

Margaret Hoover 00:00

An entrepreneur turned political newcomer and on the rise in the GOP presidential field, this week on Firing Line.

Vivek Ramaswamy 00:09

This is the American Revolution. This is 1776.

Margaret Hoover 00:14

He's just 37 years old. Vivek Ramaswamy is the son of Indian immigrants, who became a biotech entrepreneur before making a name for himself with a book *Woke Inc.* about why he believes corporations and social causes shouldn't mix.

Vivek Ramaswamy 00:31

Coca-Cola was among those companies that has mastered the art of blowing woke smoke.

Margaret Hoover 00:36

Ramaswamy has earned a prized place on the August GOP debate stage.

Vivek Ramaswamy 00:40

Trump was actually a very good president, but he fell short of the level that I would want to see us go to.

Margaret Hoover 00:46

Among Ramaswamy's policy ideas that would transform the US government: eliminate the Department of Education, the FBI, and the IRS.

Vivek Ramaswamy 00:55

I will not promise you to reform those agencies. We will shut them down.

Margaret Hoover 01:01

And US military support to Ukraine and require young people to pass a civics test if they want to vote before they're 25. What does Vivek Ramaswamy say now?

Video 1 01:13

Firing Line with Margaret Hoover is made possible in part by Robert Granieri, Vanessa and Henry Cornell, The Fairweather Foundation, The Tepper Foundation, the Asness Family Foundation, the McKenna Family Foundation, Charles R. Schwab, and by the Rosalind P. Walter Foundation, and Damon Button.

Margaret Hoover 01:36

Vivek Ramaswamy. Welcome to 'Firing Line'.

Vivek Ramaswamy 01:38

Thanks. I'm glad to be here.

Margaret Hoover 01:40

Why do you want to be the next president of the United States?

Vivek Ramaswamy 01:44

I am worried, Margaret, that we are in the middle of this national identity crisis, where my generation, in particular, our generation, we're hungry for purpose and meaning and identity. And yet we hunger to be part of something bigger than ourselves yet we can't even answer what it means to be an American. I think that loss of identity is responsible for a lot of our economic stagnation. It's part of what's actually even behind the loss of our fortitude on the global stage. And I think that I actually have a vision of what it means to be a citizen of this country because I have lived the true American dream. And I am worried that will not exist for the next generation unless we do something about it.

Margaret Hoover 02:26

What qualifies you to be the next president of the United States?

Vivek Ramaswamy 02:30

So the fact that I am an outsider is I think an important qualification, but I bring a unique combination. I do think it will take an outsider who has executive experience, who's been a successful CEO. But to combine that and, I think, this is where, for example, Trump left short, combine that with a deep, first personal understanding of the Constitution itself. A deep understanding of the laws that actually empower a US president to shut down the administrative state and the federal bureaucracy that gets in the way of prosperity and liberty in this country. That's a rare combination. I bring that combination to the table. I think that's going to be required to reach the next generation of Americans and I feel a sense of obligation to do it.

Margaret Hoover 03:16

You just said Trump fell short. How did Trump fall short?

Vivek Ramaswamy 03:20

I think in many ways, and I'm learning from the foundation that he laid, the advisers that he surrounded himself with did not even allow him really to see through the agenda that he himself said he wanted to come in and see through: "draining the swamp, shutting down the deep state". Many of the people around him tied his hands.

Margaret Hoover 03:41

So you're saying Trump wasn't able to fulfill his promises to the American people?

Vivek Ramaswamy 03:44

I think that he fulfilled some of his promises. To be clear, I think that my view is Trump was actually a very good president, but he fell short of the level that I would want to see us go to. We didn't solve the border crisis. I've said I would use the US military to secure the southern border. Take the Department of Education. He put a good person on top of it, Betsy DeVos. I believe an agency like that is not subject to reform. I've said that I would shut down the US Department of Education. So, in many ways, I think Trump did not go far enough with the very agenda that he brought to office in the first place. And that's a big part of why I'm in this race.

Margaret Hoover 04:21

The first debate is going to be the first time many GOP primary voters have even heard your name.

Vivek Ramaswamy 04:27

Yes.

Margaret Hoover 04:27

They are very quickly going to see that you are well-spoken, that you are energetic, that you have pristine Ivy League credentials, and they're also going to realize that you have no elective experience at the state or federal level. How do you expect that they will not categorize you as a Republican version of Transportation Secretary Pete Buttigieg in his campaign to become president of--

Vivek Ramaswamy 04:55

I think that will be easy because Pete Buttigieg and I are fundamentally different people. We're different human beings. I think what they will see much more naturally is exactly what the Republican base wanted in 2016, which was an outsider untainted by government, independent of the donor class, and that's me. I think the rest of that debate stage will be populated by--let's call it what it is--super PAC puppets, people whose campaigns are principally funded by super PACs that are running their ads on television. I'm not bought by the donor class. I have put over \$15 million of my own money into this campaign. Hard-earned money on the back of my own success. And I am untainted by the constraints that come with being a career government, really professional politician. The real choice that I think the GOP faces in this primary is, do we want reform? Incremental reform? Or do we want revolution? I stand on the side of revolution. I think the GOP base stands on the side of the American revolution with me and that's a big part of why it's going to take an outsider to get that job done.

Margaret Hoover 06:01

I'm going to need you to go into why we need a revolution?

Vivek Ramaswamy 06:04

We need a revival of the American revolution and its ideals--

Margaret Hoover 06:06

Which ideals?

Vivek Ramaswamy 06:07

That's exactly what we need. Ideals like self-governance over aristocracy. The idea that we the people sort out our differences through free speech and open debate in the public square without elite interference. The ideal that it's not in the back of palace halls or three-letter government agencies that we decide the right answers to questions from climate change to racial injustice, but that the citizens do it in a constitutional republic and we have lost that.

Margaret Hoover 06:34

But are you saying revolution in the context of real violence?

Vivek Ramaswamy 06:37

No. I believe in full peace in this country. My concern, and this is my concern, is if we fail to let people speak freely, that is when they scream. If we fail to let people scream, that is when they turn to tearing things down. So I do not want to see another instance like January 6th, 2021 in this country, but my concern is by failing to reckon with what actually led to events like that, we're paving the way for far worse in the future.

Margaret Hoover 07:12

How are the GOP self identified Republican primary voters going to look at what you're offering as a Trump 2.0 version, a more effective approach to delivering on Trump's original promises? How are they going to not think, You know what, he would be a really effective chief of staff for a Trump 2.0 with Trump as the president? What is going to differentiate you, other than your technocratic ability, to get it done?

Vivek Ramaswamy 07:41

I think that's an important element of it, but it's not the whole story. I think I'm the only person in this race, including Trump, who has the power and ability to inspire a new young generation of Americans that I think our voter base cares deeply about. And about 30% of this country became psychiatrically ill when Trump was in office, started agreeing with things they would have never agreed with just because Donald Trump was saying them, started disagreeing with things that they used to agree with just because Trump was in office. And without putting blame on Trump or anybody else I think most people understand that was just a fact from 2016 onward in this country. And for whatever reason, I'm not having that effect on people. To the contrary, we are bringing young people into this movement, new people into our pro American movement who have never come with the GOP before. I was a guy who supported Trump. I am a guy who still respects immensely what he accomplished for this country. But America first does not belong to Trump just as it does not belong to me, just as it didn't belong to Reagan. It belongs to the people of this country. And the question is who's going to take that agenda further? I think it's going to be the guy with fresh legs, a deep understanding of the constitution, the ability to win a landslide and bring young Americans with us.

Margaret Hoover 08:58

Okay, so you want to bring a new generation into politics. That's a very refreshing approach. And yet, one of your key campaign pillars is raising the voting age to 25, with a civics test or military service in order to maintain the age 18 voting age.

Vivek Ramaswamy 09:20

So my premise is this: every young kid who graduates from high school should be able to pass the same civics test that every immigrant has to pass in order to become a citizen of this country.

Margaret Hoover 09:33

Amen.

Vivek Ramaswamy 09:33

At the age of 18, let's attach civic duties to civic privileges. And I say that minimal duty is either knowing something about the country, the exact same things an immigrant has to know. Or else, serve the country in some minimal way. First responder role or in the military. Part of reaching young people isn't just pandering by telling them what in the short term they want to hear, satisfying their moral hunger by saying what the left says, go to Ben and Jerry's and order a cup of ice cream with some social justice sprinkles on the side. No. That's not how we satisfy the hunger for purpose and meaning. I think the revival of actual civic duty is a big part of how we feed that hunger for purpose. Citizenship means something to me. And if we make it mean something to young Americans, they'll be much less drawn to secular cults from wokeism to climatism than they are today because they actually believe that the fact that they're a citizen of the United States of America actually means something to them and it will unite the country in the process.

Margaret Hoover 10:37

You've coined this term climatism.

Vivek Ramaswamy 10:40

Yeah.

Margaret Hoover 10:41

What does it mean?

Vivek Ramaswamy 10:41

I think it refers to an ideology that says we have to abandon fossil fuels and carbon emissions at all cost to stave off existential climate risks for humanity. I think that is a religious conviction, it is not a scientific conviction. So I think we have to reckon with the facts to say that our global surface temperature's going up. Yes, it appears to, that's a

fact.

Margaret Hoover 11:03

Because of the emission of carbon.

Vivek Ramaswamy 11:06

Because of broadly man made causes including but not limited to the emission of carbon and also non man made causes. Yes. Is that an existential risk for humanity? No, it is not. Does that mean that we should abandon or even abate the use of carbon or carbon dioxide emissions? No, it does not in my book. I think the right question we should be asking is what advances human prosperity? That's what I care about, that's what I will care about measuring as the leader of this country rather than obsessing over a cult of carbon.

Margaret Hoover 11:36

When people point to the 101 degree water temperatures in Florida or the heat waves throughout the country or the unparalleled storms and climate events, how do you respond?

Vivek Ramaswamy 11:49

I respond by saying that if the same shoe fit the other foot, and you disagreed with that policy and somebody else who were picking up anecdotal data from the middle of Arkansas who didn't go to Harvard, you'd be laughing them off the stage as a bunch of [rubs] who didn't know how to follow data based on anecdotal evidence.

Margaret Hoover 12:04

Approximately half of Republican primary voters favor Donald Trump as their first choice candidate for the nomination. How do you defeat Donald Trump without contrasting yourself and making the case that Republicans should not renominate him?

Vivek Ramaswamy 12:21

Look, I'm not running from something. I am leading us to a vision of what it means to be an American and doing it while authentically respecting what Trump did for this country. But drawing a contrast, I mean, the contrasts are plenty. I'm less than half his age. I am the fresh outsider in this race. I have a clear, detailed vision to take on policy disputes, policy objectives that he was even unwilling to touch. So those are details, but I think they're important details. But most importantly, I think respecting his legacy and doing it authentically will allow me to be more successful in winning this nomination.

Margaret Hoover 12:58

You've called for Republican candidates to pardon Trump in both of the two cases that he has been charged with, the Rag DA from Manhattan case as well as Jack Smith's documents case from Mar-a-Lago. Recently, new charges have been added to the documents case. What's clear is that the scope of Trump's legal liability is not fully known yet, even still. So why plant the flag? Why plant the pardon flag without seeing all of the evidence that prosecutors have against him?

Vivek Ramaswamy 13:33

I'll give you the narrow answer and I'll give you the deeper answer. The narrow answer is I would pardon him because I think that his behaviors did not obviously constitute a legal violation even as stated in those indictments. That's the narrow answer. The deeper answer, and the one that really moves me, is that I think it will set an awful national precedent for us to become a country in which the ruling party, whoever it is, uses police power to indict its political rivals. That is the stuff of Banana Republics, that is not the stuff of the United States of America. I ask the question of, is anything, any step we take as a country; is that going to take us one step closer to a national divorce which I worry deeply about. I do not want a national divorce. I want to lead a national revival. Would this prosecution of a former president who currently is a front runner in a primary to be the next president, would that take us in the right direction or the wrong direction as a country? There is no doubt in my mind that that will take us in not only a wrong but potentially dangerous direction that will make the job of reuniting this country that much more difficult. That is what moves me.

Margaret Hoover 14:43

Is there any scenario in which you believe that the officials at the justice department can put partisanship aside and truly administer the laws of this country apart from politics? If there were a Republican president and a Republican attorney general prosecuting Donald Trump, would that be legitimate and free from politicization in your view?

Vivek Ramaswamy 15:06

I don't think the real divide in this country is between Republicans and Democrats.

Margaret Hoover 15:09

No, no, but answer my question. So is there any way to prosecute a former president without it being considered politicized in your view?

Vivek Ramaswamy 15:17

The answer would be it wouldn't be whether it's a Republican or not, it would come down to the facts and law. I'll tell you something that would change my mind. If you told me in the documents case there was new evidence that came out that Trump was selling those secrets for private financial gain to our foreign adversaries who are in a position to use that to compromise the US?

Margaret Hoover 15:33

That would change your mind.

Vivek Ramaswamy 15:33

That would absolutely change my position.

Margaret Hoover 15:34

But obstruction is breaking the law.

Vivek Ramaswamy 15:38

Obstruction is breaking the law, but if for the same reason that entrapment. Entrapment would cause someone to--

Margaret Hoover 15:44

But we're not talking about entrapment here. We're talking about the FBI asked for documents and then he potentially destroyed camera evidence of him not giving over those documents.

Vivek Ramaswamy 15:54

So this gets into deep constitutional doctrine which I'm happy to do. The way you're supposed to prosecute somebody, deeply ingrained in the legal tradition of this country, is that there is an actual act that breaks the law and then you bring the person who committed it to justice, not that you pick the person and then find the violation.

Margaret Hoover 16:12

I hear your passion and you've redirected the question and the answer from actually the circumstances of President Trump's obstruction. Bill Barr read the same indictment that you read, and that I read, and that America has read, and called it damning. So you two just have a difference of opinion.

Vivek Ramaswamy 16:30

I'm not sure we do. I'd have to talk to Bill on that. Maybe we do, maybe we don't.

Margaret Hoover 16:35

He called it damning, you don't think it's damning?

Vivek Ramaswamy 16:37

I have said it is not the basis for a legal conviction. What I have also said at every step-- I'll remind you, Margaret, I'm in this race for US president, in the same race that Donald Trump is in for a reason. I would have made different judgments than Trump made in each of those instances, very different judgments. But I think there is a fundamental difference between a bad judgment, which is an issue for the voters to take into account as they wish to where we the people decide who leads the country, versus using criminal procedures to eliminate someone from competition in that election and eliminating the ability of the voters to make that decision for themselves.

Margaret Hoover 17:15

If President Trump were to be convicted by a jury of his peers in Florida, a jury pool that is much more likely to be sympathetic to Donald Trump than not, would you still feel the need to pardon him?

Vivek Ramaswamy 17:27

I would because it would be important to move this country forward. As I said, if the facts are dramatically different, we're talking about selling secrets to foreign adversaries, for example, I would change my judgment on that. But on these facts, there's no doubt that I will pardon Donald Trump because I think that's the right thing for the country.

Margaret Hoover 17:44

You have called the potential indictment of Donald Trump around January 6th quote "a dangerous precedent for the political weaponization of police power in this country". If prosecutors have evidence of the former president committing crimes in an effort to overturn a free and fair election, isn't that also a dangerous precedent not to hold that person accountable?

Vivek Ramaswamy 18:08

There's a lot baked into your question. You use the word "crimes". If there are clear evidence in support of a crime, I always support accountability. But the question is-- it begs the question of, was there a crime?

Margaret Hoover 18:19

After January 6th, you were critical of Donald Trump's conduct, but you also maintain that January 6th riots at the capital were not his fault. You have said that censorship by big tech companies contributed. Help me understand. Are you saying that if Donald Trump hadn't spent two months promoting baseless election fraud conspiracy theories and encouraging his supporters to show up and march on the Capitol on January 6th, the riots still would have happened anyway?

Vivek Ramaswamy 18:49

That was the final catalyst. It was not the cause. The underlying cause was the frustration of people across this country. So that pent up frustration, yes, boiled over on January 6th. But my concern, Margaret, is if we haven't actually addressed that underlying problem and cause yet, it will as yet still boil over in other ways that we are yet to see.

Margaret Hoover 19:11

Do you think that Trump is addressing those underlying concerns or do you think that he is aggravating them?

Vivek Ramaswamy 19:17

I am in this race because I am best positioned to address those underlying concerns. Margaret, I'm a candidate for US president looking to lead this nation in a race where Donald Trump is--

Margaret Hoover 19:27

But you're running against Donald Trump?

Vivek Ramaswamy 19:28

Yes, we spent 30 minutes talking about Donald Trump. I would prefer to talk about our vision for the nation. I would have made dramatically different judgments than Trump did. Were Trump's judgments that he made in the lead up to January 6th good for this country? No.

Margaret Hoover 19:42

With respect, the reason that we're talking about what Donald Trump did, right or wrong, is because he is leading in the polls. And so I'm trying to draw out a contrast and understand what responsibility you feel he has for the violence that happened that day.

Vivek Ramaswamy 19:57

I don't think he's legally responsible for the violence that day. I do believe that we go further as a country when we do it based on first principles and moral authority, not just vengeance and grievance. That is what I'm bringing to the table.

Margaret Hoover 20:13

Okay, your proposal to end the war in Ukraine, many say would embolden Putin. If the US were to withdraw military support from Ukraine, cede the Donbas region to Russia, and pledge not to admit Ukraine into NATO, Putin would be rewarded for his aggression. Wouldn't the defeat of Putin actually best be the way to rupture the no limits packed between China and Russia rather than giving Putin what he wants?

Vivek Ramaswamy 20:43

No, I don't think so. And I think that this is an area where we have deep seated disagreement even within the Republican Party on this question.

Margaret Hoover 20:49

So explain why this wouldn't embolden Putin.

Vivek Ramaswamy 20:51

I don't think that whether this would embolden Putin or not is even the right first question to ask. The right first question to ask is what advances American interests? The top military threat we face is the Russia-China alliance. Our top adversary today is Communist China. And so no, I do not think it should be a US policy objective to defeat Vladimir Putin or drive regime change in Russia. I think the top goal of the US should be to ensure peace and security for Americans foremost, and that happens when we have peace and stability on the global stage. I also do not believe that Ukraine is some model paragon of democracy, it is not. And so I think that the idea that we're retrofitting this into a battle between good and evil is just fundamentally incorrect, which means we have to look at this as realists.

Margaret Hoover 21:38

If we were to follow your plan, vis-a-vis Ukraine and Russia, what message would China take away and how would that plan deter China from then invading Taiwan?

Vivek Ramaswamy 21:50

The answer is right now, Xi Jinping believes that the US won't want to go to war with two allied nuclear superpowers, Russia and China, at the same time. So Xi Jinping's bet is that with Russia in his camp, he's in a strong position should he want to invade Taiwan. If Russia is no longer in his camp, then Xi Jinping will have to think twice before going after Taiwan. That is how we deter Communist China from going after Taiwan while avoiding war over it in the South China Sea, while [in another] one fell swoop, ending the war in Ukraine and pulling American resources back. That's realist foreign policy, not the foreign policy neoconservative dogma that now pervades, frankly, both political parties.

Margaret Hoover 22:34

You came to prominence with your critiques of woke capitalism. You wrote a book, *Woke, Inc.* Explain what woke capitalism is.

Vivek Ramaswamy 22:43

Sure. So I'll start with what wokeism is. It is a worldview that says that your identity is based on your race, your gender, your sexual orientation or other genetically inherited attributes; that we are either oppressors or oppressed based on those genetic characteristics; and that it is our obligation to reorder those injustices and social relationships. Woke capitalism is the extension of using capitalism, commerce, as a means to address those injustices; racial injustice and climate change. I think that this is a mistake on two counts. One is I think it actually leads companies to be less successful over the long run. Milton Friedman made that case. I've made a revised case of it in my book. Margaret, that's not even my main reason for being against it. My main reason for being against this trend of stakeholder capitalism, what you could also refer to as woke capitalism, is that it is a perversion of how a constitutional republic, a democratic society, is supposed to work. What the model of stakeholder capitalism calls for is to say that no, no, no, we the people can't be trusted to sort out our differences on climate change or on social justice but that we have to actually trust an enlightened group of elites to determine for the rest of society what the right answers are to those questions using commerce as a vehicle to do it. And so you wanna talk about threats to democracy? I think that's pretty high on the list actually. And that's been the source of my criticism over the last several years.

Margaret Hoover 24:09

In your arguments against woke capitalism you have cited the writings of economist Milton Friedman. Friedman appeared several times on the original *Firing Line* with William F. Buckley Junior. And here he is, take a look.

Milton Friedman 24:22

We have an overblown, overgrown government spending more than 40% of our income supposedly for our benefit, mostly waste and mostly restricting our freedom. And as a result, we have destroyed a sense of individual responsibility and responsibility to one another. Now everybody takes it for granted that if there's a problem, the government is going to take care of it.

Margaret Hoover 24:47

So Friedman there is talking about how government crowds out the civic space and the social space. But you write in your book *Woke Inc.* how also capitalism has inherently invasive qualities. And you argue that the answer is to quote "build protective walls around the things we cherish most like democracy".

Vivek Ramaswamy 25:07

I think deeply aligned with Milton Friedman's view is that there's different spheres of our lives. I think part of what we've lost in our country is the integrity of each of those spheres of our lives. And part of the reason why is we've blurred the boundaries between them. One of those boundaries we've blurred is between our civic space and our space as capitalists. And I think that, as I said in one of my books, we don't want democracy and capitalism to share the same bed. What we actually need is a clean divorce. And I think that will revive the integrity of both capitalism and our Democratic Republic.

Margaret Hoover 25:45

Vivek Ramaswamy, thank you for joining me here at Firing Line.

Vivek Ramaswamy 25:48

Thank you. Good to see you.

Video 1 25:51

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