

## Budzban, Theising talk presidential race



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On this week's segment of Segue, Dean of SIUE's College of Arts and Sciences (CAS) Greg Budzban, PhD, welcomes Andy Theising, PhD, SIUE professor and chair in the Department of Political Science.

A St. Louis native, Theising expresses a long-standing love for SIUE. Beginning as an adjunct faculty in the department 20 years ago, Theising transitioned to tenure track faculty in 2002 and has since become chair of the department.

In a conversation coming on the coattails of Super Tuesday, they discuss the primary election landscape, characteristics and issues driving the candidates' successes, and predictions for the future of this presidential race.

Budzban and Theising share a belief that Super Tuesday is meant to "make decisions early" and "give direction" in whittling down the lists of presidential candidates.

Theising jokes that, "Unfortunately, some of the candidates don't seem to be getting the message. It's still a crowded field." He adds, "What used to drive people out was the fact that, 'If I can't perform well, I can't raise any money.' Now there's so much money in places – and it can move so quickly – that people are not motivated to drop out."

Although the pool of presidential candidates is still large, Theising believes this occurrence is good for the outcome of the election cycle. "We'll have better candidates, better talking points and better campaigners," he shares.

The men discuss Donald Trump's campaign, noting debate points that are likely the sources of his success. As Trump is often mistakenly labeled a populist, Theising provides a more in-depth explanation of populism's true characteristics.

Theising and Budzban also discuss immigration, a current hot-button issue for all candidates. On one hand, Theising describes the large Hispanic population and their perceptions. "A lot of that population has family outside of the United States, and they'd like to see a plan for that family to come in. There are a lot of undocumented people as well, and that's an important population. So, that's weighing on the decision for that important group of voters."

On the other hand, he expresses the thinking of many Americans on immigration. "As the issue has been raised here, the discussion of immigration has been built upon fear. There's a lot of fear out there – fear of crime, fear of terrorism and others."

Theising believes that candidates are taking advantage of this fear factor, sharing a unique fact to intensify his point. "Particularly when it comes to security, people will act on how they feel rather than what the real numbers are," he says.

When Budzban asks to share predictions for the candidacies, Theising cites the deceiving success of Donald Trump's numbers. "Trump is doing well, but the vote is being divided up among so many candidates – again,

it's getting pretty late in the cycle to have so many choices on the ballot," he points out. "So, Trump's getting a lot, but he's not getting a majority. What's going to happen is everyone's watching to see if he gets enough votes to clinch the nomination. There's a good chance he will not – he'll have the most, but he will not have the majority."

From an historical perspective, they discuss the possibility of the conventions yielding a rare occurrence: entering a presidential convention without an obvious winner for each party. "The last time I can think of this happening was the 1912 election for the Democrats," Theising says. "The favorite was Speaker of the House Champ Clark, from Missouri. He couldn't get the majority of votes, and Woodrow Wilson was put up as a compromise candidate and went on to be a two-term president."

Explained by several political editorials as "an existential crisis," Theising notes the extremist messages and tactics being utilized by several Republican Party candidates. "The only logic I can see to what Donald Trump is doing is he is playing a specific strategy to win the primary," he shares. "If he gets the nomination, he will make a gigantic shift for the general election. Because his positions are just everywhere, I think we'll see this big shift over to a more centrist position."

"Any of these politicians that need to shift to the middle, at least on the Republican side – they're getting so extreme and pulling out even the extremes of our society, I have to wonder if they can come to the middle and truly have any credibility."

They review the impressive Bernie Sanders movement, mentioning his ability to bring rise to "democratic socialist" beliefs and captivate young voters. Theising questions Sanders' future success on the ballot, noting the reluctance of young adults to participate at the voting booths.

"We are governed by those who show up," he explains. "There are enough young people who stay home to change the outcome in just about every congressional district. If low-income voters were to show up in their true numbers, they would dominate any election. If the young were to show up in their true numbers, they would dominate any election. The question is: 'Will they show up?'"

Independent of electing a new president, Theising believes the Sanders movement will make an impact congressionally. "What might happen is there may be a greater allegiance to a party," he says. "I could see where Sanders would say, 'Quit voting Republican and start voting Democrat, so Hillary is sent to Washington with a Democratic Congress.'"

"That's what I think the Sanders movement is going to do, functionally – it may change the thinking on local congressional election. We may see a Democratic Senate – that's very likely. And I'm almost hesitant to say a Democratic House, but ..."

Budzban and Theising conclude by expressing their excitement for the final results of this election cycle. Budzban shares, "It's going to be amazing political theater, as we move forward." Theising agrees, claiming, "It could be the most interesting conventions we've seen in a generation."

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*By Logan Cameron, SIUE Marketing & Communications*