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**Lizzy:** Hi, I'm Lizzy Ghedi-Ehrlich.

**Lisa:** I'm Lisa Hernandez.

**Avigail:** I'm Avigail Oren.

**Lizzy:** And we are your hosts, all three of us, for Scholar Strategy Network's No Jargon. Every other week we discuss an American policy problem with one of the nation's top researchers without jargon.

**Avigail:** So the three of us are together. Usually it's just two of us who record this banter, but the three of us are together because this is our 300th episode of No Jargon. Yes, it's a very exciting milestone for the organization.

Huge thank you and congrats to the whole team that puts this together. But we chose a very special guest for this special episode. It is the new board chair of SSN, Mark Schmitt.

And I had the pleasure of first meeting Mark about 2 and a half years ago, many moons before it, it became clear that he would step into this role. He saw that I was from SSN. We were at a large event with— I was like the least important person in this room, but he saw on my name tag that I was from SSN, and he was so effusive about his support for the organization and his love of our mission.

And so I'm so thrilled that he has stepped into this role to kind of steward our board and help guide the organization through its next season of existence.

**Lizzy:** Love to have a fan at the helm of the ship. And, you know, equal to that excitement, Mark's a fan of democracy, and I'm glad that he's also a person who's trying to steer that ship because, man, uh, it's, it's losing its steam in some ways.

**Lisa:** Yeah, I mean, I definitely think that a fan of democracy should be a fan of SSN considering how much we support engaging in the world of democracy. And obviously I can only assume that that is what Mark wants for people, especially people with so much expertise that we tend to support here and being able to engage in all the different facets of democracy.

**Lizzy:** That's right. And you know, he's worked on a lot of things over the years. Democracy itself takes a lot of different supports in order to function properly.

The most recent thing he's done that we get to talk about today is, you know, I was definitely a skeptic, and I was very excited for the way Mark was able to lay out some important premises that I could get with. Because you know what's not super popular necessarily these days is political parties and the two-party system, that even though there's room for others, but that's essentially what we've got and what we've had for a while here in this country.

It's tough. There's a lot of negative feelings, and I think learning from Mark, but really through Mark, because he is a person who's a convener, essentially. And that's another thing that he has in common with SSN.

We're here to bring experts together with practitioners, with people who use research, with everyday citizens. And so when Mark does something, he's bringing all those very important voices together to try to synthesize, arrive at consensus, and just get some really good next steps.

And political parties is a tough one. I think there's a lot of folks out there who would say, why would we try to rehab institutions like those that we associate with a lot of negative things, like some pretty crazy fundraising practices.

But that's the conversation that we had, and I'm really excited to present it to folks because that was definitely a space where I feel like I was able to shape and reform some opinions in a positive way. And that's definitely something we're trying to do.

So very excited to present everyone my conversation with Mark Schmitt. He's the new chair of SSN's board of directors. He leads the political reform program at New America, a nonpartisan think tank based in Washington, DC. He's the co-author of the recent report, *A Blueprint for Healthier Political Parties*. Here's our conversation.

**Lizzy:** Welcome to No Jargon, Mark.

**Mark:** Thank you very much, Lizzy. I'm really glad to be here.

**Lizzy:** Yeah, I'm so excited to talk to you. I love that you're here. Congrats on your new role. You're the new board chair of SSN. Thank you.

And it's especially fitting, not just for that, but you happen to be here on this occasion. This is the 300th episode of this podcast. Wow, that's a lot, right? It feels difficult to believe myself, but love to bring you into an organization that you have certainly been, uh, you know, a champion of and a contributor to for quite some time.

**Mark:** Yeah, I'm really excited about it. I'm just a huge admirer of SSN and us of you.

**Lizzy:** And I'm excited to introduce our listeners to you as a whole person. You are a person who didn't come out of nowhere, and you're not just someone who would be a good organizer, you are a guy who works on democracy.

You have that broad and deep view of what democracy strengthening and democracy support looks like. And so just kind of to kick things off, there's a recent project that you were involved with at New America that I want to discuss some of the specifics of the report, *A Blueprint for Healthier Political Parties*. I mean, even just the title, kind of when I situated it in the context of strengthening democracy, I am one of those people who I saw being described in the report as I read it, who is just like, parties? You mean the people who text me every 12 minutes to ask for \$5?

I was kind of like, is healthier parties the thing that we need? You know, and I just—

**Mark:** I think before we started, I got a text message from Chuck Schumer saying, hey, it's going to be a long one. You have to sit down and read it. I did not read it.

Well, that is so cool. And I'm not going to read it.

**Lizzy:** And here you are. You convened a bunch of experts, people, the kind of experts that SSN speaks with, people who are researchers, also practitioners, people who worked within and without of parties, people who did advocacy work, like kind of working on parties to move them towards a certain thing.

So a whole group of people who's got a lot of expertise in what has worked or maybe what hasn't and what they'd like to see. To come together and try to find some way forward.

And part of the premise of this report is that healthier political parties support healthier democracy. And I kind of wanted to start there because that was immediately the foundation that did give me a little bit of pause.

**Mark:** Yeah, yeah, yeah. And I think we need to be a lot more blunt about that. There is a very common tendency now because our parties have failed so badly, there's a tendency to just reject the concept entirely.

But parties are how people organize their political— you know, people aren't just like little atoms floating around with their policy positions and figuring out who matches them most precisely. I'm trying to figure out who to vote for in D.C. and I can't, you know, I know who to vote for mayor, but it's not just like I have a bundle of policy, like more housing or better schools, you know, but parties and other groups that aren't parties but are similar to parties play that role of helping us organize and act together.

I mean, politics is about collective action, and that means not just all together, but at times finding the people who you have some affinity with and figuring out ways to organize to get what you want.

It's one reason to bring together both scholars and— which is political scientists and also sociologists and folks like that who, who've looked at the political process— but also people who are engaged in it, not just from within parties, sometimes from within newer parties or marginal parties, and sometimes from other groups, and sometimes actually skeptical of parties.

So getting those things together, and again, it's a, as you noted, it's a very, it's, it's, it has a lot in common with things SSN does because it's getting scholars out of their, you know, I won't use the phrase ivory tower, but out of their, out of their zone. And into the zone of more relevant work.

So that calling something a blueprint and having such a, you know, a normative approach isn't necessarily natural for some of these folks. And one of the nice things about this is this was a day and a half conference, and we promised people confidentiality, so I'm not going to cite who's in the room, but, you know, I'll tell you it was a pretty broad— I think we had about 42 people and a pretty broad set of representation, and everybody was really— participated a lot, and it's all reflected in the report.

The idea that parties are a positive good is kind of the first hurdle. I think it's really important.

I mean, right now we're looking, for example, I don't know if you follow the California governor's race at all. California has a system that is all about getting rid, you know, minimizing the role of parties. They are a direct democracy state with ballot initiatives and things like that, which also I think are actually very, very positive at sort of breaking gridlock. And we've done some work on that as well.

But, um, more importantly, they now have a top-two primary system similar to Washington State that's really intended to minimize the role of parties. What that does is kind of create a whole lot of chaos.

So there was concern for a while among Democrats in California that because Democrats have, you know, 11 candidates and Republicans have 2, you could have the Republicans, you know, with 15% each occupy the top 2 slots, shut out the Democrats entirely, solely as a function of how many candidates there are. You know, there's a lot more happening in the Democratic Party. There are a lot more politically ambitious people. It's a Democratic state. There are going to be more candidates.

That's a kind of a crazy way to operate, and it takes control over the nomination out of the hands of the party, which is really, I mean, one of the things a political party should do was be able to say, let's find our best nominee and put them forward. And that it's very hard to do when you're minimizing the role of party.

So I think there's a lot to be said for, again, it's very familiar territory for academics, not so familiar in the, in a sort of general conversation, but there's a lot to be said for parties have a kind of a long-term view. They aggregate people across a lot of different viewpoints.

So when you sometimes hear Democrats say, you know, I can't believe I'm in the same party as somebody else, it is still aggregating a very, very broad coalition. Although we could also look at, I hope we have a chance to talk about the merits of a multi-party system that had more than two parties.

**Lizzy:** Yeah, sure. And that was, I mean, there's so many questions still that spring from this premise of healthier parties lead to healthier democracies, healthier parties would look like X. And I liked the way that the report that you pulled together that has to deal with this premise first, why healthy parties, we know that there's negative associations with parties, what is the value here? Showing what you just showed about how, well, voters actually aren't just a laundry list of policy positions that have no coherence or through line.

Parties are simply a space where we can organize that package together collectively, perhaps making some compromises or suppressing certain priorities and uplifting others in order to have a coalition that is available to do collective action, which is actually what gets the job done and what a healthy democracy is about.

I found that to be— that was illuminating and that was necessary for me to move forward with some of the other things that the group you convened discussed.

**Mark:** Yeah, you do have to get that out of the way first. But not everybody's going to be convinced.

**Lizzy:** Let's talk about then what healthy parties, because again, most of us only have this historic memory of what we might consider a not healthy party. Are there historic periods either in the US or even abroad?

Because I know this was a pretty rangy group of folks that you spoke to and democracies exist outside of the US. That's always important for us to remember.

Are there healthy political parties operating today, or were there at one point in the US that we could maybe give folks a picture to keep in mind?

**Mark:** Sure, sure. I mean, I think there were definitely parties that had more of a local structure that actually connected to people, you know, as recently as the 1970s. Sometimes we would denounce them as political machines, but they had a big role in people's lives.

I mean, sometimes they had a very specific role in bringing in immigrants and creating a more welcoming culture. Sometimes they had a big role in, in kind of the social life of communities. And that was an interesting conversation in the conference because it was one of the points of difference because some people were like, parties should be like out there organizing the local, you know, sponsoring the local Little League or doing things in the community. And you'll, you'll sometimes see that as a diagnosis, particularly of the Democratic Party of like, you need to do more things like that.

And then there were other people in the conference that were like, actually, I want some boundaries around my politics, you know, I want my Little League to be actually a non-political zone. And I think that's a very persuasive argument, but there was definitely a point where there was much, a much richer and deeper state and local infrastructure, which wasn't always bad. Sometimes it had a kind of conservative lean by its very nature, and you see traces of that still in a state like Massachusetts. What counts for conservatism in Massachusetts is still within the Democratic Party, for example. That's going to be less true in a state like California.

And there is variation even among states. And that was one of the things that we sort of marked out as a thing that we need research on. Like, why do some states have a richer state-level political party and local-level political party? And some, it's just really, really absent.

I mean, people often point to Wisconsin as a state where Ben Wickler, the state party chair, who was a candidate for the DNC chair, built a really solid structure that could, that found ways to compete in state Supreme Court elections and things like that. And then other states just seem to have absolutely nothing.

Like, I think Florida may be recovering a little bit, but until very recently, just didn't have any kind of, uh, Democratic Party structure.

Now, the Republican Party is, and sorry if I'm going to go on for a minute, one of the interesting things about this is we're talking about parties. Like I went to a conference a couple of weeks ago that was sort of about a similar topic, but it was really just about the Democratic Party.

This is about parties and the parties are both failing, but they're failing in ways that look very different. Right? So one is entirely personalized as, as we've seen this week with the defeat of Senator Cornyn and Senator Cassidy, it all radiates around one sun, which is a very mortal almost 80-year-old man, but the whole party is now exists in service to that person.

That's, I don't want to be Pollyannaish. That's not sustainable, you know, right?

**Lizzy:** Yes.

**Mark:** But, but it's a failing that's different from the Democratic Party, which has no guiding center, has a lot of talented people, has people who act in very different directions, doesn't have any real local infrastructure. You know, when you look at it in terms of parties and you're disciplined about that, and at the conference, we had people who'd been involved in both Republican electoral politics and Republican Party politics on the Hill.

So we're getting both viewpoints. When you look at it as a general theme, you see a lot actually in common, even though they manifest in very different ways.

**Lizzy:** And that is interesting that we have like such wildly, wildly different types of not being great right now.

**Mark:** There are more ways to suck than there are to be good, apparently.

**Lizzy:** Yeah, what a lovely picture that we get to see. I mean, I guess that's an interesting tour through faults. And failures are only truly a failure if you don't learn from them. So I feel like there's a lot to learn right now with everything we're saying. And hopefully that can be useful. Speaking to the localization piece, because this is something— and I'm not sure if this is equal with the two main parties that we work with here in this country, but it's definitely something that I, again, speaking from my observations as a person who is a voter and not a democracy specialist, and therefore hopefully speaking to a lot of the immediate concerns of our listenership.

It really feels like parties, the discussions that they have, the platforms they put together, the messaging that they do lives only at not even the federal level. It's like floating above the national level and down below it is a bunch of very disorganized or maybe not really present people who may or may not adhere to the things that are being discussed at those high-level conversations.

And it becomes a heuristic for a lot of voters. We'll use kind of a \$5 word, but just like you see that letter next to a person's name and it allows you to make a lot of assumptions about them. And people can simply stick with those assumptions and people often do is what we're seeing. And when you look at a state legislature or a local city council, there's a huge amount of diversity and variety and sometimes honestly still like bipartisanship and folks that are actually working together to govern. In different contexts, that if you only listen to the national news and only got news from those national-level parties, you just wouldn't necessarily see that at all. So it feels like there's a disconnect there. And I am interested in what folks had to say, you know, about that.

And then part 2, it's the bench-filling issue. Part of that disconnect between those lower levels of government and wherever parties are sort of living now more towards the top.

I feel like there's so much hunger from everyone across the political spectrum for new and invigorated voices who can speak authentically to what my concerns as a member of a certain party are. And I keep feeling like those folks just aren't being surfaced.

And I know they have to exist because this is a big country full of a lot of fired up people. And yet we have so many uncontested races. We have so many benches that only have maybe one person on it and you're just sort of passing the torch or no one, no one's trying.

And I'm just like, where did that go? And what was the discussion around, um, filling that gap at your convening?

**Mark:** Yeah, no, I mean, there was really a lot of discussion about part— I mean, parties have an important role in recruiting, developing candidates, developing people at the local level, helping them move up, spotting people.

Some of that has filled in with other kinds of political nonprofits. I mean, there's such a rich world of organizations. So an organization like Run for Something, for example, is trying to do, you know, super impressive, trying to do that, break some of the gerontocracy.

There's a lot of reasons why people are embedded in the political system so that you're not getting the fresh voices. I think this is particularly true in, at this point, in heavily Republican places. The name Democratic Party just doesn't get you anywhere.

So that's where you start to see, for example, in a place like Nebraska, some places where candidates are running without using a Democratic Party label. And that actually opens it up a little bit because the label kind of dooms them.

You do see in state legislatures a little bit of bipartisan, you know, there's moments of bipartisanship, particularly on issues that are a little less fraught.

At the national level, I mean, it's, it's obscure, but it's very different from even the '90s. I mean, I worked on Capitol Hill in the 1990s, and I used to say that my boss was on the Senate Finance Committee, super powerful committee. He was a liberal Democrat.

There were 3 Republicans that were kind of better allies often than 3 of the Democrats who were from, and the Democrats were from Texas and Louisiana and Oklahoma, oil and gas interests. The Republicans were from Minnesota and Rhode Island and places like that.

And that's all gone. That sort of overlap of the parties, which was sometimes confusing, I think, to voters. That was a concern of political scientists in the 1950s, that there was no kind of coherent national agenda.

There were they would say there were four parties, right? There was a sort of liberal moderate Republican wing that had its role in the, in Congress, conservative Republicans that played more of a national role. And then there were Southern Democrats and Northern Democrats. There was a kind of lack of coherence and people wanted to see more coherence. Now we have the coherence. Coherence makes it very difficult to do some of that bipartisan bridging, but ultimately the more you have issues that are not tied up in national political fights, the more you can find that, some of that connection that just enables people to act as human beings together.

**Lizzy:** That sounds still, that sounds so far away. Was there discussion at this convening of how some of the steps to improve party health could put us in a better position for what you just described to sound more feasible, or is there some question mark, question mark step still in the middle of that process that we haven't figured out?

**Mark:** Yeah, no, I think there are question mark, question mark steps, and that is also where some parties are different. Like, I, I do, I think there are a lot of Democrats who are out there like, yeah, we love to be cooperating with, you know, they, they actually started off kind of collaborating with Trump in both his terms. And then, I mean, I saw the other, you know, Cory Booker, for example, from New Jersey, voted for some Trump nominees, and then he gave that big speech and said, I'm not voting for Trump nominees anymore.

There was a feeling like the price of admission for Democrats was to seem cooperative and seem like they were viewing each thing on their own and understanding where people were anxious about, about immigration and things like that. And Republicans, particularly when every time there's been a Democratic president, like in my adult lifetime, which is Clinton and Obama and Biden, they've moved very quickly to resist everything, to stop everything.

So it is, you know, the political scientists Norm Ornstein and Tom Mann have had a line 10 or 15, 10 or 12 years ago. About the Republican Party being a sort of historic outlier in its unwillingness to participate in the same way. So there's a real big difference at the national level between those. But again, you might see very different patterns in a state legislature.

**Lizzy:** Your report doesn't touch on this explicitly, but I have to ask, based on what you just said, if that is what we have observed about the current trajectory of the Republican Party, which I want to talk about that as a party and not at like, conservatism as an ideology can be many things, but a Republican Party, no matter what ideology it was working towards, put any name in front of there, if Republican puts us too much in a space that it's hard to let go of our priors about.

What do you, what do you do when we've got this prescription for making things healthier, which is going to be about working towards some level of depolarization in some sense, doing more community building, ultimately it would lead to maybe more bipartisanship.

How do we burst through the fact that one of the two major parties right now has made it pretty clear that they're not interested in that project?

**Mark:** Well, I think it's a— I think a lot of it has to do with the idea that some of the feedback processes in our system are kind of broken. Like, the reason you shouldn't behave like Donald Trump or you shouldn't behave like the modern Republican Party, even the party of Mitch McConnell, is because there would be political consequences for that, right?

I mean, a party has a long-term interest. It doesn't in theory, doesn't just have a short-term interest. It has an issue that extends beyond the lifetimes of its current elected official. Where there's a political response, parties change. And we've certainly seen that when there's been, you know, backlash to various Democratic initiatives and things like that.

You've seen a little more, just like, kind of full speed ahead with the Republican Party. And sometimes with Trump, everything happens so fast that there's no consequences because everything's just happening so fast. Sometimes it's issues with the information infrastructure, you know, the way people are getting information and not, not necessarily aware.

There seems to be a shocking lack of awareness of how badly the war in Iran is going, for example. So I think that, I think that the lack of consequences for behavior, even going back to Republican moves, like, you know, holding open a Supreme Court seat for a year, which is, which was 2016, not, not even in the first Trump term, the lack of consequences are why that kind of, that kind of keeps going.

And again, it is not— that is not a purely symmetrical problem, although they're kind of related.

**Lizzy:** I have a philosophical question that I'd like to pose to you. People would often say to me, yeah, I disagree with X party, but we need a functional X party. And as a young person, I was always like, tell me why?

Again, I was witnessing again, like one party that felt to me that it was putting forward policy positions that were overwhelmingly harming people, even the people who championed them. And that it was oftentimes using some kind of procedure and tricks of the game in order to maintain power as opposed to popular public sentiment in support of the things that were actually being done.

And people would say, no, no, we need them to be, we need them to be here. We need them to be healthy. And I would always go, why? And so I'm asking you directly, why do we need a healthy Democratic Party and a healthy Republican Party?

**Mark:** Well, I mean, one thing is I think parties are kind of disciplined by competition and it kind of helps them behave.

**Lizzy:** I appreciate that answer a lot because I think that it makes me realize that the frame that I have been working out of, or the younger version of myself that questioned why we would need a healthy party if I thought that my party was correct and the other one was ultimately harmful.

The lens that I was viewing parties through was the lens that they had made me view them through by their poor actions, which is simply these are places that, that build power for power's sake instead of coalitions that represent actual people who want actual things to happen and then work together through that party to make those things happen.

**Mark:** The goal of the political system has to be to structure healthy contestation over issues, not just to get you one particular policy outcome. And that's what we really have to kind of reconstruct here, is a system that creates a healthy debate that leads to a result that people accept.

You know, classic political science nostrum is the loser's acceptance of the result. You know, not necessarily forever, not as the permanent arrangement of things, but, you know, we had the vote, we had the elections, we had the legislative fight, we accept the outcome as legitimate. Ultimately, legitimacy is a goal here. I can remember like, you know, Reagan era, very conservative period. I think there was a pretty broad acceptance of the legitimacy of the direction Reagan generally took the country.

It's not my direction, not my preference, but it did have a kind of, the fight happened, we cut taxes, we did whatever, we move on. And then at a certain point, some years later, we've tried to move in different directions, but getting to the point where decisions feel legitimate, which, you know, they certainly don't right now.

And obviously for many Republicans, they didn't feel like there was legitimacy in the Biden era. That's a goal. And I think parties kind of meet on that field of contestation and they know they're going to be there again, you know, and that's part of what creates legitimacy.

**Lizzy:** We're going to wrap up this discussion. I want to ask a question that's kind of bringing everything that was discussed in the report and all of the things that the folks that you brought together brought up with some current kind of the real world structure that is surrounding all of this and might be shaping what next steps actually look like to get us toward that space. And certainly, I mean, there was so much there and so much more to this conversation, but we'll be linking, of course, to everything in our show notes. So folks will get to look at your documents and see what people actually said.

But the question then that I want to pull this up to, the recent Supreme Court rulings that have decimated the voting rights Act and greenlit gerrymandering. That's where districts are drawn up in order to kind of constrain certain voters and crack apart other coalitions such to just make it

harder for actual, for whatever the party preferences of an actual state or whatever space we're talking about to surface.

There's so much outside of just improving the health of parties that feels like it constrains what they're able to do. We talked about predatory fundraising, to me, that's so— yeah, that's terrible. Everyone hates it. And it also really feels driven by the way campaign finance works and what the demands have now been put on parties as they work toward elections.

Now, with this Supreme Court and the way we have changed some of the rules around how parties can operate, how elections can operate, all of these things feel like they're constraining what would be the actualization of some of the consensus from your group? Did people talk about that?

Are there, are we thinking of ways to get from point A to point B considering all the obstacles that are in between those things?

**Lizzy:** Predatory fundraising was the other, was the concept. And I was linking that to as a structural condition that seems to be constraining some of the positive movement towards better party health.

**Mark:** Yeah. I mean, I used to spend so much time on campaign finance reform issues and now I can't even deal with them, but. You know, I mean, there's, there, you know, the, the, the amounts are huge. The 10 billionaires who are putting huge amounts of money into the system are overwhelming. But then there's the fact that since the Obama years, we've had this small donor fundraising base. Republicans and conservatives actually had it going back further, but that base is there.

And as a result, it's kind of the only thing people are going after. They're just chasing these endless fundraising and yeah, it really destroys people's faith in the parties. It's also. You're hearing a different, you're hearing like a ridiculous voice.

There are people I admire and think they're great. And then I get an email from them every day. That's one minute they're screaming that they're doomed. And the next minute they're like, we're on the verge of victory. And none of it is in their voice and none of it really reflects them.

I mean, I think the predatory fundraising hurts in a million different ways. And it's also, you know, totally taking advantage of older people, like along with so many other scams in the economy. Talk about something that erodes trust.

**Lizzy:** Yeah, well, that feels like a good one then to settle on for a thing that maybe we can all agree on all sides of the aisle, that maybe this should be some kind of a structural reform that would improve people's lives.

**Mark:** Those emails— I turned off my notifications on my phone for this podcast. I'll probably have 20 by when I turn it back on.

**Lizzy:** Well, and that is the way I see that identity. Segue with that again, as a person who has this overarching view of democracy and clearly sees research as piece of that.

I, I even working for SSN, it's not that I think that connecting research to policy is the one answer. I see it as a critical stream among many that supports the health of democracy.

For our listeners who, I love that they are actually getting to know someone on our board because I feel like that's not necessarily a thing that people do. You think nonprofits always have these structures, but who can actually name, you know, the people on there, say that they have an actual vested expertise and work history that is connected to what the organization that they're shaping does.

Tell me a little bit, you know, why you're here specifically. What do you see as the connection between what you do and now SSN?

**Mark:** Yeah, well, I just think that there's almost a kind of like a subset of academics who really want to, you know, who know a lot, and they have a lot of perspective and they have like an analytical frame and very specific research and it's really, really relevant and they want to connect it to policy debates.

And I feel like that, that, you know, that's not everyone, but I feel like the genius of SSN is creating a space where there are incentives to do that. There are rewards to do that. You meet other people who are, who are doing that.

Like a think tank where I work, we're kind of in an in-between space. New America is kind of a distinct one because we tend to have a lot of people who are more like journalists than they are like academic political scientists or sociologists.

You know, my background is really mixed, um, but it's not an academic background. But it's with a tremendous admiration for what the people who are doing that research in that tradition are doing.

And I think we can just draw a lot out of that and also getting people out of their— I mean, one of the fun things about this convening and other things we've done is there were people at the table who were political scientists and there are people at the table who are historians and there are people at the table who are sociologists and they all have different ways of organizing the world and making sense of the things they see and you put them in conversation and then you open it up to people doing relevant work in the real world.

You know, there's really potential magic when that happens, not just for making social change, but actually just for making people smarter. And everybody comes away having kind of learned from each other and building a different, a different kind of agenda.

I feel like where I've worked captures some of that, but SSN is really kind of the white-hot center of that kind of making work relevant. And, Theda Skocpol, who was one of the founders of SSN, you know, just through her whole career kind of produced those kinds of the books and ideas and also mentored people.

To do that kind of relevant work. So I feel like we're extending a really important tradition here and just really honored to be a part of it.

**Lizzy:** Well, thank you, as are we. I love that that's the way that you see it, and I love that the other work that you're doing is also putting together those spaces where those real conversations that are geared towards application of knowledge are happening in those real organic ways. And, uh, for the specific issue that we talked about today, I hope to see that over time.

**Mark:** Yeah, yeah, there's a lot more to be done. We call it a blueprint as if it could just be implemented. There's a lot between here and there.

**Lizzy:** For sure. Well, we're in it for the long haul. So this will conclude our discussion today, but absolutely not all of the discussions that we will continue having and continue making available to people. So I thank you so much for joining us.

**Mark:** Thank you very much, Lizzy. Thanks for having me.

**Lizzy:** And thank you everyone for listening. For more on Mark's work and his organization's work, check out our show notes. No Jargon is the podcast of the Scholars Strategy Network, a nationwide organization connecting journalists, policymakers, and civic leaders with America's top researchers to improve policy and strengthen democracy. The producers of our show are Wendy Chow and Dominik Doemer. Our audio engineer is Peter Linnane. And if you like the show, please subscribe and rate us wherever you get your podcasts. You can give us feedback on X, formerly known as Twitter, @NoJargonPodcast, or at our email address, [nojargon@scholars.org](mailto:nojargon@scholars.org).