

Justin Bullock: Welcome back to another episode of Bush School Uncorked. I'm here with my co-host Greg Gause.

Gregory Gause: Happy New Year everybody.

Justin Bullock: Happy New Year. It's always sad to be gone for four or five weeks, and then we don't get to express ourselves or talk about things we care about.

Gregory Gause: Well, we don't get to do it into a microphone.

Justin Bullock: Yeah, well that's the whole idea. Happy New Year everyone. We're excited to be back for the spring semester here at Texas A&M. We're in week two, and actually, which we'll talk about in a moment, impeachment hearings started in earnest today.

Gregory Gause: Today.

Justin Bullock: It's good to be back. A couple of things to make you aware of. We'll be back in our regular about twice a month schedule, but in the short term we have this recording which will be a Hot Takes. Greg and I will be updating you on some of the things we observed over the break, and some of the things really coming down today in the impeachment hearings. Next week we'll be doing a live recording on Tuesday, February 28th at Downtown Uncorked with Dean Mark Welsh and Dean Frank Ashley have agreed to join us.

Justin Bullock: The following week which I believe is February 4th, but it's that following Tuesday at 6:00 as well, the director of the Mosbacher Institute and fellow professor Raymond Robertson, who has been a regular guest, will be back with us. We'll be having a nice conversation with him. I'm sure we'll be talking about some of the elements of some of the trade deals.

Gregory Gause: Lots of trade to talk about. President just today threatened new tariffs on the Europeans, again.

Justin Bullock: A common strategy. The Mosbacher Institute, of which Raymond Robertson is affiliated with, the director, are doing explorations in migration and border issues, so we'll have some chats with him. We're also going to do something a little different this year. I will be traveling along with our podcast assistant, Faith Dingas, to have some conversations at the border. We'll be working with Team Brownsville in Brownsville, Texas to get a scope of what's going on with migration issues at the border, and asylum seekers who are working through the process there.

Justin Bullock: We're hoping to talk to a couple of immigration experts, legal experts, some people associated with the non-profit, and some folks in the local government. This has been an issue that's been ongoing in and around Texas for a number of years now. We're hoping to have a mini-series of episodes giving you a more full

picture on what's going on in and around Brownsville and at the Texas-Mexico border. We'll have some insights on that.

Justin Bullock: Today Greg and I would like to talk a little bit about three issues in particular. There was an international killing or assassination that we'll be talking about, that Greg as our resident international affairs expert, I'm going to ask him some questions about that. Because I watched it unfold on Twitter, which is not something I usually do. It was really terrifying to watch something like that unfold on Twitter.

Gregory Gause: Just so people get a sense and don't think they're missing anything, we're talking about the killing of General Qasem Soleimani, the Iranian general from the Islamic Revolutionary Guard Corps in Iran by American missiles in, what was it, January, no, December 31. I forget, or January 2. Some time in there.

Justin Bullock: I think it was right after the New Year.

Gregory Gause: Maybe right after the New Year.

Justin Bullock: We'll be talking some about that. The other ongoing hot topic that we've been discussing through our Hot Takes this past year is the Democratic primary, which is of political significance. We've had a few people drop since we spoke last. As I mentioned already, the impeachment hearings, senators were sworn in last week. The respective prosecutorial team and the defense team has been selected. Today rules were being agreed upon as to how we will proceed with that.

Gregory Gause: Let's not say agreed upon.

Justin Bullock: Discussed.

Gregory Gause: Voted on.

Justin Bullock: Yeah. I don't think we reached significant levels of agreement.

Gregory Gause: Yes. If we recall that in the Clinton impeachment trial the senate voted 100 to 0 on the rules that would govern the trial. Although I haven't looked at the votes, I'm not even sure a vote's been taken yet, my guess is it will be straight down party lines.

Justin Bullock: As partisan as it was in the late 90s, it does feel like we're in a whole other world of partisanship now in 2020. Which maybe should be its own podcast some point this year is the issues of hyper-partisanship and what are some of the causes.

Gregory Gause: And polarization.

Justin Bullock: And polarization, because I was looking at some recent survey data. When you look at people of one party, say the Democratic Party, and how they rank a lot of different groups, the group that they rate the least favorable among sets of groups is Republicans, and vice versa for Republicans.

Gregory Gause: One of the things that struck me about polling data recently is, and this is kind of an off ... This isn't a normal question that gets asked, but it turns out that recent polls indicate that people would be very leery about marrying across partisan lines. That was never the case in the past. Whether you were a Republican or a Democrat really didn't affect your romantic choices in life. I know I married across ...

Justin Bullock: Party lines.

Gregory Gause: ... partisan lines. That was back in the 80s, which we now look upon as this halcyon days of bipartisanship, or at least lack of polarization. It's troubling that these days people are much, much less likely to get married across party lines.

Justin Bullock: There's a nice series that I'm actually using for my decision making course this semester, was done by Tim Urban on the blog Wait But Why. It's called The Story of Us. He goes into a lot of detail as to some of the potential causes, but also some of the scary consequences of a country that is so hyper-partisan in terms of their teams, where your main source of identification becomes your political team rather than the actual country. Which you can just sense as you follow along with the news cycle these days. There's a couple of reasons, but we'll save that.

Justin Bullock: Greg, I watched, you were actually not in the US as this was unfolding. I thought of you, because I wanted to text you. I wanted to be like, "Greg, tell me what's going on. You're my go-to source."

Gregory Gause: I had the international service on the text. You could have text me.

Justin Bullock: I should have messaged you. We did end up exchanging text messages while you were abroad. Where were you over the break by the way?

Gregory Gause: I was in Saudi Arabia.

Justin Bullock: How was your trip?

Gregory Gause: The trip was good. The return trip a little bad. There was really historic flooding in Dubai.

Justin Bullock: Really?

Gregory Gause: Which is, of course, the hub for Emirates Airline which is how I got to Saudi Arabia. That plays into another issue, climate change, that we might talk about.

Dubai it's a coastal town, but it's a desert town. Huge amounts of rain, really it's not set up for that. It took me instead of the normal one day to get Riyadh-Dubai, Dubai-Houston, it took me three days.

Justin Bullock: I was trying to track you down, and I kept meeting with your assistant. I was like, "Where is Greg?" She was like, "He is traveling."

Gregory Gause: Amsterdam perhaps. I got rerouted through Amsterdam at one point. I had to spend a night there.

Justin Bullock: I avoid Twitter in general these days, and I-

Gregory Gause: I don't even have an account.

Justin Bullock: I do less of Facebook than I used to, for reasons that we could talk about another time. As this was unfolding, I launched back onto Twitter, because it felt really significant. There was a bombing on Soleimani, and then as a follow up the Iranians responded. This was the actual part that really had me unsettled in the days in the aftermath of the Soleimani assassination. Because as news was breaking you heard all kinds of things in terms of attacks on Iraqi bases where American soldiers were housed.

Justin Bullock: There was a lot of dialogue in real-time between some of the players across US and Iran with imminent threats of attacks. It really felt like this bizarro, World War III moment.

Gregory Gause: Including threats of attacks on Dubai while I was transiting through there.

Justin Bullock: Yeah. While you were there. Give me a little bit of, to the best of your knowledge, some background on Soleimani, so that the listeners know who he is and why he's a relevant player. Then why an assassination of him or a bombing of him is important in the terms of current affairs, and then what to your knowledge Iran's response was, and how we should make heads or tails of this in terms of tensions between the US and Iran.

Gregory Gause: Sure. Qasem Soleimani is the head of what's called the Quds Force. Quds is the Persian and also the Arabic word for Jerusalem, which gives you some sense of what the ideological orientation of this force was. They are part of the Islamic Revolutionary Guard Corps. The IRGC is part of the Iranian military. There's the regular military, and then there's this more ideological formation that was established in the wake of the Iranian Revolution, way back in 1979, to be particularly ideologically committed to the Islamic Republic.

Gregory Gause: The Quds Force, of which Soleimani was the commander, is that part of the Islamic Revolutionary Guard Corps that deploys overseas, that goes out to support Iranian allies and clients and proxies in fights in Lebanon, and Syria, and Iraq, and Afghanistan, and Yemen. It can deploy smaller units for training in

other parts of the world. More covert elements of the Quds Force have been involved in activities all over the world, South America, the blowing up of the Israeli embassy in Argentina, for example, and a couple of other sites in Argentina.

Gregory Gause: Qasem Soleimani was an extremely important person in the Iranian regime, and in Iran's efforts to spread the revolution outside Iran, very successfully. Lebanon with Hezbollah, Syria with the support of Bashar Al Assad through the civil war, which basically the Assad regime with the support of Iran and Russia has now basically won the civil war. Iraq, after the United States invasion where we destroyed Saddam Hussein's regime, the Iranians were able to form a number of militias within Iraq to support their goals there.

Gregory Gause: Afghanistan, after the fall of the Taliban, Iran was supportive of Shia militias in Afghanistan. For the most part, and this gets to this whole question about whether this was an assassination, a killing, a battlefield death, an enemy combatant.

Justin Bullock: Yeah. That's a good point.

Gregory Gause: By one standard this is an assassination. We are not formally at war with Iran. We targeted a member of the Iranian armed forces. You can imagine our response if the Iranians had targeted an American general, or an admiral who happened to be in the Middle East. Not the United States. Soleimani was killed in Iraq, not in Iran, but still. We have American generals visiting Middle Eastern countries all the time.

Gregory Gause: On the other hand, one could argue that we have been at war with Iran since 1979, a shadow war. A war beneath the surface. From the taking of the American hostages in the embassy there in 1979, through an intense but under the table conflict in Iraq after we invaded Iraq in 2003, and a number of other places where the US and Iran have been at daggers drawn. Usually covertly, sometimes overtly, probably most notably overtly in the late 1980s at the end of the Iran-Iraq war, where the United States sent a naval force in to protect shipping in the Persian Gulf, particularly Kuwaiti and Saudi shipping from Iranian attacks.

Gregory Gause: The Iranians were attacking Kuwaiti and Saudi shipping because Kuwait and Saudi were supporting Saddam Hussein in the war between Iraq and Iran. The United States came in in 1987, and we had a number of naval engagements with the Iranians, blew up a bunch of their ships. They basically tried to lay mines in the Gulf to destroy our ships. All this culminated in, in the summer of 1988, with the United States shooting down a civilian airliner, an Iranian civilian airliner that was heading from southern Iran to Dubai.

Gregory Gause: The captain of the American vessel that shot this down said he thought it was an Iranian war plane that was coming after his ship. It's so eerily similar to the Iranians shooting down that Ukrainian airliner ...

Justin Bullock: On the same night of the attack, bombings.

Gregory Gause: ... in the wake of the Soleimani killing. It's a fraught question what we even call the death of Qasem Soleimani. Me personally, I mean I don't think anyone in the United States should shed any tears over his demise. He was an enemy of the United States. He treated us as an enemy, that's for sure. I think that we need to consider two potential consequences of this, second order consequences, one immediate and one longer term, that could be negative for us.

Gregory Gause: The immediate second order consequence is the status of American forces in Iraq. Obviously we've been looking to get out of Iraq for a while. Both President Obama and President Trump came to office saying, "We want to get out of Iraq." But of course President Obama sent troops back in to fight against the Islamic State, successfully, and President Trump kept those troops there to fight against the Islamic State, both in Syria and Iraq.

Gregory Gause: Now, the Iraqi parliament has called in a non-binding resolution for the withdrawal of American forces. It's created tensions in the US-Iraqi relationship. While I don't think we'll be withdrawing our troops any time soon, it's problematic. Because it seems to me that our interests in the Middle East if we want to get out of Iraq is to build up an Iraqi state, allow an Iraqi state to develop its own resources to the point where it doesn't need us to fend off the Islamic State, to prevent the resurgence of the Islamic State, and also to sustain some independence from Iran. In fact, we had seen some indications in protests that were going on in Iraq that people were getting fed up with Iranian influence.

Justin Bullock: Because the talk in the aftermath of the assassination, just as kind of a consumer of news, was that, "Oh, well the Iraqi government's just puppets of Iran anyways." It kind of delegitimized, just the conversation around that was delegitimizing their independence, to your point.

Gregory Gause: Iran has enormous influence in Iraq as a result of our invasion in 2003. We want to encourage maybe the fiction that then becomes the fact that they are in fact independent.

Justin Bullock: Fake it till you make it, as the students say.

Gregory Gause: Fake it until you make it. The second and more long-term issue is international norms are fragile things, and not just norms but international law. It's observed in the breach more than in the actual implementation. If it becomes more common that the officials of countries with which you have enduring tensions

but aren't formally at war are open season, that, I think, puts at risk American personnel around the world.

Gregory Gause: The thing I fear about the Trump administration is they didn't do the balance of risks when they made this decision. Although, as I said, I think it was both wrong and a political mistake for so many people on the left and even in the mainstream of the Democratic Party to not recognize that Soleimani is a bad guy, and that his death is nothing to be mourned.

Justin Bullock: This is where the left can lose some legitimacy in general with and of what the facts on the ground are. I was having some conversations through a number of text message threads, because that's what we do as millennials. Some of them contained liberals, and some of them contained conservatives. One of them, one of my friends that I listen to to hear in particular what the conservative thought about something is, he was like, "What's the deal with these liberals not understanding this was an enemy of America and American interests?" Which seemed pretty clear to me in the immediate aftermath.

Justin Bullock: My larger concern was your second concern, which is the international norm around killing leaders of governments that aren't officially or formally at war seems to be something that we want to tread lightly with.

Gregory Gause: You can slice the salami as thin as you want on this. You can say, "Well, we had designated the IRGC as a terrorist organization and all." But, let's face it, there's a difference between killing Abu Bakr al-Baghdadi or Osama bin Laden who don't represent a state, they're non-state actors, and killing somebody who has a high-level official position in a government that's represented in the United Nations, even if we don't have an embassy there, and a government which just less than five years ago we were signing a nuclear agreement with. I think that I worry about the longer term consequences of that.

Justin Bullock: Well, I think that captures my thoughts on it, other than to highlight that after the killing or the assassination, whatever term we want to use, and I do appreciate you bringing attention to the importance of what we call it. Because I think that has real consequences for how it's discussed and what the impact is. After it played out, I had mixed feelings about it, as you describe, which is this is clearly a person that doesn't share my view of the world and the future direction of the world, and is happy to use violence to make sure my view of the world isn't a winner.

Gregory Gause: Incredibly successful at using violence in that.

Justin Bullock: And happy in some way that that person is removed from the international stage.

Gregory Gause: And an enemy of the United States, no question about it.

Justin Bullock: Then I watched the part that I actually watched on Twitter, I was driving home with my wife, and got an alert on my phone that Iran was responding. That was the part that I watched play out in real-time that I was alluding to earlier, which was there was an attack on an Iraqi base that had American soldiers. Then there was another. In retrospect, I try to be a calm academic observer. I try not to watch these things play out in this way. It was kind of interesting, as it did play out though, the feverishness of both sides and the quick response.

Justin Bullock: There were Iranian, I'm going to forget who the actor was, but was mocking Trump's response when Soleimani was killed of tweeting out the American flag. They were tweeting out the Iranian flag. There was comments coming from White House officials that a response was imminent and President Trump was about to be on the stage. We were going to have a serious response.

Justin Bullock: It was kind of wild, as I usually try to remove myself from that, to watch the hysteria around that seemed really dangerous and trying to trigger extreme responses from both sides in the immediate aftermath.

Gregory Gause: Then we have to ask ourselves what drives the Trump administration and President Trump to take these actions. My analysis of "why Soleimani" troubles me about this administration. Let's go back to the beginning of this, which really is the American withdrawal from the Iranian nuclear deal, which was holding. The Iranians were not developing their nuclear forces. They were continuing to engage in behavior around the region that we didn't like, but they were not violating the limits put on their nuclear program.

Gregory Gause: The president withdraws from that, and slaps very effective, I think surprisingly effective sanctions on the Iranians. The Iranians wait about a year where they try to see if the Europeans can do something. The Europeans are trying to work around this. If the Iranians stay in the deal, they'll try to work around these sanctions. It fails. America's financial power in the world economic system is such that when America basically says, "You've got a choice, you can do business with America or you can do business with whatever country we're sanctioning." People are going to do business with the United States.

Gregory Gause: It's not just trade. It's also money going through our financial system. We've been very effective. The IMF has estimated that the Iranian economy in 2019 decreased by 10%, 9.5%. Can you imagine if our economy, if our GDP went down by 9.5%?

Justin Bullock: Oh man.

Gregory Gause: It's not exactly Great Depression, but it's more, I think, than what happened in the Great Recession of ...

Justin Bullock: That's probably right. Yeah.

Gregory Gause: ... '08/'09. You're talking about a serious economic issue. The Iranians waited a year and then they said, "The Europeans aren't doing anything here. We've got to create an international crisis in order to bring in all the world powers and put pressure on the United States to get these sanctions off." They escalated slowly. They mined some ships coming out of the Persian Gulf, oil tankers, didn't sink them, but mined them, blew them up, and said, "Hey, look what we can do?" Nothing.

Gregory Gause: Shot down an American drone. Recall that in the summer of 2019. President Trump said that he was five minutes away from the attack when he pulled the American attack back. Iranian clients and allies in Iraq started more pressure, bombings, rocket attacks on bases where American troops were in Iraq, and then they turned the dial up to 11 by conducting a missile attack on the most important oil facilities in Saudi Arabia. Again, it was finely calibrated.

Gregory Gause: They took these facilities out for about two weeks, but it was a clear signal, "Look what we can do, and we can do worse." But nothing happened. There was no American response. That's the context in which the killing of Soleimani comes. There was an Iranian client group killed, we think, killed an American contractor who was working in Iraq. President Trump reacted very strongly to that.

Gregory Gause: The strategic interest of free flow of oil in the Persian Gulf which is what America has said is the reason for its presence in the region for decades didn't lead to a strong response from the Trump administration. The killing of one American led the United States to launch a pretty significant missile attack on Iranian allied forces in Iraq and Syria, a group called Hezbollah. Hezbollah, same name as the Lebanese group that Iran created way back in the 80s.

Gregory Gause: That led to Iranian groups in Iraq encouraging an attack on the American embassy in Baghdad. I think that that's what really got President Trump's attention, because that was an attack similar not just to the Iranian attack on the American embassy in Tehran back in '79, which basically ruined the Carter presidency among other things, but also the Benghazi attack. You can see from President Trump's Twitter feed, he said, "This is not Benghazi. This is the anti-Benghazi."

Gregory Gause: I think he thought that the Iranians were not just attacking the United States, they were attacking him and his reelection prospects. That led him to a very severe targeted reaction on General Soleimani. The thing that bothers me the most about this is that, and this plays into what might be our next topic, impeachment, the president seems to look at foreign policy as very, very personal. "What are they doing to me?" Not, "What are they doing to American strategic interests, and how can American strategic interests be served in this case?"

Gregory Gause: I was actually surprised and disappointed that we didn't have a stronger response when the Iranians attacked the Saudi oil facilities. I would have been

100% in favor of attacks on Iranian missile sites, attacks on IRGC bases. I thought that that was an escalation that deserved a serious response, try to reestablish some sense of deterrence. You don't touch the oil fields, because that's what's important. For the president it seems like other things are important.

Justin Bullock: Before we leave this, I have two things related to this I want to ask you about. One is that in the wake of this the president's own justification was that Soleimani was actively in the process of executing or planning attacks on four US embassies.

Gregory Gause: Embassies.

Justin Bullock: That's one thing I want to get your take on, because it seems that no one's been able to provide any evidence for that, but that could mean different things. It feels like a Bush-Colin Powell moment. I want to ask you about that. The other piece, answer that and I'm going to think about my other piece.

Gregory Gause: I think it's pretty clear that that use of the word imminent was misplaced here. I have absolutely no doubt that General Soleimani was planning bad things for the United States. There's also some indications, and I don't know how much we should believe these either, that the Saudis had asked the Iraqi prime minister, Adil Abdul-Mahdi, to pass a message to the Iranians after this Abqaiq attack, after the attack on the oil facilities, basically saying, "Look, maybe we've escalated a little too much between us. Is there some way that we could ratchet down?" According to Abdul-Mahdi, Soleimani was bringing a response to that.

Gregory Gause: I think it's entirely plausible that Soleimani was both planning in the long term for attacks on American interests around the Middle East, and maybe even outside the Middle East, and at the same time was perhaps carrying a message to the Saudis about deescalation of tensions.

Justin Bullock: Second thought didn't come to me, so we're going to move on.

Gregory Gause: I think we're done.

Justin Bullock: We've had 30 minutes on it.

Gregory Gause: I was going to say, my apologies for a lecture about Middle East politics.

Justin Bullock: No. It's good.

Gregory Gause: For those who tune in, I mean they should know.

Justin Bullock: I think they tune in sometimes to hear you describe international affairs in ways that they can understand. One other of note international affair event that happened while we were gone that I will mention, because we've mentioned it before and because of my own connection there this summer, and its relevance

to in particular China is that Taiwan had national elections. Despite what seems to have been pretty significant attempts at influence of information from Beijing and from China, the Taiwanese decided to stick with their current president who is more confrontational with Chinese interests.

Gregory Gause: A party that calls in their platform for the eventual independence of Taiwan.

Justin Bullock: Exactly. Yeah.

Gregory Gause: Which the Chinese have always said would be then the war starts.

Justin Bullock: That's just another thing that we missed while we were gone.

Gregory Gause: Maybe we can get our colleague Will Norris on some time to talk about that.

Justin Bullock: The timing of the killing is a bit suspicious for other reasons that we haven't gotten back around to, because-

Gregory Gause: Are you talking about Wag the Dog?

Justin Bullock: A little bit of wagging the dog. In between last time we chatted with folks and now Nancy Pelosi held on to the articles of impeachment. That was going on over the holidays. They were delivered in this funny, I think, traditional fashion. Pictures of everyone marching to hand them over.

Gregory Gause: Marching them across the Capitol.

Justin Bullock: The killing happened to take place in between-

Gregory Gause: The British do that so much better.

Justin Bullock: I know.

Gregory Gause: If you've ever seen the state opening of parliament, we should just stop all this stuff.

Justin Bullock: We could also talk about all the troubles going on with the British monarchy, but it's not ...

Gregory Gause: Oh, let's not.

Justin Bullock: ... that interesting.

Gregory Gause: Let's not.

Justin Bullock: In the meantime, there was this killing which is a show of strength. It's something that Clinton did during impeachment proceedings. Trump has been

impeached by vote essentially in the House of Representatives but it hasn't been passed on to the Senate. Well, now it's been passed on to the Senate, and we had this great show of walking which the big [crosstalk 00:33:44].

Gregory Gause: Walking the resolutions over.

Justin Bullock: And the controversy over the signing of the pens, or the signing with the different pens. That's another reason why this perks our antennas, this was going on when the impeachment is already underway. Since then we've had the swearing in of the senators, which happened, I believe, late last week.

Gregory Gause: Thursday.

Justin Bullock: Thursday.

Gregory Gause: I think it was Thursday last week.

Justin Bullock: They have been sworn in. The prosecutorial, if you will, team from the House, includes Adam Schiff and others, has been selected. Trump's own defense team has been selected, which includes some interesting characters of which Ken Starr and Alan Dershowitz, which are of some note, of some ...

Gregory Gause: Notoriety.

Justin Bullock: Notoriety that we can discuss. Then today there was, as we mentioned earlier, discussions around what the rules would be. It seems to be that each side is going to have 24 hours across three days, seems to be the most recent, to present their case.

Gregory Gause: As of now no witnesses.

Justin Bullock: But no witnesses as of now. Interestingly, too, as we dive into this, when we were gone there was some talk of the Senate just dismissing this outright in a majority vote, saying, "We're just done with this. We're going to dismiss these." It turns out that there weren't enough votes to just dismiss this without some type of process of an actual ...

Gregory Gause: At least the presentation of the case.

Justin Bullock: At least a presentation of a case.

Gregory Gause: If not witnesses.

Justin Bullock: What is your sense of this? I think it's useful that we're going to hear some presentation of facts. That seems to be after how on indictment, which is how all this has been described, and then having an actual proceedings, that seems how we generally think about these things. There are these claims coming from

the president's defense lawyers today that this is now the president's opportunity to defend himself, because he was cut out of the process in the House. Which is also, just so we should note, just a lie. It's just a straight-up-

Gregory Gause: Just not true.

Justin Bullock: Just not true, and that the fact that the president's team is leading with that, I think, is frustrating.

Gregory Gause: They were given the opportunity to present evidence to the House committees that were dealing with this issue. There were Republican members on those committees, intelligence, judiciary, that carried the president's water for him. I think that this is, I mean to me, I'm no expert on American politics, but old enough to remember both the Clinton impeachment, and, believe it or not, the Nixon, the moves to impeach President Nixon, the reporting out of articles of impeachment against President Nixon back in 1974. I'm old enough to remember that even.

Justin Bullock: When you were saying '87 as some of the height of the Iranian conflict, I didn't want to interrupt your train of thought because it looked like you were right on point. I was going to say that is the year I was born.

Gregory Gause: There we go.

Justin Bullock: I have no recollection of '87 or '88.

Gregory Gause: You have no recollection. No recollection of that whatsoever.

Justin Bullock: And certainly not of the Nixon.

Gregory Gause: Of the Nixon impeachment.

Justin Bullock: I actually don't have any recollection of the, I wasn't actually politically aware at that time period, but I don't really remember anything about the Clinton impeachment either.

Gregory Gause: The most interesting thing to me is the only votes we had on the Nixon impeachment were in judiciary committee. Because then the tapes, the smoking gun tape of the president basically indicating that he had knowledge of efforts to cover up the Watergate break in came out, and he had to resign.

Justin Bullock: What a weird world where-

Gregory Gause: The thing that I remember is that there were a number of Republicans on the judiciary committee who voted in favor of one or more of the articles of impeachment. It was a delegation of Republican senators who went down to the White House and said to the president, "Mister President, you've got to go

because you don't have the support even within the Republican Party to sustain an acquittal within the Senate. Because you will be impeached by the House, and you don't have enough votes to sustain an acquittal in the Senate."

Gregory Gause: In the Clinton impeachment it was a bit more partisan, but there were a number of Republican senators who voted to acquit Clinton on the charges against him, including Susan Collins. It just looks like on this one it's going to be a pure partisan vote. There was no real debate in the Clinton or the Nixon cases of the facts. There was only in the Clinton case a question "does this rise to the level of an impeachable offense?"

Gregory Gause: In this case there's not even an agreement on the basic facts. President contends that his call with President Zelensky of Ukraine was perfect. He uses the word perfect all the time.

Justin Bullock: Contrary to the GAO in their investigation.

Gregory Gause: Right.

Justin Bullock: Perfect.

Gregory Gause: Whereas the Democrats look at that and say, "This is prima facie evidence that he was abusing his office for personal political gain." We're arguing two different worlds. Maybe there'll be one Republican or two, but I think even that would be unusual.

Justin Bullock: My own sense of the vote, I no longer have a sense of how the process is going to play out between now and then. Actually it seems to be in some recent pollings a majority of support for conviction in some national polls, which is interesting. My sense of this is just for the dramatic effect, here is my hypothesis is that a few Republican senators will vote to convict.

Gregory Gause: Really?

Justin Bullock: My suspicion is three to four.

Gregory Gause: Well, four would convict him, right?

Justin Bullock: No. You have two-thirds.

Gregory Gause: Two-thirds. I'm sorry. I was thinking of majorities to call witnesses. You're absolutely right. You're absolutely right.

Justin Bullock: My projection is that on both counts, which I said this in public at one of our other events, but it will be a majority, however-

Gregory Gause: To convict.

Justin Bullock: It'll be a majority to convict across both counts, but we won't get anywhere, of course, near the two-thirds.

Gregory Gause: Near the two-thirds.

Justin Bullock: I actually think it'll be really interesting, because I do think a few, three to four of them, and it's why-

Gregory Gause: Who do you see? You see Romney.

Justin Bullock: I see Romney.

Gregory Gause: Collins.

Justin Bullock: Collins and Mur-

Gregory Gause: Gardner.

Justin Bullock: Gardner and ...

Gregory Gause: Murkowski.

Justin Bullock: ... Murkowski are all in with-

Gregory Gause: Lamar Alexander.

Justin Bullock: I don't know about Lamar Alexander.

Gregory Gause: Those are the five that get [crosstalk 00:41:18] named as being squishy. That would be amazing.

Justin Bullock: I think it would be really interesting.

Gregory Gause: No. That would be amazing if five Republicans voted to convict. Wow.

Justin Bullock: I think Romney will.

Gregory Gause: I'll put my money on ...

Justin Bullock: None.

Gregory Gause: ... at most two, and probably more likely one, maybe Romney. I think Susan Collins will. I mean she's between a rock and a hard place, between her primary and the general in Maine. My guess is that you can't get to the general if you lose your primary.

Justin Bullock: Lose the primary.

Gregory Gause: My guess is she'll vote to acquit. Cory Gardner in Colorado probably the same thing. Those are the two Republican senators in states carried by Hillary Clinton who are up for election.

Justin Bullock: We should say I think we both agree that two-thirds of senators the probability is essentially zero.

Gregory Gause: Yeah.

Justin Bullock: No matter what evidence comes to light, no matter-

Gregory Gause: I cannot imagine what evidence could come to light that we don't already know. We basically know ...

Justin Bullock: What happened.

Gregory Gause: ... what happened here. The contention that the president was concerned about corruption generally in Ukraine is not borne out by anything else. The only thing he asked about was Biden and this discredited idea that Ukraine was involved in the leaking of the Democratic National Committee emails.

Justin Bullock: One of the interesting things that did come out while we were gone that made me think of our friend Larry Napper and the professional ambassadors was what appears to be the surveillance of Yovanovitch in these. I think maybe we were talking about it, but in a way that would almost be comical.

Gregory Gause: Clownish.

Justin Bullock: Clownish, these text messages going back and forth, if it wasn't associates of Rudy Giuliani surveilling the US ambassador to Ukraine.

Gregory Gause: I know.

Justin Bullock: Which seems ...

Gregory Gause: It's bizarre.

Justin Bullock: ... almost bizarre. I mean it is bizarre and kind of outrageous.

Gregory Gause: It's exactly outrageous. This is what's happened to our politics.

Justin Bullock: One final thing that I think is worth talking about a little bit that's other major political news is the Democratic primaries. I believe Cory Booker and ...

Gregory Gause: Julián Castro.

Justin Bullock: ... Julián Castro, and who was the other, Marianne, what was her ...

Gregory Gause: Williamson.

Justin Bullock: Williamson. I think have all dropped a couple of those more serious candidates, maybe, than another one. One a Texan from San Antonio, and one in Cory Booker who I think at the beginning people would have thought would have maybe developed into a serious contender.

Gregory Gause: Maybe had a good shot.

Justin Bullock: Now we're left with no serious, well, depends on what you think of Andrew Yang, but no serious minority candidates.

Gregory Gause: Well, Yang was not on the debate stage ...

Justin Bullock: Debate stage. I looked at the polls ...

Gregory Gause: ... in January.

Justin Bullock: ... before I got here. It looks like he's polling nationally at about 3%, which puts him in, I think, either fifth or sixth. It seems to me, now, it'll be interesting to see how New Hampshire and Iowa play out, of course, and that'll help the conversation, but, one, it looks like we're going to have a drawn out primary potentially. Seems that Biden still keeps about a six or seven point lead over now Sanders, who's coming in roughly in second with Warren in a close third. Then you have Buttigieg and Bloomberg rounding out the-

Gregory Gause: Who knows about Bloomberg. I think Bloomberg really is the wildcard here. The way I've always seen this, and I'm not sure how long we're going to have those candidates, but it's interesting to reflect on the fact that we went from the most diverse set of Democratic candidates in terms of racial and ethnic and gender characteristics to Democratic primary so white.

Justin Bullock: And so old in general minus Buttigieg.

Gregory Gause: So old. Yeah. On the gender side, Senator Klobuchar and Senator Warren still in the fight. This winnowing process is brutal. All the political junkies always say, "Oh, brokered convention, brokered convention." But we're already down to, let's face it, maybe five candidates. If Senator Klobuchar doesn't do really well in Iowa, we'll be down to four. If Mister Buttigieg who's no longer mayor of South Bend. They have a new mayor as of January 1.

Justin Bullock: I missed that.

Gregory Gause: His term ended. Former Mayor Buttigieg, if he doesn't do first or second, I think, in Iowa and New Hampshire, I basically think he's done. He has got some money. He can stick around. Then you're down to three, and then we have to find out is Mike Bloomberg four, is Mayor Bloomberg four. I always thought that

these early contests, the most interesting thing is Sanders versus Warren. Because there's only room for one person in that lane.

Justin Bullock: I agree.

Gregory Gause: Who is it going to be? Is it going to be Senator Sanders or Senator Warren? That to me is the most interesting thing about the first four, and maybe into Super Tuesday when you and I get to vote in the Texas primary. I can't imagine that both of them will be serious candidates going forward coming out of Super Tuesday. One of them is going to win and the other one is going to have enormous pressures to leave the race and to endorse the other one. Because if they stay in the race killing each other, it's a Bloomberg or Biden.

Gregory Gause: Then I guess we have to look at Super Tuesday. Can Bloomberg knock out Biden? If he doesn't knock out Biden on Super Tuesday when he's going to spend hundreds of millions of his own dollars. I mean he's the real billionaire. Trump's the fake billionaire. Bloomberg is the real billionaire.

Justin Bullock: He's got all kinds of wealth.

Gregory Gause: He's also a much more serious guy. I mean he ran New York City for three terms. In terms of executive experience, he's the most qualified person running for president right now.

Justin Bullock: With Biden coming in a somewhat second [crosstalk 00:48:06] vice president.

Gregory Gause: Somewhat second being vice president.

Justin Bullock: Just being in the rooms. It's hard to imagine, I mean everything happened so fast.

Gregory Gause: Can you see Warren and Sanders both viable candidates down to the convention?

Justin Bullock: I wouldn't think so. One thing that we could note just for intrigue is now after those camps had stayed buddy-buddy, that's not the case anymore. The debate squashed that, I think. Now maybe they can reconcile.

Gregory Gause: My guess is they can.

Justin Bullock: Being on national TV and kind of-

Gregory Gause: It's not them reconciling. It's the Bernie bros. Because we know that a number of them sat out the election in 2016, or maybe even voted for Trump. Who knows? Even though Sanders endorsed Hillary Clinton. He seems to have a very passionate and committed base that is not willing to accept alternatives to Bernie.

Justin Bullock: The other thing that is probably worth noting, some of the polling data that I've seen is that Biden remains the favorite of the African American community. Which is a large voting block in Democratic primaries.

Gregory Gause: We know that can shift. Before the Iowa caucuses in '08, Hillary Clinton was the overwhelming choice according to the polls of African Americans in the Democratic Party. Then when, then Senator, Obama won the Iowa caucuses you had a real shift. African American voters said, "Well, maybe this guy can win. He's winning white votes in Iowa." I don't know how firm African American support for Biden is. This is why we have elections.

Justin Bullock: We will see.

Gregory Gause: Maybe we should wrap on this, I don't know. We choose our presidential candidates in a really weird way. The number of people who are going to vote in Iowa and New Hampshire, and in Iowa you don't even vote, you caucus. The number of people who are going to vote in New Hampshire and South Carolina, and then caucus in Nevada. Tiny. It's minuscule. The number of people who vote on Super Tuesday will be greater, but, let's face it, the turnout will be minuscule compared to a general election turnout.

Gregory Gause: One can argue whether it would be better to go back to more direct party control, party elders control, smoke filled rooms to put it bluntly, as to who's going to be the nominee. I would argue that the more open primary system has generated some good candidates, but has also generated some really bad candidates and bad presidents.

Justin Bullock: And it puts a focus, apologies to Iowans and New Hampshireans.

Gregory Gause: New Hampshireites.

Justin Bullock: New Hampshireites. I mean they get to really dominate the conversation and they may or may not be representative of the rest of America.

Gregory Gause: Well, we know demographically they're not representative of the rest of America.

Justin Bullock: It also seems like if we're going to do it that way, maybe having a day like election day where everyone votes on who the candidate for that party's going to be might also be an improvement.

Gregory Gause: Well, the rules are what they are, so we'll play them out. I don't think that we've reached the best of all possible worlds for how we do this.

Justin Bullock: Well, I think that's certainly true. Not least of which is the fact that the whole process is two years.

Gregory Gause: It's so exhausting.

Justin Bullock: Which is so exhausting. It gives us something to talk about.

Gregory Gause: Our politics are so exhausting to begin with now.

Justin Bullock: Which is so exhausting, and it-

Gregory Gause: This just makes it more exhausting.

Justin Bullock: Yeah. The amount of resources-

Gregory Gause: I haven't watched a single debate.

Justin Bullock: Yeah. Me neither.

Gregory Gause: I just can't.

Justin Bullock: Me neither.

Gregory Gause: I read the coverage of them. I listen to podcasts about them, but I just didn't have the mental and emotional energy to watch any of them.

Justin Bullock: You know what I also don't watch is Trump rallies. I can't-

Gregory Gause: Again, I read the coverage of them, but I don't have the emotional energy to ...

Justin Bullock: I find that when I do, if I either watch a debate or a Trump rally, the reality of the way the conversations play out is too disheartening. It's too disheartening.

Gregory Gause: Well, that's an up note on which to end the podcast. We'll do better next week.

Justin Bullock: We'll do better and we'll have some uplift. I mean Mark Welsh is great.

Gregory Gause: We'll talk about the school.

Justin Bullock: Frank Ashley are great. They're great company. They're great conversationalists.

Gregory Gause: We'll talk about the school.

Justin Bullock: Talk about the Bush School.

Gregory Gause: We'll talk about what's going on at the school, the plans for the school. Maybe not as nationally and internationally significant as today's topics, but we hope listeners might enjoy getting an insight from the leadership of the school where we work as to what we're doing and where we're going.

Justin Bullock: I do have one question, so that Dean Welsh is prepared, that I have been threatening to ask him, which is he helped run the air force. Now we have a space force that has partnered with the air force, and I really want to know about his thoughts organizationally about a space force.

Gregory Gause: Good luck drawing him out on that.

Justin Bullock: Did you see the uniforms?

Gregory Gause: Yes.

Justin Bullock: Oh my goodness. Camouflage. That was great.

Gregory Gause: I think we're fortunate they didn't look like Star Trek uniforms.

Justin Bullock: Well, thank you Greg. It's always fun to get together and talk.

Gregory Gause: Thank you Justin. So good to see you back for another semester.

Justin Bullock: Another semester. Thanks for listening. Thanks for putting up with us for what is now 53 minutes. We look forward to hosting both Dean Welsh and Dean Ashley to talk about some of the current state of affairs of the Bush School, maybe some insight into some leadership. Then following that up with our good friend Raymond Robertson, who's agreed to meet with us again at the beginning of February. We're excited to share our-

Gregory Gause: More trade talk.

Justin Bullock: More trade talk, and our mini-series that will be focusing on migration and border issues and asylum seekers, which will be an interesting new thing that we're doing. Greg and I have a few other things in the works that might come down this semester, just to keep things fresh and interesting.

Gregory Gause: Some new colleagues.

Justin Bullock: Some new colleagues. Some new approaches to what we might record. Some new fun for you all. Thanks again for listening. Thanks again to Downtown Uncorked in historic downtown Bryan for hosting us and taking such good care of us. We look forward to spending the spring with them and having some good conversations.

Gregory Gause: We'll see you next week.