

SUNDAY MORNINGS

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PICTURED BY DAVID GREGORY

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MEET THE PRESS TRANSCRIPT: March 9, 2014

BY DAVID GREGORY

March 9, 2014

DAVID GREGORY:

And good Sunday morning. Such a difficult way to begin the program this morning. More on the investigation into the mysterious disappearance of that plane and the questions about foul play, given that two passengers were traveling on stolen passports, a pretty rare occurrence. And the new reports that the plane may have tried to turn around.

Plus the latest on the crisis in Ukraine, with Russia tightening its grip on Crimea. Another week of intense diplomacy that's, frankly, gone nowhere. Russian troops are

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in control of Crimea and the parliament there is calling for a referendum on joining Russia. President Obama has to consider whether Vladimir Putin has already won this standoff. So how does he prevent the Russian president from going even further? I'm going to be joined by one of the president's top foreign policy advisors in just a moment.

Then I want to talk about the Pope Francis effect. This week marks his one-year anniversary. So now that he's captivated the world and the world is listening, what will the pontiff do with his remarkable influence? In a revealing interview, Cardinal Timothy Dolan, the archbishop of New York, has answers about the Vatican's stance on sexual abuse and same-sex marriage.

Plus, the fight for the control of the GOP. Interesting politics this week. Rand Paul wins a straw poll of conservatives this weekend after declaring it is time to elect lovers of liberty. Can he unify the party and take his message to a run for the White House? I'll be joined by our roundtable, and they're already here: NBC's Andrea Mitchell; *The National Journal's* Ron Fournier; Ralph Reed, founder of The Faith and Freedom Coalition; and Karen Bass, Democratic congresswoman from my native

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California.

But first, I want to go to the very latest on this horrible crash, this Malaysian Air flight. Tom Costello is with us with the latest on the investigation into the Malaysian airliner. Tom, what have you learned? What can you tell us this morning?



▶ [PLAY VIDEO \(2:24\)](#)

Plane's Disappearance Raises Questions



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TOM COSTELLO:

Hi, David, good morning. Night has now fallen in Malaysia and authorities there have suspended the air search. Meantime, the Malaysian military says its

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radar indicates the plane may have attempted to turn back early Saturday but there was never any distress call.

Malaysian authorities are also consulting with the F.B.I., looking closely at the entire passenger manifest to see who was on this plane and what were their true identities. Yesterday we learned that two Europeans, an Austrian and an Italian, were listed as passengers on that plane, but in fact they were safe and sound on the ground. Both have reported their passports stolen in Thailand over the past two years or so.

Then this morning, we learned that there may be, and I underscore "may be," two more passengers who were traveling on false documents. Meantime, 40 ships and 22 aircraft, including ships and planes from the U.S., are converging on this area near the Gulf of Thailand and the South China Sea, the plane's last known location.

On Saturday, the Vietnamese military spotted two large fuel slicks on the water. Now, it's not know if those are in any way connected to this missing 777, but it's all they have to go on at this moment so the search is concentrating in that area. Three Americans are among the 239 passengers and crew members, including



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Philip Wood, an IBM executive from Texas.

The plane, a Boeing 777 200-series, nearly 12 years old, that's considered middle age for planes. In August of 2012, that very plane lost a tip of a wing after clipping another plane on the ground in Shanghai. Now, while that wing was repaired, investigators will want to know whether that repair in any way contributed to the crash. Clearly, this is eerily similar to the Air France flight 447 which disappeared over the Atlantic in 2009. While search teams did find pieces of the wreckage, it took two years to find the body of the plane on the ocean floor, but of course was an Airbus A-330. This is a Boeing 777.

And the last time, the only other fatal crash involving a Boeing 777, was last summer, the Asiana crash in San Francisco. Investigators believe that was the result of pilot error. So this morning, we still have no idea where this plane is. We have no signs of any wreckage. It is dark again and now nearly 48 hours since this plane went missing. David.

DAVID GREGORY:

A lot to learn. Tom Costello, thanks so much for the latest this morning.



Let me get more on this story, but also the crisis in the Ukraine. I'm joined by President Obama's deputy national security advisor, Tony Blinken. He's been with President Obama in Miami this week. And Blinken has been involved in major foreign policy decisions for more than two decades, and he was at the table in the White House situation room this week as President Obama determined the U.S. response to the crisis in Ukraine. Tony Blinken, welcome to *Meet the Press*.

TONY BLINKEN:

Thanks, David, good to have you.

DAVID GREGORY:

Let me start on this Malaysian airliner. Are you worried that this could be terrorism? And what fuels that worry?

TONY BLINKEN:

David, first of all, our thoughts and prayers are with the families and those who've lost loved ones in this incident. We have three American citizens who were on board, many Chinese, Taiwanese. Second, we're actively looking into all the questions that this raises.

The F.B.I., the National Transportation Safety Board, the Federal Aviation Agency, all of them are heading to the

area to help in the investigation. Lots of questions have been raised; we don't have the answers yet. We'll get them.

DAVID GREGORY:

The stolen passports, the fact that there were two of them on one flight. If you're hearing this at home, that's got to be a red flag for the government, for investigators.

TONY BLINKEN:

It certainly raises concerns; that's why we're actively looking into it. There could be different explanations for what's involved. We don't want to get ahead of the facts. We need to get the facts, and that's what the investigators are going to do.

DAVID GREGORY:

Let me talk about the crisis in Ukraine. Since this started, the president and his top officials have issued it seems like line after line, and Putin seems to have crossed them all. Why does this president, and the United States generally, have so little influence over him?

TONY BLINKEN:

David, I think what we've seen is the

president mobilizing the international community in support of Ukraine to isolate Russia for its actions in Ukraine, and to reassure our allies and partners. We've seen the president put together a major international support package. He's invited the Ukrainian prime minister, Yatsenyuk, to come to the White House on Wednesday to further demonstrate that support and to consult with him.

And in terms of isolating Russia, what we've seen as a result of the mobilized support is that the financial markets in Russia have hit lows, the ruble has hit a low. Investigators are wondering whether to get involved in Russia because of the instability. And all of that is exacting a real cost and a real consequence.

DAVID GREGORY:

Well, but let me--

TONY BLINKEN:

Now, the question is this.

DAVID GREGORY:

I just want to go back and challenge you on this point because my question is we've said, "Don't do this or else," and President Putin keeps doing it, and more. So why doesn't the president have a greater ability to influence what Putin

does before he does it?



▶ **PLAY VIDEO** (7:20)

View from the White House: Obama Aide on Ukraine, Lost Flight



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TONY BLINKEN:

The president's made clear, and so have leaders from around the world, including in Europe where we're closely coordinated, that Russia has a choice going forward. It can continue down the path its on and face much greater isolation and much greater cost, or it can take the opportunity to resolve this diplomatically in a way that addresses its concerns but restores Ukraine's sovereignty.

DAVID GREGORY:

All right, but that's--

(OVERTALK)

DAVID GREGORY:

He's not listening, and I think people watching this want to know why it is that the administration can't exert greater pressure on him to stop him before he does something.

TONY BLINKEN:

The cost is already significant, first of all. Second, the president's made clear that going forward, in coordination with our partners and allies, we have in place a mechanism, with sanctions, to raise the cost significantly. But this is really a choice for the Russians to make. They have to decide whether they want to resolve this diplomatically or whether they want to face growing isolation, growing economic cost.

DAVID GREGORY:

So the Russian--

TONY BLINKEN:

Right now, what's happening is that--

DAVID GREGORY:

No, no, I'm sorry. Go ahead.

TONY BLINKEN:

Go ahead, David.

DAVID GREGORY:

No, no, you finish, I'm sorry.

TONY BLINKEN:

Right now what's happening is that Secretary of State Kerry is engaged with his Russian counterpart, Foreign Minister Lavrov. European leaders are engaged with President Putin, as the president has been. The president spent the weekend on the phone with Chancellor Merkel of Germany; President Hollande of France; Cameron of Great Britain; the Italian prime minister, Renzi; the three Baltic leaders; bringing together, marshaling the work of the international community to continue to exert and increase the pressure on Russia to do the right thing going forward.

DAVID GREGORY:

I've been reading this morning *The Washington Post* lead story about how now Russia's saying, "Look, if you're going to sanction us economically, we'll do something. We'll stop inspecting nuclear weapons in Russia." That's part of an important nuclear treaty. How seriously

do they take that threat?

TONY BLINKEN:

Look, we've seen those reports. The Russians haven't said anything to us about that directly. We haven't seen any change in their practices. Obviously that would be a serious development.

Inspections are an important part of arms control agreements. We've had arms control agreements with the Russians, and indeed with the Soviet Union, for decades. And throughout the ups and downs of the relationship, each side has made good on its commitment. So we'd expect to see Russia do that.

DAVID GREGORY:

So here's the reality, and that is that Crimea is, a week from today, going to vote on joining Russia. If the Crimean people speak and they become part of Russia, is the incontrovertible fact that Russian aggression into Ukraine will stand?

TONY BLINKEN:

David, first, if there is a referendum and it votes to move Crimea out of Ukraine and to Russia, we won't recognize it, and most of the world won't either. That's fact one. Second, were that to happen, the

isolation of Russia, the costs that it would pay, would increase significantly from where they are now.

But you have to step back and put this in a larger context. What's happened is this: Russia had a government in Ukraine that it supported and that started to take very aggressive action against its own people. That government is gone. A government that's more oriented toward the rest of the world and toward the west is in place.

And so what you're seeing is, I think, Putin acting from a position of weakness, concerned that Ukraine was leaving Russia's orbit. The bottom line though is that it doesn't have to be in anyone's orbit. If Ukraine succeeds economically, politically, integrated with the world, that would be good for Russia and good for Ukrainians.

DAVID GREGORY:

The question though is whether all options, even military options, are on the table should Putin go further. There are a lot of Baltic states who are a part of N.A.T.O., there are other former Soviet republics in this region who are scared, who think that Putin's not operating out of weakness. That he's doing what he wants to do because he perceives weakness from the west, particularly from President

Obama. So are all options on the table?
Are you saying to President Putin, "Go no further or else military options are on the table"?

TONY BLINKEN:

David, what we're doing is bringing the world together to exert significant pressure on Russia, and to exert significant isolation on Russia.

Understand this: When Putin thinks about maximizing Russia's power, what he's interested in is making sure that it has economic influence and global influence.

And his actions, and the actions we've taken in response, are undermining that influence. Undermining its economic influence, undermining its geopolitical influence. If the only way you have to exert your influence is through coercion and bribery and forcing people, that is not going to be a way to extend your power. And I think what you'll see in the days ahead, as this moves forward, is tremendous solidarity in coordination, led by President Obama, among the international community, to exert a price and a cost if Russia continues to move forward. But it does not need to be that way.

There is a clear off-ramp for Russia that will take into account its concerns, get the

international inspectors in, get the two countries (Russia and Ukraine) talking directly, and then head toward elections on May 25th. Russia says it has concerns about the legitimacy of the government in Ukraine. Well, that can be answered with the election on May 25th. Meanwhile, the president is mobilizing international support for Ukraine and working to isolate Russia, if it persists in this course.

DAVID GREGORY:

All right, Tony Blinken, top national security advisor to President Obama. Thanks so much for your time this morning.

TONY BLINKEN:

Thanks very much, David.

DAVID GREGORY:

Let me bring in Congressman Peter King who's on the Homeland Security Committee in the House, of course. I want to get to the questions of terrorism in this Malaysian flight, Congressman. But I'm still not getting an answer from the administration on what the best offense is, at this point, against Russia to stop him in his tracks, "him" because President Putin. He's already crossed the line. There are people in the region worried about

him doing more. And he may just ultimately annex, he may take Crimea back into Russia. What does the U.S. do about it?

REP. PETER KING:

I think we have to make it clear there will be firm sanctions. I think we should freeze the assets of any of the Russian oligarchs in this country, people close to Putin. We have to increase military support for the Baltic states, increase military support for Poland and Hungary, and make it absolutely clear that these sanctions are going to be enforced.

And we have to make sure the allies are working together. We have to make tough, ironclad sanctions on Russia. There's no silver bullet. We have to sustain it and keep it going. I think the first thing to hit home will be to freeze the assets of Russian oligarchs and top Russians in this country and throughout the western world.



▶ **PLAY VIDEO** (1:49)

Congressman: 'There's No Silver Bullet' on Ukraine Crisis



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DAVID GREGORY:

Is our energy policy our best offense here? Do we say to Europe, "Look, we're going to lift some of the restrictions on exporting natural gas. We want to become a bigger partner to you, in terms of where you get your natural gas, instead of Russia"? Do you think that's how to apply pressure on Putin?

REP. PETER KING:

David, that has to be an integral part of it. We have to increase exports of liquefied natural gas. These countries, like England

and others, Germany, cannot be forced to rely on Russia for the LNG they get. The natural gas has to be-- we have enough to supply so many countries in the world. And we should right now start lifting restrictions. We should begin the exporting as quickly as we possibly can.

And, again, that's not going to work in the short term, but it can relieve some of the pressure. And it can help these countries set their long-term policy to realize they are not going to be bound to Russia for the LNG, or the natural gas.

DAVID GREGORY:

Let me turn to these questions about this missing Malaysian Air flight. You spent a lot of time thinking about and investigating acts of terror and Americans' response. You heard Tom Costello. There's evidence obviously that can go in either direction, we don't know. But you do have a red flag here. You've got two passengers with stolen passports, maybe it's more than that. That has to be a red flag for you.

REP. PETER KING:

David, it does. I mean, first of all, we don't know, but you're right, this is a real red flag. And there's a number of other factors: The fact that the plane just has

disappeared, that there was no distress call, there was no mayday, there was no signaling at all of any trouble. The fact that it came out of Malaysia, which has been a hub for Al Qaeda activity. Prior to the attack on the U.S.S. Cole, there was a meeting in Malaysia. So many of the 9/11 hijackers went through Malaysia.

So you put all that together and you have two people traveling with stolen passports on the same plane. This has to be looked at. And I can assure you that our intelligence people, our counterterrorism people are scrubbing, going through all the databases, trying to get the identification of those two who were traveling with the stolen passports. My understanding is we do have a facial identity but we don't have the full identity yet.

All of that has to be run to ground because, again, we cannot make any conclusions. But considering what's happened in the past, and considering where this occurred, and considering the stolen passports, we have to certainly consider the issue of terrorism and exhaust every possible investigative technique.

DAVID GREGORY:

Congressman, when I first heard this, the

thing that occurred to me all these years after 9/11, that we have a much more integrated international system of checking identities, checking passports. And when you put your passport through the scanner before you get on a flight, that something would ping and say, "Hey, this isn't right." Do you worry that Malaysia is not in sync with those protocols the way a lot of other countries are?

REP. PETER KING:

David, there's a concern that, unfortunately, a number of countries are not as strict as we would like them to be. My understanding is (again, I don't want to prejudge this) but that Malaysia does not have the same security protocols that we have. And there's a question of whether or not they even screen the passport here.

Also, there's a question of whether or not the stolen passport was adequately reported, if it was reported; whether or not the Malaysians checked against the Interpol listing. But again, without scaring people, I can tell you there are a number of airports around the world which do not have, I believe, adequate security procedures.

DAVID GREGORY:

I just want to ask you one question about politics before our roundtable talks about the future of the Republican Party.

REP. PETER KING:

Sure.

DAVID GREGORY:

You've been outspoken, talking about Rand Paul who won the C.P.A.C., the gathering of conservatives, the straw poll, which is not that meaningful in the scheme of things but it gives him a little bit of bump. In the past, you've been critical of him, saying that he appeals to the lowest common denominator in the party. You found it offensive. Do you still think that now, or do you think he's a more viable candidate for the presidency in 2016?

REP. PETER KING:

No, the concerns that I have are still there. I mean, here's a person who said we're more concerned about the C.I.A. killing Americans with drones as they're having coffee in Starbucks, who said that the director of national intelligence should be in the same jail as Snowden. I mean, this to me is scaring Americans. Our real enemy is Al Qaeda. We have to be concerned about Russia. He was

being critical of Americans several weeks ago; he said we tweaked the Russians too much.

When I say he's appealing to the lowest common denominator, what he's doing, he's trying to somehow tell Americans we can retreat from the world. That, "America is an imperial power; if we retreated, the world would be safer." The fact is, nothing

can make the world more dangerous than

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Hope he does. Lord knows I have, and Lord knows I think most bishops and pastors have. Benedict did, so I would anticipate he would as well.

Commercial Break

DAVID GREGORY:

Welcome back. What a year it has been for Pope Francis, as he approaches his one-year anniversary as leader of the Catholic Church. The pope created some controversy a few days ago when he said no one has done more than the Vatican to address the abuse scandals that have plagued the Church for years. He also said the portrayal of him as some sort of superman, a star, is offensive. I sat down with the archbishop of New York, Timothy Dolan. In his revealing interview, he spoke his mind about the pope, the abuse scandals and same-sex marriage

DAVID GREGORY:

Your eminence, thank you for having us to your home.

CARDINAL DOLAN:

David, you're always welcome here.

Thanks for--

DAVID GREGORY:

Thank you--

CARDINAL DOLAN:

--thanks for-- taking me seriously when I said, "Come on in." (LAUGH)

DAVID GREGORY:

We're here. And what a year it's been for the Catholic church and Pope Francis.



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almost found it offensive. Yet, at the same time, that reception is certainly something he'd like to use for the benefit of the church, wouldn't he?

CARDINAL DOLAN:

Oh, he's a good teacher, so you're right. He knows the power symbol. He knows the power of audio-visual aids, as any good teacher does. So I think he's shrugging' and saying', "Look, I'm no better than anybody else. And don't make me a superman. But if this attention is

comin' my way, I'm gonna use it and turn the attention to Jesus and his church." And I think he's doing' a splendid job of it.

DAVID GREGORY:

It's not just the faithful, but it's also the Pope as a political influence around the world, and indeed in America. And I'm curious to know what the agenda is for him. Now that he's had his first year, where he'd like to dig in and have that influence.

There has been some criticism coming his way where he might say things that stir the masses worldwide-- begging questions about what he means, and then there's a clarification. Is there a plan of action to that? Would he like to get some of these debates, particularly over social matters, started?



▶ [PLAY VIDEO \(7:18\)](#)

Cardinal Dolan Chides Excess of Partisanship



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CARDINAL DOLAN:

I think he would. And once again, I think that might be part of his shrewd strategy. You know, if he asks some pointed questions, if he leaves people wondering and guessing, that's not bad. A good teacher does that too. We've all had good teachers that almost tease us, you know, to say, "Oh, I wonder what he meant. I hope he comes back to that. I hope he clarifies, gets us asking questions and probing." I think that's part of his strategy.

DAVID GREGORY:

But conservatives in America, some of the headlines, conservative U.S. Catholics feel left out by the Pope's embrace. Traditionalists increasingly fret over the Pope's style. One conservative commentator I read said that "The Pope is sowing seeds of confusion among the faithful." Take the issue of gay rights-- around the world. He even opened the door in an interview this week to the idea of accepting civil unions. Is that something you can see the church supporting?

CARDINAL DOLAN:

He-- I-- for one, I haven't sensed that-- too much-- bristling among-- the conservatives. They honestly will say, "His style is a little different and might-- periodically cause us a little angst," but in general they too seem to be rejoicing in what you might call the evangelical fervor, the good interest in the life of the church.

So I haven't sensed a lot of massive discontent among-- among the conservative-- Catholics. He, as you know, Pope-- Pope Francis has tried his best not to let there be a cleavage between him and Pope Benedict because there might be the tendency in some to caric-- caricature each of them and almost set up-- a bit of-- of an antithesis.

And he keeps saying how much he loves Pope Benedict. He quotes from him. I think he's a shrewd man. He knows, David-- you know what his name is, Pontiff, that's what we Catholics call our Pope, which is the Latin word for bridge builder. And he's a Pontiff par excellence, a bridge builder.

DAVID GREGORY:

Will there be a point at which there will be an expectation of action, not just debate, not just teaching, but to say he seems to be setting a course for the church that makes the church open to certain changes. Maybe not doctrinal changes, but certain changes, inclusion of women in-- in the hierarchy of the church, changes with regard to the view of divorce and taking communion-- and even gay rights?

CARDINAL DOLAN:

Uh-huh (AFFIRM). There are some who have said that, you are right. There are some, even his admirers, who have said, "Holy father, be careful." You know, there almost seems to be this huge sense of expectation among Catholics, and we're a little worried that their hopes might be dashed.

I think, though, we've got a Pope, David,

that-- that does not think in terms of winning or losing. I think we've got a Pope-- that says, "I want to-- ask the right questions. I wanna point people to the place where they can get the answers, mainly not me," the Pope is saying', "but the church's teaching, our tradition, the bible, what god has told us. Let me point them to that. Let me ask the questions. Let me get the interest going. And let's-- and then let's try to revive god's people to passionately reclaim the truth that god has revealed." I think this is his pastoral strategy.

CARDINAL DOLAN:

Do you imagine the church might open the way to accepting civil unions?

DAVID GREGORY:

He mentioned-- I haven't see-- I'm-- I'm as eager as you are to-- read the-- the full extent of that interview. And if I saw the reports accurately, they-- he didn't come right out and say he was for them. Once again, in an extraordinarily-- sincere, open, nuanced way, he said, "I know that some people in some states have chosen this. We need to think about that and look into it and see the reasons that have driven them."

It wasn't as if he came out and approved

them. But he-- he just in-- in a sensitivity that has won the heart of the world, he said, "Rather than quickly condemn them, let's see if-- let's-- let's just ask the questions as to why that has appealed to certain people--"

DAVID GREGORY:

Would that make you uncomfortable?

CARDINAL DOLAN:

The-- what, the civil unions?

DAVID GREGORY:

Yeah.

CARDINAL DOLAN:

I-- it would. It would, in a way, David. Because I don't think-- marriage, between-- one man and one woman forever leading to life and love, that's not something that's just a religious, sacramental concern. You bet it is that, and-- and we-- that's how god has elevated it, to making a sacrament.

But it's also the building block of society and culture. So it belongs to culture. And if-- and if we water down that sacred meaning of marriage in any way, I worry that not only the church would suffer, I worry that culture and society would.

DAVID GREGORY:

The issue of sexual abuse within the Catholic church is still a big issue. And the Pope was outspoken during this interview this week with an Italian newspaper. He said, "The Catholic church is perhaps the only public institution that has moved with transparency and responsibly. No one has done more. And yet the church is the only one to have been attacked."

CARDINAL DOLAN:

Right.

DAVID GREGORY:

Now, a lot of people sense that was defensive, because, of course, it was also the church that was responsible for covering up this sin, for hiding priests, for failing to report, for introducing priests with a past of pedophilia into parishes around-- this country-- among others. Was that overly defensive?

CARDINAL DOLAN:

I don't think you'll--

DAVID GREGORY:

Does the church have to do more?

CARDINAL DOLAN:

No-- oh, the church will always have to do more as-- as humanity has to do more. And we're-- we're a part of humanity here. But boy, I was cheering' the Pope on when he said that. You'll find, David-- look, I'm-- I'm with the people a lot.

Catholic people, there are three things that really tick them off about the sex abuse crisis. First of all, that a priest that would dare claim to be an agent of god would act in such a nauseating, hi-- hideous manner. There's number one.

Number two, that bishops would have-- would have not-- reacted with the rigor and the-- and the-- the scrupulous action that was necessary. There's the second. But thirdly, Catholic people say, "But why is it the church alone that is being kicked around? This is a societal problem, a cultural problem. It-- it-- it aff-- it afflicts families, every institution, every religion." "We're rather grateful that our church, which was-- an example of what not to do in the past, in the last-- 12, 13, 14 years has become an example of what to do--"

DAVID GREGORY:

But in the '50s--

CARDINAL DOLAN:

"And why does the church keep being

picked on?" I was glad the Pope said that. I think he's right on target.

DAVID GREGORY:

But in the '50s and '60s, child abuse claims were actually being investigated and-- and prosecuted when, at the same time, this was happening in the Catholic church-- church-- was-- was hiding it. The power of symbol here is to meet with victims. The pope has not done that. Should he do that?

CARDINAL DOLAN:

He probably will. I would not be surprised if he-- if he would not. I hope he does. Lord knows-- I have, and lord knows-- I think most bishops and pastors have. So-- Benedict did. So I would anticipate he would as well.

DAVID GREGORY:

The other area of-- of great potential influence is thinking about capitalism in the world. He'll meet with President Obama. And it's interesting that-- in this regard, the Pope and the president have been speaking about income and equality-- in the world. The president focused primarily in America. There are conservatives in America who say, "No, no, there's not an income and equality

problem. There's an opportunity and equality problem here." Commentator Rush Limbaugh even calling the Pope a Marxist. How does he respond to that? How do you respond?

CARDINAL DOLAN:

Well, he responded very charitably as is-- as we've come to know and love in him. I don't know if I'd have that much charity. I think that was terrible hyperbole to refer to the Pope as-- as Marxist, and-- and very inaccurate. What we try to do, David, and-- the-- the Catholic wisdom is always right smack down the middle. We use the two Latin words, *via media*, right down the middle. We're always concerned about excesses on the left, which is collectivism, socialism, communism, and excesses on the right, which is unfettered, cut-- cut-throat capitalism.

Somewhere in between is the *via media*, which will come to a fair, equitable, just, economic system. Different points have corrected either side. John Paul, as you might imagine, coming' from what he did, he was a bit more sensitive to the excesses on the left. Francis, he's a bit more sensitive about the excesses to the right.

But that's fine. I think they're both-- they're both-- pointing' us to a balance, a *via*

media, a prudential way that allows us-- allows freedom in the marketplace, economic prosperity, people to take care of themselves and their-- and their families, but yet protects the rights of the poor, and those without.

Somewhere in between those two there's the answer. He's shrewd enough to know I'm not an economist. My job is to preach the gospel, biblical values, and to be a prophet calling people somewhere between those two excesses. And once again, I think he's doing' a masterful job.

DAVID GREGORY:

In our politics now the culture wars are raging in different ways, whether it's about contraception, abortion, gay rights. And we've seen it come to a head in Arizona recently where there was a debate about-- whether the-- the government-- can force-- a non-religious corporation-- to-- to-- acknowledge-- certain rights-- even if they have different views religiously. Where do you stand on that, on this question of the balance between civil liberties and freedom of religion? Do you think there's an imbalance in our country right now?

CARDINAL DOLAN:

I'm-- yes, I'm afraid there may be. We may

be coming to that. Now keep in mind, the distinction is a false one, right, as you'd be the first to know, because high among those civil rights would be freedom of religion. So once again, we gotta achieve this balance.

Now, what we've heard-- what we've heard, David, in the-- in the recent rush to what you might call more liberal-- liberalizing laws on social issues, whether that be abortion, whether that be redefinition of marriage, you will hear the people immediately say, "Don't worry, we will never impede religions from the complete freedom that they need to exercise-- their faith, and even bring their values into the public square. So don't worry. We're not going to impede you. We're not going to intrude."

We hold our breath and say, "We're afraid we've learned the-- the hard way." What becomes tolerated si-- quickly becomes obligatory for everybody. And then we feel frozen out. Whether that's happened yet, I wouldn't go that far. But I would have to admit a certain amount of-- of trepidation, that perhaps we're now moving in that direction.

DAVID GREGORY:

Michael Sam, from your home state, the football player-- revealed that he was gay,

first in the NFL. And you saw the celebration from the President, the First Lady, and they were saying what a courageous step that was. How did you view it?

CARDINAL DOLAN:

Good for him. I would have no-- no sense of judgment on him. God bless ya. I don't think-- look, the same-- the same bible that tells us that-- that-- teaches us well about the virtues of chastity and-- and the virtue of fidelity and marriage also tells us not to judge people. So I would say, "Bravo."

DAVID GREGORY:

On the issue of same-sex marriage, you said the last time we spoke that you felt the church was being out-marketed. Do you feel that it is-- that views are changing so rapidly that church is going to-- is going to feel the power of that change, it must change if it's going to-- to keep people seeking god through the church?

CARDINAL DOLAN:

Here-- you-- you ask-- you ask a good question, and you phrased it well. When you say-- seeking god and the church, when people seek god, they wanna know

what god has taught, all right. And the church's sacred enterprise is not to conform its teaching to the values of the world, all right, as rapidly as they're changing.

The church's sacred task is to call us to conform our behavior to what god has revealed. Now that is tough, especially when the tide of public opinion is against us. But it's against us in a lot of areas-- David, as you will know. You're right. From the-- from the more left side of society, we may be takin' some-- sucker punches because of our views on the redefinition of marriage and the sacredness of human life in the womb. We're takin' it from the other side when it comes to immigration, when it comes to capital punishment, when it comes to the rights of the poor.

And the church more or less shrugs and say, "Look, we don't take our agenda from the polls. We don't take our agenda from what the world is saying. Our agenda is given to us by the god who made us, and we must be faithful to him instead of what we're-- what we're hearing' from the world."

That having been said, a shrewd pastor, and we sure got one in Pope Francis, will know, yeah, but one of the ways we-- we more effectively pass on god's teaching

(NOISE) and god's revelation is by being somewhat sensitive to what the world is saying, what the world is feeling.

And so Francis is reminding us, look, if we come across as some crabby, nay-- nay saying shrill, we're not gonna win anybody. If we come across as a loving, embracing-- mother, holy mother church who says, "Come on in. We love you. We need you. We want you. And once you get to know us, then maybe we can invite you to the conversion of heart that is at the-- is at the core of the gospel. And then maybe we can talk about changing behavior. That's a very effective pedagogy.

DAVID GREGORY:

Final question. Beyond this first year, what most-- must this Pope do to help the Catholic church remain relevant, particularly in America and throughout North America at a time when there is a big secular push around the world? What must he do?

CARDINAL DOLAN:

What he's gotta do, David, and he knows it, and he's off to a good start, okay, his first year has been good-- he's got to restore the luster of the church. See, for us as Catholics, what-- our core belief and

where we differ from others is that we believe that god has revealed himself in Jesus, and that Jesus remains alive in his church, okay?

People today say, "Hey, we like god and Jesus, we don't need the church." For us as Catholic, we're saying, "Uh oh, that's-- that's not how we understand god's design." Pope Francis is saying, "We've got to restore the luster, the appeal, the intrigue, the mystery, the romance, the invitation to the church." And he's doing' it on steroids. And that's his major agenda, I think."

DAVID GREGORY:

Your eminence, I-- I always enjoy talking to you--

CARDINAL DOLAN:

Thank you. Thanks--

DAVID GREGORY:

Thank you for your time--

CARDINAL DOLAN:

--happy Saint Patrick's Day. (LAUGHTER)

DAVID GREGORY:

And you can see more of my interview with Cardinal Dolan, including how the

pope plans to strengthen the faith of Catholics and non-Catholics alike. It's on our website at MeetThePressNBC.com.

Coming up here: Paul, Palin, Christie, Ryan, Santorum. Will one of these names be on the Republican ballot in 2016? Our roundtable weighs in with their insight and analysis on the fight for the soul of the GOP.

RAND PAUL (ON TAPE):

You may think I'm talking about electing Republicans, I'm not. I'm talking about electing lovers of liberty.

Commercial Break



▶ [PLAY VIDEO](#) (7:32)

Battle for the GOP: Where Will Party Go?



SARAH PALIN (ON TAPE):

America is counting on the GOP to get it right. And that's why the establishment can't blow it.

DAVID GREGORY:

That, of course, Sarah Palin, the keynote speaker last night at the C.P.A.C., the Conservative Political Action Conference here in Washington. Now to discuss all the week's politics, I'm back with our roundtable. Andrea Mitchell, Ron Fournier, Ralph Reed, and Congresswoman Karen Bass of California. Welcome to all of you. So--

ANDREA MITCHELL:

Thank you.

DAVID GREGORY:

--they did a straw poll. I should say this first: We want to talk about the future of the Republican Party, and the gathering of C.P.A.C. in Washington is a big deal for a lot of us who cover politics because we're trying to gauge to what extent the party is rebuilding, and what it says, the personalities say, what the messages say about where the party is going. So here

are the results from the straw poll, as you look at Ted Cruz there. Rand Paul on top again, 31%; Ted Cruz, second. Ralph Reed, what does this gathering tell us about where the party is?

RALPH REED:

Well, it tells you that they want somebody who's going to be an unapologetic defender of unalloyed, undiluted conservatism. I think what concerns them about, for lack of a better term, the "establishment" (I'm not a big fan of that term) but certainly the elected official wing of the party, the consulting class, is that they sometimes unintentionally, sometimes intentionally view the core principles of the party (limited government, stronger families, a forward-leaning foreign policy and national defense posture, lower taxes, economic growth) as somehow a liability rather than an asset. Sometimes they treat it like an albatross.

And, you know, sometimes, David, when you see some of these leaders on programs like this, and they get asked about why the Republican Party stands for the dignity of every individual, including the unborn, why they believe in the sanctity of life, it's like they get a hunted look in their eyes. So I think some of this

is stylistic. But if the party is going to win, you're going to need to have two wings to fly. You can't just do it with one or the other.

RON FOURNIER:

And I noticed Ralph taking notes during your interview just there. I think he laid out, the cardinal laid out the recipe for the Republican Party. The Catholic Church, the pope is trying to show how you can change an ossified, dying institution, and revitalize it with symbolism, with empathy, with humility, and that you can expand a tent (a religious tent, a business tent, a political tent) without undermining your core base. And I know this is something you and I have talked about: Can the Republican Party expand itself without turning off the base?

REP. KAREN BASS:

But if you look at the list of candidates in the straw poll, I don't think that's expanding the base at all. And if you look at who attended C.P.A.C., you know, there's a lot of work that needs to be done.

RON FOURNIER:

Exactly.

DAVID GREGORY:

And there's still such a fight over what it means to be a conservative. So you mention the establishment; I mean, these Tea Party folks are saying, "Look, the establishment is clinging to compromise and to the size and scope of government in a way that turns us off."

ANDREA MITCHELL:

I think Rand Paul, among all of those who were present, has expanded his base. He has a younger generational base as well, partly inherited from his father, but he is broadening his message. So I think he has really improved his message. Chris Christie was invited; this last year was not. He is invited now as the head of the Republican governors. But Chris Christie is not a player in that part of the party--

DAVID GREGORY:

So here--

ANDREA MITCHELL:

--but I do think that there's one person, to pick up on Ron Fournier's analogy with what Cardinal Dolan was saying about a pope who is, you know, speaking to core principles but presenting a different, more humble, and much broader and more inclusive image. And that could be Jeb Bush. And Ralph and I were just talking

about--

RON FOURNIER:

Let me interrupt quickly--

ANDREA MITCHELL:

--that Jeb Bush has that different approach on immigration and on education.

RON FOURNIER:

You know, Rand Paul-- just to follow up on Andrea's point, C.P.A.C. came out at the same time the Pew Research Center did another really good report on millennials. And if you look at millennials, this rising generation, they don't fit neatly into either party. They really don't like either--

ANDREA MITCHELL:

And they're independent voters.

RON FOURNIER:

--party.

(OVERTALK)

RON FOURNIER:

They're independent, and they tend to be a little bit libertarian. And they really have a problem with Barack Obama on the N.S.A. stuff. They really want a

government that is more 21st century, more tech savvy, and not impinging so much on civil liberties. And I think Rand Paul--

RALPH REED:

Well--

RON FOURNIER:

--can connect with that.

RALPH REED:

--but they're also more pro life than baby boomers and older Americans. So it is hard to categorize them. But a lot of--

RON FOURNIER:

Actually, that's not true. They're as pro life.

RALPH REED:

--this, David, you see this at C.P.A.C., you're going to see it as this field begins to shake out as we move through 2014 and '15. A lot of this is about connecting with voters and constituencies that haven't always felt welcome in our ranks.

You know, my good friend, the late Jack Kemp, used to say that people don't care what you know until they know that you care. And the Republican Party has got to do what Francis is doing what the

Catholic Church. Francis is putting the poor and care for the poor and amelioration of the poverty where it belongs, which is at the center of the Gospel.

If people who are lower middle class, who are struggling, who are poor, who are wanting to climb that ladder of opportunity but they're having a hard time grabbing that first rung, if they don't think conservatives and Republicans have a vision for the future that includes them--

DAVID GREGORY:

Then the--

RALPH REED:

--their message will be badly damaged.

REP. KAREN BASS:

But I do think, if we look at Republican policies, if we look at the budgets over the last couple of years, there really isn't anything there that says "We're going to reach out to the middle class." I mean, in fact--

RON FOURNIER:

That's not true.

REP. KAREN BASS:

--we didn't even extend unemployment insurance. If you look at the diversity at C.P.A.C., there were 163 speakers; 35 were women--

DAVID GREGORY:

Well, they don't government--

REP. KAREN BASS:

Look at the room.

DAVID GREGORY:

--to be leading the way. I mean, this is really about the size and reach of government, that's what the debate is about.

REP. KAREN BASS:

Right, it is. It is. But, you know, you have to look at the room that they had, if we're talking about diversity. In that room, it was virtually empty. There were hundreds of seats. There was--

RALPH REED:

Well, can I--

(OVERTALK)

RALPH REED:

--just point out one thing. In fact, the most successful anti-poverty program since the

Great Society is the \$1,000 child tax credit. That was part of the Contract with America. We advocated it when I was at the Christian Coalition. In 2011, the last year for which we have data available, there were 9 million people lifted out of poverty. That's a fully refundable tax credit, by the way.

REP. KAREN BASS:

You know, and it will be interesting to see-

-

RALPH REED:

That was our policy--

REP. KAREN BASS:

--whether that gets--

RALPH REED:

--Bill Clinton vetoed it three times--

REP. KAREN BASS:

--continued, based on what the Republicans are planning.

RALPH REED:

Well, but it was vetoed three times. And when Mike Lee just announced his tax reform package, I guess yesterday or the day before, what did he propose? Taking

that child tax credit to \$2,500, making it fully refundable. So what you do, David, is you get rid of the bureaucracy, you get rid of all this panoply of government programs which are inefficient, and you give the funds directly to the--

DAVID GREGORY:

I want to ask a real pragmatic question about politics. Chris Christie: Is he done, Ron? Or do you think the big money in the Republican Party, donors, are looking at him and saying, "Well, he's got some time here to come back"?

RON FOURNIER:

It's too early to say that anybody's done. But the golden brand of someone who was a nonpartisan, or at least could work party lines, who was incorruptible, who was politics unusual, that is very, very damaged. And it is hard to see-- his road to the presidency is much tougher than it was. And it was never easy because his brand didn't really fit neatly into the Republican primary. Ironically, he might have done himself some good with the Republican primary audience because he now can beat up on the media. But it's harder to see him become president than it was six months ago.

DAVID GREGORY:

Thank God the media's still here because what else would they talk about C.P.A.C. if we weren't here to kick around?

(OVERTALK)

REP. KAREN BASS:

How would we have known about Chris Christie?

DAVID GREGORY:

We've got a couple minutes left and I want to address the crisis in Ukraine with both of you. Andrea, you first. The question that I'm still posing, which is how do you make Putin stop? You think the administration has figured out the answer to that yet?

ANDREA MITCHELL:

Not at all. In fact, Putin has not agreed to direct talks with the Ukraine. That's why the Ukrainian prime minister is coming here.

DAVID GREGORY:

He's going to get love--

ANDREA MITCHELL:

But there's no--

DAVID GREGORY:

--from the administration.

ANDREA MITCHELL:

He's going to get love, legitimacy here, but he can't get a meeting in Moscow. The other thing is there are reports that Russia is attacking Ukraine, the Kiev government, with cyber war, very sophisticated Stuxnet-type cyber war. That is going to completely potentially cripple their attempts to revive their economy and their infrastructure.

And you've got, you know, military moves. Crimea is effectively gone. I don't think that Germany and the rest of the Europeans are going to help the U.S. isolate Putin economically. And there is lobbying, intense lobbying, from American businesses who have huge deals in Russia. They're worried about the blowback from sanctions because sanctions against Russia will hurt them.

So the president doesn't really have a play. And, from really well-sourced reports, Lavrov, the National Security Council, and the economic advisors were clueless about Putin's decision. Putin made that decision with three old buddies from the K.G.B. days in the '70s and '80s--

DAVID GREGORY:

So, Karen--

ANDREA MITCHELL:

--in Leningrad. Who is he listening to?

DAVID GREGORY:

--do you think the president's playing this right? Do you think that he's going to ultimately have to accept the status quo of Crimea?

REP. KAREN BASS:

Well, I do think the president is playing it right, and I think that Russia's economy is particularly fragile. I know as soon as the decisions that were made around the executive order, we saw a drop in their stock market. And so I think what came out of Congress with us passing the billion-dollar loan guarantee, with the unity amongst the European nations, I do think that the president is playing it right. I think his leadership has been strong.

DAVID GREGORY:

Ron? Yeah, go ahead.

RON FOURNIER:

We were caught flat-footed, completely flat-footed, and there's a couple reasons. One, this was the second successive president that has viewed Russia the way

they want Russia to be, not the way Russia is, specifically Putin. We could talk about President Bush if you want. Secondly, where was the C.I.A.? Where was the N.S.A.? Where was our intelligence community? Why didn't we know about this--

ANDREA MITCHELL:

Divided--

RON FOURNIER:

--sooner.

ANDREA MITCHELL:

They had conflicting--

(OVERTALK)

RON FOURNIER:

And I'm wondering if our intelligence community should be spying more on Russia and less on American people.

DAVID GREGORY:

All right, we're going to take a break. We'll be back, more with our roundtable. But first, a *Meet the Press* moment from back in 2001 when then-Senator Joe Biden actually praised President George Bush's meeting with Vladimir Putin, then a relatively new figure on the international

scene.

JOE BIDEN:

The president did, I think, two very, very good things by going to Europe and by meeting with Putin. By his engaging Europe the way he did, and engaging Putin the way he did, it made clear to Europe that we are going to remain a European power as well.

Commercial Break

DAVID GREGORY:

I wanted to take a minute to share some good news about our friend and colleague Tom Brokaw. He received the 2014 Lifetime Achievement Award at the Jefferson Awards this week, America's most prestigious honor for public service. He was honored for his work in American journalism and his involvement in so many charities and causes that he cares about so much. Way to go, Tom. We were happy to see that. We'll be back with more from our roundtable, and our images to remember, in just a minute.

Commercial Break



▶ [PLAY VIDEO](#) (1:12)

Children Flee to Lebanon in Wake of Syrian Crisis



MEET THE PRESS

DAVID GREGORY:

This week marks the third anniversary of the civil war in Syria, one of the greatest humanitarian catastrophes of our time. Dr. Nancy Snyderman joins me now from Lebanon with a preview of *Forgotten: Syria's Children of War*, as NBC News devotes 48 hours to understand the impact of this crisis. Nancy, good morning.

DR. NANCY SNYDERMAN:

David, there are over 5.5 million affected children from this Syrian crisis, and over 500,000 of them have landed in

Lebanon. Right now, we estimate that there are 450 makeshift camps like this, and the problems are real. Not enough food, not enough nutrients, premature delivery, and obviously very little education. I spent the morning at a hospital and I saw, in the span of two hours, more birth defects than I saw in an entire four years of my pediatric training. The health crises here are real.

So this next week we're going to be talking about the faces of the Syrian children because they have been easy to forget. The fact that, for most of us, our goals are very simple: shelter, food, education, and health. And we're going to focus on those four things this week, David.

DAVID GREGORY:

All right. Nancy Snyderman, thank you so much, joining us this morning from Lebanon. And I should point out the reports from *Forgotten: Syria's Children of War* begin on Tuesday on *Today*, and will also be seen on *Nightly News with Brian Williams* and NBCNews.com.

Back to our roundtable now. So I asked all of you to really think about what's happened here on the program this morning and tweet those thoughts during the program that you've been hearing, as

you've been hearing the conversation. The hashtag is MTP. We've talked about Ukraine. Karen Bass, when you look at Syria and you look at the impact on children, the catastrophe that is this story, is John McCain right? Are future presidents going to have to apologize for our unwillingness to intervene more robustly?

REP. KAREN BASS:

Well, I don't think so. But if you did leave it to John McCain, I think we would have troops on the ground in about 15 different nations. So I don't believe that's the case.

DAVID GREGORY:

Talking about Ukraine and what we've learned, Ralph Reed, you tweeted, "The Obama administration has no real answers on the crisis in Ukraine. Putin is laughing at the U.S." What if he ends up being more isolated at the end of this? Do we get the last laugh?

RALPH REED:

No. I think he'll trade isolation for Crimea first, maybe eastern Ukraine. And, more importantly, the ability to intimidate the other Baltic states. And I think, look, I would acknowledge that Obama's options are limited. But he better figure out which

options he's going to pursue, do it robustly, and project strength. That's not happening right now.

DAVID GREGORY:

Andrea, you, as you were watching Tony Blinken, concluded, "Blinken says Obama's isolating Putin. We'll see tremendous solidarity of the allies, but Germany is not fully on board. It undercuts the strategy."

ANDREA MITCHELL:

Germany's not fully on board, and I think American corporations are not fully on board. I'm not sure that that isolation strategy can work. And taking it back to Syria, when I was watching Dr. Nancy's report, think that we were relying on Russia to be our partner in peace talks on Syria. Russia's now re-arming Assad. Russia is not a partner for us on foreign policy.

DAVID GREGORY:

I was thinking a lot about Cardinal Dolan, and I tweeted this: "Cardinal Dolan points to the shrewd strategy of the pope. Says by asking pointed questions, he gets people thinking about church's meaning." Ron, what's interesting to me, you could almost apply this to politics, but it's also

about how he strengthens people's faith, not just Catholics but non-Catholics.

"Come closer," he says. "Come closer. Get closer to God, strengthen your faith." And it doesn't mean compromise, but it means a changing tone.

RON FOURNIER:

Well, it's interesting. This is something Ralph and I have talked about. If you look in the Republican Party, there's examples of them pulling this off. You had McDonnell actually got more votes from evangelical voters as a guy from the middle.

DAVID GREGORY:

All right. Thanks to you all very much. We'll be back next week. If it's Sunday, it's *Meet the Press*.

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DAVID GREGORY   

David Gregory is the moderator of "Meet the Press," America's longest-running television program. Since... [Expand Bio](#)

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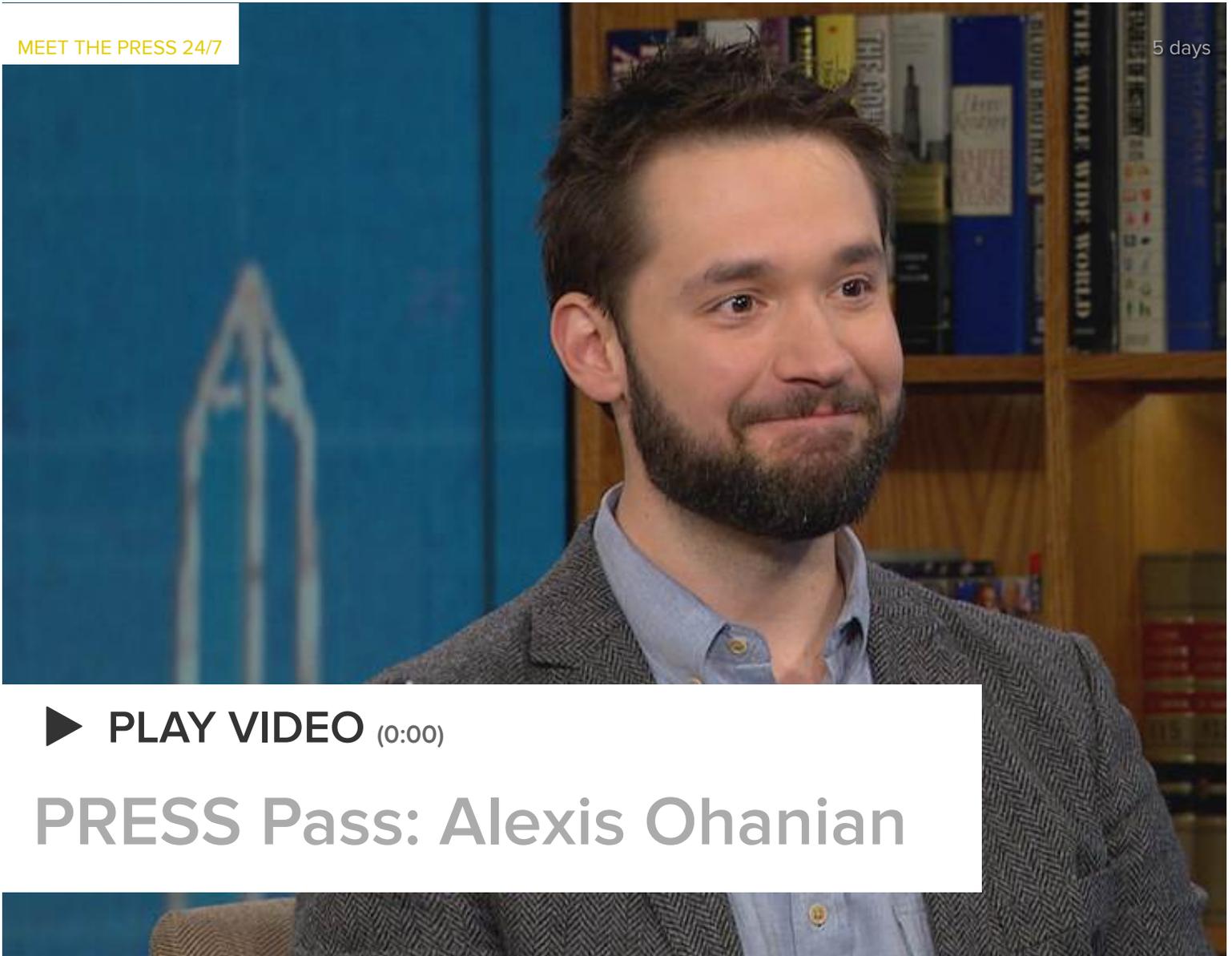
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