

≡ Q&A

Going Her Own Way

Former Congresswoman from Hawaii **Tulsi Gabbard** tells American Experiment's **John Hinderaker** why she left the Democratic Party, the importance of free speech, and finding common ground through Constitutional principles.

Then presidential candidate Tulsi Gabbard speaking at the 2019 California Democratic Convention in San Francisco, CA.



Tulsi Gabbard served as congresswoman from 2013 to 2021 representing Hawaii's 2nd congressional district. She was a candidate for the presidential nomination in 2020 and is currently a Lieutenant Colonel in the U.S. Army Reserves with multiple deployments in the Middle East. Gabbard was the keynote speaker at this year's Fall Briefing for Center of the American Experiment.

John Hinderaker: Tulsi Gabbard, you made news when you announced that you were leaving the Democratic Party. What led you to make that decision?

Tulsi Gabbard: It really came down to the reality that today's Democratic Party is controlled by this elitist cabal of war mongers who don't stand for freedom. They hate freedom and are seeking at every opportunity to try to undermine our God-given rights and freedoms enshrined in the Constitution and Bill of Rights. They're doing so by politicizing and weaponizing public institutions like the FBI and the Department of Homeland Security — you could go down a laundry list of these institutions — that we've seen, unfortunately, being used against their political opponents, seeking to silence those of us who have dissenting voices or who dare to even just question and challenge their narrative. Undermining our Constitution is doing great harm to this country and the freedoms that we cherish and hold dear.

For those of us who came of age in the Vietnam era, the idea of Democrats as war mongers is hard to wrap our

heads around. How did that happen and when?

I can't say exactly when this happened, but it's unfortunately something that we've seen increasing over time where in this culture of fear, censorship, and cancellation, traditional voices of peace in the Democratic Party have been silenced. We saw this most recently around the issue of the ongoing war in Ukraine. Several months after Russia wrongly invaded Ukraine, only then did so-called progressive voices in Congress speak up and wrote a letter calling on the president to exercise diplomacy to try to bring about an end to this war. And they did so very gently. But even then, that request was rescinded just the day after they sent the letter. And their position was almost exactly the opposite of what had been written, saying, "Well, no, actually there

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should be no diplomacy."

The reason why this is relevant is because the Biden administration, going all the way back to March, barely a month after Putin invaded Ukraine, actually stopped negotiations that were going on between Ukrainian officials and Russian officials, at the time trying to figure out some kind of negotiated end to this war. It was the Biden administration and others who said, "Don't negotiate."

We famously saw how it was both Republican and Democrat leaders in the U.S. Senate and the House of Representatives criticizing people like Senator Rand Paul, who very simply said, "Hey, if you're going to send tens of billions of American taxpayer dollars to Ukraine, we should have a special inspector general appointed to account

for how those dollars are spent, just like we did with Afghanistan." Because what we saw in Afghanistan was that this money was squandered — much of it was squandered and wasted and gone unaccounted for. Rand Paul was called names like "traitor" a "Putin propagandist." The fact that there is no room in Washington for Democrats or Republicans to be a voice for peace or even at a minimum, a voice for accountability — a questioning voice — should be of concern to all Americans.



You have a strong military background, you continue to serve in the army, and have been pro-military and pro-American as a politician. What do you see as the main international threats to U.S. interests?

Well, the greatest existential threat we face is the threat of potential nuclear war. There's no question about it. Leaders in both parties fail to speak the truth to the American people about the consequences of their policies. They fail to address the reality that it is their policies that have driven us to the brink of nuclear war and have also failed the American people in making sure that we have someplace safe to go. And this is the travesty of the situation that we're facing is that the most powerful leaders in this country, in the event of a nuclear attack or nuclear war, will have a safe place to go. And yet, even as they push us toward nuclear war, they have failed to provide the same to the American people.

This is an urgent threat that with a simple spark could turn this existing conflict into one where we are facing World War III and nuclear war. We need both Democrats and Republicans in Congress to force this shift and change in our country's foreign policy in order to walk us back from the brink.

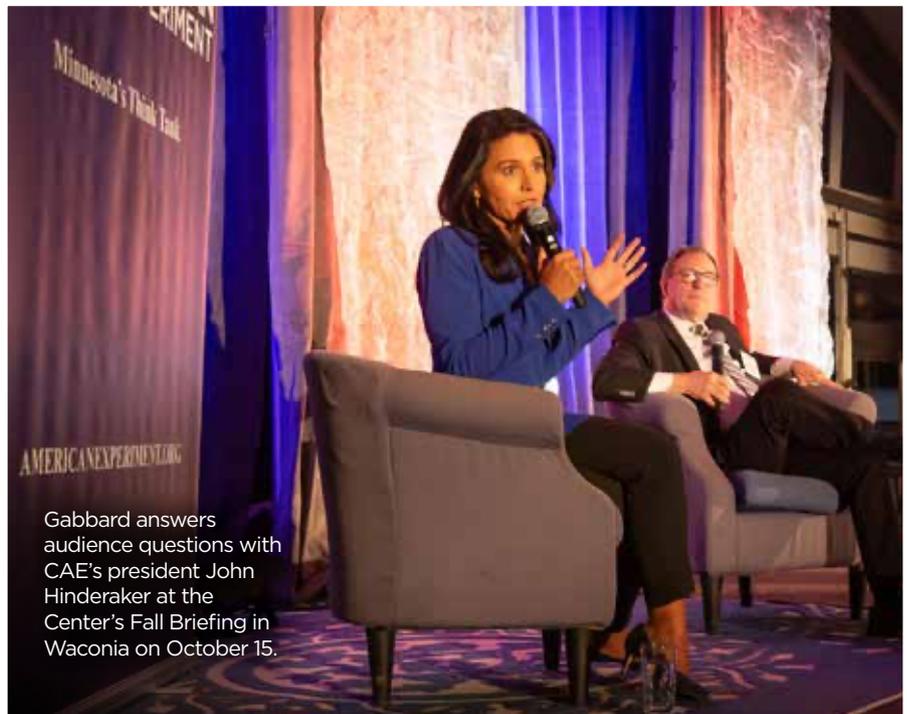
You have been an outspoken defender of free speech. Why do you think freedom of speech has come under attack in recent years and what can we do to preserve our first amendment rights?

It's unfortunate that it seems like so many people are taking our freedom of speech for granted, and perhaps not realizing how dangerous it is to put the power of limiting free speech into the hands of government. Political winds shift very quickly. Just because they may agree with the people in power in government today and want to silence those who they deem as saying things that are offensive, unsavory, or even hateful, well, tomorrow the tables might be turned and they may be the ones who are silenced.

One of the best ways for us to protect and defend our right to free speech is to exercise it. The way to defeat speech that you don't like is not to ban it or silence it, it is to defeat that speech with more speech — with superior arguments. The best way to do that is to raise your own voice and to gather others of like mind to raise their voices to defeat that speech that you find to be offensive.

What about the censorship that we have seen coming from the social media platforms and the major tech companies? Do you see that as a problem? And if so, what can we do about it?

One of the problems here is with Section 230, which has given these Big Tech and social media companies legal immunity from the kinds of lawsuits that publishers like *The New York Times*, for example, are subject to, and which is why they are selective and curate what they choose to print, as all publishers and media sources are. So these Big Tech and social media companies have the legal protection based on the assumption that they are not curating content, and that



Gabbard answers audience questions with CAE's president John Hinderaker at the Center's Fall Briefing in Waconia on October 15.

they are a true, free, open marketplace of ideas even as they are privately owned corporations. The problem is that even though they may *say* that's what they are, in reality they are curating content exactly as publishers do. They will ban someone, suspend accounts, or they will shadow ban someone. I've gone through this myself with Instagram where they will not ban you or delete your account, but they will suppress who is actually able to see it because they don't like the content that you're putting out.

This is a dangerous thing, and they are abusing the very protection of the law that they have; it's a big problem that needs to be addressed. If we have these public platforms that are actual public platforms where they're no different than if you or I went and stood on a street corner in the middle of town and had dueling perspectives on issues and we talked about them — if that's really what these platforms are — then they need to be that rather than doing what they're doing, which is essentially manipulating their viewers and readers into only seeing the information that these social media giants want them to see.

These days, Tulsi, it seems that you are mostly popular on the right. Are there still issues where you consider

yourself to be a liberal?

I don't like labels in general. And I challenge the use of the word liberal because I think those who use the term today are out of touch with the traditional definition of liberalism. And I've had this conversation with people who call themselves conservatives, and we compare the traditional liberal principles of the JFK era of politics with today's conservative principles, and in many ways they're quite similar. So, I have a problem with these labels because they have become so subjective and interpreted in very, very different ways.

It's crazy to me that if you're a voice of truth and a voice speaking out about the importance of the Constitution, that is automatically assumed to be a voice on the Right, or a conservative voice, or a Republican voice. My hope is that in our political discourse and for voters across the country, we can get out of the Left-Right, Democrat-Republican mindset and instead look at different candidates running for office and be able to discuss and talk about issues based on that common ground of the Constitution, of a true appreciation for our freedoms enshrined in it and Bill of Rights.

If we can stand on that common ground, then we have the opportunity and ability to really have a conversation about how we tackle the challenges



that are facing the American people today. My hope is that we would start to see more people who call themselves Democrats *and* Republicans who find themselves grounded in that foundation of our country.

You and I are talking, Tulsi, just a few days after the midterm elections in November — and they’re still counting ballots in some states. But what did you make of the results?

I’m not a political pundit, so I’m not going to pretend to have an explanation

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for why and how voters voted the way they did. No party had a runaway election night. This highlights the responsibility of elected leaders in both parties to put the interests of the American people ahead of the partisan interests of their political party. There are many challenges we’re facing as a country having a deep impact on everyday Americans: everything from the inability to feel safe in so many communities in this country — not only

the big cities, but also in some rural communities as well — to people’s increasing concern about the fact that we are facing an unprecedented number of people illegally crossing our southern border. Obviously too, the impact that rising inflation has had on our economy and how people are really struggling just to make ends meet.

My point is that I’ll let the pundits and the statisticians assess what happened on election day. I think it’s important for us to look at how we move forward as a country to actually hold leaders accountable to do their jobs, whether they’re a Republican or a Democrat. They’re going to have to work together and find common ground if they are serious about fulfilling their responsibility. My fear is that we have people in power who are already, just days after the close of the 2022 election, looking to 2024 and are setting their agendas based on what they think will get them more power in 2024, both in Congress and the White House. And the ones who will lose for certain in that case are the American people.

What do you see as your future in public life? Do you expect to run for office again? Do you think you’ll remain an Independent, possibly become a Republican? What does the future hold for you?

I’m honestly not thinking about any of those things right now. I left the Democratic Party, I’m an Independent and seeking to do all that I can to best serve God and this country. I will continue to use whatever platforms I have available to be a voice for truth and a voice of reason, both of which are unfortunately very uncommon and

rare in our politics right now. We need more of that. We need more people to stop self-censoring. We need more people to exercise their free speech. We need more dialogue and conversation in this country. And my hope is that I can, in my own small way, have a positive impact by encouraging others to do the same.

When you were here for our Fall Briefing in October, you had just started a podcast. How often have you been podcasting and where can our readers go to keep up with that?

Yes. I came and visited you in Minnesota at an eventful time. It was the first major event that I participated in after I announced that I was leaving the Democratic Party in the debut episode of my online show and podcast, *The Tulsi Gabbard Show*. We have published, I think, five episodes since then, examining some of the major reasons why I left the Democratic Party and going in-depth on those issues. We will be releasing an episode on the First Amendment and also talking with the former head of the ACLU who actually held the line for free speech during his tenure. I had a great conversation with Steve Scalise about the Second Amendment. We have a number of great guests and great conversations out. You can find the podcast anywhere you listen to podcasts: on Apple, Spotify, or others. And you can also watch it on YouTube and Rumble. Subscribe and share and support our efforts on Locals.com or Substack. These are important conversations about the crucial issues of our time. ★