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CHRIS: Welcome to *No Turning Back*, a podcast hosted by General Stan McChrystal and myself, Chris Fussell. Our goal here is simple: to have serious conversations with serious leaders so that we can learn from the best and navigate these complex times together. Thanks for joining us.

ANNA: This week, Stan and Chris speak with Jake Harriman, the Founder and CEO of More Perfect Union. Jake has lived a life in service to others, focusing on international poverty, as well as the dangers of political extremism in the United States.

His background informs his passions for service. After spending his childhood in West Virginia, Jake matriculated to the United States Naval Academy – and upon graduating, went on to serve in the Marine Corps as an Infantry and Force Recon Platoon Commander.

During his time in the Marine Corps, Jake began to understand that combat *failed to address* the root of the problem of terrorism: extreme poverty. He left the military after seven and a half years of service, and received his MBA from Stanford to focus his efforts on the cause, forming Nuru International in 2007 that aimed to eradicate poverty worldwide.

Jake then pivoted his focus inward to the United States and the dangers of bipartisanship in American politics to found More Perfect Union. This organization aims to “help heal the divide in our nation and make our government work for the people.” They concentrate on reforming the voting and campaigning process, uniting Americans from coast-to-coast, and refocusing on American patriotism.

Jake is a fascinating guest with much to say about the world we live in today, and how we can work together to make it better. You won't want to miss the discussion. Thanks to Jake and his team for making the time. Now, over to Stan.

STAN: All right, Jake, we have been excited to have you on, but I got to tell a story to tell you why. In 1999, I was assigned after completing command to the 75th Ranger Regiment, to live in Brooklyn, New York and to work in Manhattan.

So, we go up there and that's completely different world from us. And we've been there about a week and my wife goes, “We are going to bike on a weekend day. I think it was a Saturday or Sunday morning into Manhattan to go to Central Park.” And I said, “Okay, why are we doing that?” She says, “To see the Dalai Lama.”

And, you know, I just spent my life as a Ranger and what have I got in common with the Dalai Lama? But we, we bike into New York City, 300,000 people show up to see the Dalai Lama and my wife, you know, little gal, she fights away through the crowd so we can get close enough to the stage to actually see it.

And then I realized why we were there. He was being interviewed by Richard Gere. And that was the point. So we were that close to somebody the Dalai Lama thought it was cool, but you're another person the Dalai Lama thinks is cool. You've in fact, been put on the Dalai Lama's list of cool people, but you know, in a serious way, you are a cool person.

So, let's, Jake, let's talk about that, you know... David Brooks is a common friend of Chris and I, the author, and he's written a lot about leadership, a lot of very philosophical stuff. And one of the common threads in one of his books, *The Road to Character*, is about people who take on problems that will outlive them. Huge problems.

And you've done that. You come out of a very practical background, Naval Academy, Marine Corps, combat veteran, and then you take on problems that arguably are bigger than one person, or apparently bigger than even nations. What makes you do that?

JAKE: Well, thank you, sir. I, I, I, a lot of it has to do with how I grew up. And I think for a lot of us, our parents have, I have a heavy influence on us as we grow up. My parents were pretty amazing. We grew up in poverty and I think growing up in poverty and really having to scrap and fight for everything that you get was a really important start to me in my life.

My father was an entrepreneur. He was constantly trying to start new businesses as he was the one who taught me, basically, never say that the two words "I can't," you can always, you can do anything you want to do in this world. You got to think big. He taught me to think big all the time. And I think that combined with the compassion that my mother taught me, she was, you know, we were poor, but there was always somebody else who was more poor in our farming community, where we grew up. And we were constantly going to cut firewood for folks to bring food to families every single weekend. And I think that taught me a lot about, about this, this, this component of this human element of compassion, right?

There's, there's always something bigger than you out there and it really centers around people. And so, for me, the combination of those two things, my father just, just, , instilling in me this idea to be... to dream big. To think that the impossible was possible. Right. And then second combined with this idea of, you know, my mother really instilling in me this, this intense, character element of compassion to really believe that, you know, in the capability of other people, and what they can become.

And I would say the final thing that really kind of built this out of me was the Marine Corps. You know, in the Marine Corps, we were taught a lot about, I mean, we had these impossible missions that we had to do with very little stuff. I mean, sir, you got everything at JSOC. You know, we, we, as the lowly Marines, we, we, we got to the leftovers, right.

We had to fight with the leftovers. And I just remember, you know, people constantly telling us to take that impossible hill and we did. You know, and we'd find a way to do it. And I think... so the combination of just my, my parents, the way they care for me and help me grow up and instill these values in me early on, and then how the Marine Corps really ground that into me, this, this concept of, you know, you know, you can, you can do and create and become something bigger than what you ever thought was possible.

And I, I think that the last thing I'll say, sir, is this, this element of servant leadership. Servant leadership is something you guys are so familiar with and you, you, you teach and train people on servant leadership. For me, servant leadership was so core to being able to build teams that could accomplish the impossible, because really the core tenants of that type of leadership unlocks potential that every single member of your team never even knew was there. So that the combination of those four things really helped me to dream big and try and take on some big ideas.

STAN: Wow. And you are dreaming big. When you came to talk to me about More Perfect Union, you basically said we are going to try to repair American democracy, something that's sacred to all of us. And of course, you, you signed me on to it because I believe in you. And I believe in that cause. But describe for our listeners what we're talking about because that seems like the takable hill.

JAKE: Absolutely. Especially in today's time. And I think that's one of the problems, to be honest, is that we have the sense everyone is overwhelmed right now. And I think the thing that the main cause of that is this horrible divisiveness and fear that we face.

When I came back to the US you, you know, I hadn't, I hadn't lived in the U S for about 15 years. So first as a Marine was always deployed downrange with third battalion 1st Marines, and then first force recon company. And then after that, when I started my organization, my first organization, Nuru, we were out there trying to eradicate extreme poverty to stop the spread of some of these bad groups, ISIS, Al Qaeda, et cetera.

And, you know, I was living in villages for those seven years downrange. And I remember when I came back to the States to participate in this program that, that President Bush and President Clinton were starting up, I had to move back to the US and I, I remember thinking, you know, that old adage about the frog and the boiling pot of water, right. It doesn't realize what's happening. I was sitting on the outside of that boiling pot, pot of water. And I was terrified at what I saw. I mean, I did not recognize the country I left to fight for in 2000. There was this bitter fear and hatred that was literally ripping the country apart. And you had these two political parties that had, that were strangling the American political system to the point where it was destroying all value to the American citizens.

And I got really... first, I was just so sad. You know, all of us had been downrange fighting extremism to defend this idea of America, only to find out when we came home, it wasn't going to be ISIS or Al-Qaeda that was going to beat us. It was going to be us. Extremism had come home and was threatening our democracy here at home.

And there was nothing more evil when I saw that. And so, I, my sadness was turned to rage, you know, and I wanted to turn that on this, this problem. We had to get this, this corruption and extremism out of our system and, and return it to the American people.

I will say one more thing too, on that too, if you'll allow me. Look, in this democracy reform space, I don't have a political bone in my body. I've never done anything political. And I'm always the dumbest guy in the room when it comes to democracy or form, there's always going to be someone out there stronger, faster, better, smarter, but it's my opinion that our generation has got to step forward from the rank and file right now.

And lift your hand and say, "Look, if not me, then who? You know, we've got our generation has to step forward and take charge and own our country, you know, to get it back on track.

CHRIS: Jake, I wanna, I wanna kind of have this conversation on two levels. We want to keep revisiting these big ideas because they're, they are critical. I agree with everything you just said, and we've all been through versions of that. You saw it in a really acute way with that many years away from, from your own country, but also the tactical side, because, my hope is listeners will hear your, your life journey and your focus and say that, "Yeah, I should be doing more of that. I should be tackling bigger problems, but where do you start?" Right. And you've done it on several occasions now. So, um, can you get a little more tactical?

Like when you were, you were at Stanford and you had this idea around Nuru, or pivoting over to More Perfect Union, like what are, what are some of the lessons you've derived there of how do you actually start those conversations that are at that much scale?

JAKE: Yeah. I think, the first thing you gotta think about is, well, if a, if a poor kid from West Virginia who who's a Marine can do this, I think anybody can do it. Right. So, the first, the first step is to believe that... to believe big enough that you can pull something off, right? Don't doubt yourself. You got to step forward and do something. I'm someone who is, I'm a leader who's biased by action. I want to go out, you're going to make, take an informed risk, informed decisions, but I'm going to bias myself toward action and take that step forward and do something.

And I think the first thing, when you take that step forward, you notice I said "informed risk" and take "informed action." That means do your research, do your homework, understand the landscape. Right. When I, when I took on this problem in the American political system, I looked at it as an enemy target. Right. And I took a look at where's the critical vulnerability here. Where are people not attacking? Where's the stronghold, where's the weak point? We got to exploit the weak point, right. To gain that foothold. And so it's being very methodical about how you tackle the problem. And I think one of the biggest things you've got to do in the beginning is you have to understand who has already gone before you to do this.

There are so many brilliant people who have, who have tried to tackle this problem and who are tackling this problem right now and are making great gains in the fight. My first idea, when I,

when I came home, fellas, was not to start something. My first idea was to join something. You know, I wanted to, I wanted to add value with my, you know, when I've been given my, the blessings I have, of whatever talent and skill I might have acquired and experience, I wanted to apply that to another institute or other organizations, but the more I dug into the problem and saw what the marketplace looked like, I thought I saw a true market gap.

And to, to put it in a military parlance, a critical vulnerability that needed to be exploited. And so, my first advice or thought, as you're thinking about doing this, is don't start something, unless there's a real market gap there. You know, there's, there's so many great people already working on stuff. There's so much capital that needs to be deployed to ideas that are working. Don't add more to the mix, if there's something already good, that's that that's already stepping into that gap, but if there is a true gap, make sure you understand what's worked in the past and what has not worked in the past and why.

Don't repeat mistakes. Right? So I think for me, it was really important that I did my homework to make sure that I was not duplicating effort, that I was not repeating mistakes that are already happened. There's just far too much of that. Not just in the, in the public sector, but in the private sector as well. In the private sector, you have private markets. Take care of that, right? You've got a bottom line - you're going to die as a company if you try to pull that off. It doesn't often happen in the public sector. There's a lot of nonprofits out there that are doing, you know, well-meaning passionate people, but because the markets are not as efficient, you can have a lot of duplication of effort. You have a lot of people repeating mistakes that have been done over and over and over again. And so, I think it's really important to do, do your homework in the beginning and do that research.

STAN: I'm really struck by the practical nature of your approach. About almost 10 years ago, I joined the effort to push national service in America, civilian national service. So, every young person had the opportunity to do some kind of service, and with the idea that it would change them as citizens, it would make them different people because they've interacted across our society on big problems and feel as though they have part ownership in the name.

And one of the great challenges we've run into is every time I talk to a group or put the idea in front of people, they not, they go "That's great. That would be wonderful." And that doesn't, I quickly learned, equate to anybody doing anything. You know, there's a certain amount of inertia. Almost the lack of an opposition makes it harder to get people to action.

The idea of a "more perfect union" and bipartisanship in American politics - who could be against it? But what are the pitfalls or challenges you run into that might not be obvious?

JAKE: One of the things that I think a lot of these groups miss out on, and by the way, let me just say in the beginning, I have so much respect for other groups out there doing this work. I've learned a lot from them. I am a student of them. Let me just say that first. Second, I think one thing that is missed is the connection to the American people. I think there's a lot of technocrats out there that want to create very tactical political solutions that are really smart and that are based on sound political science.

But in our opinion, if you create a political strategy, absent the American people, it's doomed to fail in the long run. So, I think you've got to, we've got, and I guess this comes from my, uh, like operator background. I'm, I'm a real people person. I've got to be in the people. I've got to feel their pulse. I've got to understand what's going on and what, what are they thinking, real time? Right? It's the whole hearts and minds thing, the VSO mission that we had, you know, it's, you gotta be among the people to really listen to understand what's the heartbeat of America? What's happening right now with the people?

And you can't do that from Washington. And you can't do that just by putting poles in the field. You got to get out there. You got to get your hands dirty. And so, I think part of what we're doing in More Perfect Union is yes, we have this kind of quiet political strategy that we're doing. But at the same time, we're building a veteran-led movement of, of American citizens across the country to build the next generation of civic organization to help the country heal.

It's all gonna, it's all about community service projects. That's what, that's what we're going to be doing in these chapters. But it's, it's getting people from the left and right, and whatever label you have in the same room together, listening to them, you know, having tough conversations, you know, around the table, because at the end of the day, look. one thing I was so passionate about when I came home is that we've forgotten what makes us Americans/ We've forgotten what unites us. Right. We've got, we're allowing the media and the news to just rip us apart without sitting down, having a cup of coffee or a beer with somebody that, that we would have 40 years ago. Right. So I think we've got to re-instill that sense of Americanism, you know, among our population, we've got to get back it among the people to, to start that healing process.

And that's a real important part of any strategy to fix the political system. It can't just be done through, you know, we can't just have technocrats working on a specific political strategy. It has to include the American people in that process.

CHRIS: Jake is as, as much as you can, I'm sure it's, sort of, still forming. But can you walk folks through, um, the practical side, of More Perfect Union? Like what are the solutions that you think can help get there?

JAKE: Well, so I, I talked a little bit about the movement, which I do think is really important, right? We want to build this movement out of millions of Americans. And this is the vision for it is the next generation of civic organization.

If you look a lot of the research and the data, you'll see groups, great groups like Rotary and the Lions Club and Kiwanis Club. Those are all in decline sadly. People are not joining those anymore. We need a new generation that... of civic organization inspires the Millennials and Gen Z to, to, to become a part of building their community and making their communities better.

Right. So the vision for the movement is kind of this next generation civic organization using veterans to convene folks, right? Because the data also shows that the veterans are the last trust institution in the country, folks who on the left and right, trust the military, they trust veterans, veterans could be the community force to bring folks together.

So that's, that's the movement side. That's a really important component. And that will fuel and hold accountable, what we do on the political side. So, I'll speak a little bit to the political strategy. When I was looking at the landscape, this kind of American political system and looking for the gap, looking for the critical vulnerability.

I saw a lot of people working on the House of Representatives, and I saw a lot of folks trying to get the right president in the White House. A lot of people trying to reform the bureaucracy and the executive branch. I saw the critical vulnerability being the Senate. What I saw was all good ideas and legislation now go to die in the Senate.

We are not able to deliver basic solutions to problems that Americans, real problems that Americans are facing. These are not social or cultural issues. These are problems that Americans face at the kitchen table every single day, and our government cannot deliver for them. And I think that this vulnerability lies in the Senate and we're seeing that play out right now.

We have a 50-50 split as of January 5th. So, what we decided to do was essentially kind of, you know, in the language of our old job, an insurgency strategy. Our goal is to get three to five "country first" candidates elected into the US Senate to form a powerful fulcrum. Now, these individuals will run as Republicans and Democrats, but once they get the vote together on key issues to break the stranglehold that the two parties have on our political system, and give it back to the American people to get legislation moving through the Senate again, to be able to solve real problems. And there's a whole strategy around how we're going to do that and what races we play in and why, and what are the criteria and all of that.

But it really focuses on the candidate. It's the product, you got to have the right product, uh, for this to work, right? This person has to be willing to put country over party, has to be willing to put country over self. And, you know, what part of the secret sauce of what we're doing is we're taking a lot of former combat veterans, special operations combat veterans, people who have proven themselves downrange when everything was on the line, doing the right thing, time and time again, whether or not people were watching. You know, putting their life on the line ahead of their own guys and their own, their own, the men and women in their platoons and their squadrons to be able to accomplish this larger goal, something bigger than themselves.

So that's, that's a big pool of... that we're pulling from as we, as we look at potential candidates. And the other great thing about that is as, as you all know, and probably a lot of the listeners to your podcast know, we can make three phone calls in that community and know for sure what type of person that was. It's a very small community. Right. So, and if you mess up once in that community, you get a black mark that just kind of follows you the rest of your career, whether or not you like it. So it's very, it's a tough environment. And so, we're able to make sure that the folks that are coming out of there that were running for these seats are the right kind of person and the right kind of medal.

CHRIS: Yeah. It's funny. Anytime, I'm sure as you do, and understand us, talk to young folks that are heading into those communities, my, one of my constant piece of advice, is as soon as

they get selected to go to Ranger School or BUD/S or whatever the program is okay, your, your reputation starts today and it's going to follow you for 30 years, you know?

The, just to note, because she, you, you mentioned the, this is just an observation, the insurgency model. And I think one of the, one of the downsides of the last 20 years is the way that that term is now used. Like insurgents are bad, terrorism is horrible, right? It's a bit, it's terrible tech tactic, in my opinion. Insurgents, you know, they're everywhere, right? There's those are just people that say I have a better way to run the system. And so, it's something that I think we've as gotten modeled in our language as well. And maybe even add to that too, Chris, insurgents are able to use the system against itself. Right.

They're able to actually get in and you know, they're not, they're not coming in from the outside into kind of some, into some hidden gate or anything like that. They're using the system, they're getting in via the system, but they're changing the system using it against itself. Right. And I think that's an important point to point out there too.

CHRIS: No, I think it's, it's critical. Again, more of a tactical question here, but I think it's important whether your experience with Nuru or what you're doing now with More Perfect Union, how do you talk to others, or how would you recommend others think about splitting your time between, cause you doing a lot of things at once. You're coming up to the big idea, you're fundraising. You're doing all the tactics of establishing a website or all the detailed stuff there, you're recruiting people. You're building out a team. Like how do you figure out where to balance your time out of the gates?

JAKE: I focus on team. I mean, this is all about team. The greatest lesson I learned super early on is, you know, as the leader, you're not the smartest and best person on your team. You got to surround yourself by people who are smarter, faster, better than you are. And you got to let you... put your ego aside and just understand that from day one, if you want to win, you got to surround yourself by people better than you. Yeah. And so, I'm from the, from day one, I worked really hard to, to pull together just an amazing team and they are smart, smarter, faster, better than I am by far.

But that's really important in the beginning because, you know, I end up having to be the face of this a lot. I'm doing a lot of the speaking, I'm doing a lot of the fundraising, but I have an incredible team that I can, you know, you basically, we train on commander's intent. I do a lot on commander's intent, right? I'm going to, I'm going to paint the picture and the vision of here's point A that we're going to get to as a team. Okay. We're starting here. Point B and here's a couple guidelines. I don't care how you get there. Just get there. Right. And if you hit some snags along the way, check in with me, I'm here to help you, but I'm relying on you to get to point AA.

And when you hire A+ performers, whether some people call them level five leaders, whatever the language you want to use, they will get there in a way that you couldn't have even imagined and a way that's far more efficient as well, between those two points. And so, I, that's one of the ways that I think we've been able to be successful early on is I've given my team a lot of, a lot of reign and a lot of autonomy. I was telling them, uh, and not to be more, but give them enough

rope to hang themselves. You know, I, I want you to fail. I want you to mess up. I want you to make mistakes. Don't make the same one twice. Learn from them each time, take informed risks, but I want you to push the envelope on what's possible. And that's how I think you can build winning teams.

STAN: Jake you left the Naval Academy and joined the Marine Corps and the Marine Corps, probably more than any organization I know, has an effective process for bringing people into an existing culture and having them adopt the values and the rituals and the habits of that culture.

It's, it's extraordinarily impressive. Yet, as you get into larger organizations and diverse efforts, you need people from different tribes, not just one tribe. How do you look for leaders who are able to maintain the core of the good things they got from the tribe they might've grown up in and yet still be, we'll call it bipartisan, but, but open enough to bring different elements in?

JAKE: I think it's a, it's a mindset in leaders. When you're bringing leaders on the team, one of the things I always look for is does this leader see differences as a problem or as a strength? You know, leaders who can see, you know, you hear all this, there's a lot of talk now about DEI diversity, equity and inclusion, and, you know, having a diverse team, there's so much strength in that. And I've learned that the hard way. I have failed time and time again, early on, as a, you know, as I was learning as a Marine. I wanted to get people on board who were just like me, thought like me, weren't going to push back. But the, you know, I'd fail again and again.

So, I began to see that as I brought on folks who push my thinking all the time, right? Who were, who were totally not like me, they came from different background, different ethnicity, different race, gender, whatever it was, they were always brought new viewpoints to bare, that I hadn't even thought about. And this actually, uh, this, this became, it was, it was strong in the Marine Corps, but it was even stronger when I was in Nuru because I was working with a very international team.

I had Nigerians on my team, Ethiopians, Kenyans, folks from all across this country, all across the world actually joined me to, to work at Nuru. And, I had to learn a lot about how to build this strong team of people from all different types of backgrounds and cultures. And I, I did learn that though in the Marine Corps, what we learned in the Marine Corps was, you know, if you're, when you're in the fighting or you got your weapons trained down range on the same purpose, same target, you don't care what the guy on your left, right, looks like where they come from, what color their skin is. You're trained on the same purpose. You form these bonds that that just cannot be broken and you can take those lessons learned into any, any area, any industry, any, any walk of life. And that's what I did at Nuru as well.

CHRIS: Jake, can you, can you talk a bit about, the question would be around, sort of messaging and narrative. You admittedly don't have a political bone in your body. Stan, who I watched as a leader also is not, not a politician by nature, but both of you, I learned a lot watching Stan and how he ran the special operations units, the consistent daily seven days a week, multiple times per day, that consistent messaging around here's who we are. Here's why we're doing what we're doing.

And there is a, there's a, a hint of the sort of political talking points, that, that great leaders in any space, lever, they wouldn't describe it that way, but you see those similarities. One of the arts there that I've seen is it has to be delivered with a real passion. You can see the difference between a soapbox politician and someone that actually cares about solving this issue.

So, they could say it five times a day and it sounds real and new every single time. I'm assuming that's something you've had to do. In multiple domains that you've worked in. Any, any lessons there on how you've come to terms with the fact that you have to be a little bit of that, uh, that spokesperson for the movement?

JAKE: A couple of thoughts on that. One of the, the, the core tenants of leadership that I try to live by, I fail a lot at it, but I really believe a lot in you have, you have to be authentic. Authenticity is everything. You can't try to be somebody you're not, you can't try to be... You can't try to be Stan McChrystal if you're not Stan McChrystal.

Right. I can't try to be a leader who I am not. You gotta be true to yourself, who you are, or what your values are. And I think that's, that's really important. Second is, as I started doing this work, as you, you heard me talking about wanting to recruit country first candidates, these individuals that are American heroes are willing to put, you know, the country ahead of their own needs. What you did not hear me say is I'm running for office.

Now, the reason for that is not because I don't think it's needed or that, that we need to have folks maybe with my background to be running. But the, the, the painful reality right now in our current political landscape, is people distrust politicians. They distrust people that are in the political system. So, one of the things that we're trying to do, and as we disrupt that, and since I sometimes need to be the face, delivering the message, Chris, that you talk about. Americans who hate politicians or hate anything political are able to kind of maybe bond with me and identify with me at a different level of authenticity because they see me as like I'm not running for anything, right.

We're just trying to pull this great team together to be able to get our country back on track. And that allows me to speak into some groups and meet people where they are sometimes in a way, with a level of authenticity that I probably couldn't get at this moment in time running for office. Right. So I think authenticity is important. I think still being able to deliver the message you talked about Chris, you know, you have to deliver the message, but I think you can do it in a way that is full of passion. When I give talks, and when I give speeches, it's from my heart. Like I don't, you know, of course I practice and I, I stay on message. You have to have your talking points, all those types of things are very real, but you've got to have, if you don't have the fire in your stomach, in your belly of where it's coming from, people will smell that in a second. Right. So I had to ask myself tough questions. Like, do I really mean this? Do I really want this? Is this what I want my life to be about?

And because I can answer those, those questions yes with certainty and with passion, then people see that authenticity when I'm talking. Right. I don't have to fake it. I can just speak from my

heart. And it connects with people I think sometimes in a way that I wouldn't be able to do it otherwise.

STAN: I'm going to jump in and, and throw a curve ball at both of you, because I can. You know, you are two of the people that I admire most in the world, what you've done and your values, because I know, and I've obviously known Chris longer, and how do you answer the question in your own mind? There's always a, you know, a quick glib response at when people say, "Your country needs you to run for office."

If they look you in the eye and you think they're not just trying to be complimentary, but they actually look at you and they say, "Chris Fussell, we need you to run for office." How do you answer that in your own mind, Chris?

CHRIS: And Jake, you've had a lot of these conversations, so I would love to get, you know, reflections you've as you you've been talking to folks. You know, part of it comes down to, I mean, I would be lying if I said I hadn't thought about it.

I understand the importance of it, especially right now. Jake and I have a lot of conversations along these lines and you're the, one of the points that Jake just brought up and this is not an excuse to not do it, in fact, it's a reason to, but it makes it really hard. The lack of trust in the political space, you have this sort of sense that as soon as you cross that line, you can't...people won't believe you're trying to do it for the right reasons. And so, there's a lot that you perception of a lot that you're going to lose in that, in that. Which is probably, I imagine Jake would say, that's the type of person we want, but it's, there's a, there's a big hurdle there. I think that people have to come to terms with.

JAKE: I mean, you you've spoken so beautifully. Like as I'm recruiting folks to do this. I'm not going out. I'm not going out to the hill down here, down the street here to Capitol Hill and recruiting, sitting congressmen. I'm recruiting people who do not want to do this, kicking and screaming into these races. And I'm saying, look, my pitch to these veterans right now is you fought violence from his mercies and defendant's country and, and defend the idea that this nation stands for boldly and nobly, and we owe you a great debt.

However, this country is now the same democracy is in danger again, against the threat of extremism. This time at home, I'm asking you to do one more six year tour. This time in the Senate, go in there, build this center, and then you go home after that, knowing you, you saved the republic, right? That really resonates with people. And, I keep pelting Chris with this, like, he's a perfect type of guy to do this. And that's the, that's the, that's the type of profile – men and women of courage. Because by the way, it's not just about physical courage. I don't recruit from the special operations community because of physical courage.

It's about moral courage, right? It's being able to do the tough thing when it's not in your best interest. You know, and there are brave, bold Americans out there right now that do not want them... who would want to run for Senate right now? You'd have to be crazy. But those types of

individuals, there are, there are people like us who are just crazy enough to do this, who understand what's really on the line.

And I would tell you, I'll tell you both. I really believe right now our democracy is in danger. And it's not because of a certain political party or a certain person, it's because we are fracturing at the seams and it requires leadership. Leadership is the answer that can bring us back together. The right type of leaders, we don't have enough of them right now, and we need them at the top.

Right. So that's why we're going all out. And so, Stan, I mean, I think that is a lot of the, the, the pushback that I get is at which I completely understand. For a lot of these guys and gals it's, it's a tough time. They have families, they are growing businesses.

They have a great life. And again, why would you want to get into politics? Why would you want to leave that? And my only answer to that is that is of any kind of worth, is your country needs you right now, like never before.

STAN: Yeah. It's an extraordinarily difficult question. Chris.

CHRIS: Yeah. Maybe a level up or separate on that axis though. What sort of, when you talk with donors or others that can be part of this movement, not the people you're asking them to get into races, what are the negatives that people see? Like to Stan's earlier point, of course we'd love the country to be better, but are there legitimate arguments of why this isn't feasible right now that, that you have to, uh, interact with, react to?

JAKE: Sure. I think so. Some... there's a little bit of tribalism, so, you know, especially in the donor class, sometimes people want to hold onto their party and they it's tough for them to push past that, which I get, I understand that. You know, people are all the time down on the kind of what's called both sides-ism. You know, like I'm a big believer that we have problems on both sides of the political aisle. And there's a lot of people that are frustrated by that kind of language right now.

But it's true. We have problems on both sides of the aisle right now. And I think, uh, there are those out there that would be happy to see us with one political party. But again, Stan, to your earlier point, you know, we need different voices at the table to make us stronger. That's... America is not a one-party monotonous voice. We are a plethora of millions of voices, all different, and those differences make us so special. They make us unique. They make us who we are, you know, from the very beginning from our founding.

And I think we really, you know, I, I'm a big believer that America has yet to deliver on our promise, but we could, right. America is a living bold breathing idea. It's like leadership. You never arrive as a leader, right. America. We're never gonna, we're never gonna arrive as, as this perfect nation, but it's the striving that makes us who we are.

STAN: This is extraordinarily powerful, Jake. Let me just throw one final question. And it's something that Chris started in our leadership seminar that we teach at Yale, and we asked young

students to write their obituary and we asked them to describe, if it's honestly written. If it's, if it's accurate, what would you like written about you? What what's important to you?

JAKE: I would say he was a man who loved his family with everything that he had, a man of hope who fought for the idea of America, and he left it all on the field.

STAN: Brilliant.

CHRIS: Jake, great discussion. Really appreciate what you're doing, admire what you're doing, admire your leadership and your courage. Thank you for taking time.

JAKE: I admire you guys. Thanks a lot for this opportunity. I really appreciate it.

STAN: Thanks, Jake.

CHRIS: Thanks, Jake.

So, let's dive into reflections on a great discussion with, with Jake. You know, I never served with Jake, we had a lot of overlap. I'm sure we ate in the same chow hall in Iraq at some point, you know? But he had, you know, as in the community to both came up, these folks that have this sort of larger than life, personality and reputation. He was certainly one of them, everybody heard his name. You know, even back in the day when we're all just run around in uniform. So it was no surprise when he on, went on to establish Nuru and then what he's doing now.

But what's interesting, if you read his bio and you, you know, okay, this guy has been on the stage of the Dalai Lama and you know, all this amazing stuff, you wouldn't expect what you meet when you encounter Jake, because he driven by humility and hard work. And it's really, really impressive to see that he hasn't lost. He's just so grounded. It's really impressive.

STAN: You and I both know that in the military veteran community, particularly in special operations, there's a minority, but there is a population of opportunists who have collected certain qualifications and then they wear them, like an advertisement. Some have gone into politics and, and gotten fairly successful, but they're not genuine, not respected inside the communities. They're not deeply admired by their peers, but, but that's not obvious to people.

Jake's the opposite. As you described, Jake is so purely focused and humble in his approach that when I'm around him, I have a sense of deep appreciation for what he, for what he brings.

CHRIS: Yeah. And there's, um, there's... no one just lives in Africa for six years, you know, and the work he's doing now. I mean, he has sleeves up working 80 hours a week, where he could just be at fundraising dinners and hobnobbing on the hill and he is not doing that. And there's that level of authenticity and he mentioned that is you can't make it up. Right. So, I think it's, it's one of the very transferrable lessons from a leader like Jake to others.

Also jumped out at me, his, on that thread, that sort of the, the genuineness that a leader has to have, I think, as the problems get bigger and more complex, I appreciated him being honest and

saying, "I had to reflect on myself and say, is this the thing? Am I going to be, am I truly invested in this?" And obviously made the decision that he, that he is. But, you know, that, that lack of authenticity, I think a lot of leaders come to learn the hard way. It's pretty transparent at a certain level.

STAN: Yeah. What, when I think of leaders like that, and I, and I don't want to do a false comparison, but I think the Dalai Lama or Gandhi, or Dr. Martin Luther King, Jr. who become a moral presence, they become a reminder to all of us of certain causes are worth committing yourself to, even though it has great personal cost and we can't all be that, but we need those people.

And, and I think Jake's willingness to sacrifice so much, and his wisdom and not running for office, although I'd love to see him in office because I actually think he may be in a place he can leverage his moral suasion more.

CHRIS: Yeah, I'd like that he, unapologetically, compares what he's doing now to lessons he learned from insurgents around the world. Right. And it's, uh, it's a great model. I mean, it, I think in the corporate space, people would say, it's like the Challenger model. You're going to be the new upstart that's going to take over a space. But all of that thinking is the same. Like the Challenger model is the person that leaves the big company and says, "I know how the system works now I'm going to do it better."

And he is, he's building out a team and an approach that is built about around some really smart thinking. I'd love to just get your thoughts on the bigger issue for, for a little bit, that Jake is wrestling with right now. Cause it's, and this isn't a part of the statement, I don't really care where you fall out on the political spectrum, we have to solve this. Right. And I don't, I don't see a better idea out there, with more practical aims than what, what Jake is doing. But it is, one that I think is a real risk to my kids who are 10 and 12. Like if we don't get something right, the country could be significantly different by the time they're my age.

STAN: I couldn't agree more. I know there's always been politics in American governance and that's the nature of the system. But the extremism now, the fact that you are rewarded for being more extreme and vocally extreme. And I would say irritatingly extreme because that's what gets you on TV, that gets you in print, that's what gets you followers, who, and I will be very open a lot of the followers aren't doing much critical thought. I think unless we can break that cycle, then we can't get back toward the middle. We can't get people like you in the Senate where you desperately need to be, because you just don't want to be in a snake pit if everybody else is a snake.

And so, there's an excuse that, that politicians often make - now I have to do this because of these dynamics and I, I take it at face value, but it's self-defeating for our nation. It is ultimately going to be extraordinarily costly and maybe fatal to our democracy.

CHRIS: Yeah. And it's so layered. It reminds me of the, some of what he's wrestling with or the bigger challenge there's hearkens back to the conversation we have with Tristan Harris. There's a

connection point between those two, just the, the ability to manipulate the noise. You know, Tristan talks about the, the brain implant that we all have whether we realize it or not. There's just the injection of information that's unvalidated and can be easily twisted. Um, and so that's one of the big hurdles that I think Jake faces. But his, his argument and his approach is compelling.

Right? He's got the numbers, he knows where he wants to get people from, and he knows what he wants to ask them to do. Which I love his comparison to it's a tour, you know, it's going to be six years and here's what we have to accomplish. And if anybody can get there, I think it's him. Yeah, I agree.

STAN: Yep. A few years ago, Senators Bill Bradley and and they were both out of office when they spoke to me and they, they laid out a concept they had that I thought was very compelling and it was to try to get between 25 and 50 members of Congress, who were veterans, to come in and basically pledged to be bipartisan.

And they would create a block in the center that neither party could succeed on legislation without getting that block. And so, the idea was to form this, a fulcrum that would require the other two ends of the party to come toward the center. Now they haven't managed to do that, but what Jake is trying to do is very similar. And so I think that... well, I'm in full support. As you know, I support him on the way in this effort.

CHRIS: One quick question, before we wrap up and you know, my home state of West Virginia, Joe Manchin, right? Rightfully is, is the center a lot of attention right now in the work, that he's doing to try to drive that, that bipartisanship.

I'm curious from your perspective being, you know, one generation earlier than me and, you know Manchin well, is the work ... the work he's doing is important. 20, 30, 40 years ago, would... I think there would have been, that was just politics. There would have been dozens of Joe Manchins in the Senate. And it's only interesting because he's the last one.

STAN: That's right. And that's why he stands out because you're right, that would have been the majority in the Senate. We're thinking like Joe Manchin and working deals and whatnot. And he sticks out so much right now, and of course, he's attacked by many people because he's in the way of certain progress and what he's desperately trying to do is to keep the institution alive.

It's his sense that as soon as the last pillar falls, we are going to be locked in this binary sense of partisanship that just won't get back. And, and it's hard for me to disagree with that. I'm not sure whether the last man standing is enough to pull people back to it. But I think that the nature of the institution needs that kind of individual with, you know, if we write about profiles in courage, he's probably a chapter right now.

CHRIS: Well, I read this quote recently that said, make sure you have people in your life that make you feel like you're not doing enough.

STAN: I got a bunch of them.

CHRIS: But Jake is definitely one of those guys. I mean, he just, he is nonstop and it's so genuine that it just really makes you think, okay. Where should I be focusing my efforts?

So, we really appreciate him taking the time and the work that he continues to do on behalf of all of us.