

Vicki Robin

Hey, Vicki Robin here, host of Post Carbon Institute's show, What Could Possibly Go Right? We ask cultural scouts, people who see far and have long histories of activism, to tell us what healthy shoots they see coming up in the cracks of the old system. We ask one question, go for 20 minutes, and we offer clarity about this confusing time and courage to act. So today I'm joined by Claudine Schneider. She's a former Republican Congresswoman from Rhode Island, and co-founder of Republicans for Integrity. She is calling out her colleagues in the Republican party to remember who they are. She's a champion of asking all of us to engage in politics, from our core values and our highest service. So Claudine and I are in some way cut of the same cloth. We're more or less boomers who believed, and believe still, that we can change the world. That vision and intention are key in working hard for the change we want. At this point in our lives, you can call us gritty, practical idealists, still willing to work for what we believe in. This was recorded before the 2020 Election. So whenever you see it, just know whatever the outcome, whether you like it or not, the message is still the same. We need to stay positive and stay engaged and call on everyone we know to join in this work of being democracy. So Claudine.

Vicki Robin

Hey, Claudine, it's so nice to have you with me on my one question interview series. You have such a deep and broad experience, both in environmental issues and in politics. You were for 10 years, your Republican Representative in Rhode Island. You've been a founding member of Republicans for Integrity. You've been doing everything you can to bring common sense to a nation that is sort of falling apart at the schisms and the seams. So we just have one question in the series, which is what could possibly go right in the context of this present moment - in 2020, with the pandemic and the polarization, and the racial justice uprising and all the things, all of the symptoms of national psyche in trauma. So wherever you want to take the question, I am so interested. So what do you say? What could possibly go right?

Claudine Schneider

Well, I think that there are many things that could possibly go right, and I think all of us hope for even more things to go right. But I would like to cover a few of the crises that we're dealing now; not the health crises, because sadly, we always seem to react once we have a heart attack, or once we get cancer, and then we change our way. Well, the pandemic has provided one of those great opportunities. You know, the word in Mandarin for "crisis" is the same word for "opportunity". So much of it depends on how you interpret it. Many wise people have said, it's not that you have fallen down or gotten fired from a job or lost a job or lost a partner. It's how you react to that crisis. I think that at this moment in time, we are ready to react with positive solutions. So I want to talk about the racial inequality, I want to talk about jobs, and then the political situation. So I won't cover the whole spectrum, but three rather large areas.

Claudine Schneider

I'll begin with the systemic racial inequality. One of the things that struck me when George Floyd was murdered, were the number of white people immediately in the march. To me that was a sign and they continued too. It means that we white folks are finally waking up to the fact that this is all pervasive. And then the sort of waterfall of other cases of Blacks being harmed. So, what could possibly go right? Well, we know for one that corporate sensitivity has started to take some moves and the most visible, for example, Aunt Jemima, you know? There's a lot of label changing going on, whether it's Land O'Lakes Butter removing the Native American on the packaging. So there's that initial move, but also, for example, the Business Council of Sustainable Energy. And I'm going to give examples of things I've done myself to hopefully

inspire those who are listening to this podcast to do the same, because you don't have to be a former member of Congress to impact change. So I got so many of these notes from various newsletters that I received. One was from the Business Council of Sustainable Energy and they said, "We stand with Black Lives Matter". Well, at that time, I had had it with all the talk. So I wrote them back a polite letter, and I said, "What are you doing about it?" And they said, "Well, your timing's perfect. Thank you, we'll interject this." They put me in touch with the president of the organization. And just last week, they followed up that their survey has been finished; they're creating a baseline. I said, "You know, the opportunity for training people, particularly minorities, in all the jobs that will be forthcoming to build a sustainable world, need to be happening now." Everybody can be an agent of change, and we all need to be. But on a larger systemic shift, I had the great opportunity to speak with the Police Chief Maris Herold, the police chief for Boulder, Colorado. She has some fantastic well-thought-out national police reforms that focus on three things: on strategy, technology and science. And for strategy, she said, We have to focus on our core strength, but really only 4% of the work that the police do has to do with violence. So diversifying and identifying some of those challenges that the police face every day that could be better handled by others, is, of course, one of the priorities. And that will cost less for the budgets for police forces, and it will cause less police intervention in cases that could otherwise be handled. For technology, one of the things that I thought was very interesting was that it's time to look closely at some of the non-lethal options that police have. They kill 1000 people a year. That could be substantially reduced if they use new and different technology. The third thing she mentioned is science, to use science-based training - science, more likely than not, being psychological-based training - and recruit different skill levels among the various candidates. She pointed out, which I thought was rather interesting, that before the year 2020, there was no training on de-escalation nationwide, zero. So there are many opportunities for reform. She's doing it here in Boulder, she's in contact with other police chiefs, and so I believe that this too will spread. So if any police chiefs are listening to this, or community leaders, they should follow up and learn the specifics. So that's just one that I wanted to address.

Claudine Schneider

Another one is the job loss. The estimation is that even though we seem to be treading water to some degree right now, business is going through some radical changes; in how they're operating and a whole broad spectrum of ways. You don't have to think very hard about how easy it would be to start putting truck charging stations straight across the country for electric vehicles. The opportunity to improve the grid, to establish more microgrids where we have universities and hospitals so that the blackouts that have been occurring in the past are not happening. All of this can enable folks to get new jobs, and for the lesser skilled people with lower educations, insulating and providing energy efficiency technologies for our old infrastructure, but also ensuring that all new buildings adhere to net zero energy construction. Now, most people haven't heard of net zero energy. I once asked a builder, he said, "Oh, I'm a green builder." And I said, "Oh, so are you just building net zero energy buildings?" He said, "Oh, no. My clients aren't asking for it." I said, "How could they possibly ask for it, when they probably don't know it's possible." And the same thing with the value of wind and solar; so many communities don't understand that there are sectors of the United States that are going, and are almost, 100% renewable energy. I think that one of the key takeaways I hope, is that I can inspire and motivate the folks who are listening or watching this to be part of the solution. I went into the Safeway grocery store the other day, and previously, they had a big sign that said: 100% Wind Energy, but the sign wasn't there anymore. So I went up to the manager, and I said, "What's your source of energy these days?" He said, "Well, I don't know." And I said, "Well, you're the manager. Don't you pay the bills?" "Oh no, that's paid by corporate." Well, I said, "I'm a customer. And previously, I saw a sign for 100% wind. I don't see that sign anymore, and if that means that you're no longer 100% wind, then I have many other options where I can do my

grocery shopping. And you can be sure I'll share this information with all of my friends." I said, "So I would appreciate it if you would please let me know. And why not put the sign back up again?" Because the public needs to know that wind energy is possible; that the corporate world is investing in it and there is great value there. For heaven sakes, we all want clean water, we all want healthy air to breathe. This is where employees in different businesses and in different corporations need to speak up.

Claudine Schneider

So the same is true with pulling out of the Paris Climate Accord. The reason that I wanted to talk business and economics and jobs is because I hate politics. I didn't run for Congress because I liked it. I ran for Congress because doors opened and I was recovering from cancer and I was looking for my purpose and eager to serve and didn't know where to go and what to do. And suddenly I become a member of the US Congress and felt that it was an honor and a gift to actually be able to solve problems. But my real passion coming out of Congress is my client work. I can tell you that I've worked with corporations, I've recruited 50 Fortune 500 companies to reduce not just carbon, but six of their greenhouse gases; including everybody from Target and Staple stores, to Lockheed Martin and Raytheon on the defence spectrum, and many banks like the Bank of America, Citibank and others. So the corporations understand. There was a recent poll by I believe about 800 corporations that said 89% of these corporations want to do right, by the workers, by the customers, by the community and by the environment. Well, what's interesting is that's a model that more are adopting now, to create both profit and progress. It has been proven in another survey by companies that focus on environment and social and governance issues, as a company, they found a 63% positive return on investment and only 8% found a negative return on investment. So money talks, but so does taking care of your stakeholders. So, much of the discussion now is to build better technological skills, because there is no question that AI and digitizing much of the workforce now is a growing trend. But they're also looking at, thanks to the pandemic, more job sharing and more flex time, which before, they were not so interested in. So they're reorganizing supply chains. They are focused on remote operations, because of single parents or caretakers or whatever. And their mantra seems to be: Act rather than react. That's what all of us should be doing. Don't wait for the next crisis, don't react to getting sick or allowing our body politic to get sick, but to act in advance. The other thing is, they're talking about defining and actually living their value proposition. So on the radio the other day, I heard from one of our local companies, Suncorp saying, "We want to hear from you." Well, they're going to hear a lot of negativity, I assure you, but the fact that they're asking is admirable. So the other thing is that they're looking at embedding sustainability into the design, rather than an afterthought, or a token gesture. Let me give you an example. Unilever; what an incredible leader they are. Now, granted, they're not an American Corporation, but they're leading many American corporations. And you may recall, in 2016, when there was so much hate messaging going on on Facebook, that Unilever took the lead and they persuaded the other advertisers like Microsoft and Disney to pull their advertising from Facebook and Instagram. That was a \$90 million dollar loss to those companies. That's significant. So when the corporate world is standing up for what they believe in, and I can go into Safeway and say, "What are you doing?", so can the rest of you. So, I just want to remind folks when it comes to business, we're the consumers and the employees and the members of the community, so we can drive the change that is happening.

Claudine Schneider

So I just want to quickly touch on politics. Suddenly now, more people are getting engaged. Everybody has to make sure that their neighbors, their friends, their total strangers are registered to vote. We have to educate ourselves and three organizations I would highly recommend: one is Citizens for Responsibility and Ethics in Washington. They keep

Washington honest by filing lawsuits. They're primarily lawyers, putting their thumb in the dam that is overflowing right now. They have more than 400 lawsuits against Trump, his family and members of the administration. I happen to serve on their board; I'm one of the few non-lawyers. They are awesome. Not only read their material and educate yourself, but send money because so many of these nonprofits are on the front lines now doing what we can't do. Another one is Taxpayers for Common Sense. They look at where your tax dollars are going. And oh my god, we're dealing with crisis management now. Vote Smart is where you can go to find out what's the voting record of your incumbent, and where is their money coming from. These are things you should know. The solutions are already being prepared. In closing, Issue One is an organization where 200 former members of the House and Senate have come together to focus on campaign finance reform. And HR1 passed the Democratic House of Representatives, but of course Mitch McConnell ignored it... Beautiful things are emerging but we cannot afford any more disruptions. Over and out.

Vicki Robin

Wow, what a feast. Yeah, one of the things I'm hearing from you is that in this moment, part of the gaslighting that we're being subjected to on a daily basis gives you the feeling that it is an immediate emergency, at a level that sort of impacts your nervous system. You forget long term thinking, you forget your grounding, you forget what the work really is, and the work is not some immediate throwing, of mud-slinging at one another. The work really is what you're talking about. I love it that corporations are not paying attention to these short term cycles. There's so much projection on corporations as you know; "They bought politics". There's so much projection on Republicans; "They think... dah-dah-dah." There's so much projection going on out of fear and upset that we're losing our democracy, but what you're saying is there are these organizations that have the long game in mind. There's businesses that have the long game in mind. We are nowhere near where we want to be, nowhere near, but when we win the presidency - we, I will say we, because I'm on the team. When sane people who are willing to engage in legal process win back our government, then we the people get to participate in a way that forwards the things that we really know are possible; we just can't get them. We can't get these planes to land. But what you're saying is, they're all circling in there ready. So I just want to thank you, Claudine. If you want one more sentence you want to say, but I just wanted to say what I was deriving here.

Claudine Schneider

Well, thank you for summarizing that so beautifully. Vicki, I have enormous admiration for you and the work you have done in the past, the work you're doing presently, and the work you will continue to do in the future. I do want to add one final point for any Republicans that happen to be listening and that is that many of us believe that this Trumpster cult needs to go down big time. There has to be huge wins for the President, for the Senate and all the other seats. Even then, there are many people that are reimagining a new Republican Party. But that can't happen unless we have massive wins. So that hopefully will light a fire under everybody to get busy right now. And also eliminate worry, eliminate frustration. Turn off the news, if that helps. Meditate, if that helps. The only thing that saves my psyche is by getting busy, every moment. Go for it.

Vicki Robin

Yeah, thank you so much.

Claudine Schneider

My pleasure.

Vicki Robin

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