**CPB:** [00:00:00] Civics 101 is supported in part by the Corporation for Public Broadcasting.

**ARCHIVAL:** [00:00:16] Those opposed shall say no.

**Domenico Montenaro:** [00:00:21] The conventions are really cool.

**ARCHIVAL:** [00:00:25] In the opinion of the chair, the ayes have it.

**Hannah McCarthy:** [00:00:32] For years, every four years for my whole conscious life, pretty much, I have watched snippets of nominating conventions and thought to myself, what on earth is going on here?

**Domenico Montenaro:** [00:00:43] There's so much buzz in the air. There is anticipation.

**ARCHIVAL:** [00:00:47] We don't have a moment to lose or a vote to spare.

[00:00:52] Nothing less than the fate of our nation and the future of our children hangs in the balance.

**Hannah McCarthy:** [00:00:58] It's three or four [00:01:00] days. And there are a bunch of speeches. And then states cast votes.

**ARCHIVAL:** [00:01:04] Alaska cast 18 votes for Governor Mitt Romney and 9 votes for Representative Ron Paul.

**Hannah McCarthy:** [00:01:13] There's always a celebrity or two, which, what is that about?

**ARCHIVAL:** [00:01:17] And I'm Sarah Silverman. And this past year I've been feeling the bern.

**Hannah McCarthy:** [00:01:22] And then finally, the presidential candidate nominee comes out and is like, I accept your nomination.

**Domenico Montenaro:** [00:01:29] The folks on the floor really want to hear from their nominee.

**ARCHIVAL:** [00:01:32] I accept your nomination for... your nomination... your nomination for president ... I accept your nomination for the presidency of the United States of America.

**Hannah McCarthy:** [00:01:49] Which also baffles me because don't we already know who the nominee is. That's the point of primaries and caucuses, right? Is [00:02:00] anyone surprised here?

[00:02:12] And as it turns out, the answers to those questions are not really. Not really.

[00:02:19] And sometimes. It is time to take a trip into the enigmatic world of nominating conventions. I'm Hannah McCarthy, by the way.

**Nick Capodice:** [00:02:29] I'm Nick Capodice.

**Hannah McCarthy:** [00:02:30] And this is Civics 101. And today we are talking nominating conventions. Domenico montanaro is kicking things off.

**Domenico Montenaro:** [00:02:37] I'm senior political editor and correspondent at NPR.

**Nick Capodice:** [00:02:41] When he was talking about actually going to conventions, I was so jealous.

**Hannah McCarthy:** [00:02:44] I know. Yeah, me too. Hint, hint. NHPR.

**Nick Capodice:** [00:02:47] You've been to a couple to the conventions.

**Domenico Montenaro:** [00:02:50] Yeah. I was a 2008, 2012 and 2016. So I've covered the last three. Been to both both times.

**Nick Capodice:** [00:02:56] All right. So we have these primaries and caucuses and the public [00:03:00] gets to weigh in and choose their nominee. Right. So what's actually going on at the nominating convention like? What is it? What's the connection between this big event and the state elections that preceded?

**Hannah McCarthy:** [00:03:12] That is the leap that I was having so much trouble making. But I think Domenico got me there.

[00:03:18] So I think -- I'm still -- I'm struggling with connecting the public's vote to what happens at the convention.

**Domenico Montenaro:** [00:03:26] Yeah.

**Hannah McCarthy:** [00:03:26] To what degree does our vote actually decide who the nominee is?

**Domenico Montenaro:** [00:03:32] It pretty much does. I mean, you know, it's I think that for the fact that the party itself wants to make sure that the process is as open and egalitarian as possible and democratic little D as possible now than it has been in past years. Remember, it wasn't that long ago when they were doing smoky room closed door nominating fights where that had nothing to do with people's votes. And remember, this is the Democratic Party's [00:04:00] nominee for president. This is not you know, it hasn't always been a democratic process because it was the party establishment that got to pick who they wanted to represent them to be president. So this process has only really emerged in the last 30 to 40 years where they've tried to make it more so that people's votes actually helped select the delegates for the person who will become the nominee. Pretty much that is tracked with what the voter sentiment has been for quite some time as opposed to way back in the 60s and before that when they would go into a back room and select someone.

**Nick Capodice:** [00:04:39] So 1968. Right.

**Domenico Montenaro:** [00:04:42] Yep.

**Nick Capodice:** [00:04:42] Bananas.

**ARCHIVAL:** [00:04:45] There is nothing in the rules of the Democratic Party they have a right to check us every ten minutes.

[00:04:48] Peace now, peace now!

**Hannah McCarthy:** [00:04:53] That was the convention that changed everything.

**ARCHIVAL:** [00:04:56] I'm looking down at Edwin Newman in the middle of a huge bunch [00:05:00] of security people.

**Nick Capodice:** [00:05:00] Right. 1968. Racial tension, protests. Dan Rather getting punched in the gut.

**ARCHIVAL:** [00:05:06] I'm sorry to be out of breath, but somebody belted me in the stomach during that.

**Hannah McCarthy:** [00:05:09] Gave new meaning to the term floor fight.

[00:05:11] The 1968 Democratic National Convention revealed to the parties that the American public would no longer accept a closed nomination system, a system where party elites got together at these conventions to needle and negotiate and smoke cigars until they'd struck a deal and picked the person who would be on the ballot to appease the public. The parties would take the results of primaries and caucuses into serious consideration.

[00:05:35] The people would, if all went well, choose the nominee.

**Nick Capodice:** [00:05:39] If all went well, as in, things could possibly go awry.

**Hannah McCarthy:** [00:05:45] I guess it depends on how you look at it.

[00:05:47] So most of the time everyone goes to the convention knowing who the nominee is because the people have spoken loud, clear and in droves.

**Alvin Tillery:** [00:05:57] And so the person that wins the [00:06:00] most delegates at the end of the cycle should cross a threshold for the nomination.

**Hannah McCarthy:** [00:06:07] Here's Alvin Tillery, political science professor at Northwestern University.

**Alvin Tillery:** [00:06:11] Both parties set a numerical threshold. If you you need, you know, 3000 delegates by this point, you know, a week before the convention, then you will be the automatic nominee and the convention will be just be a big party.

**Nick Capodice:** [00:06:27] And this is what we typically see, right? Primaries and caucuses come to a close and we all hear who most of us voted for.

[00:06:34] And then we get to watch that person be nominated for presidential candidacy at the Democratic or Republican National Convention on television.

**Hannah McCarthy:** [00:06:41] Right. And it's worth mentioning, by the way, that some third parties also host conventions. There's the Libertarian National Convention, the Green Party National Convention. And the principles with the third parties are the same as with the major parties. You crossed the threshold in the primary and you are the nominee. [00:07:00]

[00:07:01] But there is a second the highly unlikely possibility.

**Alvin Tillery:** [00:07:05] If no one gets that threshold.

[00:07:08] Then we have what's called a contested convention, a.k.a. Christmas for political scientists.

**Nick Capodice:** [00:07:14] Well, merry Christmas, policy nerds.

**Alvin Tillery:** [00:07:19] Right.

[00:07:19] Because we get to watch all of the floor negotiations and we get to sort of talk about and think about what's happening behind the scenes and then the conventions on the floor, the delegates from the states. And this operates very much like the Electoral College. All of the states send delegates to these conventions and they vote what they think is best for the state. Who will be the best nominee?

**Nick Capodice:** [00:07:46] If the primaries don't have a clear winner, the people the conventions get to pick our presidential nominee?

**Hannah McCarthy:** [00:07:51] Bingo.

**Alvin Tillery:** [00:07:53] And in the old days before primaries. That's how you picked you picked just at the convention. The state parties would send delegates. [00:08:00] They would get into the convention hall and you'd have multiple rounds of balloting, six, seven rounds of balloting before you would get a nominee coming through the system.

**Nick Capodice:** [00:08:10] Fat cats scratching each other's backs and smoking cigars.

**Hannah McCarthy:** [00:08:13] Handshakes and horse trading.

[00:08:17] Now, this hasn't actually happened since 1952. And then after primary reform in the 1960s, it became super unlikely, but it is possible.

**Nick Capodice:** [00:08:28] What's it actually literally look like on the floor?

**Hannah McCarthy:** [00:08:31] Oh, OK. So if you watched a convention, you might remember the moment when the camera pans from state to state to state and a delegate takes the mic and brags about their state for a little bit and then reports how many delegates each candidate received in their state.

**ARCHIVAL:** [00:08:49] Madam Secretary, the volunteer state, the state with no state income tax burden on budget surplus and [00:09:00] a balanced budget. Our pro-life state proudly cast our votes 16 votes for Senator Ted Cruz, 19 votes for Senator Marco Rubio, and thirty three votes to make America great again for Donald J. Trump.

**Hannah McCarthy:** [00:09:24] So that's casting a ballot, submitting the votes for a candidate for the nomination. And the rules vary from state to state. There are superdelegates who aren't pledged to anyone. They can vote for whoever they want. And then in some states, if a candidate gets the majority of public votes in a primary, then every delegate goes for that candidate.

**Nick Capodice:** [00:09:44] So you're not going to have this Trump-Cruz-Rubio split. You just have every vote going to Trump.

**Hannah McCarthy:** [00:09:49] Right.

**Nick Capodice:** [00:09:50] How would you end up having to take more than one ballot?

**Hannah McCarthy:** [00:09:52] It rarely happens. But if after the first round of voting, no candidate ends up with 51 percent of [00:10:00] the vote. Then you have to go again. And in that situation, it stops mattering if a delegate is pledged to a candidate. They can start changing their minds and maybe casting a ballot for someone else.

**Bruce Stinebrickner:** [00:10:10] Somebody has to get a majority. You know, you might reasonably ask, does that ever happen? Are there ever first ballots where someone doesn't get the nomination?

**Hannah McCarthy:** [00:10:18] This is Bruce Stinebrickner. He teaches American politics at DePauw University.

[00:10:24] And he told us about this one time. The voting just went on and on and on.

**Bruce Stinebrickner:** [00:10:30] I think the last time it's happened was 1924. 1924 was the last time that either party needed more than one ballot to nominate their candidate. And it was the Democratic Party. Are you ready? I believe they had over 100 ballots. I didn't say two ballots or three ballots. I believe they voted about a hundred times over four or five days. That must have been fun.

**Nick Capodice:** [00:10:58] A hundred times. [00:11:00]

**Hannah McCarthy:** [00:11:00] I looked it up. It was 103.

**Nick Capodice:** [00:11:03] So in a case like that, you're just taking the public's vote and it's like you're throwing it out the window because you go from delegates who are pledged to a candidate to delegates who can now just go willy nilly and do whatever they please or be coerced or corrupted. It would be really exciting to watch.

**Bruce Stinebrickner:** [00:11:18] You will really enjoy a real life analog. It will be exciting. So will I. I mean, I'm hoping it happens. But in every year there's kind of this rumble of, oh, this is the year no one's going to win on the first ballot. But don't bet your house on that. I mean, the party organization and followers in general understand that anything other than a first ballot nomination is probably going to work to the disadvantage of the party in the general election.

**Hannah McCarthy:** [00:11:44] So, yes, a contested convention would be super exciting to watch, but it could get in the way of the other thing that's going on at a convention which has nothing to do with voting or the nomination.

**Tammy Vigil:** [00:11:56] That convention itself has not been the place where people choose [00:12:00] the candidates.

[00:12:00] This is Tammy Vigil, professor of communications at Boston University. The deal is because we've got primaries, because we pretty much already know who the nominee is before the convention even starts. Modern conventions are about PR.

[00:12:15] I mean, the convention is almost entirely speeches about what the Republican Party or the Democratic Party believes.

**ARCHIVAL:** [00:12:21] Who would trust Hilary Clinton to protect them? I wouldn't, would you?

**Hannah McCarthy:** [00:12:31] It's a lot of we collectively agree on this, guys, don't we? I mean, look how amazing we are. We're better than that other party and we're going to win.

**ARCHIVAL:** [00:12:40] They'll tell them -- they'll tell them how this time we listened to our hopes instead of our fears.

**Tammy Vigil:** [00:12:49] And then also testing out different planks of the platform and also giving voice to either rising stars in the party so [00:13:00] that they can kind of get a testing ground on the national level and showing respect for sort of the lions of the party. Right. That the grand statespeople.

**Nick Capodice:** [00:13:07] Let's pause here for a sec. The platform! So the convention is where the platform gets figured out. But what is the platform?

**Tammy Vigil:** [00:13:16] Yeah. So with the platform, it's really important because it's -- it gives a party something to rally around. It also tells people what the party stands for. So if part of your -- if one of the planks in your platform is, for example, women's rights was a part of several platforms very explicitly, especially in the 1970s and 80s. It tells you that this is something that's important to us. And then everybody can get buy in. And then messaging from both the actual candidate and then also all of the surrogates that are working for the candidate. They have a similar sort of starting point for all their messaging so that there's consistency across the board.

**Hannah McCarthy:** [00:13:54] Of course, even the platform isn't really the point, right.

[00:13:59] I mean, you don't really hear [00:14:00] a nominee going on about the party platform during the general election campaign.

[00:14:05] The platform, the networking, the clapping and the yelling and the balloons. I mean, a big part of that is just checking in with one another, making sure everyone is feeling good and coming together as a party.

**Tammy Vigil:** [00:14:20] So it's it's much more of a celebratory or confirmatory event now instead of a decision making event like it had been. So they're trying to put an hour up, very positive outward face on the party for people who are either undecided or people who are in the party that they can sort of rally. So there's there's that part of it. That's a huge part of them. In that way, it kind of is become sort of a very celebratory, jovial kind of event.

**Hannah McCarthy:** [00:14:48] Bruce Stinebrickner there actually likened the convention to spring break for politicos.

**Bruce Stinebrickner:** [00:14:51] Don't college kids go off to Florida in spring vacation and have fun with other college students?

[00:15:01] I think the answer is yes. [00:15:00] Wouldn't people who are interested in national presidential politics have a lot of fun go into some place all expenses paid and fancy hotels hanging around with other delegates? I think the answer's yes.

**Nick Capodice:** [00:15:14] Basically, it's like a giant party with thousands of people who are all into the same stuff you're into?

**Bruce Stinebrickner:** [00:15:18] It would be fun to be a delegate at the national convention. There's a lot of wining and dining. There's a lot of speech giving. I'm sure there's a lot of partying.

[00:15:26] It would be fun. It would be a four day party with other people interested in politics.

**Nick Capodice:** [00:15:34] I got pretty deep into delegates in our primaries and caucuses episode just in case people are wondering how people actually get to the convention and how votes are apportioned out and all that jazz. So if you want to know about that, just give it a listen. But who are these delegates? Who are these people?

**Tammy Vigil:** [00:15:49] Sometimes it's, you know, people who worked for the campaign, help for a campaign or volunteered and then they get tickets in.

[00:15:56] It's really it's kind of interesting because it's not just delegates [00:16:00] who show up to the convention anymore. Sometimes you've got you get a lot of scholars who show up. You get a lot of celebrities. You've got people who have worked the campaigns who are just there for the sort of celebration and the experience of it all. Members of the party who aren't delegates, but are there because they're part of their party members. So it's not really just delegates only kind of event. It hasn't been that way for a long time.

**Hannah McCarthy:** [00:16:24] Getting to host the convention is like scoring the Olympics on a smaller scale. The security and the mess is a pain, but it brings in tons and tons of revenue and tourism. People will pay thousands of dollars for tickets, the DNC or RNC, especially if the candidate is really popular or it seems like some drama could go down on the convention floor.

**Nick Capodice:** [00:16:46] How do they choose the city for the convention?

**Hannah McCarthy:** [00:16:48] Well, look at the 2020 Democratic National Convention. The DNC chose Milwaukee. Now, they were also considering Houston and Miami, but they picked this smaller Midwestern city [00:17:00] in a state that up until the 2016 election was basically a Democratic guarantee.

**Nick Capodice:** [00:17:05] Right. Until Wisconsin voted for Trump.

**Hannah McCarthy:** [00:17:07] Right. So the DNC is saying, hey, we see you, Wisconsin, we're gonna show up for you in a major way. And then once a national committee has chosen a city, they appoint a convention CEO. This is the person who's going to be in charge of the day to day operations of this event and who pays for the whole thing. Part of the deal with scoring the convention is that the host city has to raise the funds for this big party. So they also form a committee. The DNC plans the thing and the host committee ponies up the cash tens of millions of dollars.

[00:17:44] I talked to Domenico Montanaro about the mood at these conventions, like the event feels really powerful and significant, even though the nominee is usually a foregone conclusion. And so much of the event is really dedicated to patting [00:18:00] yourself on the back and building camaraderie. And he said that actually the convention can potentially be a decent barometer of the campaign to follow an indicator of an unpredictable future.

**Domenico Montenaro:** [00:18:14] The difference between, let's say, in 2008 between the Democratic and Republican conventions was it was like the place was on happy pills at the Democratic convention because they just really loved their nominee. They felt like hope and change was in the air and that they were going to win in in that election.

**ARCHIVAL:** [00:18:31] During our national convention, we will demonstrate to all Americans why we need Barack Obama and Joe Biden and the White House.

**Domenico Montenaro:** [00:18:38] The campaign for John McCain.

[00:18:43] That convention was a little more dour because it started off with Republicans canceling the first few days because of Hurricane Gustav.

[00:18:52] If you remember that.

**ARCHIVAL:** [00:18:52] Fox News alert now from Denver to St. Paul, Minnesota, we're getting news now on the potential for some changes in the Republican [00:19:00] schedule starting on Monday.

**Domenico Montenaro:** [00:19:02] And that wasn't even a hurricane that was anywhere near St. Paul where the convention was held. But because they had such bleed over from Katrina, they didn't want to seem like they were being insensitive. So it just got off on a bad foot and really was indicative of what would happen during the campaign. So sometimes you can get a sense with what the energy is like at it, each place on how the campaign's gonna go.

**Nick Capodice:** [00:19:28] It seems like the modern nominating convention is simultaneously totally arbitrary and completely crucial to a campaign.

**Hannah McCarthy:** [00:19:37] Exactly. There is this thing called the convention bounce, where the presidential nominee usually gets a boost in the polls immediately following the convention. Bill Clinton got the biggest of all time back in 1992. He climbed about 30 points.

**Nick Capodice:** [00:19:53] I mean, it makes sense. America loves celebrity. And what's more aggrandizing than accepting the nomination [00:20:00] of an entire political party before millions of TV viewers?

**Hannah McCarthy:** [00:20:02] Yeah, we could, assuming there's a clear primaries winner, we could just go right into the presidential election. But then, you know, what would elections or the United States, for that matter, be without the pomp and circumstance?

**ARCHIVAL:** [00:20:27] Part of this great, great Republican family that will give the leadership...

[00:20:31] when I think back of all the miles and all the months and all the memories, I think of you and I recall the poets words...

[00:20:39] all those millions of Democrats and independents who I know are looking for a cause around which to rally...

[00:20:44] There are moments which cannot be completely explained by words, their meaning can only be articulated by the inaudible language of the heart. Tonight is such a moment for me.

**Hannah McCarthy:** [00:21:21] Before [00:21:00] we go, I want to talk about a presidential election in which not two, but three nominees employed completely different strategies in their bid for president.

[00:21:33] Walking us through it is, of course, Brady Carlson. All Things Considered host at Wisconsin Public Radio and author of Dead Presidents. All right. Brady, when are we.

**Brady Carlson:** [00:21:46] We're talking about 1992, which is as of now, the last time an incumbent U.S. president has run for re-election and lost. So it's been a while. So what happened?

**Hannah McCarthy:** [00:21:58] Oh yeah, that is super, super [00:22:00] rare. What in sam hill happened, Brady?

**Brady Carlson:** [00:22:04] Well, that's what makes this so interesting, because if you had asked somebody in, say, 1990 or 1991 what this campaign was going to look like, they probably wouldn't have guessed anything close to what actually played out. Remember that in 1992, Republicans have won all but one of the last six presidential elections, the last three in a row pretty handily and eight years before Ronald Reagan had won. Forty nine states on election night.

**ARCHIVAL:** [00:22:31] Reagan is our projected winner. Ronald Wilson Reagan of California, a sports announcer, a film actor.

**Brady Carlson:** [00:22:39] And at one point, it looked like George Bush was going to have the same luck when he ran for re-election during his term. Bush had led the U.S. through Operation Desert Storm in Iraq. And at one point during that episode, his approval ratings were like 88 percent, 90 percent. And he just really, really high. The Cold War was thawing. The Berlin Wall [00:23:00] was coming down. And at home, Bush had signed some pretty high profile bipartisan bills, like the Americans with Disabilities Act, the Clean Air Act, this big budget deficit deal, the kinds of things that you can say, I'm getting stuff done to the American voter.

**Hannah McCarthy:** [00:23:15] All right. So Bush was in really good shape. People are like him, right? So where did it all go wrong?

**Brady Carlson:** [00:23:21] Well, the recession changed that. There was an economic expansion in the late 80s that slowed and then stopped. This is the time of the savings and loan crisis. Private mortgage banks were collapsing and there was a federal bailout. Technically, according to economists, the recession was not very long, but the recovery was slow, especially in key states like all, say, New Hampshire. And when the economy isn't doing great, usually neither is your approval rating. And remember that budget deal I mentioned with the Republican base, which had never loved George Bush the way they'd loved Ronald Reagan, was furious about it because part of the budget deal included [00:24:00] tax hikes. And when Bush had run for president in 1988, he said, read my lips: no new taxes.

**ARCHIVAL:** [00:24:07] Read my lips: no new taxes.

[00:24:13] I've watched that clip a lot of times because it was really, really important. It is what convinces a significant chunk of conservative grass roots voters to back an alternative Republican candidate, commentator Pat Buchanan. He challenges the sitting president and does pretty well. I mean, Bush gets the nomination. He's still the incumbent. And incumbency has its advantages. But it means that he has to pay more heed to the party's conservatives, including social conservatives, at a time that he's trying to show that he's in touch with average Americans concerns about the economy. Meanwhile, Pat Buchanan is telling delegates at the Republican National Convention that the country is in a cultural war.

**ARCHIVAL:** [00:24:59] It is a cultural [00:25:00] war as critical to the kind of nation we shall be as the Cold War itself, for this war...

**Brady Carlson:** [00:25:08] All of which adds up to a president who had at one point been on track to easily win re-election, was now not such a sure bet.

**Hannah McCarthy:** [00:25:14] Which means that the Democrats must be like slavering at this point, right. They actually stand a chance and they never expected to.

[00:25:22] So who did they pick to go against Bush?

**Hannah McCarthy:** [00:25:24] The Democrats nominated the governor of Arkansas, Bill Clinton, who was presenting himself as a new Democrat. Both he and his running mate were from the South. They weren't coastal or northern liberals. They were talking about revving up private businesses rather than just emphasizing spending on social programs. Now, Clinton is not a perfect candidate. Critics mocked him even back then for saying things like I feel your pain to voters or saying that he'd tried marijuana when he was younger, but he didn't inhale. Kind of trying to have it both ways.

**ARCHIVAL:** [00:25:55] I experimented with marijuana who didn't like it, and didn't inhale [00:26:00] and never tried it again.

**Brady Carlson:** [00:26:02] But he was able to present himself as a new kind of Democratic nominee, someone who could solve problems rather than just sticking to a party's ideology, that he cared about jobs and cared about the budget deficit. So it made it harder for Republicans to paint him as another version of, say, Jimmy Carter or Walter Mondale. He was something different, but he also wasn't the only challenger to President Bush in 1992.

**Hannah McCarthy:** [00:26:28] What? Who else?

**Brady Carlson:** [00:26:29] H. Ross Perot. A business executive worth more money than most of us would see in a lifetime. Loved to go on TV talk shows. A populist who opposed free trade and promised to shake up the political system and get things done. Perot's message, in short, is that we were doing government all wrong and I could fix it.

**ARCHIVAL:** [00:26:48] Now, if you can take four more years of this, God bless you. I can't.

**Brady Carlson:** [00:26:52] He also thought that campaigns were run all wrong. So instead of hiring the same consultants and placing a lot of campaign ads, [00:27:00] he would run campaign infomercials on cable TV. You'd see these programs where he'd sit there with a bunch of charts and talk about the budget deficit or the national debt or trade policy.

**ARCHIVAL:** [00:27:10] Seventy percent of our four trillion dollar national debt is doing payable in five years, and they do that keep the interest rates low.

**Brady Carlson:** [00:27:19] And because he was putting tens of millions of dollars of his own money into the campaign, he ended up with enough support to get into the nationally televised debates with President Bush and Governor Clinton. So for the first time, we had three candidates in the debates.

**Hannah McCarthy:** [00:27:31] That must have been so bizarre to watch.

[00:27:34] How did those play out?

**Brady Carlson:** [00:27:35] They were pretty memorable, to say the least.

[00:27:41] The most memorable moments from these debates reflected the narratives that were developing around each of these candidates. Clinton is the I feel your pain guy. He had pushed for a town hall style debate so that he could engage with the audiences. They'd tell him about their problems, about their difficulties, and he'd engage with them.

**ARCHIVAL:** [00:27:58] Tell me it's affected you again. You [00:28:00] know, people who lost their homes and lost their homes?

[00:28:05] Well, I've been governor of a small state for 12 years. I'll tell you how it's affected me.

**Brady Carlson:** [00:28:10] Perot, meanwhile, is giving snappy TV friendly answers about his top issues. At one point, he's asked, "you don't have any government experience. What about that?" And he says, "that's right. I don't have any experience running up a four trillion dollar debt."

**ARCHIVAL:** [00:28:23] Now, just for the record, I don't have any spin doctors. I don't have any speechwriters. Probably shows.

[00:28:32] I make those charts you see on television.

**Brady Carlson:** [00:28:34] For Bush, the people who thought he was out of touch with ordinary Americans saw him at one point sneak a look at his watch during the debate, which was a signal to those critics that this is a guy who doesn't really want to be here.

**Hannah McCarthy:** [00:28:47] You know what, Brady, the moment I see someone sneak a look at the watch, I'm done with them. It's not cool. I'm guessing that Clinton came out on top here.

**Brady Carlson:** [00:28:56] Clinton did indeed come out on top. He didn't get a majority of the popular vote. He got 43 [00:29:00] percent. Bush was at 37 percent. Perot more than 18 percent. But because generally whoever gets the most votes in a state ends up with their electoral votes. That gave Clinton a majority in the Electoral College over Bush. Perot didn't win any states. And while Bush's supporters called him a spoiler, analysts say he probably didn't cost the president his re-election. But that said, there were lessons from all three of these candidates and their campaigns that resonate even in to today. For Bush, it was taxes. The read my lips thing. The national conservative movement still points back to that 1990 budget deal saying we can't ever, ever, ever do this again, because politically, look where it got us. For Clinton, it was a line that they had put up in the campaign offices that sort of summed up their philosophy. And I'll quote, It's the economy, stupid. You'll still hear pundits on cable news talking about that line today. It's been the rallying cry of the Clinton wing [00:30:00] of the Democratic Party for decades now that if you follow the lessons of 1992, don't tack too far to the left. Focus on economic issues. Talk about the middle class and the party will win for Perot. Here's the lesson from those infomercials and his many appearances on TV interview shows that there's a path forward for populist outsider candidates to bypass the usual political circles and the usual media circles as well. You just go straight to disaffected voters and say, I'm your man. All of which sounds pretty familiar even today. And one more note about these three candidate debates. This is one of the few times where the vice presidential debate becomes memorable because you add Vice President Dan Quayle. You had Clinton's running mate, Senator Al Gore, and then you had former Admiral James Stockdale. That was Perot's running mate, who would later say he hadn't been fully briefed by Perot's unorthodox campaign. And so the opening [00:31:00] line, as he's introducing himself to the country as the candidate for vice president, is a line for the ages.

**ARCHIVAL:** [00:31:08] Who am I? Why am I here?

**Brady Carlson:** [00:31:14] And unfortunately, that's like the one thing that anybody remembered about Stockdale running for vice president, but still, at least he got one line out there.

**Hannah McCarthy:** [00:31:33] Civics 101 was produced this week by me, Hannah McCarthy with Nick Capodice. We got help from Ben Henry and Jackie Fulton.

**Nick Capodice:** [00:31:40] Erika Janik is our executive producer and chair of the Shearing Season in East Cumbria National Committee.

**Hannah McCarthy:** [00:31:45] Maureen McMurry can throw a crazier party than your national convention any day.

**Nick Capodice:** [00:31:50] Music in this episode by Florian Decros, KieLoKaz, Scott Holmes and Chad Crouch.

**Hannah McCarthy:** [00:31:55] And hey, by the way, are you a social studies or government teacher who managed to get all the way [00:32:00] to this part of the credits? First of all, bless you. Second of all, we need your help. We're hiring educators to make high school level activities and lesson plans to pair with Civics 101 episodes. And you might be the right person for the job.

**Nick Capodice:** [00:32:14] If you're interested or you know someone who is, just drop me a line and we can chat about it. It's nick@civics101podcast.org.

**Hannah McCarthy:** [00:32:20] Civics 101, in addition to being fueled by all of you, is supported in part by the Corporation for Public Broadcasting and is a production of NHPR, New Hampshire Public Radio.