

RAHM EMANUEL



Talks Trump and the 2020 Race

In a conversation with Brunswick CEO **NEAL WOLIN**, the legendary campaigner and former Chicago Mayor assesses the 2020 race for president and sketches a blueprint for a progressive future. By **PATTI SOLIS DOYLE**.

ON AUGUST 5, DEMOCRATIC POLITICAL STRATEGIST AND former Mayor of Chicago Rahm Emanuel joined Brunswick CEO Neal Wolin in a Brunswick webinar conversation. The two served together in the Obama administration, where Rahm was the President's Chief of Staff and Neal was Deputy Secretary of the Treasury and a key architect of the administration's financial reform plan. Neal and Rahm both worked in the Clinton administration as well. After winning a House seat, Rahm became Democratic Congressional Campaign Committee chair in 2006, leading the party to a gain of 31 seats in the House of Representatives. From 2008, he served as President Obama's Chief of Staff, a position he left in 2010 to run for Mayor of Chicago. He was elected and served two terms, deciding in 2018 not to run for a third. • Most recently, he is the author of *The Nation City: Why Mayors Are Now Running the World*, a book that former President Clinton called "a new blueprint for making a progressive vision a reality." This conversation took place before Vice President Joe Biden chose Kamala Harris as his running mate.

NEAL: I'd love to get your sense about where this presidential campaign stands 90 days out.

RAHM: A couple of things: One is, I think it's all but certain Donald Trump cannot win the popular vote. If Hillary won it by 3-plus million, Biden's on course to 5-plus million. I think Trump's only shot is through the electoral vote. And I think the doors on even that are closing on him.

What we do know about this season in politics is that whatever you think is true on Tuesday is probably not true by Thursday, because Donald Trump is such a different type of a factor. If the election were today, the Democrats would win the White House, the Senate, and add to their majority in the House.

Among voters, Donald Trump has depth. While he has got a loyal 38 percent, maybe 40 percent that follow him, it goes deep and it goes far. Biden has breadth to Trump's depth. And what I mean by that is he has a unique coalition that really includes retired four-star generals and Black Lives Matter protesters. That's a very broad coalition. The organizing principle of it: Get rid of Donald Trump.

There's a lot of differences in that coalition, but they're unified under one singular goal. I think that the vice presidential selection for Biden, if every vice presidential selection was to scratch some kind of itch, for Biden it's to provide some kind of spark around the candidacy, so his breadth has a little more attached to it.

Donald Trump is trying to recreate 1968, about law and order versus what's happening on the streets. I happen to think the country is way past that. I actually think the touchstone is not 1968, but 1980. In 1980, Ronald Reagan successfully not only won, but he did it by wooing what was then termed the Reagan Democrats. If you look at the demographics that are going on, both about the suburbs, women with college degrees, and senior citizens 65 and older, we're about to coin a phrase, I think, what I call Biden Republicans.

I really think the burning question for the Democrats isn't the battle between a moderate versus progressive wing; it's really about whether we're going to allow these Biden Republicans to have an election that is transactional or an election that ends up being transformational. How we govern, assuming that Joe Biden wins, and what policies we'll put forward and how it happens will determine whether those Republicans just came to the Democratic party to beat Trump or they decided because of a host of cultural issues to become more deeply affiliated with the Democratic party.

What are the things that might change the basic dynamic?

My October surprise for this election is that in September Trump announces a vaccine and says we have a cure to COVID. I mean you've got to change the dynamic of this race. Look, I've worked on four presidential elections and one other national in the midterm when I was the DCCC chair. At the end of the day, you can blow away all the smoke—it's either change or stay the course. What about COVID, the economy, and racial injustice says "You know what, America's on the right course"? The dynamics of this race are around change. That is where the center of gravity is right now.

You would have to change one of the three big factors to move that dynamic to stay the course. There's nothing about the public health and COVID crisis that says we're doing well. There's nothing about the economy from employment or income growth, evictions and homes, home ownership, et cetera, that's saying we have a rebound of sustainability. And there's nothing that's happening on the streets or around criminal justice or other issues that is saying everything's fine, this is the course we should stay on.

Is there anything that Biden should do differently?

This is a race right now of Trump versus Trump, and Trump's losing it. Why would you change that? My view is if Donald Trump wants a two-hour press conference, buy the last half-hour and have him go 2 1/2 hours.

Nobody in the country is saying, "You know what? We don't have enough of Donald Trump. We need more of him in our life." There is nothing that says that. I'm totally fine to this point, and even

As Deputy Secretary of the Treasury in the Obama Administration, Neal Wolin helped formulate the strategy that pulled the economy out of recession into a record period of expansion.



beyond, to let Donald Trump have more time to explain himself. Just the other day, when Trump is asked about 150,000 people that died, he says, "What do you want me to do about it?"

"It is what it is."

I mean, what makes you want to change that dynamic? "It is what it is." I haven't heard that wisdom since I left Synagogue. (Laughter.)

I think if tactically you wanted to pick something apart—and I wouldn't—maybe Biden could run out a bit more of the issue stuff. My old boss, Bill Clinton, used to say, "Never stop thinking about tomorrow," and "the most undervalued thing in politics is ideas."

Biden is doing really well. You're about 70 days out from the first ballots being cast. Who would you want to be—Biden or Trump? What makes anybody say, "Joe Biden needs to do this"? I don't think so right now. He's got the money. He's on the air. He's going dollar for dollar with an incumbent president. His negatives aren't high. Nothing is dragging him down. He's laid out a prospective agenda more defined than the president himself. I'm OK right now.

I guess the inevitable question is who do you think should be his running mate and who do you think will be his running mate in the crystal ball gaze?

I'm totally going to cop out. I'm for whoever he's for. There's a political reason for a vice president, there's a professional reason for a vice president, there's a policy reason for a vice president, and then there's a personal reason.

"THIS IS A RACE RIGHT NOW OF TRUMP VERSUS TRUMP, AND TRUMP'S LOSING IT."

You're going to leave a big cabinet meeting and your cabinet and staff are going to be totally opposed on an issue. The politics will be on one side, the policy choice will be on the other side, and nobody's going to help you figure out the Rubik's cube. It's unsolvable. You're going to be frustrated. You're going to get up from the cabinet room. You're going to walk into the Oval Office, past your assistant, and you're going to be immensely frustrated.

There's one person following you, still talking to you. You want to be left alone, but out of respect and partnership, you're going to listen. You were that person, now who do you want doing it? To me, this is the closest thing you get to a partner for life because the intensity of this memory in the presidency, in the Oval Office, forges incredible relationships or it doesn't.

Make sure, whatever you do, you're honest with yourself. Not what everybody else is asking you to do. Nobody else is going to live with it. You're going to live with it. Who are you comfortable with?

There are big issues being discussed: voting access, voter suppression, challenges to the integrity of voting by mail, how ballots are counted or not counted and, ultimately, the extent to which results are challenged or delegitimized. I wonder how you're thinking about these issues that get to the heart of what it is to be a democracy?

There's a lot of discussion about absentee ballot and vote by mail, and there should be, and about access and the states themselves—as Georgia showed, New York showed—getting the cobwebs out of the system and really knowing how to run this apparatus. In early October, you're going to start voting. If you know any part of history, absentee ballots and mail-in ballots don't get counted until election day is over. Like, what about Donald Trump says, "You know what? We need more time of uncertainty"? So, my view is, force the Secretary of State and the Board of Elections to count the votes that are coming in as they come in.

First of all, it clears up a lot of headaches. Second, we don't have more time for doubt. We know already Donald Trump is not going to run this on the level. Everybody knows it. The Russians know it. The Ukrainians know it. The Chinese know it. And we know it. There's nothing in the last 3 1/2 years that told you this is going to run by the books. And we also know there's a series of processes going back 10, 15 years where Republican secretaries of state have tried to figure out how to put barriers to people's participation.

I know you have a number of corporate clients on here and so I'm gonna just say it—maybe this is the last time anybody wants to talk to me: But look, I don't think it's fair that the CEO in the corporate suite can vote within seven minutes and their employees vote within seven hours. You can decide who you want to back, who your company's PAC wants to back, fine. But access to the ballot, a level playing field, should be a part of corporate responsibility. And

so my attitude is, we're going to have a different type of voting this year, but we should not have Election Day for three weeks.

During that period of time of Florida [in 2000] and the "hanging chad," Bill Clinton handled the presidency and what he needed to do really well while America went through something it had never gone through. There is nothing about the demeanor, about the value system of this president that tells you he will look out for the nation's interests. That's on us. So I'm for counting these absentee and mail-in ballots the moment they arrive.

Rahm, you spoke a bit about the Senate races. What's the importance of these races to President Biden, should he be elected? And what's the probability that the filibuster rules are going to stay in place or get removed?

I think if you lined up the battleground states for the presidency, almost 80 percent overlap with the battleground control for the Senate. That's not true about Maine and Montana, but when you go through North Carolina, Arizona, Colorado on the first tier, Georgia, Iowa on the second tier, there's a pretty good overlap for the Senate and the presidential. Having a majority in the Senate is going to be extremely helpful. I don't think we should talk in the election about ending anything around process. There's issues around healthcare, economic equality, economic inclusion, et cetera.

When I left the mayorship, I did a 985-mile bike trip around Lake Michigan. Nobody at a diner along that route ever came up to me said, "I'd like to talk to you about Senate cloture rules." My attitude is, let's talk about it when it matters to people.

As long as you have a 60-vote margin, the pharmaceutical industry will control prices in this country. As long as you have a 60-vote margin, we're never going to have X, Y, and Z. Make it about special interest control rather than about some policy debate that a few professors at Harvard debate with a few professors at Brown.

Let's just keep everything around healthcare. Let's keep everything around the economy. I do think it's better to have Senate control, that goes without saying. And I also think it's important, not only for this cycle, but when you look to the future—first about what I call Biden Republicans—to look at where the Senate races are in 2022. What the agenda is, how we handle the agenda, how we can set up where this is not a single-cycle majority, but something that's more long-term and permanent.

If Joe Biden were to be elected and he shows up to work on January 20th, he's got a health crisis that's probably still very much present, an economic crisis that's probably still very much present, plus, big issues around race equality and financial and economic inequality. Do you have a view about how he might or should prioritize all of that?

I actually think what Biden said in the campaign is relevant to the

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governing part. “Build back better.” Don’t argue about reopening, let’s argue about rebuilding. Look at what you’ve had on infrastructure, look at what you had on job training, et cetera. There are millions and millions of workers on the retail side, JCPenney, Lord & Taylor, who are not going back to work at those places.

In six months, you can get a computer code certificate that pays you six figures. That’s true also about cybersecurity. That’s true also about advanced manufacturing. Let’s set a goal, two million people per area. We will pay for your education and you get permanently the \$600 additional of unemployment insurance if you go all the way through this six months with free education and becoming a computer coder—a certificate. Let’s just set a goal, 6 of the 15 million will now have new careers—and use that time that they’re stuck at home—that they come prepared when we’re in the post-COVID world or post-COVID dominated world, that they are better prepared to make the most of their lives.

That’s going to be true about infrastructure. Getting people on mass transit’s going to be one thing—you’re going to need bike lanes, you’re going to need a whole other type of redesigning of our roads, our transportation system, to give people the confidence to go from home to work.

Let’s go do that. We need to give these people direction in their lives and opportunity and we’ll pay for it. They’re going to be better off and we’re going to be better off for that. Telling somebody at JCPenney, “We’re gonna pay you some more unemployment insurance,” as if when we get a vaccine JCPenney is going to go hire 25,000 people back is just not honest with them or ourselves. I would just say you had a north star, you ran on it, it’s the right policy. Now organize everything underneath it.

You don’t have a day to waste. There’s no chance here for trying to navel-gaze. You just got to hit the ground running. You’ve got to have a decent plan. It’s organized around one organizing principle and move on that, whether that’s on how you invest your dollars or where you invest your dollars.

Two really good questions in the chat box, Rahm. The first is, “The country seems to have gotten away from being able to have a civil discussion around politics. There have always been differences of opinion. Why do you believe the country is seemingly more divided and less willing to come together or recognize differences and find ways to compromise?” And the second, which is slightly more narrowly focused but I think gets to some of the same issues: “What are the ways to restore trust and faith in government, especially amongst young people?”

Those are good questions. I have three kids. One just got out of college at UCLA. He’s now joined the armed services as an officer. I’ve got my two daughters, who are a senior and junior. And I look at their friends and I think, if there’s something to be optimistic about, they are more publicly—I didn’t say politically—publicly and civically engaged than my generation.

I was an anomaly. You’re an anomaly, Neal, and Patti is. The best and brightest of our generation went to consulting firms and Wall

As a campaign strategist, Rahm led the Democrats to a gain of 31 seats in the House in 2006. After serving as Chief of Staff to President Obama, he served as Mayor of Chicago, his hometown.



Street and law school. These kids now are involved in neighborhood and community groups, local, national, international. So, there’s a spirit on service.

I actually think one of the things Biden should be talking about is some form of universal national service because I think it gets to that issue of trust. There are a lot of different ways, so I’m not calling for serving in the armed services, but I think I would call for a national service for the United States. Six months post-high school, all walks of life, all incomes, all backgrounds. I think it would do a tremendous amount about recreating civics.

Our party correctly says our diversity is our strength. It can only be a strength if we have an agreed-upon foundation. “Out of many, one,” comes out of the fact that you have an agreement about what that “one” should be. And I think one of the things that’s happened over the last—not just Trump’s tenure, but it’s been in the workings for a long time—is we don’t have a consensus about that one. And that to me is a problem. Reestablishing the threads and fabrics that bind us together is important so that we remind each other of what we actually share in common. You could spend a lifetime looking at the differences; there should be a little period of your life where you find our common humanity. I don’t think anybody would ever say I’m pollyannish. One of the things that COVID made us realize is that while you could be cynical about the government, when you’re in need, it is the government that you turn to.

If you’re a progressive, the assumption is that government is an affirmative force. Now, there was a whole period of time in the post-Reagan era where a lot of people did not think government could run a one-car parade. People, while they’re pretty dark about what the federal government hasn’t done in this COVID era, they

do expect it to do it. And I think that's where we have an opportunity, as progressives, to build again that trust in not just government, but in the public space, in the public arena.

How should cities be thinking about issues of systemic racism? And in particular perhaps, or relatedly, questions of policing?

Cities and mayors can lead not just a discussion, but a set of policies. When we were going through the reform effort with our police officers in Chicago—we have a big Holocaust museum, one of the unique ones in the United States here in the Chicago area. To graduate from the academy, you had to spend a day at the Holocaust Museum. And I think that's a good thing. Officers of all walks of life who are becoming Chicago police officers went to a place to see the consequences of hatred and discrimination and bigotry.

We have the DuSable Museum of African American History on the South Side of Chicago, near the University of Chicago. We decided to add a DuSable educational day to every Chicago police officer. It was part of understanding that you're a part of a community, you don't stand apart from the community. Making your police department not just look like your city, but also be integrated into the fabric and the DNA.

Now, we tried one other thing. It didn't work. In Chicago, if you work for the city, you have to live in the city. We gave them I think it was, like, a \$30,000 down payment to buy a home in a challenging neighborhood. And I don't remember the statistics, but it was something like 22 people took it. A lot of the people thought it was a great idea. It was great on paper; it just didn't work.

But there's other things that you can do. In our police department, as part of our reform, everybody had to go through a de-escalation training. We made training not just a one-time experience in your life. You then had to do 40 hours every year, lifetime, in the district retraining. We had everybody go through training in knowing the difference between a crime call and a mental health call. If I was to add one thing to it that we didn't do, I think officers should get some form of EMT training. Because if you're EMT, you're about health. It's the basis. The body, the health, and the well-being. I think it would give a different dimension to an officer.

But also, a lot of people say the police department, but there's also housing, schools. The idea that somehow the issues that deal with integration are only about the police department, you've got to look at every piece of it. I've advocated to the Chicago corporate community—this included universities, academic centers, utilities—X-amount of your spend has to go to local businesses in your neighborhood where you are. So, if you're the University of Chicago Hospital, Rush Presbyterian, Commonwealth Edison, dedicate X of your spend to locally run minority businesses. And you'll find it's not that hard to do. And you're not going to do it unless you make it a number with a goal that has people accountable for doing it. That would have a dramatic change in the effort.

Neal, the reason you're sitting where you are, and the reason I'm sitting where I'm at, is we have two things in common, and that's true for a lot of people on this phone. We have the love of our parents and a good education. Now, when you're mayor or

chief of staff you can't do something about the first, but you can do something about the second. The answer or the set of problems usually around resolve around education.

The reason I ran for mayor was to fix and really push our public education. We now have the fastest growing graduation rate. We went from 57 percent to 80 percent. Two thirds of our kids, when I left, were doing reading and math at grade level. Stanford University said Chicago children are outpacing 98 percent of all other children in the United States of America, suburban, rural, et cetera.

To me, that's where you're going to solve the most problems in a single way. We've got to get kids on a course where they're believing in themselves and they're believing in tomorrow.

We spend a lot of time in Brunswick helping our clients think about how to navigate not just financial issues and public policy and regulatory issues, but increasingly social issues. And it feels to me that in this moment where social issues are so centrally on everyone's mind—climate, equality, immigration, public health or what have you—some of our public sector leaders aren't necessarily answering the call. It feels like there's an awfully big opportunity for private sector leaders. You've counseled them many times in between your stints in government.

You say private sector—if you're a public company, you're a public company, not just because you're on the New York or NASDAQ. Today, how you treat your front-line workers, what their pay is, what benefits are—you are a public company in a big-P way. Your responsibilities aren't just to shareholders.

And I don't think I would do the, "here's what we're going to do on climate change," like a check box. You have to have a value system and a cultural system that understands the world you're in and the place you're at. A lot of companies that are going public want their board to be equally representative. Well, apply that to the corporate suite and work your way down. Have a three-year plan, have a rule. We did this in the city of Chicago. When I left, for the first time ever, every chairman of public housing, schools, community colleges, mass transit, was African American. The first time ever in the history of the city.

But you have to set a goal and drive towards a goal to get certain things done. Your employees will feel better about where they work and their contribution. And they will give you 10 percent more because you have invested in them.

Every one of us knows their productivity, their commitment can go farther if they feel they have an identity associated with where they work.

You have a big role to play, as a citizen, in our society. It doesn't mean that it comes at the expense of shareholders, et cetera, but it does mean it's part of your ethos. ♦

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