

Trends Like These 253: Iowa Caucus CL*STERF*CK, Super Bowl Stuff, Trump's Lie-filled State of the Union Address, Impeachment Finally Over and Romney Emerges a Hero?, Coronavirus Update, NYC Bans Broker's Fees

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Brent: This week: A tenant's fee buster, Trump's dishonest bluster, and a total Iowa cluster.

Courtney: I'm Courtney Enlow.

Brent: I'm Brent Black.

Courtney: And I'm impeached cheesecloth full of assholes.

Brent: With... Trends Like These.

[theme music plays]

Brent: Hello, Courtney!

Courtney: [sing-song] Hello, Brent!

Brent: [sing-song] What a week it has beeeen!

Courtney: [sing-song] And it's only Thursday! There's still more days of the week left! Everything could go to shit tomorrow, and I would be fine with that, because what are we even doing anymore? Cha cha chaaa!

Brent: Wow. I can't believe they cut that song from Cats, y'know?

Courtney: I know.

Brent: It was really probably the most plot-based one. Um, but anyway. Um, we're here, Courtney and I, to rum tum your tigger.

Courtney: Ew.

Brent: To shimble your shanks.

Courtney: What are you talking—don't rum tum anyone's tigger without enthusiastic consent!

Brent: I'll just—I guess I'll just tug my own rum tum. [laughs]

Courtney: Oh my god.

Brent: Anyway.

Courtney: Eugh.

Brent: Look, this is what you're gettin' from me this week. It's been a hell of a week for this guy. So I'm just... I'm just gettin' by.

Courtney: We're all just doing our best.

Brent: Yeah. Our Google Doc for this week was... [laughs] If y'all follow Courtney on Twitter, you saw that my initial... as my position as 'doc editor', I uhh...

Courtney: Oh, I put that—I put that on the Trends Like These Twitter. [laughs]

Brent: Oh, I—okay, okay. Sorry, sorry. In any case, Twitter saw my true feelings about this week's Politics Roundup.

Courtney: I was like, "I need to share this with the people who get it."

Brent: Yes. Yes. Um... Okay, so like, how are you, though?

Courtney: Y'know what, like, I'm... I'm here. I'm queer.

Brent: Mm-hmm.

Courtney: I'm thriving. I've worked out twice this week.

Brent: Hell yeah!

Courtney: I played D&D for the first time ever last night.

Brent: Mmm!

Courtney: There is good in the world that exists.

Brent: Yes.

Courtney: And I am just grabbin' my little bits and pieces of it.

Brent: [laughs] Okay. Well, I've got friends coming in town to save me from, uh, this week. I had to explain to my girlfriend that, while, uh... she and I appreciate the fact about each other that we're not sports fans. No shade to sports fans, but like... if you're a sports fan, think about what it would be like to date an enthusiastic opera fan. It's not that it's bad, it's that, like, how many hours of your life do you want to sit there watching an opera if you ain't into it?

Uh, so, we aren't like that. But I was like, look, this primary season is gonna be something like the playoffs, or like, the World Cup for me, and there's gonna be some cranky times, and I'm sorry for that, but I'm just like, makin' sure you know how that's gonna be. And this week was the first taste.

Courtney: I think we could say that to our listeners, too. Like, there's gonna be some cranky times.

Brent: Yeah. Yeah. But I mean... we're gonna try to... express feelings when necessary, but also, stick to facts in our reporting. That's what we're gonna try to do, but boyyy, some feelings shall arise. Um, what are you drinking?

Courtney: I'm drinking a pamplemousse La Croix and a Diet Coke, because I'm very sleepy.

Brent: [whispers] Oh, I want a Diet coke right now so bad.

Courtney: So sleepy. So sleepy ni-ni.

Brent: I don't have any in the house. Yeah. I—you're making me think about pausing to go get a coffee. But no, I want to go to sleep tonight, and it is 4:42PM on Thursday, February 6th. That is in Eastern time. And I am drinking a Waterloo black cherry, because my friend Matt's coming in town, and I was like, "What kind of sparkles do y'all want in the fridge?" And he was like, "I'm a Waterloo boy." And I was like, "That is quite a sentence." But I bought some.

Courtney: I don't think I know what Waterloo is. I mean, beyond like, "My my!"

Brent: [laughs] It's yet another, in the growing market of sparkling waters. It is a small company, though. It is, uh, Waterloo Sparkling Water Corp out of Austin, Texas. I am squinting to read below the ingredients list, which is just vapor distilled carbonated water and natural flavors.

Um, but uh, yeah, it's yummy. It's just... I'm hearing all about various sparkling waters. We've been—we've had a few people telling us about Jelly Belly sparkling water, which I'm interested to try. 'Cause you know me – even if it's naturally essenced, just a little bit of flavor, if it's like... intensely a little bit of flavor, sign me up.

Courtney: Right. Yes. I—that reminds me, I have another new fave.

Brent: Oh yeah?

Courtney: It's uh, Good and Gather, and it, uh—strawberry mango.

Brent: Nice. Y'know, I just—I wish that they had that, um... what's that brand? When we went out to visit Travis, and they came in smaller cans, but

they're sort of for kids? Was it Perrier? Was it... I forget the brand, but it was like, unicorn...

Courtney: Was that the one that you had like, unicorn... unicorns? I think that was—

Brent: There were unicorns involved. I'm Googling 'unicorn sparkling water', because—[laughing]

Courtney: Was it like, Polar Seltzer, maybe?

Brent: There you go! And I already loved Polar Seltzer. As people that have listened long enough remember, I once just went all in on a bulk 96 pack of Polar vanilla orange. And y'know what?

Courtney: The orange vanilla days... those were salad days.

Brent: I only miss them. I only miss them. But like, not just because I had all that delicious sparkling water – also, because it feels like things are getting worse? I don't even know anymore. I don't even know anymore.

Me and my friend were talking the other day about, um, pre-2015, which didn't seem great in a lot of ways, but like, truly was the long, long ago, the beforetime. The naïve little days of relative normalcy.

Courtney: I just—I feel like... I feel like we've aged.

Brent: Oh yeah.

Courtney: Like, more than... more than humans... should age.

Brent: Yeah. Pretty soon, all my hair's gonna fall out. That's a joke. I'm bald, y'all.

Courtney: [laughs]

Brent: But I will say, I'm moisturizing a lot more, because... ugh. These eyes! And—they're crinkling! They're frowny crinkling!

Courtney: [sings] Ohh, they're crinklin'.

Brent: Are you ready to jump in and do some reporting and some analysis and some complaining?

Courtney: Yeah, I guess. [laughs] Like...

Brent: [laughs]

Courtney: Because we have to? Yeah. But like—[laughs]

Brent: Honestly, if I didn't have friends coming into town like, right when we stopped recording, I would extend this intro as long as possible. [laughing] But we gotta. You ready?

Courtney: Let's do it.

Brent: Here we go. Wheeee!

[theme music plays]

Courtney: Beep ba-bee, ba-ba-ba-bee beep! [clapping rhythmically] Beep ba-bee, ba-ba-ba-bee, go on Beyond the Headlines!

Brent: Well... that is exactly right. For a second, I was gonna be like, beep ba-bee, ba-bee-ba, R-R-E-N-T! But that's just because... look, when both of your names start with a B, it's a very special letter to you.

Courtney: Special, special—you're a special boy.

Brent: Also, shout out to my—

Courtney: With a special letter.

Brent: Shout out to my alliterative initial friends. Like, when it says like, last name first, and you start to write the first letter of your last name, you will accidentally start writin' your first name the way that you sometimes take the way to work in your car when you're not goin' to work. Um... don't do that. I think Ronald Reagan did that one time. Didn't he sign something Reagan Reagan?

Anyway. Whatever. I'm just like Ronald Reagan is what I'm saying. We're just the same. [laughs and sighs] Anyway.

Courtney: Y'know, I think you're still stalling. [laughs] I think you're still stalling.

Brent: I am! I don't want to do it! No, okay. This first story is actually— y'know what? It'll ease us on into it. Uh, it's a story that trended regionally, and as a former New Yorker of ten years and a millennial, it's close to my heart, and I think it merits discussion.

Over the course of ten years in New York, I lived in four different apartments, and in three different cases, I paid what is called a broker's fee. The idea is that good apartments with trusted landlords are so hard to find in New York City, that you go to an apartment broker, they find you a quality apartment, or rather, options for one, and then you end up paying them... up to two months' worth of your rent for the service. Not like, up front. Like, on top of your whole rent lease.

In a city where you can pay \$1,500 a month for a modest one bedroom walk up 45 minutes away from where the action is, it's yet another way the city is just prohibitively expensive. Well, this week, New York state kind of eliminated broker's fees, in a way.

In an unexpected addendum to sweeping rent reforms from last year, state regulators said renters can no longer be charged the fees. Again, in a way. See, brokers can still... be brokering. They can still charge the fees, but those fees have to be reimbursed by the landlord, unless a prospective tenant specifically hired the broker to help find an apartment.

So what it means is, you can't be forced to pay broker fees - though, if you want a quality apartment, and you want to get like, an apartment yenta. Y'know, a matchmaker. You can, and then you have to pay the fee.

And it kind of reminds me of the reform where, um, when there was the big bedbug epidemic of New York City, they made it where landlords have to pay for extermination, which was like, a huge deal, because a good quality extermination in New York can be like \$900. For one freakin' room.

Um, and... so like, it is a bummer that New York City has become so prohibitive for anyone who doesn't have like, five grand stashed away. And like, let's be real - if a young, aspiring... let's say, a young aspiring person in the fine arts goes to New York with like, five grand, it could honestly last them less than three months.

And issues that benefit landlords over tenants reach far beyond New York, and I recently experienced some, because I'm moving into an apartment in Philly that's closer to where my friends live, and... look, they're doing a rent hike in my apartment, and I'm trying to downgrade to save a bit of money.

But apartment leases can be an absolutely draconian shitshow, and prospective tenants often don't have any power to negotiate. In my case, after multiple attempts to be the squeaky wheel with my new property management company, I just accepted the fact that they weren't gonna budge, and that I was essentially taking the same chance I would with any renting situation.

But my lease literally provides a loophole that the landlord isn't required by law to let me into the unit until up to ten days after the proposed move-in when the lease begins. That means if I were stranded with all my stuff in a U-Haul for nine days, I would have absolutely no recourse and would still, uh, have a huge penalty if I wanted to break the lease.

So like, some people's immediate reaction listening, and they've even tweeted this at me, would be like, "Well, you should buy rather than rent!" Now, I could do that, technically; though, it doesn't really fit my lifestyle for

a lot of reasons. But being on the old side of the millennial generation, I think that, I have to say, renting is the only option for a huge chunk of young adults, aside from maybe crashing with their folks. And it seems like the consensus of our profit-worshipping American culture is that landlords, just by dint of owning property, should have significantly more power than people who pay the rent, without whom they would be broke.

So, the broker fees law is a step in the right direction, especially in a city that like, desperately needs some relief from rising costs of living. But moments like this just make me wish, like, our country opposed the idea of an extreme seller's market in this sector, and... maybe it's not like that in cities where I haven't been. I don't know, and I'd love to hear from you about that, out in the not-Toronto-New York City-Philadelphia-Dallas zone.

But I just, like... I'd love to see more people rise up at the local level and be like, "Hey, this is bullshit!" Because – and I can't stress this enough – it is.

Courtney: I think like, the very idea that like, "Oh, you should just buy." That implies that like, you have just like, y'know, \$20,000 just sitting there, ready to just, y'know, hand over. Which like, I just now, for the first time in my goddamn life, have \$2,000 in savings. That's the most I've ever had in savings.

Brent: Girl, yes. I get it. [laughing]

Courtney: Like... [laughing] Ever. Like, that's the most I've ever had.

Brent: We're—you're a little younger than me. Mid-early-mid-30s.

Courtney: Uh-huh.

Brent: That's like—that's just such a comment on our generation. And the thing is, you and I have been lucky in our careers, one could argue.

Courtney: Exactly! Yeah!

Brent: And yet, it's just hard.

Courtney: Like, the—like—I do own a house, but like, that... that down payment was definitely, like, a gift from like, a combination of parents, plus savings, plus lots of other things. Like, that's... yeah.

Brent: Yeah, and we could say that—we could say that like, the assumption that one should buy is a privileged position.

Courtney: Mm-hmm.

Brent: And the thing is, I don't want to exactly shame privileged people, because if I made better choices with my income and had the lifestyle that I thought matched buying, I could.

But so many people – even if they're not millennials – just like, the economy's only really good for the top. It's a tough time. And it's just like, leases seem to be some of the only contracts in the world that can be this terrible shitshow of like, different drafts cut and pasted together, clauses that simply contradict themselves...

Um, like, mine had a clause where it told you to pay by check or money order. The next paragraph said, "We no longer accept check or money order." The next paragraph said, "Pay online at the website below." There was no website anywhere on the lease. And then, under that, it said, "We can choose to ask you to pay by check or money order at any time." And it's like, y'know, I'm fine with any of these contingencies, but like, your contract does not tell me what to do, and yet, if there was any question about it, surely, it would be—you would have the upper hand.

It just drives me nuts that like... I feel like I've, y'know, after a couple bad business agreements over the last ten years of my career, I've learned to basically never accept the first draft of a contract. But when it's somebody saying, "Look, you'll live here or you won't. Someone's in line right behind you, so sign this, or get out of the way." Just feels bad.

Courtney: So can I ask—the broker's fees...

Brent: Mm-hmm.

Courtney: You still have to pay them if you work with a broker. Does that mean that you had to pay it before, even if you didn't work with a broker?

Brent: Um, in some cases, yes. Because in some cases, the uh, landlord is working in lockstep with the broker to get the information to you that the place is open. So, like, your—it's kind of like, sometimes, you go through a property management company, and they're not the landlord, but they work with the landlord.

Um, in my case, I would specifically hire apartment brokers, because... a lot of times, in New York, you're risking a scam if you go on Craigslist, or if you just read, y'know, your Zillow, your Trulia, your PadMapper. If someone... I mean, there can be switcheroo type things where someone doesn't even own an apartment, but they basically get you to sign a lease, give them money, and then they give you keys they happen to have to that place for whatever reason, and you're in a place that's not theirs, and now you're stuck.

So a broker is kind of a way to shepherd you through the—y'know, a much less risky situation, and they can kind of go to bat for you. Like, I've had one be like, "Hey, you've come to me twice. You're a preferred customer. I'm gonna get the landlord to knock 50 bucks off your rent." Which like, who knows if they inflated it 50 bucks just to knock it off.

Courtney: Right, yeah.

Brent: But um, yeah. To your question, a lot of times, a broker's fee is simply the entrance fee to sign up for a certain kind of apartment, because that's how you found out about it in the first place.

Courtney: That's trash.

Brent: So the only way to contact the landlord is through the broker, and now you've... now you're paying the doorman, basically. It's really bullshit, and I'm talkin' like, up to 15% of your lease liability. The entire amount you

owe, up front, on top of what typically was first, last, and deposit. So you're lookin' at maybe five months' worth of the rent you're gonna pay to get into the place in the worst cases.

Courtney: That's trash damn garbage.

Brent: Welcome to New York City, kid! Like, that's what it is. And it's a shitshow, because like, also, lots of rich people have apartments they're never in, that they don't even AirBnB out. They might be there like, two months a year. Which like, uh, it's been proposed that there be a... oh, I think it's called like an absence tax? Or something like that.

The idea that, if you're not in your apartment, you're gonna pay a tax for that, so they can deter that. Which, y'know, some people might think that's a little.. nanny state. Little bit big government. But it's like, if... I just feel bad for the young kids that are talented that want to come to, y'know, the city with a dream.

I came to the city with a student loan. That's how I was able to get started. And a—y'know, I was getting a degree. And I had like a mini-scholarship. That's why I was able to go. If I'd been doing it out of my pocket? Who the frick knows what it would've been like. And it's pricing out talent that is not, um, bolstered by some, uh, rich and frankly statistically white family being like, "Oh, we'll help you. Oh, if you don't make it, you can come back home." And like, not everybody has that.

Courtney: Right.

Brent: So it just creates this really slanted, privilege, uh, scale that just... it takes a lot of New York out of New York, and it's a real bummer.

Courtney: I paid \$550 a month for my first apartment in Chicago.

Brent: Ugh. Y'know, when I lived with Travis, our third year of being roommates in college, we had a three bed, but it was really a two and a half. Uh, in y'know, Norman, Oklahoma, where the property values are like... just

dick. But my point is, because I got the small room, I paid, my senior year of college, less than \$300 a month for my room.

Courtney: That's beautiful.

Brent: And that would've been 2005/6. And I just... cannot imagine that there's, y'know, like... I just—I don't know. It just seems like so long ago, and so quaint now.

Courtney: Yeah, 'cause this was also in, uh, my first apartment. Like, obviously, I was paying for, y'know, my half was \$550. But that was Wicker Park. It was on Division, *just* as Wicker Park was takin' the full trip to gentrification town.

Brent: Yeah.

Courtney: That apartment building is now, like, a all-glass condominium building for like, y'know, hundreds of thousands of dollars. [laughs]

Brent: Yeah. It's just all about the condos, and the rich folks. And again, like—

Courtney: Also pretty sure it was haunted. I think there was definitely a ghost in it, so...

Brent: The—the ghost of affordability. [laughs]

Courtney: I guess so, yeah. There was a murder room off the laundry room. But yeah, y'know what? 550 bucks... sometimes you gotta have a murder room.

Brent: Was it like a murder vestibule, or like a murder atrium?

Courtney: So it was like, you go down to the laundry room, and then there is like... there was like, a bedroom kind of off of it? And it had one of those doors that had like, a glass panel. And you could just see like, a mattress on

the floor, a sheet, and then like... nothing else. And I was like, I'm pretty sure this is seedy bad stuff, but I'm 18, and I'm just gonna ignore it.

Brent: Yup.

Courtney: Because it's scary.

Brent: Yup. What a world!

Courtney: What a world.

Brent: Alright.

Courtney: But y'know what?

Brent: What?

Courtney: It's time to move on to the power of the dance.

Brent: Yeah. Let's do it.

Courtney: I don't care about sports. But I love me a show.

Brent: Hell yeah.

Courtney: And this year's halftime show at the Super Bowl was fantastic. Shakira and Jennifer Lopez teamed up for a fucking performance. These two women are phenomenal dancers and singers, and – I cannot overstate this – *dancers*. This performance had everything. Belly dancing. Children. Political statements. Some Cirque De Soleil level pole shit. Hips. Not. Lying.

Shakira, who celebrated her 43rd birthday on this very Super Bowl day, celebrated her Columbian and Lebanese heritage, including a zaghrouta, which is a tongue-trilling gesture to convey joy in many Arab cultures. Shakira also fucking shredded on guitar, and played drums.

Then, out comes J-Lo, dancing for the gods. She did some wild pole routine that was a nod to her Hustlers performance, and a big fuck you to the academy, and people who don't take pole dancing seriously as an art form, because holy shit. The thigh power and core strength required. She's just like—she's just like hanging there!

Brent: Oh yeah, it looked like nothing! It—

Courtney: She's like, hanging there by her thighs, like whatever. No big.

Brent: Yeah. It looked like she was leaning against a wall. That level of difficulty. She made it look so easy.

Courtney: She was like, fully kebab'd by the power of her own thighs! It was magical.

A choir of children led by Lopez' daughter, Emme, sang 'Born in the USA,' and some performers appeared in like, these caged orbs, a clear reference to the humanitarian crisis at our borders.

Brent: Mm-hmm.

Courtney: Lopez also wore a cape with the Puerto Rican flag on one side, and the American flag on the other. It was boss. The whole thing was superb. It put the superb in Superb Owl. But of course... the pearl clutching was almost immediate.

Brent: Yes.

Courtney: Men were horrified by this reckless display of butts, and quote, "crotch grabbing." Many of the same white women who thirsted hard over Adam Levine's pubic mounds at last year's Super Bowl were, quote, "uncomfortable," because it was "inappropriate," words that ran rampant all over Facebook and everyone's office break room the next day.

Brent: Being from Texas, I literally saw – and almost drunkenly commented on, and then did not – uh, a post on Facebook from one of my

high school friends, saying, "Can't we just for once have a wholesome halftime show?" And I was like, "Wholesome! What a word!"

Courtney: What... a... word.

Brent: [laughing] Yeah.

Courtney: This was a celebration of their cultures, and especially in Miami, and that was so important. But every Karen and Dale had something to say about it. In an op ed for the Fort Worth Star-Telegram, Cynthia Allen wrote that she was "wise enough to see that while their performances were perfectly acceptable for paying concert audiences, pelvic thrusting, crotch grabbing, and pole dancing while wearing what is effectively glittery underwear isn't the ideal choice for the television event of the year, one that attracts a wide and varied audience, including lots of children and adolescents.

My daughters, for example, are young and impressionable. Even if they could understand what they are watching is a performance, it would be nearly impossible to explain to them that women don't need to look, dress, or act like that to be beautiful and strong.

Speaking of, I've heard the argument that their performances were empowered, that self-possessed adult women in control of their bodies and sexuality is the definition of modern day feminism. I disagree."

Cool story, Cynthia. Shut the fuck up.

Brent: [laughs]

Courtney: I'd rather listen to people like Carol Cain, who wrote a beautiful piece for Romper, titled, "Uncomfortable White Women, and What's Hiding in Plain Sight." She wrote, the "vulgar gyrating" and "vagina-wagging", as described by some, were in fact—

Brent: What—I'm sorry, I'm sorry, I'm sorry. *Vagina-wagging?*

Courtney: Just waggin' my vagina, everywhere I go.

Brent: Wagging. I'm no anatomy expert, but I've been around the block. I... I... [laughs] I've never seen a vagina wag.

Courtney: Labias just slappin' in the breeze! Like arm fat, like pltpltpltplt.

Brent: [laughing] I'm sorry. Okay. Keep going. [wheezing]

Courtney: [laughing]

Brent: Boy, they're really waggin' the vagina on this one!

Courtney: Just waggin' that vagina!

Brent: They're just making the—okay, I'm gonna just stop while I'm...

Courtney: Y'know what, if I can vote with my vagina, I can wag it on the Super Bowl.

Brent: [laughing]

Courtney: Uh, but these... okay, I'm gonna... [laughing] I'm gonna start that sentence over a little bit, though, 'cause otherwise, it's, y'know... anyway.

Brent: Mm-hmm. Mm-hmm.

Courtney: “The “vulgar gyrating” and “vagina-wagging” as described by some were, in fact, dance moves that embedded in the African influences of our heritage. They have historically served as a form of expression and communication where words do not. Our moves, from the twerking to the swaying of our hips, have served to both celebrate and mourn, worship and honor. As children, we have grown watching our mothers and our mother’s mothers sway and groove, bump and lock their hips and curves at parties, or in front of the stove as they cooked. The fluid way in which we move, and

the ease with which we embrace our femininity is us and our freedom." So take that, Cynthia.

And speaking of someone who's danced my whole life, this performance was hard. And perfectly executed. Like, imagine that like, while singing. While. Singing. Like, it's incredible. So, what's inappropriate to me is seeing two kinds of athletes – one's rapidly succumbing to brain damage, many of whom have a long list of domestic violence offences – and ones who are women of color over the age of 40 celebrating their cultures, and thinking the second one is the problem.

Brent: Yyyeah. Yeah. I mean, and y'know, Cynthia's sitting there... where's the sentence? I'm just scrolling to see the one... um, "It would be nearly impossible to explain to them," meaning her daughters, "that women don't need to look, dress, or act like that to be beautiful and strong."

This is such an old trope. Like, how do I explain to my kids two gay guys holding hands? It's like, y'know, you're really shitty at explaining things if this is like, the big hurdle to get over, with you informing your children how the world works.

Like, there's a lot of ways women can be presented as beautiful and strong. Seeing one halftime show does not necessarily have to, forever, just sizzle a hot iron brand into your daughter's brains that that's the only—I don't know if I'm going too far with this, but I just—I get so...

It's like, there's a certain kind of person that would say, "Y'all need to grow up." And I want to turn around and say, no, actually, *you* need to grow up and realize this isn't that big of a deal, number one. You sound like parents when Elvis went on fuckin', uh... oh, what's his name? You know who I'm talking about. Really big shoe. That guy.

Courtney: Ed Sullivan.

Brent: There ya go. Uh, back in like, the '50s. And it's just like... this kind of puritanical shit, like... look, I get it. It was a little racy. 'Course, I liked it. I've got my reasons. But I just feel like we had this puritanical streak that, if I

may, has this enormous Venn diagram intersection with just patriarchal repression of women, even like, in the same zone, I think, as restrictions of reproductive rights.

Am I going too far? Isn't this all kind of the same flavor? All kind of wrapped up in the same marble cake?

Courtney: Specifically, Shakira's costume was every dance costume I've worn for every recital and competition since I was like, ten? Like...

Brent: Sure. Have they never seen a drill team show, like, at a pep rally?

Courtney: Yeah. Like, yeah. Mine had like, a flesh-colored mesh panel over my stomach, because I did not even, as in my youth, have Shakira's abs. but like, yeah.

Brent: That ol' flesh mesh.

Courtney: I've worn that forever. Also, Jennifer Lopez was wearing like, the thickest skater's tights I've ever seen. People were like, "Oh, she was gonna have a wardrobe malfunction!" What were you gonna see through these like, one inch tights?

Brent: Right.

Courtney: You're fine. Calm down.

Brent: Aye yai yai. Well... I will say, I was watching with Chiefs fans, just to like, kind of... y'know, we're talking about the Super Bowl. I'm not a sports fan, but I was watching with Chiefs fans, and it's hard when people are really... enjoying a game, and very pleased, not to get wrapped up in the excitement. So like, for my money, despite the fact that football is an extremely problematic sport, and the way it's done right now should go away... um, look. #GoChiefs. It was a good game.

Courtney: Also, um, Mr. Peanut died and was rebirthed as Baby Nut. And that's the worst thing I've ever heard or said. Or seen.

Brent: Yeah, the word 'Baby Nut,' like...

Courtney: [laughs]

Brent: I said it that night, and was making myself laugh, but not wanting to examine, like... [in a low voice] Baby Nut.

Like, why is that funny?! [laughing]

Courtney: I said on—on—

Brent: It's not good!

Courtney: I said on the site, in a post I wrote, I was like, "Baby Nut is the worst combination of words since 'nut butter,' and I stand by that."

Brent: [laughs] Um, y'know, first off, they totally pulled a Star Trek 3, just so we're clear. Spock – spoiler. This was 1984 or so, so you've had time. Dies, but then kind of comes back in this weird, natural way or something. But um, yeah. Baby Nut. Very weird.

But also... [sighs] It's strange to me that Planters was like, "In light of Kobe Bryant's death, we're gonna put the funeral of Mr. Peanut on hold." And like, I'm being very cynical, but... it seems like they just waited to see how much of the news—how many news cycles that was gonna take up, and then determined, "Nah, we good."

Courtney: They basically just—because they basically never announced plans to not air their Super Bowl commercial.

Brent: Oh, I thought I saw the—

Courtney: They basically just put a hold on the campaign, meaning they were not tweeting like, "Mr. Peanut's dead! Mourn this peanut!"

Brent: Ahh. I saw—that's my bad. I did the thing I always say not to do, which is, saw the headline—

Courtney: You didn't go beyond the headlines at all.

Brent: No, I didn't. Um, I had some other things to think about this week. I'll give myself a mulligan there. Anyway... there were lots of things. There were commercials. It's like this weird celebration of capitalism, and... just to touch on this real quick, I feel like... more than ever, I felt like I'm in the demographic that they're playing to, because they're throwing so many nostalgic things at me that are nostalgic for me, and it was weird.

Um, that Wal-Mart commercial that was basically Ready Player One. Um, with like, every reference to everything you've ever seen. Two Teds from Bill and Ted. Or was that Bill? That was probably Bill.

Anyway. Like, Star Wars—it started with the Star Trek, uh, Starship Enterprise, which made me just like, stop talking and look at the TV. And I was like, "Ugh! You're making me continue watching, and this is a Wal-Mart commercial, and how did you get the rights? Oh yeah, because of extreme media consolidation. Cool. Glad I'm participating in this capitalist nightmare. But also, like, ooh! C3PO!" It was a lot.

[theme music plays]

Brent: Folks, we are sponsored today in part by Quip! Quip electric toothbrush. Now, I have owned a Quip electric toothbrush and continued to use it since late 2017. It is great, in short. And Quip, the makers of the Quip electric toothbrush, want you to know that, no matter what brand you use, if you have good habits, you are good. And that means brushing for two minutes, twice a day, and flossing regularly.

Quip makes that simple. Their electric toothbrush has sensitive sonic vibrations with a built-in timer and 30-second pulses to guide a full and even clean. And the thing is that, unlike electric toothbrushes that have a big, bulky charger you gotta take with you, if you're traveling, and you want an

electric toothbrush that vibrates your mouth for that extra clean feeling... it fits into anything that a regular sized toothbrush fits into.

Aaand... now, they deliver not only a brush head, but also, floss, as well as toothpaste, every three months with free shipping. Um, now, what you can do is go, right now, to [GetQuip.com/Trends](https://www.getquip.com/Trends) to get your first refill pack for free. That now includes not just a new brush head, not just new toothpaste, but also floss. And uh, you'll get your first refill free by going to [GetQuip.com/Trends](https://www.getquip.com/Trends). Quip: The good habits company.

[theme music plays]

Brent: Alright, folks. You knew it was coming. This was probably one of the most politics-y weeks in recent memory. Um, and so, we're rounding up the big politics stories into a segment we call the Politics Roundup. Let's just jump the frick into it. 'Frick' being weirdly my Pee-Wee's Playhouse word of the day. Frick it, let's go.

So, we start with the conclusion of the Donald Trump impeachment trial. The Senate voted to remove Trump from office and shoot the fucker into space! Yaaay! Okay, that's not at all what happened, but like, perhaps that brought you some joy.

Um, no. In this past week, the Senate seemed like it might be poised to allow some witnesses to come into the process, but no. The only two Republicans to vote yes on witnesses were Mitt Romney and Susan Collins. All Democrats and Independents voted yes, and the rest of the Republicans voted no.

So, the representatives of the pro-Trump side, who have been whining about various ways the House and Senate proceedings have not resembled a fair trial, ultimately voted to not allow witnesses. Which, uh... would've been how trials work. But anyway.

Um, Wednesday saw the final vote on whether to convict the president. One article of impeachment was obstruction of Congress, which was based on the White House commanding certain people not to submit to House subpoenas,

as well as directing the state department to deny certain documents of information to House committee witnesses, such as Gordon Sondland, and other things.

On this article of impeachment, all Democrats voted yes. All Republicans voted no. But the real trending news out of the end of the trial was the fact that one Republican voted yes on the other article of impeachment, abuse of power.

And that senator was former Republican presidential nominee, Mitt Romney, who, you may remember, was totally on the 'never Trump' train, totally dissed Trump, rightly so, during Trump's campaign in 2016, and then was essentially tricked into having dinner with Trump to possibly get a cabinet position, and then didn't. So like, they've got some juicy Mormon beef.

Now, Mitt Romney gave an eight minute speech on the floor of the Senate on the, I believe, the day of the final vote. Here are some highlights of that speech.

Mitt: The grave question the Constitution tasks senators to answer is whether the president committed an act so extreme and egregious that it rises to the level of a high crime and misdemeanor. Yes, he did. The president asked a foreign government to investigate his political rival. The president withheld vital military funds from that government to press it to do so. The president delayed funds for an American ally at war, with Russian invaders. The president's purpose was personal and political.

Accordingly, the president is guilty of an appalling abuse of public trust. With my vote, I will tell my children and their children that I did my duty to the best of my ability, believing that my country expected it of me. I will only be one name among many. No more, no less. To future generations of Americans who look at the record of this trial, they will note merely that I was among the senators who determined that what the president did was wrong. Grievously wrong.

Brent: It's a sad comment on the current state of our country that one Republican senator doing the right thing, the bare minimum, ends up being

the subject of such scorn from conservatives and their media arms, as well as such celebration and gratitude from people who wanted to see the president convicted.

I originally thought impeachment would be a waste of time because of the inevitable outcome, and that it might even boost Trump's overall approval numbers. Um, folks, he's now up to his personal best of 49% approval nationwide. But several members of Congress, including AOC, pointed out that it wasn't just about strategy – it was about preventing a precedent from being set, that a president could act any way they wanted and entirely get away with it.

And I came around to agreeing with that on principle. And I guess that seeing a Republican senator lay out the facts that are all plainly obvious to most of us is, in fact, one piece of glitter on this turd of an impeachment process. Maybe some moderate Republican voters will hear him and come to different conclusions than they otherwise would have. Maybe most of them will still hold their nose and vote for Trump instead of president Michael Bloomberg. I'm kidding! I'm kidding.

But what was done here, while maybe not strategically advantageous on the part of the Democrats, was an attempt at justice. And I think that will be even more clear in the rear view as time goes on, even if... he's just still there for at least another little while.

Courtney: After his acquittal, he did a speech, and it was bad. And that's all I got in me right now. We'll talk about it next week. It broke my brain.

Brent: Alright, fair enough. Speaking of Trump speeches...

Courtney: Speaking of Trump speeches, if you will, a state of the union was delivered on Tuesday by an impeached cheesecloth full of assholes. Watching the high—

Brent: [bursts into laughter]

Courtney: Watching the highlights of this speech, I literally gagged as he entered to chants of, "Four more years! Four more years!"

Brent: Ugh.

Courtney: Gross. According to CNN and Washington Post fact checking, Trump spewed at least 31 lies or distorted claims.

Brent: Yep.

Courtney: I'm going to go over some of the biggest. Claim number one. [imitating Donald Trump] "Under my administration, seven million Americans have come off food stamps." Why does my Trump sound like Bernie?

Brent: Um, that is a very good question.

Courtney: [laughs]

Brent: [laughs] Here's what you gotta do. [imitating Donald Trump] To start with Trump, you have to kind of, um, purse your lips a little bit. That's the beginning.

Courtney: [attempting to imitate Donald Trump] Under my administration...

Brent: [imitating Donald Trump] And then you gotta just kind of put it in your nose a little bit, and... [normally] That's step one. [imitating Bernie Sanders] But I think they were goin' for—

Courtney: [imitating Donald Trump, slightly more accurately] Under my administration... seven million Americans have come off of food stamps."

Brent: [imitating Bernie Sanders] President Bernie Sanders Donald Trump! [normally] Oh my god, the worst—the worst, like, terrible monster at the end of the movie, The Thing, I've ever heard of. [laughs] Okay.

Courtney: I'm gonna have that nightmare every night until November.

Brent: [laughs] Gross.

Courtney: Anyway. I'm just not gonna try it, 'cause I'm not good at it. Claim number one. "Under my administration, seven million Americans have come off of food stamps." So, he, of course, is implying here that the economy is doing just sooo well that people no long require government aid for food. That's not the complete story.

In actuality, the decrease in people utilizing SNAP started under president Obama, thanks to recovery from the economic recession. And as we speak, the Trump administration is working to tighten the requirements for SNAP recipients, eliminating the state's ability to waive work requirements in distressed economic areas for quote unquote "able bodied" adults without dependents.

Robert Greenstein, the president and founder of the Center on Budget and Policy Priorities said, "The Trump administration issued a draconian rule in the Supplemental Nutrition Assistance Program that will cut off basic food assistance for nearly 700,000 of the nation's poorest and most destitute people." 20 states, and DC, are suing the administration over these cuts, which are set to go into effect April 1st. So it's not so much that people have come off of food stamps, as he's trying to kick them off.

Brent: Yeah.

Courtney: Claim number two. "In eight years under the last administration, over 300,000 working age people dropped out of the work force. In just three years of my administration, 3.5 million people, working age people, have joined the work force."

The Washington Post initially could not replicate Trump's math on this, until they received an explanation. Ahem. "President Trump was referring to labor market flows. To reach the 3.5 million increase under the Trump administration, and the 300,000 decrease under the Obama administration, add not in labor force to employed and not in labor force to unemployed for

each month. Then, subtract from that the employed to not in labor force plus unemployed to not in labor force." [laughing]

"Together, these results provide the overall changes for the administrations. Other inflows and other outflows are excluded from this calculation to get a better representation of working age Americans." I literally tuned out while reading that.

Brent: Ugh. Yeah.

Courtney: But! Glenn Kessler at WaPo explains, "You essentially need to add together two sets of numbers every month, and then subtract two sets of numbers. And then you add them up for every month of the president's term. The Trump math included January, 2009, which was technically still a George W. Bush month. When you take away the first Januarys of both Obama and Trump's presidency, the numbers are actually an 18,000 job loss under Obama, and a gain of 3.06 million for Trump."

Jared Bernstein with the Center on Budget and Policy Priorities pointed out that since Obama started in a recession, a better measure would be to compare the last three years of Obama with the first three years of Trump, both starting in February. That yields 2.3 million jobs gained for Obama versus three million for Trump.

Brent: And what kind of jobs are they? This is the kind of thing that like, y'know, healthcare sucks, benefits suck... now there's this new normal of like, what is a job? Is it a gig economy? Is it like, you don't quite get what they consider full time hours, but you're still giving them a lot of your life and not getting benefits? It's not like everyone's got a good job, which is why plenty of people are still working two and three jobs! Do those count as jobs? Does someone with three jobs have three of that number?

It's just... ugh. That one really pisses me off.

Courtney: Claim number three. "Since my election, the net worth of the bottom half of wage earners has increased by 47%, three times faster than

the increase for the top one percent." That's literally just nonsense, because the lowest wage earners have no net worth, because of debt.

Brent: Exactly. [laughing]

Courtney: Claim number four. "All of those millions of people with 401ks and pensions are doing far better than they have ever done before, with increases of 60, 70, 80, 90, and even 100%." There is literally no evidence to back this claim up.

Brent: It's one of his like, "I'm even hearing 60, I'm even hearing 70..." It's like, you're hearing that in your head!! Ugh.

Courtney: Yeah. Claim number five. "With the tremendous progress we have made over the past three years, America is now energy independent."

Brent: What?!

Courtney: Literally, no it's not. [laughs] Literally, no it's not. In 2018, the United States imported about 9.94 million barrels per day of petroleum from 90 countries. So, no.

Claim number six. "We will always protect patients with preexisting conditions." He is still attempting in court to totally repeal the affordable care act with no replacement, so... no.

Brent: Yeah, they're always gonna try to protect patients with preexisting conditions... from medical care! Um... [laughs] I... agh! Okay, go ahead.

Courtney: Claim number seven. "As we speak, a long, tall, and very powerful wall is being built." It literally fell over in a strong wind.

Brent: Yeah. [laughing] Watch the video if y'all haven't seen it. It's... tremendous, one might say.

Courtney: It... fell over. He also described undocumented immigrants as "criminal aliens," attacked sanctuary cities, and spoke out about the evils of

socialism. Oh, and he gave the presidential medal of freedom to Rush fucking Limbaugh. It was gross.

Brent: Jesus Christ on a cracker, that was just one of the most terrible moments just encapsulated in politics I've ever seen. Really.

Courtney: But of course, the next day, all anyone wanted to talk about was how Nancy Pelosi ripped up his speech, because decorum!

Brent: [sighs] I have a lot of thoughts about this. First off, the decorum argument with her is like... you know I don't always like the whole, like, "Civility!" Because it's like... y'know, it's kind of like when, I don't know, high up Democrats will be like, "Unity!" And then they'll like, shit on Bernie. It's like, well, y'know, he's running for the—anyway, whatever.

Um, but like, it's also kind of sexist, I think, to be like, "Well, Pelosi is a new low, 'cause she ripped up his speech!" Though, like, Trump could like, I don't know... Trump could like, take a shit in the Oval Office, and they'd be like, "He's healthy! Look at this! He's regular! He's the healthiest president ever!"

Courtney: I bet he literally would like, brag about it, too.

Brent: Yes. That being said—

Courtney: He talks a lot about people needing to flush 15, 20 times!

Brent: [laughs] Yeah, that's one of his weird things he brings up a lot. But like, I will say... [sighs] Pelosi... like, we do have a lack of substantive debate on policy stuff in this country, and so often, the trending thing that comes out of an event is stuff like that. Or like, Trump meets with a foreign head of state. They had a really important talk about international policies. And what's the headline that trends? Oh, the handshake was weird!

It's like, yeah, I get why that trended... but like, y'know, Pelosi ripping up the thing... like, fine. Okay. Whatever. Like, it's a gesture. I get it. In a way, like—

Courtney: It's a gesture I'm good with, too, because it was, again, a big speech full of just like, fucking lies.

Brent: Sure. Sure. I guess I just feel like I wish I saw more substantive talk about exactly the ways... by this, I mean, in trending coverage. Exactly the ways in which it was bullshit. I'll be honest, I was kind of reeling from the Iowa situation, and I tried to start listening to the state of the union, and after ten minutes, I was just like... I hate what he's saying. I hate his teleprompter voice, which is different.

When he's talking off the cuff, near the helicopters, or near Air Force—sorry. When he's talking off the cuff near the helicopters, [yells] he's doing this like, yelling thing. And it's really weird. But like, [imitating Donald Trump] when he's reading off a teleprompter, he does this voice. And he cocks his head to the side. [normally] And like, he's got this "I'm reading and squinting" face, and it's like, weird.

He becomes like, the Disney Hall of Presidents animatronic version of himself. But also, it was just gross. I just... all state of the union speeches have a little bit of spin in the president's favor. Of course, they always say the state of our union is strong, instead of like, "It's a'ight." [laughs] Y'know. But like... [sighs] I just couldn't. I just couldn't.

Courtney: I think you actually just—I think you just hit on what like... there's a few different things in, like, the political world right now that are really fucking annoying to me. And they—y'know what? That's bipartisan right there. It goes across the aisle. I'm going across the aisle in the fact that everyone's annoying.

Brent: [laughs] Yeah.

Courtney: But the thing that annoys me most is just like, undeserved smugness.

Brent: Mm. Mm-hmm.

Courtney: And that is the thing that like, makes me lose my goddamn shit. And that is when—that's Trump's teleprompter voice. It's just like... [mumbles gibberish in a Donald Trump-esque voice]

Brent: Right.

Courtney: Fuck you!

Brent: Yeah. He's always—it's always like, vaguely like he's talking about sending a man to the moon. But like, in this way that I'm just like, you... I... I don't know. Ugh. I just—I don't care for the man. Alright.

Courtney: [sighs] You ready for this one?

Brent: Yeeep. Uhh...

Courtney: I'm gonna say off the bat, I will only be contributing so much to this, because frankly, I don't understand caucuses. I hate them, and so, go, Brent.

Brent: Monday saw the first contest of the 2020 Democratic primary, the Iowa caucus. Now, at the time of recording on Thursday, there are... more questions than answers, including an incomplete number of precincts reporting, a difference by one measure of a mere point one percent between the top two candidates' results, and a string of missteps and fishy choices along the way.

Uh, so let's go back to last weekend before the caucuses. News outlets were expecting results of the CNN and Des Moines register poll over the weekend, which would be the final poll before the caucus. But the Buttigieg campaign caught wind of the fact that, apparently, some of the pollsters calling Iowans were leaving Mayor Pete out of the choices that, uh, their people that they were polling could choose from.

So, CNN and the Des Moines register decided not to release the results. On its face, that seems to be... the right way to go, and uh, integrity led choice.

Monday night, we heard reports of major energy on the ground for Bernie, and a surprisingly low amount of turnout for the Biden campaign. As the hours went on, the only results available were from 2% of precincts. At that time, Bernie had a slight popular vote lead, and in a surprising upset, Mayor Pete was leading in state delegate equivalents.

That's right. The Iowa caucus is another one of those electoral contests where you can win the popular vote, and still come out behind in the measure that the mainstream media runs with, and or the measure, in some cases as we know from Hillary and Trump, that actually is consequential to the whole shebang.

Um, but then, we heard that the delays in reporting the results were due to the failure of an app that caucus leaders had been attempting to use to report their numbers. We've since learned that the app was developed by a company literally named Shadow. Despite the creepy James Bond bad guy name, Shadow is a small tech company startup contracted by the Iowa Democratic party, and the party found what it described as "inconsistencies" in the reporting, partly due to what they called "a coding issue."

None of the campaigns were able to declare victory with any certainty. Sanders said that, according to his campaign's internal accounting, he expected to find out that they had done very well. Buttigieg, on the other hand, tweeted late Monday night, "Iowa. You have shocked the nation. By all indications, we are going on to New Hampshire victorious."

Now, that's a hell of a thing to say with 2% of precincts reporting, and it was, at best, an attempt to create the appearance that Buttigieg had won. I mean, victorious is a pretty bold word.

Courtney: If that wasn't enough, 4chan got involved and made it all better, as is their way. Apparently, the phone number for the Iowa Democratic party was posted on 4chan with an urge to "clog the lines." This was definitely an annoyance, and it delayed results, but there was like—there were way bigger issues afoot. One staffer said it was definitely a problem, but it was definitely not the reason the results were a mess.

Brent: Well, I mean, I think that that is true in the end. But did you see that CNN thing where Wolf Blitzer was talking to the guy on hold?

Courtney: Oh yeah.

Brent: It—for those of you that didn't see it, basically, Wolf Blitzer's talking to a man who, I guess, was a leader of one of the caucus sites on the phone, waiting to report to the Iowa Democratic party. And while he was doing a, y'know, interview via Skype or satellite with Wolf Blitzer, finally, they came on the line. And of course, Wolf's like, "Can we listen in while you do this?" And the guy, being very polite and Iowan is like, "Sure, of course you can! Here I go!" And by then, they'd like, hung up on him.

Um, anyway. Sooo, the party announced that an update on the results would be released the next day, Tuesday afternoon. And they ended up releasing 62% of the results, the findings of which had Buttigieg at 26.9 of state delegate equivalents, and Sanders, 1.8% behind that. When we say state delegate equivalents, think of that as, y'know, how you can win the electoral, but not the popular. State delegate equivalents—

Courtney: Also, some of it is decided by a literal coin flip. It's bonkers.

Brent: Yeah. True. The caucuses are just... as we'll talk about as we go on, a weird circuitous shitshow that could be a lot simpler. Um, and so, yeah. The findings of that 62% result, uh, or reporting by the Iowa state Democratic party, had Buttigieg at 26.9, Sanders 1.8% behind that, Warren in third at 18.3%, and Biden coming in at devastating fourth place. And other candidates coming in with just like, paltry, or in some cases, zero percent outcomes.

This is where I personally got... we'll say, uh, somewhat peeved. Because many mainstream media outlets immediately ran with the headline that Buttigieg was winning, and they framed it as like, a disappointing loss for Sanders, totally ignoring the fact that Sanders was, at this point, winning the popular vote, and that has been true at every different point of reporting more and more results in an extremely tight race.

Then, we learned that Buttigieg's campaign had paid the company that created the app for "technology services," according to the associated press. And also, so had Joe Biden and Kirsten Gillibrand's campaigns. Let's just say that that was not probably as shady as it looked. Um, because... it just doesn't look like those campaigns funded the creation of the app. Does part of me want to be like, "That's fishy!"? Yes. There's a lot of isolated incidents that seem fishy when you add them all together.

Now, this is the part where I point out a thing that's true, but for some reason, gets certain people's hackles up. The DNC doesn't want Sanders to be the nominee. It's demonstrable, it has been the case since 2016.

I consume an unhealthy amount of mainstream and independent media, and like, once you see enough analysis on cable news that entirely leaves out candidates like Sanders and Yang, sometimes putting up, in one case on CNN, a veery, uh, interestingly doctored looking picture of Bernie and multiple times, a picture of not Yang, but rather, a different Asian man? You start to see patterns.

It doesn't have to be the illuminati. It's just the simple fact that, candidates who, by their nature, threaten corporations at large, aren't likely to be embraced by corporate media.

So, Tuesday night and Wednesday, all these corporate-owned outlets ran with big, huge graphics, showing Buttigieg with the highest number in state delegate equivalents with like, teeny tiny little text saying it was only 62% reporting, totally leaving out the popular vote numbers. Um, and of course, Buttigieg's campaign, by the nature of the way that looked, was sort of taking a victory lap.

And what happened? The country started to lose interest, focus on the final impeachment decision, and Trump's state of the union. Now, at time of recording, 97% of precincts are reporting, showing Sanders within point one percent of Buttigieg. And um, the popular vote has been won, so far, by Sanders, by six thousand. You gotta dig to find out that fact, though.

So, let's zoom out. By all indications, Buttigieg's campaign did, in fact, pull off an upset. That would be true even if they got in at a clearly defined second place. That's a significant deal, compared to the polls, and shows you something about his potential, as well as the fact that Biden, at least in Iowa, just doesn't have that energy behind him.

And uh, the caucuses, that being said, are an extremely weird system, that uh, they're actually also non-inclusive, because the small window of time on one evening of the week means many people who worked third shift can't attend, people whose schedules aren't that flexible can't attend, and in many cases, the venues aren't accessible to the disabled.

And in terms of national representation, Iowa is whiter than a rice ball in a glass of milk. So like, the whole thing is, if I may use an esoteric phrase, a goddamn shitfire.

Courtney: Well, and like, yeah. Iowa is incredibly white, and people have—people have posited... would there be this much hullabaloo if it had occurred in a more diverse state? Many people of color pointed out, this is largely what black and latinx districts face every election, with mass amounts of like, voter suppression. And when it happens in a white state, suddenly, it's like, "Oh, the horror!" And it is horrifying! But it's also the reason we need massive voter reform across the board.

Brent: Yeah, totally. And I mean, I... I'd love to know... your... just your gut feeling about like, what would be a better system for the primaries?

Courtney: Literally not caucuses. Literally not caucuses.

Brent: [laughs]

Courtney: Um, I think—

Brent: Big agree.

Courtney: —election day needs to be a national holiday.

Brent: Mm-hmm, mm-hmm.

Courtney: I think that there—just, there needs to be just more options. More absentee voting, more, y'know, staggered dates, things like that. Basically like... it doesn't need a fuckin' app. Like, you just like... honestly, it's the one situation where paper and pen is fine.

Brent: Yeah.

Courtney: But it just needs to be easier, more accessible, and... basically, keep the billionaires away from the suppression.

Brent: Yeah. For my money, I just think that like, the circuitous nature of the primary season and the electoral college both create room for the powers that be to fudge stuff. Even the notion of super delegates with the Democratic party is, on its face, a way for powerful non-voters to have enormous votes. By that, I mean, enormous equivalent votes, like one super delegate.

I don't know if it's hundreds or thousands of voters worth of votes they have, but like, it's on its face, just... kind of that Madisonian desire to protect the landed elite from the peasants.

Courtney: One thing that I think was absolutely wonderful. Uh, Elizabeth Warren's campaign provided child care during the caucuses, because that is such a prohibitive thing for people with children. Like, if you can't get child care, and you don't want to like, take your kids with you to this like, ridiculous event that would like—like, my child with sensory issues would be just a disaster.

Brent: That's super smart.

Courtney: So like, that's—yeah.

Brent: And it reflects the fact that like, her campaign, uh, has, if I'm not mistaken, a big pillar of it is that health—not healthcare, I'm sorry. That childcare should be provided, essentially, as a matter of course to

Americans. Because it can be such a have and have not situation. And it's one thing to talk the talk, but like, to actually go into action and do that is like, a very smart move.

But yeah, for me, y'know, just off the cuff, I feel like, um... if we just had a day, let's say, late May, where every registered Democrat in the country just goes and votes for the nominee. Ta-da. Like, none of this, some states have winner take all, some states are proportional, bleh bleh. Some states are caucuses, some states, they light a fire, and if the smoke is in the shape of an eagle, it's this guy. Like, it's a bunch of dumb bullshit.

One person, one vote. Not for everything. I don't want to hear some of y'all going, "Well, we live in a republic!" Yeah, we live in a democratic republic. We live in a republic where sometimes we have referendums or referenda, and sometimes, we have a representative do it. But it's not gonna be the end of the world if all registered Democrats just... pick who they want to be the nominee, the way that they pick who they want to be the president later.

Um, anyway. So, uh, to that end, this isn't the first time Iowa has messed up. In 2012, Romney was prematurely declared the winner, but over two weeks later, it was announced that Rick Santorum had actually finished first. I don't want to propagate conspiracy theories, but let me just float some facts you can analyze yourself.

Look, I've written a bunch of copy. Let us just say, if you don't think the DNC was working against Bernie in 2016, maybe just look into that. I'll skip the paragraph that I wrote.

Um, but does that mean the illuminati is against Bernie? I'm not saying that. I am saying that, if the powers that be wanted to minimize Bernie's performance in Iowa and prop up Mayor Pete in both implicit and explicit ways, that would be an indistinguishable situation from what we have seen here.

Um, now, the nonpartisan investigative group, Smart Elections, posted a thread through their cofounder, Lulu Friesdat, finding that many precincts

used dodgy math or even coin tosses, as Courtney pointed out, to decide their winners. And more importantly, in many cases, there were what seemed to be intentional rounding errors, always in favor of nearly every candidate except for Bernie.

I have yet to see a rounding error in Bernie's favor. You do not have to take my word for it. I posted their findings on our Twitter account, @TrendsLikeThese, complete with visual evidence. Again, it doesn't mean there's a mass conspiracy, but there is a lot of smoke, regardless of whether there's a fire.

And it's not just organizations you've never heard of reaching these conclusions. The New York Times published a headline, reading, "Iowa caucus results riddled with errors and inconsistencies."

So in a stunning turn of events, not long before we went to record, the head of the DNC, Tom Perez, tweeted, "Enough is enough. In light of the problems that have emerged in the implementation of the delegates election plan, and in order to assure public confidence in the results, I am calling on the Iowa Democratic party to immediately begin a recanvas."

Now, that may sound like they're gonna hold the caucuses again. That's not what a recanvas is. A recanvas is sort of like a recount, except it's like, more of a review of the vote totals in each precinct. Now, do I trust that the DNC doing this will benefit all candidates? Uh, on its—I mean, no. [laughs] But we don't have any evidence to prove their intent to spin the results by doing this. Um, and it would be hard for them to do that without anybody leaking it in the age of smart phones and social media.

So, that being said, two sources have told CNN that the DNC got involved because of issues with allocating numbers from satellite caucus sites. And it just so happens that, whereas Buttigieg got about 1.2 state delegate equivalents out of the satellite sites, Sanders got nearly 22. So, that's a cause for concern indeed.

But, an actual honest recanvas would benefit all of the top candidates. For instance, let's say that the Buttigieg campaign actually did everything right.

The fishiness of all this does not make them look good. It's in everyone's best interest to give it another look, but what's for sure is that no campaign got to enjoy the bona fide, unqualified bump the Iowa caucuses are expected to bestow upon the winner.

The primary's gonna be a bumpy ride, and yes, I will often see it through the prism of anti-progressive bias, which... look, Bernie's my guy, but that does not not affect Warren. What I won't do is come to conclusions based on my gut. Feelings are important, and I am full of them. But facts are, the common denominator between all of our feelings.

We'll see how it goes, and we've got another debate coming up today, the day this episode comes out. So... hold onto your butts.

Courtney: I will also hold onto my Elizabeth Warren hopes until they are pried out of my cold, dead hands.

Brent: I'll say this – if Bernie crashes and burns, Jesus, please save us, Elizabeth Warren! Alright, let's do some Tidbits. Ready? Did you want to— any other thoughts on that before we—

Courtney: I have no thoughts. I just want—I want to go to sleep and wake up and it's new president time.

Brent: [laughs] Yes. Same.

Courtney: I hate caucuses. They're so bad.

Brent: They're super bad. They are super bad.

Courtney: Fucking coin toss? A fucking coin toss?! Jesus fuckin' Christ.

Brent: It's bullshit. Um...

Courtney: [growls]

Brent: So... Tidbits time. Quick update—well, Tidbit. Just one Tidbit.

The coronavirus is still going strong, but instead of alarmism, I wanted to remind you that you are almost definitely not going to get the coronavirus. No matter where you live. You'll probably be more likely, sadly, uh, to have your health threatened by the flu. There have, so far, been only 200 coronavirus deaths worldwide outside mainland China, whereas the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention estimate that, in the US alone, this flu season will see ten thousand or so deaths.

If you didn't hear me the last two times I talked about this, wash your hands! Cover your sneezes! If you get flu symptoms, but you don't feel like your life is threatened, stay home! Don't travel! Don't expose a huge group of people! And, a little hand sanitizer goes a long way. Anecdotally, I've been to about 80 nerd conventions. Two of the three times I got sick afterward were the two where I did not take a belt loop hand sanitizer.

Some of you will probably tell me that hand sanitizer can help create superbugs, but in the short term, if—I mean, if it's important that you not get sick in particular at this particular time, a little belt loop sanitizer can help a lot.

In general, though, we have enough to worry about in this hellscape. You are not going to get the coronavirus, so just breathe a sigh of relief. Okay, well, not too deeply. Nah, you'll be fine. I'm just joshin'.

[music plays]

Speaker 1: Friendship is tough. Especially when you're constantly slaying carnivorous hellbeasts bent on your destruction.

Speaker 2: Hey, make sure to clean the tub. I might actually need to shower today.

Speaker 1: Oh, don't give me that. You've been wearing the same pair of track pants since Tuesday. I mean, they still have the size sticker on the leg.

Speaker 2: Oh yeah, they do... well, still. I was thinking today might be the day.

Speaker 1: Yeah, yeah...

[wet thrashing sounds]

Speaker 2: Oh, it's still alive! Kill it!

Speaker 1: I don't have any weapons!

Speaker 2: Get it with the shower head!

Speaker 1: Agh!

Speaker 2: Agh! Shit. My burrito got some gunk on it...

Speaker 1: But that's just Fairhaven. We make it work. Bubble: The sci-fi comedy from MaximumFun.org. Just open your podcast app and search for Bubble.

[music plays]

Renee: Hi! I'm Renee Colvert.

Alexis: I'm Alexis Preston!

Renee: And we're the hosts of the smash hit podcast, Can I Pet Your Dog? Now, Alexis.

Alexis: Yes.

Renee: We got big news.

Alexis: Uh oh.

Renee: Since last we did a promo, our dogs have become famous.

Alexis: World famous.

Renee: World, like...

Alexis: Stars on the Hollywood walk of fame.

Renee: Second big news.

Alexis: Mm-hmm?

Renee: The reviews are in.

Alexis: Mm-hmm?

Renee: Take yourself to Apple Podcasts. You know what you're gonna hear? We're happy.

Alexis: It's true!

Renee: We're a delight. A great distraction from the world.

Alexis: I like that part a lot.

Renee: So if that's what you guys are looking for, you gotta check out our show. But what else can they expect?

Alexis: We've got dog tech, dog news, celebrities with their dogs, all dog things!

Renee: All the dog things. So if that interests you... well, get yourself on over to Maximum Fun, every Tuesday.

[music ends]

Brent: Now it's time for our Wi-Five of the week. Each week, we scour the internet for examples of folks doing good things and being good people, and we choose one or more to whom we'd like to give an internet high five, or Wi-Five.

[Wi-Five slap]

Brent: Some Wi-Five stories are about people going above and beyond, and some are about people doing something good that really, really needed to be done. In 2011, a group of people was brought together for a research retreat aimed at figuring out the direction of food allergy research. This group included parents of children with severe food allergies, patient advocacy organizations leading doctors, and other insightful and influential people.

They came to the consensus that the best way to go was to take a standard oral immunotherapy approach to treatment, which led to the Allergen Research Corporation, which eventually became a company which is now called Aimmune. And now, nearly a decade of research and hard work later, Aimmune is the first company to have an FDA approved treatment for peanut allergy.

My sister has peanut allergy, my cousin has it, and I've personally been a party to bad reactions, such as one family member realizing they'd eaten a Reese's Peanut Butter Cup earlier that day, and a kiss on the cheek led to a really bad situation.

Now, to be clear, the new drug, which is called Palforzia, isn't a cure, and in some cases, it carries the risk of triggering the exact reactions it's meant to treat. It's a first foray into this world. But there are families who have built their entire schedule around minimizing potential exposure, and it could ease a lot of stress and fear.

The drug is being touted as a test for a new generation of therapies that may transform how food allergies are treated. Additional drugs for other allergies, such as egg and tree nut allergies, are likely to follow, and after that, who knows? Again, Palforzia will not be right for every family, and it's still part of our not very good healthcare system.

But if it even helps one parent feel less scared for the wellbeing of their child, then it's ultimately a good thing, and it's for that reason that this week, we say to Aimmune and everyone whose work contributed to the creation of this drug... Wi-Five.

[theme music plays]

Brent: Well, I think that's gonna do it for another Trends Like These. Uh, let's see... uhh, listen to all the other amazing Max Fun shows. You can find out more about them at MaximumFun.org. Um... please give us a good rating

and review, and write some nice stuff about us on your platform of choice. We always like that.

Um, our theme song is a ringtone! You can get it on the iTunes app of your iPhone, or you can go to BrentalFloss.Bandcamp.com if you want to just have the mp3 or use it to create an Android ringtone.

Courtney, where can people find you on the internet, and what do you want them to know today?

Courtney: Well, you can find me at SYFY Fangrrls, and you can also see my other podcast, Strong Female Characters. As I said, Forgotten Women of Genre is coming back. So please, if you're not already subscribed to that, subscribe to that, because then it's gonna deliver, like, 20 episodes of obscure, awesome women into your earholes.

I also really liked, uh, the phrasing of our theme song is a ringtone, because it kind of was like, "We downloaded a ringtone, and it's our theme song."

Brent: Hell yeah.

Courtney: But really, [whispers] it's the other way around. We turned our theme song into a ringtone.

Brent: Oh, I see. Yeah, that makes sense. Y'know, fun fact – the theme song, uh... I don't think this is telling tales out of school... was originally composed as a prospective theme song for a never-made McElroy brothers' animated project. Um, and I just liked it so much that, when that didn't end up happening, I was like, "Yoink! I'm gonna use it for another McElroy thing!"

Uh, anyway. I'm gonna give you some Twitter handle zones to experience my stuff. I've got a, uh, game show of personal questions called Question Box. You can go to [Twitter.com/QuestionBoxShow](https://twitter.com/QuestionBoxShow). I am writing a Star Trek parody musical, based both on The Wrath of Khan and Star Trek: The Next Generation, and you can find more about that the Khan the Musical Captains Log, which is @UASTPM.

I also have a new Picard recap show. That's the new Picard show on CBS All Access, which is called The Luc Out. You can find more about that @TheLucOut. And... dang, is there one more? Jeeze. Um, I guess I'm also on

Twitter @BrentalFloss. Oh! And I have a party game called Use Your Words. UseYourWords.lol.

Okay, now that you have, between me and Courtney, just a full day's amount of stuff to look at... that's gonna do it for us. Courtney... I don't need to know what you're forgetting, 'cause I don't think you're forgetting anything. What I'm forgetting is, you're great. I'm glad you're my cohost. Let's keep doing the show.

Courtney: Hey, y'know what? Samesicles. And y'know what we did forget? Will no one think of Cynthia Allen's children?

Brent: Oh!

Courtney: Will no one think of the children?!

Brent: Oh, how will she explain butts to them?!

Courtney: Butts are for sinners.

Brent: [laughs] See you next time.

[theme music plays]

Brent: [sighs]

Courtney: Sometimes you feel like a nut. Sometimes you don't.

Brent: I—okay. Uh...

Courtney: Almond Joy's got nuts. Mounds don't.

Brent: Nut flub. [laughs] Nut flub.

Courtney: It happens to lots of guys. [laughs]

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