

## Sawbones 537: The Medical Freedom Movement

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**Intro (Clint McElroy):** *Sawbones* is a show about medical history, and nothing the hosts say should be taken as medical advice or opinion. It's for fun. Can't you just have *fun* for an hour, and not try to diagnose your mystery boil? We think you've earned it. Just sit back, relax, and enjoy a moment of distraction from... that weird growth. You're worth it!

[theme song plays]

**Justin:** Hello, everybody, and welcome to *Sawbones*, a marital tour of misguided medicine. I'm your cohost, Justin McElroy.

**Sydnee:** And I'm Sydnee McElroy.

**Justin:** And, Sydnee, it is such an exciting time... um, in the nation. There's just...

**Sydnee:** Oh, is it?

**Justin:** ... so much happening.

**Sydnee:** I wouldn't say "exciting time."

**Justin:** "Exciting..." I'm trying to think of a word that's like "exciting," but doesn't have any of the positivity. Uh, you know... wild?

**Sydnee:** Alarming?

**Justin:** Alarming? That's good.

**Sydnee:** Terrifying.

**Justin:** Well, I'm not terrified. You know?

**Sydnee:** Disturbing?

**Justin:** Terrif— I try not to give into fear, right? I don't wanna be afraid.

**Sydnee:** Well, I don't either, Justin. I don't know if this— When you realized... [laughs] When you realized that the things that are happening have happened before...

**Justin:** Mm.

**Sydnee:** ... and the human race is still here...

**Justin:** Yeah.

**Sydnee:** ... does that bring you comfort? Or another, more negative, emotion than comfort, would you say?

**Justin:** I have a feeling I'm about to find out, Sydnee. If I am...

**Sydnee:** [laughs]

**Justin:** ... in any way equivocal on this question.

**Sydnee:** Justin, I wanna talk to you about the health freedom movement.

**Justin:** Mm!

**Sydnee:** Or the medical freedom movement - I think both of those terms are used sort of interchangeably.

**Justin:** Yeah. We've been talking about them for a long time, but it's interesting they got branding now, [laughs] right?

**Sydnee:** Well, and it's not new.

**Justin:** Right.

**Sydnee:** It's not a new concept. It's been around for a really long time. I would say that it's been galvanized more recently... and I think specifically

by RFK Jr. When I say this, you're gonna assume that I'm gonna talk about RFK - and I am gonna talk about RFK Jr. - but not just RFK Jr., 'cause he did not create this idea.

The idea behind the health freedom movement is that we should - it's kind of a libertarian view of health and medicine.

**Justin:** Mm.

**Sydney:** We should be free to engage with the healthcare that we choose, we should have autonomy over our bodies... we should have choice.

**Justin:** Right.

**Sydney:** On the surface, those are not bad— I mean, not only are they not bad ideas: autonomy is one of our core medical ethics.

**Justin:** Of course.

**Sydney:** I believe very firmly in the autonomy of my patient to choose whether it's the thing I'm recommending that I think is the best idea, or something I think is a really bad idea. It's their choice.

**Justin:** Yes.

**Sydney:** And that is an important part of practicing medicine.

But that's not... When you say the health freedom movement, when you talk about people who are health freedom advocates, it's not just that. So I think it's worth diving into: where did this come from, where did it start, how... how did we get here?

**Justin:** Yes.

**Sydney:** Right? And so before we jump into the history, I do think it's important that we talk a little bit about RFK Jr...

**Justin:** Yeah!

**Sydnee:** ... specifically at the *top* of the show.

**Justin:** Yeah.

**Sydnee:** Because fairly recently - less so when you're listening to this, but fairly recently as we're recording it, RFK Jr. made some pretty... inaccurate and disturbing and harmful comments about autism spectrum disorder.

**Justin:** Yeah.

**Sydnee:** You think that's fair to say?

**Justin:** Yeah. I think that that is fair to say, Sydnee.

**Sydnee:** Autism spectrum disorder has *consistently* been shown to be linked to genetic markers, to be a genetic condition.

**Justin:** Mm-hmm. Right.

**Sydnee:** It has been studied for decades.

**Justin:** Mm-hmm!

**Sydnee:** We have no evidence that it is triggered by any sort of environmental factor - any sort of toxin, so to speak...

**Justin:** Right.

**Sydnee:** ... that exists around us. To compare it to lung cancer and smoking, which is the comparison that RFK Jr. made, the idea that not everybody who smokes gets lung cancer, so there must be something genetically about you that predisposes you to lung cancer, and then the environmental trigger is smoking.

**Justin:** Yeah. That's stupid.

**Sydnee:** Right. It's a terrible comparison; it's wildly inaccurate. We know that lung cancer has consistently been shown to be one of the most preventable causes of death in the United States, *because* it is so linked to smoking. Yes, this is true.

That is *not* the same - there is no environmental trigger like that for autism spectrum disorder. It's apples and oranges— No, because they're both fruits. It's completely... [laughs] It's apples and bacon. It's...

**Justin:** Yeah.

**Sydnee:** They're completely erroneous to compare. And I think that the comments that he made not only were dangerous and misleading - I think that it showed a profound lack of knowledge about autism.

**Justin:** Either ignorance— I mean, ignorance, it *has* to— I mean... Ignorance, or weaponized ignorance. I guess there's not a meaningful distinction between the two, but it is a *truly* staggering jump. And that's interesting, because it feels like if you were trying to shift the public dialogue, you wouldn't say something so wildly out-of-pocket.

But he doesn't seem to really think about what he's saying *as* he's saying it, so we can't really expect him to think about it before.

**Sydnee:** Well, and I don't know what he's talking about, to make a blanket statement that all people with autism spectrum disorder will never play baseball, write a poem, go to the bathroom unassisted - I mean, it shows a *complete* lack of knowledge about the range of supportive services that some people with autism spectrum disorder need and many people *do not* need.

**Justin:** Yeah.

**Sydnee:** And the various abilities of people along that spectrum. I mean, that is a complete lack of knowledge...

**Justin:** Mm-hmm.

**Sydnee:** ... about autism spectrum disorder.

Also, even if that *was* accurate... Humans have intrinsic value, whether or not they play baseball.

**Justin:** Or earn taxes.

**Sydnee:** Yes, or need supportive services to help them perform more complicated tasks, or activities of daily living. They still have intrinsic value.

And I think that the fact that the first thing he said was “People with autism spectrum disorder will never pay taxes...” I feel like that gives it all away, right?

**Justin:** Right. I mean, that’s the thing, right? That’s the whole... That’s the bit. How much more wealth can the mega rich squeeze out of the classes that are underneath them? Like, how much more can they squeeze out?

**Sydnee:** This is not— This is me, theorizing; I have no knowledge of the inner workings of RFK Jr.’s worm-ridden brain. But I would imagine that this is how he sees people with autism spectrum disorder, and maybe humans as a whole: as pieces of the machine. The machine that creates wealth...

**Justin:** Yes.

**Sydnee:** ... and can have a job, and pay taxes.

**Justin:** The generational wealth that he has enjoyed for his entire existence.

**Sydnee:** Right. He’s not concerned with...

**Justin:** He’s never known anything else.

**Sydnee:** ... with the health and the wellbeing of you and your family, or anybody with autism spectrum disorder. He’s concerned with the health and wellbeing of capitalism.

**Justin:** Right.

**Sydnee:** That continues to line his pockets.

**Justin:** Right. It is an evil administration, and he is an evil person who is poisoning the— *attempting to*, I should say, poison the minds of people in this country against people with autism.

**Sydnee:** And from a scientific perspective, the only reason you would make a claim like, “We’ve never found *any* evidence of an environmental trigger ever, *ever*. ... But we’re gonna find one, and it’s gonna happen by September.”

The only reason you would feel comfortable standing on stage and making that sort of claim is if you’ve already decided what you want that environmental trigger to be, and you are going to ensure that you create enough fake information, fake research or anecdotal *whatever* to back up your false claim.

It’s going to be vaccines, it’s going to be food dyes, it’s going to be... something about processed foods - I don’t know. Or maybe it’s pasteurization of milk. It’s going to be...

**Justin:** I don’t think they have...

**Sydnee:** ... something, like, they already know!

**Justin:** They don’t have the guts to ban vaccines. Because they *know*, right? That’s what people need to remember, right? People who are arguing against vaccines, or are arguing that they’re environmental triggers, the people at the very top of that know better. They know the difference.

**Sydnee:** Yes.

**Justin:** They are trying to make *money*, and build influence and power. The people at the upper echelons of this, they know better. They *know* it’s nonsense. They *know* vaccines save lives. They *know* it. They care more about power, and money.

And the sooner people— I've seen friends have trouble accepting that. Accept it! It's a bad place, right now; we're the bad guys. You have to get ready for that.

**Sydnee:** And this is really— This is a movement that spans politics. We're talking about the anti-vax movement, the health freedom movement. This is a problem that really goes to both extremes of the political spectrum.

**Justin:** Mm-hmm.

**Sydnee:** Because you find this sort of nonsense, fear mongering rhetoric on both the far-left anti-vax segment and the far-right anti-vax segment.

Anyway, we've talked about the anti-vax movement, and that goes back to the invention of vaccines. As soon as we came out with a smallpox vaccine and said, "Hey, we should probably all get this," there were people saying, "No! My body, my choice. I don't want to." Which is always an interesting phrase, depending on who... [laughs] which group is using it.

Let's talk about the bigger movement. Not just vaccines, but the bigger context in which, you know, fighting science exists.

So it's 1958, and you hate communism.

**Justin:** Okay.

**Sydnee:** Okay? Are you there?

**Justin:** I don't agree with— Yes, okay.

**Sydnee:** Are you in that mindset?

**Justin:** Yes, there.

**Sydnee:** It's 1958, you hate communism.

**Justin:** [loud groan] Argh!



**Sydnee:** You hear about a meeting in Indianapolis on December 9th. There's gonna be 12 people there who also hate communism.

**Justin:** How many?

**Sydnee:** 12.

**Justin:** Oof. Um...

**Sydnee:** I know; you don't like to be around a lot of people.

**Justin:** Oh, man. I don't know. Four is worse, though. I mean, I don't think there's any number of people that I'd love. At least if you said 300, I could sneak in and sneak out, without anybody noticing. But— [holding back laughter] Sorry, go ahead. This is not me.

**Sydnee:** No.

**Justin:** It's a fake me.

**Sydnee:** This is a fake you...

**Justin:** I get it.

**Sydnee:** ... and you hate communism.

**Justin:** I hate communism more than I hate [through laughter] talking to people.

**Sydnee:** And so you really—

**Justin:** In a little, loud room.

**Sydnee:** And really, this group hates any sort of, like, collective action. They want less government, more responsibility, and a better world. Well, that doesn't sound too bad!

So you go. The guy in charge is named Robert W. Welch Jr. He was a Harvard dropout from North Carolina, and he'd made it big in the [laughs] candy business.

**Justin:** Mm!

**Sydnee:** So his Oxford Candy Company, before it was eventually— It was bought by his brothers, and so changed names and everything over time. But, his company made Sugar Daddies.

**Justin:** Oh!

**Sydnee:** And eventually, after it became part of his brother's company, they also made Junior Mints.

**Justin:** Mm!

**Sydnee:** Yes.

**Justin:** So those are... Who owns it, now? I feel like they all got... Oh, it's Tootsie. Tootsie Roll owns all those, now, yeah, Sugar Daddy.

**Sydnee:** But that is where they came from. This was a candy business magnate, [chuckles] who retired so that he could fight communism full-time. Because the only thing he loved more than candy was fighting communism.

**Justin:** Uh, interesting. Another side note that has nothing to do with this: the original name of the Sugar Daddy was called the Papa Sucker!

**Sydnee:** Ew!

**Sydnee and Justin:** [make silly groaning sounds]

**Sydnee:** Worse!

**Justin:** [comical groan]

**Sydnee:** Worse than Sugar Daddy!

**Justin:** Don't like it.

**Sydnee:** So— And I do feel complicit in this, because I *love* Junior Mints, let me just say.

**Justin:** Yeah.

**Sydnee:** So now I feel bad about that.

So Bob had always been worried about communism, and he had long suspected, even while he was making Junior Mints, that it's bigger than that.

**Justin:** Mm!

**Sydnee:** It's *bigger* than the Red Scare.

**Justin:** Okay.

**Sydnee:** Okay? *Underneath* this communism thing that is the new flavor of control, there is a bigger coordinated effort that is trying to suppress freedom - and specifically American freedom. I mean, let's be honest.

**Justin:** Yeah.

**Sydnee:** These were "America first" guys. They're really just worried about America.

**Justin:** Yeah.

**Sydnee:** And they're not just that, but they're trying to, like, fight American superiority. Which we know exists, but they're trying to stop it. It's kind of a *shadow* effort. Kind of a shadow government.

**Justin:** Yeah! Shadow government.

**Sydnee:** But it's deep undercover.

**Justin:** Super deep.

**Sydnee:** Like, a deep state that exists...

**Justin:** Oh!

**Sydnee:** ... that controls everything.

**Justin:** Okay. [crosstalk]

**Sydnee:** And communism is just the latest front, right? And he's in— He knows this.

**Justin:** He sees the whole thing.

**Sydnee:** Yeah. Bob sees the whole picture. Probably, the Illuminati is involved...

**Justin:** This is sounding so much like most episodes of *Curse of Oak Island*, honestly. We know something bigger's going on, probably the Illuminati's involved...

**Sydnee:** Probably. Probably the Rockefellers.

**Justin:** Ah, probably the Rockefellers.

**Sydnee:** Seems like it.

**Justin:** I don't know if, uh... I don't know if Bob Welch ever found any, like, pieces of eight, or railroad spikes, any other sort of clues...

**Sydnee:** I looked it up. I was like, "So he's blaming the Rockefellers and the Illuminati. I gotta know. George Soros must not be a millionaire yet." And that is accurate; at this point in history, Soros was not yet a millionaire. So we couldn't blame him.

**Justin:** Yeah.

**Sydnee:** We couldn't say he was paying for all of it...

**Justin:** Couldn't blame George Soros, yeah.

**Sydnee:** ... because he wasn't a millionaire, yet.

So from this meeting of 12 people who get together and agree that there's a bigger thing at play here, there's something secret, and there needs to be, like, the last frontier, fighting for America, fighting for freedom, forming in this room.

And so you form a new society. You love freedom, you hate communism. You think, "Even Eisenhower. Even Dwight Eisenhower himself is a secret commie." You've figured this out.

**Justin:** [exhales]

**Sydnee:** Right? You love McCarthy, you want the free market to be freer. You need a name. And you've heard about this guy named John Birch.

**Justin:** Okay.

**Sydnee:** Now, John Birch was an American missionary to China. He was a Fundamentalist Baptist, and he was also a member of the US military. He was killed by communist soldiers in 1945.

**Justin:** Mm-hmm.

**Sydnee:** And some people kind of saw him as a martyr to the cause, and was referred to at times as the first casualty of the Cold War, okay? You can read all about John Birch's life, if you want - that's not... He's been more mythologized by the society that bears his name than I think maybe even his true story was.

So anyway, the John Birch Society is born. And outside of politics, the Society saw a lot of communists out there, okay?

**Justin:** Mm-hmm.

**Sydnee:** The Civil Rights Movement, they felt, was probably based out of the Kremlin. The Kremlin got that going. You *know* Martin Luther King Jr. was— You *know* they blamed—

**Justin:** Right.

**Sydnee:** That he was a communist. They absolutely... Um, so was Mr. Rogers, by the way.

**Justin:** Oh, yeah?

**Sydnee:** They felt very strongly Mr. Rogers was a commie. Which, *probably* there were other McCarthy heads who thought the same thing, right?

**Justin:** Right.

**Sydnee:** It was the time where he puts his feet in the pool with the police officer who's Black, or the mailman who's Black - who is it?

**Justin:** Yeah. Um...

**Sydnee:** But it was a big moment.

**Justin:** Yeah. Yeah, yeah. Sorry, was...

**Sydnee:** 'Cause there was a white man and a Black man putting their feet in the pool together...

**Justin:** Yes, yes, yes.

**Sydnee:** It was a big deal, right? So obviously, Mr. Rogers is a communist. But they were also worried about, like, "What is the—"

**Justin:** Officer Clemmons, a Black officer on the show.

**Sydnee:** Officer Clemmons. I thought it was a police officer.

But they're also worried about, "What is Big Government doing to our bodies? To our health? How are they..." I mean, 'cause the deep state can do anything, right? Their reach is endless, and their power's, you know...

**Justin:** Yeah.

**Sydnee:** ... beyond measure.

So what could they be doing to control this? Well, an obvious effort is fluoride in the water.

**Justin:** [sighs]

**Sydnee:** So the Birchers - which, the John Birch Society were often called the Birchers - the Birchers were very concerned about the secret "mind control agent" that the federal government was putting in our water, fluoride, to try to make us all... you know, communist puppets. Of a communist government.

**Justin:** Mm-hmm.

**Sydnee:** This is really where - as far as I can tell, this... I'm sure there were people voicing this concern prior to the Birchers. But the Birchers really started to popularize that... anti-fluoride [laughs] movement.

**Justin:** Yeah.

**Sydnee:** Which is also something that RFK Jr. has questioned before, as well.

**Justin:** Yes.

**Sydnee:** And if all of this feels familiar - I mean, I understand - the Birchers were very much, as I said, "America first" types.

**Justin:** Right.

**Sydnee:** They talked a lot about how “America has worried too long about the traitors without, and they need to focus on the traitors within.” Meaning ideological traitors within the United States, people who are not... “They don’t have the right minds...”

**Justin:** Right.

**Sydnee:** “... that Americans should have.”

**Justin:** Right.

**Sydnee:** “And we need to start dealing with those people, however we feel is necessary.” And they really liked Barry Goldwater, because he said— I mean, obviously they were part of the Republican party. They were part of the right.

**Justin:** Right.

**Sydnee:** The Birchers fit into— On the political spectrum, they were definitely the far right of the time. And they liked Barry Goldwater, because there was a big— At the GOP convention, there was kind of a discrepancy between the standard conservative GOPs of the time and the Barry Goldwater fans, who were like, “Maybe it’s time for something more radical.”

**Justin:** Mm. Mm-hmm.

**Sydnee:** Maybe, as Barry Goldwater said, “Extremism in the defense of liberty is no vice.”

**Justin:** Mm.

**Sydnee:** So again, if all of this kind of feels like MAGA...

**Justin:** Yeah.

**Sydnee:** ... part one - I mean, it is.

**Justin:** Yeah.



**Sydnee:** This was the MAGA movement of... you know, we're really dealing with the late '50s, into the '60s. This is the Birchers began to grow. And they really started to split the conservative party - like, the conservative side - in two.

And when I say "split in two," I don't mean in equal halves. This was an extremist group. They were definitely pulling people farther to the right. But they very much sort of solidified, in the American mind, the idea that there are deeper things at play, that the government does things to us to try to control us, and that it's *all* part of a big plot. And we can't see it, maybe... but the Birchers can see it.

**Justin:** [sarcastically] Ah, yeah. They can.

**Sydnee:** And so the Birchers can stop it.

So how did that get us to RFK? Well, I'm gonna tell you, Justin...

**Justin:** Yeah?

**Sydnee:** ... and our listeners...

**Justin:** Yes?

**Sydnee:** ... but first, we gotta go to the Billing Department.

**Justin:** Oh, let's go.

[theme song plays]

[ads play and end]

**Justin:** Alright. We're about to connect this to the modern day, Sydnee.

**Sydnee:** Yeah. Now, I will say, this isn't a direct genetic line, because Attorney General Robert F. Kennedy - so not RFK Jr., but RFK - called the

John Birch Society ridiculous, and that people should stop paying so much attention to it, by the way.

**Justin:** [laughs]

**Sydnee:** Which I think is very interesting. So RFK Jr. and his dad would not agree about the Birchers.

But they wouldn't be stopped. Now, here's the thing: there is this peak where they claimed up to 100,000 members, as we moved into the 70s. And then you kind of get this narrative that develops that the mainstream conservatives shut it down. They said, "This is tearing our party apart. This is not who we are. These people are way out there, and we are going to demean them, and distance ourselves from them to reclaim the Republican party."

But if you really look into what happened, the GOP just kind of absorbed the most popular beliefs from the Birchers: anti-immigration, and isolationism, and this idea of pulling yourself up by your own bootstraps, and personal responsibility, and that we don't need a big government to take care of us, or look out for us, or help us out when we're having a hard day. We need to learn how to do it for ourselves.

All of that was— those were Bircher ideals that sort of the new conservative movement that was forming began to adopt. And along with that came concerns about things like mandates to have fluoride in your water, mandates to get a vaccine if you didn't want to.

**Justin:** "Concerns" with air quotes, we should say.

**Sydnee:** Right.

**Justin:** Right, it's...

**Sydnee:** Exactly.

**Justin:** ... not actual concerns.

**Sydnee:** And obviously, things like the New World Order fit in really well with Bircher ideas, and so even as the Birchers kind of - their peak of popularity in the '70s started to drop off...

**Justin:** Mm-hmm.

**Sydnee:** ... they never went— There's still a thing today. The John Birch Society still exists, to this day. Even though their numbers dropped, they weren't completely relegated to the sidelines. They were still there, voicing these concerns.

And they became really loud during COVID. So the John Birch Society gained a lot more traction, questioning and being concerned with the COVID vaccine.

**Justin:** Mm-hmm.

**Sydnee:** I will say, even prior to that, they also gained a lot of traction with the Affordable Care Act. Because if Barack Obama is a communist, which of course they said he was, then everything he does must be communist, and the Affordable Care Act and universal healthcare must also be communist.

Which is a great way to turn American people against something that is absolutely in their best interest, right?

**Justin:** Uh-huh.

**Sydnee:** The Affordable Care Act, the Medicaid Expansion... the, you know, idea of universal healthcare, and the idea of a single-payer system... great ideas for the average American.

But if you tell people that it's control, if you tell people that it's part of controlling you, the government will own all the healthcare, that's a great way to flip it around, so that it scares them.

**Justin:** Mm-hmm.

**Sydnee:** Maybe it's a conspiracy. Maybe they control everything.

RFK Jr. started questioning vaccines, in just following right along with the John Birch Society and many other— I mean, I'm not saying these are the first, or these are the only. I'm not saying these are the *only* architects of the modern health freedom anti-vax movement. But certainly, I would say that a lot of the *political* playbook...

**Justin:** Mm-hmm.

**Sydnee:** ... that we watched MAGA follow, Trump and RFK Jr., it is the JBS playbook. They are just repeating their rhetoric from, you know...

**Justin:** However long. Yeah.

**Sydnee:** ... the '50s and '60s, to this day. I mean, it's the same stuff they've been saying.

So even after Andrew Wakefield came out, he said vaccines cause autism. And then his study was revoked, it was found that he faked research. He was completely discredited, he lost his license. Even after all that, RFK came out and said that vaccines cause autism.

So after we knew...

**Justin:** Right.

**Sydnee:** After we knew that was all wrong, he helped with the World Mercury Project, specifically in 2007, to understand the dangers of mercury in vaccines. And that was what the false claim was.

**Justin:** Right.

**Sydnee:** "Mercury in vaccines caused autism."

**Justin:** Right.

**Sydnee:** The World Mercury Project would eventually turn into the Children's Health Defense, which is the very prominent anti-vax lobbying

organization that *absolutely* RFK Jr. has been affiliated with throughout his career. And absolutely, even though they are a charitable organization, they can't *officially* support him...

**Justin:** It's clear.

**Sydnee:** It's all...

**Justin:** I mean, it's— Yeah.

**Sydnee:** The link is all very clear.

But beyond the concept of removing vaccine mandates and making you eat more meat, what else are they wanting? I mean, I think that's— You can find this direct line between the John Birch Society to RFK Jr. today, and everybody in between. All of the anti-vax stuff that was building in between.

But why is it so important? Why is it so important? Where's the money, right?

**Justin:** Yeah.

**Sydnee:** If it's gonna be a political movement, there has to be money, or power, or something. A lot of it has to do with the fact that they want you to buy supplements. So if you really look into a lot of the health freedom advocates, what they're telling you is you don't need Big Government to put fluoride in your water and make you get vaccines, and also they're probably trying to control you in some way, or make you sick.

But you do need a number of health food supplements that aren't regulated by Big Pharma - 'cause you can't trust Big Pharma... of course, that's a double-edged sword, right there.

**Justin:** 'Cause you can't. [wheezing laughter] I mean, you shouldn't, at least. I mean, you shouldn't.

**Sydnee:** I mean, it's tough, right? Like...

**Justin:** Trust? Trust, you can't.

**Sydnee:** No, you can't trust Big Pharma, but you...

**Justin:** I can trust scientists. I can trust scientific research. I can trust... you know, holistically arrived-upon... [laughs] I don't know. "Trust Big Pharma," that is tough.

**Sydnee:** Well, that's the problem, right? They're playing on things. Some of them are true, right?

**Justin:** Right.

**Sydnee:** We've talked about this before. How complicated is it that the companies that made life-saving vaccines during the COVID pandemic are also some companies that, [chuckles] you know, produce drugs, and take advantage of people with their price hikes on a regular basis? And how do you square it?

**Justin:** Yeah. I mean, you don't. The solution is not "Start selling people a bunch of weird, unregulated [laughs] supplements," certainly.

**Sydnee:** Well, that's the thing. So the health freedom movement that John Birchers, and everybody else who was involved with the health freedom movement throughout the years, have pushed against the FDA regulating supplements...

**Justin:** Right.

**Sydnee:** ... and vitamins the same way they do drugs, right? So instead, they are technically food. A vitamin or a supplement is regulated by the FDA as a food, and so they have way less strict rules on what kind of testing and how safe it has to be, and how much of the thing you're selling actually has to be in the pill that you're saying has it.

**Justin:** Right.

**Sydnee:** There is a Codex Alimentarius Commission, which is sort of the international commission that sets guidelines on food safety.

**Justin:** Mm-hmm.

**Sydnee:** And since then, since 2005, we have had very specific labeling and stuff for vitamins and mineral supplements. But because they're relegated as foods, it's just not the same— And, by the way, the John Birch Society completely opposes the idea of an international food commission. Did you know this existed, by the way?

**Justin:** No, I didn't.

**Sydnee:** Yeah. I didn't know that, either.

But why do we do that? Like, why do we regulate it differently? Because back in the 90s, when there was an effort to say, like, "Hey, guys, we're selling all these supplements, we're selling all these vitamins... Nobody knows what's in them, nobody's watching them, they're... You know, they're just food. We should tighten this, and make these drugs. These are medicines. These are drugs. We should tighten them, and say, 'No, we need to regulate them as drugs...'"

There was this huge pushback from the health freedom movement, saying— And especially, like, the health food companies, and the supplement companies, and the vitamin companies... they lobbied against it very strongly to say, like, "No, no, no. Because we need people to have access."

And this is just government overreach. "The government's trying to take away your supplements because they know these work better than Big Pharma's drugs. And so we've gotta push back against it."

**Justin:** Right.

**Sydnee:** Right? And they even had, like... There was an advertisement with Mel Gibson who was being arrested by FDA agents because he was taking vitamin C.

**Justin:** [laughs]

**Sydnee:** Mel Gibson just consistently staying on the wrong side of history, there. [chuckles]

**Justin:** Just never misses an opportunity to be wrong about something. [laughs]

**Sydnee:** And so then, Congress had to take action, right? So there's all of this argument, the FDA is saying, "No, you can kill yourself with these things, if you take them wrong. We should regulate them."

**Justin:** Yeah.

**Sydnee:** And then there's all this advertisement against it. So obviously, Congress had to get involved. And in 1994, the Dietary Supplement Health and Education Act was passed, which is still what stands to this day, which is why we regulate vitamins and supplements the way we do.

And this was introduced by Orrin Hatch and Tom Harkin, so a bipartisan bill. But it is important to note that Orrin Hatch had received *significant* donations from Xango and Herbalife. ... MLMs that sell dietary supplements.

**Justin:** Right.

**Sydnee:** Basically, what they said— And again, this is a result of the health freedom movement to - and the supplement industry - let us continue to sell these as foods, even though they are absolutely not foods. And then we don't— we are *not* responsible for what people do with these, and what choices they're making.

**Justin:** Right.

**Sydnee:** And so all of this has kind of morphed into this weird concept of health freedom that we have today, which is why I say it spans political boundaries. We've got this concern about big government overreach, which I really think is where the John Birch Society comes into play: the idea that there's a deep state that's controlling everything.



We've heard Trump mimic this, right? We've heard him say this stuff. The idea that when we're telling you what to do with your body, it's the government trying to control you, and it has to do with communism, or socialism, or whatever "-ism" they wanna blame.

But on the other side, you've got all these health food industries and supplement industries who had a vested interest in making sure that the stuff they sold was unregulated.

**Justin:** Mm-hmm.

**Sydnee:** And that represents a very different worldview, right? It's a much more, like, *left* worldview.

And then that all gets mushed together into the modern health freedom movement, which says, "I don't want the government telling me to get a vaccine. But also, I'm going to drink raw milk, because pasteurization is not necessary, and is better for my body. And also, I'm going to eat all of this raw food, because it's good for me." And that's a very, like, left kind of view. "But then also maybe raw meat, because why does the government get to tell me that I don't get to eat raw meat, if I want to?"

Like, it's a really— I don't know where we've arrived. Do you know what I'm trying to say? Like, it's this weird left, right...

**Justin:** There's something about the...

**Sydnee:** ... back to the middle.

**Justin:** There is, I think— If I'm trying to reason it out, I think there is a very alluring— It's very alluring, this idea that you're smarter than the system. And I think that there is a certain type of person who... they value their own intellect to an extent where they value it above, uh, consensus. They value it above society. They value it above reason, right?

**Sydnee:** Mm-hmm.

**Justin:** They value it above anything else. Because they think the power of their brain is such that should they arrive at something, it is objectively true, because their brain has arrived at it.

And they don't have what I think is sort of an essential thing that you need in life, which is kind of constantly questioning yourself, constantly thinking about what you— reevaluating what you believe. Constantly trying to, like, realize that you don't know everything. You barely know anything. [laughs]

**Sydnee:** Well—

**Justin:** So it's probably good to, like, keep learning, and keep your mind open, and keep trusting people who have spent their *whole lives* trying to understand this thing.

**Sydnee:** Well, and that's what— I mean, really, at the heart of it, what they're trying to say is, "Just because you have science, it doesn't mean that the conclusions you've reached about health and wellbeing have any more merit than the conclusions I reached with my own sort of... whether it's faith-based or spiritual, or just like stuff that I read that I think sounds true."

**Justin:** Mm-hmm.

**Sydnee:** That that all has equal merit, and should be upheld by society. And unregulated, or regulated, to the same extent.

**Justin:** Mm-hmm.

**Sydnee:** And so, I mean, I think when we go beyond vaccines... No dyes or preservatives or additives in our food - that, *that* is definitely part of health freedom movement. Which I wouldn't say is tied to an ultra-conservative point of view, per say, but that's definitely— I mean, here in West Virginia, we have banned dyes in our food. [laughs] Mountain Dew is not gonna be legal in West Virginia in a couple of years.

You can promote ideas that aren't based in science. Belief in anecdote is the same, in the health freedom movement. "If you saw it with your own eyes, if it worked for you, that's just as good as a pile of studies." Obviously, they

believe that vaccines and toxins cause autism, and they're just determined to prove it.

They still believe fluoride is a mind-control drug. That's still part of the health freedom movement. The idea that SSRIs are, again, something that this conspiracy perpetuated by the government to control us, and that we shouldn't use them for anything. That depression can be exercise, and diet, and I think state-sponsored work camps were part of RFK Jr.'s plan, too.

**Justin:** [sarcastically] Great.

**Sydnee:** "Substance use disorder isn't real; it's a choice. Autism destroys lives. Obesity is the cause of all your problems, and it only results from poor food choices, and it can absolutely be cured by calories-in, calories-out kind of thinking. Mental illness is a product of generational laziness." All of this, now, is being accepted at the same level.

I mean, that is what the health freedom movement says. "Take this in the same way you would take what the CDC or the NIH or any accredited medical body says."

**Justin:** And by the way, we— Yeah. Yeah.

**Sydnee:** 'Cause it's all the same.

And they have a solution for all of it. "Walk it off. Exercise more, eat less, eat protein. Eat meat. Take supplements, drink water, drink specific *kinds* of water - drink alkalized water," right?

**Justin:** Yeah. "Buy our stuff."

**Sydnee:** "Buy our stuff. Buy our grounding mats. Buy our pills. Buy... whatever." You know... "Work more, want less. Have children," I think that's part of it. "Have healthy children, though. Have healthy children that fulfill the needs of society. Have healthy children that pay *taxes*. Because that's what we want you to do."

**Justin:** Yeah.

**Sydnee:** And by the way, this plays— When we start talking about “Have healthy children that can pay taxes,” there is always an undercurrent in these conversations that gets back to, “And also, are they healthy *white* children?”

**Justin:** Yeah.

**Sydnee:** I mean, let’s be honest. “And are they healthy *straight* children?” There’s— I mean... When people say, “This sounds a little eugenics,” there’s a reason. ‘Cause it’s all from the same playbook.

**Justin:** Right.

**Sydnee:** And I think that, like, the John Birch Society rose to prominence, and then kind of fell out of popularity, for a while. When we start to see these movements arise again, it’s because we went through a time of global uncertainty with the pandemic where we were terrified, where conspiracy theories *really* thrived.

I mean, that’s what we’ve seen in the MAGA movement, and then since COVID, especially. The ground is really soft for that kind of thinking. Like, that there “must be” something underneath it all. “Surely, this isn’t random. There *must be* some big... *big* bad guy.”

**Justin:** Right.

**Sydnee:** “Big villain...”

**Justin:** Yeah!

**Sydnee:** “... that’s causing it all, and we’re gonna find it out.”

As I was reading through this, I was reading about commentary on the health freedom movement, and Paul Offit - who’s a very famous pediatrician and research scientist, works at the Children’s Hospital of Philadelphia, helped invent the rotavirus vaccine...

And when they asked him why he thought that this happened, he said that in difficult events throughout history, people have tended to, quote, "look for another reason, some unifying reason, other than just what is usually the reason, which is the random horribleness of life, over which you have no control."

Which I don't mean to end on a sad note, but I think that it... you can understand. [laughs] I mean, I think, honestly, I agree with Dr. Offit...

**Justin:** Sure.

**Sydnee:** ... and I appreciate the bluntness. It *is* hard to accept that, sometimes, things just happen. And they're scary, and then we get through them, and we move forward.

**Justin:** Hmm! But, you know what, Syd? Maybe we should accept that, right now. You know? If we can accept that some things are just crappy, and scary, and we get through them and move forward, maybe this is just another thing. You know?

We can't, on the one hand, accept that some things are crappy, and then think that things will always be crappy. Because if you're gonna embrace randomness, embrace that kinda chaos, then you've gotta *allow* for the fact that things might get better. Right?

**Sydnee:** Not only "might" they. I would say they absolutely will.

**Justin:** This is the thing.

**Sydnee:** This is what history shows.

**Justin:** I wanna answer your question.

**Sydnee:** Yeah, do.

**Justin:** This makes me feel better. Because—

**Sydnee:** Does it make you feel better?

**Justin:** Because we've done it before. We've gotten through dark ages before, right? We have a globally-connected source of information to combat a government that is actively trying to dissolve, like, medical knowledge.

We have lots of resources where people can find out, and store true information in repositories of information. And I think that knowing— If this is a disease caused by ignorance, I think that us being ignorant *of it* cannot be the cure. Right? The *only* cure is sunlight. That's the only disinfectant, I think, in this case.

And I think knowing that how small and craven people like RFK Jr. and Trump are, and remembering that at the end of the day, they're just as weak-willed and scared as anybody else, just clamoring for any sort of recognition or power they can scrape together...

I will also say, as somebody who has been the voice of history... [laughs] many times on this show... Like, I've been— Sorry, pals.

**Sydnee:** [chuckles]

**Justin:** It's gonna be a Justin McElroy in 100 years. Here's our sneak preview, okay? Justin McElroy Jr. Jr. is like, "You're not gonna *believe* this dumb guy. RFK Jr., he was called. And he was a big dumdummy, and we all realized that he was a craven idiot. And everybody followed—"

News flash, by the way: if you think you are a free thinker that is part of this organization, speaking as someone— It may not be Sydnee and I, but one of our kids is gonna just peg you on that big ol' wheel of dummdums. That big ol' wheel of people who think they're free thinkers, but really just snowed the same as everybody putting leeches on themselves, and worrying about their humors. I mean, you are just the latest sucker.

**Sydnee:** Mm-hmm. It's always so obvious when they're also trying to sell you a supplement for it, at the same time, right?

**Justin:** No kidding. Yeah.

**Sydnee:** I will say, it also brought me comfort— There's this song that I wanna play, before we finish, that I stumbled upon while I was researching the John Birch Society. It was a song called "The John Birch Society" by the Chad Mitchell Trio - who John Denver was a member of for a while, by the way. Not at this point.

But did a satirical— It's a takedown of the John Birch Society, basically just making fun of how silly and small and ridiculous they were at the time. And I think it's a great— I know a lot of the people who were on these, like, ridiculous communist hunts...

**Justin:** Yeah.

**Sydnee:** ... looking for all of the secret reds, in media and whatever, that they were gonna find out.

**Justin:** We're gonna include that— I mean, listen. If you wanna include that after the show, maybe we can append that audio at the end, to be able to [crosstalk]...

**Sydnee:** Sure. Yeah. But I think that hearing people at the time recognize, "This is ridiculous..." It's the same thing that we need to recognize now, and be open about. This is ridiculous. We've been here before...

**Justin:** And keep saying it. I mean, I think that it's... You know, keep speaking it. Keep saying the true thing, over and over and over again.

First, May 3rd. If you can, if you're at all able, come to Huntington between 10:00 and 7:00 for the Harmony House Renaissance Faire. It's gonna be at Harris Riverfront Park.

There's gonna be a live *Sawbones*. There's gonna be signings with *The Adventure Zone*, and there's gonna be a dunk tank. And there's gonna be horses doing combat, and there's gonna be people fighting. There's gonna be fortune telling. It's gonna be amazing.

And you gotta come check it, totally, out. If you go to [bit.ly/harmonyhouserenfaire](https://bit.ly/harmonyhouserenfaire) with an E...?

**Sydnee:** Yes.

**Justin:** Yes.

**Sydnee:** The fancy one, with an E.

**Justin:** The fancy one, with an E.

**Sydnee:** Mm-hmm.

**Justin:** Then you can get tickets for that. So I hope to see you there.

Thanks to The Taxpayers for use of their song, "Medicines," as the intro and outro of our program, and thanks to you for listening! [applause sound effect]

That's gonna do it for us. Until next time, my name is Justin McElroy.

**Sydnee:** I'm Sydnee McElroy.

**Justin:** And as always, don't drill a hole in your head.

[ "The John Birch Society" by the Chad Mitchell Trio plays ]

**Lyrics:** Oh, we're meeting at the courthouse at 8 o'clock tonight  
You just come in the door, and take the first turn to the right  
Be careful when you get there, we'd hate to be bereft  
But we're taking down the names of everybody turning left!

Oh, we're the John Birch Society, the John Birch Society  
Here to save our country from a communistic plot!  
Join the John Birch Society, help us fill the ranks  
To get this movement started, we need lots of tools and cranks.

[music begins fading]

Now, there's no one that we're certain the Kremlin doesn't touch



We think that Westbrook Pegler doth protest a bit too much...

[acoustic sting]

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