

DyNAMC Roundtable Discussion

Our feature subjects and round table participants are always selected for the qualities, professionalism, and drive we feel makes them DyNAMC Leaders for a Changing World.

DyNAMC features a series of round table discussions on a broad range of topics from a variety of industry leaders across the country. The objective of the discussions is to provide viable solutions to issues that impact diversity issues. The information and views discussed in the round tables are those of the participants and do not necessarily reflect the official opinion of DyNAMC.



MONEY AND INFLUENCE IN POLITICS



Moderator

James "Jim" Lewis

DyNAMC Advisory Board Member
Issue Advocacy Director, YDA

James is a lifelong member of the Democratic Party. In 2006, he was first appointed as Publicity Director of the William and Mary Young Democrats. In 2007, he was elected as the chapter's outreach director. In March 2012, he was elected as the communications director of the Virginia Young Democrats. He still holds this position but is running to serve as Executive Vice President. Beginning in March of 2013, James began working on Atima Omara's campaign to serve as the Young Democrats of America's first African American president in the organization's 81 year history. In August, Omara was elected and James was appointed as the organization's Issue Advocacy Director.

As Issue Advocacy Director, James serves as one of the organization's spokespeople and oversees the issue advocacy and lobbying efforts of the nation's oldest and largest youth political organization.

Jim: Let me, first, thank you for joining us and participating in this roundtable. We think it will be a great opportunity to put these issues in front of DyNAMC readers and we appreciate your taking the time to talk with us. Today's conversation is really about money and influence in politics. One definition of politics would include the premise that it is all about influence. As candidates look to run for office, they are influenced by single issue groups, unions, donors, corporations, and a whole series of people who are trying to support candidates who share their vision and pushing them in a particular direction. We'll look at that and at what has become of our political system, especially now, with Citizens United and the ability of some groups to spend unlimited amounts of

money in our political system. We'll look at what that says for the health of our political system, in general, and at what it says about individuals and their ability to enact their first amendment right to petition their government. Let's open that up for initial thoughts and then we can break it down into individual issues.

of other federal court decisions that have also changed, and largely deregulated or liberalized, the way people, political committees, corporations, and non-profits can participate in campaign seasons and elections. There are, certainly, a number of schools of thought as to whether this is a good thing or

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Dave: Clearly, there have been massive changes to the campaign finance landscape since the Citizens United vs. Federal Election Commission decision, coupled with a variety

of a bad thing. The bottom line is that, especially going into 2016, we're entering a very different type of campaign than we had, even going back eight years, to when Barack Obama and John



Mara Candelaria Reardon was the first Latina elected to the Indiana General Assembly in 2006. She went on to serve four terms representing Indiana's 12th House District until 2014. Her committees included Ways and Means, Education, Environmental, Governmental/ Regulatory Reform, Small Business/Economic Development, where she specialized in budget and fiscal issues. Additionally, she served as a Commissioner for the Indiana Commission for Women, Market Development Recycling Board, Minority and Women's Business Enterprise Commission, Hispanic/Latino Affairs Commission. Currently, Ms. Reardon is a Principal at MCR Partners, Ltd. a consulting firm which specializes in Development, Government Affairs and Economic Development Finance. She continues her commitment to public service through her appointment to the Multi State Collaborative on Military Credit, a project to facilitate veterans' participation in higher education, and also serves on the National Association of Elected and Appointed Officials (NALEO) Education Fund Board of Directors.

Mara Candelana Heardon

Former Indiana General Assembly Member
Former Rep. Indiana 12th congressional district

McCain were battling against each other for the White House. The biggest change, and one that is perhaps most notable, or more visible, is the ability for organizations to play in an unfettered way when it comes to advocating for and against candidates. This is

types of groups. They can't have a primary purpose of engaging in politics, but that, alone, doesn't stop them from engaging in politics in a major way. That is something that has become very controversial, ultimately, because of the tens, even hundreds, of millions of

dynamic already play out in the primary's in the early states, or are people already hitting the markers in swing states?

Dave: Absolutely. There are a couple of important things to note. Most of the presidential candidates, in particular, have a Super PAC that seemingly only exists to support the presidential candidate that it supports. So, in a way, most of the presidential candidates have an extension of their own campaigns. It is a parallel campaign, if you will, that, unlike the campaign itself, can raise and spend

unlimited amounts of money. A lot of reform advocates feel that this, in a major way, has degraded campaign finance limits which were put into place as a defense against corruption. There is another thing to note, as well. Take a candidate, like Marco Rubio, for example. There is a non-profit that has sprung up that doesn't have to disclose its donors, has been

"You have a republican PAC, doing fundraising for all of their candidates, and just handing their candidates a blank check. You saw it in races across Indiana, where they don't even have to do fundraising. They shake out the sofa cushions and write a check for \$100,000.00." Mara

particularly true for non-profit organizations that can raise and spend unlimited amounts of money in elections and do not have to disclose their donors when they support or oppose candidates. In a way, they can operate just like a Super PAC or any other political committee, but they have certain protections that are not afforded to other

dollars that such non-profit organizations or "social welfare" non-profit organizations have been pouring into the system.

Jim: I think that's an important point. The 2016 election will be the first presidential election where you still have an incumbent with these goals. We're almost a year away from November, 2016, but are we starting to see that



Dave Levinthal joined the Center for Public Integrity in 2013 and leads its federal politics reporting team. Under Dave's direction, the Center's Primary Source politics blog won an Editor & Publisher EPPY Award in 2014 as the nation's best political blog. For two years prior to joining the Center, Dave reported on campaign finance and lobbying issues for Politico and co-wrote the daily Politico Influence column. He also edited OpenSecrets.org from 2009 to 2011. From 2003 to 2009, Dave worked for The Dallas Morning News, primarily covering Dallas City Hall also reporting on national elections and aviation security. From 2000 to 2002, he covered the New Hampshire Statehouse for The Eagle-Tribune of Lawrence, Mass. A native of Buffalo, N.Y., Dave graduated from Syracuse University with degrees in newspaper journalism and political philosophy and edited The Daily Orange. Dave has won numerous awards for his reporting and has appeared on dozens of television and radio networks and stations, including National Public Radio, ABC, NBC, CBS, Fox News, CNN, MSNBC, CNBC, C-SPAN and Al Jazeera America. Beyond politics, he is also a two-time winner of Canada's Northern Lights Award for his writing about the arctic.

Dave Levinthal

Director, Center for Public Integrity

very, very active in supporting his campaign to the tune of millions of dollars already and advocating for him as president. Again, operating in the same way as a Super PAC, but without the requirement of having to say who is behind it, who is providing the funding for it, or who is bankrolling it.

Jim: Great. I think that dynamic is really important. I'm going to target the next question to Mara, if you feel comfortable in answering?

Mara: Sure.

Jim: As a candidate, or somebody who works with candidates, how do you--as the actual candidate and not the influencer--manage these emerging dynamics? These campaigns are getting more and more expensive. For

example, I live in Virginia and we're seeing senate races that are costing in the millions of dollars. Those numbers were there for congressional races, now it's in the state senate, and even some house races that are getting close to those numbers.

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Mara: In Indiana, we're seeing a super majority of one party that has an unlimited ability to throw money at races. They have unlimited fundraising ability. The Democrats in Indiana can't compete with fundraising or with being able to fund these

see a lot more money going to that side. So, essentially, there is not a two party system when you have some people who have to raise a certain amount of money. Let's say, they can raise it, but then you've got the Republican structure. You

have a republican PAC, doing fundraising for all of their candidates, and just handing their candidates a blank check. You saw it in races across Indiana, where they don't even have to do fundraising. They shake out the sofa cushions and write a check for \$100,000.00. I think it makes people leery of the process, in general. The effects of the super majority have been the lowest voter turnout in the nation in the last Indiana election cycle.

Jim: That is certainly a challenge, and I think this gets into my next question. Do massive amounts of money in

the system discourage people from, one, going to the polls and participating in our political system; secondly, petitioning their government, calling their members of congress or their state legislators because they assume they're already in the pockets of somebody else; and third, does it disincentivize standard people, who may or may not have twenty or thirty dollars in their budget but want to make that contribution to a candidate that stands for them? I'm not really seeing that, yet there are some interesting proposals out there that further incentivize those small donors. What impact does this have on

everyday people who are going to the polls, trying to petition their government, and be good, active, engaged citizens?

Mara: I think it disenfranchises voters. I believe that, when you see that amount of money controlling the process, people don't have an incentive to go out and vote. They believe that it's a done deal. When you have such a super majority you can conduct business in the Indiana General Assembly with Democrats not even showing up. Because of the super majority, Democrats don't even have to show up for business to be conducted. They don't even meet the thresholds for a quorum challenge. That does not have a positive effect on the political process.

Dave: I would just add one thing. I agree with all that, in principle. You are beginning to see a little bit of backlash, though. Candidates are presenting a major selling point

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for their candidacy as being, sort of, anti-big money, anti-Super PAC candidates. I can think of three at the presidential level who have done this with some success. One is Bernie Sanders on the Democratic side. We've heard from Bernie Sanders, all along, that Super PAC's are awful and should go away, and big money and politics is something that has been detrimental to democracy, etc. As a result, he's been able to cobble together incredible small dollar donor support. Lots and lots and lots of people giving him twenty dollars or fifty dollars or one hundred dollars. He may not win the nomination, but he's been able to run a very viable campaign up to this point. On the Republican side, Ben Carson has largely been fueled by similar types of people, at least in terms of the amount of money they're giving. Obviously, the donors are very different, philosophically in their political leanings, but, in the same way, they have been giving ten, twenty, fifty, one hundred dollars. In fact, we just wrote the best story on this topic earlier this week. Finally, there is Donald Trump. Donald Trump is just hither and yon all over the country at every campaign stop, just blasting Super PAC's and outside organizations as bad, terrible things with which he doesn't want to associate. That resonated with a lot of his supporters. He makes the case that, “Hey, I'm a billionaire. I'm my own Super PAC. I'm not beholden to anyone.” You probably couldn't find two more different people in the race than Bernie Sanders and Donald Trump, but, at the same time, their success has been tied, in some degree, to a similar foundation of support.

Jim: I think that is indicative of a larger push, amongst the American people, of

opposing our political class system. Despite the fact that Bernie Sanders is currently a sitting senator, when you look at the people who were leading in the Republican polls it was Carson, Trump, and Fiorina, people who don't have political titles in front of their

“That needs to translate to people voting in November and, for those that are comfortable, making political contributions to the candidates that matter to them.” Jim (James Lewis)

names. They're not governors, they're not senators. Then you see Bernie Sanders as that alternative on the democratic side in a lot of ways, and Hillary, who was a First Lady and a Secretary of State and a Senator. Do you think that this money in politics is in some ways driving this...

Dave: Let me interrupt, I'm going to have to step into the FEC meeting, right now. So, I'll be back as soon as I possibly can. [At this point Dave Levinthal stepped away]

Jim: Okay. Great. Thank you. Okay, so Mara, I guess I can pose that question to you. Are you hearing from some of your candidates or the people that there is an anger toward the political class or the political elites in the country?

“Right. I think it's a tough question. I'm not sure how you fix it. I guess the answer is to keep getting engaged. There's nobody I don't talk to about voting, about politics, and about being engaged in the process.” Mara

Mara: Yes. I think the down side of all this is that there is nothing happening in Washington due to the hyper-partisanship. People think it's a good thing, sometimes, to see outsiders in the process--Ben Carson, Donald Trump--people who have no political experience, as opposed to somebody who has a vast knowledge of the federal government, of working together, of bipartisanship. Things you see in the experience that Hillary Clinton brings to the table. She was a Senator, Secretary of State, and First Lady.

It's almost like a backlash against experience. We want somebody from outside because this process has become so tainted. People have that perception which I think is difficult to counter simply by saying there are people who have the right intentions when they get into this business of public service. The era of the Kennedy family making it a badge of honor to serve the public is long gone. People don't believe politicians are serving the public anymore and that's because politics is, essentially, being driven by money.

Jim: Somebody told me that there hasn't been an election, other than the most recent re-election of President Obama, that didn't have a Bush or a Clinton in it since the 1980 elections. I was a little surprised by that. So, has money in politics become so bad that not only are we creating a separate political class, but



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we’re essentially creating political dynasties?, There are historic dynasties in congress that have been there for years. I loved Rush Holt, I thought he was an amazing congressman, but his father was a senator from New Jersey before Hold became a congressman.

Mara: Right. Why is that a bad thing? I see it in some families here on the local level that have followed their fathers into politics. Why is that a bad thing that we raise children who have a desire to serve the public? Donald Trump touts his children joining his business. Why is that a bad thing? People perceive it as a bad thing, but it’s not. I don’t think it’s a bad thing. Sometimes people don’t recognize the sacrifices that come with public service. The time away from your family, for instance. They see that it’s some kind of get rich quick scheme. Well, let me tell you, when you have to raise a million dollars to make \$24,900.00 as a state representative, it’s no get rich quick scheme. It’s a true sacrifice to serve the public and that’s the problem. People don’t see it as serving the public anymore because of the large dollar amounts that it takes to serve the public. We have a citizen legislature. There is a lot of ongoing discussion about whether we need a full time legislature or whether we should continue to be a part time citizen legislature.

Currently, the people who serve in the legislature are either self-employed, wealthy, or retired. This is because those are the people who can afford to take four months out of their lives to go down to the capitol and serve the public.

Jim: In some ways, you’re preventing people who are already doing jobs in public service, from continuing to serve the public in an elected official role. You’re not giving teachers the opportunity or nurses or doctors, because they don’t have that flexibility.

Mara: Right. I think that all this money has really made it seem like it’s some kind of glamorous job, when it’s truly a sacrifice. It’s something to be respected. I don’t think it’s a horrible thing for somebody to dedicate their life to public service and then to have a political dynasty. Like I said earlier, I think Donald Trump is very proud of his business minded children. They followed him into the business world. Does that mean that he’s any easier on them or that it’s been any easier for them? I don’t know the answer to that, but I do know that when people serve the public, it’s not always an easy thing. It comes with sacrifice and I think that money has tainted that perspective. Nobody questioned the Kennedy dynasty, and their commitment to serve the public when they could have done any number of things with the amount of money they

grew up with. They chose to serve the public.

Jim: Exactly. I don’t think we’ve had these big amounts of

money in the process for that long, but I do agree that money has tainted the perspective of public service and the goal of serving the public and serving your community. The reason I brought up this issue was more along the lines of, do you create political dynasties because that’s the only way you can get the type of money you need to run these sorts of races?

Mara: I do. I think it’s a very difficult task. When you’re a congressman, you are in for a two-year term. You are raising money all the time. You’re raising money for the next election, all the time. That said, I think you have true public servants who want to get things done and they’re very frustrated by the process. You can’t get elected without money, unfortunately.

Jim: Yes, and that’s the problem, isn’t it? Mara, while we wait for David, I actually have a separate issue on which I think you’ll have a particularly important perspective.

Mara: Sure.

Jim: You mentioned that you’re looking at state reps who are running races costing in the millions of dollars, and stated that the state senate race is probably going to cost even more than that. I’m originally from Pennsylvania and I’ve seen the money in the state legislatures just explode. A lot

of these major dollars pay the whole of the state legislature to play in redistricting and how that process goes down. If it changed it would influence the state legislature and would have to try and influence a congressional member.

Mara: Sure.

Jim: Everyone agrees that gerrymandering is a huge problem. Yet, the Supreme Court continues to throw out cases, and they throw out maps all the time. So, are we seeing this influence in politicians in that they are fundamentally contributing to this problem of gerrymandering?

Mara: Everybody put everything they had into the 2010 races. Everyone had their eyes on the prize, you know? If you could win that election, you would control the legislature and draw the maps. That’s what we’ve seen. We’ve seen a super majority rise in Indiana because of the map drawing and due to the way the maps were drawn by the majority. I’m sure that’s not the only place we see it.

Jim: All right. I think when you look at the way the House is structured, that you can’t gerrymander a state. Indiana, I think, has two democratic congressmen, but one

democratic senator and the rest are all republican congressmen. That’s not representative of the state. It’s representative of the way somebody drew the lines, probably with the help of a really sophisticated computer program.

Mara: Sure. It was very calculated. They certainly have been able to control the process. It’s a winner-takes-all kind of thing when you have a system where the winners draw the maps. Whoever is in control draws the maps. You’ve seen it. My district changed significantly after 2010. I was drawn into a district with a colleague, so we had two Democrats in one district.

Jim: Which, of course affects the primary.

Mara: Right. So, it was either one of us would retire or... Ultimately, that’s what happened. One of my colleagues retired instead of running in a primary against me. That happened all over the state. I think you’ve seen that time and again, where the maps matter. They absolutely matter and I don’t know what it’s going to take to change that process. It’s politicized either way. If you have a commission that draws the maps, those commissions

are, in most states, appointed by the political powers that be. So, you have the same bias. It’s not as blatant, I guess. I’m not sure what the answer would be to drawing political maps. It actually is a factor.

Jim: Especially f the money influences them, and the opportunity is there, to make those decisions at that level, as well.

Mara: There is money throughout the process. There is a money hierarchy within your own caucus. Whoever raises the most money gets the chairmanships, gets the plum assignments, and gets the big fundraising committees. There is a hierarchy on every level of this process that is driven by money. If you don’t raise money for the caucus and for the team, you don’t get the right positions. You don’t get the right access. You don’t get the leadership roles. It happens at every level.

Jim: Those leadership roles also affect your ability to raise money and the estimable Ways and Means Committee is always going to be able to raise more money because everyone cares about taxes.

Mara: Right, and it affects whether you get on the Budget

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Committee or if you get on a committee at all that raises money. Look at committees that actually touch people’s lives, the Family Social Services Committee, for example. Somebody who chairs that committee isn’t going to have the same fundraising ability as someone who chairs Energy and Commerce, that’s for sure.

Jim: I think that’s exactly what you were saying about serving the public interests versus serving the money that allows you to get reelected.

Mara: Right. It is a Catch-22. You cannot be impactful if you’re not there, and you can’t be there unless you raise the requisite amount of money to get you there. Oftentimes, it’s not about your intentions or your qualifications. As we’ve seen, people who lock up the Congress are not doing so because they care about the public. They’re there because they are serving their own interests. They’re there because they are entrenched in what they believe to be the right thing. If, however, you poll the people in their state, you’d learn they don’t believe it’s the right thing

to shut the government down.

Jim: I believe it was Indiana, in 2014, that had raising the minimum wage on the ballot. It passed overwhelmingly, but the best that I can figure, the elected representatives, with a simple majority in the house and the majority of their congressional delegation all opposed that increase.

Mara: Right. Although the public wants it. It can cut both ways. Look at the amount of money it took and the amount of money it took to stop the Religious Freedom Bill from moving forward in Indiana. They finally reacted to the bottom line—the dollar. The businesses that said, “We oppose discrimination in any form.” The politicians listened to the corporations and pulled that bill. Now, what you’re going to see this next session, which is going to be interesting, is that they’re tying LGBT rights to the Religious Freedom Bill now. They’ve married the two. Now where are these corporations

going to come down? On what side? LGBT civil rights? Or religious freedom? Now that they’ve married the two, what’s going to happen?

Jim: We saw that in Arizona. There was a letter from major employers in Arizona that changed Governor Brewer’s decision on similar legislation on LGBT issues, which is an important civil rights issue of this generation.

Mara: Right.

Jim: I’d like to start talking about how do we undo this problem? With Citizens United, the only path forward is a constitutional amendment. Congressman Deutch has been an example and there are some other groups out there, as well. With so much money influencing politics, will the moneyed spend more money to continue their ability to spend? As people who believe politicians should be beholden to their constituents and not their donors, what do we do about this?

Mara: You know, that’s a tough question. I’m not sure. I looked at the statistic that sixty percent of all Super PAC donations came from 159 people in 2012. That’s unbelievable to me. One-hundred-and-fifty-nine people.

Jim: ...are making the decisions for us, basically helping decide who gets elected and who doesn’t.

Mara: That’s what happens. I think the biggest problem is that people don’t show up at the polls. People aren’t showing up to vote. How do you solve that issue? I don’t know. Is that a symptom, or a cause, that allows some to hijack the process, because they’re not engaged in it? Or, are they not engaged because they see the process already hijacked?

Jim: I think it’s a, “Which came first—the chicken or the egg?”

situation. We all understand this is a problem, but how do we move forward in fixing it? Public financing is one solution toward this problem, and there are, also, proposals that aren’t quite public funding. There are some proposals out there that help empower small donors. For instance, if you contribute fifty dollars, you’d get a fifty-dollar tax credit or there’s a matching contribution from some sort of funding source. Those the types of programs we need to be considering. Do we need this constitutional amendment? Will getting rid of Citizens United solve this problem, or is it a mix of...

Mara: ... and why not? Why do people not have to disclose their Super PAC donors? would be wrong with that

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transparency? Personally, I think that’s what’s missing in the process. The transparency. Being able to ask, “Do I support the viewpoints of this particular PAC? I don’t know. Who is part of the PAC?”

Jim: ...and you don’t know what side...unless you read their websites, you’re not sure which side of the aisle they’re on.

Mara: Right, and there are some people who play both sides. They’re hedging their bets. It’s a tough question. How do you fix it? How do you regain the public trust in the process?

Jim: Which is probably the most important issue that is facing our democracy, in a lot of ways. How are we part of a democracy when so many American’s just don’t vote?

Mara: It’s pretty disheartening when you see people who have fought and died for the right to vote and we just take it for granted.

Jim: Except for DyNAMC readers. DyNAMC readers are all informed, they all vote, and will be encouraging their friends and family to make sure they vote in all the elections.

Mara: Look at the elections in Saudi Arabia and the joy on faces of the women because they were able to vote for the first time. How do we get that excitement going here?

Jim: Occasionally, we have candidates that rise up and tap into that, but, not to the extent that we saw in Saudi Arabia, nor to the level that you saw in the 1980’s with massive African-American turnout to support Reverend Jackson in his presidential run. Many were people who had never voted before.

Mara: You saw it with the passion that Barack Obama brought to the election. You saw the passion, in the inspirational campaign he ran. I don’t know how you do that again.

Jim: Yes. Is it a call to personality, or was his campaign successful because it was about inspiration? I watched the recent presidential debate and there was nothing that inspired me. In fact, it made me want to lock my doors and not want to go outside of my house. It was brutal. It was doom and gloom, as opposed to a message of “Let’s rebuild



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the American dream. Let’s have hope in our country and hope in our fellow Americans.”

Mara: I think you see a little bit of that in the Bernie Sanders supporters. They’re inspired by the things he’s saying and by the policies he’s promoting. You’re seeing some of that on a smaller scale. But, people don’t want to support somebody they don’t think is going to win.

Jim: Yes, but you also see that with Hillary supporters who are seeing that there is a historic opportunity to elect our first female president. You see some of that, but not to the level we saw in 2008 with the Obama campaign. That’s the question, is it something inspirational or do we need to change the way we talk about politics?

Mara: Right. I think it’s a tough question. I’m not sure how you fix it. I guess the answer is to keep getting engaged. There’s nobody I don’t talk to about voting, about politics, and about being engaged in the process. I talk to one person at a time. There is nobody I don’t talk to about it, including my kids, who are very politically engaged for a fifteen and a sixteen-year-old.

Jim: Which is great! I was lucky to have a politically engaged father who was really involved in these issues, which is why I started to become engaged and involved and doing what I do now.

Mara: It was a different time. There was always a cause that my parents were supporting. They helped build Resurrection City in Washington, DC, to demonstrate for the war on poverty, which they were

passionate about in the 1960’s. They were engaged in the Equal Rights Amendment for women. They were engaged in the Cesar Chavez grape boycott. They were engaged in the dumping of foreign steel in the 1980’s that was decimating our steel industry. Those were things that mattered to them. Things that were impacting their community. It was a different time. This is a very media driven, superficial time. Now, people don’t want to keep up with issues, they want to keep up with the Kardashians!

Jim: Do you think that, in some ways the media has a responsibility to say whose money is backing these people?

Mara: Everybody has a responsibility to shed light on the process and have opportunity, but like I said, I think people are trying to keep up with the Kardashians...

Jim: As opposed to keeping up with who is running our country.

Mara: Exactly. About who is impacting their lives, regularly.

Jim: In some ways, it’s the quintessential example of nobody cares about when the trash gets picked up until it’s not picked up. Then they’re calling city hall. But, at no point do they pay attention to it except when there is a problem.

Mara: Governor Pence is a very personable guy, much more so than Governor Daniels was. Because he was a personable guy, people felt he was okay. He didn’t say much during the election, however. After he was elected, and he brought this religious freedom bill, it was like

hey, wait a minute, who is this tea party guy? Guess what? He was tea party all along, but people didn’t take the time to find out who they were voting for. We vote on how people look, not the substance of them. How many times has Hillary Clinton been asked about her pantsuits? Do we ever ask Marco Rubio what he’s wearing? Who he’s wearing?

Jim: Exactly. That’s a product of the ridiculous sexism that still exists in this country that we need to address. We haven’t because we’ve ignored it. It’s also about race and there’s no big money. It’s not the oil industry that’s buying members of Congress. It’s people who think they run other people’s lives. They’re...

Mara: ...and that’s it. You have an opportunity to do the right thing when you serve. It doesn’t matter who contributes to your campaign but, if you’re afraid of not getting reelected, that’s a big motivator for people. That’s how they justify their vote. They say, “Well, I can’t do anything unless I’m here.” Well guess what? If you have a kick-ass term and you do the right things that you’re supposed to do, maybe that’s all you were supposed to have.

Jim: Or, your constituents will vote for you if you make the right decisions. You have to communicate that you’re working for them and not for special interest. That’s the challenge.

Mara: There are people who contributed to my campaign, but I did not vote their way just because they did. You have to not be afraid to do the right thing. You have to be fully formed when you arrive. You can’t let that title define who you are as a person. If you’re afraid of donors, that’s not a good sign.

Jim: No. that is definitely not a good sign, and we’ve seen that time and time again. A

couple of days ago, there was the issue of guns and the no fly list. There are a number of privacy issues associated with that. Even so, time and time again, you see contributions to the people who voted, people who are getting mega dollars from the NRA to go in one direction and everyone else in the other...

Mara: Right.

Jim: There is also the ability for them to go after candidates, or incumbents, for their votes. If they have the ability to spend that kind of money and mail everyone in the district and let them know about this one vote, but there is no one...

Mara: In Indiana, we lost two amazing republican women in the General Assembly who worked in a bipartisan fashion. They cared passionately about what was right and wrong. They were taken out in a primary because they took a stand on gay marriage. There is a lot of money...

Jim: ...and you see that quite a bit. Things that push them, that are pushing the parties to either end.

Mara: Right. It’s that whole, “You’re either with us or against us” attitude, and that’s not how things get done. Not everybody gets everything they want. I happen to live in a two party household. My husband is a republican. We’ve figured out a way to stay married for eighteen years with being members of two opposing political parties. You can work together. You don’t have to agree on everything.

Jim: But, you can agree on the things that need to get done and do a good job of it.

Mara: That’s right. We have managed to raise two children from two political parties. It can happen.

Jim: Yes. Now, I have to ask, is there is a friendly wager to see which parties they vote for when they turn eighteen.

Mara: Oh, no. It’s a done deal. They’re on mom’s team. [Laughs] My husband is not one of those partisan people. He believes in certain ideals of the republican party, like fiscal conservatism, but he does not believe in the social issues that have been driving that party for the last decade. Blind idealism is always a problem.

Jim: Yes, and a huge symptom of the problem is that big money comes from those social issues, really. You know, they’re, of course...

Mara: Right. They’re complex issues, but I believe there’s more we have in common than not.

Jim: Yes, exactly. I think that’s probably the best sentiment on which to end this conversation. There is more that unites us than divides us.

Mara: Right. There are more of us than the 159 people controlling the political process at the presidential level.

Jim: That needs to translate to people voting in November and, for those that are comfortable, making political contributions to the candidates that matter to them.

Mara: Right, and not seeing their contribution as useless in the face of millions of dollars.

Jim: Every little bit helps. I’m sure you know that, when running for office, every little bit helps.

