



Jackie McDermott: [00:00:00] Welcome to Live at the National Constitution Center. I'm Jackie McDermott, the show's producer. This week, the National Constitution Center and With Honor Action, a group dedicated to promoting the leadership of veterans in public service, join to present a program on the state of Congress. NCC president, Jeffrey Rosen, was joined by members of the For Country Caucus, a bipartisan group of military veterans serving in Congress. Here's Jeff to get the conversation started.

Jeffrey Rosen: [00:00:29] Ladies and gentlemen, welcome to the National Constitution Center, and to today's convening of America's town hall. I am Jeffrey Rosen, the president and CEO of this wonderful institution. And let us inspire ourselves for what I know will be an inspiring conversation by reciting the National Constitution Center's mission statement. The National Constitution Center is the only institution in America chartered by Congress to increase awareness and understanding of the US Constitution among the American people on a non-partisan basis. Friends, it is so meaningful to be co-hosting today's convening with With Honor Action.

Now, With Honor Action is a cross-partisan movement dedicated to promoting and advancing principle veteran leadership in elected public service, and I'd like to thank Rye Barcott, Rory Steele, and Greg Honan, and the rest of the great team at With Honor Action for their collaboration on tonight's panel. And we've convened, today four of America's most distinguished representatives, all of whom are committed to the missions of the National Constitution Center and With Honor, and, indeed, have formed an organization, the For Country Caucus, which provides principled military veteran members a platform to work in a non-partisan way and create a more productive government.

Each of them has distinguished themselves by resisting partisan pressures on really important matters. They've been Profiles in Courage, and it's so exciting to convene them to talk concretely about what they're planning to do with the For Country Caucus to promote non-partisan deliberation, on which the future of the public depends. So let me... their... I, their, their biographies are also incredibly inspiring, and because we wanna get started, I'm not gonna read them at length, but check them out on the web and you will be moved by their remarkable biographies and public service. So I'm gonna r- introduce them in alphabetical order.

Representative Jared Golden represents the 2nd District of Maine in the US House of Representatives where he serves on the Small Business Committee and the Armed Services Committee. He is co-chair of the For Country Caucus and previously served in the Marines and the Maine House of Representatives. Representative Chrissy Houlahan is the first woman ever to represent Pennsylvania's 6th District in Congress where she currently serves. She serves on the House Armed Services Committee, the Foreign Service... The Foreign Affairs Committee, and the Small Business Committee, and she co-founded the For Country Caucus as well as the Service Women and Women Veterans Caucus. She is also an Air Force veteran, engineer, entrepreneur, and educator including teaching history and civics.

Congress man, Peter Meijer, represents the 3rd District of Michigan in the House of Representatives. He serves on the Committee on Homeland Security. He's a ranking member



of the subcommittee on oversight management and accountability. He's a member of the For Country Caucus as well as the bipartisan Problem Solvers Caucus. He previously served in the Army Reserved and a veteran-based disaster response organization. And Representative Mariannette Miller-Meeks represents the 2nd District of Iowa. She serves on the Education and Labor Committee among others, and served in the Army for 24 years as a private nurse and doctor, as well as director of the Iowa Department of Public Health and a member of the Iowa State Senate. It is such an honor to convene all of you Representatives Golden, Houlahan, Meijer, and Miller-Meeks.

Representative Golden, let me begin with you. You helped co-found the For Country Caucus, which is dedicated to promoting bipartisan solutions and putting country before party. Tell me concretely, what are some of the reforms that the For Country Caucus is proposing that you think will help us achieve that crucially important goal?

Jared Golden: [00:04:18] Thank you, Jeffrey, yeah, for the question. I do have to make sure in front of my colleagues that I don't take credit for co-founding the For Country Caucus especially with, with Representative Houlahan here with us today. In fact, in, in the last Congress, the, the caucus came together for the first time and I was just the rank and file member and just Rep Houlahan was, was one of the fir- was one of the first vice chairs. You know, I think everyone gets credit for the, the founding, o- o- of the caucus. It, it, it started out as a smaller group, it is now a larger caucus in, in this Congress.

So we have, I believe, 25 of us, 15 Republicans and 10 Democrats and I, I feel very honored to, to be one of the co-chairs in, in this Congress, Jeffrey. You know, one thing that we looked at and successfully as the caucus advocate before got into the House rules was something called the 290 Rule, which was that if you could get 290 co-sponsors of a bill as an individual member of Congress take your legislation, if you can show that 290 members will support that legislation by signing onto it as a co-sponsor, you can bypass the chairs and the committee and bring that directly to the House for, for a vote. That, that really empowers individual members and encourages of, "Hey, approach where you see bipartisanship."

It's... there, there are not 290 Democrats, or 290 Republicans in the Congress, so if you wanna go with this route then you're gonna need some bipartisan support. We thought that that was a good approach and it's a big change and one that we were successful in getting. I, I am a big believer of this one would have impacted Democratic caucus more, Jeffery, but I'm a big believer in some kind of reforms which would put in term limits of sorts on how long you can chair a specific committee. I believe that the GOP actually does this. I think that that would be an, an important step.

Much of what I support, and I'm gonna wrap it up here without getting into any specifics, but much of what I support will either empower individual members change the Congress from just being all purely about seniority that's kinda place you know, create some turnover. Getting new thoughts and ideas and new people in charge. A lot of this, I think, comes from my time in the military, where I was taught that everyone has leadership to bring to the table. Everyone brings value to the team and Congress, doesn't always, I think, see it that



way. We hear many of our colleagues talk about that you've gotta pay your dues and they gauge that in decades not years.

So I, I think that the place would be well served with the types of reforms that will push new leaders out, and I don't mean young, necessarily new leaders out into the forefront, the country benefits when we have everyone leading.

Jeffrey Rosen: [00:06:54] Thank you for that great introduction, for those very specific proposals about reform of the 290 Rule and empowering individual members, including [inaudible 00:07:26], and that is just a great way to begin the discussion. Representative Houlahan, thank you for co-founding the caucus as, as Representative Golden reminded us. What concrete reforms would you propose to achieve its goals?

Chrissy Houlaha...: [00:07:16] Well, and thanks very much for having us all. And, and Jared is right in saying that this is a team effort, and I think that's something that's why I think a bunch of veterans started something like this. And before I, you know, talk a little bit about some reforms, I will go back all the way to the inception of this idea. What's remarkable about the For Country Cau- Caucus for me is that it's it's a club that's you know, fundamentally how I described that to the, to the junior high and high school kids and, sometimes, to the college kids that I talk to. When you go to Congress, you join clubs, caucuses.

This particular caucus, the For Country Caucus, is very unique in that it is a group of people who don't really have a ton in common other than the fact that they served in uniform. We are very, very different ideologically, we come from really, really different places, and we're trying really hard to find a common ground. We're trying to find things that we can agree on, and we're also trying to build comradery or rel- relationships, and we're trying to lead by example, and we're trying to lead with civility and decency.

And so some concrete [laughs] things that we could do is just to have some decorum. I think that's one thing that you learn when you are in the military. And I served, as you mentioned, in the Air Force, but my dad and my grandfather were career Naval officers. And so one of the things that I was on is never really frankly to talk about partisanship but really to talk about the mission. And that is something that I think we could benefit from in Congress the same way that we can in the, in the military itself.

So some of the things that I would say in terms of concrete reforms, you know, Jared talked a little bit about the 290 Rule, there's a lot of conversation about returning to what is called regular order, which, you know, again, kind of empowers committee members and committee leaders in a way that we're not used to right now in the Congress. My understanding from people like Jared, who have served in Congress in Congress in states is that other states, states in general, are much more high functioning and high performing than they are in the body, the national body itself. We've evolved into an organism that really favors seniority, as Jared talked about, that really f- favors how long you've been there, I... and really favors the leadership over the individual rank and file.



I was struck when I joined Congress, as an example. My background, as you mentioned, is in engineering. I'm a kind of a, a supply chain person is my, my kind of engineering, and I was really interested in joining the transportation and infrastructure committee. And I did my very best to advocate for the fact that I really knew, you know, something about that. I'm also an engineer. I really wanted to, you know, lend that, that credibility and experience. And the response that I got from, you know, folks was, "Wait your turn. You know, sit back and relax. It's gonna be a couple of decades before you have the opportunity to influence, you know, things that you know something about, because that's not how this organization works."

So a lot of the reforms that we're talking about don't necessarily come to 290 Rules or regular order or debate on the House Floor, they just come to kind of common sense, "How do you use the team that you have and the skills that they have?" I'll, I'll... as I wrap up, I'll say, you know, I was a high school teacher. I'll correct you a little bit. I was a high school chemistry teacher, I have girls as well, and grown girls at this point. We know how to organize a schedule that allows everybody to be at different places at different times. This is not how Congress runs. We run so that we're all at three different places at the same time.

And that does not create comradery, it doesn't re- you know create the opportunity to work together, and it's, I believe, in some ways, a deliberate strategy [laughs] to keep us separated and apart from one another. And with that, I'll conclude and I'll yield back. And thanks for having us, again.

Jeffrey Rosen: [00:10:40] Thank you so much. Such helpful concrete reforms, including not only the 290 Rule, but a risk informed, a re- a return to regular order, the rise of civility, and I was inspired. It w- it was your... you went on, after teaching chemistry, to found a non-profit helping thousands of underserved students build their literacy skills. And that was the civics part that I was so-

Chrissy Houlaha...: [00:11:00] [laughs].

Jeffrey Rosen: [00:11:00] ... excited about, but your service has been amazing across a range of institutions. Representative Meijer, like everyone on this panel, you've taken significant heat for pa- for resisting your party on important issues. Just as the Representatives Golden and Houlahan have voted against some Democratic priorities, so you have, notably voted for the impeachment of former president Trump, as well as for a bipartisan commission to investigate the events of January 6th. As you listen to your Democratic colleagues do agree with their proposals, and what proposals do you have for restoring the guardrails of democracy and promoting non-partisanship in congress?

Peter Meijer: [00:11:41] Thank you, Jeff. And I have to say when, when Chrissy said it feels a little intentional, right, that, that we... it's, it's easier to keep the two sides apart. You know, heaven forbid some folks realize there are areas of common ground, and then, potentially, we can... That, that general pull to one side or the other. I think we see that a lot in some of the legislative items that have been put forward. And, and I don't mean this in a, a partisan way, I'm sure it's a bipartisan affliction but as a freshman member, I haven't known anything but a Democratic majority.



But, you know, we'll look at a, a piece of legislation and sometimes, it's because it was passed in the previous Congress and so there's a grace period where if it wasn't taken up by the Senate, get re-introduced, but wha- frankly, we see this in some spending bills and omnibus packages as well, where you'll have multiple discreet areas of interest and rather than try to have... which may be a, a more frustrating from a, a transformational standpoint, but an incremental, patient, deliberative process where you can vote on certain areas contained within the larger package, everything becomes an all-or-nothing. Everything becomes a must-pass, and you, you really lose that ability to capture a lot of it, to Chrissy's point, to capture a lot of the knowledge and insight that may not be embedded within a committee, right?

There used to be four amendments in that era of regular order, and for sure there were some folks [laughs] who may abuse those, and that may take up a little more time, but you also have the ability to bring in knowledge or bring in a perspective that may not be represented on that committee, or may not be beholden to, to whoever is in charge and, and running that schedule or running that, that amendment calendar in order to, you know, really add value to some of these legislative items.

And to that broader point, COVID was dealt with by... in different ways by, by both parties, and there were varying degrees of, of precautions, and I think one thing that really led to was an aura of not just suspicion of partisan motives, but then that extending into many other areas. Now you compound January 6th and you have just all these ways in which Republicans and Democrats see each other through hostile lenses. I'm grateful for some of the bipartisan caucuses that I'm a part of, including For Country, because this actually allows us a chance to sit down, talk through some areas, find surprising areas of agreement that may not fall neatly along partisan lines, but I think that's one of the one of the frustrations with a, a two-party system, is that it doesn't always match ideologically.

I think of the work that, that Jared and I have been doing on War Powers Reform and on authorizations for these some military force, there's not really a Republican or a Democrat approach to that. I mean, a lot of this has to do with a belief in, in government role and, and, specifically, within that, between the executive and the legislative when it comes to war-making. So any opportunity for that to be expanded upon, I think, is incredibly positive especially when you have most interactions in pre-COVID times taking place in committees that are very firmly structured.

And when everyone there is kinda preening for the cameras and trying to get into your soundbite, it creates a very different atmosphere than, I think, many of us have felt in the closed door hearings that we've had, where you see how much people are actually looking for information, rather than trying to tailor how they're asking a question or what answer they wanna get to a narrowly targeted audience.

Jeffrey Rosen: [00:15:07] "Leaning in for a camera and looking for the next soundbite." That's a really powerful way of putting the incredible pressure that transparency puts on partisanship. And, just as you said, when people will have to play to their base it's much harder to engage in the kind of bipartisan deliberation that all of you champion. The... we



have a question in the chat about did anyone support the challenges to certify in the Electoral College vote? And Representative Miller-Meeks, you did not support that which took a great fortitude since, since most of your colleagues did.

So I, I, I guess I'll... as you, as you in this round, identify what reforms you think would be helpful to promote bipartisanship, describe what it was like to be in Congress and to resist that sort of partisan pressure. What enabled you to do it, and what would you propose that would enable others to be similarly the non-partisan in their positions?

Mariannette Mil...: [00:15:57] Well, it's interesting you ask that question since this is the National Constitution Center. And so I actually based my vote on the Constitution. So I looked at the Constitution, what were the provisions in the constitution? I'm from a small state in Iowa, so the Electoral College is extremely important to our state and the Electoral College vote is it... Versus the National Popular Vote, I had been defending the Electoral College for two years as a state senator because it has important.

So, constitutionally, what, what is Congress supposed to do when it comes to the electors? What's the province of the 10th Amendment and state's rights? What's the province of constitutionally, that states have the authority to conduct elections? So I looked at it from a constitutional standpoint. And given that I'm a military veteran and I swore an oath to defend the Constitution, I felt that my duty was to have respect for the Constitution as our rule of law.

So there were, certainly people on you know, both sides of this issue, especially within Republican party but for me, the decision... I felt very comfortable in my decision, I was very calm about my decision, because I was basing it on the principle of the rule of law and the Constitution and you know, support for my s- my state, for our states to be able to conduct elections. We had passed some very hard fought election law changes with our voter ID. Those things are not easy to do within a state. People think that they're easy, but they're not easy even when you have a majority of, of a particular party. And because of that, I felt very comfortable in my decision to vote to certify the electors.

Had the state sent us multiple slates of electors, then it would have been a different matter we would have had a choice, but states have the authority to send forth their slate of electors, and our job, in Congress, is to certify what the states have sent us. So from that standpoint yes, it was hard, because there were a lot of different opinions and there was pressure, but nonetheless, I felt calm that I was doing the right thing and I could explain my, my vote for certification of electors based on constituti- constitutional principles.

And as far as you know, how do we... you know, what concrete solutions for bipartisanship Representative Meijer and I are both new. We both came into Congress during the pandemic so we had some challenges on swearing in day, on January 3rd we had challenges with January 6th then we had challenges with the impeachment, and we have not had an you know, an opportunity, until very recently, to really meet and interact with with our colleagues. And that's on both sides of the aisle. So whether it'd be face-to-face or whether it'd be in small groups, that's been lacking.



So I will say that I really appreciated the opportunities in the For Country Caucus, because we actually do discuss, you know, bills we look for avenues of bipartisanship. I passed four bills two weeks ago. These were all bipartisan bills, all with members of For Country Caucus with veterans and bills that were in, you know, through Veterans Committee onto the Floor.

So I think if you look and you seek for ways to be bipartisan, that's helpful. That goes back to what Representative Houlahan said on civility. I do think regular order would be helpful, and I agree with Jared in the Rep- on the Republican side. We are term limited for committee chairs, and I think that helps bring new blood in, whether the blood is from an older person or from a young person, you know, we all have a perspective that we bring to Congress and I think that that's helpful.

And then I'm gonna tell you what I did in the State Senate and my... We were the majority in the State Senate, and I was even as an incoming member, was chair of Human Services, which is one of the largest committees and areas of appropriation in a state budget. And I believe in the golden rule, treat others how you wanna be treated. So I try to treat people with dignity, respect and look for opportunities where we can reach common ground and move things forward.

You know, we're... and also, I think Representative Houlahan said this, so both... All three of them actually have said this, but you know, when you're in the military, you focus on a mission. So I'm here to, to execute and to achieve a mission. I'm not here for soundbites, I'm on not here f- for TV time we have a job to do and we represent our states and our country and I want both my state and my country to be proud of me.

Jeffrey Rosen: [00:19:57] Well, both your state, your country, and I know everyone watching this is proud of you in... through your inspiring defense of the Constitution of the United States. You're patriotic service and putting Constitution about party is precisely what the founders of the Constitution hoped the representatives would do when they created the Constitution, and it's very inspiring to hear you talk about it. So thanks to you and to all of you for your service in that respect.

It was so moving to hear you talk about that concrete choice you faced. Maybe I'll ask you Representative Golden to talk similarly. You've said that you often remind yourself just 'cause you can do something doesn't mean you should. It doesn't mean it's in the best interest of the country. For that reason, you have been an opponent of passing bills through you know, budget reconciliation, you, you don't support ending the filibuster and you've opposed your party on pandemic relief and gun control bills although you support public financing of election.

So, you know, talk about the, the, the cultural, technological, political pressures you've felt when you've decided to break ranks in areas like this, and what are some of the cultural, institutional, or even moral changes that you think would help others take similarly principled positions?

Jared Golden: [00:21:09] Well, I've certainly become familiar with going it alone at times. [laughs] as a member of the House of Democratic Caucus certainly with the American



Rescue Plan I was the only Democrat actually the only Democrat in the nation, though, to vote against that. And I, and I could take the whole answer to talk about my rationale behind that. And jeez, you know, I've been... there's been some, been some times where I've been there too. Like you named a couple of them.

The first big one I will say, were, were the splits of the first round the first impeachment former president, Trump, where I split my vote voting in favor of the First Article, the abuse of power, which I felt was very clear and clearly impeachable.

And you were talking about the founders. I mean, when you go back and read the Federalist Papers about what they had said about foreign... their fears of foreign influence, certainly in much different contexts you know, as we were a much weaker nation then than we, we are today, but I still think they would be appalled not only at that instance, but any, any kind of foreign influence in our, in our domestic affairs and, and, and politics, and I think they would just be, you know... they, they, they would be on fire and they'd be very alarmed.

The second article, however, I didn't end up supporting. And I thought that the issues of executive privilege versus the subpoena power of Congress looked very important, very sensitive. I played a bit of a game where I re-imagined the outcome of the 2016 election and you know, maybe someone could have imagined some GOP you know, chair, if they were in control of the House of Representatives wanting to do some kinda hearings and then maybe building towards the impeachment of a President Clinton over the Ba- the Benghazi affair, in which he had exercised executive privilege, likely. You know, you've gotta put yourself, sometimes, you're... i- in, in a different position and imagine what could have been or what could be coming down the road in the future.

I thought it was important to this country that we used that subpoena power you know, to the greatest extent that we could and, and coming up against a stubborn executive that we're bringing to the courts. I just thought that establishing that process wa- was very important. And I felt patient about the impeachment process itself. I didn't feel a need to rush through it, even though many people said, "In an election year, you want this behind you, not in front of you." And I said, "Whatever is best for the country. Slow is smooth and smooth is fast. Let's get it right." And I don't think we crossed our T's and dotted our I's.

And when it comes to impeachment in the presidency of the United States, the place that I started was to say that my standard is that I'm a no until I have gathered the evidence of any information where there's no other choice but to be yes. And so that's how I ended up yes, on abusive power, and no on the obstruction of Congress, because I felt like we had not done our due diligence and we had not done our part in the process and, and taking that to the court. So you know, that, that just explains the decision.

Jeffrey, boy, you wanna talk about pressure and blow back nationally and, and locally. I just... you gotta do what's in, what's in your heart and what you think is right for the country. The bigger the vote, the more important that is. And I've done that a number of times now, and I never regret it. I have put the work in my staff puts the work in to to, you know, have confidence in the decision that we make. And then we go out there and we communicate how we got there.



And I think often, what I hear Jeffery, from people, is, particularly in Washington or, or national reporters and others, is, "Well, Golden must be in the hot seat back home in his district with his base, with the Democrats." Oh, not so. [laughs] you know, what I get from people is a big kudos and thank yous for the clear communication that I put out, not just about my vote decision, but the whole process. I show people how I, how I started and how I got there. And like there are number of people that reach out and say, "You know, I didn't agree with the decision, but, boy, do I like seeing the process that you took to get there. It makes me feel comfortable with you as my representative." And I get that from Democrats and Republicans.

You know, I just outperformed our current president, President Biden, in my district, by 30,000 votes, more than any other Democrat in the, in the country. And, you know, people tell me all the time, "You'll never get full Republican support here. So why, you know, why would you ever, you know, break ranks with your party? You know, that's just not the way it's done anymore. It's all about the base." Not true. And I don't believe... I know it's not true in my district. I don't think my district is special.

I don't think it's true in, in much of the rest of the country at least those... not in those that have, that have not been overly gerrymandered, but the longer I've been doing this, and this is my last just, you know, bet, Jeffery, the longer I've been doing this, and I haven't been doing it long, obviously but in particular since January 6th.

I walked out of January 6th and I said, "That's it. Gloves off. From here on out, on every issue, and and on, on the biggest issues in particular, I'm just gonna do exactly what is in my heart. I'm not gonna stop and worry about the politics of left and right, the fact that I'm in a Trump district, or that my base might be upset. That's not why I'm here. It's such a blessing to be in this position. Less than 11,000 Americans have done this in the history of the United States of America. We're lucky and privileged to be in this position, and I don't wanna have a single regret when it's all said and done." So that's just how I carry myself in making these decisions.

Jeffrey Rosen: [00:26:20] Wow, you've gotta do what in your heart you think is right. That is the definition of a Profile in Courage. And you grew up listening to John F. Kennedy's speeches in rural Maine County, and you are embodying the Profiles in Courage that he wrote about in his famous book. Representative Houlahan, tell us about one of the toughest votes you've cast, where you've resisted partisan pressures what it was like, and how you feel empowered to do what a lot of your colleagues are not doing.

Chrissy Houlaha...: [00:26:53] It's interesting, I'd like, I'd like, if it's okay, to take a bit of a step back, because some of the things that Jared was talking about are some of the reasons why I find For Country to be such a compelling group of people. We all take different paths to the decisions that we make on behalf of the communities that we represent, and we all do our very best to lead with our hearts and to listen. And that may lead us to different decisions and to different votes. And that's okay. You know, and that's, what's so important, is that we're here... as, as Jared said, it's, it's an enormous privilege to be here and to be in... of service in this way.



But I guess what I would say, if it's all right to answer your questions, I'd rather focus on the things that never happen rather than the things that do happen. And I think that's one of the things that I never really understood as a person who's never served in this way before, is that what's im- important as much as anything is the votes that never occur and the influence that you have to be able to say to your party, "Hey, you, you can, you can bring that to a vote, but you're not... you don't have the votes." You know, or, "You need to modify this, because I can't support that."

And that's a helpful, you know, super power in some ways, but I think that people don't understand when I'm back home in my community, which is Purple, 40-40-20, roughly speaking, you know, has ha- has been Republican for 163 years before I joined in 2018. It's... you should see the things that never happened, you know, on the Floor [laughs] of the House of Representatives. And those are the kinds of things that I, I, frankly, feel like I'm most proud of that I also feel as though I need to learn more about how to use those levers.

I'm also new. I've only been here, you know, for two-and-a-half years, didn't have experience in the House of Representatives in... or the Senate in my state, and I definitely am starting to, you know, kind of understand where our levers are, where we are able to assert influence and power at the beginning of processes, rather than, you know, having to answer to them at the end. But those are some of the things that I'm, I'm most proud of.

I was one of the people who co-authored the, the Washington Post article, which asked for impeachment proceedings to begin. This was similar to Jared and his experience, something that I never wanted to do. I never really wanted to come here to im- impeach a president le- once, let alone twice but, you know, in my, in my heart of hearts decided that that was the thing that, unfortunately, ha- I had to do. And I think that Jared is right in articulating how important it is to be transparent and, and communicate frequently and often with your community about the processes that you're going through and why you're thinking the way that you're thinking.

I think it's really important for them to understand that you are doing your very best to listen to everybody in your community and do your very best to, not only represent them, but in some cases to lead. And that's sometimes when I get frustrated with some of my colleagues when they say, "You should see how angry my community is. They think X, Y, and Z, and so, therefore, I'm..." and, yes, you're responsible for, you know, hearing and listening to your community, but, sometimes, you're also responsible for leading them. And that means, sometimes, making difficult choices and, and, in some cases voting or acting in a way that may not be exactly what all of your community would like you to do.

Jeffrey Rosen: [00:30:02] You're getting a, a lot of nods from your colleagues about all that. And you're so right to focus on the votes that don't occur as being as important as those that do. Representative Meijer, you are o- one of the handful of Republicans to vote for impeachment. What was it like... what was the pushback like, and what conception of your role as a representative led you to take that principled position?

Peter Meijer: [00:30:26] Before I answer that, Jeff, I wanna say listening, especially to Mariannette and, and Jared I think nothing... there's nothing like having to defend a tough



vote to make you an expert in all of the different arguments for and against, and getting, you know, a, a... someone will come up and talk to me and I'll be like, "Okay, which, which... what i- what is the objection? Okay. Now, I understand and, and, I'm kind of working through that, and if it involves going back to the Electoral Count Act of 1887 and going line by line, then we can do that." But-

Jeffrey Rosen: [00:30:57] [laughs].

Peter Meijer: [00:30:57] ... You know, obviously, the... January 6th was something none of us foresaw or, or wanted to have happen. And it was I mean, to... Chrissy says, you know, never... didn't wanna come to Congress to, to impeach a president once, let alone twice.

I, I certainly didn't wanna come to Congress to do the same to a member of my own party, but you know, it, it... and this is where when I talk about those tough votes, you know, oftentimes, it's because we've argued it both ways with ourselves, right? It's not just a, a hypothetical of how do I defend this, it's, there is a, a, a deliberative process that involves external parties where, you know, I might talk to a colleague and say, "I'm, I'm, I'm looking at it this way. What do you think?" And, and that, that bounce back back and forth of, you know, trying to sharpen and hone and, and bring in information that you maybe don't have and then there's also just that internal deliberation.

So I I don't wanna dwell on it too much, but, obviously, it was highly unpleasant and, and probably a, a deliberative process that left me both, to, to Jared's point questioning, you know, "How much... how, how do I ensure that I'm not just making a decision with my best political prospects in mind but, and what I feel is, is the right direction for the country?"

And everyone's going to arrive at that at, in different ways. I... when I say I, I fully respect, you know, folks who, who chose a different vote that day, because I could easily see myself having done it, I just... I couldn't get there. But it was... there is a certain clarifying feel to not walking on pins and needles and multiple tight ropes and being able to express kinda openly and clearly how you feel and, and how you arrived at that.

And, and, frankly in an era where people are disgusted by politics and frustrated by politicians and increasingly cynical and, and, and despondent breaking from the path I've at least found is, is e- even if it's... even if fo- folks vehemently disagree with, with the result you've arrived at, even if that is, i- is pushed back upon strongly I've, I've had, you know activists that I've known for a while that will tear in on on a county GOP Zoom, and then afterwards pick up the phone and say, "You know what? Again, still disagree, but appreciate the fact that you had a reason and, and you stuck to your principles."

Now that's... that offers some cold comfort, at times, but you know, I, I certainly think it's important to, to step back and remember why we ran and, and what we're doing, and I think it's, oftentimes at least I've, I've seen this temptation and I've tried to, to steer clear of it, get into this cycle of, "Well, I know I should vote one way, but I will vote another because I need to make sure I'm re-elected in order to do this other more important thing." And then that rationalization in the moment may be appropriate and may make sense in, in, "What is this



one vote that no one will remember versus you know, this incredibly important, you know, issue, which is why I ran for office?"

But those kind of moral surrenders add up, and up, and up, and, and I think at at a certain point, it can become confusing and you forget why you were there. And then I wanna make sure to nip that temptation in the bud and, and be able to speak honestly, speak forthrightly and... as, as Jared defending splitting on the, the first impeachment vote and Mariannette on the certification.

You know, we certainly do talk about these issues a lot because people have a lot of questions, but at the same time the, the amount of folks who have come up to me in a small group setting or one-on-one, and, and asked me a pointed question, and when they realize that these are not knee-jerk reactions, that these were deeply thought-out and, and deeply reasoned opinions, even if at the end of the day they don't agree there still is an appreciation and a respect because it, it just doesn't fit into a narrow, a narrow narrative that we're all you know, cowed or just reacting one way or the other.

I've I've... I have not been... I've been incredibly impressed at, at some of the colleagues that I've gotten to know that showed just an incredibly thoughtful perspective and, and deeply searching and, and wanting, above all, frankly, to honor the oath to the Constitution that we all have sworn.

Jeffrey Rosen: [00:35:18] Wow. He- he- hearing all of you talk about honoring the Constitution, making decisions in a long-term, best interest of the country, rather than the short-term interests of the party, as you just put it avoiding moral surrender, and then that clarifying feeling you just described of breaking from a path that leads people to respect you for sticking to your principles is exactly what Madison had in mind. That, that is what is the point of Federalist 10 and resisting factions or groups animated by passion rather than reason so that you can serve the long-term interests of the country and the public good. And it's, it's very powerful to hear you say that that can actually lead people to respect you, rather than the opposite.

Representative Miller-Meeke, you, you gave us an incredible example already, of, of the vote about the electrical certification. If there's another test decision you wanna share, that would great, and, and then maybe amplify on what your colleagues have said about the fact that, in the end you do get respected for sticking by your guns and voting for principle rather than the party.

Mariannette Mil...: [00:36:18] Well I'll give you two examples, but first I'm gonna, I'm gonna detour and take speakers privilege and congratulate Representative Golden on his the birth of his child. So-

Jeffrey Rosen: [00:36:28] [laughs].

Mariannette Mil...: [00:36:29] ... I haven't had a chance to do that in person, but congratulations Representative Golden. Congratulations, Jared.

Jared Golden: [00:36:33] Oh, my God. Thank you so much.



Mariannette Mil...: [00:36:36] [laughs].

Jared Golden: [00:36:36] She's three weeks old, just over three weeks.

Mariannette Mil...: [00:36:39] [laughs].

Jared Golden: [00:36:39] She's wonderful. I'm enjoying every minute. But if any of you... if you want, want to go out drinking coffee you know, at seven o'clock at night, almost eight o'clock at night, 'cause I'm still gonna be able to fall asleep 'cause we're all tired. But it's, it's just been great. And, and I... Mariannette, thank you so much.

Mariannette Mil...: [00:36:55] Well, I was wondering if you were being kept awake at night. I'll-

Jared Golden: [00:37:00] [laughs].

Mariannette Mil...: [00:37:00] ... You know, it would... yeah, so hopefully, for you, it'll be less time than that. So two votes, and one I thought would be much more pro- problematic than that was, and that was the violence against Women's Act. There were certainly parts of that that I did not agree with but having worked with domestic violence shelters, having done volunteer work at community health centers-

Jeffrey Rosen: [00:37:19] Mm-hmm [affirmative].

Mariannette Mil...: [00:37:19] ... and free clinics, and then having raised both a son and a daughter and our daughter having had an issue with stalking that was an issue that was important for me to be able to send a message of support to women even though there were things within that bill that I did not like. I actually thought, since I was the only one of our Iowa Delegation Republicans that voted for it that it would be problematic, and it turned out that I, I didn't hear anything about it.

Most recently, however, it was my vote on the commission. And so I'll be participating in Zoom in a little bit with with a, a County Republican Central Committee meeting, and so, but I think what's great is what all of my colleagues have said, and that is... and actually Jeff, you've said it also, and it's Madison that were animated by passion and not by reason. So I have a reason for why I vote and I have to be clear in my mind why it is, so that I can explain it to people.

So I think when you're voting, especially if you're voting against your party that have concrete rationale for why you do what you do, be willing to be transparent about it, be willing to go out on the day after the vote for the for the commission. I was at a central committee meeting and explained why I voted the way I voted, what was my rationale point-by-point, what I was hoping to achieve, acknowledging their concerns, and that we may not agree with one another, but at least they knew that I rationally approached it and why I approached it in the way that I did. Most of the time, that's okay, sometimes it's not but I think if you do that, it's very helpful.



The other thing that I think, was some advice I got right as I got into Congress and that was to have somebody that has served in Congress but is no longer in Congress, so that you can talk to them about things, because they're not in Congress. So it's... and I can see some heads nodding. So that's helped me also. So I have two people that I contact that, you know, one from Iowa, one that's not from Iowa and it helps me to gain perspective.

And then, I think I hope that the level of humility that I have now, I will continue to have. We are here just a small, small small part in time, we are not all-knowing, we are not you know, all-thinking and there, there will be someone who will replace us. So, you know, something has to withstand us beyond our time in Congress, and that's the Constitution and the rule of law.

And so I think there are things that supersede us that are more important than our tenure in Congress, so we should do the, the good will that we can, try not to ruin the institutions that are there, that have kept us this great nation for, you know, 250 years, so that, you know, somebody else can come up, when our time has passed, and have that same foundation upon which to build.

Jeffrey Rosen: [00:40:01] Gosh. I, I, I f- I feel like I, like Madison is, indeed smiling at this discussion, because you put it so well, the Constitution on the rule of law are more important than the individual careers of any representative, and that elements of transparency and a willingness to explain your reasons to your constituents is what he thought the whole system would stand or fall on.

The conventional wisdom was that in a large republic, people wouldn't know their representatives and they'd be animated by passion, but Madison was confident that if representatives took the time to explain their reasons using new... the new technology of newspapers, which he thought would have a commerce of ideas that would slowly spread reason across the land therefore, we could survive them.

I'm smiling, of course, because our current Twitter world is so very different from that republic of reason that he anticipated, and, but, but all of you are providing a way forward. All right, then, our time is precious. We have 10 minutes, which probably means there's time for one substantive intervention each. And I wanna say this, the Constitution Center has started a new initiative to restore the guardrails of democracy. And, essentially, we're trying to do, at the Constitution Center, what you're trying to do in Congress, which is to identify the reforms, the political technological, and cultural reforms that could help restore this devotion to the Constitution and the rule of law.

So I'll just ask you to be as y- broad or specific as you'd like. I'm gonna hope to reconvene all of you, to enlist you in this initiative, so you can help us identify reforms, but starting with you Representative Golden, what guardrails of democracy do you wanna put on the table that will allow everyone to play the roles that each of you is playing and you know, wh- how, how can the Constitution Center help your great caucus collect this so we can make a real difference?



Jared Golden: [00:41:47] Jeez we need a lot of guardrails, Jeffrey, I, I, I, I think you would agree. You know, a lot of times, I, I, I, I think you would agree that that the founders were really brilliant people. And not just the founders, but many of the people that stood behind them and their, and their families, and, and, and many other leaders so that's the history of the country. And while, while I think it is always fine to search for, for new solutions, and important to change with the times. I think we've too easily turned our backs on those great things that we've had all along. And, and really, I would just say recommitting to many of them, i- i- is something that i- that is very necessary.

I guess the greatest guardrail that comes to mind, naturally for me right now, Jeffrey, in, in this time and place where we are as a country, is we need to get out there amongst the the who- the, the, the American people. The whole, country, I think, needs to have a strong understanding that you can't take this for granted. This democracy, these freedoms and shrines in our constitution for us this country that we live in, it's greatness, our standard of living, the fact that we have s- a phys- physical security from violence and war on our homeland, none of this can be taken for granted. We have to earn it. We have to ensure that it's there for us and for our children and for their children. And that's what we have to thank the past generations for.

I don't wanna be here if the ball drops, and I don't wanna be responsible if it does for the next generation. But I think people take it for granted. And, and growing up, I certainly... you know, no one taught me that I shouldn't... I learned it the hard way, serving the country in uniform in Marine Corps Infantry in Afghanistan and Iraq, where I can tell you that I saw developing... would-be democracy, developing democracies, s- struggling and fighting it out physically [laughs] where they do it on their streets, where their families are. We don't want that here in the United States of America, but it can, it can happen. And I think people assume wrongly that it couldn't.

And I think just having that collective understanding is a great guardrail to start with, Jeffrey because [laughs], you know, whe- wh- when I... people sometimes ask me, "Jared, how far will you go in, in wor- trying to work with Republicans?" M- most of the time, the people that will ask me that think I'm being naive for even trying. My answer is, "I have to keep trying, no matter what," because I think that's how far we have gone in the wrong direction irresponsibly, and how dangerous this time could be, potentially, in the, in the years ahead.

My obligation is to continue to reach across the aisle and work with Republicans, 'cause I don't think we have any other rational or responsible choice than to live together in this country, peacefully, and, and, and to work together for, for the best interest of the country. 'Cause I don't wanna imagine... I don't think people can imagine what the alternative could look like, but it's... it doesn't take a lot of creativity if you just do some research on it around the world. So...

Jeffrey Rosen: [00:44:43] Brave. Ha- ha- having a collective understanding of the importance of bipartisan deliberation to preserve the union, you said, is important. It sounds, of course, like Benjamin Franklin, a re- republic, if you can keep it, and that's, of course, why all of you is playing such a crucial role in public education, and the Constitution Center can help play a



role in, in educating people about civics and the Constitution so that underlying value, the importance of deliberation, is inspired and maintained by all. Representative Houlahan, your guardrails and your final thoughts.

Chrissy Houlaha...: [00:45:13] Sure. And tha- and thanks, again, for convening this really important conversation. And I would echo what, what Jared talked about. And part of the reason why For Country exists and why I hope it will be such a powerful force for good is exactly what we're talking about right now, which is we have to work with one another. We cannot not work with one another. I was really pretty struck by, of course, January 6th and s- did a lot of soul searching myself, personally, on, you know, where my boundaries were, where my guardrails were, and decided, emphatically, that I have to continue to move forward, I have to reach out across the aisle, and, and, frankly, within my own party because that has to be the way that we move forward.

What I would say, the thing that we can collectively agree on in For Country in the two years that we've existed, two-and-a-half years that we've existed, is the importance, to your point, of understanding civics and our civic in- responsibility, understanding how we're a part of that process even if we're not elected officials, we're a part of the electorate and I... so I have been advocating along with our For Country Caucus for that kind of civic engagement and civic education.

We've also, collectively, been very strongly advocating for the importance of national service. It's not a coincidence that we're all here and we've all worn the uniform. It's, it's part of who we are, it's part of our DNA, it's why we think that we can be effective representatives of our communities, partially, but also we should, we should turn that outward and say, "What's wrong with our country right now has a little bit to do with we're not talking to one another, we're not working with one another, we don't see one another, we don't collide with one another. To use a mole- molecular analogy, we're not reacting with one another, and national service is part of the solution, I believe, to that."

And that I think is why we have come together as a caucus to say, "This is something we're working to move forward." And if there's something you guys can do with the Constitution Center to help us elevate and underscore the importance of national service of all forms, that would be helpful. You know, not just wearing a uniform, but City Year, Peace Corps, AmeriCorps, Tea- you know, Teach For America, The Senior Corps you know s- Conservation Corps, you, you name it. These are opportunities to grow yourself as an individual and as a citizen, but also force multipliers to use a military term to make sure that, that that person can, can, can elevate dozens if not hundreds of other people as well with their service.

Jeffrey Rosen: [00:47:30] Thank you so much for that. You, you said I have to reach out across the aisle in order to make the country work. And the... inspired a survey, to which you have supported, which would support not only national service, but also prioritize civic education is such a great example of that. And the Constitution Center would be honored to work with you and your caucus both on the... and With Honor on behalf of national service and civics education. Representative Meijer?



Peter Meijer: [00:47:57] Yeah, thank you, Jeff. And, and, I really appreciate the National Constitution Center and With Honor Action for having us here today. You know, I, I got involved, at the federal level, in politics actually through With Honor very early on, 'cause I think there was a collective feel amongst a lot of veterans that we have an important voice to bring to this table because we know that what the government does and what the government doesn't do, lives hang in that balance.

And now, we may have experienced that in the context of an overseas conflict but as we, as we see that conflict or that, that sense of tension come home, and, and to Jared's point, I mean, I f- I feel a deep sense of gratitude having spent three between Iraq and Afghanistan as a combatant, as a non-combatant, as a soldier, as a civilian. I appreciate the fact that what we have here in this country did not arrive at by accident. This is intentional, it's the, the effort.

It's not just what was done, it's what was prevented from having had happened, and there are, certainly, a lot of mistakes made along the way. There's a reason why in our preamble, it says, you know, "A more perfect union and emphasis on constantly evaluating, improving, you know, a little bit of self-criticism, but not so much that we don't appreciate all the good things that we have." and I, I f- I have that strong sense of feeling and debt and obligation that has been paid for in blood and sacrifice and weigh that against the accelerationists who are, are pining for a military coup or, or pining for a civil war, who just want to have everything get burned down because maybe they'll maybe they'll win out in a zero-sum world.

And, and to me, that's an incredibly dark and dangerous worldview. It, it doesn't have a political party, it's... it is this nihilistic trend that I think is a by-product of modernity. But to Chrissy's point, I mean, how we piece together a country where, you know, you... if you have... If peo- people are born apart, right, you can be separated by geography, separated by income, separated by education, separated by occupation. It's really just in jury duty in the post office that we all come together, and then having some shared collective investment in this project of which we all hold a responsibility and, and achieving that through national service, I think, is, frankly, a, a priority.

I mean, that helps address the root causes of the lack of trust, of the alienation, of the, the, the feeling of, of being disconnected from what binds us all together as Americans. So I'm, I'm excited that For Country working on these issues and and really feel that, you know, we owe it to the nation to give it a shot and we can't just escape into cynicism and and that, that sense of isolation, because this is something that we have to own and have a responsibility for on behalf of the hundreds of thousands of constituents in each and our districts.

Jeffrey Rosen: [00:50:53] We have to own and have a re- sense of responsibility for. And what a... what an, what an inspiring parsing of the words, "A more perfect union, and al- always improving, but not so much that we fall apart and forget what binds us as United States of America." Representative Miller-Meeks, the last word in this memorable conversation is to you.



Mariannette Mil...: [00:51:13] Well, thank you very much. And I heard some channe- channel... channeling of Ronald Reagan there by what our country is and how important it is to protect democracy and protect those values. So part of that is, number one, you know, are we educating people on what the values are of United States, what it stands for, how it was developed, and came about, so that there is this love of country, love of the Constitution, that is our foundation? So that's number one.

Number two, what has evolved in Congress and in the federal government with more and more reliance on executive orders? And so to me, it seems that there is... Congress has advocated its responsibility to be a co-equal branch of government. And I think it's very important, and I know it's not the same regular order that Jared was talking about with... you know, within Congress itself, the House, having regular order, but also within the three branches of government. And I think that's important.

And then the third thing is, and I'll mentioned this and you brought it up and you said Twitter, and then that's the media. And how does the media inter- interplay in this? I think a free s- free, free press freedom of the press, freedom of speech, is extraordinarily important in a democracy. And that means that there has to be some objectivity and fairness in our media, because the media is a watchdog over government, not government by Republicans or government by Democrats, but government in general, to hold government accountable. And I think one example of that is what we see right now with the origins of COVID-19 and how that sto- that story was suppressed, and why it's very important that we investigate and we find out more about it.

So I just... 'cause I know we're out of time, those are three things I would say you know, education and constitution. Are we teaching that? Is that promoted within our educational system K-12, especially civics, as you mentioned executive orders, and the co-equal branch of government as the House Congress should be, and then the media and, and the role the media plays in holding government accountable, not government of one party, but by, by government of all party.

Jeffrey Rosen: [00:53:08] Wonderful. What a, what a productive and galvanizing summary to this great discussion. Education, especially in civics in the Constitution ensuring that Congress does its job, and not delegating its power to the executive branch, and media, that exercises oversight functioning for most deliberation. So your... Thanks for this... appearing on this amazing panel. Of course, there is more homework, which is that wi- w- w- w- With Honor and the Constitution Center will hope to convene you again in various forms so that we can produce a report with concrete proposals, for cultural, technological, and constitutional reforms in all the ways that you've just identified.

F- and I have to say on behalf of the Constitution Center and all of our great audience, thank you for being an inspiring model of what representatives in America are supposed to be, which is to represent, not only the immediate passions of the people, but also our highest constitutional ideals, the ones that bind us as we, the people, and that ensure that we are always becoming a more perfect union of the United States of America. Representatives Chrissy, Houlihan Jared Golden, Peter Meijer, and Mariannette Miller-Meeks, thank you so



much for your service to USA and for participating in this wonderful panel. And thanks to all of our friends for listening. We hope to reconvene soon. Thank you.

Jackie McDermott: [00:54:34] This program was presented with support from With Honor Action, as part of the National Constitution Center's Restoring The Guardrails of Democracy Initiative. This episode was produced by me, Jackie McDermott, along with Tanaya Tauber, Lana Ulrich, and John Guerra. It was engineered by David Stotz. Please rate, review, and subscribe to Live at the National Constitution Center on Apple Podcasts, or follow us on Spotify, and join us back here next week. On behalf of the National Constitution Center, I'm Jackie McDermott.