

THE ECONOMIC CLUB

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

Signature Event

The Honorable Mike Pence

Speaker

The Honorable Mike Pence
48th Vice President of the United States

Interviewer

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

Wednesday, September 16, 2026

DAVID M. RUBENSTEIN: Tomorrow, you just reminded me, is Constitution Day. What do you think about the U.S. Constitution in terms of – [laughter] – honoring the way it's written? [Laughter.]

MIKE PENCE: David Rubenstein, it is great to see you. [Laughter.] It really is. The Constitution of the United States is the greatest charter ever written for any people in human history. And our founders wrote it down. [Cheers, applause.]

MR. RUBENSTEIN: So, if I had had a chance to be vice president of the United States for a second four years, and maybe then president of the United States, I just wondered what I would have done. Did you ever think about the possibility that you might be hurting your career a little bit by not agreeing to what somebody asked you to do on certifying certain electors? Did you ever occur to you that your career could – might not be as robust later?

MR. PENCE: It did. [Laughter.]

MR. RUBENSTEIN: OK. So why did you –

MR. PENCE: It was the easiest decision I ever made in my life.

MR. RUBENSTEIN: Really? [Applause.]

MR. PENCE: Look, we – there's some wonderful law enforcement officers with us today. My son's a major in the United States Marine Corps. My son-in-law is a lieutenant commander in the Navy. Every member of our armed forces, every elected official, takes the same oath. You put your left hand on a Bible. You raise your right hand. And you swear an oath to support and defend the Constitution of the United States. And it's a promise that you make to the people that you serve. But it ends with a prayer: So help me God. And I must tell you, in those difficult days at the end of the administration in 2021, my only focus was on that oath and on the promise that I had made to both. And I'll always believe, by God's grace, I did my duty that day to see to the peaceful transfer of power under the Constitution. [Applause.] And I'll never see it any other way.

MR. RUBENSTEIN: To relive that day, when were you told that people were invading the Capitol, and that maybe your own safety was in danger? And what did you think about that?

MR. PENCE: Well, it was when we convened – we convened on the floor of the United States Senate for the session to begin the process of counting electoral votes. The Constitution is quite clear. The role of the vice president as president of the Senate is to preside over a joint session of Congress, where the Electoral College votes that have been certified by the states are opened and counted. Nothing more, nothing less. And we were in that process when a Secret Service agent came up to me and told me that some people had entered the building, and that there was a riot developing.

And I must tell you, we first stepped off to my office just off the Senate floor. And eventually, would wait in the parking garage underneath the Capitol building. And I mean to tell

you, there's – people over the last five years have from time to time been gracious about our service that day. But David, the only heroes I saw that day were wearing uniforms. [Applause.] When the violence was quelled, we reconvened the Congress of the United States. And I think history will record not any one person, but every Republican and every Democrat returned to the Capitol on the very same day and completed our work under the Constitution of the United States. The day of tragedy became a triumph of freedom. And I pray it's always remembered as that.

MR. RUBENSTEIN: What is it like to read the tally when you're reading that you lost? Is that not the most unpleasant experience you had, or?

MR. PENCE: OK, I prefer it the other way. [Laughter.] I occasionally told people that, you know, I understood the frustration with the outcome of the 2020 election. Remember, I was on the ballot. [Laughter.] But look, at that point – and it's something my predecessors as vice president had all done without fail through the years – was you discharged the duties. I had some predecessors that were actually their party's nominee for president.

And I came across a quote from George Washington that I think you'd love. It's a great – can we thank David Rubenstein for all he does to preserve American history? [Cheers, applause.]

MR. RUBENSTEIN: Oh, thank you.

MR. PENCE: But I don't know if you know about this Washington quote. George Washington said: If I am asked what is the most significant moment in the early republic, I would say it is – and I'm paraphrasing – but he said, I would – I would not say it was the election of our first president, but it was the election of our second president. Recognizing that that tradition of peaceful transfer of power, from someone who literally led a revolution and then voluntarily turned his revolutionary army over to a democratically elected government.

Now, one of my favorite quotes is that King George, when he heard George Washington had surrendered his commission and surrendered his army as the Congress met in the Annapolis State House, and then he returned in a carriage. He headed back to Mount Vernon. The king of England reportedly said: If he did that, he is the greatest man on Earth. Well, George Washington did do that. And he was the greatest man on Earth. And we're all the beneficiaries of his courage and vision.

MR. RUBENSTEIN: Well, he was succeeded – he didn't want to run for – he could have run for third or fourth term, whatever. He was succeeded by John Adams. John Adams' vice president was Thomas Jefferson. Thomas Jefferson later ran against John Adams and won. And John Adams left town before the inauguration occurred of Thomas Jefferson. Can you imagine a president leaving town and not being there for the inauguration of his successor? [Laughter.] It can happen?

MR. PENCE: It fades in and out. I feel like – [laughter] – it sounds familiar.

MR. RUBENSTEIN: Right.

MR. PENCE: But, to your point, it happened before. Adams didn't want anything to do –

MR. RUBENSTEIN: Now, I've read your book. And I enjoyed it. And I highly recommend it. Everybody has a copy of it. In the book, you point out that, despite the fact that President Trump was not happy with your decision that day, you kind of developed a relationship with him after the events of that. And you talk to him quite freely after the events of January – after the events of the election. Can you talk about what your relationship was after you made that fateful decision?

MR. PENCE: You know, I'm incredibly proud of the record of the Trump-Pence administration. I mean, we rebuilt our military. We reduced taxes, rolled back regulations, unleashed energy, appointed conservatives to our courts. And up until that first-in-a-hundred-years pandemic, we had an economy that was roaring and abounding as never before. Didn't end the way I wanted it to, but I'll always cherish and be proud of having been part of that administration.

And President Trump – I've said to you before, David – President Trump was not just my president; he was my friend. We forged a close working relationship over those years. Truly did. I mean, some people think we're a little bit different. [Laughter.] I mean, he was big city. I was small town. You know, he was – his grandfather was an immigrant. My grandfather was an immigrant. His dad built a family business. He watched his father build and built himself a family business. I told people, actually, if you think about it, other than a whole lot of zeros, Donald Trump and I had a lot in common. [Laughter.] And it was a belief in the American dream, something you know an awful lot about, David.

And so, yes, it was very difficult at the end. I had to carry myself as vice president in such a way that if I had an opinion that was different from the president's, I shared it with him, in private, and then I respected, as vice president, the decision the president would make. But my oath and the circumstances brought about that public confrontation. But after it all settled out, the president had said that the next day everything that needed to be said. He committed to a peaceful transfer, orderly transition. He condemned the rioters at the Capitol. He said, you will pay, in an address to the American people. But the president said what needed to be said. The administration was back on track, in my view, for its waning weeks.

But it would be about five days before I'd be approached by a couple members of the family who asked if I would be willing to sit down with the president. And I said, well – I said, candidly, I've said everything I needed to say to him, but if he has something he'd like to say to me, I'll listen. And we sat down those five days later and talked through all of it. And really, during that time, I would tell you – and you know the president well – it comes as a surprise sometimes when people read the account of this in my first book, which is entitled "So Help Me God." And it's available on Amazon.com and where all good books are sold. [Laughter.] But the president was very contrite in that time. I think he was, in many ways, saddened by what had come about.

And in the waning weeks of the administration, we talked just about every day. But I'll never forget particularly a moment. I was in that back dining room just off the Oval Office. And he seemed downcast, as he had since that sixth day of January. And I looked at him as I got up from our meeting, and I said – I said, Mr. President, I want you to know, I said, I'm praying for you. And he looked at me and he said, don't bother. And I got up and walked over to the door before heading back to the Oval Office and out.

And I turned around and I said, well, you know, Mr. President, I get the impression there's two things that we'll never agree on. And he looked up faintly and said, what's that? And I said, I get the impression we're never going to agree on my duties on January 6th. And I'm never going to stop praying for you. And I never have. We spoke from time to time in the weeks after we left office. But when he returned to much of the rhetoric about the election and about my actions on that day, we parted ways. But I've kept that promise. I've prayed for the president. We've spoken a couple of times since then.

MR. RUBENSTEIN: Well, last year –

MR. PENCE: I hope and pray, like every American does, that our president is successful, because when our president succeeds, America succeeds. [Applause.]

MR. RUBENSTEIN: Last year, you were given by the Kennedy Library their Profiles in Courage Award for your decision. And I don't know if you ever got any congratulations from the White House for getting that award. Maybe you don't remember that. But in the end –

MR. PENCE: Not yet.

MR. RUBENSTEIN: Not yet. [Laughter.] But let me ask you, by the standards of recent presidents you're very, very young, and you have a long time ahead of you if you want to run for office. Have you ever thought about running for office again, in the Senate, the governorship again, president? Any interest in that?

MR. PENCE: Well, honestly, you know, I would think about running for office, but I've got a health issue.

MR. RUBENSTEIN: Which is?

MR. PENCE: Well, if I ever ran for president again, my wife would kill me. [Laughter.]

MR. RUBENSTEIN: Well, and –

MR. PENCE: No, and, by the way, I understand you've got some news for people in here.

MR. RUBENSTEIN: Well, I haven't had as been as successful as you. You've been married for how many years?

MR. PENCE: We've been married 41 years. [Applause.] How many days have you been married?

MR. RUBENSTEIN: About 90 days. [Laughter.] And but so –

MR. PENCE: Congratulations. [Applause.]

MR. RUBENSTEIN: But 41 years. So now when you – because, as I understand it, she didn't want to go out with you initially. Is that right? [Laughter.]

MR. PENCE: You know, we're really talking about a different book.

MR. RUBENSTEIN: Oh, OK. [Laughter.] Oh, I got it wrong.

MR. PENCE: Yeah. No, I followed her out of church as a freshman in law school. And she was playing in the guitar group. She was this beautiful brunette. And I walked up to her and said, you know, I'm really interested in playing in that guitar group. [Laughter.] She loves to tell people the first thing I ever said to her was a lie. [Laughter.] But I did – I could have backed it up because I could strum a little guitar. I could have faked it.

MR. RUBENSTEIN: Now, in your book you point out the Pence rule, which is very famous in certain circles and probably not observed by anybody else in Washington but you, which is you don't have dinner with any woman unless your wife is actually at the dinner as well. Is that more or less the essence of it?

MR. PENCE: Well, I think you grossly mischaracterized it.

MR. RUBENSTEIN: Oh, really? OK.

MR. PENCE: No, it's not about Karen being there.

MR. RUBENSTEIN: OK.

MR. PENCE: It's about – no, look, when we were first married we made a promise to each other. And I'm a big believer in keeping promises. And it was simply that, as much travel as my job would take me, and politics even more, I just said – I made a promise to Karen that I would – I would never dine alone with a member of the opposite sex without someone else present. And I kept that promise. And I must tell you, it first was published in The Hill newspaper in my first year in Congress. And they did a profile on our family. We had moved our family with young children to Washington D.C., and they wanted to know how are you managing things? And this just came up casually and was without controversy.

Well, fast forward 16 years later. And my wife is being profiled in The Washington Post. And they found his article and they found this reference to actually what was better known as the Billy Graham rule. That's where I drew this from, the example in the life of the late Reverend Billy Graham. And I'll never forget, you know, when I was vice president I didn't want to be the

story, which was not hard on any given day. [Laughter.] It wasn't a stretch. But, no. But seriously, I'll never forget. I opened up the newspaper early in the morning. I was getting ready. I got my briefing. And I saw this story on the front page of The Washington Post, and it was raging all over the internet and social media.

And so the president and I usually spend about four hours a day in the Oval Office. And when I showed up for our meeting at roughly 10:00 in the morning, our first meeting, I was a little – didn't know how that would go. And I walked into the Oval Office. The president waved me in. He was surrounded by a group of people for our meeting. And the president looked up from the Resolute Desk, and he said, you know, after everything they've said about me, now they're attacking Mike Pence for being faithful to his wife. [Laughter.] So, we were OK.

MR. RUBENSTEIN: Well, did you ever observe when you were members of – when you were in Congress that anybody else was in favor of adopting your rule?

MR. PENCE: Well, I think, you know, honestly – [laughter] – I can tell you, and I say this with great sincerity, that public office and public service can be very taxing on families. And everybody sorts it out to the best of their abilities. And I respect the way people sort it out. And most folks make it work. They really do. But for me and for my house, and for my family, that was a promise we made to each other, and it was a promise we kept.

MR. RUBENSTEIN: Now, your political career didn't get off the ground so easily. You ran for Congress and lost. And then you ran another time and lost. How come you didn't give up after two times? [Laughter.]

MR. PENCE: Well, thanks for bringing that up. [Laughter.] I really appreciate you.

MR. RUBENSTEIN: Am I wrong? I thought that was in your book. [Laughter.]

MR. PENCE: At least you didn't say, you lost badly. [Laughter.] It wasn't even close.

MR. RUBENSTEIN: So, what propelled you to try a third time? And what would you have done if you lost a third time?

MR. PENCE: Well, it was one of those things – I was told it was one of the things Newt Gingrich and I had in common, other than the same color hair.

MR. RUBENSTEIN: Right. I know that.

MR. PENCE: Is it took him three times to get to Congress. And I will tell you, it was quite a stretch for us because I was the classic young man in a hurry at age 29. I ran in 1988. Ronald Reagan was still in the White House. I met the president and sat with him. He was the reason I became a Republican. It was an incredible honor for me.

MR. RUBENSTEIN: Well, you had been a Carter Democrat, if I recall.

MR. PENCE: Well, you're getting me into all kinds of trouble. [Laughter.]

MR. RUBENSTEIN: I thought you –

MR. PENCE: As I tell conservative friends, you know, and I hope you enjoy the book. You know, sometimes I'd say to people, you know, I was a Democrat when I was growing up. And say, I actually voted for Carter. [Laughs.] And they'd say in '76, everybody voted for Carter. And I said, no, I voted for him in '80. [Laughter.]

MR. RUBENSTEIN: We needed – we needed more of you. [Laughter.]

MR. PENCE: Yeah, little rough. [Laughter.] But, no, when I heard the voice, and the values, the ideals were Ronald Reagan, I joined the Reagan revolution. I write about it a lot in my book. He didn't start the conservative movement, but he certainly was the first president, I think, to fulsomely bring it to the White House. And it really – I would say, the conservative agenda that I describe in the book, and certainly believe, really defined the Republican Party and our movement from the Reagan years through the first four Trump years. And I mean, it was – those were the – it was the keel of the boat for our party and our movement.

But, no, I ran a couple of times, lost. And I thought politics was over for me, David. I really did. Our kids came along. I started a syndicated radio show in Indiana. It's kind of like Rush Limbaugh on decaf. [Laughter.] And I thought I was going to go in like you have for part of your career. I thought I was going to go into broadcasting. But opportunity came back around in 1999. Some people approached me about trying it again.

And I have to be honest with you; it was a tough decision. We were nice middle-income family, middle class. We had built a little dream home, three small children. And we had to pull up stakes, sell the house, move back to our hometown. But we felt called to do it. I mean, for me, I can tell you, to answer your first question, I mean, when I think about the future in my life, I think of that Luke Combs song where he says, "I think I rode that rocket about as far as it'll fly." But my life is not my own. And, you know, we'll go where we're called.

MR. RUBENSTEIN: Well, you were – and when you got to Congress, you became a leader of the conservative part of the Republican Party, and I think maybe the most prominent leader of the of the conservative side of the Republican Party. And you had a pretty good career going. Why did you leave the House of Representatives and run for governor?

MR. PENCE: Well, that's a great question. I don't think I've ever been asked that.

MR. RUBENSTEIN: Really?

MR. PENCE: Really?

MR. RUBENSTEIN: That's the only question I've asked that it was a great one? I thought my other ones were good too. [Laughter.] OK.

MR. PENCE: Well, that one was great.

MR. RUBENSTEIN: OK, good. All right. So, why did you actually want to be governor? I mean, in, you know, Washington D.C. you had a great career going.

MR. PENCE: Well, the honest answer is I had decided long, long before that I thought 12 years is about right in Congress. I'm a big believer in term limits. [Applause.] I'd love to see us cycle more Americans in both political parties into the process. And for me, I always thought about six terms in the House, if I had that privilege, would be about right. And when the opportunity came along to run for governor of Indiana, which is something I never imagined I'd have the privilege of doing –

MR. RUBENSTEIN: You ran for governor. You got elected.

MR. PENCE: Yes, sir.

MR. RUBENSTEIN: And after you were elected, Donald Trump later came calling. And why – you didn't even know Donald Trump, did you really?

MR. PENCE: Well, of course, I'm an American. I knew about Donald Trump.

MR. RUBENSTEIN: Well, but you hadn't met him that much, I thought you said.

MR. PENCE: Oh, no. I never had known him. But I was – we had a good run in Indiana. Lessons learned. But we had record surpluses and record tax cuts, and more Hoosiers working than ever before. And it was a great, great privilege for us to serve Indiana in that capacity.

MR. RUBENSTEIN: But so why did you want to be vice president? You could have been governor for another 10 years or so.

MR. PENCE: Well, it's a more – the thing about it is, as the Indiana primary was approaching – true story – Donald Trump came by the governor's residence with Chris Christie to ask for my support. We had a perfectly good meeting, cordial meeting. But as the president never let me forget in four and a half years, I actually endorsed Ted Cruz in the Indiana primary because Ted and I had known each other in the conservative movement. I just was – I felt that he more reflected my views. And in all fairness, Ted Cruz won every one of the three counties I campaigned with him in. And Donald Trump won the other 90. [Laughter.]

But the president told the story many more times than I can remember about – at various events with friends that about the fact that I endorsed somebody else. But he always would add, generously, he would say, but Mike's non-endorsement was nicer than the endorsement most people gave. [Laughter.] Because I did say at the time I endorsed Ted Cruz that I acknowledged that then-candidate Donald Trump was making a connection with people of my state like very few people I'd ever seen before.

You know, I really do think in 2016 the American people were tired of being told. They were tired of being told this is as good as it gets. They were tired of being told, you know, that their values are no longer relevant. They were tired of being told, as Ronald Reagan said, that a little intellectual league in a far distant capital can plan our lives better for us than we can plan them ourselves. And I think in many ways, Donald Trump tapped into that. And so when they called and asked if I would be interested in being considered as his running mate, I was surprised to say the least.

MR. RUBENSTEIN: So, why were you surprised? You had a good meeting with him. And why did you not think he would pick you? You didn't know him that well, or?

MR. PENCE: Well, yeah. They invited us to Bedminster, because when he – when his team had reached out they had said, you'd have to give up running for re-election as governor to be on the national ticket. And I said, well, the only way we would know whether we felt called to do that would be if we knew them better, because I really didn't know him much at all. And, secondly, I said, I really wanted to know what the job description was, because, you know, there's no real job description. There's a couple of duties in the Constitution for the vice president, but it doesn't go beyond that.

And so, I told his mutual friend, I said, if you could just tell him – this was a couple of weeks before the convention. I said, I'm sure we won't have time to really sort through these things, so I'll understand. And he called the next day, his friend did, and said, well, actually, he loved your answer. They'd like you to come to Bedminster this weekend. Bring your whole family. Everybody was there. And we went and spent a whole weekend together. And it was – you know he and I obviously played golf. He peppered me with questions for 18 holes about everything under the sun.

MR. RUBENSTEIN: Who was a better golfer?

MR. PENCE: OK, that's obvious. [Laughter.] And he asked me when we stepped up to the first tee box, he said, what's your handicap? I said, lack of talent. [Laughter.] But I enjoy golf. But I've never – it's never been a barrier that I didn't play well. But he was – they were all very patient. But we got to the end of the weekend. It was at one of those dinners. And the president and Melania and Karen and me, out there on the balcony of Bedminster. The president kind of went into this thing where he said, you know, this is – seriously, however, this works out, this has probably been good for you. [Laughter.] And I said, yeah, probably. And he goes, I mean, this has got a lot of good attention. I mean, you're going to win re-election. But, you know, I mean, if we don't do anything together, you'll be in great shape. And I said, OK. [Laughter.]

And so Karen and I, on the way home she looked at me, and I said, so, what did you think of them? And she said, we could work with them. She said I was very comfortable with Donald and with Melania. And I said, what else? And she said, there's no way he's picking you. [Laughter.] So, I didn't feel a lot of pressure. But when the call came, we were very honored. We said yes on the spot. And can I just say, I want to thank you all for the privilege of serving as your vice president. It was a very proud moment. [Applause.]

MR. RUBENSTEIN: Thank you. So does your wife always have so much confidence in your career? Was that unusual?

MR. PENCE: Yes, always. She actually has an excessive amount of confidence in me.

MR. RUBENSTEIN: OK. So let's – now in our country, when somebody serves as president afterwards, they have –

MR. PENCE: Seriously, we were thinking about running for president a couple of years ago. And I ran for president in 2023, not so where you'd notice. But we were in there for a while. But Karen and I were talking about it, David. And we realized we had to really put some prayer on it, reflect on it. And we finally figured we were talking past each other and making the decision whether to get in the race because, you know, I was hesitant about running because I was afraid we were going to lose. She was hesitant about running because she was afraid we were going to win. [Laughter.] And once we solved that puzzle, we prayed about it, stepped forward, and trusted God and the American people with the outcome. I love that John Adams quote, and it's been a defining principle in my life, that duty is ours. Outcomes belong to God.

MR. RUBENSTEIN: What do you think about the famous Joe Biden quote when he was vice president. He said, why do people take an instant dislike to Ted Cruz? Because it saves time. [Laughter.] But that wasn't your view, right? You – OK. So let's go on from there. OK. [Laughter.]

So, let's say as – well, in our country when you're finished as president of the United States, you're retired or you're or you're defeated, whatever, we still treat you as a demigod, more or less. You got Secret Service the rest of your life. Your wife has Secret Service the rest of her life. You have a nice pension the rest of your life. And people honor you and so forth and so on. We don't treat the former vice presidents in quite the same way. There are a number of living former vice presidents – Dan Quayle, from your home state, Al Gore, and others. And we don't give them quite the same treatment. Why do you think it is that the vice presidents don't get treated the same way presidents do? They've served the country in a way that's very important. And does it ever occur to you that you don't get treated the same way a president does? And you ever think about that?

MR. PENCE: Well, I think the presidency is the embodiment of the American people. And throughout our history, people that have worn that mantle for a time, I think, are altogether deserving kind of the ongoing support, as well as practical considerations and security. But for vice presidents, it's different. I love what Calvin Coolidge said. He said, we draw our presidents from among the American people. And it's an altogether wholesome thing that they return to them. And I can tell you what's true of presidents. It's also true of vice presidents. Karen and I, the first decision we made when everything settled out in 2021, was we were moving home to Indiana. We bought five acres and a pond. I got a riding mower. Got a red pickup truck, dog, cat, turtle. We got the whole package.

But I'll never forget – and we had some Secret Service for a while. You have it for a little while. And some people thought I should have it longer. But I'll never forget, we moved

into our neighborhood and all of our neighbors came up to the Secret Service that day, and they said, we just want you to know we're all Republicans and we all have guns. [Laughter.]

MR. RUBENSTEIN: So, where do you live now? Do you live in Indiana, or?

MR. PENCE: We live a little bit out of the country, just north of Indianapolis.

MR. RUBENSTEIN: OK. So let me ask you this, you started an organization called Advancing American Freedom.

MR. PENCE: Yes. Thank you.

MR. RUBENSTEIN: And what does that organization do? And why are you so committed to it?

MR. PENCE: Well, as soon as I left the White House my chief of staff, who's with us here tonight with his wonderful, Kristen, Marc Short. [Applause.]

MR. RUBENSTEIN: Marc Short is here? Oh, there he is. He was your chief of staff, and Donald Trump tried to steal him as his chief of staff at one point.

MR. PENCE: He's been stolen a couple times.

MR. RUBENSTEIN: Right. OK.

MR. PENCE: He was my chief of staff when I was conference chairman of the Republican Conference. And he's just maybe one of the best men I've ever known, and a principled conservative. But when we left the White House, Marc and I started to talk about the ongoing challenges of sustaining the movement, the advent of the new Biden administration with its leftward surge. I write a lot about these trends in both parties right now. I tell people – I tell people, you know, I wrote the book because in some respects I think that Republicans have lost their way, but Democrats have lost their minds. [Laughter.]

The embrace of the progressive left and socialism. But on our side, we were already sensing that there was shifting sands in the Republican body politic. And we thought it would be important to create a beachhead in Washington D.C. that would advance the principles of a strong defense, American leadership in the world, limited government, and traditional values. And so we created Advancing American Freedom Foundation and continued the work.

MR. RUBENSTEIN: So, what does it do?

MR. PENCE: Well, we're a policy advocacy group. And some people call it a think tank, but I think that sounds too sedentary. We lean into the effort. We educate from Capitol Hill to state houses around the country. We take the principles of conservatism that are captured in that book and apply them to the issues of the day in the public debate, in print, on Capitol Hill. And we

recently went through a tremendous amount of growth at the end of last year. We went from a staff of about 17 scholars and principled conservatives to about 50 today.

MR. RUBENSTEIN: Fifty?

MR. PENCE: That are doing –

MR. RUBENSTEIN: And do you take charitable contributions?

MR. PENCE: We accept contributions.

MR. RUBENSTEIN: OK.

MR. PENCE: Some of them are tax deductible.

MR. RUBENSTEIN: They're tax deductible.

MR. PENCE: Just so you know. But it's a 501(c)(3), (c)(4).

MR. RUBENSTEIN: OK.

MR. PENCE: Advancing American Freedom Foundation.

MR. RUBENSTEIN: OK. So, let's maybe ask you about some conservative Republican principles. Generally, Republicans are supposed to be in favor of not having big budget deficits, and debt, and so forth. How did we get \$40 trillion of debt? And what are we going to do about it?

MR. PENCE: I think this is the fundamental question of our time. And when I think about – when I say Republicans have lost their way, and I do write about it extensively in the book, and we speak about it through Advancing American Freedom every day. On these economic issues, David, I think we've seen the most dramatic departure. On foreign policy, there's been some embrace of the populist right's isolationist views, but not in their entirety, of course. And the president's the first president in history to take the fight directly to the mullahs in Tehran, stand without apology with Israel. And while there have been stops and starts on Ukraine, the administration has gotten to a better place.

But on economic policy, which bears upon the livelihoods of a lot of the people here and a lot of the people that you represent, there have been real fundamental departures. I mean, the president's imposition of broad-based tariffs on friend and foe alike is fundamentally different than what we did during the Trump-Pence years. We used targeted tariffs and the threat of tariffs to open markets. We put \$250 billion in tariffs on China to bring China to the table to begin to more join the family of nations and end years of trade abuses. Now these – the broad-based tariffs, that fortunately the Supreme Court turned aside, it represents an industrial policy that is at odds with the free market, free trade tradition at the heart of the Republican Party.

But there's also been – I think it's now more than three dozen businesses have been nationalized in part by the federal government, price controls imposed on credit and pharmaceuticals, and even the expansion of new proposals for welfare state policies. I think these all represent departures. It's one of the reasons why I tell people that we got midterm elections coming up, and we're all very involved. And I hope the Republicans are all on the winning side. I'm cheering on the team. But whatever happens on November the third, we all know that – not just this city, but all across America – everybody's going to be focused on who's next.

But it's our view that it's going to be more important for us to focus on what we're for before we focus on who we're for. And I'm determined, and our group at American Freedom is determined, to take that case all across the country for that broad mainstream conservative agenda that's always made America strong and prosperous and free.

MR. RUBENSTEIN: So, what about, let's say, Iran? There's a situation where the president started a war without congressional approval. Hasn't really still received a congressional authorization for it. It's unclear exactly what our goal is there. What is your position on that war?

MR. PENCE: Strongly support the president's decision to strike nuclear facilities last year, and then Operation Epic Fury this year. Now, our military did a brilliant job for those four weeks. I can tell you, my son and son-in-law are both fighter pilots. I never talk about where they are or where they were, but I know for a fact the brilliant execution of our military. I think every American should be proud of the job our military is doing. [Applause.]

MR. RUBENSTEIN: And what about –

MR. PENCE: It's unfinished work. I think it's absolutely essential that we keep assets in the region, we keep economic pressure on. Because I honestly believe that bringing about – ultimately bringing about a change and allowing the people of Iran to claim their birthright of freedom would be transformational for the region and for the world.

MR. RUBENSTEIN: What is your view on Russia-Ukraine? Do you think the administration could do more to get that resolved? And you think we should do more to support Ukraine?

MR. PENCE: Well, I'm hopeful that the House of Representatives tonight will pass the Lindsey Graham Russian sanctioning act. It will be a tribute to my late friend, the senator from South Carolina. But much more important than that, it'll send a deafening message to Putin and to the Russian war machine that the free world will not tolerate the redrawing of international lines by force. My view, and I just returned a few weeks ago from Ukraine, my third visit. I believe, as leader of the free world, America needs to ensure that our country and our allies give the people of Ukraine the support they need until that Russian invasion is repelled and defeated. [Applause.] And the reason for that...

MR. RUBENSTEIN: All Right.

MR. PENCE: I've met Vladimir Putin. I've stood closer to him than I am with you. I've told him things he didn't want to hear. And I don't underestimate him. I have no doubt if Vladimir Putin overruns Ukraine, it'll only be a matter of time before he crosses a border, and our men and women are going to have to face him in uniform. I mean, there's that old Reagan doctrine, remember? It was, if you're willing to fight the communists in your country with your troops, we'll help you fight them there, so we don't have to fight them. I believe it is in the interest of the United States of America and the free world to stand strong, as the Congress will do tonight, I hope.

MR. RUBENSTEIN: What is your – now, one of your signature achievements in your term as vice president was the renewal of the NAFTA agreement with Mexico and Canada and the United States. Why do we seem to be now saying we don't like the agreement we have, and we're fighting with Canada, and Canada now wants to become a member of the EU? What do you think about that?

MR. PENCE: Gee, look at the time. [Laughter.] I just think we're –

MR. RUBENSTEIN: We have a few minutes left, but –

MR. PENCE: No, I'm incredibly proud of the USMCA.¹ I was involved in some of those discussions, particularly with Prime Minister Trudeau. And I saw President Trump drive a very hard bargain to correct what were some inherent, perhaps unintentional, flaws in the NAFTA agreement. I mean, Ross Perot back in 1992 wasn't completely wrong when he talked about a giant sucking sound. I mean, there were some perverse incentives that actually gave some business and industries a reason to go south of the border. I think we fixed a lot of that. And I give the president all the credit in the world.

I'll never forget a conversation. I don't know what kind of negotiator you are, but I expect good. I'll never forget we were on the phone with Prime Minister Trudeau. And we're trying to get something done on dairy – I forget what it was – it's always a big issue with Canada. And Prime Minister Trudeau says – you know, he's on the phone. He says, no, Mr. President, no, just – we're not going to be able to do that. The president goes, no, we really need to do it. He said, no, we're just not going to be able to get there. It's very important for us. And the president says, OK, well then, I'll just tax all your cars. Long silence. Just like now. And Trudeau says, well, that would destroy our economy. President Trump said, well, it wouldn't do a lot of good for ours, but, you know, we got to have what we got to have.

So, I saw the president drive a hard bargain and use the threat of tariffs, in that case, as a way of achieving what became the largest trade deal in American history. What's happening now – you know, our founders had a very strong feeling about taxation without representation. And one of the things they enshrined in the Constitution, Article I, Section 8, was the notion that the Congress levies taxes and tariffs. And for my part, the Supreme Court reversed the liberation day tariffs. The administration has moved on to other means where the Congress has deployed that authority. But I think we would do well in the years ahead to get back to have the Congress

¹ The United States-Mexico-Canada Agreement (USMCA) entered into force on July 1, 2020, replacing the North American Free Trade Agreement (NAFTA).

reclaim its authority over taxes, whether they're tariffs at the border or revenue from the American people, as the Constitution provides. [Applause.]

MR. RUBENSTEIN: So now given your position, I'll ask you what I earlier asked you, but I just want to make it clear, would you consider running for office again, including the presidency?

MR. PENCE: Is that a follow-up question? [Laughter.]

MR. RUBENSTEIN: I wanted to pin it down to be the headline out of this interview. [Laughter.] But you don't have to say you're running. You can say –

MR. PENCE: What I can tell you is that we have no plans. You know, we spent a lot of time in Iowa a couple of years ago. A lot of times in New Hampshire. Lots of wonderful people. The calling of my life right now is to be a champion for these principles that have not just made the Republican Party successful and strong, but I think the principles enshrined in the Constitution, I think a strong defense in embracing America's role as leader of the free world, I think less taxes, less government, less regulation, respect for the sanctity of life, traditional values, these are a wellspring of American strength. And for whatever time I have left on the stage, I'm going to spend championing those principles.

MR. RUBENSTEIN: OK.

MR. PENCE: So help me God.

MR. RUBENSTEIN: So, as you look back on your distinguished career, what are you most proud of having done? And what do you regret that you didn't do that you wish you had done?

MR. PENCE: Well, I think I'm most proud of Michael, and Charlotte, and Audrey.

MR. RUBENSTEIN: OK. All right, but in your career. [Laughter.]

MR. PENCE: I mean, I tell people I have a Ph.D. and D.A.D. And, just in the last two months, we've got our sixth and seventh grandchild born, just in the last five years. [Applause.] You know, for me – so Karen and I won't gainsay that at all. I mean, we've been so blessed in so many ways with opportunities. But I'll always believe our primary responsibility is to each other, and our primary responsibility is to our kids. People sometimes ask me what my legacy I think will be, and I always recite my kids' names.

But in terms of accomplishments, I would say – and it's lesser known, it's lesser talked about, but the president did tap me, as other vice presidents had in years past, he tapped me to lead what's known as the National Space Council. And this was at a time where, for the last 10 years, we'd literally been hitching a ride from the Russians to get back to the International Space Station. It was just appalling. We'd grounded the space shuttle with the idea that we were going to come up with another rocket, and we just didn't. In America, human space exploration was faltering when we came into office. And so, for me to be able to step into that role to pull

together the best minds in and out of government, and to be standing, as I did, next to the president, next to my wife, at the Kennedy Space Center in the summer of 2020 when, for the first time in 12 years, we sent American astronauts back to space on American rockets from American soil.

In addition to that we created the United States Space Force, which I think maybe a hundred years from now we'll come to understand was a great accomplishment. The President gave the privilege of being involved in those issues. And as someone who tries to always be looking out the windshield and not in the rearview mirror I think that those accomplishments were important.

MR. RUBENSTEIN: Now, in your book, you wrote that your mother – your father died when you were relatively young. And he didn't live to see your success in the political world. Your mother did live to see number – a lot of it.

MR. PENCE: She's 93 years young. And she's only called me twice today. [Laughter.]

MR. RUBENSTEIN: She give you advice? Who gives you better advice, your mother or your wife? You get better advice from your children, your mother, or your wife?

MR. PENCE: My mom is a first-generation Irish American. And my grandfather emigrated from Ireland. And she's a precocious redhead, strong-willed, my biggest fan, and my toughest critic sometimes. But we just – we're so blessed to have her in our lives still.

MR. RUBENSTEIN: Well, Mr. Vice President, I want to thank you for your courage on the election a number of years ago. And, you know, obviously you did what I think was the right thing for the Constitution, the country. And thank you for coming here today and letting us know about your book. And hopefully we'll see you again in the future, OK? Thank you. [Applause.]



The Honorable Mike Pence 48th Vice President of the United States

Michael R. Pence was born in Columbus, Indiana, on June 7, 1959, one of six children born to Edward and Nancy Pence. As a young boy he had a front row seat to the American Dream. After his grandfather immigrated to the United States when he was 17, his family settled in the Midwest. The future Vice President watched his mom and dad build everything that matters—a family, a business, and a good name. Sitting at the feet of his mother and his father, who started a successful convenience store business in their small Indiana town, he was raised to believe in the importance of hard work,

faith, and family.

Vice President Pence set off for Hanover College, earning his bachelor's degree in history in 1981. While there, he renewed his Christian faith which remains the driving force in his life. He later attended Indiana University School of Law and met the love of his life, Second Lady Karen Pence.

After graduating, Vice President Pence practiced law, led the Indiana Policy Review Foundation, and began hosting The Mike Pence Show, a syndicated talk radio show and a weekly television public affairs program in Indiana. Along the way he became the proud father to three children, Michael, Charlotte, and Audrey.

Growing up in Indiana, surrounded by good, hardworking Hoosiers, Vice President Pence always knew that he needed to give back to the state and the country that had given him so much. In 2000, he launched a successful bid for his local congressional seat, entering the United States House of Representatives at the age of 40.

The people of East-Central Indiana elected Vice President Pence six times to represent them in Congress. On Capitol Hill he established himself as a champion of limited government, fiscal responsibility, economic development, educational opportunity, and the U.S. Constitution. His colleagues quickly recognized his leadership ability and unanimously elected him to serve as Chairman of the House Republican Study Committee and House Republican Conference Chairman. In this role, the Vice President helped make government smaller and more effective, reduce spending, and return power to state and local governments.

In 2013, Vice President Pence left the nation's capital when Hoosiers elected him the 50th Governor of Indiana. He brought the same limited government and low tax philosophy to the Indiana Statehouse. As Governor, he enacted the largest income tax cut in Indiana history, lowering individual income tax rates, the business personal property tax, and the corporate income tax in order to strengthen the State's competitive edge and attract new investment and good-paying jobs. Due to his relentless focus on jobs, the state's unemployment rate fell by half during his four years in office, and at the end of his term, more Hoosiers were working than at any point in the state's 200-year history.

As Governor of Indiana, Vice President Pence increased school funding, expanded school choice, and created the first state-funded pre-K plan in Indiana history. He made career and technical education a priority in every high school. Under Vice President Pence's leadership, Indiana, known as "The Crossroads of America," invested more than \$800 million in new money for roads and bridges across the state. Despite the record tax cuts and new investments in roads and schools, the state remained fiscally responsible, as the Vice President worked with members of the Indiana General Assembly to pass two honestly balanced budgets that left the state with strong reserves and AAA credit ratings that were the envy of the nation.

It was Indiana's success story, Vice President Pence's record of legislative and executive experience, and his strong family values that prompted President Donald Trump to select Mike Pence as his running mate in July 2016. The American people elected President Donald Trump

and Vice President Pence on November 8, 2016. President Donald Trump and Vice President Pence entered office on January 20, 2017.

In 2023, Vice President Pence joined Young America's Foundation as the Ronald Reagan Presidential Scholar. Long before Mike Pence became Vice President to President Donald Trump, the vision and leadership of Ronald Reagan inspired his youth.

Vice President Mike Pence remains grateful for the grace of God, the love and support of his family, and the blessings of liberty that are every American's birthright.