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A DEMOCRAT, A REPUBLICAN, A RENTAL CAR — AND A ROAD MAP TO
BETTER POLITICS

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LIST OF PARTICIPANTS

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Texas

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BETTER POLITICS

(10:20 a.m.)

MS. BALL: All right. How is that? Is it on?

SPEAKER: Yes.

MS. BALL: Can people hear me? All right. Thank you so much for coming everybody. I am Molly Ball. I'm a staff writer for *The Atlantic*. I'm here with Congressman Beto O'Rourke and Congressman Will Hurd to talk about their bipartisan road trip back in March.

I cover politics for *The Atlantic*. I write about American politics. I don't write very much about bipartisanship because I cover facts.

(Laughter)

MS. BALL: And --

MR. HURD: Starting -- you've already starting. There is some bipartisanship that happens in the Congress.

MS. BALL: There may -- okay. I'll --

MR. HURD: Yeah.

MS. BALL: -- try to tone down the snark, Congressman.

MR. HURD: Yeah.

MS. BALL: Congressman O'Rourke represents a district that includes El Paso. He was elected in 2012 as a Democrat after winning a Democratic primary against an incumbent member of Congress. Congressman Hurd represents -- is it the biggest district in the country? One of the biggest.

MR. HURD: It's one of the biggest that's not its own state.

MS. BALL: Yeah.

MR. HURD: It's bigger than 26 states.

MS. BALL: It's bigger than 26 states, an enormous district, basically a lot of rural Texas, a Senator from San Antonio, which is where Congressman Hurd is from. He is a Republican who was elected in 2014.

So dogs and cats living together. Back in March these two illustrious Texas representatives missed their flights back to D.C. because of a snowstorm and decided -- I believe it was you, Congressman O'Rourke -- had the bright idea to take a road trip and they rented a car together.

So let's tell the story for people here who didn't watch the entire -- how many hours of Facebook Live was it?

MR. O'ROURKE: I think it's 29 hours.

(Laughter)

MS. BALL: So --

MR. O'ROURKE: Twenty-nine hours.

MS. BALL: I'm sure most of you sat through all 29 hours --

MR. O'ROURKE: Yeah.

MS. BALL: -- but for those of you who didn't. So tell me how you got the idea and what your relationship was with Congressman Hurd before that?

MR. O'ROURKE: We actually -- we were trying to set the Guinness world record for longest continuous live stream congressional bipartisan rolling town hall.

(Laughter)

MR. O'ROURKE: And --

MR. HURD: Just missed it -- just missed it.

MR. O'ROURKE: Yeah, yeah. We were both in San Antonio. I'm on the House of Veterans Affairs Committee and Will has been a passionate advocate for veterans, and he knew that I was touring different VA facilities around the state and invited me to join him to visit the South Texas VA Medical Center and some of the mental health care group therapy treatment centers. And in between meetings, we find that Will's flight to D.C. has been canceled and it's a Southwest flight. And so when Southwest cancels, it's for real.

MR. HURD: It's a problem.

MR. O'ROURKE: Yeah.

(Laughter)

MR. O'ROURKE: This stuff is real. And other airlines we won't mention them. Like American when they cancel flights --

(Laughter)

MR. O'ROURKE: -- it could be for any number of reasons. And so we're in an elevator with the South Texas VA Medical Center staff and I almost as a joke say: "Well, what if we drove to D.C. tomorrow?" And Will kind of jokingly responds: "Yeah, that sounds like a good idea."

We leave to go to the next appointment. We're in two separate cars. And I call Will and I say, "You know what? I actually think we should drive to D.C. and I think we should really do this. I think it could be fun and I think we could invite people to join us via Facebook Live. What do you think?" And Will, you know, maybe calling my bluff said, "Let's do it."

So 5 a.m. --

MR. HURD: Somebody didn't think I was going to

say yes.

MR. O'ROURKE: Right.

(Laughter)

MR. O'ROURKE: So 5 -- this is spring break in San Antonio, so there's literally in the entire city of San Antonio one rental car left. It is a 1994 Chevy Impala at the Dollar Rent a Car facility. And I'm there at 5 a.m., pick up the car and Will and I start from La Tierra Cafe or La Tierra Restaurant in --

MR. HURD: Mi Tierra.

MR. O'ROURKE: -- Mi Tierra Restaurant in San Antonio. And that started the adventure.

MS. BALL: And the adventure began with Congressman Hurd trying to give you directions out of San Antonio and being partially successful. So what were you thinking when this all got started?

MR. HURD: This is going to be either terrible or we're going to learn a lot about each other in the process. And I'll be frank, the first 90 minutes the tenor of the conversation on our live stream was pretty nasty.

MR. O'ROURKE: Yeah.

MR. HURD: And I --

MR. O'ROURKE: Because people are -- you should explain, people are commenting --

MR. HURD: Absolutely. Yeah. So --

MR. O'ROURKE: -- in real-time as we're driving.

MR. HURD: So 35 hour trip, 31 hours in the car, 1,700 miles, 29 hours live streamed and we're constantly taking questions. So we talked about health care for eight hours. We talked about -- we talked about every

issue imaginable. But at the beginning people were pretty nasty. And after about 90 minutes is when folks started realizing, "Hey, this is actually pretty cool that you all are having this kind of conversation." And ultimately -- one of my takeaways from this was we showed that you can disagree without being disagreeable and that we were, you know, willing to listen to the other person. And it was -- and Beto and I didn't know each other that well before the trip. You know, I always say Beto would not have gone with me if he'd known me better.

(Laughter)

MR. O'ROURKE: Because he's like: "Don't stop until you have to use the restroom." I'm like: "Let's stop at every elementary school and give civics lessons."

(Laughter)

MR. HURD: And he was getting nervous. He was -- he got -- he actually started getting a rash at one point.

(Laughter)

MR. HURD: So --

MR. O'ROURKE: We stopped at a coffee shop within the first 90 minutes in St. Marcus. And I thought we were just going to pick up a cup of coffee and Will wants to know where the beans were harvested, how they roasted.

(Laughter)

MR. O'ROURKE: We got like a 20 minute lesson in the barista's philosophy on life and we would have stayed another couple of hours if not for my impatience. And mind you, we had a deadline. We had to be at votes --

MR. HURD: Yeah.

MR. O'ROURKE: -- at 6:30. And if we failed that, then the mission had failed. And so my goal was to

keep us on schedule and on track.

MR. HURD: And -- but --

MR. O'ROURKE: And that was the tension. That was what was interesting.

MR. HURD: But at that coffee shop -- it was the first stop that we made -- the barista said, "You know what unites America?" And he said, "Coffee." And he started explaining it.

(Laughter)

MR. HURD: And, you know, it was good. And then we stopped at South By Southwest and Austin was going on and we were asking people what unites us. And the guy said music, culture, food. And so that was I think one of the themes that we tried to come away with. And for me that trip, crisscrossing my district -- there's more that unites us than divides us and we only focus on that 20 percent that divides us.

And that is why we have to continue to shine a light on some of the issues that we actually all agree on and that are moving the country forward. And, you know -- look, it doesn't get clicks, it doesn't get people writing about it. This is why I was so shocked by -- we were on every single news for a day and a half. Twenty-something million people watched in the -- between our two social media feeds. And to me that's just an indication -- I don't care where you are on the political spectrum, people want to see folks working together and getting things done. They want to see people that are result oriented.

And it was -- and what I learned from my friend Beto is, you know, he cares about this country. I knew he cared about the VA. I knew he cared about the border. I knew he cared about making sure the communities are taken care of. But there were so many other things that I realized: "Man, we really should be working on more things together." And that was -- that -- and once you see that, you can't un-see it.

And so it's how do we continue that kind -- how do we take that ember -- because I don't know if I can say it's a flame yet -- how do you take that ember and get it to grow?

MR. O'ROURKE: Another thing you cannot un-see is Will Hurd crushing a double cheeseburger while he's driving --

(Laughter)

MR. O'ROURKE: -- with mustard and onions dripping down his face.

MR. HURD: Really?

MS. BALL: His special talent remember. Not for us folks.

MR. HURD: Yeah.

MS. BALL: Well, what would you say you learned? Congressman Hurd, what did you learn?

MR. O'ROURKE: So I'll pick up on something Will said. The first hour or two the -- you know, one of us would be driving. The other is reading the comments out loud that are coming in on Facebook. And they were really nasty. They were snarky, to repeat a word you used earlier. Very cynical. Folks who are Beto fans saying: "Why the hell would you hang out with Will Hurd," who wants to take away our health care and, you know, do all these terrible things to the country. Will's fans --

MR. HURD: Which I don't want to do, by the way.

MR. O'ROURKE: Which he doesn't want to do.

MR. HURD: Let's just put that out. And so --

MR. O'ROURKE: Will's fan saying: "Why do you want to drive with somebody who wants to let every illegal alien into country." You know, just the worst --

MR. HURD: Yeah.

MR. O'ROURKE: - caricatures and stereotypes of who people assume we are based on their party affiliation. By the end of that day, which was, you know, 14 -- 16 hours later, we're pulling into Nashville and almost every comment on the stream, which by now has grown by, you know, many factors, is folks want to know if we're okay. "Is Will wearing his seat belt?"

(Laughter)

MR. O'ROURKE: "Beto looks a little sleepy." "Are you guys going to make it in okay?" Folks, many of them saying, "You know what? I've got to get up in four hours, but I can't turn this off because I want to make sure that you guys get to your hotel okay."

MR. HURD: Yeah.

MR. O'ROURKE: So there was this really incredible sweetness and some of the cynicism at least temporarily had broken down and we were just -- you know, we were just people. It was really a beautiful moment.

MS. BALL: But do you believe that that's because the nasty people went away or because they changed their minds?

MR. HURD: No, that was --

MS. BALL: It was the same people staying on the stream and having their cynicism actually defeated by watching what you guys were doing?

MR. HURD: So a couple of the comments that stick in my head is one woman said: "You know what? I woke up this morning feeling good about my country and I'm going to tell my kids that they can be proud of the future of our country because of two people like you." All right? That is someone that was scared and nervous about the direction and the future of our country who felt that: "Hey, if these two guys can work together, then maybe there is some hope." So I would think it was both.

But also when people came in and got negative, other folks that had been watching said, "Hey, listen" -- you know, we would sit and we didn't talk about serious stuff all the time. And when we weren't talking about serious stuff, people would say, "Well, why aren't you talking about health care?" And other folks that were watching was like, "They did for eight hours."

(Laughter)

MR. HURD: And --

MR. O'ROURKE: Right.

MR. HURD: And so that mentality came in and helped keep the tone in a way that was trying to be constructive and informative.

MS. BALL: So in a way it's remarkable that this is what it took for you guys to get to know each; that, you know --

MR. O'ROURKE: Right.

MS. BALL: -- you were both members of the same delegation -- and Texas delegation is big, but you're both seen as sort of, you know, mavericks or moderates within your party and yet until this coincidence occurred and this wacky idea came to pass you weren't -- you didn't really know each other, you weren't really friends, you worked together only on a limited basis. Why is that?

MR. O'ROURKE: Here's my theory. The crushing imperative for every single member of Congress -- if they're going to be honest about it -- is to get reelected. That comes before the defense of the Republic, renewing our democracy, passing a budget, fulfilling our obligations to veterans -- it is to get reelected. And there's a logic to it: "If I get reelected, I can work on all those things."

Well, in order to get reelected you have to raise, you know, a lot of money, you know, some would say

too much money. And so your time outside of committee hearings, outside of voting on the floor is really spent securing your own reelection. And hanging out with Will doesn't get me there.

It's also frowned upon in both of our parties. So when I first wrote an immigration bill and was able to get a Republican co-sponsor who was in what is considered a vulnerable district, a district that we the Democrats want to take back, my party leadership pulled me aside and said, "Look, Beto, you're new here, you probably don't know how this works. But when you work with that guy, you make him look good, you make it harder for us to win that seat and that's not helping us out. So quit working on bills with Republican members of Congress."

So from what our imperative is -- to get reelected, to raise that money, to defeat perhaps challengers in our own party primaries, to work well within the party leadership -- there's almost no incentive and almost no opportunity or time available to do that.

Now, obviously, I don't think Will or I subscribe to that and I don't -- you know, I'm a term limits guy. I voluntarily will serve no more than four terms in the House; if elected to the Senate, no more than two terms. I'm a get big money out of politics guy, no PAC money in my campaigns. I think if you control for those things, you introduce the opportunity for us to spend some time together.

MS. BALL: Do you agree on those issues?

MR. HURD: So I agree with some. You know, I -- when I got out of university, I had the honor of serving shoulders to shoulder with some real patriots as an undercover officer in the CIA. I was in what I used to call the super secret CIA training, famously called "The Farm" for two years. But now it's on Google Maps.

(Laughter)

MR. HURD: And I wish that was a joke, right? And then two years India, two years Pakistan, two years

New York, a year and a half in Afghanistan. And in addition to being the guy in the back alleys at 4:00 o'clock in the morning collecting intelligence on threats to the homeland, I had to brief members of Congress. And not every member of Congress was like Beto to work. And I was pretty shocked by the caliber of our elected leaders. So I decided to leave a job I loved and was good at and move back to my hometown and run for Congress.

The only way -- I wasn't wealthy and my parents weren't wealthy and the only way I was able to challenge an incumbent, to challenge people that had been doing this before was the ability to go out and raise money, all right. And it's all open and it's all there. You can go to the FEC to see that. So it is an equalizer for some being able to have that chance. But what I think is going to change --- you've got to change the kinds of people that go to Washington, D.C. And the way you do that is make races competitive in November, not in primaries.

You know, there's so -- I think there was only this last cycle -- and don't quote me on this, I think it was 22 -- 24 districts that were split ticket, where they voted for one party for president and the other party to Congress. Mine was one of those, all right. Fourteen years -- seventeen years ago that number was like 95 and 10 years before that it was like 130.

And so I think the way the lines are drawn and the way districts are drawn, you have to make to where it's competitive. We shouldn't have plush 22 D seat. You shouldn't have plush 22 R seats. Because that focus is on a very small group of people that ultimately send people up here.

And what I would say is my freshmen class and the current freshman class, Ds and Rs, all came from some previous background. We weren't career elected officials. And so the folks that have previous backgrounds, you have a bias towards action. In your previous -- whether it was in the private sector or working in the military, you always had to get something done and you bring that bias to Congress.

And so that's why I see some of -- why I'm hopeful for the future. And I use last year as an example, ESSA. Again, see, nobody in this room knows what ESSA is. There you go. It was Every Student Succeeds Act. If you have kids or grandkids, you should know about this because it changes the way that we're able to educate our kids in the United States of America. You no longer have this one size fits all solution education. It was bipartisan, overwhelmingly bipartisan. Nobody talks about that.

The 21st Century Cures Act. You know, this is something where we've got to double down on basic research because we can cure cancer, and this was bipartisan piece of legislation that passed last year that nobody talks about. This year when the health care vote failed the first time in the House, there was another piece of legislation that passed with 400 votes that said if you have small businesses you can actually work together to get your own insurance. And most people are like, "Why can't we do that already?"

So those are some of the examples that aren't sexy, you don't see a light on it, people aren't writing about it. But that's the kind of the stuff that's happening and you have to have those victories in order to have a victory on some of the big issues like health care or immigration reform or things like that.

MS. BALL: And I do want to talk about health care, but just to go back to the road trip for a second. In the aftermath of it besides doing panels together, have there been substantive collaboration between the two of you?

MR. O'ROURKE: So this immigration bill that I had mentioned, which is not comprehensive, not holistic, addresses one part of a broken immigration system, the foreign born family members of U.S. citizens who for a technical violation of immigration law are barred from reentering United States for life. We want to make sure in the bill that a federal immigration judge can determine whether that person who at the age of 12 at the Paso del Norte International Bridge falsely declared citizenship

should be able to pay a fine, you know, have their time spent outside the country and then join their U.S. citizen family.

Not the most controversial idea. Very hard to get Republicans to join that bill. Immediately following the road trip, Will signs on to that bill in part because I think he now trusts me and knows I'm not trying to screw him. I'm not part of the Democratic Congressional Campaign Committee whose number one goal -- because there's only one competitive seat in the state of Texas out of 36 Congressional House districts -- is to get Will Hurd out of office. He knows I'm not part of that. He can trust me. He knows signing on to this bill -- we've done our due diligence -- he's going to be okay.

He signs on to that. He has a bill that speeds the process by which veterans returning from service can enter local law enforcement. I sign on to that bill. And there were a couple of other things that we worked on together. And we now have a relationship that will allow us to work on bills and legislation going forward. And his opinion is often one that I consult when I'm trying to figure out what's going on in the Republican side, where, for example, on health care there might be some common ground.

And there was some substantive conversation along those 31 hours of driving, where, as Will said, I had to begin with the conclusion that Will want to get to a good place for America, he wants this country to be safe, he wants our elected leaders to be accountable. So we may disagree on whether there should be an independent investigation of the president's campaign team and maybe the president's team in the White House when it comes to possible collusion with Russia, but I know that he wants to make sure that justice is served, that the truth comes out, that our democracy and our country is safe. We just see this in a little bit of a different way. And that for me is the basis for compromise.

Okay. I know that Will doesn't want to cover anything up. I know that he wants to do good. I'm going to listen to his idea in good faith and maybe we'll find a

way to agree. So those are just a few examples of areas where we've been able to work together.

MR. HURD: And an epilogue on that. The bill on getting -- making it easier for veterans to go into law enforcement that passed overwhelmingly in the House and the Senate has been signed into law. The bill about the administrative issue on immigration, we're working on getting that scheduled to get a hearing at the committee and then ultimately full time. And what has been interesting is the support that I'm learning there is for this piece of legislation from key influential folks, people on the Judiciary Committee, where this has to go through, and people on the Appropriations Committee, who always have influence.

So this is how we're able to build a -- you know, start -- you know, build -- get some victories, get some victories. And we're being able to do that.

MS. BALL: Well, and what about inspiring your colleagues, because obviously you're only two out of 435 members? And there was a lot of action on social media while you guys were doing the road trip --

MR. O'ROURKE: Right.

MS. BALL: -- of other members jumping on the bandwagon and suggesting colleagues that they might do this with -- did you hear that actually happen?

MR. HURD: It did. There was a trip in Minnesota where a Republican and a Democrat drove from, you know, one part of Minnesota to the other and they live streamed it. And we've seen a lot of people -- over the last couple of weeks I've seen an increase in the number of Republicans and Democrats doing interviews together. I didn't see that -- I didn't see that last year at all. And now, you know, I walk by a TV, I'm like, "What's going on? It looks like" -- "you know, why isn't Beto and I up there?" Right?

(Laughter)

MR. HURD: And so you're seeing that. And I think what undergirds this is the shooting in Alexandria a couple of weeks ago, where -- you know, we're two and a half weeks away from that and you still do have people talking about working together. I'm used to talking about it, that's all I've ever talked about. But I've been seeing some of my colleagues from both sides of the aisle talking that way. And if you look at the people that called in while we were driving, it was an indication that -- they're like: "Hey, we recognize that this is valuable and there's something there and this is a real opportunity."

So despite -- Washington, D.C. is a circus, but there are some things that are going on and sometimes it's hard to see it, all right. But that's where we got to shine light on it and that's why we like to talk about this stuff because it's important for the rest of the country to see it. And ultimately, we have to change the way we talk. You know, if we don't change the way we talk about politics, then we're not going to change our behavior, and if we don't change our behavior, our outcomes aren't going to be any different.

And that is something that's -- and I know that has been a theme that has popped up over the Aspen Ideas Festival for this last week. And it starts with elected official showing leadership and it starts with the folks that are voters and the population demanding it.

MS. BALL: Are you maybe alluding to a certain high ranking member of your own party with that comment?

(Laughter)

MR. HURD: Well, look, I think some of these tweets are demeaning and beneath the office of the president. But we also have to realize that we did not elect an emperor. There are co-equal branches of government. And the president does not speak for every person that considers himself a Republican. And we often times focus so much on that that we miss other things, right. We let that be a distraction.

And so, yeah, I wouldn't do it. I don't talk that way. I don't want my nephew and nieces to talk that way. But there is -- this is bigger -- the government is bigger than just one man and we have to remember that. And that's why you have -- you know, we never shine a light on people that say, "Hey, that was a really nice, polite tweet." That's not sexy and no one's going to focus on that. But there's more of that going on than the silly stuff.

MR. O'ROURKE: I was lucky to join a couple of colleagues in a dinner with Former Secretary of State Colin Powell and one of the questions we asked him is, you know: "What do you think" -- this was a couple of years ago -- "what do you think is the most urgent issue that we need to be focused on as members of Congress? You know, is it North Korea? Is it Iran? Is it the deficit and the debt? What is it?" And he said if I could do one thing, I would get rid of cable television.

(Laughter)

MR. O'ROURKE: He said that is the greatest threat to this country and to our democracy. And so, you know, to Will's point, we need to call out bad behavior. Folks need to know where we stand. And we need to reassert our values in the best traditions of this country. But we also need to provide the alternative and these unheralded bills that pass that make life better for the people that we represent, the work that we're doing on the House Veterans Affairs Committee to address an epidemic in suicide amongst veterans that is happening on a bipartisan basis.

The defense bill that we just spent 14 hours working on from Wednesday morning through to Thursday morning that is a \$700 billion authorization for every critical function that this country performs overseas through its military and how we take care of our service members and their families, that happened on a bipartisan basis. I think the vote was 62 to 1 in the Committee.

So there are some good things going on and we need to make sure that we share that, we remind ourselves

that although this democracy is undergoing a unprecedented pressure test right now -- I think we just have never had anything like this presidency and the breakdown in civility and norms. The institutions that were designed 230 plus years ago are by and large holding up, our courts, the press.

And I'll tell you, Molly, I learned just as much or more by reading the *Washington Post*, *The New York Times*, maybe some of your articles in *The Atlantic* as I did in secure briefings with my colleagues about Russia, their involvement in our elections and the threat to our democracy. That institution is holding up, our democracy.

I've been traveling the state of Texas for the last six months, I have never seen people so fired up, engaged, involved -- and not just pissed off, not just, you know, "I'm angry about this president. I'm angry about a Muslim ban. I'm angry about military style round ups of immigrants. I'm angry about him saying the press are the enemy of the people." People who say, "I also want to get something done, so I'm running for school board. I'm running for mayor. I'm running for Congress."

I've met close to 1,000 congressional candidates it seems like --

(Laughter)

MR. O'ROURKE: -- in the state of -- everyone is running right now --

(Laughter)

MR. O'ROURKE -- because they recognize that in a democracy that that really is one of the highest callings, is your level of civic participation and there's a consequence when we're not involved and when we're not participating and when we're not engaged.

So I'm an optimist by nature and I think we're going to pass this pressure test. I think it's going to be tough, but I think the institutions, our democracy and our colleagues we're going to make it through this. And I

think it's going to be a moment that we look back on with pride.

MR. HURD: You know, there's -- I'm going to mess up this Bible quote, but it's something to the effect of: "The peaks are great to see, but it's in the valleys where I grow." And, you know, I think there is an opportunity here.

And I was on a panel with a bunch of -- YouTube stars is probably the best way to put it. And I didn't know any of them, but one of the women on the panel manages the digital production arm for The Rock, Dwayne Johnson, the actor, former wrestler. And she said -- and this is right when the movie *Moana* came out. It's a cartoon that The Rock is a voice in. And she goes, "If *Moana* fails, we don't blame moviegoers. We say it was a bad movie, like it was a poorly made movie."

And often times in politics we blame constituents for not coming out to vote: "You're not voting enough." But we also have to look at ourselves: "Are you delivering a product that people want to go out and buy?" Right? And buying in politics obviously is going out and voting.

MR. O'ROURKE: Right.

MR. HURD: And so we have to look at ourselves that if we continue to do things the same way and talk the same way, guess what, we know what that ceiling is. If we want to crush that, then we have to ultimately change our behavior.

MS. BALL: Well, let the record reflect both of these men are in competitive elections next year and they believe that if they lose, they deserved it.

(Laughter)

MR. HURD: Hashtag -- that's a hastag in the summer.

(Laughter)

MS. BALL: Well, we don't have eight hours, but I do want to get to health care, obviously the subject of a lot of action on the Hill. Both of you voted against the House health care bill. From different perspectives I'd like to hear what you think should be done? What you would do if you were writing a health care bill to fix the system that we have? And then I am going to eventually open this up for questions, if you want to start thinking about questions for the Congressmen as well.

MR. O'ROURKE: No -- and start --

MR. HURD: Yeah, I'll --

MS. BALL: Go -- sure, go ahead.

MR. O'ROURKE: Go ahead.

MR. HURD: Whatever we do has to increase access to and decrease cost of health care, and that is what I evaluate on these issues. Taking \$820 billion out of Medicaid does not fix Medicaid. There's still going to be people that need that, right. And so those are some really basic principles. So how do you do it? I still think it's some of the things that you heard before: being able to sell across state line, having -- making sure there's price transparency when it comes to the provision of health care.

You know, I have terrible allergies and so the fact that I can go in to get something done and say I'm going to pay cash and they can't tell me how much it costs, that's a problem, right. And that's -- we have to deal with the cost of health care. And so these are some of the areas that we should be focusing on and I'm concerned that we may not be able to get there before the end of July.

MS. BALL: But it does sound like what you're talking about are relatively small bore fixes to the system established by the Affordable Care Act, not a full repeal, not a total overhaul?

MR. HURD: Look, who cares what verb you use before Affordable Care Act, all right. Like we get so wrapped around the axle about: "Well, you said repeal or replace or just repeal or this." Look, fix it, right. That's what people want. Get people access to good health care that they can afford, simple.

And so, you know, always having them, you know, boil it down to one phrase we get so wrapped around that and we start focusing on that issue rather than what we should be focusing on, is how we provide -- how do we fix it.

MS. BALL: Well -- and I'm less focused on what language is used than on whether in your view the system -- the health care system that we have can be built upon and can be fixed.

MR. HURD: Again, it's based on what the final piece of legislation is. We know there's problems with the existing system. Everybody agrees with that. And so the existing system there's something wrong with it and we need to do something to it. And whether it's fixing it -- look -- so there are things that everybody agrees on: keeping kids on your insurance until you're 26, being -- you know, not being able to get kicked off of insurance for a preexisting condition. Those are things -- every Republican and Democrat agrees on those things.

And so whether it's the language in the existing legislation or something else, I think it decides on when you're writing the actual bill and what the final piece looks like.

MS. BALL: Well, Congressman O'Rourke is a member of the congressional minority. What you think doesn't really matter. But --

(Laughter)

MS. BALL: I -- you weren't in any of the meetings --

MR. O'ROURKE: Why don't we just let Will

continue to talk?

MS. BALL: -- you weren't in any of the meetings where this legislation was being written, correct? Oh, there weren't any! But what would you do?

(Laughter)

MR. O'ROURKE: Right.

MS. BALL: What would you do if you could fix the health care system?

MR. O'ROURKE: So, you know, the Affordable Care Act has done a lot of good for a lot of people, people who had preexisting conditions who were precluded from buying care, folks who had lifetime caps for whom care became unaffordable. And I think that is something that you can build upon. You can address issues that we have in El Paso, where you still have a very high rate of uninsured El Pasoans, and those who have insurance have a really hard time seeing a doctor because we have one of the worst doctor to patient ratios in the country, it's on par with Panama or Syria.

So ACA, as well intentioned as it was, didn't address the fact that you can mandate coverage but you couldn't necessarily mandate access. I would look to a public option in the exchanges as something to improve upon or build or to use Will's term "fix" some of the things that are broken.

But I've come to the conclusion as politically uncomfortable -- it may be unpopular as this is -- it's inescapable to me that if you truly want everyone to be able to see a doctor or a nurse or a provider or a psychiatry -- and I'll give you an example: in San Antonio, Will's hometown, one untreated schizophrenia patient visited the emergency room at a hospital there 40 times, racking up a bill of \$90,000 that he will never be able to pay, it will be borne by other rate payers and taxpayers in Bear County, and, oh, by the way, he's never going to get the treatment and the consistency and continuity of care that he needs to be okay and lead a

productive life.

What we have right now as much as ACA may be an improvement over some of the things that we were lacking, it's not enough. If you want to cover everyone, everyone gets in to see a doctor and you drive total health care spending down, you need to go to universal health care, you need to have a single payer system. There are --

(Applause)

MR. O'ROURKE: There are undoubtedly plenty of challenges with that that we can learn from the other countries. In fact every single modern wealthy democracy in the world has some version of a single payer system. A lot we can learn. A lot we can acknowledge where it is not working that we need to improve upon. And I think there is something uniquely American that we can devise, hell, maybe between Will and I that builds upon the best of what the world -- the rest of the world has discovered, includes those things that are unique to our country, you know, the health care system that we already have.

But if we're really going to meet the goals that Will laid out, everybody can see a provider and we drive care down, the only way -- I'm not an expert, the only way that I see that you get there is through a single payer system.

MS. BALL: And you've both just come from Washington while we've all been busy frolicking in the mountains. The Senate blew through their self-imposed deadline to get their version of a bill passed. What is your sense of where things stand? Will, I'll start with you.

MR. HURD: Well, you had I think it was eight public Senators against voting to proceed, which is a procedural vote to move forward on an actual vote on the legislation. And if you have eight public, that probably means you had five to six other folks that were going to be a no if the vote came to it. That's a pretty significant divide. But look, I've learned to not try to predict what the Senate does. They have their own rules.

They do things differently.

But the clock is ticking. And if we want to get to -- we've got to fund the government for 2018. We've got to get a budget agreement in place and we want to use that budget agreement to do tax reform as well. And that needs to be done in August or -- you know, August, no later than early September. And as soon as that process starts, the reconciliation tool, which is a parliamentary procedure that we use in order to get only 51 votes in the Senate that expires.

So there is a hard clock on and that's why the Senate has to get their work done. Because whatever they do is going to be different than what we pass. So it has to come back to the House and the House is going to have to pass the Senate version. And I don't think you can -- usually on legislation there's some tweaks; you go to a conference committee where everybody works that out. I think because of this issue, we can't go to a conference and the House is going to have to likely pass whatever the Senate does.

MS. BALL: Do you think that there's a possibility that something actually gets done on this issue whether or not it's something you agree with?

MR. O'ROURKE: Yes, I do. The question for me is whether that happens in Washington, D.C. or somewhere else. You know, you see -- Texas is a great example, Arizona years before that. After 30 years of failure and substantially rewriting our immigration laws to reflect our reality, our economic interests, our values, states have been taking matters into their own hands. Sometimes we like the results, sometimes we don't.

When it comes to health care, you're seeing a very similar dynamic play out right now. Washington cannot fix or improve upon ACA. They can't completely repeal it and return to what existed before. They don't seem to be able to pass the bill that would replace it. You're seeing states really began to take the lead on some of these issues, maybe not too unlike the lead up to social security, where the federal government really

wasn't the one that took the lead. It was the states, the laboratories of democracy, that were trying out different models of how you ensure that older Americans didn't live out their golden years in poverty and out of that came the pressure and the political will to force members of Congress and the president to do the right thing.

I wonder if that won't be what it takes in this instance because I don't see politically how this comes together. Will mentioned the eight Senators and they can afford to lose two who are already opposed to this. If the Senate Majority Leader, McConnell, moves too far to the right, he loses the moderates; too far to the middle, he loses the four Senators to the right who have come out against this.

So I think the pressure is going to have to come from somewhere else. So I'm not holding my breath that something will happen in the near-term. Although Senator Sasse has proposed -- and I'm not against this -- that we forgo our month long August district work period, a.k.a., recess and stay in the Capitol as miserable as that might be and hash that up. I love that. You know, stick Will and Beto in a car for 29 hours together, live stream that thing -- we worked out some things. Force other members -
-

MR. HURD: And don't let me stop -- don't let me stop.

MR. O'ROURKE: Well --

MR. HURD: We'll definitely --

MR. O'ROURKE: Force members of Congress to stay in the Capitol in really uncomfortable conditions to do their job and maybe -- and say, "You don't get to leave until you have figured something out." I mean, I think there are worst ideas to get this done.

(Applause)

MR. HURD: But often times it's not the length of time that you need in order to get these things done.

It's having the political will and -- so people push stuff down. You know, Congress is very -- like we have to have a deadline and we can't think about things at the same time. We have to think about stuff in series. That's just the way the institution is. I'm not advocating for it. It's one of the problems.

And so the -- what is going to change --

MR. O'ROURKE: But don't think -- let me interrupt you.

MR. HURD: -- in the next, you know? Nothing is going to change from the next week that they couldn't have done this before Friday.

MR. O'ROURKE: So I think Will is right about how things work now. I think there's something that we need to pay attention to in the election of Donald Trump, this promise to drain the swamp. There's hope from a lot of people that we're going to blow this place up because it's dysfunctional, it has been so disappointing, it's corrupted, it's captured -- and I may not like everything that Trump says, I think some people feel, but at least this guy is going to shake it up and get these guys to actually do their job or just blow past them.

So much of what we do is procedural, is ceremonial. It is the rare exception to listen to a member of Congress who isn't reading what he's saying that was written for him by -- and I love the young people who work for us -- but some 24-year-old in his or her office, literally reading, "Mr. Secretary, I am outraged. How could you" --

(Laughter)

MR. O'ROURKE: You know, this -- and when -- the rare time that someone is speaking their own thoughts, which I think is part of the appeal of someone like President Trump, it catches your attention, it is so unlike what is happening there. And so if ever there were a moment for all of us to figure out how to restructure the way that Congress works, because I agree with Will's

assessment of how it does business today, it would be right now and it could be on this issue. I mean, this could be the brink that forces us to either, you know, jump or that forces us to reorganize and be more responsive.

And all this stuff that hasn't been working has been so disappointing. We don't have a budget. It's crazy. We're going in -- what are we, two months from the next -- three months from the next fiscal year? We just marked up, as I mentioned, \$700 billion in defense authorizations, but they have no budget to match these. So it's not -- those almost aren't real decisions right now.

So I agree with many who voted for Donald Trump that this system is badly broken, it needs to be changed. I'd love for it to be changed thoughtfully, rationally, logically with present company. But it's going to change one way or the other and this really maybe our test right now.

MS. BALL: Well, on that note, I think we're going to throw it open for questions. So there's a microphone coming to you. Let's go here in the middle.

SPEAKER: Hi. My name is Greg Fishback (phonetic) and I work in the --

MS. BALL: And if I can just -- sorry. If I can just make a request. If you could just try to be concise and ask a question, don't give a speech.

SPEAKER: I wasn't giving a speech.

MS. BALL: That's not directed to you. That's directed to everyone.

SPEAKER: I'll have to sit down again.

(Laughter)

MS. BALL: Right.

SPEAKER: The constitution describes it as "how do we make a more perfect union." And it seems to me that all of the discussions that are going on in Congress are in the weeds. We actually don't look at the broader issue of where we want to be tomorrow or tomorrow (sic). We look at point by point by point and we disagree with this one and we agree on that one. How do you solve that problem?

MR. O'ROURKE: Yeah. I'll just give you one example that I think further makes your case. So I sit on the Armed Services Committee. We are now through an authorization for the use of military force. It's how we declare war, the power reserved to Congress. It's how we declare war. We declared war in 2001 against essentially al-Qaeda and the Taliban for the 9/11 attacks.

We have now used that authorization to pursue a war in Afghanistan in its 16th year, but also to pursue war in Iraq. The troops we have there right now are not under the 2003 or 2002 authorization. They're under that first one. We're in Syria under that authorization. We're in Yemen under that authorization. We're in Libya under that authorization. And a lot of people don't know this, we are at war in Somalia today. Six different countries.

We have not had a meaningful discussion about that authorization. We have not reauthorized that war. We haven't closed out that '01 authorization. I in the Defense Committee asked, "Who are we at war with? Who are the associated forces like al-Shabaab, for example, that we need to know about so I can tell my constituents, the American people?" And on process and procedure, because it referred to the House Foreign Affairs Committee, I was not allowed to ask that question there.

That that's what I say about -- the old forms and processes in Congress may have worked really well in the 19th century. I don't think they serve our purposes in the 21st century and they prevent us from fully owning our responsibility and our obligations to you, to the service members whose lives are on the line and to the thousands of people that we are killing all over the world

in the name of this country and of our goals.

And so that big picture: Why are we at war? What will victory look like? When will we bring people home? How much does this cost? None of those are being asked because nobody wants to own the answers. We saw when Hillary Clinton was running in 2008 that war vote in 2002 to go to war in Iraq essentially haunted her and perhaps could be described as the reason that she lost to Senator Obama in the primary. The lesson learned from that is don't have your fingerprints anywhere on this, allow this sucker to go on autopilot. And if we do that, we will keep sleepwalking into country after country and we will be at war not 16 years, but we'll be at war for 26 years next time we get together to talk about this.

So you're right, the big questions are not being asked and therefore we don't have the answers to them that we need as a country.

MR. HURD: So this authorized use of military force that Beto was talking about, a Democrat proposed that in a defense -- the appropriations bill, where how you actually fund the government. And it was supported by Democrats. And there was one article written about it on Thursday. It's a pretty big issue. And the fact that this was addressed -- now, it's likely undressed in the wrong place and is that going to lead to a debate on the House floor? Unlikely. But the fact that there were people willing to take on -- you know, to use some of that political capital to do that, that happens. And again, it's something that people aren't focused on.

I think Simon Sinek has been here at Aspen Ideas and he always says begin with "why". And you're absolutely right, a lot of the legislation that we're passing we got to ask the why. And so for me when I do things -- I do a lot on IT procurement.

MR. O'ROURKE: That's hot.

MR. HURD: Yeah.

(Laughter)

MR. HURD: On July fourth when I'm doing parades, no one is going to hold up a sign that says IT procurement, right?

(Laughter)

MR. HURD: But the way -- the federal government spends \$90 billion a year on purchasing IT goods and services and 75 percent of that is on old and legacy systems. That's absolutely outrageous. It's a gross misuse of taxpayer dollars. So why should we be focused on IT procurement? Because we have to introduce the best technology into our digital infrastructure to protect ourselves against hackers.

A couple of weeks ago there was a hack through a Department of Education website that leverage an IRS tool that stole information that hackers were able to use to defraud the government. You know, we -- why do you have to go into a post office to get your passport renewed? You should be able to do that at home. So the why is: how do we defend our digital infrastructure from getting our stuff stolen; and two, making sure the government is providing a service that the American people demand. And if you change the way the government operates, you're going to change the outcomes.

And so those are -- so you have to take every particular issue. I also think it's Congress' responsibility to take more of their Article Two authorities -- Article One authorities, excuse me, when it comes to national security, foreign policy and not just punt all of that to an executive branch.

MR. O'ROURKE: Yeah.

SPEAKER: The question I was asking is more overarching. Why don't we have a kind of common goal to republic? Then you can decide whether you want health care, you don't want health care. You can decide how you want to fight a war.

MR. HURD: Well -- well --

MS. BALL: Okay. Sir, I want to move to another question, if you don't mind. Let's go all the way up here. And wait for the microphone.

SPEAKER: I was going to read it. I'm practicing.

MS. BALL: Did a 24-year-old write it for you?

SPEAKER: Right.

SPEAKER: Yeah.

MS. BALL: So I was just in a session about artificial intelligence and how it's accelerating our society and our business. And at one point they suggested that that was -- half of our population was being left out, right, being left behind. And I work in rural development. And I'm just going to guess by the bubble comments that were there that they believe it might be rural -- I mean, it might be rural communities that are being left out and so -- whether or not -- but then that lead to the idea that our democracy wasn't keeping pace with this.

And so there's something about -- any ideas about how we accelerate -- and it sounds like you guys are on to this a little -- how we accelerate our ability to work together so that we benefit us all, right, like that there's -- something along that lines?

MS. BALL: Okay, so it sounds like this is partially about cooperation, but also partially about the urban/rural divide and about technology and innovation and --

SPEAKER: Well, I think our democracy isn't -- where the outcome is creating a half have, half not.

MR. O'ROURKE: So I represent --

SPEAKER: I guess we're not wrapping (phonetic) -- we're not --

MR. HURD: I represent 29 counties from San Antonio to El Paso, 820 miles of the border. It takes ten and a half hours to drive from the southeast corner into my northwest corner at 80 miles an hour, which is actually the speed limit in most of -- there is --

(Laughter)

MR. HURD: -- more cows in the middle of my district than people and I am only able to have cell phone service on a third of that place where I'm traveling. So unless you -- when I think infrastructure -- let me talk on infrastructure -- you have to have infrastructure where you're providing these services to everyone so that they can take advantage of it.

You can't talk about -- you know, I know some of the booths out here some are telemedicine. Telemedicine is awesome if you can --

SPEAKER: Telephone.

MR. HURD: If you don't have tele -- exactly. And so we have to be able to focus on that. And, look, how do we use these tools? My title is representative and I take that seriously. And I don't represent just the people that voted for me, I represent everybody. And we got to be able to use the latest tools to keep in touch with your constituents.

Thomas Friedman was talking earlier about how when he reads the comments on his article, you know, he'll go through all 500 and there's like five that are really good ideas. Well, we got to be able to take advantage of that in order to introduce this into how we do things because I think we can crowdsource many of the problems that we're faced. But we have to have the tools and we have to have the processes in place to do that.

And again, it's just -- it's forcing your elected officials and demanding that from them. But we also got to have some folks that are out on the front trying to do that.

MS. BALL: Well, I want to let you address this as well, Congress O'Rourke, but I like to hear you address in your answer also whether a generational change in Congress is part of this? You folks are both part of a younger generation in Congress. Is that part of the turnover that's needed to address some of these 21st century issues?

MR. O'ROURKE: Yeah, it's -- so Will mentioned -- he didn't say this, but we effectively have members of Congress choosing their voters instead of the other way around. There's one out of 36 competitive congressional districts in Texas. We need to have independent nonpartisan redistricting committees so that it makes it easier for Congress to reflect the people that it's supposed to serve.

Right now you're locking in people who have served decades in some cases. When I was elected in 2012, there was a gentleman who was serving his 60th year in Congress. I think if you have an end to gerrymandering, nonpartisan redistricting, you take big money out of politics and you end the process of perpetual reelection -- the reelection rate for a member of Congress over the last 50 years is 93 percent -- you're going to get an institution that is more reflective of the country.

It doesn't mean that we have necessarily younger people. Younger or older doesn't matter to me. I just think new people who, as Will said, bring the urgency that they have from not being in Congress. If you know you're going to be there 30, 40 years, get it done this year, get it done next year, get it done in 10 years, what the hell does it matter, you're going to be there for the rest of your life.

I think you've got to take -- I think you've got to change back to the gentleman's question about, you know, renewing our democracy. You've got to make this institution more reflective and today it isn't.

MR. HURD: Let's do a quick test. Raise your hand if you have a Snapchat account?

SPEAKER: If you have what?

MR. O'ROURKE: Snapchat.

MR. HURD: Snapchat. Okay, some of them. Raise your hand if you check your mailbox every single day when you're at home?

SPEAKER: Physical mailbox?

SPEAKER: Physical or --

MR. HURD: Physical mailbox.

SPEAKER: Oh!

MR. HURD: Physical mailbox -- physical mailbox, right.

MS. BALL: Wait. Explain that to me? I --

MR. HURD: That's -- you know, that is -- no, the way --

MR. O'ROURKE: Raise your hand if you understand where Will's going?

(Laughter)

MR. HURD: No, my point is this: in order to engage with people you have to engage with them at the mediums that they're using. And you have the entire -- look, most people still watch commercials on television, most people still read the stuff that comes to their mailbox. Not everybody is getting their information from Twitter, Facebook or Snapchat. And so you have to have an elected official that's nimble enough -- if you're going to communicate to the entire stack of folks in a district, you have to be nimble enough to know how to push a message and to communicate and engage with people on all of those forms of -- on all those different mediums. And that's not -- that's -- it's hard, it's really hard to do.

And so, yeah -- so there is a gap, there is a gap. And we're going to see -- look, at some point -- we're not going to see a gradual increase of millennials being a part of the voting population, it's just going to happen. We're not going to see it. And every person that talks about elections are going to pontificate about how everybody missed millennials taking over the electoral process. It's just going to happen. We can't keep track on -- can't keep track (phonetic) of every trend. But you have to recognize those tools that are out there.

MS. BALL: Well, the direct mail industry thanks you for that, bringing the door open.

(Laughter)

MS. BALL: Let's get to another question. Let's go on this side, the gentleman in the pink shirt.

SPEAKER: So both of you have indicated that you would be in favor of some sort of independent panel to handle redistricting rather than the way it's currently done and I totally agree with it. My question is, since -- my understanding is that's a states issue. How do you actually make that happen?

MR. O'ROURKE: Yeah, there are two ways. You could amend the constitution, number -- you know, a pretty high bar. But as we know there are so many different ways that the federal government can incentivize behavior by states: "If you want this highway funding, you're going to require seat belts or child seats for kids," you know. So there are carrots or incentives that I think we can drop with states.

But as we've seen on so many things, including independent nonpartisan redistricting, some states through public pressure have already taken the lead. We see it in marijuana legislation, where Congress is going to be the absolute last to act after a majority of the states through popular referendums, through popularly elected legislatures decided that marijuana, as in Colorado, should be able to be available recreationally or medicinally or should be decriminalized.

It gets back to the health care answer. I really think the leadership right now in this country -- and I hate to say this -- present company excluded, is coming from cities, it's coming from states, it's coming from folks in their communities, taking matters into their own hands in a real positive way.

So that's my answer on how we would do it federally. Unfortunately, given the job that we have right now, I think that's going to come through the states independently. I don't know if you feel --

MR. HURD: The short answer to that is I don't know.

(Laughter)

MR. O'ROURKE: Yeah.

MR. HURD: And we have to look --

MS. BALL: Well, there's also the possibility that the Supreme Court --

MR. HURD: Because there are other states --

MS. BALL: -- will do something on this.

MR. HURD: Yeah, the --

MR. O'ROURKE: That's right.

MR. HURD: We'll see -- we'll see.

MS. BALL: There's a Supreme Court case pending --

MR. HURD: There's going to be several cases.

MS. BALL: -- that addresses the issue of --

MR. HURD: Yeah.

MS. BALL: -- partisan redistricting.

MR. HURD: There are going to be several cases that come up to the Supreme Court, but some states have already done this -- and looking at how did that happen there and whether there are lessons that can be used in order to translate into the other -- in the other states.

MS. BALL: All right, let's get one more. I think we've got time for one more question. Let's go to some unassuming --

MR. HURD: Louise (phonetic) is giving us a smiling face.

MS. BALL: -- person in the back. The woman with the red hair.

SPEAKER: My question is about the Health Care Act. What would your thinking be if all the members of Congress would have to have the same Health Care Act as the one they're passing?

(Applause)

SPEAKER: Because your health care is a lot better than what you're passing.

MR. HURD: Yeah.

SPEAKER: What about that?

MR. HURD: So I will say this and this is what a piece that's missed (sic). The Affordable Care Act and the health care we're talking about now will only talk about 17 percent of the country, because 60 percent of the country -- I guarantee you there's nobody in this room that's on Obamacare or the ACA.

SPEAKER: I am.

MR. HURD: We got a few. Okay.

MR. O'ROURKE: Amy?

SPEAKER: And some over here.

MR. HURD: And there's probably nobody on Medicaid either. We got one.

MR. O'ROURKE: Got one.

MR. HURD: So we are talking about only a small percentage of the entire pie, and I don't think you can fix the entire pie by just focusing on 17 percent.

MR. O'ROURKE: Yeah. Amy and I just bought our policy off the Obamacare exchange. I'll tell you that there's -- the spirit of your question, though -- we have a nice job. We get paid 174,000 a year. We get to come to amazing opportunities like this one with you here today. We have the honor of representing 700,000 of our fellow Texans and Americans. And there are some perks that come with the -- with that job.

One of the things, I'm going to see if Will -- maybe we can decide this today. I love to do away with pensions for members of Congress. If we believe in term limits, let's -- I do -- let's remove some of the incentives to stay there forever. Let's make sure that we have to eat our own -- you know, the meals that we prepare for everybody else.

So I agree with the spirit of your question, and to that end, Amy and I have purchased our policy through the exchange. And I think that the best way -- and I said this earlier -- to universalize the experience so that no one is preferred including members of Congress is to have universal health care. So --

MR. HURD: And I'm on the individual market as well.

MR. O'ROURKE: Yeah.

MS. BALL: And to the question of whether you can team up on this?

MR. HURD: Well, I don't plan on staying in Congress long enough to get a pension.

MR. O'ROURKE: Yeah.

MR. HURD: So --

(Laughter)

MR. HURD: So --

MS. BALL: There we go. All right.

MR. O'ROURKE: That was a yes.

MS. BALL: Well, I --

(Laughter)

MS. BALL: On that note, I think we're over time. Thank you everyone for coming.

MR. HURD: Thank you. Yeah.

MS. BALL: And thank you to --

MR. HURD: Good work.

MS. BALL: -- Congressman O'Rourke and Congressman Hurd.

MR. HURD: Yeah.

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