

leeway to indulge the work he loves. He also has high hopes for the Institute of Politics he founded at the University of Chicago. There, he wants to give students a connection to the vibrant, engaging world of politics and to awaken them to the stakes he sees for them in the current political world.

THAT'S HOW DEMOCRACY'S SUPPOSED TO WORK, BY SEIZING CONTROL OF THE FUTURE.

He says, “My job whenever I talk to young people, but certainly at the University, is to make the point that whatever equity you care about, whether it’s human rights, climate change, deficits, education... it’s going to be impacted dramatically by the decisions that are made in Washington, in state capitals, and in capitals around the world. And you can walk away and let other people make those decisions, but then you have to live with the consequences of those.”

On patriotism:

I was the son of an immigrant who came here with nothing; I ended up as the Senior Advisor to the President. I grew up in a housing development and my sister and I shared a room in a rental apartment that was probably about as big as from here to the kitchen. And I’ve lived my dreams. My father came here in 1922. If he’d tried to come in ’23 when the very harsh immigration laws were put in place, he probably wouldn’t have been here.

And his life would have been different and I think less good. So I believe in America. I believe in what America has been. I believe in the values that have been time honored and I think fighting for those is a worthy cause. And I hope young people pick that torch up because they’re the ones who are going to have the greatest—by far the greatest—stake here.

On keeping the republic:

The greatest admonition I can give to young people is don’t take what we have for granted. Democracy requires participation. I’m biased in this regard because I’m devoting my life to it—to this project—but I think they should get in the arena. And getting in the arena doesn’t necessarily mean running for public office, although it could. It doesn’t necessarily mean working in campaigns, although I think that’s a good thing to do. You know my sister is an educational psychologist. She helps kids with learning disabilities deal with school systems in Massachusetts. And she was not political at all. And she got involved in politics through school board elections in her community because she was very concerned about policies there. And from there she was the one who called me and said I should work for Deval Patrick, because she was so inspired by him.

That’s how democracy’s supposed to work, by seizing control of the future. Seize control of the decisions that are made in your communities. Seize control of it or at least a piece of it, understanding that the outcome is not always going to be what you want; the second thing that we need

to understand is that compromise is a necessary ingredient. This whole country was founded on compromise. *The Federalist Papers* are full of compromise. The Constitution is a big compromise. And it’s a work in progress, you know. But, you can’t be an absolutist and engage in a healthy democracy.

As messy and as troubled and as challenged as it is, I really believe it’s the best path forward. . . . This is the best vehicle to influence your future and the future of your community, the country, and the world. So my advice is to get in the arena—be a candidate, work for a candidate. Be a policy advisor, a speech writer. Go to work for a not-for-profit that is trying to push for public policy. Be a journalist and communicate in a thoughtful way what’s going on in the world.

But be involved in it; don’t, don’t surrender to the cynicism. That would be a tragic thing to do because I’ve seen it. You can bring about real fundamental change. I know that there are people who now have healthcare who wouldn’t have. There are soldiers who are home with their families who are not at risk today because of what we’ve done. There are autoworkers on the line that would be unemployed today but for what we’ve done. There are gay people who would be still unable to serve in the military, still unable to marry, still unable to live their full lives but for what we have done. . . . So my message is make a difference, get involved.

Source: David Axelrod spoke with Christine Barbour and Gerald C. Wright on August 18, 2014.