What Is National Conservatism?

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Chris DeMuth explores the thinkers, ideas, and books that national conservatism offers amid current political challenges and debates.

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A new group of thinkers and activists calling themselves national conservatives believe American politics and policy questions increasingly invite a national approach. They seek to combat the left's attempt to bury our constitutional order and replace it with a matrix of identity politics, vast social spending, and other objectives.

Chris DeMuth, a leader of the national conservatism movement and former president of the American Enterprise Institute, joins "The Daily Signal Podcast" to explore the main trends of American conservatism and what national conservatism brings to the discussion. Conservatism must move beyond, DeMuth argues, a fusionism that makes individual freedom the only end sought by policy and understand that culture, patriotism, community, and faith are equally important for policymaking.

On today's episode, we discuss the thinkers, ideas, and books that national conservatism offers amid current political challenges and debates: Should conservatism embrace a worker first set of policies—industrial policy, labor-union revival, and wage subsides? How would national conservatism navigate foreign policy? Is realism and restraint the best

approach for American defense strategy in the 21st Century? What does national conservatism bring regarding health care, environmental, and education policies?

Our lively discussion also considers the post-liberal conservatives and how they fit or do not fit into national conservatism. Listen to the interview or read a lightly edited transcript below.

Richard Reinsch: *Today I'm joined by Chris DeMuth, a distinguished fellow at the Hudson Institute, longtime president of the American Enterprise Institute, a veteran of Republican presidential administrations. Chris has had a distinguished career in Washington. And we're going to be talking about all things national conservatism today. Chris, I'm glad to have you on.*

Chris DeMuth: Richard, it's great to be here with you and congratulations are in store. Congratulations are due to you for your distinguished career at Law & Liberty at Liberty Fund. And congratulations to The Heritage Foundation for snaring you. This is a great move on their part, and I know it's going to be a wonderful new association for both of you.

Reinsch: *Well, Chris, thank you so much for that. And, of course, recently in your career, you have become involved with a movement known as national conservatism. And I look forward to discussing that with you today.*

You've had a long career in Washington working within the conservative movement and all of its interesting elements and facets. What got you interested in national conservatism? You've been involved in their major conferences and the last conference you were chairman.

DeMuth: I think as the 2010s were beginning, I was seeing that there were new problems in American society that the conservative movement was not addressing sufficiently. I had in my long career, within the movement, I had seen developments along the way that had seemed to me to be adverse that I'd argued against, for example, the centralization of the conservative movement in Washington.

There was a time, Richard, as a Hoosier, you may remember the old American Spectator in Bloomington, Indiana. And the neoconservative Public Interest in New York City. And with the Reagan administration, everybody sort of moved to Washington. And I thought that we were losing a certain amount of diversity in the movement, a little bit of attachment to localism.

There were always things that I'd been alert to and I thought the problems of having a big conservative establishment in Washington, breathing the air of Washington, joining in a large Washington consensus, was problematic for a movement that I think always has to be a little bit contrarian, skeptical, alert to new problems. In the 2000s and especially the 2010s, I was starting to worry about these things actively. And I started reading widely. I was also noticing the new wave of nationalist sentiment.

This was not entirely new. I can remember one of the things that first intrigued me about Ronald Reagan back in 1979 and 1980, is that he spoke in the language of patriotism, which

had not been something that I had seen during my adult life. You would've had to go back to Roosevelt, Coolidge, much earlier to see such strong patriotism, but I was seeing more and more of it.

In my reading, I came upon a book from a man who is now one of my national conservative colleagues, Yoram Hazony, a distinguished Bible scholar. I had had him give talks at AEI back when I was leading that institution in the 1990s, early 2000s, some of his work on biblical scholarship, he wrote a big book on Israel. So I had known Yoram and he had published a new book, "The Virtue of Nationalism." And I was struck that many people thought that that was an audacious idea, that there should actually be virtues in nationalism.

I read the book and I was very impressed. I wrote a review/essay on it, and it was a positive review. And so Yorum and I rekindled our old friendship and we started working together. He was putting together these initial conferences in Europe and in the United States of the national conservatism movement and he and his colleagues were highly practiced intellectuals and very, very accomplished as thinkers, but they'd never put on a big conference before. Well, I'd spent 25 years putting on conferences.

And so I worked with them on some of the backstage logistics and organizational aspects of these conferences, but at the same time, I was falling more and more into their views of the problems we were facing and the virtues of national conservatism as a new movement that was intending to refresh the conservatism that I had grown up with, libertarianism, old-fashioned National Review conservatism, the law, and economics movement—all of these older movements that I had been part of.

I came to believe very strongly in the potential to refresh and bring these conservatisms up to date for a new set of problems. And also as part of that, to interpret and apply this new sense of nationalist spirit that was sweeping the United States and Europe, and that came abruptly to the forefront in 2016, with the Brexit vote in the UK and the Trump election in the United States.

Reinsch: *There are a lot of questions I want to get to coming out of your response there. In preparing for this interview, Chris, I took the opportunity to reread some chapters from George Nash's great book, "The Conservative Intellectual Movement in America Since 1945." And the groupings that he discusses coming out of the 1940s and 1950s, the traditionalists by which he includes thinkers like Robert Nisbet, Russell Kirk, Eric Voegelin, and Leo Strauss, isn't that a group?*

DeMuth: Yes.

Reinsch: *The libertarians, Frank Chodorov, Friedrich Hayek, Ludwig von Mises. And the anti-communist writers James Burnham, Whittaker Chambers. Then the 1960s come and the way Nash writes about it within conservatism there's a quest for philosophical order. They'd broken*

through, they're no longer giving off irritable mental gestures as one person characterized it, but there's something substantial here.

The 1960s happen and their major push is fusionism, that seems to largely work. I don't know if it theoretically works, but it seems to work practically politically with Frank Meyers' vision in his 1964 book, "In Defense of Freedom." And then we have sort of the reaction to the 1960s and the neoconservatives, to my mind, really emerge, particularly the failure of progressive policies and the Great Society and the failure of those policies in the urban city.

DeMuth: In the 1960s, yes.

Reinsch: *Then the religious right is another group that emerges in the 1980s as a part of the cultural fallout from what had happened in the 1960s. I mentioned all those groupings because American conservatism is obviously contested. It's a raucous conversation at times—it has been and still is. And there is no single unifying thing that is American conservatism.*

Where does national conservatism fit in? Can you give us something we can latch onto to think about its argument?

DeMuth: Let me give you two—there may be more—aspects that I think that are departures among national conservatives. There's a tendency to emphasize our differences from the past. My own view is that the continuities from these earlier movements are stronger than many national conservatives recognize.

We are drawing from different strands from the past, but there certainly are differences, one in the international sphere, the emphasis on the nation-state and the opposition to international organizations and to the emergence of global corporations that often have their headquarters, in fact, most of the great ones have their headquarters in the United States, but obviously don't really regard themselves as American. They regard themselves as citizens of the world. They are in some respects, much more willing to work closely with the government of China than with the government of the United States, which actually defends the territory on which they live.

Certainly, there were isolationist strands in the old conservatism, the Robert Taft conservatism of the early 1950s, but it became increasingly internationalist. And so I think that there is a turn away from internationalism that can be overstated. There are many respects in which national conservatives understand the importance of international norms and institutions. But I think that is a pretty sharp change.

The sharper change is the opposition to what I would call the extremes of individual liberalism, liberalism conceived as placing the liberty of the individual first, something that trumps all other considerations. For example, Frank Meyer fusionism is placed the liberty of the individual above all other things. I believe it's a matter of a fair dispute. You can find it in the text.

You can find ways that he acknowledged some qualifications, but whether or not this was part of one or the other earlier strand of conservatism, it is certainly something that national conservatives today recognize as extreme and dire threats to social wellbeing that the exaltation of the individual unattached to not necessarily, I should say, attached to community, to religion, to family, to any norms other than the norms that each individual can dream up for himself or herself in their own self-created conception of the universe.

We national conservatives believe that these extremes are behind an enormous amount of the mischief in modern politics, which has actually gone far beyond mischief to be really sources of enormous social upheaval and threats to the fabric of society.

Reinsch: *Thinking about your answer and, in particular, the questions you raise about Frank Meyers fusionism, a question that I have and I think others have: What work is the term "national" doing in national conservatism?*

When I ask you that I'm thinking about the full extent of American constitutionalism, that it also encompasses federalism and local rule and is concerned about the centralization of power. Do national conservatism conservatives view federalism as an integral part of policy, or is that something that's largely pushed to the side?

DeMuth: No, I would say that the nationalism of the national conservatives is certainly in the American context, a vast continental nation, highly heterogeneous, huge amounts of variation from region to region, 330 million inhabitants.

Our nationalism in the American context is a layered nationalism. It is built of many subordinate loyalties, most of which will be stronger loyalties to family, to faith for religious people, to local community, to occupation, to advocation. And I believe that federalism, localism, is a, I don't want to say unavoidable, it is an intrinsic part of the nationalism that we subscribe to.

Localism would take a different form in nations, such as France or the UK or Hungary, much smaller nations which have different structures. In smaller nations, the nature of localism will be very, very different. Probably the closest to the United States would be Germany, which has a huge tradition of localism, which the new nationalists in Germany very much subscribe to and regard as a strong component, as in the United States, of what makes up our successful nation.

Reinsch: *Thinking deeply about fusionism, Meyer, from my read, he says, the end of the political realm is freedom. It can't be virtue. He also says, though he's trying to conjugate the American founding in the 20th century, and that would of course mean a lot of state and local decisions being made at the level of virtue, but the federal government in that regard is not necessarily where it should be focusing.*

He also is very clear Jewish Christian biblical anthropology should be the standard of our freedom, of our responsibility, and it's the way we should think about why the government should be limited.

Is that out of step with how you would see a national conservatism? A lot of times when I hear fusionism being criticized, what I really hear is libertarian ideology of the last 20 years, which I would criticize that as well.

It's sort of exultation of the autonomous individual and freedom not really being rooted in anything larger than the individual. I would accept those criticisms, but I don't think that's what Frank Meyer was trying to articulate.

DeMuth: There are a lot of disagreements within national conservatism and, as I have often said, that's a strength, not a weakness because we're dealing with some new and very, very dire threats and problems and a lot of confusion. And there's going to be a lot of arguments.

We're going to be looking to the past, both for help and looking at the past for mistakes, wrong turns that were made. And I actually think that you can argue Frank Meyer either way. There's no question that he put individual liberty at the pinnacle. On the other hand, well, first of all, like everybody back in those days, he was operating in a world where whether one was religious or irreligious, whether one was a strong family man or not, all who were libertarian, they all were working in a world where marriage was the norm and divorce legitimacy was frowned upon.

A large majority of the population in the United States was religious believing, practicing, and they all recognized at one level or another, even those who were very strong individualists, atheists, and so forth, they recognized that there was this enormous social capital. That to some extent they benefited from living into this in this world.

Now you can find Frank referring to the decline of religion, the decline of and so forth. So he can say, well, he recognized that and he still wanted to make individual liberty tops as far as government was concerned, certainly at the national level and on questions of ethics and morality wanted to duke it out in private society. On the other hand, he many times, over and over, when he refers to the individual, he refers to the dignity of the individual.

This does not sound to me like somebody who would embrace the levels of organized devotion to pornography that we have today. It doesn't sound to me like somebody whose idea of the individual is the visual who gets to choose his/her or its sex at will. And because the individual is supreme, everybody else in society is obliged to recognize and cooperate with that gender choice as it may admit itself today.

I think if we asked Frank those things, I mean, he wouldn't even know how to discuss those matters. Now you're going to give me some quote where maybe he begins to—

Reinsch: *No, no, I think that's right.*

DeMuth: But I do think it was a different world. But I will grant this to those who say Meyer and the fusionism was a wrong turn. There's no question that he wanted to put individual liberty first that he was worried about the infusion of issues of morality into the public square and to that, it is often the case that an intellectual will come up with a powerful proposition that is introduced into one context, and to some extent that he doesn't even recognize, assumes the existence of that context. And then the idea ends up destroying the context. It ends up being actually insidious against things that the had intellectual not thought of.

Richard, if I can borrow from another conversation you and I have had, John Maynard Keynes was a budget balancer. He introduced the idea of deficit spending in recessions. As somebody who simply will assume, well, then of course, when the recession's over we'll pay back the borrowing, we'll retire the borrowing. That was part of the world that he lived in. Everybody assumed that that was true, but his idea once it got out there and once people with their own designs began to make use of it, completely destroyed the balanced budget ethic principle that he had assumed as a basis for his arguments.

I always want to take the work of a great intellectual and try to understand it as opposed to simply condemn it as somebody made a horrible mistake. It certainly seems to me that Frank gave liberty a very large dominant role that came to have practical consequences that I believe he could not have foreseen. But whether or not he could have, we are where we are today.

One thing he was right about is that introducing questions of morality as central matters in the public square has turned out to be very problematic for our politics. Now, national conservatives do not want to say, well, therefore, let's take moral issues out of the public square.

We recognize that they are there, that the secular woke progressivism of today is, at its base, a moral movement, a terribly wrong, diluted and destructive one. But these issues are out there. And so simply saying, let's just hold seminars, let's argue about these things, and even in many cases, let's argue about them at the local level and keep them out of national politics. It's just not realistic, given the problems that we are dealing with today.

Reinsch: *So many of these problems that we're dealing with are interesting and I don't want to keep going on about fusionism. I think Meyer, I think the idea being, what do you do if our intellectual class in many respects abolishes reason? Or abolishes the idea that there is a nature? That's really what's at the heart of the transgender movement.*

We can act upon those as we choose without any regard to logic or a deeper foundation for thinking about what we should do. And I think Meyer's fusionism would struggle to understand that.

DeMuth: Yes.

Reinsch: *But, of course, what remains true at the difficulties of power and the limits of power and what you can, and in fact do, and of course, the fact that many of these issues we could deal with on a local level, they are national-level issues, as you say. But that's also a result of the deformation of our politics, of our constitutional order of how to set things right.*

The national conservatives had two national-level conferences, I've been involved in both. I spoke at the recent one on virtue in the market. I appealed to Roger Scruton on the nation and Wilhelm Roepke on virtue in the market in my talk. David Brooks was there. He wrote a piece in The Atlantic that a lot of people have discussed, and I don't think he said he heard irritable mental gestures. He said he heard anger. And he heard people expressing an America that he doesn't recognize.

I was at the conference. I didn't necessarily experience that. He said he heard no notes of grace. He should have been at our panel. We had your Hudson colleague Diana Furchtgott-Roth. My Heritage colleague Jay Richards. I thought there were notes of grace in that panel. So maybe he went to the wrong panels. What did you think of his criticism of that conference?

DeMuth: I had a poor opinion of that essay, but my strongest reactions were the two that you have made, it's somewhat different. I didn't hear a lot of anger, but I heard some anger. And I would say to that as Aristotle said, failure to anger when anger is called for, justified, is foolish, it's a defect of character.

I believe that there is a lot to be angry about in America today. I am angry. And one of my heroes that I try not to let the national conservatives know about from my youth was Albert Jay Nock. And Nock once wrote, "I am a little bit angry all the time." And as somebody who's lived in Washington for 50 years, I would say that I have been a little bit angry all the time.

But I think if you look at the misery at our essentially open Southern border, if you look at 1,000 murders in Chicago last year, 800 of them black-on-black with black victims, if you look at what is happening to storekeepers in cities, there's a lot to be angry about today and so I think that's fine.

I did not think that the anger was overwrought or was vicious. I found it to be justified anger, and there was a lot that was, I think understandable at this point in our movement and at a conference held in the fall of 2021, there was a lot of dismay at what is going on around us. But first of all, there was a lot of grace. There was a lot of compassion.

There was a lot of understanding of the variety of views within our movement and trying to come to grips with the larger political developments. I would say that in the talk that I gave and the talk that you gave and many, many others that I heard, there was a great deal of grace.

Now, one always hesitates to claim grace for oneself. But I thought that the idea that this was an angry, a scary, a frightening bunch of people who had no grace or gracefulness and

should raise fear in the hearts of any moderate balanced person, I thought that that was a false characterization and I was frankly surprised because I have several friends, including some people that I brought down there who are skeptical or more than skeptical of many aspects of national conservatism, who found it to be an intellectually bracing, invigorating time. Disagreements that they found very well ventilated, original arguments that had not to them before. So I've said what I've said maybe twice over in answering your question.

Reinsch: *I will say this being involved in two of the national conservative conferences, I don't consider myself a national conservative, but I've always noticed a really intense energy at those conferences. People very much want to be at the panels. They want to participate in Q&A. I've appreciated that and you can obviously tell that there's something going on. And I've enjoyed being involved and I've had my own thinking sharpened. So to me, those who would criticize those conferences at that level, probably have their own agenda going on, there are much sharper criticisms made also by other people.*

DeMuth: And I should say, Richard, this movement, it's not a union shop. It's not a coat shop. And it's not just that we tried to get some good liberals to be among us, but we're really trying to draw upon many of the different strands today. Some of which I would say, Richard, your views, which you brought out with enormous clarity and that wonderful piece you had in National Affairs a few years ago in your contributions at our conferences.

We're trying to learn, and we do have some very sharp arguments among ourselves, but I believe, and as we've been trying to organize these conferences, we recognize that there are hard debates, and we think that they are manageable. And that is to say more than manageable, that they are productive debates. There are times when debates can be destructive.

Every once in a while, I see some formulation kind of veering off in that direction, but we have tried to keep the debates, even though they are sometimes high-concept intellectual debates, to try to keep them anchored in practicality and to think through what we as a movement might do to not only arrest current developments, but going, as I said, in my talk, going beyond simply slowing down the rate of change to actually reversing several bad developments in American politics and culture of the past 20 years. But it is those actual changes, as opposed to scoring sharp and brilliant debaters points in internal fisticuffs, that we are aiming for.

Reinsch: *I want to ask you about one group that many associate with national conservatism, I'll call them the post-liberal thinkers: Patrick Deneen, Gladden Pappin, Adrian Vermeule, a brilliant thinker at Harvard law school. I disagree with him, but I always try to engage everything he writes.*

As I read them, they are sharply critical of the American founding. They seem very critical of American institutions, even basic constitutional concepts. In the case of Adrian Vermeule,

separation of powers. He actually wants the administrative state to be enlarged and to have more power.

Are they a part of the national conservative movement or a group that has some sort of contribution to make that you just don't know what that is?

DeMuth: Whether they're national conservatives, you'd have to ask them and they could give you an answer. Just to take two names that you've mentioned, Patrick Deneen has been a valuable part of our conferences and Adrian Vermeule has not. And I also see a very sharp difference in their views.

I would say that Professor Vermeule's ideas about Catholic integralism and sort of weaponizing the national American Washington-based executive state on behalf of moral and especially Catholic moral values. I've actually not heard any of that in any of the conversations we've had, either in private or in public at our national conservative conferences. I myself have argued against it in print. And so I would say that I certainly disagree with him.

I take a very different view of Patrick. Again, he is saying that there were flaws at the beginning. This is a little like talking about 1950s-1960s fusionism, that there were flaws at the beginning. I have learned a lot reading his work and reading criticisms of his work. I happen to know a lot about the founding and, in my view, part of the explanation for its success is that like national conservatism today, it had some very, very strong tensions within it. And I think that the aspects that Deneen has pulled out, and I think you're going to see some more of that in an upcoming book by Yoram Hazony are very true and important.

The view of the American founding is essentially, in my view, it was both Lockean and traditionalist. It wasn't one or the other, given the use that Lockeanism had in subsequent history. So that it's now part of our traditions.

For example, in the Gettysburg Address, I see it there, but there was an enormous role for faith that many of the authors of the Declaration and Constitution, the most prominent ones were deists of one variety or another. … So let me say that when we turn to practical manners, I do not hear in any of our councils anybody arguing for turning over the American nation to the pope or anything like that.

I sometimes see allegations of that by people who were trying to marginalize us. But when I listen to Patrick Deneen, I hear him say some good things about the American founding. And when I hear him talk about things that he would like to see happen in the United States, I find myself four-square on almost all of it. And I wonder what you would say when we got down to particulars.

Reinsch: *I wanted us to talk about policies.*

DeMuth: OK, let's talk about a range of things. There is now a strong movement in New York state to say to essentially ban Catholic adoption charities. Catholic adoption charities

will place a child of any religion or no religion into a household of any religion or no religion, but they have two requirements for the household. The first is that it be headed by a married couple. And secondly, that the couple be male and female. And for those reasons, there is a movement to say that this is unjust discrimination and it has no part of the fabric of life in New York state, and that they should not be permitted to place any of their children into any of the households that meet their criteria.

Another movement in New York state wants to require all private schools, including religious schools, to abide by the state-established curricular requirements for public schools. So yeshivas would go away the next day, there would be no more yeshivas. So I am in favor of resisting those movements.

I'm in favor of the state of Maine being required not to discriminate against religious schools in the provision of … Maine, like Vermont, it's got a lot of rural areas and there are many counties where there are no public schools. So there's actually this long tradition as in many rural areas of what today we would call vouchers or school choice. And it's just sort of building out the education establishment, where the state cannot have schools everywhere. Maine says that they cannot give money to Catholic schools, but only secular schools. I think that's wrong. I've got a position on that. The Supreme Court's going to make a decision.

So on all of those matters, that is permitting a larger role for religion in the public squares. Now, I'll try to bring this to an end. I just want to give you a sense of the spectrum here. There are many national conservatives who want to bring prayer back into the public school or at least not to say that it is banned at the federal level.

If I could remove the Supreme Court's ban, I would do that, but I would leave it to local sensibilities very much as I would on the question of censorship. If I were a school board member, say where I live in Northern Virginia, I think I would be opposed to prayer in school because we're such a heterogeneous world here, the prayer would just be mush and I don't think it would add very much. There are many communities in America where if I were on the school board, I would be in favor of prayer in schools. So people will take different positions on that.

Finally, there are some national conservatives who are now pushing on the idea of restoring the Sabbath. And because we regard ourselves as the heralds of a new working class for a Republican Party, we can remind ourselves that Sunday closing laws were cooperative enterprise of religious organizations, churches, and earlier embodiments of the union movement.

So that is a push. How far that is going to go, I don't know. It does not offend my sensibilities that we would have Sunday closing laws. I think that we were not at risk of becoming a theocracy when we had Sunday closing laws for long portions of our history.

I think that's the span that we have of the actual practical debates, which is to move against the strong, progressive initiative to further isolate and destroy religious practice and belief,

which is evident all around us. And then secondly, to make the public square more comfortable for people of religious faith, and I think in particular, when it comes to the education of children.

But also, there can be little things. I was struck in Virginia we had the inauguration of a new governor, lieutenant governor, and attorney general. It was a surprising election, and at the end of the inauguration ceremonies, these three and their spouses joined hands and the governor led them in prayer.

Well, I think I can imagine that happening 50 years ago. I don't remember seeing that at least as far north as Virginia anytime recently. And I would say to somebody that's made uncomfortable by that, well, religious people have to learn to live in a society where there are lots and lots of people that do not share their faith, and you too Buster, on the other hand, have to learn to live in a society where there are a lot of people of serious religious faith. And that's what it means to be in an effective society in a nation such as America.

Reinsch: *As I listen to you talk about these situations, one of the things that comes to me is your back is against the wall You've got no other choice than to come out and start reemphasizing certain moral norms if they are going to make it impossible to have distinctive religious education in various blue states like New York or Vermont; Maine surprises me.*

But in those places, you have no choice but to come out with strong moral arguments in defense of religious education. And, of course, I assume next would be trying to limit what happens in the homeschooling world. But those arguments go very deep in American constitutional history and have a footing in the Supreme Court and some of its opinions as well.

As I hear you talk, and as I don't think about that situation in New York, which has happened in various blue cities, various states, I think almost every element of conservatism for various reasons would come out in support of defending those schools, even say the libertarians, for reasons of just plurality and choice.

I think religious education is a positive good that must be defended in our law. It must be something that parents can choose, because what it has to offer is actually good for the souls with those who go through it. Also, as I'm listening to you, I just have this question in my mind, what the nationalists are doing, because these are a lot of things happening at the state and local level that require vigorous moral response. But a moral response conservatism in America has always been capable of, and perhaps it retreated from that in recent decades, but it's always been there and been a part of conservatism and so I think that reignition of it is good.

And as I hear you, I'm thinking of another name, Willmoore Kendall, that comes to mind who would emphasize we are a republic of deliberation, and what we actually need is a much more engaged deliberation. And the school board was key, it was ground zero of this deliberation. Why? Because education is at the center of the republic and what type of a republic we're going to have and deliberation at the school board level should be robust and is inherently going to be

charged with moral norms because you're dealing with the souls of the next generation. All of that being said, and I don't really disagree with a lot of the policies you put forward.

Sunday closing laws. I wouldn't want that to be nationally dictated, but at various states, I can easily see that and would not be necessarily uncomfortable with that happening where I lived, but that, of course, is a recovery of the old American citizenship, which has retreated and the American citizenship of people actually knowing that their choices matter and they're not going to be sucked away from them by either the judiciary, the administrative state, or federal government.

What I'm hearing is national conservatives are a very tough moral conservatism in defensive family, religion, and civil society. And I say, yes, we do need that now.

DeMuth: I think that they all need defending. And I would hope that people who are not as attached to the traditional family, traditional religion … I think that society requires all sorts of people and if you look at some of the greatest thinkers, scientists, poets, authors of one kind or another, a lot of them were rebels.

I'm for maintaining a lot of room for rebels, but effective statecraft calls for moving port and starboards to keep the ship on a steady course and we've gone far too far in one direction. And I think you inciting Willmoore Kendall, this matter of deliberation is to me, key. And I think in a sense, we're kind of creating a model within our own councils of national conservatism of what serious deliberation looks like.

It's true that it's the more elevated kind of deliberation of ideas rather than that of interests, but it is certainly true that this elevation of the autonomous self-defining individual, especially in the jurisprudence of the Supreme Court has taken one after another matter out of deliberation and Congress is handing over many great and momentous issues to specialized administrative agencies, where our laws are made by agencies that don't give a damn about anything but environmental quality or women's rights or automobile fuel economy.

None of these laws really reflect the kind of deliberation that we all require if we are going to respect the laws which we will frequently find ourselves disagreeing with. If I could offer one quick example, the Obergefell decision of the Supreme Court holding that a gay marriage was constitutionally guaranteed. I, myself am pro-gay marriage. There was an important shift in a political opinion as reflected in the views of the legislatures around the country, on the subject. As recently as the beginning of the Obama administration, there was very, very strong opposition to gay marriage, including by President Obama, many liberal Democrats.

I think as people started to realize, and there were some writers, but there was a lot of examples that people saw in their own lives, that there were a lot of these gay couples that we kind of knew them. They really wanted to get married. And some of us thought, well, the marriage institution could certainly use some new recruits and these people seemed really

serious about it, but in the deliberations, and I think the state of Utah was key here in approving gay marriage, but also making it clear that that did not mean that a gay couple getting married, got to force a baker or a photographer to celebrate their wedding.

Once the Supreme Court ousted local deliberation, there was no room for those kinds of perfectly practical, reasonable compromises. And now it comes down to whether when a baker is baking a cake, is that speech? Is it religion? What if he's a mute atheist? Does he still get to not make the cake and let the person across the street make the cake for a gay wedding?

When we put these things into these abstract categories that the courts work through, when we approve of delegation of large amounts of the law-making in our society to specialized agencies, we're removing things from deliberation that involves not just fancy global, smart, articulate, highly educated people that love to work the agencies and the courts, and that almost unfailingly have left progressive values, but also involve lots and lots of other people that actually constitutionally are their equals as citizens and who have been cut out of things.

And what I really hope for all of the people in the conservative world that are skeptical of national conservatives and of the progressives that regard us as a threat to America, and as they would put it, a threat to democracy. I hope that at some point they would see some virtue in actually having a representative assembly argue about some of these things and come to a decision that they would accept and not try to say, no, this is a matter of right.

This is not a matter where we can tolerate any disagreements in society. If we don't arrive at a point, which is I think a central point for many, many national conservatives, that we get a large number of very smart, affluent, highly educated people on board with the concept that we are a government of representative law that takes into account a wide variety of views.

As for myself, I've got strong views and I'm willing to live with laws that are maybe way less than 100% of mine and I'm waiting for people on the other side to join me.

Reinsch: *Maybe we can close on economics. I know you're noticing this, and I think we all are, that the shift in populations in America, this sort of continued movement away from blue states that have had a tremendous impact in American economic life in the 20th century. In states like California, New York, Illinois, people are leaving blue cities, young people, for places that are more affordable, perhaps have more job opportunities.*

This, to my mind, is people trying to recover a competitive federalism deliberative framework and find places they want to live that are congenial to the lives they want to live. Even as we have this incredibly powerful federal government that wants to try and prohibit that or not prohibit it, but limit that competitive framework from happening.

I'll just say it is happening, and it's going to be the task of conservatism in the states to defend that, to defend their policy philosophical approach as people move in, but for strange reasons

might bring in their blue state politics, things like that. And also to protect it at the national-level, which, as our mutual friend Michael Gravatt has noted, the federal government and the 20th century was everywhere about abolishing the competitive federalist framework. So this is another challenge for conservatism going forward.

On economics, one of your leading thinkers is Oren Cass. He's very clear: large-scale industrial policy in favor of distributing economic opportunity back to manufacturing workers, reshoring jobs that were sent overseas. Others also talk of reviving private sector, labor unionism. Sen. Marco Rubio even wanting to see an Amazon warehouse distribution center unionized and wage subsidies as well and things like that.

Is that a distinctive contribution of national conservatism, worker power, and even using governments to do it?

DeMuth: It certainly is. If we look at the Oren Cass program, I agree with some of it. I disagree with some of it. I think that these are important arguments to make.

When Donald Trump came in and won the presidency by calling attention to miseries, I might even say that it would be graceful, it would show some grace to acknowledge the fact that a lot of Americans in the Heartland have been suffering without getting much attention out of Washington. So there's some attention there.

I believe that his calling attention to the vast imbalance in tariffs and trade policies between America and other nations, especially China, was a great contribution. But I have to notice that for all of the changes that were made in his administration, a lot of these problems still persist and, Oren Cass and his group are, I would say, leading the effort to try to think through exactly what we do about it.

In the old days, I used to say I was a free-trader and if America is losing its manufacturing edge, what we need is some good job-training programs. Well, that was a pretty weak rhetoric on my thinking, because if somebody had followed up and said, "Well, what do you think about government job-training programs?" I would've said, they're a joke. I've looked at a lot of these programs and the government has no idea how to train people for anything, and it doesn't even know what to train them for.

I was trying to find a way to make myself comfortable with my strong, free-trade sentiments. The idea of wage subsidies has a long tradition, mostly on the left, but there are many people on the right that have said that they are greatly superior to the minimum wage. And I am for working on these matters.

I believe that the time is coming that we're going to be in a position that I would call post-Trump national conservatism. And we've been talking a lot about having become a working-class party and about what we used to call the Reagan Democrats and now they're the Trump Republicans. We've made substantial headway with Latino Americans, and

we're starting to make headway, which I think the critical race theory movement has actually accelerated, of African-Americans moving in our direction.

The time is going to come when we're going to have to make good on what we've been saying in terms of rhetoric. I hope that we will come up with something that is better than the Great Society programs that is more economically informed and more effective. One that recognizes the very profound changes that have been made in private markets and tries to harness markets.

I think markets need confining and discipline and turning back in some cases, especially when it comes to cultural destruction, but the market is still very, very powerful. And I would say that one of the two or three huge and exciting challenges for national conservatism is to make good on the pledge that is sort of implicit in what we've done so far to actually come through with policies that make a difference to average folks that have not been part of the conservative coalition until recently.

Reinsch: *Chris DeMuth, this has been a great conversation. Our conversations and debates on these matters will go forward. Thank you for joining us. We really appreciate it.*

DeMuth: Richard, thank you very much for having me, and congratulations on this new venue that you have created. All the best.