-Nazi in the United States one of the key organizers of unite the right say that this case has quote financially crippled him and so if we did nothing else but bankrupt Richard Spencer I feel pretty good about that

uh but it also goes beyond that right so so certainly the case has bankrupted these groups many have talked about how it's undercut their operations some have shut down a few have claimed that they've left the movement and even though we're skeptical about that it speaks to the pressure they're facing um but what the case also does is really pull back the curtain on how these groups operate what their what is their actual conversation happening on these Discord channels where they plant violence how did they intend to use tools like plausible deniability this idea though we were just joking about hitting protesters with cars we didn't actually mean we would do it how do they use different tools like that to plan to recruit to conspire to engage in violence and to really I think also illustrate the conspiracy theories and the hate that's at the core of their ideology this replacement Theory this idea that there is you know a Jewish Puppet Master pulling the strings bringing immigrants and refugees into this country supporting the black community in its progress and anything good that happens to

these populations that don't fit into their vile narrow vision for sort of a white ethno state there has to be some someone pulling the string someone funding it and it's that same rhetoric again that same conspiracy theory that has become normalized in our politics in so many ways and so again by going after their finances their operations by pulling back the curtain on how they operate and we made a deliberate point to put all of the trial materials the exhibits the transcripts the evidence database it's all on the Integrity first for America website yeah um so that people including future litigants researchers journalists academics can use this as a tool to better understand extremism and we've actually seen our case now serve as a model there are a number of January six cases modeled on it and other cases that use the same framework to go after these extremists in their pocketbooks and with their operations

Amanda Ripley: yeah I was very grateful that you made all of this so public I think that helps because we've got such deep distrust going in the country and it also helps to your point of pulling back the curtain and also you know replicating in other places what you've done it also brings to mind this point that you know you have to do many things all at once for a problem like
this it is a wicked wicked problem speaker Tate you you have this wonderful aspiration of making government making politics boring again which I love and I wonder it sounds like one way to do that potentially correctly if I'm wrong is to make government function for more people so can you tell us are there one or two things that you've been able to get done that you feel like go towards that?

**Joe Tate:** absolutely so I think there are a few things and as you mentioned too and you know this theme of of how long this does take to actually get to a point where you know we are reducing you know extremism and polarization one of the things that that we've been doing in in Michigan there's been a couple of ballot initiatives I think one is around um one a couple that has has been around just lowering barriers uh for for voting so you know we've done ballot initiative around no reason absentee voting we recently had a ballot Initiative for early voting and um so other items like that to to lower the barriers there but also we had a ballot initiative around an independent redistricting Commission so we know when and immediately I'm I'm you know I'm political um you know when we have the legislature we know that that draws draws the lines they draw it in in their favor so the people of the state of Michigan decide to have that separated out from from the legislature and I think what we've seen and this is the first cycle that this has taken place where we have new lines drawn by an independent body we see that the lines are more are part more partisan Fair but also we're seeing

**Amanda Ripley:** the lines are more split like in other words like 50 50 districts

**Joe Tate:** yes yeah yeah we're seeing more of that so there there are more districts where you can't you can't as a candidate you know go too far um you know in the fringes and and I think that's going to play out especially with the legislation that we've been looking at as well too so I'll give you one example is gun violence reduction so we've we've been able um in

Michigan in this first part of this legislative session to do gun violence uh Common Sense gun violence prevention so so simple not easy but simple things like um Universal background checks safe storage um extreme risk protection orders uh things that you know my colleagues on the other side of the aisle to you know had no interest over the past decade to even take a look at even though it was something that the people of Michigan wanted

well they get primaried out right if they support it absolutely to be fair yeah it was structurally set up that way yeah but it sounds like now that's less likely a little bit

**Joe Tate:** yes and I think over the the next several Cycles you will see because there are uh seats that are held by Republicans that you're seeing a large body of of their constituents that for this example gun violence they they want to see that right they the majority of Michigan residents want to see us do something about reducing gun violence

**Amanda Ripley:** majority of Americans yeah absolutely yeah that's a great example of like a structural change sounds like
Joe Tate: and we want to keep moving kind of in that in that sense so when we look at things how can we continue working you know with thinking about pocketbook issues as well too so in terms of tax relief uh in terms of we've been able to expand our civil rights um law to include the LGBTQ community as as well too so those are things that that you know where where essentially the policy is good politics right at the end of the day like this has a majority of support

Amanda Ripley: and these are good sound policies okay so this is a good example right of of a tactic to try to make politics boring more boring again uh by reducing the rewards to conflict entrepreneurs right making it harder for people who incite and inflame conflict to be in positions of power for um you know if you have a sort of diverse first politically mixed District then it's harder to just you know dehumanize large groups of people many of whom are you know your constituents um so that's a great example and I wonder also I mean as we think about the way you have to deal with this problems from so many different directions One Direction is um sort of mental health direction right I would assume like you can't just react to these problems and litigate or prosecute you want to deal with it further Upstream so Chris I wonder I think one of the things that makes you so powerful and wise in this work is that you have been there so you can't just villainize every veteran or person who's ever gone down the YouTube rabbit hole right

Kris Goldsmith: yeah I don't know if he's still here but me and Max Blumenthal probably would have been friends like 15 years ago um my first time in DC I had a mohawk I was an anti-war protester I was I came out of Iraq like really really messed up um and angry and lashing out and uh pretty pretty right-wing libertarian um and that that period in my life I was literally meeting people like Stuart Rhodes who were starting organizations like The Oath Keepers so that they could one day go on to storm the capital and try to overthrow democracy

I know what it's like to fall down the conspiracy theory Rabbit Hole I know what it's like to feel vulnerable and to lash out at others because I feel unsafe on a deep deep level and for me you know the thing that saved me from that more than anything was access to VA Healthcare and that's that's something that veterans have that no other American we have a right to Health Care and the VA really helped me put my life back together and stop feeling stuck and start moving forward and that I I have no sympathy for the people the the Nazis that I I'm hunting um so that to be to be clear

um I know how a lot of them got there and it is somebody else's job to work on their mental health what I am focused on is making it difficult and expensive to be a Nazi you want to be a Nazi you can I'm just going to try and ruin your life

Amanda Ripley: I'm curious um I'm actually really curious where you draw that line like why don't you have sympathy that could have been you yeah yeah had you not had Access to Health Care
Kris Goldsmith: I mean I I could have been a very scary terrorist um and we actually just uh back on on January 6 this year we ran an exercise where me and my team taking our knowledge from being inside these militias and these hate groups built out um you know what could happen on another January section you're very good at it yeah um I and I I see myself in a way in in some of these people and that doesn't mean that if I had become that person that I wouldn't deserve jail time right or I wouldn't deserve um people's anger right so there are professionals who who are focused on Mental Health you can be an expert in nothing and a jack of all trades right I could try to do everything or I could be an expert.

Amanda Ripley: this is what you're doing right now?

Kris Goldsmith: this is like task force Butler Institute we have one Mission hunt Nazis ruin their lives yeah

Amanda Ripley: and meanwhile but telling your story I think and understand why people are feeling motivation and why people are seeking belonging right and purpose and uh an explanation for their grievances right a scapegoat um uh and then this also gets to you know what are the interventions right that might work could you talk a little bit about you were telling me about the something hopeful that recently happened uh at the White House last week I think it was weak

Amy Spitalnick: yeah yeah look I think I I much like I think this whole panel we probably talk about these issues a lot publicly and it's important to recognize there are reasons for Hope and that it's not all dire and so I just want to say that to start because there really are and for me the last week in particular has been hopeful the White House put out a week ago this comprehensive historic strategy to fight anti-Semitism and at its core it recognizes that to fight anti-Semitism you have to protect democracy and you have to fight for the safety and rights of every other community under threat and vice versa to protect democracy and fight for other community safety we have to take on anti-Semitism because it animates and fuels so much of that bigotry and white nationalism and conspiracy theories that we've been talking about

Amanda Ripley: because these things are often siled

Amy Spitalnick: often silos

Amy Spitalnick: some people over there and the anti-racism people over there and like

Amy Spitalnick: exactly and as it sorry as a Jewish woman right I know that my safety is inextricably linked with the safety of you of like everyone else in this room no matter our identities because if one of us isn't safe none of us are safe and also yeah
and that's to be a no-brainer right but the ways that we look at these issues are increasingly a siled and when we start to see them as part of the holistic sort of tools that are used holistically by extremists to attack our democracy right replacement theory is fundamentally anti-semitic racist xenophobic islamophobic and so much more if we are not understanding How Deeply interconnected all of our Fates are it's that much easier for the other side to tear us apart and make it easier for them to win and so at the fact that the strategy recognizes that at its core that didn't happen by accident there were many of us for sort of the six months from the first round table at the White House in December to the strategy coming out last week that we're hammering this point because you don't hear it a lot in the conversation on anti-Semitism sort of a lot of The Usual Suspects do try to act like you know it's a zero-sum game and if like one Community gets something another Community doesn't and when we start to recognize that for example in a moment when neo-nazis are actively recruiting off of anti-trans and anti-drag events that makes all of us less safe right we begin to move the needle right

Amanda Ripley: right because so many movements have been short-circuited by this kind of factionalism right so what's one specific thing that that initiative is kind of trying to push forward when it comes to like interventions online or other things that might work at this Upstream level?

Amy Spitalnick: well there's a number of of things both that the government itself can do that are outlined in the strategy and then identified partner that partners are doing Civil Society organizations on the Civil Society front my two favorites are well one it calls out the Jewish Council for public affairs where we're going to be building coalitions focused specifically on this cross community solidarity in fighting heat and protecting advancing democracy and it also calls out one of my favorite organizations that I'm on the advisory Award of the polarization and extremism research and Innovation lab which is a mouthful an

American which is a small lab that does targeted evidence-driven interventions to help prevent people go going down the rabbit hole of online extremism giving caretakers parents teachers direct resources so that they could spot the early warning signs of extremism the stuff that Chris has been talking about are we actually empowering the people who are with those typically young white men on a daily basis to spot the signs before they go and buy the assault weapon and shoot up the synagogue or the supermarket or

Amanda Ripley: is it giving money towards those efforts?

Amy Spitalnick: so um there are there is government money that is starting to go towards those efforts okay and then the plan itself identifies a whole Litany of other efforts including of course The Usual Suspects doj DHS but it also it brings in other sort of surprising agencies into this the FDA and the USDA right so part of preventing extremism and hate and fighting for democracy is also creating an inclusive Society where everyone feels welcome and so if there's a family that's on the snap program and they're kosher and they don't have access to kosher food as part of that that's not an inclusive democracy and this is true of any Community right
who has dietary needs or any other needs and so when we start to look at our society in this holistic way understanding that fighting extremism and protecting democracy requires not just the same tools we've been using that clearly haven't worked this more holistic cross community cross-issue Dynamic right we cannot just fight the extremism but work towards that inclusivity which I think goes hand in hand with so many of the policies you've been talking about in terms of voting rights in terms of gun violence prevention the broader societal issues that you know again because to your point we're not going to sue prosecute or barricade our way out of this crisis it requires proactive measures to get to Upstream prevention and to build that sort of democratic resiliency into our society that makes it that much harder for people to be radicalized or move towards violence in the first place

Amanda Ripley: right there needs to be like more immunity exactly um and I love this idea of experimenting what actually works to be helpful to people online I mean every story I write there are 10 different headlines that are tested online in the first hour by the places I write for but we don't see anything close to that with like interventions right for extremism online so if we just could put a little more attention to this I really feel like there's incredible opportunity because a lot of people who correct if I'm wrong but a lot of people who end up getting radicalized are depressed they feel a lot of grievance some of which are fair and valid and some of which are imagined right and and incited by others and so like there's opportunity in that um I wonder speaker Tate as as you think about ways in which I mean you still have to get things done right like you can't wait for these things to get fixed or for all the reforms and you're living in the in the real world of politics where you have a majority of it are very slim majority right um what do you find has been helpful in trying to get things done across the aisle that maybe I don't know maybe you wouldn't have done you know five years ago?

Joe Tate: I think you know we have to be able to identify and I've always been you know hold to this that I think you know we have to move into bipartisan fashion I mean and and in our state I think that's incredibly important I think we have to you know pursue pursue that goal we don't always get there and and that's okay but there has to be I think a new way of thinking in terms of of building new coalitions um and how do we go about doing that a lot of that is you know in part building Trust there but finding those opportunities and I know I use you know kind of those pocketbook issues as as one egg one example like things that cut across you know cut across anything whether you know I'm a Detroit or whether you're in Detroit or you're in the upper peninsula uh of Michigan like things that that people you know there's just that common overlap so finding those issues and kind of building those cracks so so to speak to to to create that so I know we talked a little bit about gun violence prevention but some other things like you know when I travel across the state one issue that always comes up and for us is housing like no matter what like you know I I could be again on the east side of Detroit or you know could be in Traverse City Michigan housing is it's one of those issues that you know you just say okay we have to figure out how to fix this um and I think those are those one-time opportunities
where it helps to build some muscle memory say that we can we can maybe build new coalitions to work together on those issues because us at the end of the day I think I I sincerely believe this like there we have to keep the trust of our institution and for me in particular the house and by doing that we have to get work done we have to take action there's no longer just sitting on the sidelines and hoping something kind of goes away um so when we do deal with the harder issues at least we were able to take you know kind of a crawl run approach and hopefully build out from there it doesn't always work yeah you know we kind of appreciate

**Amanda Ripley:** the hard problems are solved through boring slow you know collaborative difficult work right this is the kind of thing that um so I love this idea of seizing every opportunity we're going to open it up for questions before we do that I'd just like to give our panelists a quick Round of Applause and thank you

**Q&A**

I think we've got two mic runners in the house and we've got a bunch of hands up so we will see yes go ahead

you need to get this mic turned on if at all possible here we go we got a second mic I'm just going to do a color commentary

um I'm Alexandra thanisatos I work for the Anti-Defamation League so obviously this is the core of our work I love that we're talking about both accountability and prevention and so I have a question for speaker Tate specifically if you could talk about education initiatives in Michigan to help you know combat extremism you know even talking about whether there's uh you know mandatory mandatory Holocaust Education anything like that yes absolutely so we're act we're going through our budget process right now so um you know hoping to get a

budget done the fiscal year budget done uh before we go on summer recess but to that point you know we're no longer in the seat of where we have to fight against still have to somewhat where you know last last legislative session you know we had people wanting to have bills Banning CRT and things you know of that nature which you know we're this audience is familiar with but how do we approach it and and a big part of that is through our our our budget as as we go along so you know ensuring that not only that we are teaching you know courses and and and kind of baking it into our language uh but also providing those resources for that so whether it is you know um you know we'll say even African-American history or history route um you know we can talk about uh sex education as well too which is something that we are dealing with uh as well too that we have to to fix because there’s not any standardized approach right now or requirement of the state of Michigan so anyone can you know there's no alignment there so we start that with our budget and then for me in particular it's kind of a focus around Equity like how are we funding Equitable equitably with at-risk students and special special education as well too but that's kind of the start for us and and the hope that we continue to kind of make
those strides to not only support policy wise but actually fund those supports so our school districts can can teach those programs

who's next uh do we have a mic here we go

hi thank you Eliana Johns I work on nuclear force structure at the Federation of American scientists uh first thank you for sharing your perspectives on such a complicated issue so this was touched on a little bit but I'd love to hear more of folks thoughts on the role of myths and disinformation in fueling both political division and extremism especially considering growing accessibility of AI enabled technology and what you think can be done to mitigate these risks thank you I'm so glad you asked that I was literally thinking ah we need to talk more about this do you want to start yeah so I uh you know I kind of talked about the origin story of how I became an investigator um studying Mission and disinformation that was targeting the military and veterans community a lot of it for the explicit purpose of of radicalizing my community and turning us against one another and other other groups Mis disinformation and conspiracy theories are at the heart of most hate I mean anti-semitic conspiracy theories about immigration about the media about politics I mean these Nazis think that I'm Jewish and therefore have superpowers um which which is fine like they can keep being scared of me that's very helpful but this that that conspiracy theory aspect is is what drives so much raw hatred and that's that's where people like dig into their camps and uh the threats that they perceived imaginary threats uh they view themselves as being in an existential fight and that's how they justify violence in their own minds hmm can I add one thing yes which is that no social media site or any platform is obligated to give a platform to this sort of disinformation misinformation or extremism

it's the idea of free speech has been wholly co-opted by sort of extremists in this debate where somehow the First Amendment which applies to what the government must do is now being used to say Facebook YouTube Discord any of these sites can't possibly take action to

either remove violent extremism hate disinformation or anything else from their sites and we know in Charlottesville we saw how Discord was used explicitly to plan the violence we have we've seen it over and over again this cycle of extremism in which each attack inspires the next on social media and not just the Fringe sites like gab and 4chan and all of those but Facebook and YouTube and other platforms that we all use and so being very very clear about social media moral and ethical obligations and ability even if they don't have a legal obligation in this moment to remove that and perhaps they will have a legal obligation down the road there's a lot of debate about that but I think we so often lose sight of the fact that there is something very obvious that those who control so much of where the discourse is happening can do in this moment so it feels like we're moving in the wrong direction though because a lot of people have been laid off who work in those already two small departments uh looking at this information in these companies so it also feels like Congress is not going to seriously and competently regulate this anytime soon hopefully I'm wrong um so where what's the most likely way to
interrupt this because you know as the audience member pointed out with AI it's just going to get harder and harder to tell what's for any of us to tell what's true and what's false like I know this is a hard question but I mean yes to begin so part of part of my Evolution from going from studying misinformation disinformation trying to combat it by like promoting narratives of Truth and doing fact checks I now think that all of that my years of doing that was a complete waste of time yeah I have shifted Focus that's why task force Butler is specifically going after the Bad actors because you can you know take down Steve bannon's YouTube channel yeah but if Steve bannon's still out there creating content for other people and it's getting onto other platforms you're never ever ever going to match his engagement right because hate and conspiracy theories get more online engagement than anything else so taking them off the field and using legal tools to do that that that is that is my Mo that is that is what task force Butler is all about but don't you think someone will just replace them like isn't there an infinite supply of Steve Bannon [Music] um

infinite there well there are there are very talented propagandists yeah when you take out a very talented propagandist like de-platforming works right so it does if you take out a really talented propagandist someone else has to learn those skills someone else has to build that audience and that is tax time and money and so yeah so our objective is make it difficult and expensive to be a Nazi right the platform works but also it makes all of the other tools we've been talking about the preventative measures the media and digital literacy right the resources we're providing people so that when there are still these platforms that they are on or if another propaganda does take that place people on the front lines with our kids with the people most likely to be radicalized at least have some of the tools to help identify that disinformation those early warning signs and so on and not just identify but hopefully exactly because I think that's really exactly probably most people in this room have some family member who has fallen down some you to rabbit hole right and it's really hard to know what do I do yeah you know I mean I don't want him to get arrested you know my my cousin or my brother or whatever so then what um how do I intervene in a way that is useful and effective um okay we've got another question here hi there um okay so on that note actually uh I have

a question about sort of Grassroots supporting Grassroots anti-fascist organizations so I was in Charlottesville for the unite the right rally I led a small group of Faith members to in support of the counter protesters they call us Care Bears for those of you who are not in the protest scene um and we brought uh you know water and snacks and things like that medical supplies for the folks who are counter protesting signs that said things like Jesus was anti-fascist for example made by one of my plaintiffs

um so before the rally though our little group was trained by local organizers in de-escalation and protest Ops we took fascism 101 trainings Etc and because we're in the northern Virginia area there's lots of local groups that are interested in this kind of a thing afterwards and more recently I've been called by my friends out in like Idaho and other places much more rural and less sort of tested in these these things and they're dealing with issues at local libraries with
drag protests calling me and saying how do we secure this library for these fascists that are coming on a bus tomorrow and I'm just wondering we've talked a lot about how do we stop the fascists before they get out there and do stuff what about the Grassroots support of local organizations to build the capacity and capabilities so that all of us in here have what we need to cease fascism where it is and do something about it where it is

okay so um so my organization is is more or less brand new um though it looks like a lot of you folks who are out last night donated last night and thank you uh as of as of like until last night we had zero money and that meant that like getting me here like Truman had to pay for it right we need funding and local activists need funding to make this connective tissue happen we do heat fat training we do train activists and and really journalists uh specifically how to engage or how to not engage responsibly and and safely um and it really it boils down to resources I mean the right the and I know I said I wouldn't use this term but like the political right the grifter right the Steve bannons the pillow guys people spend money and give money on on that side for like the most absurd stuff in the world give send go is like created for January 6 defendants right

yeah and for some reason the velocity of money over there is allows them to be on the attack much more and that's why task force Butler and students that are saying we're out there to defend democracy no we're going on offense like we want to go get the bad guys we want to take them off the field so we're reaching out to and I kind of talked about this a little earlier we're reaching out to um some pride organizers and helping them like perform physical safety assessments of their actual location and doing simple things which in this everybody should know about this I only just found out about this when talking to an attorney general the other day you can issue a do not trespass order without having to go to court you just go to the police station every jurisdiction is different but I'm generalizing you don't need to go to court you can issue a do not trespass order those police deliver it to that fascist or that fascist organization so as soon as as they set foot on private property that's it that's a misdemeanor and and the police can take them away right there it doesn't need to escalate to violence you cross that invisible line that's it they're arrested and that that is a new tactic for us and and

that's what we're really trying to get Pride organizers this month to be aware of that that's a tool that they can use it's so important I agree with a lot of what Chris said and I also think it's so important to not let local governments off the hook because in Charlottesville so the response fell to local community organizers and the faith community and others because the local government was not hearing their concerns about this massive violent event that was being planned and it wasn't the first time that these Nazis came to town that summer it was a summer of hate and we're seeing this as a tread and so we can't let local and state governments off the hook in places like Portland and Idaho and all these other places we were talking earlier about how last last June when Patriot front members were arrested in Idaho it was remarkable because they so rarely get arrested and held accountable and it's harder to expect our local and state governments to treat this appropriately when there's false equivalencies being thrown
around all the time between neo-nazis and antifa and we know that pointing and misdirecting to antifa is a very specific tactic of these white supremacists we saw it in Charlottesville when we saw elsewhere I sat through a hearing a couple weeks ago on Capitol Hill where I was the only Democratic witness and the hearing was called left-wing violence there was no hearing on right-wing violence and you know I sat there like being berated by Marjorie taylor green about how it's antifa that's the problem there's a trans invasion the real white supremacy is abortion and so our homeland security committee which is where we should be figuring out how do we prevent these sorts of Act of mass mobilized violence is instead using these opportunities to normalize the anti-immigrant anti-trans and other rhetoric as opposed to actually doing the work that local community organizers end up doing and so we need to be holding our government accountable to their responsibility here and part of that starts with calling out the false equivalencies we see far too often

foreign for one more question do we have a mic that is out here

okay hi my name is Bali Kumar I live in Minnesota so we have a democratic Trifecta like you have in Michigan speaker Tate you stated that you you want to lead with bipartisanship and so my question is you're leading the trifecta do you feel like that helps lower the temperature or you feel like now it's easier to find common ground because you have a trifecta or do you think people are too entrenched

that's a good question I I think that it's always good to be in the majority um yeah I'll take that any day um I think that what we've been seeing and and you know we've kind of talked about it and the the most frustrating thing I think that I see even working across the aisle um is I have a lot of a lot of cop colleagues and this is why elections have consequences and I think Michigan is the case it can be used as a case study for it is that you know when I talk to my colleagues individually like about a policy um it's like yes I can I can get there and right we've all heard this but I know I'm going to get beat up or or somebody who's going to primary me and you know that's going to keep me off of the sideline so so they know what the right thing is but they just don't do the right thing versus and there's more of those that yes I get it versus those that are say True Believers and are saying and and actually like adhere to this

misinformation I mean most and that's the frustrating part uh there so I think that over time that is going to change um you know it's just giving it time to where you know this may take a cycle or two when I've mentioned before you know you know good policy is is going to be good politics because after a while I think that's going to start playing out as as to you know these conflict entrepreneurs like after a while that just gets old and that just gets exhausting and that gets you know you just can't you can't continue that way you can only do that for for so long so I think there was initial entrenchment kind of of the first the first part of the legislative session um for us but as we get into okay we got to go get through the budget oh by the way you know I have you know a school in my district that needs you know some support or some resources or you know I have a bridge that you know that's been shut down and hey I need you know that's
connected to a hospital like it's a main thoroughfare in my area um I think you're going to start seeing that people start breaking away uh from the homogeneity of like you know we have to we have to oppose uh just to oppose because you know we want to win back um you know a chamber will want to you know that's encouraging so it does sound like as the wheels of legislation start to grind forward people do put down some of their weapons so to speak and most people know what's the right thing to do but they've been incentivized not to do that in some cases absolutely because there there's a there's a fear of you know of of a group of people that that said you have to be an obstructionist right like no matter what I mean that that you know we are you're We're Playing for Keeps and if I'm working with you know a Democrat um on something or I'm voting some way yeah you know I'm going to be primary they have to get over right right and and I would say it's not just politics where that's encouraged right it's journalism it's activism it's all kinds of parts of our society where obstructionism and uh contempt has been I think um rewarded in in many ways right um uh we are going to take a break for lunch uh Rachel Maddow you may have heard of her is coming at 1 35. I've been told that Truman members can find their lunches in the member lounge and everyone else can go to the hub across the hall but I just want to thank you all for being here and thank our panelists for joining us today

thank you

friends we will now take a break for lunch and resume our program with our keynote speaker promptly at 1 30 in this Ballroom if you are a Truman member lunch is available exclusively in the member Lounge if you are not a Truman member lunch is available on us in the hub across the hall thank you