

Demetri Kofinas: Today's episode of Hidden Forces is made possible by listeners like you. For more information about this week's episode or for easy access to related programming, visit our website at hiddenforces.io and subscribe to our free email list. If you want access to overtime segments, episode transcripts, and show rundowns full of links and detailed information related to each and every episode check out our premium subscription available through the Hidden Forces website or through our Patreon page. And remember, if you listen to the show on your Apple podcast app, you can give us a review. Each review helps more people find the show and join our amazing community. And with that, please enjoy, this week's episode.

Demetri Kofinas: What's up everybody? I'm Demetri Kofinas, and you're listening to Hidden Forces, where each week I speak with experts in the fields of technology, science, finance, and culture. To help you gain the tools to better navigate an increasingly complex world, so that you're less surprised by tomorrow and better able to predict what happens next.

Demetri Kofinas: My guest this week is former US Senator and Governor from the great state of Nebraska, Bob Kerrey. Senator Kerrey currently serves as Managing Director at Allen & Company. He is also Executive Chairman of the Minerva Institute for Research and Scholarship. Senator Kerrey also served as one of the ten members of the 9/11 commission, tasked with investigating the terrorist attacks of September 11th, 2001. I don't often have the opportunity to speak with an elected official, let alone spend almost two-hours in conversation with one. The overtime of this conversation, which includes a discussion about senator Kerrey's work on the 9/11 commission, the role that the Saudi government played in orchestrating the attacks, as well as my questions about why the Bush administration and the media refused to hold the Kingdom accountable for its involvement, can be accessed through the episode page on our website.

Demetri Kofinas: In this episode, senator Kerrey and I discuss his experience growing up in 1950's and early 60's America, his service in Vietnam and the life-altering injury that sent him down a path of service, first as Nebraska's governor during the mid-1980's, and later, as its senator from 1989 to 2001. We discuss both the cultural, as well as the political transformations that have overtaken American society throughout the course of his life, as well as how the media and social media have altered the political landscape and introduced new challenges to governing and elections that are altogether new. We discuss the tremendous wealth divide currently present in America, the role of the 2008 crisis and its aftermath in furthering the divide, and the emergence of populism, both of the left and on the right, as a powerful new force that is shaping American politics in ways that we are only just begging to appreciate. What I'm most proud of however – what I think makes this discussion most unique - is it's civility. It is at times both provocative and pleasant, humorous, but serious. It is a template for the types of conversations that we should all be able to have with people across the political spectrum, irrespective of our disagreements, in 2019 and beyond. And with that, let's get right into this week's conversation

Demetri Kofinas: Senator Bob Kerrey of Nebraska, welcome to Hidden Forces.

Bob Kerrey: Thank you. Nice to be with you.

Demetri Kofinas: It's great having you here.

Bob Kerrey: Thanks for the animal crackers.

Demetri Kofinas: You're welcome. I love animal crackers. We have them here in the studio for guests. They're mostly actually for children, but I think for you and I ... they are for the Sesame Street generation. It's great having you here. We're recording this a few days before Christmas. We're actually recording it, you told me, on the anniversary of-

Bob Kerrey: 20th anniversary of the House Impeachment of Bill Clinton.

Demetri Kofinas: Amazing. We're going to get into that because you were in the House at the time.

Bob Kerrey: Senate at the time.

Demetri Kofinas: Senate, I'm sorry. You were in the Senate. As I said, you were a Senator. You were also a governor.

Bob Kerrey: Yes, I was.

Demetri Kofinas: You started as a governor of Nebraska.

Bob Kerrey: Yes. Well, I started in business, and then I ran for governor, then went back to business. The senior Senator died so I ended up running for Senate.

Demetri Kofinas: I'm fascinated to learn about this. I read your memoir as I was telling you. Your memoir deals a lot with, some of it's your early life, but it deals a lot with Vietnam and it deals a lot with your injury and the loss of your leg and the recovery afterwards. Your emotional and physical recovery. I told you I had, and the audience knows, I've had my own experience with a brain tumor. It wasn't war, but there are some similarities. I told you also that I read Ron Kovic's book, Born on the Fourth of July.

Demetri Kofinas: There were obviously more similarities between his book and your story, but I related to things between both of those. There are a number of things I want to speak to you about. One thing is I heard, is this true? There's a rumor that you were born in the home of William Jennings Bryan?

Bob Kerrey: That's correct.

Demetri Kofinas: How is that possible? How did you do that? How did you manage that?

Bob Kerrey: Well, I didn't manage it at all. My mom made the decision. She and my dad was in the Army Air Corps. There's an Army Air Corps base in Lincoln. They were down in Miami, which is where I was conceived. Then they got reassigned up to Lincoln. She arrived just a couple days before I was born. I don't know why she went to ... It was Bryan Memorial Hospital, but it was an overfull crowd. His House was right next door.

Demetri Kofinas: Conceived in Miami, that's a great place to be conceived. Warm weather. Gets you in the mood.

Bob Kerrey: Easy to understand, yeah.

Demetri Kofinas: Yeah. That's fascinating. I read, years ago I read, I think in 2012 I read Michael Kazin's book on the biography of William Jennings Bryan.

Bob Kerrey: You're ahead of me. I have not read the biography of William Jennings Bryan.

Demetri Kofinas: Yeah. It's a great biography. It's a great story actually. You should know since you're from Nebraska. But fascinating, obviously, fascinating especially today to know the history of the Free Silver Movement.

Bob Kerrey: Especially the rise of populism.

Demetri Kofinas: The rise of populism, yeah.

Bob Kerrey: He was like the original populist. Yeah.

Demetri Kofinas: 100%. The best kind of really ... I mean, his speeches were incredible.

Bob Kerrey: Yeah. Actually, there's a guy by the name of Frank Morrison who was a governor in Nebraska before me, quite a while before me. Frank was in his audience as a young man, probably very young man. He said he had a voice, un-amplified that could be heard in very large auditoriums. So he had a remarkable set of lungs.

Demetri Kofinas: Booming.

Bob Kerrey: Yeah.

Demetri Kofinas: But, I saw when I was preparing for the interview with Michael Kazin, I watched C-SPAN which I love. C-SPAN is actually not even government funded, right? I think it's the cable companies.

Bob Kerrey: That's correct.

Demetri Kofinas: Right. They fund it. Amazing. It was footage from that home. I've seen the home, I've seen the desk where William Jennings Bryan worked next to his wife. They worked in the same place. Anyway, so I've seen where you were born, Senator Kerrey. I've seen you from the cradle. So, you grew up in Lincoln, Nebraska. You're actually a city guy, even though you grew up in Nebraska.

Bob Kerrey: Well, Lincoln is the state capital. It's a university town as well, but it's quite common to find people of first generation, second generation, right off the farm because when I grew up, and it's still that way, but it was really that way when I grew up. The city limits were corn fields. You ride your bike out to the edge of town, and you're in the country immediately. At that time when I grew up, it was probably 100,000 people, 125,000 people. It's double that now. It's a city with lots of country characteristics.

Demetri Kofinas: What years was that, that you grew up in Nebraska? When were you a kid?

Bob Kerrey: In the 50's. I was born in '43. So, the poet Auden had this question which was, what's the first memory you've got of a public event? That is to say a memory that other people would have as well. Mine was the test in Eniwetok of the hydrogen bomb.

Demetri Kofinas: Really? I think I remember you saying that in quotes.

Bob Kerrey: Right, late 40s.

Demetri Kofinas: Wow.

Bob Kerrey: '49, I believe that was.

Demetri Kofinas: What was that like? You remember that. What was your experience-

Bob Kerrey: I just remember it. I don't want to remember what it was like. I didn't think anything of it. In matter of fact, you see it and at the time that it was, really kind of beautiful. A big mushroom cloud and I didn't comprehend the destructive power of it. I just saw this extraordinary event and I knew it was important.

Demetri Kofinas: What was America, I mean, specifically Nebraska, but what was America like in the 1950s?

Bob Kerrey: Well, we were booming. Most of the other countries on Earth had experienced devastation in the Second World War. We had restrictions on what you could buy and how much you pay and so forth during the war. Boy, once those restrictions went off, it was boom time almost everywhere. Manufacturing was hot, housing was hot. I got out of high school in 1961 and class was 330 or something like that. In our family, we had one choice. University of Nebraska or nothing. The kids in my class who went right straight to the workforce, they

went to work for half a dozen companies, all of which paid a wage that was enough to support a family. Had pensions and healthcare when they retired. All those jobs were available and mostly available as the consequence of us not having the kind of competition that began to affect us in the 1970s.

Demetri Kofinas: How common was it for your generation, for kids that grew up particularly in the middle of the country to aspire, if not want to go to war? To go to the military?

Bob Kerrey: I don't know. I know I didn't. I graduated from college in 1965. I went right to work. I'd finished a five year program a little before, was practicing pharmacy, actually doing some research in pharmacy, and my draft status changed.

Demetri Kofinas: You knew that you were going to get drafted so you figured you might as well apply to where you want to go?

Bob Kerrey: Right. Well, I knew I was going to get drafted. I passed my physical and it had never occurred to me. I had nasty childhood asthma, but in December when I took the physical, I was asymptomatic so they said, "You're ready to go." I knew I was going to get drafted by the army, and the only reason I went in the Navy because I just read The Caine Mutiny, Herman Wouk's book about going to sea and I said, "That's for me. I'm going to go to sea." I volunteered for the Navy.

Demetri Kofinas: Not just the Navy, you became a Navy Seal.

Bob Kerrey: Well, again, Serendipity played a big role in it. I got in the Navy in the Fleet Reserve, then I applied for Officer Candidate School at New Port Rhode Island, was accepted. While I was there, a number of people came by, flight guys came by and a friend of mine that I'd met there, we both applied for flight school. He had something wrong with one of his eyes so second choice was underwater demolition. We applied for that and he ended up getting called down to be interviewed by Hyman Rickover, the father of the nuclear Navy, because he was an electrical engineer. He went off and did that, and I went to San Diego and went through underwater demolition.

Demetri Kofinas: He was working in subs or-

Bob Kerrey: Yeah. Nuclear submarine program.

Demetri Kofinas: Really?

Bob Kerrey: I went out to San Diego and went through Coronado actually. I went through underwater demolition. When I was done with that, I got selected for Seal Team at the end of the class. Mostly because the war was ramped up and they need bodies.

Demetri Kofinas: This is when?

Bob Kerrey: '67.

Demetri Kofinas: Before you even tell me what Seal training was like, what was it like being in the military at that time? Did you know in, let's say, 1966, that you were going to go to Vietnam?

Bob Kerrey: No, I didn't. Obviously, the presumption is you volunteer for the Navy, not likely to go to Vietnam. Underwater demolition was the same way. Very few UDT Teams deployed to Vietnam. In fact, I don't know think any the time I was there, but Seal Team did, and Seal Team was relatively young, so yeah. When I got selected for Seal Team, that's the moment I said, "Oh, this is going to have a different ending that I thought I was going to have."

Demetri Kofinas: You have to be a really tough person to get through Seal Training? It doesn't just make you tough, you have to be tough, right?

Bob Kerrey: Well, I don't know about that. You certainly have to be willing to do a little bit of discomfort, to put it mildly, but I don't know that you necessarily have to be tough. I think you do have to ... There are certain physical things you got to be able to do, but the most important thing is your mental attitude.

Demetri Kofinas: Right. Yeah, but I mean, that's like the toughest thing, right?

Bob Kerrey: Well, it is. In my case, I think I was helped, actually, by childhood asthma because I wanted to quit football, I wanted to quit particularly football, because it was in the fall when the symptoms were at their worst. With underwater demolition training, there were plenty of moments where I wanted to quit, but I didn't. That's the toughness part of it. It's just being able to say, "No, I'm not going to do it."

Demetri Kofinas: We have a listener to the show, a listener who reached out to me. Army ranger or was an army ranger, and either I asked him or he brought it up about how he got through training, and he described it as going through a wood chipper. He said it's like-

Bob Kerrey: From Fargo?

Demetri Kofinas: No. That's a great movie.

Bob Kerrey: Yeah, I know that.

Demetri Kofinas: That's the sick scene.

Bob Kerrey: That's a sick scene. I went through Army Ranger school as well. We went to Airborne Ranger School back to back, now that they incorporated the Seal Team training.

Demetri Kofinas: Well, he described it as going through a wood chipper in the sense that he said the only way he was able to get through it is when he just accepted that this is what it's going to be and that he just has to give his body into it, just like going through a wood chipper. That's how I understood it. It's quite a visual he painted.

Bob Kerrey: It is quite a visual. I think in both cases, you have to learn to work with others. They don't call it Seal Team for nothing and Rangers are even more because it's a larger entity. I learned a lot from both those training programs and one of the things that I apply to this day.

Demetri Kofinas: You weren't in Vietnam very long, I think less than a year.

Bob Kerrey: Right.

Demetri Kofinas: Before you got injured.

Bob Kerrey: Right.

Demetri Kofinas: Tell me what that was like and what it was like, to the extent that you feel comfortable talking about it. It's been a long time, I know, but what that was like. Not just the war, but the injury.

Bob Kerrey: First of all, I finished UDT and then Ranger and airborne school and watched Lyndon Johnson in late March in 1968 say he was going to run for the election and he's going to negotiate an agreement with North Vietnamese. At that point, anybody that sort of processed what he was talking about knew we were going to finish second. We were not going to win this war. The question was how long we were going to be there before the politicians could negotiate an end.

Demetri Kofinas: The public at the time pretty much felt that we were going to lose the war?

Bob Kerrey: Well, I don't know about the public. That's a good question. I don't know.

Demetri Kofinas: People in the military.

Bob Kerrey: One of the things they said about Vietnam is that they had to end it because it got unpopular and that's not true. Majority of America still supported it. If you're going to negotiate an end with another party and their objective non-negotiable, is that they want to control the entire country, the whole war effort was to preserve independent South Vietnam. I'm saying at that point, the war was up. I'm just telling you how I process it in late March of '68. I heard the president describe what he was going to try to do it.

Demetri Kofinas: Where were you at that time?

Bob Kerrey: San Diego, back out in San Diego.

Demetri Kofinas: You hadn't deployed yet?

Bob Kerrey: No. All right. The great things about humans is that we forget pain. You're darn sure, you forget it. It began 55 years ago now in my case. Again, the most important thing I remember is that we were in a fire fight when it happened. We had to get all the way through that and then-

Demetri Kofinas: A lot of that memory has faded for you.

Bob Kerrey: Sure. The joke is do you know the difference in a war started in a fairy tale? There's a buzz to it. A fairy tale always begins once upon a time and a war story always begins, "No, shit, this is true. I was there." There is a tendency to forget. I just did. It's not a bad thing.

Demetri Kofinas: To repress or suppress.

Bob Kerrey: Well, I don't know. It's just time. If you'd ask me right now what I was doing yesterday afternoon, I'd have to scratch my head and try to remember what the hell I was doing yesterday afternoon, let alone what I was doing 55 years ago. I do remember the pain, I remember the dramatic change in the circumstances of my physical condition. I went from 185 pound seal to not being able to do anything.

Demetri Kofinas: How tall are you?

Bob Kerrey: 5'11.

Demetri Kofinas: 5'11, 185 pounds. You were pretty lean at the time?

Bob Kerrey: Yeah. But by the time you finish your program, there's nothing that you can't do. I mean, that's how you feel. A lot of things you can't, but-

Demetri Kofinas: You were how old?

Bob Kerrey: 25.

Demetri Kofinas: That's what every guy wants to be, just jacked, athletic, in shape, looking great at that age and tough. Knowing how to do anything.

Bob Kerrey: It definitely was-

Demetri Kofinas: Tough Superman.

Bob Kerrey: It definitely worked in the bar.

Demetri Kofinas: Did you kind of feel-

Bob Kerrey: Is that what you're saying?

Demetri Kofinas: Also, I know you dated Debra Winger.

Bob Kerrey: Yeah, that was later.

Demetri Kofinas: Actually, I had a huge crush on her when I was a kid. I'm sure many in the audience know who she is, many I'm sure don't. But yes, both in the bars absolutely but also just generally the feeling of being Superman. Is that what it felt like? Did you feel like Superman?

Bob Kerrey: Not really.

Demetri Kofinas: No?

Bob Kerrey: No. I'd be lying if I said people thought you were but they'd say, "Oh my God! This guy is dangerous." Some are more but I wouldn't call myself in that category. Physically, if you said to me the day before I was injured, you said, "I want you to go 100 miles from here to such and such a place and you're going to be crossing four rivers and you're going to be going over a mountain and you're going to be ..." I'd say, "Okay, I can do that."

Demetri Kofinas: Wow.

Bob Kerrey: "Just give me the map and I'll figure out how to get there." The Philadelphia Naval Hospital for almost nine months and I needed help to go to the bathroom.

Demetri Kofinas: This was in Australia? Where was this?

Bob Kerrey: No, I originally went to Yokosuka, Japan and then went to ... I actually first went to a field hospital in Nha Trang and then down to Cam Ranh Bay and then over to Yokosuka. All that time is about four or five days and most of the time I spent recovering and getting surgery was at Philadelphia at the Naval Hospital there. I'm just saying you go from being able to do lots of things to being able to do almost nothing without asking somebody for help. It's one of the challenges that men have in particular. We don't like asking for help, we don't like letting people take care of us. It was startling to go from there to not being able to be mobile, other than in a wheelchair.

Demetri Kofinas: I don't even know where to start with this. I mean, it's not like we can get through the whole ... We could spend hours and try to extract some meaningful insight from your experience. I guess my question would be, how long did it take for you to kind of incorporate that experience into your life and to move forward into who you would become, and how important was the experience in making you who you are today?

Bob Kerrey: When you're in that kind of pain situation with, I would say, very imprecise prognosis as to how long it's going to take. I was discharged from the hospital on December 1969. I went back to Nebraska. My last surgery was 1978, the last serious surgery that I had on my limb. On the other hand, I started a business, we build a business side. We're still doing a lot of things but I would say I wasn't able to do as much as I can today until 1978.

Demetri Kofinas: Because of the surgery, the last surgery.

Bob Kerrey: Yeah. To me, the most important lesson is the government almost killed me by sending me to Vietnam and then it saved my life. I wouldn't be alive were it not for the Philadelphia Naval Hospital.

Demetri Kofinas: The VA.

Bob Kerrey: No, first the military hospital, a Naval hospital and then secondly when I was discharged, the VA.

Demetri Kofinas: The health insurance that you have.

Bob Kerrey: It's not health insurance.

Demetri Kofinas: The health care. What would you call it?

Bob Kerrey: What would I call it? I call it socialized medicine.

Demetri Kofinas: Socialized medicine.

Bob Kerrey: Dystonia, it certainly worked for me. Without them, I wouldn't be nearly as mobile and as healthy as I am now.

Demetri Kofinas: I do want to talk about that as part of a broader conversation about political issues. In terms of historical point, one of the thing that I wanted to ask has to do with what it was like when you came back from Vietnam. So many of us have heard stories of what it was like for returning veterans. But it's something that I've reflected on a bit more because, I don't know if it was preparing for your interview. I was just kind of thinking about what it would be like to go to war as a young man with certain expectations about what that meant, and then to come back and be surrounded by people my age who viewed me very differently and all of my expectations being shattered. What was that experience like and why do Vietnam veterans talk about that so much when they reflect on the war?

Bob Kerrey: Well, we haven't lost very many wars and we lost this one. We finished second. We didn't win it. Even though American people supported it, there are certainly no glorious feeling coming out of that war and the country as it was in the Second World War. Even Korea which is a forgotten war, felt better because you

get an armistice and at least South Vietnam survives, South Korea survives. There's a bit of that. But the broader context of what was going on in the country in '68, '69, '70 and '71 wasn't Vietnam, it was race.

Demetri Kofinas: By civil rights.

Bob Kerrey: Oh my God, five days after, Johnson announces he's going to negotiate with the North Vietnamese in Paris, Martin Luther King is killed. Every major city in America was in flames except for Indianapolis for Bobby Kennedy happened to be campaigning, talk African-American community-

Demetri Kofinas: Right, that famous speech he gave on the back of pickup truck.

Bob Kerrey: There were 2000 bombings in 1970 and almost all of them connected to race, 25 dead. '71 was bad. It was race that was driving it and it was a movement to say, "We have to change our culture." Particularly the demands of women to have more rights in the workplace and the Equal Rights Amendment rose and fell during that period. It was a lot more than just Vietnam. It was an uncomfortable time in some ways because the country was changing.

Demetri Kofinas: What you're saying is the Vietnam war was part of this larger cultural movement in America?

Bob Kerrey: Yeah. If you ask me what was the most important thing going on for a civil society in the late 60s, early 70s, I'd say civil rights. It's busing. I mean, Richard Nixon, when he ran for president in 1968, he would have lost the nomination of Miami to Ronald Reagan, had he not gone to Strom Thurmond and said, "I'll give you every single federal judge, give you a veto over him because I want to slow a busing down." He didn't say that explicitly but that's exactly what was going on. The big change that came about was he get four appointments to the court, including he got the opportunity to appoint Warren's replacement. That wasn't about Vietnam, that was about race.

Demetri Kofinas: In the 1970s when you came back and all of these changes were happening, you went back to Nebraska?

Bob Kerrey: Yes.

Demetri Kofinas: And you got into business as an entrepreneur?

Bob Kerrey: No, I actually went back to Nebraska and applied to Stanford Business School. Got accepted to Stanford Business School. I went out there in the early summer 1970 and I went to see the registrar. First thing he said to me was, "Oh, gosh, you're from Nebraska. You must really like Willa Cather.

Demetri Kofinas: Who?

Bob Kerrey: Exactly, that's what I said. "Who's Willa Cather?" Pulitzer Prize winning Nebraska author in the early part of the 20th century, I didn't know who she was. I went home, I went to our apartment there in Palo Alto and I said, "Damn, I can't spend two years here, finance and accounting, all that stuff." I went to Berkeley and I learned how to read at Berkeley for about a year and a quarter or something like that. Then came back to Lincoln to see some friends in between classes and one of them said, "There's this guy coming into town, his name's Allard Lowenstein. He's a former congressman and let's go hear him talk." His idea was we're going to registrar all the newly entered ... Because they just lowered the voting age is 18.

Demetri Kofinas: Give us some timeline here. This is now what year?

Bob Kerrey: '71.

Demetri Kofinas: '71 you're in Berkeley.

Bob Kerrey: Yeah.

Demetri Kofinas: 1971 and-

Bob Kerrey: '70 and '71.

Demetri Kofinas: '71, what were you studying at Berkeley? English literature?

Bob Kerrey: English, History.

Demetri Kofinas: Okay. You were just letting yourself get totally radicalized.

Bob Kerrey: Not really, I had taken all science when I was in school. I mean, I was in college, I was in pharmacy. I got out in four years so I had an accelerated program without a lot of electives and I didn't know how to read.

Demetri Kofinas: You didn't know how to read literally?

Bob Kerrey: Well, I could decode words but in terms of actually-

Demetri Kofinas: You had no experience with the arts and with literature.

Bob Kerrey: No, to take a book, let's say you want to read Job of the Greek. If you read Job of the Greek and you get all of it done with it, the question is, can you tell me what the book was about? I couldn't.

Demetri Kofinas: That's interesting.

Bob Kerrey: What I learned was, what it meant to really learn something, to know something, to really know it as opposed to being able to talk about it in a

cocktail party. That's why I learned to read. I now know what it means to be able to say, "I just finished reading Frederick Douglass's biography. It's a remarkable story." If you said, "Do you know that book?" I'd say, "Not quite." I think I need to read it probably one more time in order to really be able to have a better command of what the author was saying. He took a lot of care to put that book out, to write that book. I learned how to read and it was enormously important to me to do that. It turned out to be a smart thing to do.

Bob Kerrey: Anyway, Lowenstein, the voting age got lowered to 18 and the ballot cry was if you're old enough to shoot, you're old enough to vote. I was in favor of raising the shooting age. That didn't happen. I traveled with him, registering all these newly enfranchised 18 year olds on the presumption that they would vote against Richard Nixon and they ended up voting for him. I did that and then afterwards started business.

Demetri Kofinas: We didn't mention that you're a Medal of Honor recipient and that there's actually a picture of you, I have it in my rundown, receiving your medal from Richard Nixon, putting it on your neck, on your chest.

Bob Kerrey: Right.

Demetri Kofinas: You talked about how you were conflicted, you didn't know if you wanted it. Your parents were there. That must have also been a very emotional time. Going to Washington, being there with the president, having your parents there after everything you were going through.

Bob Kerrey: I mean, the dominant memory for me was pain. I was in a lot of pain.

Demetri Kofinas: Physical pain.

Bob Kerrey: Physical pain, yeah. This is May of '70. I was injured just a little over a year before that. As I said, I had a fair amount of surgery after that coming my way. Standing up wasn't all that easy and you stoop up a long time and walking. I don't know how many aspirin I took, but it was well in the double digits to get through the day. I had ringing in my ears. I remember that quite vividly. I wrote medals when I was an administrative officer and so I knew that in order to get a medal, particularly Medal of Honor, you have to have the action itself, then the action's got to be witnessed. It's got to be witnessed by somebody who likes you, it's got to be witnessed by somebody who likes you, who can write and then it's got to make its way at the mysterious process. I knew there were lots of people who got nothing. I was persuaded by a petty officer in Coronado who visited while I was in hospital, that I had to receive it for other people and that's the spirit then and now.

Demetri Kofinas: Yeah. You wrote that you felt cynical about it and-

Bob Kerrey: Skeptical.

Demetri Kofinas: Skeptical and that there was a lot of politics that you felt went into it for the next administration, Richard Nixon in particular. We know a lot about Richard Nixon now because-

Bob Kerrey: Well, in my relationship, I've never met President Nixon other than at that event and I hated him.

Demetri Kofinas: You hated him before and after. How much-

Bob Kerrey: No, after the war.

Demetri Kofinas: After the war.

Bob Kerrey: Many people told me, well, he didn't actually promise to end the war, he didn't have a secret plan, he didn't say he had a secret plan but I felt that he did. Remember the '68 election, this occurring after Johnson announces he's going to negotiate a piece, so the possibility of getting a piece negotiated seemed to be quite high.

Demetri Kofinas: They say that he actively intervened in the negotiations in Switzerland, I think.

Bob Kerrey: The most important moment for me regarding Vietnam was really after I was served as governor. I ran for governor and won and was governor for four years from '83 to '87. A truly remarkable man by the name of Walter Capps who was the chairman of the Department of Religious Studies at the University of California Santa Barbara said, "Why don't you come out after you leave office and coach a class about the impact of the war on America?" I did and full disclosure, if you have a choice between living in Omaha in January, February, March or on the beach in Santa Barbara, it wasn't that difficult of a choice.

Demetri Kofinas: What year was this now?

Bob Kerrey: 1987. I go out there-

Demetri Kofinas: Go, go 80s.

Bob Kerrey: The first time I had studied the war. I begin to understand how Eisenhower, actually goes all the way back to Eisenhower supporting the French after they ... Into China. I can understand how Kennedy made the mistake and Johnson. The Cold War was a ferocious battle between good and evil as far as I'm concerned. It's easy for me to understand how all these guys including Nixon made mistakes. I went down to the beach one night after making that conclusion and shouted into the surf zone and I forgave Richard Nixon. It's important because what I learned then was, I'm 100% certain that Nixon didn't notice but I noticed. I was the one who was suffering the hatred. I was the one that was being hurt by hating another human being. Once I stopped hating Richard Nixon, which I

did that, sincerely did, I felt relief. I don't come out of it saying, "Gee, Richard Nixon is a horrible human being." He had all kinds of issues to put it kindly.

Demetri Kofinas: Yea, for sure. Well, I've heard a lot of those tapes, I'm a junky. I heard a lot of LBJ's tapes, Nixon's tapes, Kennedy's tapes. I must say living in the United States, we have done a great job. Obviously, the vast majority of information is confidential but we've done a great job of making a lot of that information available.

Bob Kerrey: Oh gosh, here we go.

Demetri Kofinas: The internet has made that -

Bob Kerrey: In the Ken Burns '17 part documentary of the Vietnam War, which has probably had a bigger impact in Vietnam than it's had here, there's a North Vietnamese soldier who at the end, one of the last of the shows says, "I used to think that the demonstrations in the United States during the war was a sign of weakness." He said, "Now I realize it's a sign of strength." He said, "We couldn't protest war." It's one of the things that's going on in Vietnam right now. They're coming to terms with what actually happened in Huế city, what actually was going on there. Again from that series, I didn't know it but there were preteen girls driving those trucks down the Ho Chi Min trail.

Bob Kerrey: I do think that it is a sign of strength that we can protest, it is a sign of strength that we can say, "We don't want to be in this war. We want to make change happen." We can tolerate that and we need to tolerate that. We need to encourage our citizens to be watchful up to and including pretty angry protests of what our political leaderships are doing.

Demetri Kofinas: I'm still thinking about what you said around learning how to read. That's really stuck with me. Just this idea of not just learning how to recite something but learning what's meaningful about it, sounds kind of what you're saying. It's a skill that I wonder, I have never heard it sort of talked about like that and I think that's something that everyone should be able to try and do. I try to do that when I prepare for these episodes but there's a big difference between just reading something and remembering it versus drawing something out of it.

Bob Kerrey: Yeah. You can get to a point with a book, cliff notes, read the introduction that allows you to have apparently informed conversation at a cocktail party or-

Demetri Kofinas: Apparently informed, I love that there.

Bob Kerrey: Yeah, or you can learn it so that you get a profound understanding of what this artist was saying with his story and you may not be able to have a conversation with anybody. But it can change the way you see life, the way you see other human beings.

Demetri Kofinas: So, 1987 you were howling into the wind in Santa Barbara on the beach, you had just finished your four terms as governor in Nebraska.

Bob Kerrey: One term.

Demetri Kofinas: One term, sorry. I mean, four years. You ran for re-election but did you lose?

Bob Kerrey: No, I did not run. I ran one term and then chose not to run for a second term.

Demetri Kofinas: Interesting.

Bob Kerrey: In fact, I would not have gone to the Senate. Had I not gone to Santa Barbara and studied the war and get an understanding of the foreign policy, both the good and the bad, and all of a sudden the senior senator of Nebraska died. The governor who followed me is Republican, she appoints a Republican and the seat for a Democrat is essentially open. If I had run for a second term and remained as governor, I would never have run for Senate.

Demetri Kofinas: It sounds like what you're saying happened for you in '87 when you started the war, was that you gained a larger appreciation for the complexity and the nuance.

Bob Kerrey: Well, yeah. I knew this going in. Some of it came from having been governor. I had been governor before and you get in these executive positions like that and legislator can be the same way, except there you're just dealing with a vote. You get this moment and the choices aren't good versus bad. The choices are usually bad, not so bad or good, not so good.

Demetri Kofinas: Shitty and worse.

Bob Kerrey: Yeah. You don't get a moment where you say, "Oh, I'm going to do this because it's great. If I don't do it, it's horrible."

Demetri Kofinas: I feel like we have really bad candidates.

Bob Kerrey: Right. We end up with something I think I've learned over time, which is to be sympathetic. It's one of the gifts I got from being injured. I can see pain that I previously wouldn't have seen. Having the capacity to be sympathetic is a really good thing.

Demetri Kofinas: I can relate to that. Did that fade at all or is it as strong as it was when you first came back?

Bob Kerrey: If I'm fighting to get out of a subway, it fades immediately.

Demetri Kofinas: You're like, "That guy is going down."

Bob Kerrey: Yeah.

Demetri Kofinas: But a lot stuck around, right? For me-

Bob Kerrey: Yeah, it's not like I'm walking around like-

Demetri Kofinas: Jesus.

Bob Kerrey: The Dalai Lama or something, so I'm a long way to be perfect but when I stop and consider and look around me, I'm able to see pain.

Demetri Kofinas: You've experienced suffering and that's given you --

Bob Kerrey: And, I've experienced what it takes to end that suffering or at least substantially reduce it. It was government action and non-government action. It was both. People just coming in and volunteering their time and helping me out. It's yes, the Naval Hospital and the VA Hospital are enormously an important part of my recovery but it was friends, family and strangers that did an awful lot as well.

Demetri Kofinas: So 1987, you run for the Senate. How difficult was that election? Was it a shoo-in?

Bob Kerrey: No, actually I made a decision late in '87, the race was '88. Was it a shoo-in? No. There was a very attractive Republican senator who had been appointed to the position. We had at the presidential level and tends to matter, George Herbert Walker Bush was the top of the ticket on the Republican side and Mike Dukakis was the top of the ticket at the Democratic side. The government, he made a couple of mistakes.

Demetri Kofinas: He wrote around in a tank in that famous video.

Bob Kerrey: Right. I won by roughly comfortable margin but it was also difficult because as a governor, I really didn't know the national issues and you got to learn them.

Demetri Kofinas: Did you like campaigning?

Bob Kerrey: It's an answer that is going to be yes or no and there's lots about campaigning that is difficult. You're raising money, for example. But overall, they're fine. Young people get opportunities to have responsibility way beyond what they're typically going to have. You meet and make friends with you forever. You remember the campaign of '82, the campaign of '88, '94, you remember these things and you became friends with people that typically are on the other side.

Demetri Kofinas: Well, what's his name? Mary Magdalene.

Bob Kerrey: Right. James Carville.

Demetri Kofinas: James Carville.

Bob Kerrey: I would say yes. I'm saying yes mostly because people who are listening need to take a shot at it. It's not all pleasant, it's not like you're going to the beach. But because it's work and it's intense and changes every single day, I enjoyed them.

Demetri Kofinas: I wonder if that relationship would have worked out between Carville and Magdalene if the shoe is on the other foot. If she had won.

Bob Kerrey: If she had won?

Demetri Kofinas: I don't know if that would have worked.

Bob Kerrey: I don't know. I don't know.

Demetri Kofinas: She stepped in after Lee Atwater passed away and she took over the Bush HW campaign, right?

Bob Kerrey: Yes.

Demetri Kofinas: But it was originally Lee Atwater. He was going to be the campaign manager but he died tragically-

Bob Kerrey: I think I saw him.

Demetri Kofinas: Of a brain tumor. You of course, not only did you run twice for the Senate and one both times, right?

Bob Kerrey: Yes.

Demetri Kofinas: But you also ran for president in 1992. I read that you were somewhat reluctant to do it. You weren't 100% onboard.

Bob Kerrey: Well, mostly because I wasn't fully prepared. I really had not been given-

Demetri Kofinas: Who was pushing you to run?

Bob Kerrey: It's entirely me. There are people saying, "If you do it, I'll support you." But it's-

Demetri Kofinas: Was it kind of those things where a lot of people are like, "Come one, this is ..." You know?

Bob Kerrey: No, you can't.

Demetri Kofinas: Really? This was entirely you.

Bob Kerrey: People are encouraging, you have to be careful with that because you think, "Everybody wants me to run." Well, can you define everybody for me? Then you make a list of everybody that tells you, you should run and maybe you have 50 people. You need 100 million votes to win.

Demetri Kofinas: You're saying a lot of people say that to make themselves sort of-

Bob Kerrey: No, they'll say it and they're sincere about it but it's still a small number. Anytime you're running for office, I think it's important to recognize, and I think it's likely to occur in the next 10 years, these guys that are working with human DNA, that they'll find a base pair which instructs everybody who becomes a candidate for office to be, I'd say 25% more self-delusional than everybody else. I think we're all a little delusional, that's how we get through life. But those of us who run for office, there's this delusion that we say, "Gosh, if they just get to know me, they'll vote for it." It never occurs for you to say, "Is it possible if they get to know you they won't?"

Bob Kerrey: I think you really have to be careful not to presume that if they just get to know you, you're going to be able to win or that you don't want to do it. I remember asking Bill Clinton, "When did you decide?" He said, "I was thinking about it all back in the early 70s." I asked Jimmy Carter, he was governor of Arkansas at the time. I asked President Carter if I could spend the night in the White House. I wanted to see ... He said what it was like to sleep in the White House, will I like it? Yes or no. He said, "I liked it."

Demetri Kofinas: Well, not only did he like it, Bill Clinton of all the presidents that I've studied seems to be the one that was most reluctant to leave, most reluctant to leave the White House. In fact, he said that ... One of the anecdotes I've heard about Bill Clinton and he's repeated it often is that it took a long time for him to get the song out of his head, the Hail to the Chief out of his head because he said everywhere you'd walk into a room, they play Hail to the Chief.

Bob Kerrey: All of them missed the plane.

Demetri Kofinas: Everyone says that. Everyone says that. Have you been on Air Force One?

Bob Kerrey: Yeah, I have. It's pretty cool.

Demetri Kofinas: I mean, George HW Bush, he had a brand new plan. He was the first one to have that Air Force One, then Clinton also had, and then I guess got retired with Barack Obama. I don't know. But I think he had a brand new jet and I read one particular anecdote where he used it and I don't know which senator he was campaigning with but he wanted to get a vote. He took the senator on the plane and by the time the flight was over, he was like, "You have my vote Mr. President." I could never ever run for anything, just on account separate from anything else, I'd be not just self-conscious, yes self-conscious but also I feel like

losing would be devastating. Telling people, "Do you like me? Vote if you like me. If you don't like me, don't vote for me."

Bob Kerrey: Losing is nowhere near as devastating as winning and not knowing what the hell to do when you're done.

Demetri Kofinas: You were like Robert Redford in The Candidate?

Bob Kerrey: No, I was not like ... Yeah, I would say when I ran for Senate, Kind of. Except I'd dealt with the Senate. I wasn't totally baffled but there was lot I had to learn. I would go over and listen to all arguments at the Supreme Court, just to get a better understanding of the relationship between the constitution and the law and to get a better understanding of the illogical differences.

Bob Kerrey: When Earl Warren read the constitution, he saw something different than when Warren Burger read the constitution. When you hear people say, "Well, they just call it balls and strikes." It's nonsense, they don't call it balls and strikes. They bring their ideology to bear and the ideology is, what's the role of the government? Should we use original interpretation of the constitution which she modified as society changes? I had to learn the rules of the Senate. There's lots that I didn't known going in and it wasn't quite like Redford, "Now, what do I do?" But a little bit because you got to figure it out.

Demetri Kofinas: You didn't know where you stood.

Bob Kerrey: Well, I kind of knew where I stood but when we campaigned in '88, David Karnes who was incumbent senator and I, the big debate in foreign policy was should we build the MX missile? It was all about national security-

Demetri Kofinas: What was the MX missile?

Bob Kerrey: It was a part of our nuclear armament against the Soviet Union. Do we need it?

Demetri Kofinas: The bigger, more bad ass nuke?

Bob Kerrey: It was MIRV, Multi ... I don't know what the acronym stands for but it had 10 warheads on a single missile and each of them were 10 times a blast of Hiroshima. It's, to put it mildly, a nasty weapon. But the only point is, the Soviet Union is still there. I get elected in '88 and '89 the Berlin Wall comes down. By '91, the Soviet Union is not there any longer and all of a sudden, what do I get to learn? The difference between Shia and Sunni. We don't have a bipolar world, it's a single-

Demetri Kofinas: The end of history.

Bob Kerrey: Well, except it didn't turn out to be the end of history.

Demetri Kofinas: No, it didn't.

Bob Kerrey: Trying to understand when we should intervene and when we shouldn't intervene, how to build our weapon systems, not just for today but for 20 years from now, those are oftentimes, brand new propositions that you didn't campaign about.

Demetri Kofinas: What committees were you on in your first term?

Bob Kerrey: I was on agriculture, I was on appropriations and I was on intelligence.

Demetri Kofinas: You were saying about coming to a better understanding of where you stood. You had some idea but you weren't the man you are today in terms of your ideas. How did that happen? How did you come to a political identity? Sounds like that was sort of forged during your time in the Senate.

Bob Kerrey: I would say yes. I mean, if you asked me to write an essay on my ideology in 1988, that would have been incomplete compared to what I would do today because the lessons are ... Let me give you an example of a lesson. 1990, that was President Bush's first budget. That was the budget that set in motion, the balancing that occurred in 1997. Democrats gave him far too little credit because he'd given the speech.

Demetri Kofinas: "No new taxes."

Bob Kerrey: But relatively modest. One of the taxes was to-

Demetri Kofinas: Well, good luck doing that today if you are a republican [laughter]

Bob Kerrey: Yeah, we were paying down debt at the end of the decade and it began with him.

Demetri Kofinas: The twin deficits.

Bob Kerrey: Yeah. So, you start off ... and I'm saying, "Okay, we'll get this thing done. We're going to have to raise a little taxes and cut our spending back." One of the things in that '90 bill was big tax and luxury yachts. That's easy, these rich guys, they can pay a little more money. He had shut down the boat building industry in Rhode Island. We had to reverse it because we put them out of business.

Demetri Kofinas: You put the Rhode Island boat manufacturers out of business.

Bob Kerrey: Boat building out of business. They went from whatever it was to zero practically overnight.

Demetri Kofinas: So interesting.

Bob Kerrey: Yeah. Warren Buffet once told me, he gave me really good advice all the way through but one of the things he told me was, "Don't try to change human nature. Try to write a law so that when people satisfy whatever is in their rational self-interest, you get a desirable outcome." Well, you're talking about 330 million people now, so this is a big country. You'll do something you think is going to go due north, it ends up going due south. You don't get a do over with a vote. With the vote, you go down there, you get two choices, yes or no. The most difficult moments are when you're 51% certain it ought to be yes and then two days later you're 49% certain it ought to be yes. You can't walk back down at the floor and say, "I want to change my vote to no." You vote yes and that's recorded as a yes. You vote no, it's recorded as a no.

Demetri Kofinas: What is that like? The legislative process, the process of reviewing a bill, coming to determination, casting a vote, living with the repercussions, attempting to think about all the possible repercussion that you couldn't foresee. A great example was criminal justice, how it is practiced by Democrats in the 90s and now the way that people view the repercussions of that and the way-

Bob Kerrey: Although we forget how violent those cities were as a consequence of crack cocaine, it wasn't like we were sitting around in the Garden of Eden. The American people are saying, "Do something about violent crime." They didn't regard a drug kingpin as a nonviolent criminal. Even though he wasn't killing anybody, there were people dying as a consequence of the consumption of the drugs. It's easy today to look back and say, "Why did you guys do all that stupid stuff?"

Demetri Kofinas: Do you think that happens a lot where people look back and judge people in the past based on-

Bob Kerrey: Sure, and it's not a bad thing. It's not a bad thing if you're willing to push a little further to try to understand it. Absolutely. I'm reading a biography right now of Winston Churchill and some of his attitudes on race at the time, oh my God! He was writing a book every 60 seconds practically so there's plenty of recorded observations that he was making about imperial Britain and importance of maintaining the empire and all of that sort of stuff.

Demetri Kofinas: Woodrow Wilson had filmed Birth of a Nation at the White House.

Bob Kerrey: It was southern races.

Demetri Kofinas: Yeah. But it's ridiculous to look back and judge people, to judge Woodrow Wilson based on the standards of today or to judge Thomas Jefferson who was a slave owner based on today's standards. That doesn't make any sense.

Bob Kerrey: Well, I don't think it's bad to observe that it happened, I don't think it's bad to say it but it certainly doesn't make Woodrow Wilson a terrible human being. It

doesn't eliminate all the good things that he accomplished as well and likewise with Jefferson.

Demetri Kofinas: It would make him a psychopath if we brought him to today. But point is he was living when he was living.

Bob Kerrey: If you go back and look at the laws of the United States in 1800, it looks barbaric compared to-

Demetri Kofinas: It looks barbaric.

Bob Kerrey: Right. Yeah, I do think it's one of the things we tend to forget.

Demetri Kofinas: It had duos.

Bob Kerrey: Yeah, I know. We harken. Alexander Hammack got shot.

Demetri Kofinas: Exactly.

Bob Kerrey: People say today, "God, it's terrible today. It's never been this bad." Get out of here. 700000 men died because we couldn't figure out to end slavery without a civil war. It has been a lot worse that it is today.

Demetri Kofinas: Like you said also in 1968, Martin Luther King, Robert, Kennedy. '63, the president of United States murdered in the streets of Dallas.

Bob Kerrey: The protest against busing were violent.

Demetri Kofinas: The protests against busing, civil rights. 1974, Ford was shot, right? '81, Reagan was shot. I mean, we've had it really easy by comparison.

Bob Kerrey: Right. What's it like in the Senate? You get to the Senate and one quick thing. When somebody gets up and gives a speech and said, "Washington D.C. is broken. I'm going to go there and fix it." That is unadulterated horseshit. I can break a glass. There's things I can break you cannot break the capital. You certainly can change the rules and people need to say, "What kind of rules do you want to have? What should the rules of the congress be? What should the rules surrounding campaign finance reform or whatever you want." Yes, the rules can change but when you're changing a rule, the next question is, can you persuade 535 people to change the rule?

Bob Kerrey: I arrive in the Senate in 1998, get sworn in by George Herbert Walker Bush, I'm one of 100. I actually am one of 535 because it isn't enough for me just to persuade 51 senators to vote for an amendment I've got. I've got to get it past the House, I've got to get it through conference. It's a process and the process almost always requires me to yield a little bit of ground to get what I want. There's compromise necessary in order to get a majority. If you go out in the

streets in New York and get 10 people and bring them in a room and they haven't decided they're going to go north, south, east and west when we leave here, you probably have three who want to go north, three who want to go south, two who want to go east, two who want to go west and say, "I'm sorry, you can only go one direction."

Demetri Kofinas: Some will stay put.

Bob Kerrey: The 10 of you have to decide. The 10 of you make a decision which way you're going to go and guess what happens? You vote, six say north and the other four have a different choice. When you're all done, you all got to go the same direction. One of the questions that happen in politics and I've had so many people that have gone in and they get frustrated and bitter by it, what do you do when you lose? Well, you keep going. People say, "Well, I passed that law and now it's changing." Democracy is always moving. We amend our constitution, we change according to now how do we do the world. Yeah, it can be massively frustrating because you don't walk and there and say, "Gee, I think we should do X, Y and Z and have everybody give you a standing ovation and say, "Yeah, well, we're all with you, Bob." I had things I wanted to do that I never got done. Maybe I could persuade two or three people over a 12 year period that I was right and that was it.

Demetri Kofinas: When did things change? How did we go from the stories I read about Tip O'Neill and Reagan and the Congress and the executive and the relationship within Congress in the 80s and before, to what we have today? How did that happen? How would you compare what it was like when you were senator?

Bob Kerrey: Well, there's two things. One is you see it and we didn't use to see it with the C-SPAN and now you've got-

Demetri Kofinas: You see how the sausage is made.

Bob Kerrey: Yeah. I see it and I can penetrate the veil. I know what's going on. I can see stupid people, I can see really smart people, I can see cowards. I get to see stuff that in the old days up until 2002, I couldn't see it.

Demetri Kofinas: I saw Ken Starr. You saw Ken Starr.

Bob Kerrey: We did.

Demetri Kofinas: I watched that on C-SPAN as a kid.

Bob Kerrey: Even then, a lot of it gets missed. The most recent one was when Kavanaugh was being considered.

Demetri Kofinas: That was brutal.

Bob Kerrey: It was brutal but when they show the Anita Hill questioning, when that occurred in 1991, if you wanted to watch that hearing, you had to sit in front of a television set. That's how you had to watch it. If you're there before the Senate or you're in the Judiciary Committee, you get to see it up close and personal. But if you want to see what those questions were, you had to watch it on television. If you're working in the afternoon when those questions were asked, you could maybe-

Demetri Kofinas: I see what you're saying. You had to watch it on a broadcast. You couldn't catch it afterwards, is what you're saying.

Bob Kerrey: I can't go to YouTube and call it up.

Demetri Kofinas: I see what you're saying.

Bob Kerrey: In the Kavanaugh hearing, people were going to YouTube and calling it up and watching how Howell Heflin said to Anita Hill, "You look to me like a woman scorned." He said, "Whoa." I loved Howell Heflin.

Demetri Kofinas: No one could say that now.

Bob Kerrey: No.

Demetri Kofinas: Joe Biden was tough on her too, wasn't he?

Bob Kerrey: Yeah.

Demetri Kofinas: Joe Biden, yeah.

Bob Kerrey: Yeah, but they all were. But they were saying things that ... All I'm saying is today with the Kavanaugh hearing, I just go to the computer and pull up the whole darn hearing or five minutes or 10 minutes, everybody is blowing all things all over the place.

Demetri Kofinas: What do you think about that? Not about the hearing in general but the spectacle of the Kavanaugh hearing? Do you think it was a spectacle? It seemed like a spectacle to me.

Bob Kerrey: I was on the commission that George Mitchell put together to investigate the question of POWs in Vietnam. This was in 1991. It was a contentious difficult process. John Kerry chaired, John McCain was on it, I was on it. A couple of other people that had been in Vietnam were on it. We had some screaming matches. But you didn't see it. It was a spectacle but it was an unobserved spectacle.

Demetri Kofinas: But that makes a difference, right?

Bob Kerrey: Yeah.

Demetri Kofinas: I assume that the spectacle ... Those senators and congressmen act very differently and women very differently if they know the camera is on and people are watching versus ... yeah.

Bob Kerrey: Yeah. By the way, every now and then somebody proposes to put cameras in the Supreme Court and I've opposed it ever since-

Demetri Kofinas: It sounds like a horrible idea.

Bob Kerrey: It's a horrible idea. I go down there a couple of times a year to listen to all arguments still and I never leave without saying, "Well, this thing works." Because you can't be a populist in the court, you can't be a demagogue in the court. You either present your argument in a persuasive way or you don't. When it's all done and they put their order out there, thanks to John Marshall, that decision is final.

Demetri Kofinas: But it's a shitshow now. I mean, it's a shitshow. People-

Bob Kerrey: What do you have against shitshows? I mean, come on.

Demetri Kofinas: Well, if they're in the government-

Bob Kerrey: It's messy.

Demetri Kofinas: But isn't it more than just messy?

Bob Kerrey: No, it's not more-

Demetri Kofinas: Let me ask you this, for example. I'm the least expert person in the world when it comes to politics. Let's just take redistricting, for example. As I understand it, the incentives in primaries have changed to such degree that we have extremely polarizing candidates being elected. The polls are dragging out the center and now we're getting people in Congress, who also apparently are spending far less time in Washington than they used to be and flying home to not just be with their constituents, but to raise money and that's not a huge thing, right? How big of an issue is that, the fact that these congressmen and women spend between 30% and 70% of their time on the phone trying to raise money?

Bob Kerrey: What's your question? I'm kidding.

Demetri Kofinas: My question is shitshow.

Bob Kerrey: No. What it provokes in me is what do you want the rules to be? For example, we have not changed the rules about the number of Americans in a congressional district is 1920. What does that mean? That means there's no

accommodation being made for the significant movement of people from rural areas to urban areas. What it means is urban areas get under represented. I think it's now 700000 people for each congressional district. That's how it's apportioned and it probably ought to be 300000. But that means the House is going to get bigger if you do that. The rules of the Congress are set by the Congress themselves. I don't know why Madison thought that was okay, probably was early on. I don't think it is okay now.

Bob Kerrey: It does produce more difficulty and obviously, the middle ground being able to have more power. The power has been moving over away from the committees over the leadership. There's a number of things that I would change but it's about changing the rules. It's about changing the rules. That's you don't have a shitshow because we're going to have arguments.

Demetri Kofinas: That's different. That's not what I'm talking about.

Bob Kerrey: Yeah, I know but I'm just saying right now, I believe in a number of areas, some rules need to change. Gerrymandering happens to be one of them. I think what California has put in place is better because you end up with representation that's much, much closer to how the people themselves are voting. It's an open primary. I think rank choice which was done up in Maine is a preferred system because it means a third party candidate come in and doesn't have to worry about being a spoiler. There's a number of changes and I think campaign finance reform happens to be it. Although I personally think the only way you're going to get from where we are to where we need to be is by amending their constitution, because you've got a couple of serious Supreme Court decisions, the biggest one being Buckley vs. Valeo that limits the Congress's capacity to put limitations on what could be spent.

Demetri Kofinas: How important of a priority ... There are people that have made that the hill they want to die on. I don't know about in Congress but someone like Lawrence Lessig, for example, I don't know if I mentioned it during the show to you or before, but he thinks that is the single most important issue facing congress because if that doesn't get solved, nothing else can get solved.

Bob Kerrey: I disagree with that. I think it's important but I don't think it's the single most important thing. You could have public financing. The campaign, it won't necessarily produce better candidates. Part of the problem is you get 75% of the American people can name all three of the three Stooges. You can't name a single member of the --

Demetri Kofinas: Are they dumber than they used to be?

Bob Kerrey: I don't think we're dumber than we used to be but we might be.

Demetri Kofinas: You're saying we've always been this stupid? That doesn't really make me feel a lot better.

- Bob Kerrey:** Yeah, but democracy has always been vulnerable to that. From the beginning, there was nervousness about it. You can only vote if you have-
- Demetri Kofinas:** We're pretty stupid today, I don't know. I was actually kind of hoping that your answer is-
- Bob Kerrey:** No. The founders said, "You don't get a vote unless you're white and have property." White male and have property. They limited the franchise and as the franchise grew, the old guys, Adams and Jefferson were saying, "Oh my God, we're going to get ruffraff." And the big ruffraff, the big moment, the first time that you had all men and all white men could vote was the year that Andrew Jackson won. It's always been that the most dangerous force in democracy is uninformed public opinion.
- Bob Kerrey:** We have a Republican form of government which means I'm not supposed to. Lick my finger and hold it up there and figure out what the poll ... I'm not supposed to read polls and say, "I'm only going to vote what the polls tell me to vote." Because it maybe that the public has reached a conclusion that's wrong. Maybe my job is to explain to the public that they're wrong and try to educate them and maybe not the worst thing in the world to cast a vote that you believe is right and lose as a consequence.
- Demetri Kofinas:** You mentioned two things there when you were talking that I want to use as seeds or pegs for further conversations. One is, you mentioned Andrew Jackson and populism and I really want to discuss the resurgence of populism today, I think both on the right and on the left. The other one is you mentioned property rights and that the Founding Fathers required that you own property. They reason they required that of course was because they were terrified that people without property and particularly mobs would take over the government. I think what's interesting about ... Let's start with that, with property. How big of a deal is it that the distribution of wealth, forget income. Let's just talk about wealth. Ownership of America has shifted so dramatically and we have such a greater concentration of wealth today that we had 20, 30, 40 years ago.
- Bob Kerrey:** First of all, I think it's a problem that typically when the expression, the populist expression, the rich are getting rich and the poor are getting poor. That's the populist expression. Oftentimes, in fact if not all the time, the person speaking the proposes things that have to do with income, has nothing to do with wealth. I'm going to raise the minimum wage, I'm going to help people buy health insurance, I'm going to safety more generous, I'm going to make it easier for you to go to college. These are income issues, these aren't equity issues. I think it is a big, big problem. But I don't think you solve the problem by redistributing wealth, because part of what's happening is you're getting phenomenal wealth over the last 20 years being generated by a relatively small number of people. It's not like-
- Demetri Kofinas:** Also stolen. The 2008 crisis, for example, a huge wealth transfer occurred with the bailout, not primarily the federal government but through the Federal

Reserve. Basically, the way in which the financial sector blew up a tremendous amount of debt and then a select number of people were rescued and asset prices continued to rise. That was a huge wealth transfer.

Bob Kerrey: It was a huge wealth transfer. You get the same thing happening by the way, when you try to get the economy going again by dropping interest rates practically to zero. It's a transfer of wealth because people that have saved, they're the ones who get punished.

Demetri Kofinas: Retirees, for God's sake.

Bob Kerrey: There's no question that there are policies independent of everything else and some dramatic moments and 2008 was the biggest one. TARP may have been the most unpopular piece of legislation ever to have passed the Congress and they should have. In my view, they should not have paid out a hundred and something dollars for people who are owning credit default swaps and doing all these other financial engineering things. They should have made them pay and they didn't.

Bob Kerrey: They didn't have to do 100% in order to be able to make certain that we didn't have a financial meltdown that ruined everybody. But if you're sitting out there with a 401K in 2008 and it goes from enough and you're 65 years old and you're about ready to retire, and your 401K becomes a K, and we're watching within a year, the bank is about getting the same kind of bonuses that there were before. If you look at that and say, "That's not right." You're right, it isn't right. I don't think you saw the wealth distribution problem personally.

Demetri Kofinas: I don't agree with you on that.

Bob Kerrey: Well, I think you got to start by saying, "What is wealth?" You got to help people when they come into the workforce over the course of their lifetime, acquire the capacity to get a second check because if all you've got, so security when you're done working and in today's workforce, we've gone from almost everybody in the workforce having to find benefit retirement programs, the 401Ks and 401Ks don't even come close.

Demetri Kofinas: We have a huge unfunded liability bomb, ticking time bomb. That's a huge, we didn't even touch that one.

Bob Kerrey: Yeah. But what I'm trying to say is that a relatively small amount of wealth generated over the course of a life can make the difference between living in poverty and not living in poverty when you start drawing SOL security. If you only have SOL security as a source of income, you're going to be in poverty. There are ways to do it. There are ways to say, "I would start at birth." I would say, "We're going to create a savings account for every one of the four million live births in the country and we're going to contribute on a progressive basis."

Meaning that you got to get like \$800 or \$1000 a year and it can only be used at that moment you draw SOL security to be converted into income.

Demetri Kofinas: What do you mean? I don't understand. You're saying when someone is born, the government sets up a savings account for them?

Bob Kerrey: Yes.

Demetri Kofinas: How would that work?

Bob Kerrey: Well, range of ways it could work. First of all, it become a self-funding mechanism. If you start up by saying, "I think you have to make the investments relatively safe. You can't have people turning their investments over because the money is going to get lost in fees." There's other things you got to do besides saying how you're going to fund it. But I think, yes. I would personally take it out of the income tax. Maybe I'd do it by taking off the cap on income tax or SOL security. If you're really trying to do this in a way that allows you to say that you're helping lower income people accumulate wealth, it might be that-

Demetri Kofinas: But wasn't that a form of redistribution? Wasn't that what you were talking about?

Bob Kerrey: Everything we do-

Demetri Kofinas: No, but-

Bob Kerrey: You're not redistributing assets. Redistributing assets mean you've got a home that's worth \$5 million, you've got stocks and bonds worth \$10 million or you're Bill Gates and you started a company and you're worth billions, whatever. I don't want to go and attack that wealth and take it and redistribute it.

Demetri Kofinas: You're talking about Leninist Russia there.

Bob Kerrey: Yeah.

Demetri Kofinas: That would be like a full blown communist revolution if they didn't care of one's assets.

Bob Kerrey: Yeah, but even if it wasn't communist, even if you say, "Well, that's what Adam Smith proposed." The mechanism to do it is exceptionally difficult. Piketty the economist is actually proposing some mechanism to do it but I think it's unworkable. It's far better in my view to begin first of all by saying income, as you started the question, that income and wealth are two different things. It is possible for everybody that's born in America, it is possible to create a trajectory, where by the time they draw SOL security, whether it's '62, '67 or '70, whenever they start bringing it in, that they've got another source of income besides that. It is possible to do that but you got to start early.

Demetri Kofinas: Are you talking about universal basic income?

Bob Kerrey: No.

Demetri Kofinas: UBI?

Bob Kerrey: No, I'm talking about universal basic wealth generation as a consequence of saving over a long period of time.

Demetri Kofinas: Let's look at some more practical issues. For example-

Bob Kerrey: That was pretty practical. That's actually a good example of something ... I had 10 other people out of 535 members of Congress before.

Demetri Kofinas: That's interesting.

Bob Kerrey: It's a good example of an idea that I had that, you're not the first person to think it was impractical.

Demetri Kofinas: Let's talk about something, maybe the word practical is not the right word, something that's more tangible. We can get our hands around it, our minds around it, which is tuitions and you've worked in education. I was telling you before we started recording, I had breakfast this morning with two students. One freshman at NYU and another one a sophomore at Stanford. The last time I calculated the cost of going to NYU, was when I had Jonathan Haidt on the show. I thought it was \$72000 including room and board. But they actually told me it was closer to \$80000. I don't know if they were exaggerating but they were calculating books and things like that.

Bob Kerrey: If you're charging the students, you round to 70. If you're paying it, you round up to 80.

Demetri Kofinas: Exactly. Regardless, I had done interest payments on that, if you were to take that out as students loans. There's just no way that you can build a life going to college.

Bob Kerrey: Well, I think the question for NYU, before you can get into the conversations, what's the average debt going out as a graduate of the undergraduate program? Because whatever that 72 is probably their gross price. I don't know what their average debt is. I know the new school is about \$15000 of debt when they're at the undergraduate. The graduate level can be more expensive. Every single day that goes by, we set a new record in student debt.

Demetri Kofinas: What's interesting though is that they were both young women, girls. I mean, I know you would call someone who's 19 or 18. Another shocking experience by the way, I want to also speak to you about your experience in the 911 commission. These kids were born, they have no memory of 911.

Bob Kerrey: No kidding.

Demetri Kofinas: No.

Bob Kerrey: They shouldn't. They were born before ... Born after.

Demetri Kofinas: Well, they were born right before I run there but that's crazy. To me, that's nuts.

Bob Kerrey: It happens.

Demetri Kofinas: That's my experience with you in the war, right? But the thing that they said that really blew my mind, it wasn't so much what they said, they really just kept talking about the wealth disparity on campus. Their anecdotes about how wealthy the fellow students were at Stanford and NYU, just blew my mind. I went to NYU and I remember there were a lot of rich kids there but it wasn't something that people really flaunted. There were some circles of people that did, especially the stern students but it wasn't what they described. Again, it's not big for me, the inequality or disparity of wealth because it's some sort of progressive issue that I think or that I look at from some kind of progressive lens or some kind of conservative lens.

Demetri Kofinas: It's more just a problem and I don't see it being resolved through legislation, at least not right now. What instead I see is it filtering into, and already I think this is happening, into our politics and that brings us to Andrew Jackson and populism. I think there's a brand of populism on the right which is more nativist, focused on the stuff that you're seeing with the Trump campaign. But there's going to be a populism that's coming and Bernie Sanders show some of that. You might be seeing some of that with Cortez and Warren of course, Elizabeth Warren who looks like increasingly will run in 2020. I don't know if you have any special insight being a former senator, if you know anything.

Bob Kerrey: About what?

Demetri Kofinas: I'm just saying, I don't know. I don't think there's a special room where you guys go and smoke cigars and pick candidates. I'm messing with you.

Bob Kerrey: There's a special place where we go and take some of that new medical cannabis but we're not reliable at that point.

Demetri Kofinas: Okay. I think that's an emerging trend in politics, populism and it sounds something that we've seen since when? Since Goldwater?

Bob Kerrey: Look, I don't know.

Demetri Kofinas: It's Ross Perot.

Bob Kerrey: Put it this way. Let's say you tell me that you want to run for the Senate but you're not certain whether you want to run as a Republican or Democrat, but you want to make health care your big issues. Okay, so I can write a speech that you could give to a Republican audience on the issue of health care, that would get you a standing ovation. I could write you a speech that you could give to a Democratic audience, that would get you a standing ovation. Both are populist and both are lies but the audience would love it. Get the government out of health care, so a standing ovation for the Republican audience. High quality affordable health care for all is a guaranteed standing ovation Democratic audience.

Demetri Kofinas: I can't deal with herd mentality.

Bob Kerrey: No, I know but we're ...

Demetri Kofinas: Herd animals.

Bob Kerrey: We haven't been out of the herd that long. The whole idea of history is to examine how we are beginning to civilize ourselves. There are times when populism is-

Demetri Kofinas: Beginning to civilize ourselves. I love that.

Bob Kerrey: Yeah. We're getting ready to go. I don't think there's anything inherently wrong with populism but if populism blames somebody else for your problems-

Demetri Kofinas: Isn't that what populism is?

Bob Kerrey: Well, kind of. It doesn't always have to be because maybe it's right. Maybe the group of people you're targeting are screwing everybody else. If you're going after ... When Teddy Roosevelt said, "We got to bust up the trust." He was right. When you talk about anti-competitive environment, I would say with Facebook and Google and these guys, they're running the show. Maybe it's okay, maybe that's fine. You don't want to make a change. There are times when you're identifying something that is causing a problem and there's something that you could do about it. But if you're blaming somebody else for a problem, you're encouraging people to think that they don't have to do anything. They just have to whack the guys that are causing the problem.

Bob Kerrey: That said, back on the education thing, there is no question and all you have to do is look at higher education to the lens of the SAT and the ACT. If you've got enough money, you can basically hire people to come in and work with your kid until you get his numbers up higher enough to get into any school he wants to. But if you start off and you don't have enough money to pay those people that are doing all the training, you're not likely to get that done. I don't know if you've read this book, Charles Murray's book, *Coming Apart*. It's a really good story. Murray is a controversial economist.

Demetri Kofinas: I read the book. We've talked about him.

Bob Kerrey: Coming Apart is a story about how the elites had moved further and further away from everybody else. He grew up in a little town in Iowa, where Mr. Maytag lived.

Demetri Kofinas: The Maytag man.

Bob Kerrey: No, this is Mr. Maytag that started the company.

Demetri Kofinas: Really?

Bob Kerrey: Right. He lived in a slightly larger House in that part of town. He was making about three times what his employees was making. Now, Mr. Maytag retires and they get a new CEO and, "I don't want to live in a little town anymore. I'm going to go in the big city, Des Moines." The a new CEO in and, "I want to go to Chicago." Then a new CEO in comes and, "I want to go to New York." The camp for the new CEO is like, I don't know, 400, 500 times what the average guy is making and their kids are going to Yale and Stanford and Princeton and so forth. You get this cycling of elites that move further and further away from everybody else.

Bob Kerrey: Here's a test in which he says, "Okay, we're going to find out whether you're an elite or not. Answer the following questions. Have you ever won the uniform of the Unites States of America? Raise your hand. Have you ever had a job where you went home at night and you were in pain? Raise your hand. Do you have a friend who's an evangelical Christian? Raise your hand. Have you ever watched Duck Dynasty? Raise your hand." He asked a series of questions and it's pretty easy to see who the elites are. His argument is the elites have to make an effort.

Bob Kerrey: You were talking about NYU and these two women there were saying all the luxuries on display and you know who the rich kid are. You probably know who the rich kids are because of the way they're behaving. The rich kids have an obligation. They need to understand what noblesse oblige is all about. To those who are given a lot, a lot is expected.

Demetri Kofinas: Senator Kerrey, please stick around. I want to ask you a few more questions before you go and we're going to make this available to our Hidden Forces subscribers. I have a few more questions I want to ask you about politics today and also your experience on the 911 commission, so stick around.

Bob Kerrey: Okay.