

Alyssa Milano: Sorry Not Sorry
Guest: Congressman David Cicilline (D-RI)
Original Air Date: March 9, 2020

[00:00:08] Hi, I'm Alyssa Milano, and this is Sorry Not Sorry.

Alyssa Milano [00:00:34] Today, I'm so happy to welcome Congressman David Cicilline to the show from the small but mighty state of Rhode Island. Congressman Cicilline has been a stalwart progressive voice in Congress since his election in 2010. Before that, he was the mayor of Providence, Rhode Island. He sits on the House Judiciary Committee and was a highly visible presence in the impeachment hearings against Donald Trump.

Congressman David Cicilline (D-RI) [00:01:02] If, in fact, my being honest about who I was was going to make it impossible for me to run and win, that I'd sort of want to know that before I embarked on this journey for two years.

Reporter [00:01:11] Former president Bill Clinton endorses one of Rhode Island's most closely watched races was the battle for the first congressional camp by David Cicilline.

Reporter [00:01:19] He was projected to win, but he was not expected to take as much of the vote as he did today..

Congressman David Cicilline (D-RI) [00:01:26] First, I just received a call from Representative John Laughlin, who extended his congratulations and I want to thank him for a great ride.

Congressman David Cicilline (D-RI) [00:01:33] I was elected into the Democratic House leadership, which means Rhode Island will have a voice at the leadership table so that as we set our priorities and develop budgets and decide the sequence of events, we're going to have a loud voice in all those conversations, which is great for our state.

Congressman David Cicilline (D-RI) [00:01:49] I am David Cicilline me and I'm fighting to protect our democracy. Sorry, not sorry.

Alyssa Milano [00:01:57] First of all, Congressman, thank you so much for joining us on the podcast. I really appreciate you. I appreciate your voice, especially in these times. So I think that my first question, I used to just close my eyes and try to imagine what it was like inside the Democratic caucus as you were deciding whether or not to impeach the president. So I'm wondering if you could tell me a little bit about what that process was like and what just the vibe was inside the caucus?

Congressman David Cicilline (D-RI) [00:02:28] Well, you know, it was a process that evolved over time. I mean, there were many people who and I think particularly members who served on the Judiciary Committee, who had been engaged in a substantial amount of oversight and had the chief responsibility, obviously, for the question of impeachment. And so we were both learning information and reading the contents of the Mueller report with, you know, an understanding that there was jurisdiction of our committee to respond to it. And so I think there were many on the Judiciary Committee, including me, who came to the conclusion earlier that it was necessary to move forward with articles of impeachment. I think there were other members who didn't serve on the relevant committees of jurisdiction or the Intelligence Committee who were paying close attention to it, but were doing their other work and had not, I think, fully appreciated the dangers of this

president's grave misconduct. And but it was a process that over months, I think lots of colleagues spoke to each other about this issue as evidence was developed, as witnesses were coming before the committee, after the Mueller report was released. And I think it worked really the way it was supposed to. People really examine the evidence, examine the arguments. It looked at the relevant law and really kind of debated within the caucus among themselves to really come to the conclusion that, you know, ultimately the entire caucus supported was to move forward on the articles of impeachment.

Congressman David Cicilline (D-RI) [00:03:53] Since our founders ratified the Constitution in 1788, the president of the United States has had his duty to advance our national interests, not his own personal or political interests. 220 years later, a congressman on this committee said, and I quote, This business of high crimes and misdemeanors goes to the question of whether or not the person serving as president of the United States put their own interests, their personal interests ahead of public service, end quote. The congressman who said that was Mike Pence. The list goes on and on. So this claim that this is the thinnest of evidence is simply not true. There is overwhelming evidence of the existence of a scheme led by the president, led by his personal lawyer Rudy Giuliani to corrupt the American elections, to continue to withhold military aid until such time as a public announcement was made that would smear the president's chief political rival. And with that, Mr. Chairman, I yield back.

Congressman David Cicilline (D-RI) [00:04:49] When the Ukraine scandal broke, it sort of changed everything because it was a new set of events happening in real time. And I think even those who were reluctant to move forward based on the contents of the Mueller report recognized the dangers of inaction. If this president were allowed to continue to attempt to corrupt the American presidential election by dragging a foreign power into the election in order to cheat, that that the consequences for our democracy were so great and waiting for the election was not be a satisfactory answer. And so that's when things really start to change.

Alyssa Milano [00:05:23] And do you think it was worth it?

Congressman David Cicilline (D-RI) [00:05:25] Oh, absolutely. I don't think there's any question. Those of us who have the privilege of serving in the Congress take an oath of office, and our responsibility is to protect and defend the Constitution. And in the face of this grave, serious misconduct of the president and frankly and in the kind of conduct that the framers warned our country about, you know, they said when they were developing articles of impeachment in the Constitution, the framers said, you know, we can imagine one day that the office of the presidency may be so powerful that some president may attempt to use the office, not for the public good, but to advance his own or her own personal, political or financial good. And there has to be a remedy for that. And there was a discussion, well, can't you just wait for the next election? People said, no, you know, this is this could present a real threat to the democracy and to our country. There has to be a remedy. And they developed articles of impeachment. And frankly, they spoke about specifically the dangers of foreign interference as one of the chief dangers facing our democracy. So it's almost as if they were talking about this. So we had a responsibility in the face of this conduct to honor our oath of office and to charge the president with these very serious crimes. Obviously, impeachment by the House is not just a probable cause finding. It's it's a finding that the president committed offenses which are worthy of impeachment as high crimes and misdemeanors. And it's hard to think of something more serious than obstruct- abuse of power and obstruction of Congress. Abuse of power is the biggest crime. It's the highest of the high crimes because it means that the government,

the leader, the president is not working for the public good, but he's working to advance his own personal, political or financial good, which is, you know, the most serious abuse of power that the framers discussed. So we had a responsibility to do it. I remain disappointed that our Senate colleagues abandoned their responsibilities and in the face of overwhelming evidence, simply decided to protect the president and even refused to allow witnesses or documents to be introduced. So it wasn't really a trial. It was a cover up. And I think the American people know that.

Alyssa Milano [00:07:33] Yeah, well, and I think since the the trial, it feels like Trump feels even more emboldened. And I'm wondering if you think not removing him has actually strengthened him?

[00:07:47] Well, it has certainly encouraged him to follow his worst impulses, you know, unchecked. I mean, it's important to remember that the day after Robert Mueller testified and Donald Trump sort of thought he got away with the foreign interference in the 2016 election, literally the next day is when he calls President Zelensky to try to get him to help him cheat in the 2020 election and to corrupt the presidential election. So you can only imagine on Wednesday evening when he was acquitted by the Senate, you know, who did he call Thursday morning? But I think he has received a message that the Republicans will protect him at all costs.

Alyssa Milano [00:08:23] Right.

Congressman David Cicilline (D-RI) [00:08:23] They will not hold him accountable in any way. And so now we've seen a series of things which are really disturbing and dangerous, a president undermining the rule of law by saying that he's going to interfere in individual criminal cases. You have over 2000 former Department of Justice officials strongly condemning that he had escorted out of the Pentagon people who testified truthfully against him in a very kind of authoritarian way. Think about it. The same week he's trying to get Roger Stone's sentence lightened, who lied to Congress and committed seven felonies. He's walking out a Purple Heart recipient for telling the truth. And his brother. Oh, by the way, just to send a message to anybody else about the dangers of Speak coming forward to report the misconduct of this president.

Reporter [00:09:11] A campaign of retribution and vengeance is underway at this hour against those whom Donald Trump blames for his impeachment. Two of the most prominent fact witnesses in the impeachment investigation against him have been fired. Barely 48 hours after the Senate acquitted the president, Trump recalled Gordon Sondland, his ambassador to the European Union tonight. Sondland released a statement saying, quote, I was advised today that the president intends to recall me effective immediately as the United States ambassador to the European Union. And just hours before that, Lieutenant Colonel Alexander Vindman was removed from his job as the top Ukraine expert at the National Security Council.

Congressman David Cicilline (D-RI) [00:09:51] I think he's been emboldened. I think all you know, all of that lies at the feet of obviously the president first and secondly at the feet of the Republicans, who, in the face of overwhelming evidence, refused to hold him accountable and have had basically transmitted a message to him that you are above the law, that there's nothing we're gonna do to hold you accountable. And he's taken them at their word and he's engaged in really serious misconduct. When I heard Senator Collins say, oh, I think he learned his lesson. I mean, it's laughable. Yeah, he did learn a lesson.

You know what the lesson was? I can do anything I want because the Republicans are too cowardly to raise their voices and hold me accountable. That's the lesson.

AD - BetaBrand [00:10:34] As a mom, actor, designer, author, activist and business owner, I know what it's like to be busy and just how distracting uncomfortable clothes can be. And that's why I love BetaBrand's dress pant, yoga pants. These pants look great anywhere I go. And they're so comfortable. Seriously, I look professional enough for any meeting I need to go to but feel like I'm in my p.j.'s. It's the best of both worlds. Whatever your style, BetaBrand has the pants to match. Choose from dozens of colors, patterns, cuts and styles like boot cut, straight leg, skinny cropped and more. They even have a pair with eight. Yes, eight pockets. And now they also offer premium denim with the same flexibility and comfort as yoga pants. Right now our listeners can get 20 percent of their first order. When you go to BetaBrand.com/Alyssa. That is 20 percent off your first order at BetaBrand.com/Alyssa/ Millions of women agree that these are the most comfortable pants that you'll ever wear. Go to BetaBrand.com/Alyssa For 20 percent off.

Alyssa Milano [00:11:59] What do you think is going on there, Congressman? I mean, I have to believe that the Republicans in the House know how terrible he is. Right? Do they think he's great?

Congressman David Cicilline (D-RI) [00:12:08] I think, you know, I - This is a very sad observation. I think it is almost exclusively a result of their desire to protect their own elections. I mean, there's really no other explanation. The evidence is too overwhelming. And so I think they recognize that in their districts in a Republican primary, he still is wildly popular. And they're afraid of him. They're afraid of his backing a candidate against them and losing their seat. And, you know, I test myself all the time, I think. Well, suppose Hillary Clinton won. And suppose it turned out the Russians helped her and she welcomed their assistance. And then she appointed these horrible people to be in her cabinet. And then she stood in Helsinki and undermined our intelligence community and sided with Putin. And then she cozied up to Kim Jong un, and then she tried to blow up NATO and then she put children in cages that were - would I still be supporting her?

Alyssa Milano [00:13:02] I'd be calling for I'd be calling for Hillary to step down.

Congressman David Cicilline (D-RI) [00:13:05] Of course I say, no, I wouldn't support her. And they said, well, suppose she was going to run somebody in a primary against me in Rhode Island. Then I'd probably lose. But I wouldn't betray my country to protect the candidate I had supported. And I think in the end, it's what these individuals are doing. They're betraying their country in that the institutions that this president is attacking have been the envy of the world. They've made America the strongest, greatest democracy in the history of the world. And they're watching a president undermine a free press, the rule of law, an independent judiciary, and they're allowing him to do it and not raising their voices in order to protect their own political future. And to me, that is just so wrong and so disappointing. And I search for another explanation because I'd like to think, well, maybe they just believe it. But I mean, I think the other piece of it, which we don't hear a lot about is he's also promoting agenda, which many in the Republican Party have promoted, or worse, you know, huge tax cuts for the richest people in this country taking away health care and declared the ACA unconstitutional, rolling back regulations that are destroying our environment. Right. So, I mean, they're putting on the court people who are, you know, hostile to women, hostile to LGBTQ equality, hostile to choice. So, I mean, they're getting what they want. I think so long as he's moving forward on the agenda that they're committed to. They're not prepared to break ranks from him.

Alyssa Milano [00:14:28] You got to think that this is going to affect so many generations after just even these last three and a half years. Let's say he's a one term president. I mean, we're still looking at a generational damage here. Is there any accountability for presidents anymore after this? Or do you think Trump and McConnell have, you know, rendered impeachment permanently moot?

Congressman David Cicilline (D-RI) [00:14:51] No, I think in a very ironic twist to this, they've reinvigorated the ultimate accountability, which is our democracy, because the ultimate accountability is going to happen in November. In the end, we're going to have had to wait too long for accountability and too much damage will have been done because we could have had accountability if the Senate had done their job. But the good news is that ultimately the American people are going to hold him accountable because ultimately in November, they're going to decide, do we want to give this president who has, you know, worked on behalf of the richest, most powerful people in this country and undermined the institutions that have made our democracy great, has attacked immigrants and women and the LGBTQ community. And they're going to make him a one term president and they're going to send packing the Republicans who enable this. And so I think in the end, we will have accountability by the most powerful voice in the country. That's the people of this country.

Reporter [00:15:44] Voter turnout nearly doubles in Virginia as Dems are fired up and ready to dump Trump. Super Tuesday hasn't just been a good night for former Vice President Joe Biden, who continues to rack up big wins in states all across the country. It's also a huge night for the Democratic Party as turnout is through the roof and places that the eventual nominee will need to win in order to defeat Donald Trump in November.

Congressman David Cicilline (D-RI) [00:16:08] But you're right that it'll be generations before we repair the damage this president has done, not only to the environment, not only to human rights, but to our standing in the world. I serve on the Foreign Affairs Committee and it's still remarkable to me how much people miss American leadership and what a difference American leadership has made in the world. And they sort of look at you when you go to meetings with this sort of really troubled look on their visit, what happened to America. And I assure them America hasn't changed, We're the same great country. We're going through a difficult period. But, you know, America will be back.

[00:16:42] It's a really important point because I wonder - should the American people have faith in the government after all of this?

[00:16:52] It's a fair question. I mean, the American people have seen the government respond to the most powerful special interests that exist, and that continues to be the case. And this president is rolling back environmental regulations to reward fossil fuel companies and giving huge tax cuts to the wealthiest Americans and the most successful corporations in this country, refusing to support common sense gun legislation to respond to the demands of the gun lobby, refusing to work with Democrats to lower prescription drug prices, to respond to the demands of big pharma.

Congressman David Cicilline (D-RI) [00:17:25] We ran on a commitment to demonstrate that we would work for the people of this country and focus on three principal issues: driving down health care costs, particularly prescription drugs, raising family incomes by rebuilding the infrastructure of our country and making a real investment there and taking

on a serious way the corruption and self-dealing in Washington. And we've got to, I think, deliver on those three promises first.

Congressman David Cicilline (D-RI) [00:17:47] So I think there's a real reason for people to wonder, like, does government actually work for them? The good news is if people look at the work we've done in the house, it's been one of the most productive house sessions in modern history. We've passed over 400 pieces of legislation, 275 bipartisan bills. They address the urgent priorities, of the American people. Bills to drive down the costs of prescription drugs, to protect coverage for preexisting conditions, to reauthorize the Violence Against Women Act. Universal Background Checks H.R. 1, the biggest anti-corruption bill since Watergate. And the list goes on and on. So I think if people want to have a sense of what the world might look like or what the country might look like if Democrats retain the House, win back the Senate and elect a Democratic president, we can make all these great ideas a reality, but only half the work got done in 2018. We took back the House and Mitch McConnell, as long as he's the Senate majority leader, we're not gonna see progress on any issue other than appointing, you know, judges, many of whom don't deserve to be judges. And so, you know.

Alyssa Milano [00:18:47] Well, that's that that's the most terrifying thing.

Congressman David Cicilline (D-RI) [00:18:49] It is, because that's many generations. So I think, you know, people should look at the work we're doing if they believe that that's the right agenda for our country. Help us take the Senate back, hold onto the House and elect a Democratic president and we can get to work on the urgent priorities of the American people.

Alyssa Milano [00:19:04] Yeah, I think that that's where my frustration lies, though. You know, 400 bills in the House have passed. Three quarters of them are bipartisan?

Congressman David Cicilline (D-RI) [00:19:12] And 80 percent of them are sitting on McConnell's desk.

Alyssa Milano [00:19:15] And the Senate is doing absolutely nothing. And so I have a hard time keeping the faith that our government is working because it's so divisive right now and it's everyone's so calcified in this very Republican, Democrat. Left, right. And I don't know that the government can properly work if we don't commit to working together.

Congressman David Cicilline (D-RI) [00:19:38] I think that's in many ways what the opposition wants. I mean, the opposition wants people like you and people like me to sort of give up and think, you know what, it doesn't matter. Nothing's going to change because their voters, the people who are supporting the Trump vision of America, they're going to vote and they're going to vote no matter what. And so the more they can discourage people who disagree to vote, the more advantageous it will be.

Congressman David Cicilline (D-RI) [00:20:00] I think we ought to be able to talking bipartisanship on all those issues I just mentioned. In fact, the president spoke about driving down prescription drug prices. He talked about an infrastructure bill, a talk about draining the swamp. He hasn't actually done any of those things. But I think if he's serious about that, he's going to find willing Democrats in the House are willing to work with him.

[00:20:17] The truth is, there's a lot of bipartisan work being done. You know, as I said, of those 400 bills, 275 of them enjoy bipartisan support. Almost every major bill I've

introduced, I look for and usually find a lead Republican sponsor, because I think it's important to show it's bipartisan. There's a lot more agreement on these issues than disagreement. But you have to elect people who are willing to do the work. I mean, Mitch McConnell doesn't have to pass the bills in the form that we send them. He can amend them and send them back or he can vote them down. But you have to elect people who are willing to do their job. Whatever your view is on any of these issues, be willing to be held accountable and vote on it. And I think people will have a choice in the 2012 election. It to me, it's less important about the stand on a particular issue. But electing people who understand that they owe a responsibility to the American people to address the urgent priorities in their lives. My constituents don't agree with me on every single view I have on every issue, but they know that I understand I work for them and I get up every day trying to figure out what can I do to make the lives of Rhode Islanders better. And so if we elect people who are—who have that view and are willing to work even across the aisle to do it, I think we'll have better results. But we can't give up because they're counting on us to give up.

AD - CANDIDCO [00:21:30] Big news, everyone. Yep. It's finally happening. This is the year I'm straightening my teeth with candid, clear aligners. And you could be, too, if you're anything like me, unhappy with your smile, self-conscious in photos. I recommend you check out candid. Beyond delivering clear aligners directly to your door, candid treatments include remote monitoring by your orthodontist throughout the treatment. That means you can get the same treatment oversight that you'd get by seeing an orthodontist in person without inconvenient office visits. All for a fraction of the costs. Unlike braces, candid, clear aligners are comfortable, removable and totally invisible so you can transform your smile without anyone noticing a thing. Plus, you'd never have to set foot in a doctor's office or a waiting room. Your treatment is prescribed and monitored remotely by a licensed orthodontist. Unlike other companies, Candid only works with orthodontists. Never general dentists. With other remote clear aligner options you may never hear from a doctor at all as you go through your treatment. But with candid, your treatment will be designed by an expert in tooth movement. With Candid, not only will your treatment be designed by an experienced orthodontist, but it also includes remote monitoring by the same orthodontist throughout. So you'll never have to wonder how everything is going because your orthodontist will be able to keep an eye on your treatment from anywhere. So looking ahead to wedding season or a special event with Candid, the average treatment length is just six months and you'll start seeing results way before then. Learn more about candid's process and get a complimentary 3-D scan of your teeth at a candid studio near you. It's the simplest, freest way to get started. So are you ready to take the first step toward straighter teeth? For a limited time you can get started with seventy five dollars off by using code sorry at CandidCo.com/sorry. That's candid code dot com slash sorry use code. Sorry for \$75. Five off candid co dot com slash. Sorry. Code sorry.

Alyssa Milano [00:23:50] You've been in Congress for, what, about a decade?

Congressman David Cicilline (D-RI) [00:23:54] I'm in my 10th year, my fifth term.

Alyssa Milano [00:23:56] How have you seen it change over time?

Congressman David Cicilline (D-RI) [00:23:58] You know, I have to confess, since the election of Donald Trump, it has changed significantly. I mean, before Donald Trump was elected and I served in the minority for eight years. I had lots of friendships on the other side because you have to work with colleagues particular when you're in the minority, because it's the only way you can make progress on the issues you care about. And so it's

sort of my personality. You know, I was a mayor. When you're a mayor, you don't have Republican potholes or Democratic schools that need to be repaired. I mean, you just have stuff you need to fix and get done. And my personality is also just like I get along with people. And so I've really developed friendships. And I always believed that people on the other side of the aisle had very different views on environmental policy, on tax policy, on health care policy. But I always believed, you know, they're doing what they think is right and what their constituents believe in. It's just different from my constituents. And I have to confess, having watched for the last three years, the same people unwilling to hold this president accountable or to raise the voices in the face of really serious failings or serious misconduct. It's made. It's made it harder. I mean, I don't look at them in the same way because I sit there and think, how can you sit through this and allow the president to undermine the rule of law, to to attack immigrants, to attack the LGBTQ community, to attack the independence of the judiciary and not speak out? It's just it's made me feel differently. And I'm trying to work through it because I still have friendships and I still have colleagues working on legislation with me. And I'm in the middle of a major bipartisan antitrust investigation. But it's tough because it's hard to watch the damage this administration is doing and and know that these these folks have to know it's not good for our country in the long term.

Congressman Ted Lieu (D-CA) [00:25:45] Donald Trump's chief of staff, Mick Mulvaney, told the Conservative Political Action Conference that the Coronavirus was a hoax of the day. Do you agree with Donald Trump's chief of staff Culvaney, that the Coronavirus is the hoax of the day?

Secretary of State Mike Pompeo [00:26:00] The State Department is doing everything it can to protect American citizens around the globe.

Congressman Ted Lieu (D-CA) [00:26:05] Do you believe coronavirus is the hoax of the day?

Secretary of State Mike Pompeo [00:26:05] I'm not going to comment on ways to either say.

Congressman Ted Lieu (D-CA) [00:26:08] I'm just asking you, [CROSSTALK] Do you believe the coronavirus is a hoax?

Secretary of State Mike Pompeo [00:26:14] We're working to keep people safe.

Congressman Ted Lieu (D-CA) [00:26:15] You can't even answer that question. It's a very it's not even a gotcha question question. [CROSSTALK].

Secretary of State Mike Pompeo [00:26:20] It's a gotcha moment. It's not useful.

Congressman Ted Lieu (D-CA) [00:26:22] Is it a little virus, a hoax? Can you just answer that question?

Secretary of State Mike Pompeo [00:26:26] We're taking it seriously.

Alyssa Milano [00:26:28] Do you have hope?

Congressman David Cicilline (D-RI) [00:26:29] I have hope.

Alyssa Milano [00:26:29] Is there a way back? What's the way back?

Congressman David Cicilline (D-RI) [00:26:31] I mean, the way back is, you know, for people to be certain that they are paying very close attention in the 2020 election and that they're electing and voting for and working for people who share their values. The one thing that gives me the greatest bit of hope is I think before the election of Donald Trump, we lived in a country in which people sort of thought we had a self-executing democracy. You know, as long as you voted and maybe, you know, once in a while contributed to a candidate you really liked or maybe worked on a campaign that the system worked. And frankly, even if you didn't do any of that, you never really worried that our democracy was in danger and people sort of thought it just sort of worked on its own. I think the election of Donald Trump made people realize we don't live in a self-executing democracy. And if we're going to hold on to it, it's going to require the deep, sustained, meaningful engagement of every single person in this country. And I think the good news is we're seeing evidence of that everywhere, not just people sort of going to one march, but people making certain their voices are heard and writing letters and coming to Congress and protesting and working on campaigns and contributing. And I think that level of engagement is so good for our democracy that the one sort of silver lining of this, I think, is after the Trump presidency, we will have a country with the most engaged citizenry in our history. And that means people will be listened to. It means a [INAUDIBLE] government will be more accountable, and it means that work of government will be of a higher quality. And I think that's great for our country. So, you know, assuming we get through the next year, God only knows what could happen with this president. I think at the end of a Trump administration, actually, we will have a stronger and healthier democracy.

Alyssa Milano [00:28:11] I mean, one year with this president feels like a decade.

Congressman David Cicilline (D-RI) [00:28:14] I think particularly the thing I worry the most about is if we're successful and the president is not reelected, that period in between November and January, when he will feel completely angry and unaccountable. And I think that will be the most sort of challenge.

Alyssa Milano [00:28:30] That's interesting. Nobody is really talking about that period of time. And I'm concerned, I have to tell you, I have a lot of friends who really just believe that he will not be reelected. And I have my concerns. I am very aware of what his rally is look like and what his base believes in. And we've really got to show up. We can't take it for granted. We have to work every single day to make sure that he does not win the election.

Congressman David Cicilline (D-RI) [00:28:55] I agree. I think nobody should at all take it for granted.

Alyssa Milano [00:28:58] We can't be complacent.

Congressman David Cicilline (D-RI) [00:28:59] This is a tough, tough campaign. I think the good news is that on the issues that the American people care most about, once you get beyond impeachment and you get beyond the kind of terrible misconduct of the present, you say, OK. Let's focus on the issues that matter in your family's life. One by one, health care.

Congressman David Cicilline (D-RI) [00:29:14] Mr. Speaker, this is Trudy Willis. Trudy and her husband William are lifelong residents of Middletown, my district in Rhode Island.

They have three children and four wonderful grandchildren. And like millions of Americans, Trudy relies on Medicare to pay for her health care needs. For Trudy, Medicare isn't an entitlement. It's a benefit that she and millions of Americans have earned and a promise our government has made. And that's why I'm disappointed that president like Donald Trump has announced he will appoint a secretary of health and human services who wants to end Medicare as we know it. Let me be very clear. President elect Trump does not have a mandate to end the guarantee of Medicare. He lost the popular vote by about two and a half million votes. We're not going to let him kill one of the most effective tools that seniors have to live their retirement years with dignity. If Republicans bring up legislation to end Medicare. We will stop this legislation dead in its tracks. We did it a decade ago when President George W. Bush tried to privatize Social Security. And we'll do it again. And by doing so, we'll maintain the promise we've made to Trudy and millions of seniors across our great country. Thank you. And I yield back.

Congressman David Cicilline (D-RI) [00:30:21] We're fighting to drive down the costs of prescription drugs and protect coverage for preexisting conditions. He's in court right now in a lawsuit trying to have the ACA declared unconstitutional. Tens of millions Americans will lose coverage for preexisting conditions. And he just submitted a budget that includes the repeal of the Affordable Care Act. You look at gun safety. The overwhelming majority of Americans want something be done to reduce gun violence in this country. The president has stood in the way of that.

Congressman David Cicilline (D-RI) [00:30:46] That's why in the coming weeks, I will be introducing legislation that reauthorizes the assault weapons ban. During the 10 years this ban was in effect, localities reported as much as a 72 percent decline in gun crimes involving assault weapons. The only thing that stands in the way is Congress's failure to act this time. The time for action is now.

Congressman David Cicilline (D-RI) [00:31:06] Prescription drugs. You know, you go through the list on and on taxes. You know, they propose. And the president signed a 2 trillion dollar tax cut where the vast majority that went to the richest people in this country and working people are seeing their wages remain stagnant. So I think as you go through these issues, people realize that Donald Trump fights for himself and his friends. He's for people at the top. He's not fighting for working people. And I think the realization of that will be what wins the day. And I think when we focus on those issues, the work we're getting done to drive down health care costs, to rebuild the infrastructure of our country, to get government working for the people again and not the special interests. And they compare that to what Donald Trump has done. We will win the election on the merits. Separate apart from his personality and his misconduct and his impeachable offenses. But just on the priorities of the Democratic Party and what we're fighting for and what Donald Trump's party is fighting for.

Alyssa Milano [00:32:15] There's so much to fight for and there's so much to fight against. But you and I actually met when we were fighting for something. You when I first met, when I testified at Congresswoman Maloney's shadow hearing for the Equal Rights Amendment.

Congressman David Cicilline (D-RI) [00:32:30] Yes.

Alyssa Milano [00:32:31] And you've been such a huge supporter of the ERA since you first came to Congress. So I just want to say thank you for that. And I'm wondering if you

think we're closer? How do members of Congress view this this amendment? Do you think we're gonna get it done?

Congressman David Cicilline (D-RI) [00:32:45] Yeah, I mean, it's very exciting, obviously, with Virginia's passage says the 38th state. And there was a really important opportunity on the House floor to remind people why the Equal Rights Amendment is still necessary. It seems kind of crazy when you think in year 2020 that we still do not have a provision in the Constitution that prohibits discrimination based on gender. And it's you know, our framers began with the founding documents that we know were flawed. The ideals of equality for all were not fully reflected in that document. And we've made progress as a country in moving toward equality. But is still the case that women earn, on average, a two cents on the dollar? Women face tremendous discrimination in a variety of areas of life, and the Equal Rights Amendment is essential to ensuring that once and for all, women are fully equal in this country. And it was hard to listen to the debate, to be honest, to hear people opposing it. You know, it's just seems like such an obvious proposition that reflects the greatest values of this country. The idea that all people are created equal and the notion that this is kind of controversial is really bizarre to me in a way. But I'm very proud of past, you know, the extension. And I think we're very close. I mean, obviously, electing a Democratic Senate who shares that priority is going to be critical. I think this election, the 2018 election was very much powered by women, maybe because women just are smarter than men. They figure out these things before the men do. But, you know, women who left supporting Donald Trump and supported some extraordinary Democratic congressional candidates around the country, women made all the difference. The world actually, women and young people. And I think 2020 is going to be the same thing. Women and young people are going to save this country because they're going to insist that their voices be heard and that their values be shared by those whom they elect.

Congressman David Cicilline (D-RI) [00:34:34] I think we were all terrified because the country elected a sexual predator. And I think it was a wakeup call for all of us that with Harvey Weinstein and we saw so many powerful men, you know, being taken down and felt like this was our time. This was our time to rise up and to form a sisterhood, you know, knowing that so many of our rights were going to be at least attempted to be stripped away. You have been a strong supporter of abortion rights. And I know in Rhode Island it has a very interesting set of elected Democratic leaders who have been less pro-choice than other Democrats.

Reporter [00:35:13] Anti-abortion activists gathered at the statehouse to mark 40 years since the Supreme Court decision on Roe versus Wade. That 1973 ruling legalized abortion in the United States. Providence Journal reports yesterday's rally featured speeches from former Boston Mayor Ray Flynn, as well as women who have undergone abortions.

Reporter [00:35:32] Well, today was obviously a big blow for pro-choice advocates after the Senate bill failed. But it's not over yet because after that vote, the committee chose to hold the identical House bill for further study, leaving it in play for the rest of the session.

Reporter [00:35:53] The Democratic Senate president escorted from his office by a sheriff as pro-choice protesters streamed in demanding a floor vote on reproductive rights after the Reproductive Health Care Act failed in Senate Judiciary.

Alyssa Milano [00:36:06] First of all, thank you for fighting for a woman's right to choose. Do you think that that hurts you at all politically in Rhode Island?

Congressman David Cicilline (D-RI) [00:36:13] I don't know. I mean, Rhode Island is a very Catholic state. I think it's the most Catholic state in the country percentage wise. So I think there's a lot of opposition to abortion rights is based on a religious teaching. But I think your religious tradition informs lots of things about the way you think about issues, but I'm very proud that Rhode Island actually was one of only 13 states that recently passed legislation to incorporate Roe versus Wade in statute to protect women. But I think this is just a basic fundamental issue about the right of women to have control over their body. There's obviously lots of evidence about the economic implications about family planning and this notion of women making decisions to terminate a pregnancy which are always difficult and hard and complicated. But their decisions best made by the woman and in consultation with her doctor and whatever other family members she chooses to. But it's her body, her decision, period. And I think it is a very dangerous practice if you begin to say the government is going to limit medical procedures based on their religious tradition and women like men, should have full autonomy over their body and all of their health care decisions. Period. That's always been my view.

Alyssa Milano [00:37:22] Rhode Island is really interesting. It's a small state, but it's kind of a microcosm of America really.

Congressman David Cicilline (D-RI) [00:37:29] Very much so.

Alyssa Milano [00:37:30] Yeah. What are the important issues for the people of Rhode Island?

Congressman David Cicilline (D-RI) [00:37:33] And you're right, Rhode Island is unique in that way where, you know, have some very progressive kind of liberal types like me. But it's also there's a number of folks who are much more conservative Democrats. So it's a very you know, we have we were hit hard by NAFTA and by the loss of jewelry and textile manufacturing. And so manufacturing is a really important issue in Rhode Island. I've worked a lot on it to help revitalize American manufacturing. Health care is a big issue for Rhode Islanders. You know, the cost of prescription drugs, a very important issue we have, particularly for our seniors. Climate change is another huge issue. You know where our state motto is the ocean state, coastline is really important to the economy of redound to the quality of life here. And, you know, infrastructure is a really big issue in the Northeast, particularly in Rhode Island. We have, you know, serious needs in terms of bridge, road, rail. And our governor has taken a real lead on that. You know, we're about to do a big infrastructure bill, which will have a make a real difference in Rhode Island as well.

Alyssa Milano [00:38:30] So you were the first openly gay mayor of a U.S. capital city. What year was that?

Congressman David Cicilline (D-RI) [00:38:35] I was Mayor from 2003 to 2011, eight years.

Alyssa Milano [00:38:38] And then one of the first openly gay members of Congress, which was when?

Congressman David Cicilline (D-RI) [00:38:41] Yes, yeah, I got elected in 2011 to Congress and began serving there in 2012.

Congressman David Cicilline (D-RI) [00:38:45] I'm David Cicilline from Providence, Rhode Island. And before I ran for mayor, I had contemplated running for Congress and there was a reporter for a local newspaper was doing a story. And at the end of the story and the interview, he said, you know, I will ask you a question which you don't have to answer if you don't want to, but are you gay? And I said, yes. And he said, OK. And he finished writing his story. And he called me the next day and he said, I finished my column. But the publisher will not include in the column the answer to the last question I asked you. I have to say that in my run for mayor and my recent campaign for Congress, my sexual orientation was really irrelevant. And I think it demonstrates how far we've come as a community and how far we've come as a country that in both my campaign for mayor, what people were really interested in knowing was what I intended to do about the important issues facing my city. And we're at that place now, as it has certainly in Providence and I think in Rhode Island and hopefully in more more of the country that people are starting to recognize that sexual orientation is irrelevant.

Alyssa Milano [00:39:51] It's unbelievable to me. So you are a trailblazer.

Congressman David Cicilline (D-RI) [00:39:53] Yeah, well, it's funny. When I ran for mayor, it was, you know, a big deal back then. Now, you know, we have lots of members of our committee who are running. But I remember this funny story. This guy came into my headquarters. His name was Mr. Fitzgerald. And he said, you know, I want to ask you, I've been following you seem like you're really good and you have all the right ideas to the city. But I wanted to. Do you have a gay agenda? I said, Mr. Fitzgerald, I do. I think you need to sit down and kind of looked white. I said, I want great schools, low crime, good paying jobs for Providence. Right. He was like I. I thought so. He said that's what I told my wife. You know, when John Kennedy was running, they said the Vatican was going to control. And look, he turned out to be great. And this volunteer became a great friend to one of my best supporters. So sometimes just running for office is a great way to build understanding and change people's hearts about what they previously thought about a particular community.

Alyssa Milano [00:40:43] Do you think that it's changed the way you view your job?

Congressman David Cicilline (D-RI) [00:40:48] Yes. I mean, I think when you're part of a marginalized community, whatever that community is, and you get elected to public office, I think my career has always been kind of looking out for the underdog. I mean, I've always been sort of fighting against whether it was, you know, who I perceived to be powerful state when I was a criminal defense lawyer or a civil rights lawyer, whether it was trying to change a corrupt government when I ran for mayor and now taking on the technology companies in my antitrust investigations. I've always been the guy kind of fighting for the underdog. And I think it's informed what I do as a member of Congress and informed what I did as a mayor.

Alyssa Milano [00:41:23] If you had one message to American voters before the general election, what is that message?

Congressman David Cicilline (D-RI) [00:41:30] I don't have to think long about it. It's don't give up on your country. Don't give up on America. This is a democracy worth fighting for. And take your responsibility of citizenship deadly seriously. Study the

candidates, study the issues, vote for candidates that you know are going to fight for the things that matter to you and you will help protect our democracy.

Alyssa Milano [00:41:53] I'm proud to walk by your side. Thank you so much.

Congressman David Cicilline (D-RI) [00:41:55] Thanks.

TedX Speaker [00:41:56] We have to stop expecting politics to be sexy. A lot of the things that matter most that are most likely to help us heal the system and make it more about us and the things we care about. Again, aren't that sexy. There are things like campaign finance reform to help us rebalance the effect of the facts of money in politics. They are are things like redistricting so that our elected officials can't choose their own voters. Things like government ethics reform, so that the revolving door between government and industry stops skewing the incentives of government toward industry. And we need to use our voices all the time, all the time, not just as a tool of a campaign or a protest, but in support of the things that are things that matter most to us in our communities.

Alyssa Milano [00:42:44] We all can blaze trails if we have enough courage and we need trailblazers so badly, we need Republicans willing to stand up to Donald Trump even at the cost of their own seats. We need Democrats who will push against the status quo, who will always dream of something better for all Americans. And we need you. We need you to find that thing inside you that makes you unique, that only you can contribute. And we need you to lead the way with it. Are you an artist or a writer, a singer or a poet, a thinker or a maker of any kind? We need you. Are you part of a marginalized community? Boy, do we ever need you. Have you suffered in an unjust America where the rich do well and the rest? Help them get richer. Well, blaze a trail. Light a torch. Lead the way.

Alyssa Milano [00:43:53] Sorry Not Sorry is executive produced by Alyssa Milano - that's me. Our associate producer is Ben Jackson Editing and Engineering by Natasha Jacobs. And music by Josh Cooke, Elicia Eagle and Milo Bugliari- that's my boy. Please subscribe on Spotify, iTunes, or wherever you get your podcasts.

[00:44:12] And if you like the show, please rate review and spread the word. Sorry. Not sorry.