

THE ECONOMIC CLUB

O F W A S H I N G T O N , D . C .

Signature Event

**The Honorable Wes Moore, Governor of Maryland and
The Honorable Spencer J. Cox, Governor of Utah**

Speakers

**The Honorable Wes Moore
Governor of Maryland**

**The Honorable Spencer J. Cox
Governor of Utah**

Moderator

**Judy Woodruff
Senior Correspondent (former Anchor and Managing Editor)
PBS NewsHour**

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JUDY WOODRUFF: Everyone want to welcome the governors again? [Applause.]

So, the reason this has come about, in large part, is because the National Governors Association is meeting in Washington this week. Governor Cox, you are the chair of the Governors Association this year, and your initiative that you've been putting a lot of focus on is called Disagree Better.

I want to ask the two of you what does that mean? Why disagree better right now?

UTAH GOVERNOR SPENCER J. COX: Sure, Judy. Well, let me start by just thanking everybody for being here. It's such an honor, and I'm so excited to be here with my good friend, Wes Moore. And by the way, I'm in cycle right now, so I'm up for reelection this year, and me just saying, my good friend, Wes Moore, is a true testament of courage, I think – [laughter] – in this –

MARYLAND GOVERNOR WES MOORE: I think so, too. [Laughs.]

GOV. COX: – in this type of electoral cycle.

Look – and I mean that a little tongue-in-cheek, but Judy, that's the issue that has really got my attention. So as chair of the National Governors Association, we get to do an initiative every year, and I was really excited. I looked back at some of my predecessors. Governor Hogan, he focused on infrastructure, and that gives you an idea, kind of more traditionally, what – you know, we've had education initiatives.

I was looking specifically at healthcare – you know, what can we do to reduce the cost of healthcare. I was looking at critical minerals and energy policy, and my team, as we were talking, we just had this realization that we can't accomplish or solve the biggest problems facing our nation today if we – if we all hate each other. And so, when we looked at what we felt was the single-most pressing problem in our country, it is the contempt that we feel for our fellow Americans. And so we thought, could we try something around that, could we put an initiative together where the last adults in the room – governors, when it comes to politics – could show that there is a better way to do this, and again, not just some new way, but the way we used to do it here in the United States; that we could actually disagree – and this was really important. This isn't just another civility initiative, it's not just about being nice to each other, although we desperately need more of that. It is relearning how to disagree the right way, how to have debate, how to stay true to your principles, your core values, without demeaning and tearing apart the other side, and in so doing, actually find where there is common ground and where we can meet each other to solve problems. So that was the idea behind this initiative, and we had no idea how it would be received. But there is an exhausted majority out there, and it has been very well received.

MS. WOODRUFF: Governor Moore, why did you want to be part of this?

GOV. MOORE: You know, I just – I believe deeply that you can't claim to love the country if you hate half of the people in it.

GOV. COX: Amen.

GOV. MOORE: It just doesn't make sense. And I – [applause] – and I just think that – you know, and I'll just tell you, you know, one, why I agree is because – is because my good friend asked. And I have to tell you, you know, when we first – when I first was inaugurated, we went down to baby governors school, as they call it, for all the new governors.

It's so funny. When I got back, my mom asked me, she said: What grade did you get? I was, like – [laughter] – it doesn't work like that, Mom.

GOV. COX: He got an A. [Laughter.]

GOV. MOORE: But one of the first people who came and embraced me, and helped me, and has consistently reached out and asked how things are going, has been – is the Republican governor of Utah, Governor Cox; like he's been a real friend.

And so, I think about what it means where, you know, I don't come from a political family, I don't come from a political background; you know, I was a combat veteran with the 82nd Airborne, I ran a small business in Maryland, and then I ran one of the largest poverty-fighting organizations in this country.

I've been an elected official for 13 months. And the thing that I know is that this whole divisive left, right, what party are you a part of – I didn't come up in that culture. I wasn't raised in that culture. You know, I'd say that I had to convince members of my family to vote for me – [laughter] – but it wasn't because I'm not cool with my family. I'm very cool with my family. It's because there are members of my family who had never voted.

So, the idea that we're supposed to hate somebody because of their political affiliation is not something that I understood. It's not something that I came up in, and I have no desire of learning that. And so, I just believe deeply that if we're actually going to get stuff done that it means understanding and getting back to the basic humanity of what it is we're trying to accomplish and keep that as your north star.

MS. WOODRUFF: Governor Cox, what do you think is at the bottom of this polarization, this polarized time we are living in? What do you think is the cause of it?

GOV. COX: Well, you've been trying to chronicle that for several months. I should be asking you that question, but I think both of us have lots of answers about what's at the bottom of it, and there – I could spend all afternoon on this but let me try to be concise here.

So, this is something that started several years ago – a few decades ago, maybe the '90s – early '90s was when we started to see that division happening in Congress. And certainly, certain politicians have figured out how to take advantage of dividing us to help themselves, using fear and anger. It's very motivating.

Look, there are different ways to motivate. We both love sports. There are basketball coaches that inspire you to run through a wall for them, do anything, and there are basketball coaches who literally choke you, and, you know, they're – out of fear – may he rest in peace – [laughter] – but out of fear, and fear can be very motivating, right? Fear can be very motivating. So, there's that piece.

And then what happened was the internet and social media, which was supposed to bring us all together, has done the exact opposite at a time when – and again, I could spend all day talking about loneliness in America and how critical that is. Dr. Putnam famously – now over 20 years ago, gosh – “Bowling Alone,” the book that was so well-received, and started to help us understand that, as Americans, we are losing community, and we're losing the institutions that have historically brought us together. We're less religious than ever before, and if you go back – I know you don't want a lesson on de Tocqueville in the 1830s, but I can give you one – but what America looked like then, and all these community institutions like religion and others that brought us together to take care of each other, they're all falling apart. And so, we're lonely. We're wired for connection, we're desperate, and now we don't have it, so we're finding it in unhealthy places. And, you know, if I don't have any real friends, at least I can – we can hate the same people together on Facebook, right? That's where we are and what we're doing now.

And I want to go back to something that Wes said: this idea that there is nothing more un-American than hating our fellow Americans, right? We didn't – we never defined ourselves by our political parties growing up. I didn't not know who the Republicans were in my town, who the Democrats were in my congregation. I did not know that. That was like the 20th thing or 30th thing you would rank yourselves at. We were Americans first – Utahns, Utah Jazz fans, you know, Patriots fans, Jets fans, whatever.

MS. WOODRUFF: Right.

GOV. COX: That –

GOV. MOORE: Who?

GOV. COX: We were – yes, not Jets fans, oh, sorry. [Laughter.]

But we were dads, we were – you know, we were Mormons, or Catholics, or – that was so far down the list, and now it's the first thing. It's the first thing most people define themselves as. That is crazy and so unhealthy in a pluralistic society like ours. If that's how we see ourselves first and foremost, we're sincerely in trouble. So, I'm grateful to find people – but I do think that's how it all kind of came together. Then we have a pandemic which makes things, you know, even worse. We're more divided, and we've got to get back to redefining ourselves.

MS. WOODRUFF: Governor Moore, you – I know you've been thinking a lot about this as you just said. From where you sit – I mean, you've been in office 13 months – what do you see? What is going on that's driving this harsh partisanship?

GOV. MOORE: I think a lot of what's going on is that people are just opting out. They are opting into their own social corners. They are opting into, you know, listening to news not to be educated but to be validated. They are opting out of having a measure of societal connection. And so, you know, it's interesting because, when we first came on board, I remember during my first inaugural – during my first State of the State, you know, I talked about the idea that I want Maryland to be the state that serves, and I want us to be the state that serves because I knew that, you know – and why we pushed in our first legislative session. One of the first things we pushed and got done, and got done in our first 90 days, is Maryland is now the first state in this country that has a service-year option for all of our high school graduates. [Applause.] So, all of our high school graduates now have a chance to have a year of service to the state of Maryland, and they can choose however they want to do it. They can serve seniors, they can serve young people, they can serve veterans, they can serve returning citizens, the environment – completely their choice. I say you find that thing that makes your heart beat faster, and we just want to foster a way for you to do it.

But there is a couple of big reasons why I prioritized it. One is I'm a big believer in experiential learning – you know, give people an opportunity to find that item and give them a pathway to do it; big believer in financial cushions and earned financial cushions, and that people – that service is not something that people should just do because, but there actually should be a financial incentive to do it. That's also how you democratize it. It's fantastic for workforce training, but the big reason? It's because service is sticky. Those who serve together generally stay together, and I know I saw that with people – I served with people in Afghanistan who came and campaigned for me when I was running for governor. Many of them were not Marylanders. Many of them were not Democrats, but they literally came from their homes and where they lived to come and door knock on my behalf and were simply knocking on doors and saying, let me tell you about the guy that I served with.

So I believe in this time of this political divisiveness and political vitriol that service will save us, and that's why we want to make our state the state that serves; because we believe that's a core way of being able to heal these divides because if we're a state that gets to know each other again, we're going to be a state that's willing to compete together and actually is ready to win.

MS. WOODRUFF: And we are here at The Economic Club of Washington, and there are so many questions I have for the two of you, but I do want to start at this point with a question about the economy because just a few blocks from here Congress is deadlocked over the budget. We are just a few weeks away from what could be – and I'll start with you, Governor Moore, on this – a government shutdown –

GOV. MOORE: Yes.

MS. WOODRUFF: – because they can't come to an agreement over spending. What would the impact of that be?

GOV. MOORE: Oh, it will be severe on us. I mean, we're talking about a state that has the third highest level of federal jobs and workforce is the state of Maryland. I mean, there are

jurisdictions in our – in our state – for example, Prince George’s Country, which is one of the largest jurisdictions in the state of Maryland, 23 percent of their – of our employees in Prince George’s County have some form of – some form of connection to the federal government. It’s disastrous, and it’s avoidable.

MS. WOODRUFF: And, Governor Cox, what we’ve seen is over the last – there was a budget deal last year. It didn’t hold. A number of House Republicans came back and said, no, we want deeper cuts; this is not enough, and here we are.

How do you see it?

GOV. COX: Yeah, the same way. Look, this is devastating for every state, right, and for all of us as Americans. And we should all be completely embarrassed by the fact that – like this is the only thing they’re supposed to do, guys; like it’s the one thing, the one thing –

GOV. MOORE: That’s right.

GOV. COX: – the one thing that they are back there to do. And look, this is what happens – again, going back to what we were talking about earlier, this divisiveness, this corrosiveness – that we are elevating – and social media helps to do this, traditional media, cable news helps to do this – to elevate the extreme voices. See, we’ve got the incentive structure all wrong now in America. We’re elevating the loudest voices in the room, so what’s happening is politics is now full of just performers, right – not people who want to solve a problem – speaking of Congress.

The thing about governors is we still have to do stuff, right, like potholes are not partisan. We have to do stuff. They are supposed to do stuff, but they are not, and that when we elevate performers who have no incentive to actually accomplish anything – look, I still use the traditional kind of right-left framing because we all do – it’s shorthand for so many things – but in my more lucid moments, I get rid of those terms and I look at builders and destroyers because there are builders on the right and the left and the middle, and there are destroyers on the right and the left, and probably some in the middle. But who are the people that are building, that are trying to create something. It’s so easy to tear down. And now we have a Congress full of people who are good at tearing things down but terrible at building anything.

MS. WOODRUFF: Is it your sense that people are even talking to each other, listening to each other on questions as fundamental as this in Congress?

GOV. MOORE: I mean, it’s difficult to see any evidence of that. I mean – and I think – and Governor Cox is right; I mean, the challenge is that we don’t have that luxury, right? Every single year we have to balance our budget. Every single year the budget that I present to the legislature is a budget that is balanced by constitutional mandate, right? So, every single – and I’ll tell you what’s really frustrating about it, as well, is this: is that there are things that – on the state level that we can fundamentally do to be able to get our economic engines going. You know, when I first took office, Maryland was ranked 47th in the country in economic momentum. We were ranked – you know, over the past five years our economy had grown by 0.2 percent. The average state had grown by 7.5 percent, right? Our unemployment rate – we

were ranked 43rd in the country in unemployment. So, we knew that one of my first priorities was we've got to get this economy going. We've got to have more people that are entering into the economy. We need to make sure we're investing in industries of the future. We need to be deliberate about how we are utilizing our balance sheet.

And if you look at where we are right now, right, Maryland is now – we've now jumped 20 slots in economic momentum, one of the fastest-growing economies in the entire country. We now, for the past five months, have the lowest unemployment rate in America – for the past five months, right? We have an economy that's actually moving, and now we're sitting there having debates about government shutdowns. Now we're sitting there having debates because we, as governors, deal with the consequences of broken border policies because there is no governor who is in charge of immigration.

MS. WOODRUFF: And I want to ask you about that.

GOV. MOORE: And so that's – but that's why this does become so frustrating and why that level of engagement, the level of thoughtfulness that governors have to bring into this work. There are consequences to dysfunction.

GOV. COX: And as the – as the best economy in the last 10 years, Utah – [laughter] – I want to – no –

GOV. MOORE: The historic supremacy, I will acknowledge that. [Laughter.] I was talking about present. But yes. [Laughter.]

GOV. COX: No, no, no, but – because this is really important. It's like we've always felt – and you're feeling it now – that we're like a race car with a parachute on the back, and the federal government is the parachute. When they can't do simple stuff like this –

MS. WOODRUFF: Do you think you can have any influence on them?

GOV. COX: – it's just a drag.

MS. WOODRUFF: Do you feel –

GOV. COX: Can we have any influence –

MS. WOODRUFF: On what – can you, as a governor, have influence on this – on this particular impasse right now?

GOV. COX: If I could, we would have fixed it a long time ago. Look, again, you are talking to people who aren't interested in fixing the problem – too many of them. Not all of them – obviously, there are great people in Congress. I don't mean to disparage all of them, but – [laughter] – look, I know, it's 99 percent of Congress that gives the other 1 percent a really bad name. [Laughter.] And it's really hard when they are not interested in listening to anyone.

GOV. MOORE: But I – the only thing – I would push on that only a little bit by simply saying I do think it's important to not underestimate the voices that governors do have in this, and the collective voice that governors can speak on, and why this becomes so important because I think that people understand that governors – we're the closest to the people, right? You know, like – and as we always say, the people who are closest to the challenges are oftentimes the ones who are closest to the solutions. And so I think – I do think the collective voice of governors – that governors can and should have on this, I do think that does matter, and also why I applaud, you know, the work of the NGA and why we're here during this moment is because I do think it's important for people in Congress and for people in Washington to hear a collective voice from people who are directly responsible and directly touching the people, and saying, we need you all to act.

And so, I think it is actually very appropriate and very important that, in a week when so much is being decided, that the governors are coming together and saying, you know, we have – we have a – we have a concerted voice.

GOV. COX: And I will say that Governor Murphy, who was the chair when I was the vice chair, and now Governor Polis, who is my vice chair, we've weighed in on behalf of the National Governors Association on every one of these budget negotiations and so many other policies.

MS. WOODRUFF: Governor Moore, you brought up immigration. As we know, there has been an unprecedented surge of migrants coming across the southern border. We now have Republicans saying the border is out of control. They have turned it into a huge issue. Is that criticism accurate?

GOV. MOORE: Yes, very accurate. It's very accurate because, I mean, and it's – it is remarkably frustrating because it's the governors who end up taking on the brunt, right? It's the governors who end up taking on the responsibility of making sure that people are safe, and housed, and clothed, et cetera, and without any form of either – you know, without enough supports and without enough policy that can really help to come up with a long-term solution.

I actually signed a letter with eight other governors a little over a month ago, just, you know, asking Congress to be able to move on both budgetary allocation coming towards the state, but also coming up with a border policy that's actually functional. And so, it does have very real implications because, you know, the responsible governors – our habit is not going to be, well, let's just ship them off to other governors, right? Responsible governors don't do that.

Well, speaking of border policy, Governor Cox – someone you know, I'm sure – Senator James Lankford, conservative – long-time conservative, state of Oklahoma – helped to lead a bipartisan effort to come up with a proposal that would be acceptable to both sides that involves giving the president the authority to cut off all immigration for a period, makes it harder to grant legal asylum. As we know, that's been rejected.

GOV. COX: Yes.

MS. WOODRUFF: What happens now when something that's been led by someone, you know, at the heart of conservative thinking, doesn't work?

GOV. COX: Yeah, it's incredibly frustrating. You know, I don't know what else to say. I mean, I think this is a very complicated issue when we try to simplify it, and I think both sides do this a little too much. There is so much more the president could be doing right now, and there is so much that Congress needs to do as well, and Congress has kicked this can down the road now for 40 years and continues to do so. But even that one, I think it's just illustrative of how broken our Congress is right now.

Yes, I understand, you know, the way it happened, and who was responsible for doing the negotiation, but those negotiations happened behind closed doors. Ninety-nine percent of Congress never saw that law until it was actually presented to them, and then there – you know, I don't know how you do it in your state, but I'm pretty sure it's not like that. It's certainly not like that in my state. You're supposed to, you know, negotiate, bring it out, let people offer amendments, go through a process, and that didn't happen at all. And so, yeah, there are a lot of people who felt left out of that process, and then Republicans bolted.

Again, there has to be a fix, and we have to have willing people who are willing to do that. I admit that my side probably should have stayed at the table longer and done that. But then last night you have three candidates for senator, Democrats in California, saying they would not have supported that bill as well.

So, I – you know, I don't know what the answer is. I just know that we're not getting any answers by the way they are doing it right now.

MS. WOODRUFF: Part of what we're talking about here – not the whole thing by any means – is the tone. The two of you disagree on a number of issues, but you are able to have a conversation, you're able to talk about it. And yet – I just want to cite just a couple of – there are many examples I could cite. Just recently a senator from the state of Utah, Mike Lee, charged that Democrats – in his words – “hate the Bill of Rights.” For her part, Democratic Congresswoman Alexandria Ocasio-Cortez of New York – she was talking about immigration, and she said Republicans want to roll back child labor laws.

How do you – I mean, this is just two examples out of thousands of others – how do you inject civil conversation, discussion at a time like this?

GOV. MOORE: I mean, I actually care about getting things done, and I just know that, you know, performative, emotive splurges is not how you do it. You know, I think – you know, I think about our first session where, you know, we introduced 10 bills in our first legislative session. We went 10 for 10, and we didn't just go 10 for 10, we went 10 for 10 bipartisan. We got Democrat and Republican supports on every single bill that we introduced. We're now in our second legislative session and – you know, and knock on wood, you know, we're feeling pretty good that we'll be able to – you know, we're going to be able to match the idea of bringing both Democrats and Republicans on every single bill that we're going to get passed.

It matters because I think they see that there is a real partner in this work. It matters in that people say, well, how did you do it? I said, I actually did outreach. I actually went to their districts. I went to go talk to them. I spent time with their families, I spent time with their constituents, and we then made the argument as to why fighting child poverty is not a Democratic issue; it's an issue that's hitting your districts, too. Why making sure that we had put together the most aggressive housing package in two generations in our state – that wasn't because it's only going to impact Democratic areas. It's because the housing shortage that is taking place in the state of Maryland is impacting urban, rural and suburban parts of the state.

And so, I just – I think it fundamentally comes down to do you actually want to get something done, do you actually want to accomplish anything, or do you actually benefit from the dysfunction. And I think for the people that actually want to get things done because we actually want to take this moment seriously and these roles and responsibilities seriously that we're in, I think you have to come up with a way of actually engaging people instead of demonizing them because you're not going to get a different type of conclusion.

MS. WOODRUFF: Do enough people want to get it done, and what do you do about that civil tone?

GOV. COX: Yes, so there are so many great things that Governor Moore just said there that I think I just want to underscore. He's talking about persuasion and this idea that we can actually still persuade people to work on a problem. We've gotten so far away from persuasion in both political parties, and when you do that – so I've really – we've spent a tremendous amount of time working with experts on polarization, to understand what polarization – what's actually happening in our country today. And there are different types of polarization, but it turns out that we're not as partisan polarized as we think we are. Now I know that sounds weird. We just spent, like, you know, a half hour telling you how polarized we are, and now I'm telling you we're not. And what I mean by that is if you actually interview Republicans and Democrats on certain issues like immigration or abortion or whatever – you name the issue – and I will show you polling that shows that the median Republican and the median Democrat aren't that far apart in what they actually believe.

But here's the problem. The problem is that we think we're that far apart – we think we're this far apart, right, and we have politicians who win by making us think we're this far apart. And that's why I have to – you know, I have to convince you all that Governor Moore hates the Constitution and hates our country, right? Or Governor Moore has to convince people that Governor Cox hates immigrants and hates the environment, right? If we can do that, then it's so much easier to get our base to just fall in line and not ever listen to the other side when none of that is true.

And so I think that's incredibly dangerous, and we know it's dangerous because the experts have told us that when you think that the other side is willing to violate democratic norms or engage in illegal or even violent behavior, then you become much more permissive with your side, then you are much more willing to allow your side to violate democratic norms and engage in even violent behavior because that's what it's going to take to save what's so important to us.

When you realize – and again, there is a great study at Stanford where they ran these different experiments, including an ad that I did with my Democratic opponent a couple of years ago, where they engaged over 30,000 people and found that when you saw that the other side wasn't as far apart as you think they are, then your willingness to engage in violent behavior or violate democratic norms goes way down.

And so that's – I do think that there still is an exhausted majority. We know that the polls show that 70 to 75 percent of Americans hate what's happening in politics right now – the exhausted majority. By the way, they hate both major candidates for president, as well – they don't want either of them to run for president, and yet here we are. And so, it's leading us down this path that's very dangerous. But if you can have people like Governor Moore and others who are willing to just stand up and say, hey, I disagree on abortion – I disagree passionately on abortion with Governor Cox, but I don't hate Governor Cox. I don't think Governor Cox is a bad guy, and we're going to figure out how to work through this, then that brings us all back to the table. And you have to have that in a pluralistic society to survive.

MS. WOODRUFF: And that's – and actually you're getting to what I wanted to ask you now, which is I wanted to just raise a couple of very difficult issues, like abortion. What would be an example of a civil, productive discussion, debate about abortion? I mean, what would it even sound like, and I'm not asking you to go through all the details of your thinking, but what would it even look like?

GOV. COX: So, I think there's a couple ways this could go, right? So, one, we can debate when life starts and, you know, the value of life. Those debates have been going on for a long time. We know we're probably going to end up at a different place than that.

So are there some areas where we could find agreement, and I'm just positing this because he and I have not had this debate. Governor Polis and I actually have had this debate, and what we realized was there are some areas where we could focus on and that is could we focus on making abortion as rare as possible because most pro-abortion people also believe that abortion is not a great thing; they would prefer that that didn't happen, right? So, could we agree on, you know, sex education or contraception availability – something like that? Could we – could we do more to help single moms and babies? If we care about life, we should care about all life, not just life until it's born, right? And so, could we focus on those areas? Are there places for agreement? We know we're never going to agree on this piece, but could we agree on that piece? And I think those are – again, that's an area for rational debate and rational problem-solving.

MS. WOODRUFF: What would you add on abortion? Is it possible to have, in that highly-charged subject, a civil debate?

GOV. MOORE: It is, because I think that there's a difference between having a civil – a civil debate but also saying that we're all going to come to the same in conclusion. We might not come to the same in conclusion because, you know – but for example, you know, I think about the work that we did last year where, you know, yes, we – you know, we passed legislation that

focused on things like privacy and protections of people – of people both performing – both patients and providers of abortion. And this year, you know, we helped to lead an initiative where now abortion rights and reproductive health care is going to be on the ballot for the state of Maryland to put it in our constitution, you know.

But even though I – you know, even though my belief on abortion is that abortion and reproductive – and reproductive rights, that's health care. That's women's health care, and I'm not going to take away a woman's right to her health care on that. I also know that the ability to focus on things like education and prevention like we did working with upstream, and knowing that, you know, part of reproductive health also does mean making sure that women and girls are getting the education that they need about family planning and that type of thing. So, I think that there is a way that, even if we end up at a different point at the conclusion, there is about how can you have a respectful debate and respectful disagreement without being – without it turning vitriolic.

MS. WOODRUFF: Here's another very difficult issue: guns, crime. How – Governor Moore, I'll start with you on this. What would a – [laughs] – again, a civil discussion that – a productive discussion look like, even, on guns?

GOV. MOORE: Well, I mean, and this is – this is a – you know, it's, again, a very challenging and a very personal issue for me. You know, I'm a – I'm a person who, you know, spent my – you know, from the time I was 17 years old, you know, that's when I joined the United States Army. I served with, trained with, and deployed with paratroopers, and where we spent most of our time being trained up on weapons and multiple calibers. And I have seen firsthand how destructive they are. I've seen firsthand what they do to the – to the human body. I grew up in neighborhoods where the idea of public safety was always a want and not a have.

And so, when I think about putting together responsible and, you know, common-sense gun laws, as we've done in the state of Maryland, it's not about are you taking away people's freedoms. The way I look at it is, are you actually offering a sense of freedom to people to be able to grow up in safety in their own neighborhoods and to grow up in safety in their own communities? And so when we said things like that, you know, there's – that a person who has a history of mental illness and a history of violence should not be able to be able to get their hands on a firearm; that a person, you know, that – you know, that anyone under, you know, the – you know, the – of a certain age should not be able to get their hands on a gun; that there's no reason for a person to bring a firearm into a nursery or into an amusement park or into a home of worship; so we said that there are just common-sense gun laws that you can put in place that even for people who believe in a Second Amendment or even people who believe that people have – you know, that we're not about taking away firearms from people, but what we are about, though, is making sure that people can and should feel safe in their own neighborhoods and can feel safe in their own communities.

MS. WOODRUFF: What would that discussion look like, that debate look like, to you?

GOV. COX: Yeah. I mean, obviously, in Utah the debate would be a little different. And I think what I'm fascinated in this discussion, where I would – I would start when we're having

this debate as he started, talking about his background and growing up. My background is very different. I grew up in a rural community, small town of 1,200 people. I grew up on a farm. I had a gun in my truck every day when I drove to school my sophomore, junior, senior year, as did all of my friends. I had a 22 – a 12-gauge shotgun or a .30-06 depending on what we were hunting after school. That was – that was kind of – you know, that’s the way I was raised. It was very – now you would never drive to school with a – you know, a shotgun in your truck, right? That’s crazy. I mean, I get that that’s crazy. This was absolutely normal. You know, you were weird if you didn’t have a shotgun in your truck when we went to school. And I think that that’s – again, that’s an important starting place for me and very different than for him.

And when we – when we recognize those differences instead of dehumanizing and attacking – like, you’re just trying to take – you’re trying to take guns away; you’re trying to – you’re destroying the Constitution, right, so I’ve got to hold on. Or, vice versa, like, you want kids to die, you know; what’s wrong with you? That’s – you can’t get to an even starting line when that’s where we’re starting from.

And I do think it’s important – and I want to underscore this – it’s OK – it’s OK that the laws in Maryland are different than the laws in Utah. It’s not just OK; that was how our country was founded. I think one of the problems that we’ve gotten ourselves into is this idea that every state, we all have to have exactly the same laws. And people naturally push against that. But federalism was important then and it’s important now. And if we had a little more of that, I think there would be a little less tension at the federal level.

MS. WOODRUFF: Another issue, again, that’s getting a lot of attention, become very hot, difficult: diversity – diversity, equity, and inclusion. Governor Cox, you just recently, this last month, signed legislation restricting what your – the state can do, what state-supported schools can do. Talk about your thinking about thinking about that issue.

GOV. COX: Sure.

MS. WOODRUFF: And then talk about – I want to hear both of you talk about how you have a discussion about DEI.

GOV. COX: Yeah. So, I actually wrote 5,000 words about DEI a couple days ago. I know you’re all dying to read 5,000 words by the governor of Utah about DEI. [Laughter.] And so I would – I would encourage you to do that if you have nothing else going on later today.

But to me, this was a – this was a really critical discussion. And what we did in Utah was a little different than what’s happened in some other – in some other places, in some other states. I was looking for a more positive vision about what does this look like. I do not believe that government should discriminate on the basis of race, ever, at all, period. I take a very universalist approach. I am a student of Dr. King and the Civil Rights Movement, and I have tried – this idea that a White person can’t understand what someone of color has experienced, I get that. I can’t put my place in your shoes. I don’t know what that’s like. But I do believe, again, in a universalism that we are all humans first, and that I can understand what it means to be sad or hurt or attacked unjustly, and I think that’s very important.

More to the point, though, I think that the government should never use that power. It's counterproductive and will always be counterproductive. The more we divide ourselves into groups, the worse off we're going to be. And so, what I said was, we – that DEI is really tough because there is DEI the words – diversity, equity, inclusion – and then there is a very defined and political philosophy that is also DEI, or DEI comes from that. It's postmodernism. It's postcolonialism. There's been a lot of work done on this. I won't – I won't rehash all of that. But I believe it's an ideology that is counterproductive and can ultimately be dangerous, and that is that the government should be engaged in discrimination on the basis of race to elevate certain races or certain ethnic groups or certain sexualities that have been oppressed in the past. I think that's incredibly problematic, and so that's why I pushed back.

And so, what we did in Utah was, again, very different. What we – what we said was, government can't do that. Government can't discriminate. We can't require you to submit a statement pledging allegiance to DEI to get hired or advance. But we did not defund DEI. What we said was, we're going to use that to help people who are struggling. We should be looking at first-generation college students. We should be – we should be looking to help anybody who's struggling towards completing a college degree. We should be looking at those who come from poverty and don't have the same opportunities as other people. That's going to disproportionately help minorities in the state of Utah, right, but it's not going to discriminate distinctly on the basis of skin color. It's going to help them.

And so, again, people will disagree with me, but that's where – for me, that's where it starts.

MS. WOODRUFF: Governor Moore, obviously, that's Utah.

GOV. MOORE: Yeah.

MS. WOODRUFF: Governor of Maryland, how do you see this issue? I mean, listening to his description of his thinking on this, how do you have that conversation? How do you express your own views, which I assume have some differences with Governor Cox? How does that evolve?

GOV. MOORE: You know, so I remember when the morning of our inauguration – and some people who are here were there – we actually started the inauguration that morning down at the Annapolis docks. And the Annapolis docks, they're beautiful, but that's not why we started that morning down there. The reason we started down there is because of the history of the Annapolis docks, because the Annapolis docks was one of this country's first and largest slave ports. And we started down there with a wreath-laying and we said a prayer to the ancestors, and then we marched from the docks up to the statehouse. And it was at that statehouse – which was built by the hands of enslaved people – that I was inaugurated as the 63rd governor of the state and the first Black governor in the history of the state of Maryland.

And I remember some of the coverage that I heard from it where immediately it was like, well, he's starting his inauguration with indoctrination. He's starting his inauguration with DEI. No, I started my inauguration with history.

GOV. COX: Yes.

GOV. MOORE: That's history. And I think there is this really warped conflation of what we mean by when we're talking about, you know – and again, not coming from a political world, this politicization of this idea of what we're simply asking is that we want everyone to be acknowledged in who they are. We want everyone to feel accepted with who they are – with their family history, with their family lineage – that there is never a room that someone is in there because someone's trying to make a point or because someone is doing it out of kindness or doing it as a social experiment. I want everybody in my state to know that every room you're in, you are in that room because you belong there, and that you're in that room because that room would be incomplete if you weren't there.

The idea of making sure that we – everything from our curriculum to how we're building out a society, we want a society that actually looks like the beautiful mosaic of the places that we call home. And so, focusing on inclusion, focusing on making sure that you have an administration that looks like the state, making sure that you're not getting into a point of, you know – you know, I agree – you know, I agree with Governor Cox about what becomes the role of government. I also don't believe the role of government is telling people what they should and should not read, what books should and should not be in libraries, or telling people whose history is worth reading and understanding and whose history is not.

That's where I believe that past the acronyms or past the politicization this is simply about are we willing to understand and acknowledge our own history, because if we're willing to do that – and for people who say, well, the reason they're banning this may be because they don't want people to feel bad, that's not the reason. The reason that's happening is because if people don't understand their history, they don't understand their power. That's the reason I walk into every room I walk into with my head high and my chest out, because I know my history.

MS. WOODRUFF: But you know there are governors who are part of the Governors Association that do believe that there should be restrictions on how history is taught.

GOV. MOORE: Absolutely. But I think that –

GOV. COX: I would say I'm not one of those. I just want to be very clear. [Laughter.]

MS. WOODRUFF: No, and I didn't say you were.

GOV. COX: In fact, if you read the last thousand words of my 1,000 – 5,000-word post – [laughter] – I talk specifically about the importance of teaching correct history.

GOV. MOORE: Yes.

GOV. COX: Thank you.

GOV. MOORE: But I do think it is – I do think it is important that for – that for those governors who are doing that – not Governor Cox, but for those governors who are doing that – that we have to be – we have to as a society be honest as to what’s their motivation. It’s not altruism. It’s not because they don’t want people to feel bad. There is something deeper as to why all aspects of our society, no matter who you are, why they don’t want everybody to understand where they’ve come from and the journey that we all collectively have taken to make our society better.

GOV. COX: Yes.

MS. WOODRUFF: We are at the end of our time, but I want to close with a question to each of you: Where will we be on all of this in five years? Where do you think we will be? And I’m asking you to look at the crystal ball, but what do you think? Are we – what do you think? Where are we headed, Governor Cox?

GOV. COX: [Laughs.] I am a natural optimist, OK, and so I’m going to take that approach. I believe that pendulums always swing, and I think this pendulum will swing, too. It’s very easy for all of us to say – and we do this all the time; I think it’s a mistake – but this is the most important election of our lifetime. What if I were to tell you that that’s not true this time around? We’ve survived the last eight years. We had two presidents that – again, that, weirdly, most Americans didn’t want to be president, and yet – and yet here we are, and we’ve made it through.

I see some kind of green shoots of spring kind of coming up where more and more people are starting to recognize this. When we launched this initiative, I thought half the people would think I was crazy and the other half would be angry, and it’s turned out to be a lot less than that. In fact, it’s the exact opposite. We are finding allies. We are finding that there are groups all across the country that are deeply engaged in the work of depolarization. There are wonderful groups – More in Common, Better Angels; I could name dozens of them – and they care deeply about this. The polling is showing us that Americans are desperate – there is a market failure right now in politics, a huge market failure, and neither party is taking advantage of it. Neither party is capitalizing on it, but somebody will at some point.

I don’t just share Disagree Better with my fellow governors because I think it’s the right thing for America to do, that I think it’s – you know, it should be altruistic. I believe that I think Governor Moore believes that, and I wish more people did. But I also think it’s just good politics. I really do believe it’s good politics. And I believe that you will be rewarded for treating your opponents with dignity and respect. I think – I think the public will be OK with a Democrat and a Republican sitting onstage and having a conversation like this because I think there are more adults out there, and they would like to be treated as adults, and they actually want to engage. They want to know what you think about DEI, even if they disagree with you. They’ll respect you for sharing it not just in 280 characters on Twitter, but that you’re actually willing to have a thoughtful conversation about how you got there. And I believe there are more people like Wes Moore than aren’t, and I’m betting on it.

So, I think five years from now we're going to be much better off, especially when both major parties are forced to have two new candidates.

MS. WOODRUFF: Governor Moore, where will we – [laughter] – we heard what you said. [Laughter.] Governor Moore, where will we be, five years?

GOV. MOORE: Well, we'll be – we're going to be in a better place, and I think it's a – and I think I really believe that for two reasons.

One is because – and I think about, you know, something that Governor Cox said, where it's right – you know, so I'm a student of history. I love history. And as difficult as times are now, it's important to actually add a historic context to where things are. And I go through this exercise sometimes where, you know, even when I'm having a tough day or things didn't go well or things don't look good, you know – you know the thing that I would ask people to do? Spend time – when you're having that time, spend time reading history because it adds a sense of context to everything.

So, like, for example, when I'm having a bad day, I think to myself: Imagine having a conversation with Frederick Douglass and explain to him how difficult my day was. [Laughter.] Right? You know, imagine a Marylander, right – imagine having a conversation with another Marylander, Harriet Tubman. And imagine historic – a true conversation with Harriet Tubman saying, you know, Ms. Tubman, I just got to tell you about my day today. And then see the look that she'll give you. [Laughter.]

We have to remember the historic contexts of the evolution of this country, of the evolution of our states. And I think if we do that and we're willing to do what those who came before us did, which is go do the work and not just simply give up or retreat, then I think we are guiding ourselves to a better place.

I remember – and Governor Cox knows this story – in my first days as governor, the first trip that I – that I took outside was out to a place called Lonaconing, which is over in Western Maryland. And they were having a boil-water advisory because they were having a water crisis, and I went to go see the mayor out there, who's turned into a friend, who I know Governor Cox knows. He is a guy named Mayor Coburn. And Mayor Coburn, when I first met him, he said: Governor, do me a favor. [Laughs.] Turn 360 degrees. So, I turned. And he said: The only guarantee I can give you is you didn't see a Democrat within five miles of anywhere you just looked. [Laughter.] But he – but he said – he said, but you know what? You're the first governor that's been here since 1996 – '96. You got to do the work.

And so, I'm a big believer in this idea that, you know, I believe and I have faith that we will be better in five years. But as the – as the – as the holy book says, faith without work is dead. Faith alone is not going to get us there. We have to understand our history and understand that trajectory we're on, and we're going to be fine. But faith without work is dead. We got to do the work and we got to get to know each other.

GOV. COX: The arc of the moral universe still bends towards justice. It still does. It's never been a direct line, ever, and it's still not. And someday, somebody like Wes Moore is going to run for president and I'm probably going to campaign for the other side, but – [laughter] – but our country will be much better off if and when that happens. [Laughter.]

MS. WOODRUFF: We'll be much better off when what happens, did you say? [Laughter.]

GOV. COX: If and when that happens. [Laughter.]

MS. WOODRUFF: All right. OK. Well, that's the subject of the next luncheon. [Laughter.] Let's give a big hand to Governor Cox and Governor Moore. [Applause.]



The Honorable Wes Moore Governor of Maryland

Wes Moore is the 63rd Governor of the state of Maryland. He is Maryland's first Black governor in the state's 246-year history and is just the third African American elected governor in the history of the United States.

Born in Takoma Park, Maryland, on Oct. 15, 1978, to Joy and Westley Moore, Moore's life took a tragic turn when his father died of a rare, but treatable virus when he was just three years old. After his father's death, his family moved to the Bronx, New York, to live with Moore's grandparents before returning to Maryland at age 14.

Moore is a proud graduate of Valley Forge Military Academy and College, where he received an associate degree in 1998, and was commissioned as a second lieutenant in the U.S. Army. Afterward, he went on to earn

his bachelor's in international relations and economics at The Johns Hopkins University in Baltimore, where he graduated Phi Beta Kappa.

While at Johns Hopkins, Moore interned in the office of former Baltimore Mayor Kurt Schmoke. Moore was the first Black Rhodes Scholar in the history of The Johns Hopkins University. As A Rhodes Scholar, he earned a master's in international relations from Wolfson College at Oxford. In 2005, Moore deployed to Afghanistan as a captain with the 82nd Airborne Division, leading soldiers in combat. Immediately upon returning home, Moore served as a White House Fellow, advising on issues of national security and international relations.

In 2010, Moore wrote "The Other Wes Moore," a story about the fragile nature of opportunity in America, which became a perennial New York Times bestseller. He went on to write other best-

selling books that reflect on issues of race, equity, and opportunity, including his latest book “Five Days,” which tells the story of Baltimore in the days that followed the death of Freddie Gray in 2015.

Moore built and launched a Baltimore-based business called BridgeEdU, which reinvented freshman year of college for underserved students to increase their likelihood of long-term success. BridgeEdu was acquired by the Brooklyn-based student financial success platform, Edquity, in 2018.

It was Moore’s commitment to taking on our toughest challenges that brought him to the Robin Hood Foundation, where he served for four years as CEO. During his tenure, the Robin Hood Foundation distributed over \$600 million toward lifting families out of poverty, including here in Maryland.

While the Robin Hood Foundation is headquartered in New York City, Wes and his family never moved from their home in Baltimore.

Moore has also worked in finance with Deutsche Bank in London and with Citigroup in New York.

Gov. Moore and his wife Dawn Flythe Moore have two children – Mia, 12; and James, 10.



**The Honorable Spencer J. Cox
Governor of Utah**

Gov. Spencer J. Cox is a husband, father, farmer, recovering attorney, and Utah’s 18th governor. He’s also currently serving as 2023-2024 chairman of the National Governors Association.

Gov. Cox has a long track record of public service, serving as a city council member, mayor, county commissioner, and state legislator before being appointed as Utah’s lieutenant governor in 2013. He was sworn in as governor on Jan. 4, 2021.

During his first term in office, Gov. Cox has cut \$1.1 billion in taxes, implemented landmark changes in water law, water conservation, and infrastructure planning, locked in record funding for education and teachers, enacted universal school choice, and secured funds for affordable housing. A long-time advocate for suicide prevention and mental health resources, he’s become a national voice for protecting youth from the harms of social media. He also signed early education and workforce program funding, launched the One Utah Health Collaborative, and

expanded opportunities for women, diverse communities, and those living in rural parts of the state.

With a focus on solutions, Gov. Cox promotes respect in politics and innovation in government, works across party lines to find common ground, and regularly participates in hands-on service projects. These elements are the foundation of his NGA Chair's Initiative, "Disagree Better: Healthy Conflict for Better Policy."

A sixth-generation Utahn, Gov. Cox was born and raised in Fairview, a town of 1,200 in the center of the state. He met First Lady Abby Palmer Cox at age 16 and they married after he returned from serving a two-year mission for The Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints in Mexico. He attended Snow College, Utah State University, and the Washington and Lee University School of Law, then clerked for U.S. District Judge Ted Stewart and worked at a Salt Lake City law firm. Several years later, Gov. Cox and First Lady Cox moved back to Fairview to raise their four children – Gavin, Kaleb, Adam, and Emma Kate – on the family farm. The governor, first lady, and Emma Kate currently reside in the Kearns Mansion, also known as the Governor's Mansion, in Salt Lake City.