

# THE ECONOMIC CLUB

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

## **Signature Event**

**The Honorable J. Kevin Stitt**  
**The Honorable Wes Moore**

### **Speakers**

**The Honorable J. Kevin Stitt**  
**Governor of Oklahoma**  
**Chair, National Governors Association (NGA)**

**The Honorable Wes Moore**  
**Governor of Maryland**  
**Vice Chair, National Governors Association (NGA)**

### **Interviewer**

**David M. Rubenstein**  
**Chairman**  
**The Economic Club of Washington, D.C.**

**Wednesday, February 18, 2026**

DAVID M. RUBENSTEIN: The governor of Oklahoma, Governor Stitt, thank you very much. And the governor of Maryland, there he is.

MARYLAND GOVERNOR WES MOORE (D): What's up, buddy? How we doing?

OKLAHOMA GOVERNOR KEVIN STITT (R): Good to see you, buddy. Good to see you. [Applause.]

MR. RUBENSTEIN: Wes Moore. OK. So, thank you both for doing this. Governor Stitt is the – in his second term as governor of Oklahoma. He's term limited. And you are in your first term. And you're running for re-election.

GOV. MOORE: Yes, sir. Yes, sir.

MR. RUBENSTEIN: All right. So, let's start off by asking, what actually does the National Governors Association really do? Tell us. What do they do?

GOV. STITT: Yeah. Well, first off, thanks so much for having us. Such an honor to be here with you, Governor Moore.

So, the NGA was started by Teddy Roosevelt in 1908 after he was president of the United States, because he knew the importance of governors. He was the governor of New York. And so, he set up the NGA to bring different voices together. So, it's a bipartisan – it's Republicans and Democrats – that we get together and we talk about policy ideas, what unites us. And I think what most people will find interesting is there's more that unite us as governors than divide us. And so, people just love seeing governors. We actually get along. I really respect Governor Moore, whether it's immigration reform, whether it's permitting reform. There's so many things that we can work together. And so that's what the NGA does, best practices all across the country.

MR. RUBENSTEIN: So, Governor, have you ever seen a movie called Guess Who's Coming to Dinner? You ever heard of this movie? [Laughter.]

GOV. MOORE: I say the double entendre of that, yes.

MR. RUBENSTEIN: Can we have dinner Saturday night or something? [Laughter.] You're free for Saturday dinner – Saturday night?

GOV. MOORE: We are free for dinner on Saturday night, if anybody's interested in attending. [Laughter, applause.]

MR. RUBENSTEIN: So, all right. So, you're the – you're the new – you're going to be the incoming chair of the National Governors Association. How does one get to become the chair of the National Governors Association? Do you campaign for it, or it just happens – falls out of the sky? How does that happen?

GOV. MOORE: Well, no. You know, honestly, I think about the same way that Kevin became the chair, was that the other governors, or all of us, we just recognized who was a person that could help bring us together, who is a person that could, you know, bring – because it is important to acknowledge – and, first, good afternoon, everybody. It's great to be with you.

The NGA is really one of one. There's no organization like it, where you are bringing people from all these various jurisdictions – Democratic and Republican backgrounds, all with people with, in many cases, different things that we might focus on in our own individual states. The top priorities in Maryland might be different than the top priorities in Nebraska or Washington state or Oklahoma. And that's OK, because everyone's coming in with a basic focus of we just want to do right by the people of our states and do right by the people who put us there.

And so when I think about, you know, the leadership, or the chair – you know, and I'm thankful that the group selected me be the vice chair, and I'll be the – I'm the now the – would be the chair elect – is that we just wanted leadership that would say, we're not here for the partisan food fight. We're here to focus on actually getting things done, and coming up with best practices, and sharing ideas. And so that's how – you know that's what it's like to come in.

MR. RUBENSTEIN: There was a chair of an NGA years ago who later ran for president of the United States and got elected, Bill Clinton. You ever thought about that? [Laughter.]

GOV. MOORE: Well, I mean, I got a re-election in November. Kevin, what about you? You ever thought about that? [Laughter.]

MR. RUBENSTEIN: You're not running for president?

GOV. STITT: No. I'm happy being governor.

MR. RUBENSTEIN: Now, you were – you're finishing your last year as governor.

GOV. STITT: Correct.

MR. RUBENSTEIN: And then you're going to go back to the business side. You were in the business world before.

GOV. STITT: Yeah. So, I started my company with \$1,000 and a computer after college and grew that to over 1,000 employees. And, you know, I think our Founding Fathers thought you would be a successful businessperson, or farmer, or rancher, or teacher. And you'd leave the private sector to go serve your state or your country. And then come back and live under the same rules that you're actually passing. And so not that this – you know, and so politics shouldn't be, like, a profession, climb the ladder. We feel like it should be service. And in too much that's why people hate politicians, because they can see right through them. They see that they're not focused on the next generation. They're focused on the next election, not the next generation. And so, I just think we need more people of integrity running for public service.

MR. RUBENSTEIN: OK. So many people here are probably not as familiar with Oklahoma – [applause] – as probably you are. Tell us about Oklahoma. How many people does it have? What’s the main thing to the economy of the state? And what are the biggest issues on the minds of Oklahomans?

GOV. STITT: Yeah. So, Oklahoma – is anybody in here from Texas? OK. Well, Oklahoma is a step above Texas, OK, on the map. [Laughter.] So, Oklahoma’s 4.1 million people. So, we’re the 28<sup>th</sup>-largest state populationwise, 19<sup>th</sup>-largest state landwise. But it’s really the people. You know, we have the most affordable electricity cost to the consumer and to the industrial customer of any place in the country, because we believe – we get government out of the lives of private business. We let businesses innovate, whether it’s natural gas or whether it’s wind or solar. And we have a great electricity grid. And that’s a huge differentiator from us versus some other places around the country.

And because of that – you know, I was just talking to the ambassador here from the UAE – we landed the first ever smelter that’s going to be built in the U.S. in 45 years, aluminum smelter, in the U.S., because of our electricity costs. So that’s just a huge differentiator for us. But it’s our people. I mean, we’ve got great, great people there.

MR. RUBENSTEIN: OK. So, once you go back to the private sector, you’re out of politics. You’re not running for anything else ever?

GOV. STITT: Well, we’ll see. [Laughter.] We’ll see what happens.

MR. RUBENSTEIN: OK. So, tell me –

GOV. MOORE: You’re making news here, David. [Laughs.]

MR. RUBENSTEIN: So, people – everybody here probably is more familiar with Maryland than they are Oklahoma. But how big – how many people live in Maryland? And what’s the main part of the economy of Maryland, that’s making Maryland do OK?

GOV. MOORE: Yeah. So, Maryland’s about 6 ½ million people. And we’re excited that we’re now seeing that Maryland’s population growth is the fastest population growth that we’ve now seen in a decade within our state. But a big thing that we’re trying to do and focus on is actually economic diversification for our state. Where, if you look at the history of Maryland, a lot of our economy is kind of built on – it’s the eds, the feds, and the meds, right? Those have been the things that Maryland –

MR. RUBENSTEIN: Say that again?

GOV. MOORE: The eds, the feds, and the meds.

MR. RUBENSTEIN: OK.

GOV. MOORE: Those have kind of been the big – you know, the big scaffolding for Maryland’s economy. One of the big things that we have really drilled in on when it comes to a focus on economic growth is what are we doing to center our work on economic diversification? And how are we then focusing on the industries that we think we have a unique competitive advantage in? And so in the case of Maryland, it really is – it’s IT, it’s life sciences, it’s aerospace and defense.

And how do you think about those industries with a real laser-like focus? Because one thing, if you ask most CEOs, you say, hey, you know, what do you do? No, CEO is going to say to you, oh, I do everything. Like, then you probably don’t have a very good company. Like, what do you focus on? And as a state, we really had to focus.

And so, if you look at, even just recently, the announcements we had around AstraZeneca, which is now making the largest private sector investment in the history of the state of Maryland. It’s going to support about 2,600 jobs. That Samsung Biologics is going to create their first manufacturing facility in the United States. They’re doing it in the state of Maryland. That the Sphere has just been announced, and that’s going to be worth about \$1.3 billion of economic activity annually. And so, you’re looking at how economic diversification is really going to be a triggering mechanism for economic growth for our state.

MR. RUBENSTEIN: Now, despite all these very good things, do you get tired when people say, are you going to run for president? How much – how many times a day do you get asked that? Is it five times a day, 10 times a day?

GOV. MOORE: [Laughs.] I don’t, because the people of Maryland just want to make sure that I’m running for reelection. And I tell them, I absolutely am. [Laughter, applause.]

MR. RUBENSTEIN: OK. So, in Oklahoma, is there – I guess you’re a big believer in the American dream. And the NGA has focused on reigniting the American dream. Sadly, many people in the United States now don’t believe in the American dream as much as maybe they did generations ago. Or as immigrants come to this country, they believe in the American dream very often more than people who are born here. Why are you focused on the American dream? And did you live the American dream yourself? Are you from a wealthy family, or you’re not?

GOV. STITT: No. My parents were pastors in Norman, Oklahoma. And so, yeah. Didn’t grow up with money. Went to public schools growing up. I’ve lived the American dream. And the American dream, to me, is this idea that it doesn’t matter who your parents are. We live in the greatest country in the world. You can accomplish anything you set your mind to. And that’s our message. Let’s stop teaching our kids there’s such thing as equal outcomes. We just want opportunities for our young people. And the idea that you’re only limited by your imagination, by your hard work, by the education that you get.

And so, we’re trying to inspire people. We’re trying to talk about it. Every chairman has an initiative that they roll out that we can all get behind. Governor Cox’s initiative, two governors ago, was this idea of disagree better. Let’s model how a Republican and a governor – how a Republican and a Democrat can get together and really debate policy without being

hateful to one another, right? And so I wanted some aspirational goal that we could really teach the next generation. So, I'm putting a full featured documentary together. We're interviewing people like Governor Moore, to hear his American dream story, and from Mark Cuban to the immigrant from Nigeria that became the mayor of Colorado Springs, to Oprah to – we're just telling these stories. And it's just amazing. We want to tell your story. So, will you be on the documentary? [Laughter, applause.]

MR. RUBENSTEIN: I think you can do better than me. But let me ask you, your parents were both pastors?

GOV. STITT: Well, no. My mom stayed at home with us, but –

MR. RUBENSTEIN: OK, your father was a pastor?

GOV. STITT: Dad was a pastor.

MR. RUBENSTEIN: When you went into business, did he say you're committing a sin or something? [Laughter.] Or he didn't want you to follow in his footsteps?

GOV. STITT: No. I think - you know, I think God puts different desires on everybody's hearts. He told me to chase my dreams. And you can do anything you set your mind to. And he gave me that – you know, I had great parents that instilled in me that you can accomplish anything you set your mind to. And so I think –

MR. RUBENSTEIN: Did they live to see your success?

GOV. STITT: Oh, yeah. My parents are both alive. They've been married 59 years. Dad –

MR. RUBENSTEIN: Fifty-nine years?

GOV. STITT: Fifty-nine years. Dad's 81. Mom's 79.

MR. RUBENSTEIN: Wow. [Applause.] Do they give you advice still?

GOV. STITT: Yeah. My mom said I did really good at the state of the state. [Laughter.]

MR. RUBENSTEIN: OK. So now you have lived the American dream, for sure. And your mother is giving you advice still, right?

GOV. MOORE: Always, yes.

MR. RUBENSTEIN: And what does she tell you? You're doing a good job, or not? What does she say?

GOV. MOORE: [Laughs.] I wish she would say that. [Laughter.] No, you know, it's funny, because my mom, in many ways, is just – she's my hero.

MR. RUBENSTEIN: You were raised by a single mom?

GOV. MOORE: Raised by a single mom. Yeah, my dad died in front of me when I was three years old. And my mom immigrated to this country from Jamaica. She came to this country. And she – you know, it's interesting. With a lot of the immigration debates and conversations that are taking place right now, I explain to people that this is a very personal conversation and debate for me. I think about the fact that my mom is a woman who did not get her first job that gave her benefits after my dad died until I was 14 years old. And so when we're having so many of these conversations about immigration, or equitable pay between men and women, or the racial wealth gap, I explain to people, you know, that I don't need a white paper to explain it. I don't need a tutorial. Like, I grew up in this.

And the reason that we believe, the reason that we work the way that we do, and the reason that we are always going to fight to make sure we have that opportunity of the American dream, is I know that I'm standing here as probably, you know, one of the most improbable governors in this country, when you just think about my life trajectory.

MR. RUBENSTEIN: How many Black governors are there in this country right now?

GOV. MOORE: There is one.

MR. RUBENSTEIN: One. Sitting right here.

GOV. MOORE: Yeah. And I'm only the third African American ever elected governor in the history of this country in its 250-year history.

MR. RUBENSTEIN: Let me ask you, when you went to Johns Hopkins, you were a Rhodes scholar, which is the highest honor, many people would say. Thirty-two are picked every year. Very often, Rhodes scholars come back to the United States, and they go into business, politics, and so forth. You went into the military, in combat. Didn't your mother say, look, you're a Rhodes scholar. You didn't need to go into combat. Weren't you afraid of risking your life?

GOV. MOORE: No, because, I mean, I love this country.

MR. RUBENSTEIN: But you can love your country as a private equity person too. [Laughter.]

GOV. MOORE: Touche. Touche. But, no. But, you know, honestly, for me, you know, I got sent to military school when I was – when I was a kid.

MR. RUBENSTEIN: Because you were such a good kid.

GOV. MOORE: Because I was an outstanding student, and I was doing all the right things. And my mother said, you know what? You know how you reward kids that are doing great? Military school. [Laughter.] And so, I got sent to military school because I was outstanding. And but – [laughs] – but military school, in many ways, it helped to not just change my life but really save

it, because it was in that environment that I tasted leadership for the first time. In that environment that I built bonds and friendship. And, you know, and I found that – I found that people were relying on me. And when people asked my mom, how's Wes doing, she could say he's doing well and not be lying. And that actually meant something.

MR. RUBENSTEIN: But, I mean, like, somebody shoots at you. That's not a good thing.

GOV. MOORE: Not a good thing.

MR. RUBENSTEIN: So, were you in combat?

GOV. MOORE: I was, yep. So, I – so I actually joined the military when I was 17 years old. So, true story, I wasn't old enough to sign the paperwork. My mother had to sign the paperwork for me. But, as David highlighted, after my teenage years my mom signed whatever paperwork the Army put in front of her. [Laughter.] And then I finished up at Johns Hopkins, became a Rhodes scholar out of Johns Hopkins. I finished my work over at Oxford. And I started working in finance.

And I remember getting a call from a dear friend who was also the deputy brigade commander of the 82nd Airborne Division. And he asked me a question that I will – I remember exactly where I was, and I will never forget. As I was working, you know, in finance, and he was with the 82nd Airborne. He asked – and he said, so when are you going to get in the fight? And that question almost felt indicting. And I remember I went back, and I prayed on it, and I went back. And that's what led me back to the 82nd Airborne Division. And that's when I led soldiers in combat in Afghanistan.

MR. RUBENSTEIN: Now, the 82nd Airborne is very famous. But what about the 81st, the 80th, and so forth? [Laughter.] Why do we have an 82nd? Are there actually any to get up to the 82nd, or is there just the 82nd?

GOV. MOORE: [Laughs.] No, you know what's so funny? Honestly, it's a very good question that I've never figured out. Where you have – like, you have the famed units like the 82nd Airborne, the 101st, the 10th Mountain. And I actually have that same question. Like, who is the 9th Mountain? [Laughter.]

MR. RUBENSTEIN: Right? I don't know. So, Oklahoma is associated with oil and gas. And it's an important part of your state. Many people in the United States would say that oil and gas is producing, let's say, carbon in the atmosphere, and producing some climate change that's not desirable. Do people in Oklahoma think that is true, or do they think that climate change is not really realistic, or not a big problem, or it's not being caused by oil and gas?

GOV. STITT: Well, first off, let me back up for one second. I just want to talk about our grid for just a second, because this will surprise many in the room.

MR. RUBENSTEIN: OK. The Oklahoma grid?

GOV. STITT: Oklahoma grid, yeah. So, we're so proud of our oil and gas industry. We're literally – I think we're number, you know, five or six in the country in oil production, natural gas production, pipeline capital of the world. But we're also number two in the country in electricity generated by wind. One of only four states that half of our electricity comes from renewables.

So, when you don't care how you get the electricity, and you let businesses go meet the needs of Americans, and you don't put your thumb on the scale, just good things happen, right? We need to get – right now have a pendulum swing. And you've got, you know, the Obama administration killed the Keystone Pipeline, then Trump brings it back, and then Biden kills it, then Trump brings it back. Finally, the developers are like, forget this. We're not doing it anymore.

Just like today, I mean, if I criticize my own party, is, you know, my friend McKee in in Rhode Island. They've got a wind project. It's offshore. They did everything right. It's been eight years. They got all the permits. It's 90 percent complete. And now we have a new administration killing it. We can't have these pendulum swings back and forth, depends on who's in the White House, right? So that's the first thing I'd say.

But I would also say, most Oklahomans think, like me, that, sure, the climate's changing. But the question is what's causing it. And how do we stay as a world leader? How do we make sure that we have an affordable electricity grid? Because most Americans just want to take their kids to piano lessons, soccer practice, heat their homes, their businesses. And the real question is, from a foreign policy standpoint, you've got – you know, you've got China that has built more coal-powered plants in 2025 than – by far – than any other country combined, right? Probably about 200. They put, I think, like, 200 – or excuse me, 100 gigawatts of coal-power electricity on their grid just in '25 alone. So those are some other questions we have to ask ourselves.

MR. RUBENSTEIN: So, if you're from Oklahoma, why are you called a Sooner? What is a Sooner?

GOV. STITT: [Laughs.] OK. That's a good question. So we all – Oklahoma Sooners. We've heard of Oklahoma Sooners. So, the term "Sooner," in 1889 we had this land run, right? And so, we said, hey, come out here and be part of the American dream. It's part of our fabric as Oklahomans. So, 1889, April 19th, there was at 12:00 you got on your horse. There's famous photos of you running out to go stake your claim on 160 acres. Well, once you took off and you got around the bend or wherever to stake your claim, there was already somebody there. They were called the Sooners, the ones that went out a little bit – little bit early. [Laughter.]

MR. RUBENSTEIN: I get it. OK. So most people –

GOV. MOORE: Great story. I didn't know that.

GOV. STITT: Yeah. That's a Sooner.

MR. RUBENSTEIN: When people run for office, usually might start at a lower level. You started – you never ran for anything. You ran for governor. Didn't you think about starting a little lower? How come you never thought about – you never thought about anything else?

GOV. MOORE: No. Well, and it's because I didn't run for office because I wanted to run for office. I ran for office because I knew the issues I wanted to focus on, and the governor uniquely can solve that. And so, like, for example, when I – you know, when I think about the issue of child poverty, for example, I'm actually, I'm – I lose sleep over the amount of children that we have in our society who are growing up in poverty. Because I just think it's so deeply unfair that children's destinies are being decided before they even have a say. And I remember – and I remember once when I was – for the organization that I used to run, that I was CEO of an organization called Robin Hood, which is a poverty-fighting organization. And we were looking to make – at a former governor – to make adjustments on the child tax credit.

And I remember working with them and saying, you should do this. And I gave them all the data and all the analytics. And I said, you should talk about it in your state of the state. And I got an advanced copy of the state of the state. And there was nothing in there about child poverty and nothing about the child tax credit. And I remember being upset. I talked to the head of public policy at the old organization I used to run. And I said – and I was furious. And he said to me, he said, well, we tried to convince them for six months to get them to include a line in a speech, but what if you could just write the whole speech? And when I ran for governor, and I won, the first state of the state that I gave to the state of Maryland we probably spent about 10-12 minutes talking all about how this was the moment that Maryland was going to do a full bipartisan assault on child poverty. And that's exactly what we've done these last three years.

MR. RUBENSTEIN: Now, shortly after you became governor a boat crashed into a bridge in your state. And you're now rebuilding the bridge. What was it like when you heard the bridge collapsed? And the rebuilt bridge, when will it open? And will it be called the Moore bridge? [Laughter.]

GOV. MOORE: No, it will not. It will not. You know, it's interesting, because one thing I've learned about in this job – and I know, Kevin, Governor Stitt, will say this, is that, like, if you haven't dealt with a tragedy as a governor, just give it a second. Yours is coming. And it was relatively early in our term that, at 2:02 in the morning, my phone rang. And I was told by our chief of staff, they said that a bridge that – a ship the size of three football fields had slammed into our iconic Key Bridge, which is a bridge that's about two miles long. And it was now sitting in the bottom of the Patapsco River. And I'm really proud of how the state collectively responded, because we responded together.

And, you know, not only were we able to bring closure and comfort to all those families, because we lost six construction workers that night who fell 180 feet into the water. Not only were we able to find all the bodies, and it took five weeks, but bring that closure to those families, and reopen the channel where, you know, they said it would take 11 months, and we got it clear in 11 weeks. And now, even still to this day, the – you know, you talk about the speed that governance should move in, where – or the permitting process, which they said for a project like that can normally – you know, can normally take years. We got it done in months.

To get to a 70 percent design build, they say it could take anywhere from five to seven years. We got it done in 14 months.

It is now the largest – it is now the fastest-moving large project in this country. And my commitment to the people of the state of Maryland is I will be the governor to cut that ribbon. We will reopen the Francis Scott Key Bridge on my time as the governor of the state of Maryland. [Applause.]

MR. RUBENSTEIN: And is – how are you going to prevent another ship from crashing into it? I mean, is the bridge going to be stronger the next time?

GOV. MOORE: It will be. And, honestly, it has to be. And it was actually – we look at the work that NTSB<sup>1</sup> and others have done in this moment, where infrastructure is a real challenge in this country. And it's our roads. It's our bridges. It's our tunnels. And it's the fact that so many of these things were built not just before our times as governor, for many of these things these were built before we were even born. And so there is a very real infrastructure challenge that this country has got to wrestle with.

And then, so you will see, that the new bridge that we will build – you cannot build the bridge that was built in 1975 now, because you do have to have extra safety precautions. You do have to make sure you have additional spans. You do have to make sure that the reason that bridge is so important is because it's one of the leading arteries to the Port of Baltimore, which is responsible for about 13 percent of my state's economy and supplies about two-thirds of this country. But you need to have a bridge that can actually support the size of the ships and the size of the cargo that we have now, which is different than what it was in 1975. And so, I think that this country needs to have a much larger and a much more serious conversation about the infrastructure that we have. And are we really preparing our country for the 21st century?

MR. RUBENSTEIN: And you have the money for the bridge? You have the money now?

GOV. MOORE: We do. And we're thankful that Congress did a 100 percent cost share on it. And so, we actually have significant skin in the game as a state, but really the reasons the cost share becomes important is we're currently in litigation. But I can't wait for litigation to be done to start building the bridge. I want to – I want to build now.

MR. RUBENSTEIN: So, the person you mentioned earlier, Teddy Roosevelt, once was asked if he could not do a better job of controlling his daughter, Alice. And he said, look, I can either run the country as president, or I can control my daughter. I can't do both. [Laughter.] Now you have six children. What is it like to have six children and be governor? Is that easy to do?

GOV. STITT: I am going to use that quote. [Laughter.] Yeah. So, my wife and I, Sarah, have been married for 27 years, and have six kids from 25 down to 11. Three boys, three girls. And we just had our first grandbaby about two weeks ago. So, our oldest daughter married – [applause] – yeah. And his name is Theodore.

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<sup>1</sup> National Transportation Safety Board

MR. RUBENSTEIN: Wow.

GOV. STITT: So, yeah. So, his name is Theodore. And so, yeah, we're really excited. But –

MR. RUBENSTEIN: Is it hard to have six kids? I mean, they're running around all the time, and you got to be governor as well?

GOV. STITT: It is crazy. It is crazy.

MR. RUBENSTEIN: Do they live in the mansion, or? Do you have a mansion?

GOV. STITT: We do have – we do have a governor's mansion. And kind of a funny story. So, when I first won, my youngest was four years old. And so, we were commuting from Tulsa as I waited until my oldest daughter graduated from high school. So, I was commuting to Oklahoma City. And they hadn't had a little kid in the governor's mansion for a long time. And so all the staff, they were just doting over my four-year-old, right? And just loved him. And, you know, just spoiling him. So, we come on a Saturday and none of the staff is there. And my little four-year-old walks in and he's, like, where's all my ladies? Where's all my ladies? [Laughter.]

MR. RUBENSTEIN: But when you come home and you have dinner with your kids, do they care about what you're doing as a governor every day?

GOV. STITT: My wife says, you're not governor here. Go take the trash out, so. [Laughter.]

MR. RUBENSTEIN: Now, Wes, you have two children. And you chose to keep them in the same school that they were before. So, they have to commute to Baltimore? Is that right?

GOV. MOORE: They do. You know, but that was actually – and I give thanks to the NGA for that. Because I remember – whenever we're elected, the NGA does something called Baby Governor's School, which is where all the new governors get a chance to spend time with the governors who are more seasoned. And in fact, my mother asked me when I told her I was going to Baby Governor's School, she was, like, what grade did you get? I was, like, it's not a real school, Mom. [Laughter.]

But I remember a conversation with Phil Murphy, who was the former governor of New Jersey. And we were talking about schools for the kids, and all that kind of stuff. And he said, have you decided? And he said, "Can I give you one piece of advice? I said, of course. And he said, whatever your kids are doing, do not change it. He said, because their friends are their friends. They've earned them. And he said, everything from now on is going to come with a context with them. And he said, so talk to them about that. And we talked to the kids. They said we don't want to change schools. So, our kids are in the same schools. They still do the same after-school programs. My daughter's still in the same dance group. Our son is still doing travel baseball. So, like, the thing that I love about it, and the NGA was really helpful with this, was our kids are, for the most part, pretty unaffected by all of it. And, frankly, as a parent, that's a – that's what I want.

MR. RUBENSTEIN: Do they have sleepovers in the governor's mansion? You have a lot of those?

GOV. MOORE: They do. They have a lot more sleepovers at our house now, which I don't mind at all, actually.

MR. RUBENSTEIN: Now, I've kidded you about some things. You know, I exercise once or twice a year, and – [laughter] – don't want to overdo it. [Laughter.] But you exercise every single day with the Navy midshipmen, who are, like, 21 years old. And you keep up with them. And how do you do that?

GOV. MOORE: Well, keeping up with them is a relative term. But, you know, but it's great. It's fun.

MR. RUBENSTEIN: You work out every day?

GOV. MOORE: Oh, yeah. But it's interesting, because I remember one of the early days, I call up our team. And I said, listen, I need to find a gym. And, you know, like, Planet Fitnesses don't work anymore. [Laughter.] And so – and so they're, like, all right, let's see what we can do. So, they call me up a few hours later. And they're, like, listen, good news. We talked to the superintendent of the Naval Academy. And he says you can work out, you know, here if you want.

And so, I arrived there the next morning. And a guy opened up the door, big guy. And he was like, listen. He's, like, you know, nice to meet you, Governor. He's, like, listen, we can kind of cordon off a part of the gym if you want, and we can let you be. He said, or, if you want to, we can work out together and you can actually get after it. [Laughter.] And I'm, like, these are all Navy folks. I'm an Army guy. I'm never going to let you disrespect me like that. [Laughter.] And so, for the past three years, we've just been getting after it. [Laughter.]

MR. RUBENSTEIN: And so, can they keep up with you? Or can you keep up with them?

GOV. MOORE: [Laughs.] Well, no, you know, honestly – and I think one of the – one of the great things about our workout – our workout crew is every day is going to be something different, where you show up in the morning and I have no idea whether that morning we're going to be swimming, whether that morning we're going to be, you know, doing sprints, whether that morning you're going to hit the gym. One very quick, funny story. I remember one time we were swimming. And I see, like, four or six people, whatever it was, at the bottom of the pool. So, I'm swimming. And I get to the end. And I asked the person I'm swimming with. I'm, like, did you see those folks at the bottom of the pool? [Laughter.] And they're like, yeah. He's, like, these are all – they're pre-BUD/S, so they're getting ready for SEAL training. And I said to him, I said, listen, I just want to let you know, if you ever see me at the bottom of the pool – [laughter] – I'm not training for anything. I need you to come get me. [Laughter.]

MR. RUBENSTEIN: My philosophy is I get my exercise being a pallbearer at the funerals of my friends who exercise a lot. [Laughter.] So, Governor, affordability. Affordability is a big

issue. Some people don't think it's a big issue. But is affordability a problem in Oklahoma? Is the economy doing well there now? Or people are worried about rising inflation, or so forth?

GOV. STITT: So, affordability, I think, is a question we all have across the country. You know, how do we get more affordable houses, first time home buyers? How do we help them reach that American dream of home ownership? You know, and so one of my initiatives this year – and so I don't believe it's the government's job to build housing, OK? That is maybe where we have some disagreements, because I believe it's a private sector. We have to deregulate. We have to make sure that, you know, we can get – we can get the permitting done to have new lot developments, et cetera, et cetera. So, we've got a MUD district, is what I'm focused on right now.

And it's basically a – it's an ability for big developers to be able to put in utilities. For example, if you want to go to, you know, a suburb of Oklahoma City and build hundred-acre development, no problem – or a hundred lots, they'll give you the water taps. You hook into the sewer, all that. But if you said I wanted to build 2,000, there would be this chicken or the egg. Well, they don't have enough water tap. So, you need to give the developers the authority and the ability to be able to put in that infrastructure and to be able to – be able to pay themselves back for it. So, other states have this. And that's one of my initiatives this year. And I think that's really, really important to get done.

But affordability, we're already way more affordable than some of the coasts, than California. Probably a third of the price for housing because we do have land, and we do believe in this idea that let the business community meet the needs of the citizens.

MR. RUBENSTEIN: OK. I have flown over Oklahoma many times, but haven't probably been in Oklahoma, as much as maybe you would think I should. But if I was going to take a weekend to go to Oklahoma, what are the tourist sites that would attract me to go to Oklahoma? Why would I want to go visit Oklahoma? Is there anything for me to see there?

GOV. STITT: Well, number one, we'd take you to the reigning NBA champions, Oklahoma City, Thunder. I'd take you to a basketball game, OK? [Applause.]

MR. RUBENSTEIN: That's pretty good, right.

GOV. STITT: Yeah, see – OK, see how he just did that? Oh, you're a flyover state. Y'all see that? [Laughter.] OK, the elitist here, right? [Laughter.] So, I want you to come to Oklahoma. And we're going to – we'll take you to a rodeo. We'll take you to the NBA championship. But Oklahoma City now is the 20th largest city in the country. People don't realize that. And so many great things going. We're top 10 in people moving to Oklahoma. Right now, true numbers, not per capita, because people are seeing the American dream is alive and well, and it's the way it used to be.

MR. RUBENSTEIN: OK. So, I did go to some rodeos not too long ago. I was filming this PBS thing on rodeos. And a thing I couldn't understand. They have a thing called Mutton Busting, I

think it is, where you take eight-year-old boys, and maybe girls, and you put them on a sheep, I think it is, and they're supposed to stay on for two seconds. You ever seen this thing?

GOV. STITT: Absolutely, yeah. [Laughter.]

MR. RUBENSTEIN: Is that – is that a sport?

GOV. STITT: It's just to get the little kids engaged. It's super fun.

MR. RUBENSTEIN: They all fall off right away. I mean, I've never seen – OK. All right.

GOV. STITT: There's some good ones. These are pre-, you know, PBR bull riders.

MR. RUBENSTEIN: But rodeo is very popular in Oklahoma, I assume?

GOV. STITT: Yeah. Rodeo is popular.

MR. RUBENSTEIN: If you can't ride a horse, could you get elected governor of Oklahoma?

GOV. STITT: It'd be difficult. [Laughter.] It'd be difficult.

MR. RUBENSTEIN: I couldn't get elected then. The last horse I was on was named Molasses. And it was appropriately named for me. [Laughter.]

So, Governor, today would you say that Baltimore has lot of challenges that are going to be typical of large cities in the East Coast? And you think you can really make Baltimore more vibrant than it has been? It's had a lot of problems over the years. What are you doing to try to make Baltimore more vibrant?

GOV. MOORE: Yeah. You know, it's interesting, because when I was first elected governor of Maryland, we saw how Baltimore City had over 17,000 vacant homes, inside of the city alone. Because it used to be a city of about little over 900,000 people. It's now got to just below 600,000. So, the fastest exodus, with the exception of Cleveland and Detroit, of any comp-sized city during that time period. Baltimore was averaging almost a homicide a day when I took over as the – as the governor. We saw how the Inner Harbor, the downtown area, was in receivership. Our Baltimore Orioles were months away from not having a lease.

And I was just very clear that, you know, when I would talk about Baltimore all over the state, people say, you know, like, you know, of course, you're say you're going to support Baltimore. You're a homer. I'm, like, no. I don't support Baltimore because it's my hometown. I support Baltimore because I'm very good at math. It's the state's largest city. So, the states – tell me a single state in the country where the state's largest city is not doing well, but the state is, right? It literally, mathematically, cannot exist.

And so, we decided we're going to, you know, unapologetically support and invest. We're thankful that we have not just our amazing Baltimore Orioles, our future World Series

champion Baltimore Orioles, locked in for a 30-year lease, but also we have great new leadership and ownership of the Baltimore Orioles as well. [Applause.]

MR. RUBENSTEIN: Well, I took the team from first place to last place, which is hard to do. [Laughter.] It can only get better.

GOV. MOORE: You know, but also you – so now we have a plan and a new developer for the downtown, for the Inner Harbor area. That Baltimore, now that the state of Maryland has had the fastest drops of violent crime anywhere in the United States of America. The homicide rate in the state of Maryland is now down nearly 50 percent since I put my hand on the Bible to become the governor. Baltimore, the last time the homicide rate was this low I wasn't born yet.

And you now look at everything that's happened from the housing inventory, where we have now cut the vacant housing inventory essentially by a third since we come on board, with a plan now within the next 12 years we will completely eradicate the vacant housing inventory within the city of Baltimore, creating a vibrant new community. The point is this, is that we focused. We centered our attention. And I think that's what's required in order to get the kind of results that we're seeing.

MR. RUBENSTEIN: If somebody is from Oklahoma and they've never been to Maryland, what should they come to Maryland and visit? What's the best thing to visit in Maryland?

GOV. MOORE: Well, the first thing I'd say, you have to go to Baltimore Orioles game. [Laughter.] But one of the great things I love about Maryland –

GOV. STITT: Can I get a good, suite ticket?

MR. RUBENSTEIN: Absolutely. [Laughter.] We have premiere suites. We have a lot of new suites. Just tell me when you want to come.

GOV. MOORE: But, you know, but one of the great things is that, you know, we – and we pride ourselves in Maryland, where we say, you know, Maryland really is America in miniature. And I say that for this reason: You just tell me – if you're in the state of Maryland, tell me what you want to do, and I can tell you how to get – how to have a world-class experience within two hours of anywhere that you are. You tell me that you want to go to see farmland. You tell me that you want to go to the mountains. You tell me that you want to go to the beach. Tell me you want to catch a ball game. Tell me you want to visit institutions of higher education. Tell me you want to visit the Naval Academy. Tell me what you want to do, and I can tell you how to get there within two hours, no matter where you are within the state of Maryland. And I think that's one of the things that makes our – makes our state so special.

MR. RUBENSTEIN: OK. Governor, I saw you in Davos in January. So, what was the governor of Oklahoma doing in Davos? Was that controversial in Oklahoma to be going to Davos? Or what were you doing there?

GOV. STITT: Just bringing some Oklahoma commonsense to the – [laughter] – Oklahoma commonsense to the to the hooty-tooties over there at the World Economic Forum. [Laughter.] But, no, I mean, listen, my whole life has been – you know, I just say yes. So, when people ask me to come do stuff, I just say yes. And try to be yourself. And try to just say, hey, here's what we – here's –

MR. RUBENSTEIN: And what did you get out of Davos? Would you go again, or?

GOV. STITT: You know, well, I saw you there. That was great. And, let's see, what did I get out of that? You know, I was in a climate – my staff put me in this forum, right, with, you know, climate change, and blah, blah, blah, blah, blah. And I'm, like, I'm sitting there. And they're about to call on me. I'm like, oh my gosh, why am I in this meeting, right? And I basically just said, OK, well, I'm just going to say what I said earlier about we need oil and gas. And we need a baseload to make sure that we can meet the needs of Americans. And we have – our power in Oklahoma is a third of what it is in Germany.

And I go through all these things. And then at the end of that, almost every single person was like, well, I agree with the governor. That's right. We do need that. We do need to take our thumb off the scale, so to speak, and just – I don't believe in incentives, but we need to let people meet the needs of their citizens. And so I've met with probably a hundred different ambassadors, have this international strategy, because I want to take Oklahoma to the world and bring the world back to Oklahoma. And everybody talks about energy. It's so important. And I think we lost our way a few – you know, a few years ago, where we were trying to say, you know we're – you know, we don't need natural gas. Well, that's just not true. And so I just think we're not afraid of wind, and we're not afraid of solar, but we're certainly not going to pretend like we don't need natural gas either.

MR. RUBENSTEIN: Now, when I was growing up, Oklahoma had a great football team. They won the national championships under Bud Wilkinson. What's happened in the last few decades?

GOV. STITT: [Laughs.] So, Bud Wilkinson, yeah, famous football coach back in the '50s. Three national championships. Then we followed him by Barry Switzer. Ran three – won three national championships. Then Bob Stoops, the Bobs there – or, the B's, Bud, Bob, and – or Barry and Bob. Then he won one. But, yes, it's been a little dry spell here.

MR. RUBENSTEIN: But you're from Oklahoma State.

GOV. STITT: I went to Oklahoma State. It's been a really long dry spell for us.

MR. RUBENSTEIN: So, what's better? The University of Oklahoma or Oklahoma State? If I could go to one university, which is better to go to?

GOV. STITT: [Laughs.] Go Pokes. [Laughter.]

MR. RUBENSTEIN: Either? OK. So, and let me ask you, in terms of Maryland, you had a football team in Maryland. And they're still there. But they're moving to the nation's capital eventually. So, is that considered a loss by Maryland, or you're OK with that?

GOV. MOORE: No, I mean, I'm OK with it. First, because I'm a Ravens fan. [Laughter.] But also – but I'm actually OK with it also for this reason. What we had there was a football stadium that sat in the middle of 200 acres that was being used eight times a year for a couple hours. And that was it. It was underutilized. You had land that actually could have been leveraged, and it was not. And when they had an ownership change we had new owners who – and I love the fact that, you know, for all the owners, they're all – they're Marylanders. And the only ask that I had when they came on board – and they came on with the intention of when they bought the team, they wanted to move it to Washington, D.C., which I got.

And people, remember, these are private entities. And they can choose to do what they want to do. The only thing that I asked was that do not leave me with a hole. Do not leave me, like has happened with other times when sports teams have left, with, you know, a now stadium that we're now responsible for taking care of. And the agreement that we negotiated, and we're really proud of what we were able to negotiate, is saying, like, you know, we'll support that move. It's fine. But the promise that I made to the people of Prince George's County and the state of Maryland is that what we are going to have, even after they go to Washington, D.C., is going to be better than what we have right now.

MR. RUBENSTEIN: So, the current stadium is called Northwest Stadium. What is the new stadium going to be called? Has that been resolved?

GOV. MOORE: [Laughs.] I think they've got to figure that one out. That's their problem, not mine. [Laughter.]

MR. RUBENSTEIN: OK. So today what would you like most people to know about what the NGA really stands for? In other words, you've been the president for a couple of years. What would you say is your main accomplishment as a chairman of the NGA? What are you most proud of having accomplished?

GOV. STITT: Well, I think just explaining the fact that our Founding Fathers got it right. And Governor Moore alluded to it earlier, that Maryland's different than Oklahoma. And we don't want – you know, the thing that frustrates people, I think, nationally about these elections, national elections, is, you know, the federal government shouldn't dictate all of our lives across the country, right? We have 50 different laboratories of democracy. And, you know, we don't want – we don't want Oklahoma to become California. And you don't want Maryland to be Texas or Florida.

And the governors are elected by the people of their states. And I think that's – federalism is an idea that we need to embrace and teach to that next generation because sometimes we think that – you know, used to politics was local. Well, now it feels like politics are national. And you've got everybody on the fringes, and everybody's watching either Fox News or MSNBC. And we're being driven to our corners.

But I have found that, you know, 70 and 80 percent, and maybe more than that, of the country literally wants us – wants that freedom to go chase their American dream and to raise their family. And, again, we just – we talk about that a lot, that these states are different. States rights are very important. Federal government has its place, but we need to defer to the state governors, whether it's on whatever the policy that we're talking about of the day.

MR. RUBENSTEIN: So, Saturday night, where will you be? [Laughter.]

GOV. STITT: I will be – I will be at the White House on Saturday night. And, you know, to speak on that issue, I basically just simply said the NGA is not the facilitator if not all governors are invited, right? You can invite whoever you want to the White House, but it can't be an NGA event if it's not inclusive to all 50 governors. So that's all that was. I'm excited to go. I support the president. And, you know, we're going to go and have a great time.

MR. RUBENSTEIN: OK. Where are you going to be Saturday night? [Laughter.]

GOV. MOORE: I will not be at the White House. But actually, I do want to say thank you to Kevin for his leadership on this. This has been a very trying time. It's been a trying time because there are certain traditions that have lasted for decades, where no matter who the president is, no matter who the governor is, that they're all invited. It's for once a year to come spend time and break bread. And you could have a president or a governor who completely, vehemently disagree with one another, but there are certain traditions that are being broken right now. And one thing I always learned in the Army was that you never learn anything about anybody in times of ease, because in easy times anybody can show me anything. If you ever want to understand somebody's mettle, watch them when it was hard. Watch them when it was tough. Watch how they led. Watch how they made decisions.

And Kevin was very clear from jump street, where he said you are not going to pick which governors can and cannot attend. That when the president told me that I was disinvited because I was not worthy – which, again, I'm very clear, I say this respectfully to the president, God determines my worthiness, not him. But Kevin had our back and immediately said, well, if this is not going to be something where we are going to do the traditional, which is everybody's invited, then this, by definition, is not going to be an NGA event. And we're going to stand with you. So, I just want to publicly say to you, Kevin, thank you, because you had our back. [Applause.]

MR. RUBENSTEIN: OK. Well –

GOV. STITT: And I'm not – let me just jump in there, because I've told people, you know, publicly, that a red state governor, really conservative state. The NGA has allowed me to get to know Wes Moore as a person. And so that's so good. And people love – we're not as divided as you think. And so – and then I did this TED Talk with Matt Meyer, the governor of Delaware. And people were saying – I'm, like, you know, people hate me just because I have an R by my name, and they hate Matt Meyer because he has a D by his name. But they don't – they don't know Matt, and they don't know Wes, or they don't know me. And so, the fact that we can get

together and really like each other, and agree on probably, I don't know, 60, 70, 80 percent of the things? We can fix this country. We can fix this country if we could get away from the fringes. And we could literally come together and lead. But politics is such a – it's a weird time right now.

MR. RUBENSTEIN: Well, listen, I want to thank both of you. I will not be at the White House dinner either – [laughter] – I think it's fair to say. But I'll be at the Kennedy Center. [Laughter, applause.] But I want to thank both of you for a great conversation. And thank you for being great stewards of the National Governors Association. Thank you both.



**The Honorable J. Kevin Stitt**  
**Governor of Oklahoma**  
**Chair, National Governors Association (NGA)**

Governor Kevin Stitt is leading Oklahoma with a vision to become Top Ten in job growth, infrastructure, education and more.

He is an entrepreneur who founded Gateway in Tulsa, Oklahoma, in 2000. Starting with only \$1,000 and a computer, he grew Gateway into a nationwide mortgage company operating in 42 states and servicing more than \$20 billion in residential mortgages. In 2018, he led Gateway through a merger and established Gateway First Bank, which today is one of Oklahoma's 10 largest banks by assets with over \$2 billion in assets, 166 mortgage centers across the U.S., and more than 1,600 employees.

Oklahomans spoke in record numbers that they wanted Stitt to use his business acumen to transform the state. In 2018, he received more votes than any gubernatorial candidate in state history in his first bid for elected office of any kind.

Governor Stitt has taken a groundbreaking approach to his administration by appointing the most female cabinet secretaries in state history and tapping expert advisors from the private sector, including the first chief operating officer in state history.

He is committed to delivering taxpayers more for their money, and his fiscally conservative leadership helped the state build its largest savings account in history, which proved to be prophetic in the face of an oil and gas downturn.

Stitt is a fourth-generation Oklahoman and a graduate of Oklahoma State University. He and his wife, Sarah, have been married for 25 years and they have six children.



**The Honorable Wes Moore  
Governor of Maryland  
Vice Chair, National Governors Association  
(NGA)**

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, 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 to live with Moore's grandparents before returning to Maryland.

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 Johns Hopkins University in Baltimore, where he graduated Phi Beta Kappa and was the first Black Rhodes Scholar in the history of the University.

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. Moore then built a Baltimore-based education business for underserved students to increase their likelihood of long-term success.

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.