

MSNBC's *The ReidOut*

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JOY REID: We begin *The ReidOut* tonight with the most important and really the most debated political question of the moment: What is happening to the Republican Party? Our — our country, our democracy is currently under siege by one of our two major political parties. One controlled by a twice-impeached, one-term president who's more Jim Jones than George Washington. A party that, thanks to Donald Trump's rabbit hole of conspiracy theories, white grievance, and an unquenchable thirst for absolute power, embraces causes that were once viewed as fringe. Things like abortion bounty hunting, now the law in Texas. Banning books, really any idea that doesn't render every single white American in history going all the way back to 1619 and right up to today as innocent and benevolent, even as a noose literally hung outside the U.S. Capitol just six months ago. It's a party that's committed to turning domestic terrorists into martyrs and freedom fighters while launching a crusade against the COVID vaccine and now any vaccine, even if that leaves America more vulnerable to sickness and suffering and death and anyone who's encouraging you to stay alive by taking the vaccine, well, they're called neo-Nazis. Remember when these ideas were relegated to some cookie corner of the internet? When erasing a politician's crime sounded like Putin? Not too long ago, our idea of the Republican fringe were people in tricorner hats getting angry about taxes and a black president. Well, this new fringe ate that fringe for breakfast and it's taken over the mainstream Republican party. And it all culminates in that new bizarro world, Republican ideology doing everything in their power to make it so hard for you to vote that you can never vote them out. And you know what they call that? A dictatorship. And as in all autocracies, what's fueling all of it is the chief autocrat's Big Lie, something Texas State Representative James Talarico took on — head on while standing in the belly of the beast, Fox News.

[FOX CLIP]

REID: [INTRODUCES PANEL] I have to start with you, Representative Talarico. Kudos to you for standing up to — not even just, you know, Pete Hegseth, I think his name is, but also the Big Lie. Can you talk about how that Big Lie about the election has impacted your constituents? Because that seems to be why you're in D.C. right now.

TEXAS STATE REP. JAMES TALARICO (D): The Big Lie is the only reason that I'm on this show talking to you right now. If it wasn't for Donald Trump's lie that the election was stolen in 2020, I'd be back at my desk in the Texas State Capitol working on early childhood legislation, I wouldn't be here fighting for my constituents and their sacred right to vote. And what's what we have to understand. All of this is because of one man's inability to accept factual reality and because of one party's complicity with that Big Lie. And so, I was proud to go into the lion's den and expose that Big Lie for exactly what it is. We can't treat voter suppression as a legitimate issue to be debated in the public square because it's not. It is not like any other issue. It is foundational, it is essential, and eroding that is anti-American and it's undemocratic. And I'm proud to stand with my colleagues in fighting for our sacred right to vote here in Washington,

D.C.

REID: And you were a middle school teacher, right? I think you said in that — in that segment?

TALARICO: That's exactly right. And I am a Texan. We are a rowdy bunch and we know how to fight, so —

REID: Clearly Texans know how to fight. You guys are all teaching us how to fight. What did you teach in middle school? What subject?

TALARICO: I taught sixth grade language arts.

REID: Language arts. So I mean, and I have to ask you just as somebody who, as you said, sixth or seventh generation Texan in the south, governing in the south, the atmosphere that Republicans have created. Has that filtered down to the — the level of, you know, the kids in your former school, their — their parents? What kind of atmosphere has been created by this zeal against history, against voting? Does it feel as much like war on the ground as it feels to us watching it happen here in D.C.?

TALARICO: Absolutely. Before I was a politician I was a middle school teacher, as you mentioned and I taught on the west side of San Antonio, beautiful, historic, Mexican-American neighborhood. And I only taught Black and Brown students and they and their families are the ones that are targeted by these types of extremist pieces of legislation, particularly this voter suppression bill. And when I ran for office I ran to improve my community and I took a sacred oath in front of God, in front of my students, in front of my constituents to uphold the Constitution, not to uphold Greg Abbott's extremist agenda. I'm doing that here in Washington, D.C. I am fighting for my constituents' right to vote and I'm fighting for my former students and their right to vote and their family's right to vote. That's what this entire trip was about. I am doing my job. Even though I'm not in Austin, I'm doing my job. And unlike our home state Senator of Ted Cruz, you know, I'm — I'm leaving the state to serve my constituents, not to abandon them.

REID: Amen. Amen to that. Xochitl, you know, the reason I wanted, you know, Representative Talarico to describe the way it feels on the ground, I think a lot of folks worry that Democrats in Washington aren't reacting with the same level of urgency that Representative Talarico and his fellow Democrats are, right? That the sense in D.C. is that, well, you know, we'll do a couple bipartisan deals and, you know, we'll pass a nice Juneteenth law, and everything will be fine. I worry that that's what they think. Do you get the sense that that's what they think?

XOCHITL HINOJOSA: Well, it does worry me as well. You have these Texas state representatives who are in the minority and have been in the minority for some time. They're using every tool in their arsenal to — to stop a voter suppression bill right now and to protect Black and Brown people to make sure that they have the right to vote. That says a lot. They — that don't have very many tools but they're using everything. I think this has happened three times in history where they were able to break quorum and now they're all in Washington, D.C. They're

pressuring the White House and Congress to act and yet you don't have Democrats who control the White House, the House, and the Senate necessarily acting right now. I do think that — I mean, it would be a major contrast for Democrats right now to deliver on voting rights. You have a Republican Party right now who continues to back Donald Trump and the Big Lie and the majority of Americans don't stand on the side of Republicans, they actually stand on the side of protecting voting rights. So it is a win-win for Democrats right now and what the American people want to see is bold action from the Democratic Party and that is my hope that happens in the near future.

REID: Stewart, let me — let me go to you real quick. Let me play for you the Texas Governor, Greg Abbott, tweeted out a video in which he defended the law that they're trying to pass that will limit the ability to vote. Take a listen.

GOVERNOR GREG ABBOTT (R-TX): President Biden and the Democrats must stop the misinformation. Texas is very simply making it easier to vote and harder to cheat.

REID: That is the talking point. The easier to vote, harder to cheat talking point. But it's — it's obviously, just when you read the letter of the law, that that is not true. But I wonder if Democrats are, because of the way that it's being framed by Republicans and Republican framing always seems to win because they're good at it, it's sort of anesthetizing D.C. Democrats. Do you — can you understand why Democrats seem — in D.C. seem much more to be prioritizing cutting deals with Republicans and doing bipartisan bills with them and normalizing them than having the urgency to say, this is not — this is not a normal Republican Party? I say this all the time. My father was — if he had been an American citizen, would have been a Republican. He loved the Republican party. He was a Reaganite. He would — he's rolling in his grave, being like, “what is this?” And I — I — do you think Democrats are almost anesthetized to it, somehow in D.C., from the President on down?

STUART STEVENS: Well, look, on Greg Abbott, I mean, somebody who won't admit that the President of the United States is a legal president is not someone to listen to when it comes to the truth. It's just a straight up lie. Look, I think Democrats have to nationalize this election and I was one of those Republicans on the other side that was not so bad at nationalizing elections. They have to make 2022 a referendum on democracy. And I think what's happening with the Texas Democrats is a tremendous help toward that. But they've got to elevate this, so it's not about this little bill and that little bill, it's got to be about something big, something that's patriotic, people fought and died for to defend. Now, I get that they're balanced with this. Democrats still are a governing party. They actually want to govern. They want to get things done unlike the Republican Party which has really just become an autocratic movement. So I get the push and pull but, I mean, here in the Lincoln Project, we don't have to defend any of that, we can just speak about it being an autocracy and we know these people well. But to win this election in 2022, which is going to be very tough for Democrats to do, they're going to have to nationalize this around a great threat and that great threat is a great threat to democracy.

REID: I think that that is true. I want to go back to Representative Talarico because, right, you did not, I'm sure, run for office thinking that your cause was going to be defending American

democracy from the other major political party, right? None of us really thought that the threat would be much greater from within than ever thinking about any foreign threat at this point, and so, I guess I wonder as you look at the coming election, how much jeopardy are we in if the laws in the state of Texas become not just standard there but all over the country?

TALARICO: Yeah. This is an historic moment. We just celebrated America's 244th birthday and if we want this American experiment to survive for 244 more years, we have to act now and as was mentioned, Texas Democrats are the ultimate minority. We don't hold the majority in the House, we don't hold the majority in the state Senate, we don't have the governor's mansion and yet, we were able to find a way to stop this bill in its tracks and stand up for democracy and voting rights at the same time. And we're not asking Joe Manchin to sacrifice very much. All we're asking is that he make one exception to one Senate rule to save this American experiment of ours. You know, so many of my colleagues are making tremendous sacrifices.

REID: Yep.

TALARICO: they're leaving behind kids, they're leaving behind elderly parents, they're leaving behind sick loved ones. One of my colleagues canceled her wedding to be able to break quorum and cancel this bill. And so, the contrast between what we've had to do and what Joe Manchin has to do couldn't be more stark. And — and obviously, Joe Manchin's task ahead is nothing compared to the sacrifices that brave Americans

REID: Yep.

TALARICO: — from Normandy to Selma had to do to protect the sacred right of people.

REID: Yeah, absolutely. And your governor is acting like an old Jim Crow governor threatening to arrest y'all when you get back. Xochitl, is this going to happen? Are Democrats going to — you know, the people who made Joe Biden the nominee — and the only reason he's President — are the very voters who are being attacked now in these states. He said he was always going to have those voters' back. He said that out loud. It's on tape. Are — is he going to allow Joe Manchin and Krystin Sinema's love and devotion to the filibuster break — force them to break faith with those voters? Is that what's happening? Are these two people going to force the President to break faith with the people that voted him in?

HINOJOSA: Well, I think that President Biden is committed to ensuring something happens. If we continue to see that there is no action, then I do think that you will eventually see the White House put their political muscle around this to end a legislative procedure that makes no sense right now when it comes to voting rights, right, that's standing in the way. One of the things that — you show a clip earlier of Governor Abbott and misinformation. I think that one thing that's also lost on the messaging right now is that, you know, Republicans in Texas, the indicted attorney general in Texas actually admitted that the whole reason why this was happening is because in places like in Harris County in Houston, Texas, one of the largest counties in Texas, if they would have mailed applications —

REID: Yep.

HINOJOSA: — to African-American and Latino voters that they would have —

REID: Would have lost.

HINOJOSA: — lost the election in Texas.

REID: Yeah.

HINOJOSA: Exactly. And so, one of the things the Democrats must continue to do is to tell people exactly why they're doing this. Combat the Republican lies that are in the state and I've seen the Texas Democrats —

REID: Yeah.

HINOJOSA: — do a great job of that.

REID: I know we're out of time but I'm — very quickly before we go, I want to tell you guys. As you guys are calling your senators and everybody about these two bills, this is the difference between the two bills. HR-1, which you hear us talking a lot about, which is the For the People Act, this is an ambitious proposal. It would transform everything about elections. This is everything from campaign financing to the way that gerrymandering works and all of that sort of thing. The John Lewis Act is a much narrower bill that just addresses reversing the 2013 Supreme Court ruling that made it harder to block racially discriminatory voting laws, basically putting preclearance back in. All the other stuff, the — all the other stuff — is in HR-1, meaning the campaign finance changes, making it easier to vote, making it harder to gerrymander, disclosure on people who give money. Last word to you, Stuart. If we don't do this, then what happens, in your view?

STEVENS: Well, look, I — I think it's our inability to imagine what will happen —

REID: Yeah.

STEVENS: — which is our greatest danger.

REID: Yeah.

STEVENS: It is a replaying of 9/11 and we cannot imagine what this attack on America — and we have to get out of that.

REID: Yeah.

STEVENS: We call it the American experiment because it could have failed.

REID: Yeah.

STEVENS: It was an experiment.

REID: Yeah.

STEVENS: And it's up to us to defend that.

REID: Absolutely. Texas State Representative James Talarico, cheers to you and all of the Texas Dems. Xochitl Hinojosa, Stuart Stevens, thank you very much. You guys are great.