

Interview of Elias Moyse
Conducted by Ewan Dignon
15 October, 2023

Elias Moyse, or Eli as he prefers to be called, is a gun control advocate and current Dartmouth College student. He has participated in the movement for stricter gun laws in Connecticut as an activist with Connecticut Against Gun Violence. Moyse has also recently been focusing on economic justice issues surrounding inequality.

EWAN DIGNON: So thank you so much for taking the time today to share some of your experiences with us. Before we get started, I'm just going to review some of the ways we're going to handle the information you share with us. So this interview is being recorded and, with your consent, it will be uploaded to DukeBox, which is a secure server, and then to the Rubenstein Rare Books and Manuscript Library, where we're keeping a running archive of youth justice activists since the 2010s. I'll also be taking, I'll be making a transcript of this which I'll send to you if you'd like to make any edits to it before uploading it to the library. In case I misspell a name or get a date wrong, we hope you'll correct us on that. And once we've completed the interview and the transcript and with your permission, upload it and it will be put into the Duke University repository and kept. There will likely be things you share today that are very important and I don't know enough to form good questions. This isn't necessarily unusual for oral history and sometimes we may need to circle back to something you've said much earlier and we may need to ask follow up questions via email if that's okay with you?

ELI MOYSE: Yeah, uh huh

DIGNON: So how are you today?

MOYSE: I'm good, I'm tired. I have a lot of work ahead of me today but overall I'm good, I'm happy.

DIGNON: Glad to hear that.

MOYSE: How are you, how are you?

DIGNON: I'm doing well. Home this weekend from school. Getting, catching up on sleep

MOYSE: Nice

DIGNON: So I just wanted to ask you about any advocacy work in the past if you'd like to give us a broad overview of what you've done.

MOYSE: For sure, so I've worked for, God, at this point a number of organizations. I would say I would pinpoint my most, maybe influential work or the work that I'm most proud of probably

with Connecticut Against Gun Violence¹ and generally within the gun violence prevention space. I've worked with a number of organizations in the state including, you know, political campaigns, nonprofits to try to pass gun violence prevention law. More recently, I've worked just on general political campaigns and general interest groups, kind of shifting my focus to other issues other than gun violence as life has changed my perception of things. I'm not, gun violence prevention is still extremely important to me but I've shifted my focus a little bit more towards other issues.

DIGNON: Can I ask why you focused on gun violence as one of your first issues?

MOYSE: Absolutely, so I would say that my life definitely gets, it's very personal, you know what I mean? What effects, how it affects what I'm into or that I want to work on, so I would say for gun violence prevention started from a very young age. I was always kind of politically aware and then I grew up in Connecticut and we were, we were, we're the same age as the kids who died in Sandy Hook² and we lived, or I lived about 30 minutes from Sandy Hook, so what had happened, I was in, we were in second grade, and I didn't really understand it, but my mom told me, and she was like and tried to explain it and everything. I mean how do you explain that to a second grader? But as I grew up, I kind of became more aware of the problem of gun violence, especially in our schools. And it was a scary thing. Like it just scared me a lot. And then in fifth grade, we had a lockdown in our school district. That was kind of traumatizing to me because it was like a realization of my fears. We didn't know what it was. Supposedly it was a bomb threat or something, but it really scared me. And then after that, I would say like sixth, seventh, eighth grade, I started to really become more aware. And then in high school, I was like, I really want to do something about this. So then that's how I got involved. And I knew a couple of people in this organization. I joined the Young Dems³ at my high school and they had connected me to all these people. And one of them was like, "You should definitely work for Connecticut Against Gun Violence" because they were trying to start a youth council comprised of just some people from around the state. And at this point we were using Zoom. Zoom was the thing. So it was really easy to connect with people from all across the state. And we would just start, I just started going to the weekly meetings and that's how I got to co-founding their youth council.

DIGNON: Could you elaborate on any work you did with the CAGV⁴ Youth Council?

MOYSE: Yeah, so the Youth Council did, oh, I would say the most notable thing that they did was probably they had a summit, which was pretty big. It was in, it was in Bridgeport⁵. It was a summit about gun violence prevention and that we had a bunch of kids come. We talked about gun violence prevention and the importance of it and we planned that for a really long time. We also did a lot of lobbying at the State Capitol. CAGV is very—They have worked a long time in the

¹ Connecticut Against Gun Violence is an organization in Connecticut that has been working since the early-1990s to combat gun violence and pass stricter gun control legislation.

² Referencing the massacre at Sandy Hook Elementary School in Newtown, CT on December 14th, 2012, where a gunman killed 20 first-graders and 6 educators.

³ Young Democrats club, referring to a high school chapter of the Democratic Party

⁴ Acronym for Connecticut Against Gun Violence.

⁵ Referring to Bridgeport, Connecticut

State Capitol. So they know their way around it. They know all the lawmakers. So we would go with them, because they said a lot of people, it was like two or three people who really ran that organization. It's small but mighty. And they said to us, "They know us, they know our faces, but if we send you in, you're like new faces, you're young people, maybe they'll listen to you." So we would go, be a group of like three or four of us and we'd go to the State Capitol and wait outside, you know, legislative offices or outside of chambers like the House and the Senate, wait for legislators to come by and try to get their attention and talk to them about the issues. So that resulted in the passage, this most recently was the passage of the Governor's bill to HB6667⁶, the governor's bill addressing gun violence, which did a number of things, closed a number of loopholes, specifically on ghost guns. It was the biggest gun bill since Sandy Hook, since the gun bill passed after Sandy Hook⁷. That was the most recently. And then the year before we also passed, I'm forgetting which, what number it is, but it was another big bill addressing gun violence. So that was the main, I would say that was the main work that I did with them.

DIGNON: The first thing you mentioned, the summit in Bridgeport, why do you think it's important to educate young kids about gun violence prevention?

MOYSE: So for that summit, we actually specifically targeted kids that we knew were affected by gun violence, because we knew that a lot of them probably had experienced gun violence or knew someone who had experienced gun violence. And we knew that it would be important. We knew that probably a lot of them didn't exactly know what you know what it was and what was happening. So we wanted to educate them on what it was, how to prevent it, how to stay away from it. It was basically, it was less about and then kind of at the end a little bit like how can they get involved in activism related to preventing it but we tried - we didn't try to really push that because we knew it was like pretty young, like middle school kids, so we were just basically trying to educate them because there's this big group of students who mainly grew up in pretty poor areas so the goal was just to make sure they knew what was going on and and try to help start to break the cycle of gun violence that exists in a lot of poor communities.

DIGNON: When you focus on breaking the cycle, what exactly are you teaching these kids?

MOYSE: Primarily education about their options, I would say. If you're growing up in a poor community, there was one speaker we had, this was at a different event, but basically he said, "A lot of you live in cities where it's easier to buy a gun than it is to buy a pair of Jordans, right?" Like a pair of basketball shoes. Like, it's like, you live in a society that is pushing you literally towards gun violence. And so making sure that they're aware of that system, and making sure they're aware that there are other ways, you know, to be successful or to live life, you don't have to follow potentially role models of violence that exists in their communities or older kids, older adults that they see that kind of fall into it and making sure that they are, they're getting a different perspective than just potentially what they receive from their friends or whatever. Just

⁶ A new, stricter gun control bill enacted in Connecticut in 2023.

⁷ A series of sweeping reforms were enacted in the wake of Sandy Hook, adding 150 guns to the list of banned weapons, instituting a stricter permitting process with universal background checks, and banning magazines holding over ten rounds.

giving them the top-down perspective of, “Listen, this is an issue. If you get into the cycle, if you're under the cycle, there's a good chance you're not gonna get out. You might die, you know what I mean?” Just giving them facts and then saying, these are other options that we have. And this is how you can kind of you know, you can make a better life, right?

DIGNON: Yeah, I get what you're saying. With the educating about other options, did you do any advocacy work surrounding providing those other options? Because oftentimes these kids are kind of forced towards that life, as you were saying.

MOYSE: Yeah, so again, I mean, CAGV was a pretty small organization. So it was kind of hard to go beyond just what we were doing there. I wish we could have and I know a lot of other great organizations that do. We actually worked, one of the organizations we worked with was Bridgeport Youth Lacrosse⁸, BYL, which was—they would bring us kids and their entire mission was to give kids holistic afterschool activities. So they had a, like they had a house, or like, I think they called it The Shack, I'm pretty sure. And it was where they hosted kids after school and they had, they would teach them lacrosse. They had a lacrosse team and they also just had general community events. So the goal was basically to fill time that otherwise wouldn't be filled. We also knew of other organizations and events that kind of followed this, a similar model. I'm forgetting what town it was in. There was one town that kind of did, they did a similar thing to, they did it in the city, in New York City. It was midnight basketball. It was like from midnight to 3 a.m. They had a pickup basketball league that was very popular because midnight to 3 a.m. was the highest crime hours in New York City⁹. So they would do it and they would have potentially, you know, police officers go and play with people who just wanted to play. And it helped to reduce violence in those communities by a noticeable margin. And I think a town in Connecticut did something similar. It wasn't exactly the same, but it was something similar. I'm forgetting where it was. And it supposedly also helped. So it was mainly just about filling a time. We didn't exactly do that ourselves, but we partnered with organizations who did do that to try to make that holistic approach.

DIGNON: Now jumping back to the lobbying you did with HB6666667.

MOYSE: Yeah, three 6s.

DIGNON: The numbers. Yeah. HB6667. Did you notice lawmakers were willing to listen to young people?

MOYSE: It was very interesting to see what, how they interacted with us. I would say a lot of them either already had their mind made up so they would talk to us and they would give us the little smile, obviously you're a young person. So they're gonna be like, “Oh, it's great that you're here. Thanks for being involved.” But at the end of the day, you can kind of tell after you've been doing it for a little bit, whether someone is actually listening. There would be a lot of lawmakers

⁸ A program for children aged 9-14 in public schools, providing them each with ten hours of after-school physical activities.

⁹ Midnight basketball started in Maryland in the 80s, running from 10pm-2am in areas with nighttime criminal activities and has been accompanied by drops in local property crime.

that we knew openly opposed the bill and they would still give us a little nod, smile, right? Like, "Thanks for being here." It's like, why are you even saying that? You know what I mean? Like there were a couple of them that would actually get into real conversations with us. And there was one that I kind of worked to convince and he was like one of like a couple who really was kind of on the fence. And those ones, they would usually come up, there was like a group of maybe five or ten of them who would come up and really ask questions about the bill. Right, they would be like, "What about this? What about this? What about this? Can you answer my questions on these?" And yeah, the other interesting dynamic that I found there was that a lot of these lawmakers were, less focused on their actual support for the bill. So they would say "I support the bill, but I have to sell it to my constituency." That was the main concern. So if there was a thing in the bill that they knew would be especially controversial, they would try to ask like "Okay, if this passes and I vote for it, how am I going to go back to my constituency and say, well, I voted for it because of this." And that was a very interesting dynamic as the play as well because we had a lot of lawmakers who would say that they supported it but weren't even sure if they were going to vote for it or not so that was you know.

DIGNON: If a lawmaker came up to you and said something about how they supported it but their constituency might not have how would you have responded?

MOYSE: You know, "We understand obviously it can be tough, especially with special interest groups who try to spin the bill, but you know, these are all of these are common sense measures and I can go through each of them and explain to you specifically how each of them are common sense and won't affect a responsible gun owner's ability to own a gun." That would be essentially it.

DIGNON: Did you find that to be effective?

MOYSE: Yeah, it was effective for most. For some, they still just couldn't really get around the whole popularity thing, which, you know, to some extent is understandable. It's just frustrating. But I don't know. It raises questions, right? Should our [coughs] sorry, Should our lawmakers care, right? If they believe in something should they just vote for it? Or is our democracy meant to be what the people want? They vote for it. It was interesting to see that at play.

DIGNON: How would you answer that question?

MOYSE: I think it's a mix of both, which is such a cop-out answer. If I was leaning towards one, it would probably be that the lawmaker should be able to make some say on, without the, separate of the opinion of the voter because here's the way I look at it: Your doctor makes personal decisions about your health all the time because your doctor is an expert. All right, you trust your doctor to make those decisions for you or to make a judgment call for you. Even if sometimes you think that it sounds a little bit drastic, if a doctor says "You should go to the ER" or a doctor says "You should get this surgery," even if you feel fine, you still do it, right? And I think we're living in a world where some judgment calls need to be made. Some existential judgment calls need to be made, right? Whether that's on climate, whether that's on the injustices in our economy. There are some judgment calls that need to be made that a lot of

people probably won't like. But should we, you know, if those decisions are going to save our society and save our world, they have to be made. So it's either unpopular decisions are made or we come to the end of the line, right? So that's what I would say.

DIGNON: And what did this bill actually do? If you don't mind me asking.

MOYSE: Yeah, so here's a little, this is an interesting thing that I always like to talk about when it comes to this bill. Connecticut banned—so a ghost gun, I'll start with this really quickly. A ghost gun is a 3D printed, there are aspects of it that are—so you can buy—you can buy a metal frame of a gun from a lot of places legally. So you can buy essentially parts of a gun legally with no license. And so people will buy parts of a gun and then they could 3D print the rest of the necessary parts of the gun and essentially build a functioning semi-automatic weapon without any registration and without any license. Or in some cases, some frames require a license. So you would need a license, but they could buy guns that you're not supposed to be able to have just through a mix of 3D printing. And then the worst part of it is that the guns aren't registered. So essentially they don't have a serial number, there's nothing, there's no way to ID them. Like it could have come from, it could have been shipped here from Guam. Like we have no idea where it came from, or it could be from Dave down the street who has a 3D printer in his basement. We have no idea. So essentially Connecticut decided to ban them along with other states have started to do that as well. But the problem is they said, OK, we're going to say all ghost guns after 2019 are now or (maybe I don't remember what the cutoff might have been) 2020 are now illegal. Right. So you can't have them past 2020. The issue is if a police officer is in a situation where they have to—where they find a ghost gun, right. And they say this is a ghost gun. This is against the law. It was made after 2020. There's no way to tell if a ghost gun is made after 2020 because it's not registered. This is a ghost gun and someone could just say, “Well, it was made before 2020.” And there's no way to tell whether it was. So they would just be like, okay. So essentially the law that they passed was completely pointless. So this bill made it so there was a 60 day window where all people who own ghost guns now had to go and register them. So basically you would get a serial number stamped on it. So you could still technically have the ghost gun, but now after the 60 day period is up, if a police officer finds a ghost gun that doesn't have a serial number on it, they know definitively that it was made after the law went into effect and that it's illegal. So when people were talking about that part of the law, there was a kind of a sales pitch, right? It's for police. This part of the law is not about gun violence prevention, it's for police, it's for law enforcement. That's why we're doing it. And that was a big selling point on that. Although that wasn't a really controversial provision. Another part of it was about safe storage laws. So they required that a gun, if it's not in active use, I don't remember the exact wording, but it should be stored in a lock box or some kind of gun storage container. Because we saw that gun robbery was still one of the major causes of, or the major contributors to gun trafficking in poorer communities. So people who maybe are not able to get a gun, would go to a straw purchaser or would go to someone who robbed someone and buy the gun off of them. So that is another thing. There's a third provision that I'm not going to lie, I'm currently blanking on, but those were the two pretty big ones, if I want to say. Oh, it was funding for community gun violence prevention. So there was two million, I think, in the bill for funding basically

preventing community gun violence through programs, Project Longevity¹⁰. It's basically programs that - one really cool one is Violence Stoppers¹¹. I don't remember exactly what it's called, but it was a group that basically would go to hospitals on nights where there has been a shooting and go to shooting victims in gang territory. And talk to the victims and try to get them to stop because there's a decision point, right? If you're shot and when you're a member of a gang and you're shot, they say that there are two things that go through your head, right? There's one, I should really stop doing this and two, I should get revenge. So there's like two combating things. And oftentimes fellow gang members will go to a hospital and they'll plan the revenge or they'll plan the counter attack at the hospital. So if you can get a representative there basically to talk to the person who's been shot and say, "Listen, it's time to leave. I have these options for you, right? You can come do this instead and make money and right, live a successful life." A lot of people will be like, "Okay, like I'm done. I'm getting out and I'm living my life the safer way." And so it was an organization that funded trained experts who would do that. It was mainly just like really granular community stuff and they needed money. So we got the money.

DIGNON: That brings us back to options again, just providing options for people that get out of the cycle of gun violence. Would you mind explaining what some of those options are for people?

MOYSE: So there's one essentially—it's mainly about organizations that have the power and have the leverage to get people who don't have the background to get a job, to get them a job. So there's one that's, it's run by the police basically, and the police go to, so gun violence is really run or gun violence, statistically is done by a small group of people in a community. They say it's a small group of repeat offenders that cause the most gun violence. So Project Longevity will go in and identify these long time, like repeat offenders. And they'll go to them and say, we have you a couple of times basically on the books for gun violence. The next time we find out that you perpetrated an act of gun violence, we'll give you, or here, these are the options they're given. They can either go with the police to some extent, and the police and the government, the state government, town government, will give them all the resources they need to get a job. So they have, it's the state government, so they have connections to jobs, they have connections to resources. They, I think that sometimes, if I'm not mistaken, they even will put them up, like they'll put them in housing, if they need housing, they have the resources to do that,? So, mainly the resources given are just a job, housing, food, if that's needed, whatever. And they say you can take that deal or the next time the police catches you with a gun or committing an act of gun violence, we're going to punish you max. We're gonna give you the maximum punishment, right? So whether that's like jail for 20 years or like it's some very serious sentence. Because basically the philosophy is one way or another, we're going to end the gun violence, right? And whether that means putting you away for 20 years, or it means giving you a better life, we just need that to happen. So I would say mostly the resources are just the basic necessities that you and I would think are essential, But a lot of people don't have them.

¹⁰ Project Longevity is a grant program run by the CT State Government to build connections between non-profits, police departments, and the community.

¹¹ The CT Department of Public Health runs the Community Gun Violence Prevention Program, which includes Hospital-Based Intervention Programs spoken about.

DIGNON: Yeah, that makes a lot of sense. Earlier on, you mentioned that you've kind of moved on from gun violence prevention to other issues. Would you mind just explaining what some of those are?

MOYSE: Yeah. So it's kind of hard because now I'm at college and my schedule is always incredibly busy. And it's just hard to connect with state advocacy in Connecticut. I'm in New Hampshire. So it's not that far away, but it's certainly a distance, right? So it'd be hard to be more involved specifically with CAGV. And I think as my life has progressed, I've learned more about the issues that face our country. I've kind of found a new priority in economic justice, seeking economic justice. That I would say is my, really my primary issue. That's harder to get involved in on a small level. But here I would say I have tried to in college as an activist, use my voice as much as possible to spread new perspectives. Whether that means talking to friends, whether it means gaining leadership positions in political organizations here, whether it means writing for the newspaper, whether it means campaigning for, I mean, it always means campaigning for people who you agree with. And here we have the Young Dems Club who they do campaign, they do canvassing work with, so if I ever have free time, I'll do that. It's just canvassing for local candidates. That is something you can always count on as being critical. But I would say in general, it's become less about the grind. Literally like the grunt work of doing the paperwork, and it's become more about using my voice. And this might sound weird, but I think that I've come to a point in my life now where people will listen to me. They value it because, this is gonna sound super arrogant, but it's because of the work that I've done in the past, I now have the ability to use my voice and people will listen, right? And so that's what I've kind of been trying to do now is to use my voice and use the influence that I've gained, whether that's on campus, whether that's within my community to kind of address the issues that I see that are most relevant now, which is economic justice.

DIGNON: Yeah, with economic justice, what exactly are you campaigning for? Like what measures do you believe are important for economic justice?

MOYSE: I think we live in a country with a system that systemically benefits the wealthiest in every aspect of being. So whether that means preferential treatment in academics, whether that means preferential treatment when it comes to jobs. I mean, wealthy people, people with generational wealth fundamentally have a head start that is so large in this country. So I would say my goal or my vision for - obviously it's a very ambitious, some would argue even impossible vision, but my vision would be to have a country where everybody doesn't necessarily get an equal start, but everybody gets a fair shot. I think that the gun violence stuff kind of showed me this, and I think it's very exposing. There are people in this country who fundamentally don't get a fair shot at life. Whether they're born into crime or they're born into violence and they are born into poverty, and we know, you know, the countless studies have shown and proven that poverty breeds all of the problems in society that we think are most pressing. Poverty breeds crime. Like literally think of an issue, you can trace it back to, well, it's because we have an excess of poverty. And we have an excess of poverty in this country compared to every single other country, other developed country, in Europe, everywhere. We have a higher rate of poverty. So my goal would be to systemically ensure every child who's born gets a fair shot or a fair ability to try to realize

their goals. Even if that shot or that, you know, window of opportunity is smaller than another person's, they should get that opportunity.

DIGNON: How do we get there so that everyone has that same opportunity?

MOYSE: That's a really good question. I think that's an ongoing debate. We recently had, I'm in the Dartmouth Political Union, it's an organization that I'm an ambassador for as a freshmen, like kind of a junior executive. So we run a lot of debates, like campus-wide debates. Recently we had one that was about, what was it about? It was about a UBI, a universal basic income¹². And a lot of people argued "Well, this is a good way to kind of make sure everybody at least has the bare necessities or has some base of money that they can use to get their bare necessities in order to survive." While other people argued "Well, look, it's regressive. It is money for everybody and it's not fair. It only benefits, we should be targeting it more." So I would say the main conversations that I've been having are really about welfare, are about the systems that we have in place and how we can improve them or whether we need to fundamentally overhaul them. Because if you look at it this way, we as a country spend immense amounts of money on welfare and immense amounts of money on, per person, on addressing poverty or poverty targeting activities, poverty targeting programs. And yet our poverty is still super high. So that tells you that your programs aren't working. So I think the main issue is identifying what isn't working and what we need to do to get those things to work more smoothly or to get them to actually work, period. There are a number of theories on why our welfare system doesn't work. One of them is that it is run by for-profit corporations primarily, and it has been designed in order to keep people in poverty. That is a theory. Another theory is that we just don't really know what works. I mean, there are a number of talks about that, but I would say primarily how we get there is transforming that system because we have an immense pool of money that is already being spent on that. And if we can somehow transfer that money to be spent in a more efficient way, I think that would make a lot of really, really big changes. Another way we get there is addressing the massive wealth inequality in our country, which has only gotten worse with time. That conversation usually looks like, you know, tax the rich, right? But it's about a lot, I think a lot more than just that. It's not necessarily about raising taxes, it's about closing tax loopholes that already exist. And if we can do that, I mean, we've seen recently, we've seen over COVID with the Great Resignation¹³, we saw a significant wage gain for minimum wage workers who, although the federal minimum wage has not been raised, they have seen themselves, I think the stat was they've caught up to about 25% of the wage loss that they had since 2000 against the hyper wealthy, right? So the hyper wealthy are making, whatever percentage more than they used to, on minimum wage workers. And minimum wage workers earned about 25% of that back. So we saw that, that was due, I would say primarily to market conditions. But if you look at it this way, we have seen that gain and there haven't really been the downward effects that a lot of economists claim there will be if you raise the minimum wage. In fact, job creation has remained the highest it's been in years. So the whole theory that if you raise minimum wage, less people will be hired, I mean, that's just BS. Right. So I think it's just kind of addressing those myths, the economic myths, and it's supporting economic policy that will make that possible.

¹² A program guaranteeing a basic level of income to every person, distributed by the government.

¹³ The nickname given to the period after the COVID-19 lockdowns when many people quit their jobs.

And the other big thing I haven't mentioned, supporting the non-governmental organizations that make that possible, a.k.a. unions. We've seen a union resurgence in this country over the past couple of years, the most union friendly president in probably American history, first ever president to walk the picket line while he's been president¹⁴ and he's done a lot of really great work for labor unions. And I think that you can partner the issue of unions and the issue of workers' rights with the issue of climate change. And there's a potential to change how America works. I mean, if you can potentially run job retraining programs and you can create a new industrial base in the United States that's focused on producing green-related products you'll have a new revolution. I mean, you really will. So I think that is another part of what I see is most important. Again, these issues are really hard to kind of address on the granular level, right? Because the state can't do this on its own. This has to be a federal thing. So it's kind of hard. I mean, you can support candidates who are in line with that vision, but other than that, you know, it's kind of hard to address it.

DIGNON: You mentioned that it's important to dispel myths. Like how do you go about dispelling myths about how the minimum wage will lose jobs or how the UBI is socialism or how the green revolution will cost us thousands of jobs? How do you go about dispelling those myths on the, I know you said it's hard to get these changes on the granular level, but oftentimes myths must be dispelled on a granular level. Like how do you go about doing that? And if you notice my camera's gonna be off, but I am listening.

MOYSE: Sorry, what? Okay, got it. Got it, you know, I got it.

DIGNON: Got to blow on my nose.

MOYSE: Okay. I think a lot of that for me would probably be a messaging thing. And this is something that I talk about, it always comes up in my conversation, especially about economics. The people who support, and I don't want to necessarily say it's one party, pretty much is one party, but the people who support these issues that I'm talking about and these policies that I'm talking about. They don't know how to talk, and they don't know how to sell themselves. We have seen a shift, and this is also a major problem—it's a problem with the Democratic Party. It's the Democrats, right, but it's a bigger problem within the Democratic Party that I've seen as a trend that the elites in the Democratic Party have increasingly appealed to college-educated white people. That is the demographic that is now what the Democratic Party caters to. It's highly educated elites. And that's great if you have a group of really smart people who have bachelor's degrees and graduate degrees who say “Yeah, we'll vote for you every time. We're consistent voters.” But guess what? The vast majority of people are not that. So you can't just turn in and say “Well, we want these people.” And if your messaging appeals to specifically college educated people, do you really expect someone who doesn't have that same education or someone who has fundamentally different priorities than someone with a college education to listen to what you're saying and say “This makes a lot of sense”? No, it doesn't make sense how they talk to voters, it just doesn't make sense. It is way too separated. It's focused a lot on issues

¹⁴ Referring to when President Joseph Biden accompanied the Union of Automotive Workers on a picket line outside of a General Motors plant in Belleville, MI.

that the vast majority of Americans really don't care about. And I'm sorry, that sounds insensitive, but it's just true. You get to a point where you're talking about issues and you're talking about things that are just no longer relevant to the majority of people. So if you can re-center the political conversation on the fact that, listen, the opposite party is literally sitting on the laps of millionaires and billionaires, they take money constantly from the wealthiest parts of our country, and they are completely funded and backed up by the dark money of these corporations that literally, literally every single person in this country that doesn't work at a high level hate, then you will shift the conversation and you will gain more support. I mean, that is one thing that is entirely bipartisan in this country at this point. There are so many people in this country that care fundamentally and know on a very basic level that companies are too big; they have too much power. We have tech companies, big tech companies that have gained so much power and influence in this country. It is dangerous. It is dangerous for all of us. So if you can somehow shift the conversation to a message that is not necessarily more populist, right? That doesn't necessarily appeal to "the lowest denominator," but is more simple and is more appealing to a majority of people, you'll start winning elections. I mean, that's what we've seen. I would say a great example would be Pennsylvania. You saw that with, to a lesser extent, John Fetterman¹⁵, to a larger extent, Shapiro¹⁶, right? The new governor. And one of his first things that he did, when he was elected governor, was he eliminated bachelor's degree requirements on 90% of state jobs. Because he said, these state jobs just don't need that bachelor requirement. So if you can address policies like that. And then he also has been essentially trying to make a state that is more friendly to organized labor. If you can create those kinds of policies, you'll appeal to a broad base of people that the Democratic Party used to appeal to. That used to be the Democratic Party's base. It no longer is. They've shifted increasingly towards the right wing because Trump came in and said basically "I know that your life sucks. I know that your jobs have been reoriented overseas and I am angry about that and I know you are too and let's just screw it. We both hate the system, so vote for me and I hate the system and I'll come in and destroy everything." And they said, of course, because of course if someone says that they're an outsider and your life has been fundamentally screwed by every single lawmaker that's been in power, of course you'd be like "Yeah, let's vote for the outsider. Let's see what he can do." And guess what? He did nothing. He did absolutely nothing for them. He only exacerbated wealth inequality and he's only more entrenched in special interests and in interests that are fundamentally bad for the future of our country, whether that was oil, whether that was big tech. And so now we're at a crossroads. You have a smaller base of people that will support Trump no matter what. That base is consistent, but it is significantly diminished than what it was. And so you have that small base of voters that are really hard to address. Then you have your own base of voters, which is a mix of some labor that has kind of fallen off, but you still have some of it and more elite people. And then you have people kind of in the middle or people who are in identity crisis. I think people on the right wing at this point are kind of confused because a lot of them don't really see a candidate that suits them. They see that Trump has taken over the party and they don't know where to go. And then you have the people who don't really identify. So if you can, as a party, target the people who you know don't have anybody right now and target the average American, you will win. And that's what they have to do. And I'm sorry, if that means

¹⁵ A Senator from Pennsylvania first elected in 2022.

¹⁶ The Governor of Pennsylvania, Josh Shapiro, first elected in 2022.

talking less about issues that appeal to college educated voters, that's what needs to happen. Because if you know that a college educated voter is going to go out and vote for you every single time, because they know on a fundamental level that you are the best option, you don't have to constantly talk to them. You can talk to the people who you aren't sure about. You can talk to people who might be in the middle, who probably, if they're not talked to directly, just won't vote. And if you target those people, then you have a full coalition.

DIGNON: With those college educated voters and with, I mean, college students are now eligible to vote as we age, what role like on a university campus can advocacy—can you advocate for for these college students who seemingly only have one option, and they only have one real choice, according to you. Like, how can advocacy occur on a college campus like that, then?

MOYSE: Right. And now I do want to clarify, there are certainly people who are college educated and who are Republican, or who lead to the right. That exists. But I'm just saying the vast majority of people or the majority of people with a bachelor's degree are going to vote for someone on the left, whether that person talks to them or not, right? Because they just understand the importance of voting and they're more likely to understand that that is probably a better choice. I want to get that out of the way. What do advocates have? Okay, so I think there are two things that advocates can do on the college level. First of all, obviously the actual, the most important part, which is registering people and making sure they vote. I would say in New Hampshire, we have a large base of college voters. And in fact, I recently was in a meeting with, he's the chairman of the New Hampshire Democratic Party. And he basically said to us “Listen, the only reason why we have won the elections that we have won in New Hampshire over the last, you know, 10 or 20 years is because college students have registered and voted here.” Because I mean, like when you think about it, New Hampshire is not that big of a state. The people who vote here, that's an even smaller group of people. And if you have a number of colleges here that comprise a base of tens of thousands of students, you can really make an impact in an election and you can really change what goes on on the state level. And that's true in a lot of swing states. I mean, you see the margins in a lot of these swing states are so tiny. So if you can somehow influence college students to vote. And at this point, we've learned that that is becoming increasingly easier because college students in Generation Z are the most politically oriented and politically interested generation in years at this age. So if you can harness that and get them to vote, that will really cause big differences. Now, the other thing, this is my personal philosophy on what you need to do as an advocate or an activist on a college campus, especially on a college campus like mine, I attend Dartmouth, very separated, I would say, from the real world. The vast majority, not the vast majority, one fifth of people here are literally from the 1%, the economic 1%. I mean, the vast majority of people here were wealthy, very wealthy, and myself included. I come from a relatively privileged background in comparison to the rest of the country. But I think what needs to happen on the college level is to make sure people are aware and people are understanding of where the rest of the country is. Because at this point, in a lot of classes and a lot of peers that I talk to, it is clear that this school, and I'm sure it's common at a lot of schools, are not preparing leaders of the vast majority of people, right? It is preparing leaders that will be separated from the regular person, maybe perhaps corporate leaders, perhaps leaders in a more separated sense. It is not preparing people to have real conversations and to be aware of how the vast majority of Americans live their lives. And that is fundamentally

a problem. If you are living in a society where your centers of education, your centers of higher education, are separating their most highly educated people and kind of educating them in this kind of bubble that is isolating them from the rest of the country. What, I mean, what do you have? Essentially, you're creating an entirely separate class. At this point, economic inequality is so, so large, but now you're just perpetuating that inequality by educating people and culturing people who are going to your lead institutions that they should just be focused on and they are going to live in wealthy society and they really don't need to worry about anything else. And that is a big problem at a lot, the elitism at a lot of these institutions. So I would say as an activist, focusing a lot of your talk and a lot of your efforts towards making sure students are aware and students are preoccupied with the issues that will affect the vast majority of people. And honestly, if these students are not told that, and if we are not reminding ourselves of that, there's a good chance that you can graduate from the school and never think about those people again. And you can live in your bubble. We live now in a country where you can get your degree from an elite school and go off and work on Wall Street or work in a nonprofit and live a life that is completely separated. But if we keep doing that, and we let our institutions do that, it will be damaging.

DIGNON: How do you raise awareness of the rest of America on a college campus? Like I know you talked about the Dartmouth Union and your work with them. How the Political Union puts on debates. How do you get that to reach a broader audience?

MOYSE: Oh crap, sorry. That's a bug. We have a lot of bugs here. Give me one second. I got to kill it.

DIGNON: Take your time.

MOYSE: Okay, I might have gotten it, I might not have gotten it, but I don't know. I think that you focus, well, there are a number of ways to do that. One, on a more communal level, you can just essentially make sure that the issues that affect the vast majority of people are talked about. So whether that is unions, whether that is welfare, bringing those conversations to the forefront and making sure they're being discussed, making sure people are aware of them is important. Making sure people are aware generally of how the wealth in our country is separated or is divided. Something that's very interesting to me. I was talking to a kid the other day, I was with some of my friends and he kind of sat down with us. We were eating, and we were talking about something, a common theme, is a conversation about how rich people here are. And we were like, someone asked, because we were talking about the top 1% and someone asked "What's the cutoff?" And I was like "Oh, it's \$660,000 a year." It's the cutoff for the top 1%. And the kid who was sitting there, he was like "What?" I was like "Yeah." He said "Oh, I thought that was average." So you have this immense cognitive dissonance that I think also exists where you just kind of have to make sure people are aware of their privilege in relation to others. I don't know how to really do that on a more systemic level. I think the other thing that is important that I'm trying to learn how to do would be to make sure courses about social issues are oriented and are focused on economic inequality and are focused on the state of our economy in relation to everybody instead of in relation to just elite people. That is more hard to do. Influencing

curriculum is harder to do, but it is something that needs to happen and I'm trying to figure out how to do that here. That's one of my goals. But yeah, that's what I would say.

DIGNON: Part of college economics is based around a school's endowment. And I know you've been talking, before we started, you were talking about an article you're writing for The Dartmouth about the Dartmouth endowment. Would you care to get into how that endowment impacts (a) school life and (b), I don't want to say corporate America, but how a university interacts with the corporate world?

MOYSE: Absolutely. So I am an opinion columnist for The Dartmouth¹⁷. Check it out. I think it's thedartmouth.com. Check it out. Lots of great stuff on there. No, but I'm recently—actually my first column, I wrote a couple things, but it's my first column. And it's about the endowment at Dartmouth. So the endowment at Dartmouth right now is currently worth \$7.9 billion. The figure is if they took the endowment and they split it up right now among the undergraduate population, every single undergraduate would get \$1.7 million. So they have \$1.7 million for every single undergraduate that currently attends the school. It's an obscene amount of money. And I essentially write in my article that obviously, I don't think it's hard to argue as a student, and I don't think the vast majority of people would argue that Dartmouth shouldn't have the resources that it needs to support academic endeavors and ambitious goals of academics here. It's incredibly important that your institutions of higher education are well funded. At the same time, there are major problems with how the endowment here is handled. I would say one, 60%, over 60% of the endowment is invested in either private equity or hedge funds. And I've read all of the paperwork. It took me a while, but I've read all the paperwork on the Dartmouth Office of Investment website. I've read all of the paperwork in all of their yearly financial reports. There is not a single, not a single ethical or moral mention in, first of all, in the endowment report. That's their yearly report that they publish and it includes information on the endowment. There is not a single mention of ethics at all in what they invest in or how they invest. There is one disclaimer on the Office of Investment site that's about climate change and it essentially is about them divesting¹⁸. Dartmouth divested from fossil fuel in 2017 only after massive protests. There are a couple caveats though. They divested from direct investment in fossil fuels. So they still probably are invested in fossil fuels indirectly through hedge funds and private equity. Which I mean at that point what even is the point, right? If you're not directly buying shares in ExxonMobil but you are putting your money into a hedge fund that's buying shares in ExxonMobil, you're doing the same thing. It's just one degree of separation. But the problem is that since they invest in private equity and hedge funds, it's a black box. We have no idea where the money's going. Obviously to some extent that's expected because private equity and hedge funds keep what they invest in secret most of the time or they try to keep it more protected because it's investment strategy. But it also creates this very alarming aspect of trust that we just have to have with the people who are investing. We just have to think, okay, I don't know what they're investing in, and they have no ethical guidelines, so who knows what it is, and we've seen in the past 20 years that private equity, the growth of private equity, has been responsible for heinous things. I mentioned this in my article, but private equity has been blamed or has been directly held

¹⁷ The Dartmouth is the student newspaper at Dartmouth College.

¹⁸ Referencing to divestment from ownership in stocks related to oil and gas companies.

responsible for the gentrification and the eviction of impoverished people and specifically diverse neighborhoods in major cities around the country. They have been held responsible for the creation and growth of surprise medical bills. It's like all things that we hate, right? And they just, they were found to be responsible in a study for over 1 million layoffs in the retail sector. I can go on, right? There's not a lot of things that are ethically good about private equity, but it gets better returns than a lot of other investment strategies. So I basically wrote in my article, it's really hard to believe Dartmouth is all about being ethically holistic. I mean, recently they've talked about how they've expanded financial aid, they're trying to make sure that the college is inclusive to everybody, that they have diverse perspectives. It essentially feels like it's do as I say, not as I do, because they are saying that they're dedicated to all these things and then in, what I would argue what influences the country most directly, the amount of money, like if they're the billions of dollars that they're investing into things that is investing that is affecting things around the country, they are not making sure that that is in line with their values. And that is fundamentally hypocritical.

DIGNON: Should it be students' responsibility to change the way their schools invest?

MOYSE: Absolutely. Absolutely. Who else's responsibility is it? There's no one else to do it. If no one else is here to hold the university accountable and to hold schools accountable in what they do, it's the job of students. Now there is one thing that I will give to Dartmouth. I'll give them credit. They say that students are leaders in changing things. And that has been true here. Recently we had a new policy in place. You can now, for certain things, you can now take mental health leave for two terms, which is basically, you know, like, I think it's up to a year and hold your place here. So it's certain things like that, where that is a policy that is a direct result of student advocacy and the divesting was a direct result of student advocacy. So they do listen to students if there's enough of a push. There just needs to be that push or else nothing's going to happen.

DIGNON: How do you create that push?

MOYSE: You educate people around you. You make people, you get people to care about it. You tell them what's the matter with it. You get a really good elevator pitch. I know Divest, the group here that helped to divest Dartmouth from fossil fuels. They had stickers that they would put. They still are up. They're everywhere. They put them everywhere. Even though Dartmouth has already divested, they literally plastered the campus with them. And it was simple. Their message was quick. It's "We need to divest from fossil fuels." And that was it and it worked and it got really popular and people obviously were, you know, it resounded with people, with young people and it got to enough of a fever pitch where the college realized that they had to change it. And so I think that's mostly what it's about.

DIGNON: Thank you so much for your answers today. Within the next couple of weeks, I'll be reaching out with a transcript of this interview for you to make any edits to, as well as to ask some questions about how you would like yourself represented in this interview. You've already sent me your consent form. If you have any questions about that, please do not hesitate to reach out. This interview will be uploaded to Box very shortly, but it will not be uploaded to the Rare

Books Library until the transcript is ready and any necessary edits have been made with your consent. And I wanted to, again, just thank you for talking to me today and answering these questions with the depth that you have been.

MOYSE: Well, thank you for having me. It was a pleasure. I always like to talk about this. Thank you.

DIGNON: Pleasure. I'll be stopping the recording now.

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