

Running for President!

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Larry Bernstein:

Welcome to What Happens Next. My name is Larry Bernstein. What Happens Next is a podcast which covers economics, political science, and culture.

Today's topic is Running for President!

Our guest is Asa Hutchinson who is the former Governor of the State of Arkansas. Asa is currently running for the Republican Nomination for President of the United States. I want to learn from him what it takes to run for president in this election, what the critical policy issues will be, and how he can beat the front-runner, Donald Trump.

My first question for you is, what is your objective of running for President of the United States?

Asa Hutchinson:

The objective is to straighten our country out. We're going the wrong direction. President Biden is wrong on energy policy. He's wrong on border security. He's spent too much money at the federal level, so he is wrong on the economy, and he has challenges from a national security standpoint.

I have the breadth of experience to address each one of those challenges, whether it is dealing with border security issues or balancing the budget. I've done that as eight years as governor. I did it while I was in Congress. Whenever you look at our national security issues, that was my responsibility to protect America after 9/11. So, I'm running because I care about the future for our country, and I have the experience and breadth of knowledge to address those challenges.

Larry Bernstein:

What is the process for running for president and has that changed over the years?

Asa Hutchinson:

What you see today is a continued trend toward nationalization of our elections. And this is a good example where the Republican National Committee sets criteria for the debates from a national perspective, and it diminishes the role that Iowa and New Hampshire has. And it's a constant effort to streamline it, to short circuit the voters and the role that they play. That's part of the challenge. Obviously, it's more expensive than it's ever been before, and that's just the environment you got to compete in.

Larry Bernstein:

During the 2020 presidential campaign, candidate Joe Biden faced several candidates but most of them dropped out quickly turning it into a 2-man race with Bernie Sanders. Why did the Democrats want to force a reduction in the number of presidential candidates?

Asa Hutchinson:

The delegates selection processes have been front loaded. It moves very quickly. And in the case of Biden and Bernie Sanders, it was really after South Carolina that the party consolidated around nominee Biden at the time.

Larry Bernstein:

Why does the Republican National Committee want to reduce the number of presidential candidates so quickly in the process?

Asa Hutchinson:

Here you're trying to do a consolidation four months before the first votes are cast. Why is that important? If you want to have somebody other than Donald Trump, you recognize that after you hit Iowa, New Hampshire, South Carolina, and Nevada; all of a sudden, you've got Super Tuesday, which is the vast bulk of votes. That's all going to happen by March 5th. It's slow developing, but it's going to be like a freight train that hits a wall whenever you get to March 5th and Super Tuesday. The decisions are made quickly, and so they're trying to narrow the field prior to that, but you just can't get ahead of the candidates, and you can't get ahead of the voters.

Larry Bernstein:

The national debates give an opportunity for the public to learn about the candidates. Are the debates effective in that goal? I reread the transcript for the first debate and the substance of the discussion was thin gruel. No argument was considered in a serious way. There were personal shots back and forth, but the policy differences were not that meaningful.

Asa Hutchinson:

Well, the public learned that I would take a stand and say, I'm not going to vote for a candidate Donald Trump if he's convicted of a felony. And they learned how people interject themselves. It's disappointing that it becomes so much of who can steal the microphone time and who can speak the loudest. But it's still advantageous the public tunes into it. They want to see the give and take. They want to see how you stand up and defend your positions.

Larry Bernstein:

The debate was two hours long. To hold the public's interest, it needs to be entertaining, so you need a lot of back and forth with some personal jabs, otherwise no one will want to watch.

Asa Hutchinson:

Yeah, that's right. The next debate's probably not going to be that much different because Fox Business is going to host it. I asked them about whether they're going to control the mics and they said no. They want to have the interchange back and forth, which means they want to have the entertainment value to hold audiences, that's the world in which we live today.

A candidate today has to present himself or herself in unique ways that the public can grab hold of. Because the best advice I ever had about a debate was don't make it boring. And any debate ought to be an exciting exchange back and forth. So the way you do that is have a structured Q&A, but where you can have cross questions to other candidates and they'll have structured time to respond, but the moderators have to be able to control the time.

Larry Bernstein:

Who performed well in the first debate?

Asa Hutchinson:

If you take me out of the picture, then I thought that Nikki Haley got a lot of credit for her performance because she was substantive. She answered the questions, but also she got very aggressive on Vivek Ramaswamy and put him in his place. And other than that, it was pretty much as you said, very thin on issues.

Larry Bernstein:

From Donald Trump's perspective, does it make sense for him to abstain from the Republican debates?

Asa Hutchinson:

He will have to participate at some point. This time to do his rally in Detroit simultaneously with the debate. Last time he had the Tucker Carlson interview. It's not just about not participating. But it is counter programming, which is all about himself. And that's what's shallow about Donald Trump. It's not about the common good. It's not about the party, it's about Donald Trump. That's not the kind of leader that we need. Eventually he's going to have to defend his position and participate in a debate.

Larry Bernstein:

What do you make of Trump's recent polling results?

Asa Hutchinson:

Well, if you look at Iowa and New Hampshire, both are lower versus the national polling results. He's less than 50%. And that's because you've got other candidates in there working hard. They haven't made their choice yet, and so his numbers are going to stay high until they decide where

they're going to go. It could be late fall, early winter that you're going to see those numbers decline. That's why the low polling numbers shouldn't bother a candidate at this point because that's going to change as people start making decisions. Donald Trump as a former president, somebody they voted for before, is in a default position. They're going to stick with him until they decide where they're going to go.

Larry Bernstein:

Ron DeSantis decided to use cultural issues to differentiate himself, but it has not worked out well. How are cultural issues playing in the Republican primaries?

Asa Hutchinson:

Cultural issues are always important, but they're generally defined by your local school boards, your families, and your communities. They're not the focus of a national debate. Ron DeSantis made a mistake. and he paid a price for that. He dropped in the polls.

The last debate, the word “woke,” I don't believe was ever used in a two-hour debate. It really demonstrates that he went too far on this and he pulled back. While it is an important issue to the voters, it's not something that you define a national campaign on.

Larry Bernstein:

Why are there always so many governors in the Presidential race?

Asa Hutchinson:

You don't just get to vote and walk away. You're actually responsible as a chief executive for implementing policy and making things happen. And you're held accountable if you don't. That's why governors make good presidents, but also why they have to perform well in their states. We've had to manage through a pandemic. You can look at the track record, and that's important because all the candidates have similar positions.

We're for pro-growth energy policy, we're for securing the southern border, we're for controlling spending and reducing the size of the administrative state. The question is who has done that? And as a governor, I can point to the fact that I did move National Guard down to the southern border. I can say I've balanced the budget for eight years. I reduced state government employment by 14%. I know how to shrink the size of government and transform it. I lowered taxes and a hundred thousand jobs were created. So that to me is the difference; you can look at someone's record as governor and say, did they do it or they didn't do it.

Larry Bernstein:

Vivek Ramaswamy is a businessman with no prior governmental experience. Why are Republicans inclined towards individuals who lack government experience but made a fortune in business?

Asa Hutchinson:

We always admire people who are successful in business. Those who are running for office have to be able to point to some success in their life. It's not always translatable to government. Also, there's this tendency to overpromise and underdeliver. Donald Trump did that—simplistic solutions that people love to hear, easy to promise, but hard to perform. A CEO of a company, sure you're responsible to the shareholders, but you're not having to deal with the Congress and the Supreme Court. You're not governing in a balance of power environment, and that's what you have to do in government.

Larry Bernstein:

Vivek Ramaswamy mentioned in the first debate that he is reticent to provide more weapons to Ukraine. Do you agree?

Asa Hutchinson:

It's bad public policy because he would be giving Russia a reward for their invasion of Ukraine. It has distinguished him, but that's not what good policy is about, and it has divided our party. I was disappointed that Governor DeSantis in the last debate waffled on it.

To me, it's an easy analysis that Russia is in the wrong. We have free people fighting for their liberty at a great cost to themselves. It should be an easy call as to what side the US should be on. And once you're on that side, we have the benefit of not having to send our men and women in uniform there, but we are able to support them militarily and economically and other ways. So, it bears scrutiny that we do continue to support them, and that's important for the United States of America and our national interest.

Larry Bernstein:

Vivek Ramaswamy was not as committed to Israel as the other Republican candidates. Where is the Republican party on its support of Israel?

Asa Hutchinson:

There's a unity within the Republican party that we need to continue to support Israel. Now, Vivek Ramaswamy said prior to the debate that he wanted to be able to end the support for Israel down the road when it's up for renewal. I wanted to make clear at the debate my long-term commitment to Israel. So, I wore the Israeli and United States flag lapel, and I was a little surprised the moderators didn't pick up on that, but it was intentional, and it shows the

importance of our relationship to Israel. If you had asked me, about what do we do on Iran, I would say, listen to Israel. Israel is threatened and we need to be in partnership with them, and we need to work hand in hand with them to the threats from Iran. I got a feeling we didn't consult with them very well. We decided under the Biden administration to give Iran \$6 billion. I can't imagine that being well thought of in Israel.

Larry Bernstein:

In the first debate, there was a discussion about a potential conflict between China and Taiwan. How should we think about defending Taiwan with our allies in the region to contain Chinese aggression?

Asa Hutchinson:

If they see that commitment, that's going to give them great pause. I don't think it's inevitable that they invade Taiwan, but we have to show strength and long-term commitment to support that freedom. Ultimately, it really comes down to Taiwan too, and I believe that they're all-in on their defense. We certainly need to be supportive of Taiwan.

Larry Bernstein:

Does it make sense to focus on the latest presidential polls?

Asa Hutchinson:

From a candidate standpoint, I'd love to be able to do internal polling and never have any public polls out there. I do believe in the science of polling and I look at it.

It's more difficult today than ever before because people don't want to do the poll. It's harder to get the communication, whether it's online or through mobile phones. Landlines are decreasing. And so having the accuracy in polls is a challenge. I think it does damper the democratic process and the vibrancy because the media magnifies the polls to such a great extent. It is human nature that everybody wants to know the end of the story. So, the public needs to realize that it's just a window in time and it could change dramatically.

We shouldn't give it as much attention as the media does every day. Running for governor, we would have maybe four polls during the course of the election that would be public. But you look at a presidential campaign, you're getting three or four polls a week and sometimes two or three polls a day. They're polling which Republican candidates do well against Biden. Well, it all changes once you get the nomination, and you engage the other side.

Larry Bernstein:

In the 1960s, Presidential nominees were selected in smoke-filled rooms. How is it done now?

Asa Hutchinson:

I believe in a two-party system and the strength of the party. I don't think it's working that well today and there has been an inability of the parties to control a whole lot this year. They have asserted themselves to narrow the number of candidates, but this year could also be different because you look at the Republican party that has a top of the ticket in Donald Trump. And when the nomination process comes next year, if he continues as our nominee, then you could have somebody not only under indictment but convicted cases pending against him. And you could have a 14th amendment claim, which there will be, that he's not qualified for the ballot under the Constitution. So then what does the party do? That's when you're going back to a very small group of people to determine how are we going to clean this up?

So, this year, the parties are going to have to do some soul searching as to how to figure that one out.

Larry Bernstein:

Speaker McCarthy recently started an impeachment inquiry into President Biden. It seems we are headed for a tit-for-tat impeachment process going forward. Is that problematic?

Asa Hutchinson:

It is not healthy for our democracy and for the Congress. I engaged as a manager in the impeachment trial of President Clinton, the process was followed, and I thought it was done in a way that had a high regard for the Constitution. But now you see early on it was policy disagreements. We didn't like the policy, so we talked about impeaching Mayorkas, and he's carrying out the policies of President Biden.

The Democrats did this when it came to Trump. They got aggravated about the Ukraine call, didn't have a thorough investigation of it, and even had less of investigation on January 6th. And it resulted in unhealthy or inadequate factual basis when the case went to the Senate. And now people are even coming more vocal and saying, it is going to be used as retribution, it's going to be tit-for-tat, and that is not healthy. Impeachment should be reserved for corruptness and for high levels of wrongdoing, not for policy disagreements and not for getting an advantage of the political race coming up.

Larry Bernstein:

NJ Senator Bob Menendez was recently indicted and there have been calls to resign by members of his own party including the governor of his state. Should politicians resign if there are allegations without a conviction?

Asa Hutchinson:

There'll be many members that call for his resignation. As governor, I called for member's resignation once they were indicted just because they hold public office, and the office is above that. Now, I think the question is whether the Senate under their ethics rule would pursue a case to remove him or to penalize him. It's a difficult position for the Senate, and that's why office holders should just simply say, I'm stepping aside while this is being litigated.

Larry Bernstein:

There is an enormous amount of discretion for prosecutors to bring a case, should the prosecutor have the power to determine who represents us, or should we wait for conviction?

Asa Hutchinson:

That is a challenge in terms of fairness. And the same case is made with Donald Trump. He's got four indictments. I've called for him to step aside for the good of the country under that same principle. But the counterpoint is if it's a sham prosecution to begin with, he shouldn't have to step aside. So valid point there. I just happen to believe that whenever you're facing a criminal charge and you've got the probable cause that's been established for it, you can't concentrate on your public duties. There's always an opportunity in the future to come back once you clear your name.

That's just the principle. I think that's important because the public sense it is being unfair. It started off with Trump's New York indictment, a state case that liberals and conservatives said it was a step too far, was not a good foundation legally.

Larry Bernstein:

Why do you think that Trump's polling has improved so dramatically since his indictments?

Asa Hutchinson:

It appeared political, so that's how he garnered the support. He's the one that has made those talking points, that is that it's a corrupt prosecutor. It is a corrupt judge. It is a corrupt system. I'm being picked on and I'm fighting for you. He sold that message. He even sold it to Vladimir Putin. Putin goes out there and makes a speech and says, the American system is corrupt and referred to the charges against Donald Trump as evidence of that. That's harmful to the United States.

As time goes on, will the public reevaluate that and say, even though we thought it was unfair to begin with, this is serious. This is not reflective of who we want as a commander in chief in our country. And that's what I encourage voters to do is disregard the criminal cases and just concentrate on the underlying facts. Is this who we want to lead our country?

Larry Bernstein:

Thanks to Asa for joining us today.

If you missed last week's show, check it out. The podcast was Religion and the Constitution. Our speaker was Stanford Law Professor Michael McConnell who recently published a new book Agreeing to Disagree: How the Establishment Clause Protects Religious Diversity and Freedom of Conscience.

Michael believes that under the first amendment the government should not endorse any specific religion, and that the separation of church and state does not mean that the government should always require a secular position.

You can find our previous episodes and transcripts on our website whathappensnextin6minutes.com. Please subscribe to our weekly emails and follow us on Apple Podcasts or Spotify.

Thank you for joining us today, good-bye.