



CANCEL CULTURE AND THE CONSTITUTION: THREE REASONS WHY WE SHOULD EMBRACE FREE SPEECH

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I'm profoundly honored to participate in this year's Linton Dunson Constitution Day Lecture.

But I'll begin by noting that, although Constitution Day is indeed coming up soon, today is in fact 9/11.

As I was flying into town this morning, I couldn't help but think that, 24 years ago, hundreds of my fellow Americans were also in the air.

My flight landed safely. Theirs never did.

And that's for one reason: There are people in this world who simply hate America.

When faced with people who hate America, the optimistic, forward-looking part of my personality drives me to turn my attention instead to the people who love America. And so, with your indulgence, that is how I will open my remarks today.

I.

One of the greatest privileges of being a federal judge is the honor of presiding over a naturalization ceremony. I do it every year in May, to celebrate the anniversary of my own naturalization in May 1982.

I wasn't born in the United States. I didn't enter this world as an American. But I wake up every morning thanking God that I will leave this world as an American.

* Circuit Judge, U.S. Court of Appeals for the Fifth Circuit. These remarks were delivered at the Annual Linton R. Dunson Constitution Day Lecture to students at Wofford College on September 11, 2025. Similar remarks were delivered on February 14, 2025 at the Woodward Report Conference, hosted by the Center for Academic Freedom and Free Speech at Yale Law School.

I like to say that I'm Taiwanese by birth, Texan by marriage. But most importantly, I'm American by choice.

If you've never attended a naturalization ceremony, there's nothing more inspiring. People from all around the world come together in one room, for one purpose—to become Americans.

As Americans, we should never forget how special it is to live in a place that people around the world would do anything to join. There aren't a lot of countries you can say that about.

It reminds you that people aren't desperate to come to America in droves because it's a failed nation. They're desperate to come to America because it's the most successful nation in human history. And it's worth thinking about why that is.

In a nation of over 300 million Americans, we're bound to disagree on virtually every issue under the sun. And that's okay. There's nothing wrong with that.

In fact, I would submit that that's precisely what makes America so successful. We're successful, not because we're all the same, but because we're all so different—different backgrounds, cultures, and experiences. Yet we come together as one Nation.

Yes, we have many different views and many different voices. But we harness this diversity to get the best out of everyone. We respect each other. We respect the fact that the best ideas will emerge when we engage in robust and fearless debate. And we're not afraid to compete in any forum—including, indeed especially, the marketplace of ideas.

Our nation's Founders debated this very concept. The Federalists firmly believed that, despite our differences, the American colonies would be far better off together, as one united country—that we would enjoy numerous economic, diplomatic, security, and other advantages that flow from scale.¹

¹ See, e.g., THE FEDERALIST NO. 3, at 14 (John Jay) (Jacob E. Cooke ed., 1961) (“[A] cordial Union under an efficient national Government, affords [the people] the best security that can be devised against hostilities from abroad.” (emphasis omitted)); *id.* at 15 (“[W]hen once an efficient national government is established, the best men in the country will not only consent to serve, but also will generally be appointed to manage it.”); *id.* at 20 (No. 4) (John Jay) (observing the strength of American commerce and the ability of a single government to “collect and avail itself of the talents and experience of the ablest men, in whatever part of the Union they may be found”); *id.* at 21

The Anti-Federalists thought that this was a crazy idea. They reminded us that no republic had ever succeeded at anywhere near this size. They feared that we'd be *too* diverse. They worried that we'd bicker endlessly. They believed that we would be better off apart.²

The Federalists prevailed by offering two critical ingredients for avoiding endless conflict: federalism and freedom of speech. We would do at the national level what must be done at the national level.³ But we would leave ample space for differing viewpoints. And we would have the freedom to advocate and advance our beliefs in our respective communities.

(“[One government] can apply the resources and power of the whole to the defence of any particular part, and that more easily and expeditiously than State Governments, or separate confederacies can possibly do, for want of concert and unity of system.”); *id.* at 20 (“Wisely therefore do [the people of America] consider Union and a good national Government as necessary to put and keep them in such a situation as instead of inviting war, will tend to repress and discourage it. That situation consists in the best possible state of defence, and necessarily depends on the Government, the arms and the resources of the country.” (emphasis omitted)); *id.* at 28–36 (No. 6) (Alexander Hamilton) (noting that a union is the best way to counteract inimical tendencies of neighboring nations); *id.* at 65–73 (No. 11) (Alexander Hamilton) (arguing that a single national government would produce major economic benefits).

² One leading Anti-Federalist, writing under the name Brutus, said in his *Essay I* that a republic can “have only a small territory, otherwise it cannot long subsist.” *BRUTUS I* (Oct. 18, 1787), in 2 *THE COMPLETE ANTI-FEDERALIST* 369 (Herbert J. Storing ed. 1981). He believed that “a free republic cannot succeed over a country of such immense extent, containing such a number of Inhabitants” as the proposed United States. *Id.* at 368. “In a republic, the manners, sentiments, and interests of the people should be similar. If this be not the case, there will be a constant clashing of opinions; and the representatives of one part will be continually striving against those of the other.” *Id.* at 369. “The laws and customs of the several states are, in many respects, very diverse, and in some opposite.” *Id.* at 370. So “a legislature, formed of representatives from the respective parts, would not only be too numerous to act with any care or decision, but would be composed of such heterogenous and discordant principles, as would constantly be contending with each other.” *Id.*

³ See *THE FEDERALIST*, *supra* note 1, at 83, 86 (No. 14) (James Madison) (noting “the necessity of the union” under a “general government [that] is not to be charged with the whole power of making and administering laws” but “is limited to certain enumerated objects, which concern all the members of the republic, but which are not to be attained by the separate provisions of any”); *id.* at 86 (“The subordinate governments which can extend their care to all those other objects . . . , will retain their due authority and activity.”).

II.

Thank goodness the Federalists prevailed. But I worry that we may ultimately prove the Anti-Federalists right.

In recent years, our ability to engage in free and open debate with fellow Americans has come under severe strain. Instead of education, we experience indoctrination. Instead of conversation, we endure condescension. Instead of dialogue, we get destruction. Instead of acceptance, we face cancellation.

So instead of engagement, too many of us engage in self-censorship.

And we see it across our country's leading institutions. From the newsroom to the boardroom. From health care to Hollywood. And yes, we see it in the academy.⁴

And I worry that the consequences for our Union and our national unity are profound. Because when society's elite institutions announce that certain politically disfavored views don't belong here—that they aren't worthy of debate, and must be removed from polite society—the people who hold those views often return the favor.

I would contend that cancel culture is one of the leading reasons why citizens no longer trust a wide variety of once-leading institutions. And for good reason. Because when institutions forbid debate, it's inevitable that they're going to get things wrong. Instead of good judgment, you'll get groupthink. We don't trust the product, because we know that it hasn't been tested.

III.

So how do we come together, when we disagree so passionately about so much? How do we unite as one nation?

In his new book *American Covenant*, Yuval Levin observes that “[u]nity does not mean thinking alike; [it] means acting together.”⁵ He notes that the problem is “not . . . that we have forgotten how to agree but that we have forgotten how to disagree.”⁶

⁴ See, e.g., *Whole Woman's Health v. Paxton*, 10 F.4th 430, 465–68 & n.1 (5th Cir. 2021) (Ho, J., concurring) (discussing cancel culture in the scientific and medical community).

⁵ YUVAL LEVIN, AMERICAN COVENANT: HOW THE CONSTITUTION UNIFIED OUR NATION—AND COULD AGAIN 3 (2024).

⁶ *Id.*

I think that's exactly right. I can't think of a more essential ingredient of American citizenship than learning how to agree to disagree with one another.

We've all heard the maxim, "I disapprove of what you say, but I will defend to the death your right to say it."⁷

It's a quintessentially American ethos. And I certainly hope that it always will be.

But think about that statement for a moment. If you truly detest what someone says, why on Earth would you want to defend their right to say it—never mind defend it to the death?

Do you know anyone that altruistic? I don't.

So if the statement makes any sense, it must be because it's not altruistic at all. In fact, it's quite self-interested. In fact, I would say that it's self-interested in at least three distinct ways. With your indulgence and patience, I'll spend a few moments examining each one.

A.

First: On any given issue where people disagree, you may well be right—and those who disagree with you may well be wrong. But you could always be better.

Or put it another way: You may be right. But you should also want to win. And the way to maximize your chances of winning is to constantly expose yourself to competing viewpoints—and to do so as vigorously and frequently as possible.

We teach students—and we certainly *should* teach students—that you have to be able to respect and understand good faith views on both sides of any issue.

I've devoted my entire adult life to the legal system, so this is a point of special importance to me. Because that's the job of the lawyer in our adversarial system. Our legal system depends on both sides of any controversy having the benefit of zealous representation and advocacy.

I was an appellate litigator for longer than I've been on the bench. As an appellate litigator, it was just in my DNA to always conduct as many moot courts as possible before any oral argument. And I wanted those moot courts to be as tough and

⁷ The maxim is often credited to Voltaire, though it appears to be English writer Evelyn Beatrice Hall's characterization of Voltaire's views. "S.G. TALLENTYRE" (EVELYN BEATRICE HALL), THE FRIENDS OF VOLTAIRE 199 (1906).

painful as humanly possible. I needed members of my moot court to drill down and criticize my client's position on every possible front they could imagine.

Because that's the only way to ensure the best possible advocacy for your client. It's the only way to know that you've put together the strongest position, the most formidable legal arguments, the most winning strategy for your cause. Because you've tested it on the battlefield—again and again and again.

In as learned a crowd as this, I'm sure you've all read John Stuart Mill, and especially his noted essay *On Liberty*. So I'm not going to take the time to quote the various passages from that essay that bear directly on this topic.⁸

Instead, I'm going to talk about a winning sports team from Philadelphia. Congratulations to the Eagles for winning the Super Bowl. But I'm going to talk briefly about Fred Shero—the head coach of the Philadelphia Flyers from 1971 to 1978.

Coach Shero led his team to back-to-back Stanley Cup wins in 1974 and 1975. But if you asked Coach Shero, those Stanley Cup wins are not his proudest accomplishments as a hockey coach. Instead, he would point to an exhibition game, of all things—one that took place the following year, in 1976.

Because during that exhibition game, his team wasn't up against the best team in the United States—they were up against the best team *in the world*. That exhibition game was played against the Soviet Union's Red Army team.

Years later, Coach Shero's son Ray reflected on that exhibition game. He said that "[m]y dad always felt the Russians were the best. If you can beat the Russians,

⁸ See generally JOHN STUART MILL, ON LIBERTY 15–52 (Elizabeth Rapaport ed., 1978) (1859). As Mill put it, “[h]e who knows only his own side of [a] case knows little.” *Id.* at 35. So you must understand your opponent's views in order to fully understand, and thus powerfully defend, your own views. And that means exposing yourself, not just to the arguments on the other side—but to the very people who most fervently believe in those arguments. To quote Mill, “the way to do justice to the arguments” is to “bring them into real contact with [your] own mind.” *Id.* You “must be able to hear them from persons who actually believe them, who defend them in earnest and do their very utmost for them.” *Id.* You must learn them “in their most . . . persuasive form.” *Id.* You must “feel the whole force of the difficulty” that you’ll have to “encounter and dispose of,” or “else [you] will never really possess . . . the portion of truth which meets and removes that difficulty.” *Id.* Indeed, this exposure is “[s]o essential . . . to a real understanding of moral and human subjects that, if opponents of all-important truths do not exist, it is indispensable to imagine them and supply them with the strongest arguments which the most skillful devil's advocate can conjure up.” *Id.* at 36.

then you'd be the best. Even though you won the Stanley Cup . . . , how do you know? You haven't played the Russians, so how do you know you're the best?"⁹

B.

I'll turn now to my second point. In any particular disagreement, you may well be right. But you also could be wrong.

And you need to be okay with that. Because if your goal is not to soothe your ego, but to discover the truth, then you need to be prepared to be wrong at any given moment, on any given issue.

I'm going to spend a little more time on this point, because it's alarming to me how much misery can result when smart people refuse to believe that they could be wrong. Bad things happen when people think they're infallible.

We're often told to "follow the science." And rightly so. But scientists don't always follow the science themselves—even when it's one of their own colleagues who is pointing out their mistakes.

Today, we all take for granted the overwhelming medical and scientific consensus that germs cause disease—and that handwashing is essential to basic hygiene.

But this was not always the conventional wisdom among doctors and scientists.

To the contrary, handwashing was once the subject of severe scorn and ridicule among "mainstream" scientists. In fact, it took the outspoken efforts of a few dissenters in the medical community who were willing to withstand years of ridicule and peer pressure in order to challenge—and eventually, change—the reigning consensus.

Ignaz Semmelweis was a Hungarian physician who practiced obstetrics in the maternity clinic of the Vienna General Hospital during the late 1840s. At the time, there was a disease known as "childbed fever" that was responsible for killing many women who gave birth at his hospital.¹⁰

There were two things notable about this hospital. First, the maternity clinic there had two different wards: One was attended only by midwives, and the other was attended only by physicians. Second, the physicians at the maternity clinic

⁹ Adam Kimelman, *Shero's Wisdom, Innovation Made Flyers into Winners*, NHL (Nov. 7, 2013), <https://perma.cc/QA2B-BZPD>.

¹⁰ SHERWIN B. NULAND, THE DOCTORS' PLAGUE: GERMS, CHILDBED FEVER, AND THE STRANGE STORY OF IGNÁC SEMMELWEIS 79–85 (2004).

didn't just deliver babies. They also performed autopsies on the women who died from childbed fever.¹¹

Semmelweis observed that the women who gave birth in the ward attended only by midwives enjoyed much higher survival rates than women who gave birth in the ward attended only by physicians.¹²

Semmelweis hypothesized that the physicians were examining the bodies of women dying of childbed fever, and then transmitting contaminated particles from the infected patients to healthy women during childbirth.¹³

Because at that time, physicians generally saw no reason to wash their hands between conducting autopsies on recently deceased women and treating healthy women in the delivery ward. So they didn't.¹⁴

To test his hypothesis, Semmelweis advised physicians to start washing their hands in chlorine solution after performing autopsies and before treating healthy women.¹⁵

The result of his advice: Childbed fever deaths in the physicians' ward plummeted.¹⁶ The death rate fell to "virtually equal" in the two wards.¹⁷ Semmelweis proved that the hospital could effectively eliminate the spread of infection, simply by insisting that physicians wash their hands.¹⁸

Semmelweis's discovery saved lives. But instead of being praised or even accepted, he was ridiculed as an agitator.¹⁹ He was marginalized within the scientific community for his "unorthodox" ways.²⁰ His more senior colleagues expressed "alarm [at] the increasing influence of younger physicians" like Semmelweis.²¹

¹¹ *Id.* at 96–97.

¹² *Id.*

¹³ *Id.* at 100–01.

¹⁴ *Id.* at 100.

¹⁵ *Id.* at 101.

¹⁶ *Id.*

¹⁷ *Id.*

¹⁸ *Id.* at 104–05.

¹⁹ *Id.* at 157–58.

²⁰ *Id.* at 147.

²¹ *Id.* at 120.

So, to use modern parlance, they cancelled him.

Semmelweis was denied another term as an instructor at the medical school because “he kept demanding that students and staff wash in the chloride solution.”²² And even when he was later accepted for another teaching position, he was restricted in what courses he could teach and what materials he could access.²³

Why did the scientific community turn its back on Semmelweis, even when it turned out that he was so obviously right—and on a matter so critical to patients’ lives?

These events have been studied by Sherwin Nuland, an accomplished surgeon and clinical professor at the Yale School of Medicine. Professor Nuland reached this conclusion: It was “intolerable” for the respected doctors at the time to admit that they had been proven horribly, brutally wrong.²⁴ They could not accept “the possibility that they had been killing their patients for years or decades.”²⁵

So instead of admitting they were wrong, they destroyed Semmelweis.

The reaction of the “mainstream” scientific community to Semmelweis should seem outrageous to us today.

In fact, it might seem too obvious—so much so that many of us might be tempted to dismiss these examples as ancient, obsolete, and entirely irrelevant to the modern world. Surely we’re all much savvier and more sophisticated than the folks who condemned Semmelweis two centuries ago, right?

But those same problems persist to this day. Marty Makary, a medical professor at Johns Hopkins, has published a new book entitled, appropriately enough, *Blind Spots*. Professor Makary tells story after story, chapter after chapter, where intolerance of dissent in the medical community has spelled disaster for patients.

His first chapter, for example, tells the story of the peanut allergy epidemic in the United States. In other communities around the world, peanut allergies are actually very rare—and typically very mild—to this day. But because of a few stories in the American media during the 1990s, the American Academy of Pediatrics be-

²² *Id.* at 125.

²³ *Id.* at 128–30.

²⁴ *Id.* at 118.

²⁵ *Id.*

gan telling parents that they should simply avoid all peanuts. As a result, more children developed peanut allergies—not less. And the allergies got worse—and more deadly.

That's because, as Professor Makary put it, the Academy "violated a basic principle of immunology known as immune tolerance: the body's natural way of accepting foreign molecules present early in life. It's like the dirt theory, whereby newborns exposed to dirt, dander, and germs may then have lower allergy and asthma risks."²⁶ In sum, early exposure to peanuts helps establish the strongest immunity. By contrast, "peanut abstinence doesn't *prevent* peanut allergies, it *causes* them."²⁷

But what's even worse, this was all preventable. As Professor Makary explains, "back in 2000, scientists in the immunology community knew the truth about early exposure, and they'd had strong data to support it. But they were not included in the small committee that had issued the [Academy's] recommendation."²⁸

Unfortunately, the professor notes, this kind of surprising intellectual incuriosity is all too typical in the medical community. As he puts it, "the establishment is often resistant to new ideas, marginalizing [them] with an old fashioned trick—referring to the people who believe in them as 'controversial' when they should be called 'interesting.'"²⁹

Professor Makary draws a direct connection between the epidemic of disrespect for dissenting views, on the one hand, and the scientific failures that he documents throughout his book, starting with the peanut allergy epidemic, on the other hand.

As he concludes in his book: "Today, more than ever, organized medicine is finding ways to limit and stifle scientific debate."³⁰ "Freedom of speech is not designed for easy speech—speech that is welcomed by the majority because it affirms

²⁶ MARTY MAKARY, BLIND SPOTS: WHEN MEDICINE GETS IT WRONG, AND WHAT IT MEANS FOR OUR HEALTH 5 (2024).

²⁷ *Id.*

²⁸ *Id.* at 12.

²⁹ *Id.* at 174.

³⁰ *Id.* at 184.

their beliefs. It's designed to protect speech that is uncomfortable—speech that challenges groupthink.”³¹

C.

Let me now turn to my third and final point.

As we've discussed today, in any given disagreement, you may be right, but you can always be better. Or you may be wrong, and you'll hopefully want to learn.

But regardless of whether you're ultimately right or wrong on a particular issue, I would submit that respecting disagreement will make your life much better. It will also make the world a far more pleasant place to live.

Because it ultimately doesn't matter whether you're right or wrong. Intolerance will lead you to do things that you would never want done to you.

After 25 years in the legal profession, I continue to believe that the most important rule in life is still the golden rule: Do unto others as you would have them do unto you.

Each of us has a simple question to answer for ourselves: If someone disagrees with us, are we entitled to make their life as unpleasant as possible, with every tool at our disposal? Look, I won't deny that, if you get enough people to go along with such tactics, it will certainly have an effect. But is that really the kind of country we want to live in?

Shortly after the *Dobbs* decision, an activist group offered \$250 to any restaurant worker who reported seeing out in public any of the Justices in the majority. They wanted the information in real time, so that they could send protesters to try to drive the Justice out of the restaurant. And they did so with the apparent encouragement of officials in Congress and the White House.³²

³¹ *Id.*

³² See, e.g., Thomas Catenacci, *ShutdownDC Group Offers Bounties on Twitter for Public Sightings of Conservative Supreme Court Justices*, FOX NEWS (July 8, 2022), <https://perma.cc/U8RR-SXUJ>; *Group Offers up to \$250 for SCOTUS Justices Sightings After Kavanaugh Protest*, AXIOS (July 10, 2022), <https://perma.cc/VDP9-LZXS>; Yael Halon, *Progressive Lawmakers Rally Behind Protesters at Justices' Homes, Churches: 'I Welcome It'*, FOX NEWS (May 10, 2022), <https://perma.cc/2T73-ZSK7>; Andrew C. McCarthy, *Biden Encourages People to Violate the Law by Protesting at Justices' Homes*, HILL (May 11, 2022), <https://perma.cc/B3F6-HBYT>; Allie Griffin, *Jean-Pierre: 'For Sure' White House Approves Protest of Kavanaugh Steak Dinner*, N.Y. POST (July 8, 2022).

This past fall, a supervisor at FEMA instructed relief workers not to provide hurricane relief for any home that displayed support for the election of Donald Trump. The FEMA official issued a four-word directive: “avoid homes advertising Trump.”³³

I don’t doubt that there are people in this room who have strong feelings on either side of the *Dobbs* case—just as I’m sure there are people in this room who have strong feelings on either side of the election this past fall.

My point is that it doesn’t matter which side you fall on. Because these tactics can just as easily be used *against* you—to punish some judicial decision or political act that you *like*.

This point is made well by Katha Pollitt, in an article entitled *The Left Needs Free Speech*. Here’s her warning: “If you call for a bookstore not to stock your enemy’s book or rejoice when a problematic classic is taken out of print, your enemy will do the same. Then it just comes down to who has more power. You won’t have a universal principle to appeal to.”³⁴

Imagine a world in which a person has car trouble in the middle of the night, and they can’t get someone to help because people disagree with a certain bumper sticker on their car. Imagine a doctor refusing treatment to a patient because of something the patient said on social media.

³³ See, e.g., Leif Le Mahieu, *EXCLUSIVE: FEMA Official Ordered Relief Workers to Skip Houses With Trump Signs*, DAILY WIRE (Nov. 8, 2024), <https://perma.cc/W7FW-EX9M>; Debbie Elliott, *Florida Sues FEMA for Discrimination Accusing It of Denying Aid to Trump Supporters*, NPR (Nov. 14, 2024), <https://perma.cc/969E-TAA5>; Jackie Llanos, *Florida Settles Suit Accusing Former FEMA Head of Discrimination Against Trump Supporters*, FLA. PHOENIX (Apr. 28, 2025), <https://perma.cc/7NNH-U3ZG>.

³⁴ Katha Pollitt, *The Left Needs Free Speech*, 68 DISSENT 45, 47 (2021). See also, e.g., *Oliver v. Arnold*, 19 F.4th 843, 843 (5th Cir. 2021) (Ho, J., concurring in the denial of rehearing en banc) (First Amendment claim by student who was punished for disagreeing with the Pledge of Allegiance on both political and religious grounds); *id.* at 844 (“No legitimate pedagogical interest is served by forcing a student to endorse the political views of the teacher,” “whether it’s a ‘liberal’ or ‘conservative’ public school teacher who is attempting to punish a ‘conservative’ or ‘liberal’ student.”).

Perhaps you don't think this is possible.³⁵ But I think it's inevitable, if we continue on this course as a country. Merriam-Webster added the term "deplatforming" to its dictionary just a few years ago.³⁶ And for good reason.

Perhaps some people are okay living in a world like that. My only point is this: That's not the America that I know and love. It's not the America that drives people all around the world to come here. But it is the deeply divided country that the Anti-Federalists warned us about.

And I fear the problem is only getting worse. Just two days ago, the Foundation for Individual Rights and Expression put out their annual study on the state of free speech on college campuses.³⁷ They reported that, for the first time, one in three college students now believes that violence is an appropriate way to stop a campus speaker.

We should be especially troubled by intolerance on college campuses, because colleges are the canary in the coal mine.

We look to colleges to teach the next generation of citizens and leaders. So if we keep teaching that speech *is* violence, we shouldn't be surprised when people conclude that they can respond to speech *with* violence.

Three years ago, police officers thwarted an assassination attempt against a sitting Supreme Court Justice.

Last year, two assassination attempts were made against a former and future President.

Earlier this year, two state legislators in Minnesota were shot—one was killed.

³⁵ But see, e.g., Christine Sellers, *Healthcare Worker Appears to Encourage Drugging ICE Agents in Videos*, DAILY CALLER (Jan. 27, 2026), <https://perma.cc/V7NK-V5SP>; Rachel del Guidice, *Florida issues emergency suspension of license of nurse who wished childbirth injury on Karoline Leavitt*, FOX NEWS (Jan. 28, 2026), <https://perma.cc/EVA4-WTHV>; Kate Plummer, *Nurse Gives Up License After Saying He Won't Anesthetize MAGA Supporters*, NEWSWEEK (Jan. 30, 2026), <https://perma.cc/JX3V-34Q5>; see also Rod Dreher, *How Afraid Of Nurses Should We Be?*, ROD DREHER'S DIARY (Jan. 30, 2026), <https://perma.cc/2PTN-LDNK>; Tyler O'Neil, *What's Behind the Politicized Threats From Nurses?*, DAILY SIGNAL (Jan. 29, 2026), <https://perma.cc/KD6Z-3JPR>.

³⁶ We Added 455 New Words to the Dictionary for October 2021, MERRIAM-WEBSTER, <https://perma.cc/D3D3-P32A>.

³⁷ 2026 College Free Speech Rankings: America's Colleges Get an 'F' for Poor Free Speech Climate, FOUND. FOR INDIVIDUAL RTS. & EXPRESSION (Sep. 9, 2025), <https://perma.cc/F9G3-EV7U>.

And just yesterday, the assassination of Charlie Kirk, founder of Turning Point USA—an organization founded on the principle of ensuring robust discourse on our Nation's college campuses.

He didn't just welcome questions from those with different views. He would famously address his college audiences: "If you disagree with me, move to the front of the line."

Charlie Kirk believed in free and open debate. And he was murdered for it.

We must not let his message die with him. We must learn from him. We must embrace his vision that, in a nation as diverse as ours, we're going to have disagreements—and that we're much better off ventilating those disagreements, rather than destroying those we disagree with.

Charlie Kirk did not fear competition over ideas. And we shouldn't either. Instead, we should embrace what robust competition will unleash. Competition leads to good things—whether in business, or politics, or science, or anything else.

In the marketplace of ideas, robust competition leads to truth.

* * *

I'll end with this thought. Instead of dreading disagreement, we could welcome it. We could approach disagreement with a presumption of good faith—and with the assumption that there's always something that we can learn from our fellow man—whether anyone ultimately changes their mind or not. That assumption may not always prove true in every case. But it's an assumption that we can always entertain, if we choose to.

I'd propose that we follow Charlie Kirk's model—and that we actually look forward to engaging in good faith with those who disagree with us.

After all, one of three good things can happen—and maybe even all three:

You might learn something. They might learn something. And you both might gain a friend.

Thank you for listening. I'm honored to be here with you all.