

## #111 State of Siege: What the Free State Project Means for New Hampshire's Public Schools

**Jennifer Berkshire** Welcome to Have You Heard. I'm Jennifer Berkshire.

**Jack Schneider** And I'm Jack Schneider.

**Berkshire** And Jack, this episode features a trip down the rabbit hole.

**Schneider** I feel like that's every episode.

**Berkshire** No, actually, you don't even know rabbit hole until you've joined me for this episode.

**Schneider** Okay. Well, here I am. I've joined you.

**Berkshire** So the idea for this episode actually came from a book talk that you and I did in New Hampshire. And somebody who participated in that, he described a situation where things in his town were kind of unpleasant. And he asked a question just about, you know, like, did we have any tips about how to, you know, make the discourse in a community more positive around the schools? And I think we answered in kind of a generic way. We mentioned some conversations we've been having with other groups around the country. And then he and I started corresponding and I realized, wow, he's not just talking about like ordinary levels of acrimony. There is something really weird going on and I need to know more about it. And so that's where we're headed.

**Berkshire** We're going to Sunapee, New Hampshire. Are you ready?

**Schneider** I'm ready. Let's do it.

**Jesse Tyler** I'm Jesse Tyler, I'm a school board chair in the town of Sunapee, New Hampshire which has about 3,300 residents spread over many beautiful acres with an incredible pristine lake.

**Berkshire** Maybe you've heard of Mount Sunapee - that's the ski resort that draws people from all over New England. And a lot of New Yorkers. The local schools are also a draw, in part because the district is so small.

**Tyler** It's always been a very small district. We have right around 400 students, K through 12. So we have graduating classes of 35, 36 kids. Multi-generations of towns folks have gone through. Great pride in the district. Sunapee has always been small and it lends itself to a very wonderful experience for the students and the families.

**Berkshire** Jesse has lived in Sunapee for six years and he's been on the school board for four of those years.

**Tyler** I hit it off with somebody who was on the board and they said, 'Hey, we could really use some fresh ideas and, and would you be game?' And I was like 'Oh boy, I just got here. Let me get my, let me get my sea legs.' I had intended to sort of learn my way around town and get to know people more, but I'm an advocate for public schools and they asked for some help. And I said, okay. And my incredibly supportive and patient family said go for it. So that's, I suddenly found myself on the school board.

**Berkshire** And Jesse says that almost immediately he noticed something. School related debates in the town were intense. Like really intense. And that made it hard to get anything done. Take the ongoing debate over upgrading Sunapee's elementary school, a building so old that its heating and cooling system is literally from another era.

**Tyler** There are airflow columns in the center of the building with manual baffles to open. So in order to get fresh air, and this is before COVID so magnified greatly during COVI, the staff at night, when they cleaned the building, open the baffles and open the windows. So you can imagine in a January winter in New Hampshire, that we're paying all day to heat the building. And then in order to get fresh air, they open the baffles and open the windows, pay someone to open the windows, get all the fresh air and then walk around and close all the windows and close the baffles.

**Berkshire** Three years ago voters rejected a proposal to build a new school. So the district came back with a much smaller proposal that would bring the elementary school up to code and put a small addition on it. But the acrimonious debate hasn't stopped. A local anti-tax group which calls itself the Concerned Taxpayers of Sunapee has marshalled MANY different arguments against spending more money to upgrade the building. When the fire chief testified before the school board that there was nothing so bad about the school that it would have to be shut down, the anti-tax group pounced.

**Tyler** The standard for an elementary school learning space shouldn't be that the fire chief won't shut it down. Okay. So it's fine. We're just trying to bring it up to some reasonable standard. And it was unbelievable. There's this deluge of very expensive, very professionally done flyers that kept getting mailed to everybody. We're a little school board in a little district. We don't have this engine of marketing and communications. Between that and the behavior at our school board meetings, it was frankly pretty overwhelming.

**Berkshire** When Jesse first described to me what was going on in Sunapee, I wrote it off as typical anti-tax stuff. There's a guy where I live who devotes his weekly column in the local paper to tyrales and conspiracy theories about school building projects. But the more Jesse shared with me, the more convinced I was that he was right. There's something else happening in this bucolic New Hampshire mountain town.

**Tyler** Four years later, I assure you with some pain and some bruises that there is a small, what appears to be a small group that is absolutely intent on breaking public education, not just in Sunapee, but in New Hampshire. As an elected member, serving the community as a volunteer,

I have to advocate to move the district forward. That's kind of what it comes down to, what a school board member does. It's been an amazing adventure, learning a lot about the human spirit, and sometimes the darker side of the human spirit, with a lot of badgering and bullying and name calling and yelling and meetings disruptions. It's just, it's been kind of wild.

**Berkshire** So Jack, I want to bring you back in and I'm just going to put this question straight to you. What, if anything, do you know about the Free State Project?

**Schneider** Okay. I think I'm remembering this correctly, that a bunch of people who believe that government is the problem rather than the solution bought land together or bought property in some proximity to each other up in New Hampshire and decided that they would lower taxes to zero, which meant that they couldn't pay for things like garbage pickup or animal control. And I think I'm remembering this correctly, that the natural consequence of that is bears roaming through the streets, eating garbage

**Berkshire** Well, Jack, that is a very particular account as it happens, you are partially right. And we're going to be learning a lot more about that in this episode. In fact, we're, we've got some special guests on the show and they are in fact bears.

**Schneider** This is not what I prepared for, but I feel like I am ready.

**Berkshire** So Jack's recollection of the Free State Project while somewhat particular in nature actually got the main points right. In 2001, a small group of freedom lovers announced an ambitious plan to recruit 20,000 libertarians to move to New Hampshire in order to make the state a sort of libertarian utopia.

Caitlin Rollo is an activist and union organizer in New Hampshire and she still remembers her first encounter with Free Staters.

**Caitlin Rollo** I had heard about them actually, when I served as a legislator. Being in college full-time, I tailored my schedule around the session days. And so I asked to be on a committee that didn't meet as much. And so one of the bills that we had before us was to have Killington Vermont secede and come to New Hampshire. And so we had this public hearing where I think someone from Killington came in and to talked about why they wanted to come to New Hampshire or whatever. If you want to come here, we'll take your money. But then there were some folks there that were really interesting and they weren't from New Hampshire. And so they sat at the table and they're like, wow, I'm from Maryland. And you know, we're part of the Free State Project. And we're really, really invested in this bill. We think it's really great. And then in the next, you know, few years, we want to move to New Hampshire as part of this movement.

**Berkshire** If you were paying close attention you probably noticed Caitlin referring to the fact that she served in the New Hampshire state legislature while she was still in college. We need to pause here briefly for a little social studies lesson. New Hampshire's house of representatives is huge by design, which means it's relatively easy to run for office, even for a

then college student like Caitlin. And that is actually very relevant to why those early Free State organizers settled on New Hampshire.

**Rollo** It provides that time and space and opportunity for folks to actually get in and to represent their community on the statewide level. And then on the other hand, so we have the third largest legislative body in the English speaking world, but then we also have one of the smallest upper levels. So the state senate, we only have 24 members of our state senate. And then on our executive branch, we have the governor and we have an executive council. Now you all have an executive council down in Massachusetts, but the one that we have here is really provides a checks and balance on the executive branch. And all of this stems back - our form of how our state government was established - back to the King of England and such distrust that we had for what happened.

**Berkshire** Fast forward to 2010 and Caitlin is out of the legislature but still very much in politics and she's trying to make sense of the wave election that had just crashed over New Hampshire.

**Rollo** We were really decimated. We had barely a hundred members in the Democrat caucus in the House. So it was a three to one majority in the House. It was a super majority in the state Senate for Republicans. And then we were able to hold the governor's seat. And so for me, I had been working at, prior to that, I'd been working for a member of Congress. So had some free time, I was working on my master's and I started to dig into thinking, okay, who are these people that got elected and where did they come from? And how were they funded? And that's really how the research really started, just trying to figure out like, who are these people that all of a sudden that no one had even heard of are now representing us in Concord, moving this agenda that quite frankly was completely out of touch with the normal New Hampshire voter

**Berkshire** As Caitlin dug deeper she says she could see why her home state would make such an appealing target for the Free State Project. New Hampshire has a long history of activist groups, both local and national, pushing for smaller government and lower taxes. So when Free Staters started moving into the state, they found fertile ground.

**Rollo** So we've always just had a libertarian flare. This anti-tax flare. It really became easy for Free Staters, who kind of became the, I guess, the best way to put it the storm troopers for some of these conservative organizations. So it's sort of that you got the buy-in and they became credible with the more right of center Republicans in state. And then they put their push. They keep pushing and pushing and pushing to where we are today.

**Berkshire** Remember at the start of this episode when we heard Sunapee school board member Jesse Tyler talking about the bitter battle in his community over school funding? Well, New Hampshire abounds in that sort of hyper-local democracy - the kind where town voters get to weigh in on local budgets, school spending, even teacher union contracts. And that also made it attractive for Free Staters.

Here's an interview that Jason Sorens, who started the Free State Project, gave back in 2001 to a group called Patriots of the Republic. When a listener asked what Sorens thought were the biggest obstacles to creating his libertarian utopia in New Hampshire, he said that recruiting 20,000 people was only one hurdle. Getting in at the local level was going to be the big challenge.

**Jason Sorens** It's at the local level where we'll start our first reforms. For example, zoning is something that will happen at that level. Privatizing education is something also that happens at the local level. So these are major policy issues that are defined at the local level. And if there is a backlash against us, then it could, it could hurt us for a long time. But if we succeed, we will have that experience at the local level and we'll have the name recognition. We'll be able to push it up to the state level.

**Berkshire** As it turns out Sorens was right. Translating the ideals of libertarianism into policy at the local level is really hard. In fact just how hard is the subject of a great new book by writer Matthew Hongoltz-Hetling. It's called *A Libertarian Walks Into a Bear* and it was prompted by Matthew's interest in a series of weird bear attacks in Grafton, New Hampshire. And as he rooted around, he discovered that Grafton was also under siege by another kind of invader.

**Matthew Hongoltz-Hetling** My first interest really was the bears. So like I kind of like back ended into it. I was told about these, you know, kind of kooky bear stories happening in Grafton. And then as I started asking myself like, well, why are all the bizarre bears in Grafton of all places? What else is unique about this town? Only then did I kind of learn about the Free Town Project that had been launched by the libertarians. And then that kind of like, yeah, I had this aha moment of like, Oh, this is why this is happening. These two oddball things are actually connected. Who would have ever thought that

**Berkshire** Matthew chronicles what happened when an early iteration of the Free State Project tried to take over the town. And part of what makes the book so effective is that he forces you to view the world through libertarian eyes.

**Hongoltz-Hetling** Yeah. I think a lot of people, they see something in the libertarian philosophy that they like, you know, like we all like the idea of people, you know, doing well when they work hard. We all like the idea of freedoms in certain situations, you know what, like gay marriage, you know, as a position that's become mainstream just so recently. Right? if you look at it historically, they staked out that position in favor of civil unions, yeah, pretty early in that debate. But when you look at it as this overall solution to all of society's ills and you try to put it into practice, that's when I feel like it really starts to break down and not just a little bit, but dramatically

**Berkshire** Take for example the question of Grafton's public schools and who should pay for them - or if Grafton even needed schools. For the town's newest residents, this was a debate they relished.

**Hongoltz-Hetling** Yeah, if you think about it from a libertarian perspective, like you already feel like being taxed is someone taking money from you at the point of a gun. There's like an implied threat of violence behind every tax dollar that is collected from you. And now you're being told that this money is going to be spent to craft an education or an educational institution whose teachings you don't necessarily particularly believe in. And then you have to send your kid there. It's outrageous, right? Like this is like... if you look at it from that kind of like out of society alien perspective, it's a really intrusive step into the American family and to the traditional American family. And so like, I kind of get why their starting point is hell no, the less, the better. One of the very first questions the libertarians who came to Grafton asked of their, their libertarian friendly residents within Grafton was can we defund the school district? Can we, can we withdraw from the school district?

**Berkshire** Listening to Matthew describe what happened in Grafton reminded me of what a lot of education policy fights feel like right now as the push for school privatization intensifies. Like proponents and opponents don't even inhabit the same universe. And Matthew says he agrees.

**Hongoltz-Hetling** They're starting from a place that is so different from where a progressive or from where you or I might start that conversation that it can be really, really difficult to find that common ground. And so I, I agree that this is kind of a new and emerging challenge that, that a lot of folks who are arguing on behalf of education systems have to deal with, you know, it's not just little things at the margin. It's almost like the whole concept of institutional learning is on trial.

**Berkshire** OK - what about the bears? They deserve an entire podcast episode but basically what happened can be summed up this way: the behavior of a small number of individuals ended up creating a collective problem. And it's a story that feels very relevant right now.

**Hongoltz-Hetling** Bears were also kind of a good example of a libertarian philosophies and breakdown because bears are also very much like a communal problem, right? So an individual can deal with the bear in their face, how they feel like they have a right and a personal right constitutionally guaranteed, right. To deal with that bear. But that bear walks off of their property over onto the neighbor's property with behavior that's been altered. Well, then you've really got a problem. You've externalized your decisions in a way that affects somebody else. And we see the same thing with the COVID pandemic. We see the same thing with emissions that contribute to global warming and climate change. I suppose we're also seeing the same thing with education. You know, if we are doing things to undermine the education system because we don't want it to affect our kid, then we're ultimately changing the education system in a way that can affect the behavior of other people's kids.

**Berkshire** A Libertarian Walks into a Bear is a rollicking good read as you can probably tell. But it's easy to come away thinking that the failure of that early libertarian experiment in Grafton means that the Free Staters and their goal of privatizing public education have gone away. And that is not what happened. Here's long-time New Hampshire newspaper columnist Susan Bruce.

**Susan Bruce** All of us who started watching the Free State Project at the very beginning kind of ignored the whole education piece. I don't think we took it seriously. Well, and unfortunately we haven't taken them as seriously as we should have. If we did, we were regarded as obsessive and strange. And then they kind of went underground for a while and we kind of ignored them. I'm guilty of that.

**Berkshire** A little background. Susan spent decades writing a weekly column about New Hampshire politics for the North Conway Sun. In fact, she was the first female columnist in the state. And as she chronicled state politics she found herself returning again and again to some familiar themes.

**Bruce** When I retired from writing a column, it was largely because I was writing the same column over and over and over. It seemed like for 20 years about the pound, nothing really ever changes here. And how often the same bills get filed over and over. And it's ideological some of it. And some of it's just nuts. We had a state representative who every two years filed a bill to create a New Hampshire state militia. There was another guy who filed a bill for a while to pay legislators in silver dollars. Legislators earn a hundred dollars a year, but there are 400 of them. So that would have been an enormous amount of silver coins. And that led to discussion support work. Where would they be stored? How would this even work? But there were always those fringy legislators

**Berkshire** Fast forward to the present and politics in New Hampshire suddenly looks very different.

**Bruce** It's kind of a remarkable confluence of events that happened all at the same time to make it different. Like they wouldn't be where they are without Donald Trump, which is kind of interesting. Because he changed the tenor of Republican politics at the same time that the Free State Project elected people who had joined forces with the Republican party in order to get elected. So they became part of that whole radical fringy Trump thing. And then they all swept into office this year largely because of the Coronavirus. People weren't going out door to door campaigning. Well, they were.

**Berkshire** Susan estimates that there are a couple of dozen Free State Project members in the New Hampshire legislature. She's a purist. She only includes representatives who self-identify as members - like current House Majority leader Jason Osborne. I talked to other people who put the number as high as 60-80 legislators. What's not in dispute is the amount of influence that the Free State wing exerts over the GOP in New Hampshire. Take the sweeping private school voucher bill that is a priority for Republicans right now. Not that long ago, budget-minded conservatives fought vouchers because they cost too much. But they're gone.

**Bruce** The traditional Republicans, you know, some of them got old and left and have been replaced by younger, more radical Republicans. And some of them just have been subverted by

the process. They have to be radical in order to stay in office. It's really discouraging. And they have control of the entire state government. I mean, every single part of it. They have control of the New Hampshire House, the Senate, the executive council, which is the body that kind of oversees the governor. And they have the governor and even people who previously appeared as moderate, like the governor, really aren't that moderate. They've become pretty radicalized along the way.

**Berkshire** One way to chart the radicalism of this trajectory is to compare what those early Free State visionaries had to say about school privatization to the current policies that are now being enacted in New Hampshire. Back in that 2001 interview Jason Soren did with the Patriots of the Republic, a caller asked him what schools would like under a Free State government. Here's what he said.

Sorens I can't speak for every Free State Project member, of course, but in my view, the government should retain control of police courts and prisons and, and the military and the private sector should run virtually everything else. So schools, for example, would be completely private. You could homeschool, or you could send your children to private schools and pay tuition for that. There's an interesting, interesting way I think that we can privatize schools while co-opting maybe some of the opposition we would otherwise have. And that is I think, to simply turn them over to the teachers and abolish the property tax that is used to fund them. So then the teachers would have to charge tuition and they would have to compete with each other. So the bad teachers would sell out their shares to the good teachers, and we would have an overall improvement in education.

**Berkshire** So not all of that vision has come to pass - teachers aren't charging tuition yet. But the larger goal of privatizing education is now being advanced by a broad coalition of groups and forces in New Hampshire, including individuals with a lot of power. Zandra Rice Hawkins is the executive director of Granite State Progress.

**Zandra Rice Hawkins** And there really is not just to say a concerted effort to try to undermine a strong public education, but unfortunately, individuals are being placed into really powerful positions to do that. So our education commissioner, Frank Edelblut, somebody who homeschooled all of his children, sits on the board of a religious university that has some really questionable policies about inclusion for students, had never been a part of a school board, had never been a part of a public school or the, you know, our new-ish state board of education chair. Again, put into, same as our education commissioner, handpicked by Governor Chris Sununu, is the president at the Josiah Bartlett center, which is an ALEC supported, State Policy Network-supported entity that has as one of its major priorities school privatization in our state.

**Berkshire** Just a little background on Granite State Progress. They work on all kinds of issues but for the last several years, public education has been at the top of the list because it's so vulnerable right now.

**Rice Hawkins** We kind of fell into some of the education work through this because you know, we, we do a lot to push back on conservative shenanigans that are trying to influence public policy in a way that, that we find harmful. And it was clear very early on that there was a large movement in New Hampshire trying to undermine strong public education. And that one of the best things we could do is to align ourselves with those who were champions for our kids and really help, help work to push back on that.

**Berkshire** Now by this point in the episode, you may be feeling a little downhearted, even if you're not in New Hampshire. Well Zandra surveys what's happening in the Granite State with what might seem like unlikely optimism. Take what's going on right now with the sweeping school voucher bill. It stalled due to massive public opposition which means that the state senate must now try to sneak the legislation into the budget. And Zandra says that's a sign of weakness, not strength.

**Zandra Rice Hawkins** We are expecting the Senate to try to do that. So the House was unable to garner the votes that they needed to move their privatization bill. And so what the Senate did is they passed theirs. They laid it on the table, and everybody believes that when the Senate gets the budget bill, that they're going to put it in there. And this is really, you know, bad politics all around, right? They know they don't have the votes for it. They're going to try to put it in, in this bill that it really shouldn't be in, this sweeping change that would divert taxpayer dollars to private religious and homeschools. And then instead of having any further policy discussions or up and down committee votes or floor votes on it, the only vote that the House members are going to have on this policy that could drastically change how education is handled in our state is through one budget vote, you know, this omnibus bill. And so, you know, there's a reason that they're doing it. And there's a reason that the House and Senate Republican leadership along with Governor Sununu are doing this out of the public eye because they know the public doesn't support it.

**Berkshire** I talked to a lot of people from New Hampshire from this episode. And one thing that really impressed itself upon me is that this place, its history and its identity really matters to them. Bryan Mascio trains future teachers to work in New Hampshire's rural schools. He used to raise bears but that's a story for a different episode. And he thinks a lot about the famous or infamous state motto - live free or die - and how its meaning appears to have changed.

**Bryan Mascio** When I was growing up here in New Hampshire, you know, I knew it was the live free or die state. And that was very important here. It was more than just a thing on our license plate. But my understanding of it growing up was that it was about a fundamental distrust of when power and control is too far removed from the reality of being on the ground, where stuff happens. This is the foundation of local control, but that distrust was equally aimed at big government, as it was aimed at big business or aimed at like individual rich people who weren't attending our schools and were doing other things growing up. My understanding is, was that we had a fundamental distrust of them too.

**Berkshire** Bryan told me something that I heard from a lot of public education advocates. That what's happened in New Hampshire in recent years isn't just about the push for privatization. It's about the erosion of local control as the state increasingly regulates public schools. Bryan says he regularly talks to friends and colleagues who find the school choice pitch appealing because they promise freedom from all of the state mandates.

**Mascio** School's rigidity around seat hours and around traditional grading policies, the standardized testing, I think all of that is massively to the, you know, to the detriment of students and to teachers for that matter. But for me, I think it falls apart a little bit is when we talk about it, they don't tend to then make the connection between, right. But do you notice that it's some of the same politicians that are hamstringing the schools and holding them accountable for kids, standardized test scores, that's all bad for schools. It's all clearly bad for kids. And then they're turning around and pointing at the obvious failures that would come from that and say, see, the schools can't do the work. You know, we should like move it away from these government schools. And for me, it just, there's something very intellectually dishonest about that because it seems to be very obviously trying to advance an agenda.

**Berkshire** For Bryan, what's so jarring about the political transformation of his state is that New Hampshire appears to be poised to abandon the ideal of public education as a public good. A few years ago Bryan was driving to one of the rural schools he works in. And he heard a legislator who was in favor of private school vouchers being interviewed on New Hampshire Public Radio.

**Mascio** The interviewer made a mention of like at one point we used to really believe in public education in schools as being a public good. And the person responded saying, well, I think these private schools are a public good. And I remember while driving, I actually laughed out loud and thinking this person either doesn't know what that phrase means because the phrase actually has a meaning. They either do not understand what that phrase or they are purposefully manipulating the language in order to adopt these ideas that we hold dear and pretend that you can use those ideas to uphold things that are exactly the opposite of it. You know, there's nothing less of a public good than a private school that you have to compete with others to get into.

**Berkshire** Remember way back at the start of this episode when we met Sunapee School Board member Jesse Tyler? Well this spring, Sunapee held yet another vote about whether to spend money fixing up the elementary school.

**Tyler** We stood out front several of us four and again, stood out front all day and asked people for their support. And at the end of the night, I think it was around nine o'clock. I was, I went down to hear the results and learned that we were 42 votes shy of the 60% required for a bond municipal bond in New Hampshire. We were 42 votes shy of passing the project. So we've made great strides, but now we have to try again for a fourth year in a row.

**Berkshire** In the days and weeks leading up to the vote, locals were deluged by mailers. And they were a little unusual for a town vote. Professionally printed, multi-color - kind of like what you'd see in a big money campaign. And while the anti-tax message was front and center, that wasn't the only pitch being made. One told voters to reject the school construction project because in 10 years we might not even need school buildings. Another said that this was the wrong time to invest in the elementary school because there are plenty of alternatives, like education freedom accounts. Jesse says he thinks the effort may have backfired, spurring interest and turnout. But that doesn't leave him feeling much better.

**Tyler** It's just really upsetting to see this big clearly well-funded machine rolling into our little town to try to break a successful school system. And in New England, where are some of these kids going to go? There's not a lot of them and they're spread out in little towns. It's very, it's frightening to think of what it would do to the fabric of our, of our state, of our, of our region.

**Berkshire** A huge thanks to everyone in and near New Hampshire who assisted me in the making of this episode. And Jack and I will be right back to talk about one of the oddest match ups I've come across in a while: that would be libertarians and legislation banning the teaching of quote unquote divisive concepts. And we'll be unveiling the topic of this episode's In the Weeds topic for our Patreon subscribers. Spoiler: it's about the death grip that economists continue to exert over public education even as their influence wanes in other policy arenas. If this piques your curiosity, just go to [Patreon.com/HaveYouHeardPodcast](https://Patreon.com/HaveYouHeardPodcast) and become a supporter.

[Music]

**Berkshire** I obviously learned so much about New Hampshire and about libertarianism and about bears doing this episode. But I have to tell you that the one piece that I can't quite wrap my head around is that you have these Free State Project people who then are the ones who introduced this bill, banning the teaching of what they call divisive concepts about racism, about sexism. It seems so lip unlabeled hereon, and yet there they are. And while I was working on the episode, the legislature passed it right. Or they stuck it in the budget. And so I'm, I'm just, I know that you have a sense of where these kinds of measures come from historically. And I'm kind of curious about whether we've seen other instances where there are these kinds of wildly contradictory bedfellows.

**Schneider** Yeah. That's, it's, it's a really good question. You know, I think that a part of it is that libertarianism doesn't really have a strong history in the U S there's a kind of libertarian thread that runs through American political thought. And for the last couple of decades, it has run through the Republican party. But the Republican party is not a libertarian party, right. They don't believe in you know, individual freedom in all cases. And so this is why you see these kinds of contradictions, where when it's convenient to adopt libertarianism as a philosophy, you often do see that on the right and particularly on the far, right. But sometimes it's not convenient to adopt that stance. And what we see is a kind of merging of, you know, a more typical conservatism

where there's a resistance to change, particularly drastic change, particularly change that might disrupt the social and economic order.

You see that merging with these, you know, small government efforts that might philosophically be in line with libertarian approach. And the result is that, you know, many of these folks are against government unless the absence of government would bring about some reality that is upsetting to them. Often because it challenges the status quo. And, you know, with regard to the curriculum, we've seen a culture war stirred up over the past few years. The former president did his very best before the election to stir up a culture war in public education. And we're still dealing with the fallout from that where a large swath of Americans believe that the 16, 19 project is coming for their kids. They don't really understand what Critical Race Theory is, but they're fairly sure that it's a liberal plot to brainwash young people. And they have been presented with a kind of straw man against which they've erected their own straw man the 1776 project and its imitators and offshoots. So I think, you know, it's not surprising to see this mix of embrace of government and rejection of government, as long as it brings about the kinds of ends that people are interested in. You know, and this is not something that we only see on the right. We see it on the left that, you know, consistency is not a hallmark of American political thought on either side.

**Berkshire** Well, thank you for that, Jack. Once again, you've managed to leave me feeling quite a bit better informed, but also a lot worse. So there you go.

**Schneider** I thought you were going to say a lot sleepier, but just, just depressed.

**Berkshire** Well, getting back to this whole idea of the inconsistency of libertarian ideas, you may be surprised to find out that there is actually one libertarian idea that I hold dear. Do you know what it is?

**Schneider** I feel like it, any of my guesses run the risk of slander here. So I'll just keep my mouth shut and listen.

**Berkshire** That's the idea that if there's something people should really value like a podcast, they should put a market value on it. And conveniently there's a way to do that. Isn't that weird?

**Schneider** Yes.

**Berkshire** If you're a regular listener to this podcast, you know that we keep it going and pay our excellent producer by using [patron.com](https://www.patreon.com). If you go to [patreon.com/HaveYouHeardPodcast](https://www.patreon.com/HaveYouHeardPodcast), you'll see a list of all the cool extras you can get by supporting us each month. And one of them right now is that if you support us at the \$10 a month rate, you get a free copy of our book, a Wolf at the Schoolhouse Door, and you get to join us in a special place that we call In the Weeds. And Jack, do you know what we're going to be talking about today?

**Schneider** Bears eating garbage is my guess. Yeah.

**Berkshire** Even better. We're going to be talking about economists.

**Schneider** That's not very different, actually.

**Berkshire** Exactly. We are going to be talking about the persistent hold that economists have over education, even at a time when their tyrannical grip on the way we think about almost every issue seems to be loosening. But Jack, I know you're going to want to put a plug in for things listeners can do that don't cost any money.

**Schneider** Well, the jokes on you, Jennifer, because I'm not going to say the thing I usually say. I was thinking, you know, what would thinking about the Red Scare here? What would, what would like a dyed-in-the wool communist suggest to listeners here? And I think that that individual might say, you know, let's start a Time Bank. So, you know, if you are listening to the whole show, that's probably 30 minutes give or take a few. So we made a gift of 30 minutes to you. So don't give us money, give us your time. And it'll, it'll be an equal trade. So then spend 30 minutes doing good out in the world. Now doing good could be going on and giving us a five star review. But I think a dyed-in-the wool communist wouldn't believe in those reviews and the way they undermine a real discourse. So maybe like go out and have conversations with people about the things that were in the episode. And then if they ask, you know, what got you talking about this, then you can share the podcast with them. So that's what I'm going with this week, Jennifer.

**Berkshire** That's great Jack. And I would suggest people go out and give somebody a massage or a haircut. Because that's usually what you find at a Time Bank.

**Schneider** That's right. That's right. Or an occasional Lyft to the airport

**Berkshire** On that note. I'm Jennifer Berkshire

**Schneider** And I'm Jack Schneider.

**Berkshire** This is Have You Heard.