

SERIES: Caucus: New Jersey with Steve Adubato
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STEVE ADUBATO, host:

Hi, I'm Steve Adubato coming to you from the campus of William Paterson University. This is a very special edition of "One on One." A little bit later on we'll be joined by Dr. Neil Kressel, author of a terrific--it's a provocative book. It is called "Bad Faith: The Danger of Religious Extremism."

But in this first segment we are joined by another faculty member here at William Paterson University. She is Dr. Christine Kelly, associate professor of political science at William Paterson, author of the upcoming book called "Chimes of Freedom: Student Protests and the Changing American University." We'll be talking about the youth vote and whether in fact in 2008 there'll be more young voters, that is, 18 to 29, more young voters voting than ever before. You know, people say, 'What's the difference what you say to young voters? Because in the end, they just don't vote.' Well, Dr. Kelly doesn't believe that's the case, and particularly in 2008 if Barack Obama is the presidential candidate on the Democratic side. We will see.

This is "One on One." We are at William Paterson University. This is one you can't afford to miss. We'll be right back after this.

Announcer: Funding for this edition of CAUCUS: NEW JERSEY has been provided by: QualCare Inc., a local-managed care company covering 600,000 New Jersey residents; New Jersey Natural Gas, proud to support education in our communities; Johnson & Johnson, the worldwide health care products company; and Verizon communications.

ADUBATO: You are looking at Dr. Christine Kelly, associate professor of political science, William Paterson University, author of the upcoming book "Chimes of Freedom: Student Protests and the Changing American University."

Good to see you, doctor.

Dr. CHRISTINE KELLY (PhD, Associate Professor of Political Science): Great to be here.

ADUBATO: Let's talk about young voters. First of all, we are talking about

18 to 29?

Dr. KELLY: Eighteen to 29 is the most commonly used measure, but 18 to 24 sometimes is used, but 18 to 29 is very exciting.

ADUBATO: OK. Here we go. We are taping this program, beautiful William Paterson University in the middle of March. We are in a very heated presidential campaign on the Democratic side. The Republican nominee is clearly John McCain, 72 years of age.

Dr. KELLY: Mm-hmm.

ADUBATO: By the way, does it matter how old John McCain is as it relates to younger voters?

Dr. KELLY: I don't think it's age. I think it's style and I think it's substance, and I think there is a clear sort of set of preferences in terms of issues that are of concern to young people.

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ADUBATO: What are those issues?

Dr. KELLY: The issues seem to be, most saliently are jobs and economic...

ADUBATO: It's not Iraq?

Dr. KELLY: Iraq is right up--right in there, but we're seeing jobs, health care, Iraq. The war is very much a motivator amongst young voters. But I think the surprise is that there are very worried about their economic future, and I think that makes sense. But they're also concerned about health care. They're concerned about the war and the environment.

ADUBATO: Go back. When you say health care, do you mean not that they're concerned that they won't be able to afford health coverage?

Dr. KELLY: Precisely.

ADUBATO: And so how is it that they're following presidential campaign, and what is it as they follow it that they're looking for in a candidate? Is it simply, 'We're going to provide' or 'I'm going to provide universal coverage. You don't have money, it doesn't matter. We're going to provide universal coverage'?

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Dr. KELLY: I think that the details of what's in their mind and how they're analyzing the issues hasn't really been measured that much. There have been some focus groups. But what we're seeing is a broad, more liberal set of policy concerns amongst the young that has traditionally been so. But what's so interesting is that there was this upswing in their desire to express that electorally since 2004.

ADUBATO: How does that manifest itself? Express it electorally.

Dr. KELLY: In other words, they may have had these tendencies. We've been able to see through various studies that they show more tolerance racially, more--they're a little broader or easier on immigration issues, but what we're seeing since 2004 is that they are entering the voting booth and they are voting based on their preferences.

ADUBATO: What do you think is happening? I mean, someone might say, 'Well, it's easy. It's Barack Obama. He's 46 years of age. He is dynamic, he's charismatic.'

Dr. KELLY: Mm-hmm.

ADUBATO: He captures the imagination, the attention of particularly college students when he speaks on college campuses. He's against the war. He's made that a primary issue, and young people relate to him. Is it as simple as two words, Barack Obama?

Dr. KELLY: Now, I think that this candidate has clearly energized the youth vote, but the tendency, the trend was well under way. We saw a 10 percent increase in the youth vote in 2004. That would be 11 percent for college students and 9 percent for noncollege-attending young people.

ADUBATO: Who'd they vote for?

Dr. KELLY: They voted overwhelmingly for the Democratic candidate, for Kerry.

ADUBATO: For Kerry.

Dr. KELLY: In 2004.

ADUBATO: So younger people, the people we're talking about do or do not relate well to President Bush?

Dr. KELLY: Do not at this--currently, he is very unpopular amongst the youth. That is not to say he does not have youth supporters; he does. But what we're seeing in these primaries and caucuses is that the youth, about two-to-one, are coming out for Democratic candidates as opposed to the Republican contests.

ADUBATO: Yeah, but doctor, you're talking about the Democratic candidates. Let's play this out a little bit because there's this generational thing that I'm curious about. Barack Obama 46, Hillary Clinton 60?

Dr. KELLY: Close, yeah.

ADUBATO: I believe she's 59 or 60

Dr. KELLY: Yeah.

ADUBATO: Those 14 years matter a great deal for most younger voters?

Dr. KELLY: I really want to say that it's not about the numbers, that it's about the message and the style.

ADUBATO: Wait. You don't want to say it, but are you going to say it?

Dr. KELLY: No, I don't think that there's enough evidence to support that young people vote based on your age.

ADUBATO: Is she connecting with them?

Dr. KELLY: She's not connecting with them to the degree that he is connecting with them. She does have some young people that she connects to, but Barack Obama, across all of these contests that we've seen, has really energized this youth trend and is winning about 59 to her about 36, 37 percent of those coming out for the Democratic contest.

ADUBATO: Is the race--is race a factor? Is race in any way a factor that he is black, she is white. Does it play in any way to voter preferences among those who are younger?

Dr. KELLY: I think it is not an explicit preference--issue for them, that they don't express it in racial terms. What I do think is exciting to them is the idea of, in either case, right, electing the first woman or the first African-American. I think that something new is what is...

ADUBATO: Breaking new ground.

Dr. KELLY: Breaking new ground, and clearly young people seem to be indicating that they think Barack Obama is going to break more new ground than Hillary Clinton.

ADUBATO: Say at the end of this very difficult and challenging process, and controversial process in the way a nominee on the Democratic side is elected--or nominated.

Dr. KELLY: Mm-hmm.

ADUBATO: Say Barack Obama has the most delegates. He has the most popular votes, but the so-called superdelegates in fact decide that Hillary Clinton should be the nominee.

Dr. KELLY: Mm-hmm.

ADUBATO: She gets most of them and she winds up being the Democratic nominee over Barack Obama. Your prediction? The vast majority of young voters do what in the 2008 general election?

Dr. KELLY: I think it would deflate what we've seen, the enthusiasm going on. I think it would probably make young people feel a little cynical, and I think it would be a mistake on the Democratic Party side.

ADUBATO: A mistake? Why a mistake?

Dr. KELLY: I think because one of the things we've seen in the surveys is that, prior to this election, about 8 percent of state party chairs thought that the youth vote was important to the long-term health of the Democratic party.

ADUBATO: Eight percent.

Dr. KELLY: Eight percent. Whereas, 21 percent thought it was senior citizens. What we're seeing with this trend is that the youth are the future of this party and that they have been long ignored. When they are--have a candidate who appeals directly to them, when the Get Out the Vote or the registration and the Get Out the Vote efforts are there, they respond. They've responded to the Democratic Party utilizing Facebook, MySpace and some of the electronic communication.

ADUBATO: Stay on that for a second. In the time we have left, I'm curious about this, doctor. MySpace, Facebook, the Internet, blogging. How much impact has it had on the involvement in the political process of these younger people?

Dr. KELLY: I think it's been very influential, but I think what we see is that there has also been about 10 years of initiatives that have been going on at the level of colleges, public schools, civic youth organizations that have really said 'we've had a crisis of youth participation, we've been addressing that.' So there has been an effort to actually direct energy toward young people politically. They have responded, and they are really energized in these primaries and caucuses. We've seen the youth participation in these caucuses and primaries double, triple and quadruple on the Democratic Party side.

ADUBATO: Let me ask you something. Do you believe that in this race, no matter how it plays out for the next president, that young people will have played a significant role in determining who that president is going to be?

Dr. KELLY: I think they have--they will determine the outcome of this next selection.

ADUBATO: They will?

Dr. KELLY: If--they very well could. And I, you know, I think that we really need to pay attention because I think when they realize that young people make up 20 percent of the eligible voters and that they are now reaching levels of real strong participation, the candidates are going to have to speak to their issues. Whether young people are going to be able to articulate their needs: more funding for higher education, more funding for education, you know, they're indebted with student loans. They have real concerns, and it would be nice to see the candidates really speaking directly to them. So far, Barack Obama seems to have caught their ear and he speaks to them in a language that they respond to, which is a language of hope.

ADUBATO: OK. But that's the thing about Barack Obama. I'm curious about this. If Barack Obama gets up, gives a speech and says, 'We have to have hope.'

Dr. KELLY: Yeah.

ADUBATO: 'Yes, we can. Change is the message. We can do this together.' And then someone says, 'Senator, could you tell us exactly how this happens?' Are there large numbers of young people who are pressing the senator on the specifics of how he gets that done? Or are they saying, 'Wow, we like how that sounds and feels and that's good enough for us'?

Dr. KELLY: I think--I think because they're young political people, they're maturing, they do not have the kind of like policy questions that we might

associate with other constituency groups. They are aware of some of their needs, and they're sharpening in this election. But I think the tragedy would be for either party to walk away from the youth base in terms of specifics.

ADUBATO: Yeah, but one second. You're saying either party walk away. What chance does John McCain have, realistically, of attracting, motivating, getting younger people excited in this campaign? I mean, I don't see any indication that he's been able to do that. So you're saying don't blow them off, but can he turn them on?

Dr. KELLY: Well, you know, it--I don't--I don't think that it's likely that he will say, 'I'm going to increase Pell grants,' you know, 'by 200 percent.'

ADUBATO: Higher ed grants. Not saying that.

Dr. KELLY: Yeah, higher the grants.

ADUBATO: Yeah.

Dr. KELLY: I don't think so. But I think that's the kind of thing that would capture the attention of young people. I don't think his policy on the war resonates with young people.

ADUBATO: OK, so, wait, how--John McCain says, 'Listen, I know war better than anyone else. Served five and a half years as a POW.' Right? In Vietnam. 'I don't want this war, but this is the best way to address the situation over there. We have to stay the course.' He's being honest. He's not trying to pander. Do most young people say, 'You know what? Even if I disagree with Senator McCain, I respect his honesty and there aren't a lot of politicians who are honest'?

Dr. KELLY: I think that, you know, that has him some play, but I think that the level of distrust over this war is enormous amongst youth voters. It really, they are not, you know, supporting the war, they're not supporting the president's position, and they really think it's a waste of precious resources. I mean, that's what we've seen in some of the focus groups.

ADUBATO: OK. Before I let you out of here, I'm curious. Jon Stewart, a major influence on younger voters?

Dr. KELLY: I think he's an influence. I think it doesn't hurt. It can help, but it's certainly no substitute for knowing real politics and being involved on a practical community level as well. And I think one of the things we see, even with the television and the Internet, is that it's part of an overall winning package, but actually, nothing has replaced the kind of operations, that face-to-face operation, that's made the difference in the youth vote. And up until now, Barack Obama's organization has really done that the best.

ADUBATO: Dr. Kelly, let's do this. After this presidential race is over, you will come back with us. We will analyze exactly who voted.

Dr. KELLY: Uh-huh.

ADUBATO: Those who are age 18 to 29, and who they voted for, and we appreciate your analysis today. Thank you so much.

Dr. KELLY: Thank you for having me.

ADUBATO: You're be--your colleague's going to joining us in just a little bit. Neil Kressel wrote a wonderful book called "Bad Faith: The Danger of Religious Extremism." We are coming to you from the beautiful campus of William Paterson University. Stay with us. We'll be right back. This is "One on One." ONE. Great job.

Dr. KELLY: Oh, thank you.

Announcer: If you would like more information on this program or if you'd like to express an opinion, e-mail us at info@caucusnj.org and visit us online at caucusnj.org.

ADUBATO: Welcome back to William Paterson University. I'm Steve Adubato. A very special on location edition of "One on One." We're coming to you from the Shea Center for Performing Arts here at William Paterson University. You're about to meet another distinguished member of the faculty here. He is Dr. Neil Kressel. He is the author of "Bad Faith: The Danger of Religious Extremism." He's a professor of social psychology here at the university.

Good to see you, Neil.

Dr. NEIL KRESSEL (PhD, Professor of Social Psychology): Thanks for having me.

ADUBATO: I'll tell you what. You've written a very provocative book here that should get people's attention. You should go out there and get it right away because this whole question of religious extremism. People talk about it but don't understand it a great deal. Define it. Religious extremism is?

Dr. KRESSEL: Well, it's been defined in a lot of ways, but the one I like best is when people in a religion, because of reasons that they consider religious, will go out and hurt other people. And the people who they hurt are usually people of a different faith. They can, because of their extremism, hurt people in the same faith as well, though.

ADUBATO: They do it in the name of their God?

Dr. KRESSEL: They will often say that they are. We have plenty of sociologists who'll give you hundreds of other reasons why they're doing it. But if you ask somebody who's a religious extremist why they're doing it, they don't say it's because they're poor. They don't say it's because they somehow have had something bad happen in their life or their psychology is somehow off kilter. They say they're doing it because their God tells them to do it. And so I think that sometimes it makes sense to take them at their word. One point that's interesting to make or is important to make that I think is that some people say that when a religious extremist hurts another person, they're corrupting the true essence of their faith, that in other words, true religion would never leave anyone to do it.

ADUBATO: Do you buy that argument?

Dr. KRESSEL: I don't--I don't buy it. I think that first of all they never really say what true religion is, so how can you say if they're corrupting it? In other words, if they draw on a religious text and if the text goes way, way back and they have religious leaders who tell them they're doing it, then I

think that then that motivation is religious. But then there are other people who take the other--all the way over to the other side and say that all religion is the problem. And...

ADUBATO: Any religion.

Dr. KRESSEL: Right. So that Sam Harris, for example, in his book "The End of Faith" makes the argument that any religion is bad. And I think that's way off base. I think that if we look at, say, the way people reacted to Hurricane Katrina. Many, many people were acting, doing great deeds of charity because of their religious faith. Now, that faith maybe true in its origins or not, I'm not here to discuss that, but the point is that religion made them do it. So that what we need to do is to distinguish in a sensible way...

ADUBATO: Right.

Dr. KRESSEL: ...between good religion and bad religion.

ADUBATO: So I just want to be clear. As a Catholic, I happen to be in church and they say the second collection in church on Sunday is for a program, an inner-city program for poor people, whether it's a fund drive to feed poor people who are struggling and starving in Africa, whatever it is, that is in the name of the Catholic religion that that collection is made. How does one criticize that? I mean, that's not religious extremism.

Dr. KRESSEL: No, no. I don't criticize that.

ADUBATO: I'm not saying you are, but...

Dr. KRESSEL: Yeah. Yeah, I'm saying that's--the people who do that I think are wrong. One way I would look at religion, I follow the founder of psychology, William James. He wrote an important book called "The Varieties of Religious Experience." And in that book he said that we should judge religions by their fruits, not by their roots. In other words, don't...

ADUBATO: By what they do?

Dr. KRESSEL: By the consequences of religion. Look at what the religion makes people do who believe in it. And if the religion makes people happy and if it makes them behave in ways that are socially constructive, then maybe that religion isn't true in some metaphysical sense, but it's certainly not a bad thing.

ADUBATO: So if Mother Teresa is in Calcutta, she's driven by religion, she's feeding the poor, dealing with people who otherwise are ignored by countless millions, it's not a bad thing. But let's move to religious extremism in the sense of this. It's often--people will perceive--many will perceive that your book is about Islamic extremism. Is it?

Dr. KRESSEL: Well, my book starts from a premise that all of the three major Abrahamic religions--that's Judaism, Christianity and Islam--they all have the potential to create extremism.

ADUBATO: Is that why--excuse me. Is that why you have a chapter called "Killers in Every Faith: Christians and Jews"? I was thrown by that one.

Dr. KRESSEL: Yeah, that's precisely why I have that chapter in there. For example, the people who blow up abortion clinics or who kill the doctors who carry out abortions and they do it in the name of religion.

ADUBATO: They're Christians.

Dr. KRESSEL: Right. They're Christians and they believe they're acting in the name of their faith. There also have been--there have been Jews, for example, who have tried to blow up the Dome of the Rock in Israel or the Jew who assassinated Yitzhak Rabin. He thought that he--the Israeli--former Israeli prime minister--he thought he was acting in the name of his religious faith.

ADUBATO: But isn't there something--while you can name anecdotally these situations like that, is there something about Islamic religious extremism that is different, that is more heinous, more dangerous and more consistently violent than any Christian or Jewish faith? I mean, I'm confused by this.

Dr. KRESSEL: Yeah, yeah. No, I certainly...

ADUBATO: It's a question of degree, is it not?

Dr. KRESSEL: Well, first of all, we have to talk about specify the time period that we're talking about. If we're talking about now...

ADUBATO: Talk about now, the last 15 to 20 years.

Dr. KRESSEL: Then I would--I would make the argument, and I do in my book, that Islamic extremism is different. And here are the ways that it's different. It's different, first of all, because it enjoys a much larger degree of public support. We're not talking about a handful of Muslim extremists. We are talking about an ideology where there may be a handful of terrorists; I think probably the number is closer to thousands of terrorists.

ADUBATO: How about terrorists--how about sympathizers to those terrorists?

Dr. KRESSEL: And if you look at the sympathizers--for example, if we do a survey, and they've done surveys of people in various countries in the Muslim world and they ask them, 'Who do you think is--who understands world affairs better, George Bush or Osama bin Laden?' You can find huge numbers of people who say Osama bin Laden.

ADUBATO: Even after 9/11?

Dr. KRESSEL: Especially after 9/11.

ADUBATO: Especially. So you do those same surveys in those same countries with those same--the same religion we're talking about and you say, 'Was the United States a victim in 9/11?' The answer is?

Dr. KRESSEL: Well, they--many of those people would say the United States deserved what it got, and many more would say that the Jews carried it out. So if you--if you're really asking what is believed by these extremists, some of it is very far out of touch with reality.

ADUBATO: What does the rest of us do when we hear such insanity?

Dr. KRESSEL: Well, what to do about it is a--is a very, very big problem, and I don't have any simple answer, but...

ADUBATO: I mean, we can't--respectfully, doctor, we can't act like it's not the case. We can't act like it's not insane. We can't act like it's not dangerous, and we can't simply say all religions are dangerous in that way because this is consistently dangerous, it is more widespread and even those who are not involved in the terrorist acts on behalf of Islamic fundamentalism, are in fact sympathizers of it. Not all, but many. And isn't that so different?

Dr. KRESSEL: Well, I think that the first thing we have to do is be honest about who we're calling a moderate.

ADUBATO: Go ahead.

Dr. KRESSEL: And I think that what happens is that many of the people who even President Bush calls moderates in the Islamic world are not real moderates. They're people who will endorse terrorism sometimes in the name of Islam. They're people who hate Americans, people who hate Jews, but they may say, 'We condemn 9/11' or 'We condemn Osama bin Laden.'

ADUBATO: Right.

Dr. KRESSEL: That's not enough to qualify somebody as a moderate. Then the question is if there are so many people--and by the way, I don't think this is the majority of Muslims. I think what we're talking about here in terms of sympathizers, the real strong sympathizers, maybe 10 percent or 20 percent. Some of those people who say that they endorse Osama bin Laden, they're expressing anti-Americanism, but they're not expressing the deepest form of extremism. But I still think if you look at 10 percent of a Muslim world of over a billion people, you're talking about a huge number of people. And now we can't declare them all enemies and go after them in a military--with military means. I just don't think that's practical. That's not the American way. So we have to think of some way of strengthening real moderates, and that--I think that's the trick. I don't--that's the thing that I say I don't have the simple answer for. I think you have to identify genuine moderates. I think the real effort has to come from inside the Islamic world. I think that there are plenty of Muslims who understand that this stuff is non--is nonsense and I think that there's a lot of responsibility upon them to speak out and condemn it. And I think that soft-pedaling critiques of terrorism or extremism is not the way to go.

ADUBATO: We--in the time we have left, real quick, doctor, we do not have the luxury of playing the political correctness game here, do we? We need to call it what it is and deal with it directly.

Dr. KRESSEL: I think we do, and I think we have to understand that the problem is not Islam. Islam is capable of sustaining many different political ideologies. It's a very large religious tradition. But when we see extremism, we can't just say it's somebody else's religion and we can't say anything about it.

ADUBATO: That's right.

Dr. KRESSEL: We have to be tolerant, but when we see extremism, we have to condemn it in very square and straight forward terms.

ADUBATO: Doctor, you have done a great job laying out this case in "Bad Faith: The Danger of Religious Extremism." Want to thank you so much for joining us here at William Paterson University. We learned a lot.

Dr. KRESSEL: Thanks for having me.

ADUBATO: Thanks very much. Great job.

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