

Interviewee: Wade Pitrucha

Interviewer: Crystalina Peterson

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Abstract: Wade Pitrucha, Marine Corps veteran and butcher, was raised in Texas and lived in California for several years, and currently works as a butcher and lives in Barron, Wisconsin. In this interview, Wade discusses the political and economic developments he has observed since the beginning of the COVID-19 pandemic. Wade gives an inside look at the COVID-19 meat shortage, and explains some of the causes, as well as the impacts on farmers and families. Wade also shares some of his personal experiences and frustrations with the local handling of the pandemic, and how he feels the federal government and the Trump administration has contributed to the massive spread of COVID-19 in the United States. In an entertaining and sometimes darkly humorous interview, Wade's military experience and personal beliefs provide a unique and well-balanced view of the COVID-19 pandemic and modern American society.

Interview:

Crystalina Peterson: We are recording. Okay, so today is Saturday, November 14 2020. It is 5:23 pm. And the worldwide cases of COVID-19 are at 54.3 million cases and 1.3 million deaths. In the United States, there's 11.2 million cases, and 20-, 251,000 deaths. And in Wisconsin, which is where we are located, there's 306,000 cases and 2600 deaths. And those are just rounded numbers. I've rounded most of them down. So, I will go ahead and let my participant introduce themselves.

Wade Pitrucha: Hi, I'm Wade Pitrucha. I live in Barron Wisconsin, work in Rice Lake as a butcher. We do livestock processing, some wild game processing, and some retail for the local population, and a lot of tourists come through. I'm 35 years old, originally from Texas, lived in California and overseas while in the military before settling here in Wisconsin. And that's pretty much me.

CP: Cool. Okay, so we're gonna get right into it here. What does a typical day for you, with, with COVID-19 going on, look like these days?

WP: I mean, there's a new part of the whole phone-, phone, keys, wallet, money, cell phone and all that game, getting to the car in the morning. Definitely a new frustration when you get halfway to work, and you go SOB [son of a bitch] I forgot my mask. And then you got to wear

one of those disposable ones which are super uncomfortable. But I don't know, when I was in-, I was in Japan for a couple years, and everywhere I went other than here in the States, it's pretty common for-, I mean, even if you just got allergies, you sneeze and you're wearing a mask all day, it's just almost like- like wearing the proper foot attire was wearing- just part of the deal. Like if you're gonna go work at a construction site, you put a hard hat on, it's common sense. If you're sick, you put a mask on. So, it's not the most alien concept to me. It is constantly frustrating when I see businesses that have the sign clearly posted that they require a mask- Kwik Trip talking to you- and nobody's enforcing the fact that people aren't wearing masks. I get it, bottom dollar, bottom line matters. But my company has shifted to an entirely curbside delivery, our whole process is social distanced, and all outside. And for a butcher that's kind of complicated. But we've made it work and we're doing pretty well with it. We're busy as heck, we're working more than we've pretty much ever worked. So, it's a busier day because of COVID for sure. More happens in the day, and there's more going on. But there's definitely frustrations when I see businesses taking their-it's all about the money. They'd rather not lose those 'Merica [America] people and the ones that are wanting their freedoms, to not wear a mask when- you got to wear a T shirt. That's more- that's a bigger- putting a T shirt on is more exercise than putting a mask on. Sorry, I went on a little tangent there, but it's- that's definitely become a daily annoyance and a daily frustration. Just people, what the heck.

CP: Yeah. Definitely I can- and we've had multiple conversations about this before and you know, just kind of- what about other people? We got to consider other people, right, so yeah, definitely, definitely. So, you kind of touched on this a little bit, but you did mention that you served in the military, and that you were in Japan. So

WP: Yes.

CP: Wanna just kind of, like, give me a quick outline of what that was like?

WP: Well, I mean, day to day was, on base with here in America, but with a few tweaks- like Japanese people were more- actually, I think the best explanation that I saw the TV show years ago, and one Japanese man looked at the other and said "You're not special. You're Japanese." [laughs] Because that's really how the people view it, they view themselves as a collective, and the individual is not as important as the whole. Which, as a species, and from an intellectual standpoint, that's true. It's absolutely true. But then again, humans, as a species, will send 20 fully healthy, athletic men running into a burning building to save one elderly lady.

CP: Right.

WP: So, I mean, as a species, we're kind of off on that. [laughs] But the [laughs] that- like- but in Japan, you've got kindergarteners walking clear across town to go to school, like groups of 20 or 30 of them, and no one's worried about them, because everyone's looking out for them. And out here, it's quite- quite the opposite. Where everyone's looking out for number one. And it's- that's- that's kind of the disappointing thing, the big difference between the two, especially in

looking at stuff- I've got friends that are still in COVID- still in COVID- still in Japan, dealing with COVID and- I mean, the Marine Corps bases are the worst places for COVID in all of Japan, where the Americans live, what does that say?

CP: Yeah, yeah. definitely.

WP: Yeah. We're winning.

CP: [laughs] The greatest country in the world! [laughs] Yeah, definitely. Now, you said that you used to live in Texas, and then California. And now you live in Wisconsin. What is it like- and like- what's the difference in like, a typical day there versus a typical day here? What's like- the top two things for you?

WP: It's less rushed out here than it is in California for sure. Everyone's kind of on their own pace.

CP: Sure. Yeah.

WP: Like, you get stuck behind the poop truck rolling down the road, you're stuck behind poop truck rolling down the road and everyone goes, "yeah, well, we're stuck behind the poop truck." Where, California you get stuck behind the poop truck, you're going down the shoulder to get around, to get around.

CP: Yeah.

WP: Like a friend of mine- actually, she just went back to California and she had a Mustang go flying around the shoulder, around her U-Haul today. Okay [laughs] but definitely everyone's in a bigger hurry out there. Yeah, you don't see that craziness out here so much. And in the south, also people, you get the- the "Oh, no, you go first" at the stop sign. "Oh, no, you have the right of way." "Oh, no, you go." And then everyone sitting there for five minutes trying to figure out who's gonna go. And then usually I'm the one that's like, "fine. I'll go."

CP: Yeah, yeah [laughs]

WP: But [laughs] that's definitely out here, people- which surprises me about the mask thing. It's the next second thing would be the kindness, people show towards each other out here, versus California. Like, I'm a cigarette- cigarette smoker. In Texas, smoking a cigarette, you're out in front of the restaurant, going to smoke your cigarette so your food comes faster. And someone outside doing the same thing- y'all like seven minutes best friends.

CP: Right.

WP: Whatever you want to talk about. It's coming out right now. You're having a good conversation. You're enjoying a cigarette together. Especially if they asked for one.

CP: Oh, absolutely.

WP: California. You walk outside, light up a cigarette, lean against the wall next to a guy smoking a cigarette, "Hey, what's up, man? How you doing?" "Do I know you?" "No, just smoking a cigarette next to you, man. What's up?" "I don't know you." "Yeah, we established that. How are you doing?" "I'm gonna go this way now." "Oh, all right. Bye, friend." But- and out here it's kinda the middle of the two. It's "you shouldn't smoke, but I'll stand here and talk to you about it. And not try to damnation you about it." All right. "You don't smoke. But my friend Jimmy smokes, and Jimmy's into hunting. Do you like to go hunting," and suddenly you're talking to somebody like you've been friends since high school.

CP: Right, right.

WP: So, I imagine that they'd be more- like they love their neighbors out here. Neighborly love is so important. Well, if you put a mask on, you might stop your neighbor from getting sick. "Oh, no, no, no, no, no, no, that's too much." You just helped that guy build a barn. "But that mask thing is just too much." You let him use your property to go hunting and he killed- he shot the buck you wanted last year. And you were cool with that, you helped him sk- mount it. "Oh, but that mask thing. Nope. Can't do it." Yeah, okay guy.

CP: Yeah. It's like a disconnect. Yeah.

WP: And I think most of it's because, and I know somebody's gonna see this and get all offended. But the Cheeto man said at the beginning of the thing- at the beginning of this whole deal that "it wasn't real" and all this BS [bullshit]. And then they stopped listening after that. They heard what they wanted to hear, and then just stopped paying attention because even the Cheeto man went back and said later, this shit sucks." [laughs] "This is real it hurts. Don't get it." But everyone's like, "Oh, no, he- someone made him say that."

CP: Right.

WP: It's not how that works. Nobody can make that guy do anything.

CP: No, right? [laughs]

WP: We can't even make him admit that he lost the election yet. [laughs] Come on. It actually happened. The world watched. And he's like, "Oh, no. Didn't happen."

CP: Yeah.

WP: Okay. Okay. [laughs] Okay, bud. All right. That's off topic. Sorry. [laughs] Turned that political, see but that's what they did was COVID. So why not?

CP: Hey, that's fair. That's fair. Because we've said multiple times. You know, a virus isn't political, but it can be used as a political ploy. I think that's really what-

WP: Oh, it's amoral. Yeah, it's completely amoral. And that's the, I think that's America's problem. It's amoral so they can't hate it.

CP: Yeah that makes sense.

WP: If it was a person spreading this thing. Oh, America would be masked up and the proudest masked people on the planet if there was a person they could blame.

CP: Right.

WP: But you can't blame Mother Na- what are we gonna do nuke- nuke the sun? Blow up the planet, bad Mother Nature, we're killing Gaia. Kind of our only option [unintelligible].

CP: [laughs] Right? Yeah, for sure. Um, so what are some of your first memories of COVID-19? And what was like your initial reaction?

WP: [laughs] So [laughs] about the time COVID hit Minnesota, ya know when the first stimulus checks came in, and- I never lost my job. I'm lucky, actually that- never lost my job until this next week where we might actually have to be closing down. But that's another, we'll get to that. I'm sure that's coming up in your questions. So, we'll get there. But yeah, first things first, I got my stimulus and I bought guns. I went and bought two, three firearms in rapid succession, a nine-millimeter and a carbine- 40 Smith and Wesson carbine. Not for any reason of, I might have to shoot a person, because neither of those firearms are really what I would want to use in that scenario. The pistol is- I'm out of California, California's got some ridiculous pistol laws, I finally had money enough to afford a new firearm, so I went and purchased one. The carbine was definitely an impulse buy, because it's- I had the money. And for the- I'm not California broke anymore. I was- California's really good at leaving you with zero dollars. So those kind of luxuries I was not- was not able to have the luxury of having- using my rights, which I feel is a good way of wording that.

CP: Yeah.

WP: Because it definitely seems to be a luxury to be able to flex your rights these days, which is strange. But the overall of- got the guns- which everyone I work with, everyone I know was like "ope, there he goes, COVID prepper." Yeah, maybe a little bit. The subsequent purchase of an AR that I acquired- from the same store, mind you- was- that was when the riots were getting so bad in the cities, that you could see the glow of the flames from Hudson. And at that point, I

made the conscious decision that I would rather- if I was going to be a statistic, I was going to go one way or the other. And I'm a Marine, at the end of the day, if people want- people want to get froggy, I will jump, along with just about every other person in the north woods of Wisconsin, so I feel less scared- less weird about that, but that goes back to that whole geographic, political positioning thing that we've discussed recently.

CP: Right. Yeah.

WP: And it's bad here, but it's getting better. It seems- Wisconsin did manage to wiggle itself blue this year. And, yeah, I am military. I am also, I did vote libertarian. I should have mentioned that sooner. I did vote libertarian this year. I am definitely a more left-leaning libertarian. But that's- only reason I'm in the Libertarian Party is due to the fact that the red and blue headed monster have effectively destroyed any semblance of government that I once loved in this country. And [unintelligible] like, especially with the way they've handled this COVID deal.

CP: Oh, sure. Yeah. Absolutely.

WP: Back to the beginning of it, you and me, were sitting here talking in the dining room of the house, having a conversation about it as soon as it popped up, and one of the first things that we said was the fact that they were saying carriers, were calling them a- what- atypical. No, was- atypical? Asymptomatic, that's the word, thank you. They were calling it asymptomatic, which is accurate, but at the same time, they should have been using more layman's terms, because our public education system is a joke. We all know that. So, using scientific terms on the media just confuses people.

CP: Right. Yeah, sure. That makes sense, actually.

WP: I've truly felt they should have started the beginning calling asymptomatic, carriers or spreaders- except at that point, they probably would have incited violence because 'Merica [America]. People, "oh, you're not, you're not getting sick, sick from this. We should kill you." 'Merica [America]. Anyway. [laughs] The overall, they, yeah, it was like I kind of saw. I mean, we- first things- first I was like "ope, everything's about to get shut down. Hopefully we do what Italy did," and then we didn't.

CP: Right.

WP: And then we waited, and then we waited- actually, I was happy that the company I work for, we- soon as the first cases started popping up in Wisconsin, we basically barred the doors and became a "we'll bring your stuff to you. Please stay out of our tiny little building. We got like six, eight guys in here. And we don't want to get sick," which worked wonderfully for seven months now has g- since March?

CP: Yeah, yeah.

WP: Seven, eight something like that. And yeah, I'm probably just gonna jump way ahead in your questioning here, but we actually had- yesterday, we had two members of our staff go to Mayo clinic for testing and, today they got- got their results as positive. Third guy in the shop left work early because he wasn't feeling good. So, we're at least half of our shop's exposed- or has got it, and the other half have been at least exposed, which obviously means- it's not guaranteed you're going to catch it when you get near it. But now we're stuck with the face- the question of, "so do we lock everybody out? Close all the- close the till all week, and just work with the three of us that are st- left standing [laughs] and try to cut some beef?"

CP: Right.

WP: Which goes into the freezer. I mean, everything is sanitary and that's- we wear masks so it's not an issue, on the side of the house as far as health and- health and safety practices. That's where we've got that down- handled, but the question is do we- where do we- do we try to force three- a couple guys- a few guys to do the work of eight for a week- a week plus and try to keep trudging through it, or do we close down, make sure everyone- let it all run its course, get everyone back to full health, get them back in the shop, and then worry about a COVID- closing down for that week, and then another outbreak happening next week in the shop and getting worse in the shop, because we can't just close our doors.

CP: Yeah.

WP: We- like we have- I don't know and can't really even give you a fair estimate on the actual market value of the beef that's hanging- beef and hogs, hanging in our carcass cooler, but it's I mean- hundreds of thousands of dollars. And that's a lot of hungry families.

CP: Oh, definitely.

WP: Like these are people- and like they've already thrown all their money into this. Their budget for meat is spent for the year.

CP: Right.

WP: They can't afford to go to Walmart and wait for something to come up to where we can get them- get them their meat or get the insurance money to reimburse them.

CP: Right.

WP: Because if we do close, all our business is insured, the locker, everything in the locker and the freezers and coolers, it's all insured. But what do you tell a farmer, when he's got 10 beef sitting in your cooler that are now rotted? "Well, here's your money back. You can pay your customers back, and you're basically back to zero."

CP: Yeah, exactly, for sure.

WP: And it's definitely got us in a weird position. We're all taking the weekend to kind of figure out what we're gonna do with it. But it's- it's- I mean, it's here. And, of course, the fact that it's here, you would imagine people'd put the damn masks on, but nope. [laughs] I get side-eye when I walk into Kwik Trip with a mask on, when there's- and I'm gonna keep beating on Kwik Trip because hopefully someone at some point from Kwik Trip sees this, or goes to the UW or some business, and it gets back to their ownership because, dear god, it is terri- gas stations across this state. Illinois just shut down today. California just shut down this morning again. My friend, she just said that she- when she got into California, they- she's doing a 14 day mandatory, obviously. But they- like- when she got over, they have an inspection gate- inspections go in and out, and they're telling everybody, "state's locked down, so I hope you're not here for fun" [laughs].

CP: Right.

WP: That's like, I was hoping to get a- get to go back to California here in February, for a trip- that was beginning of COVID. That was fun. I was supposed to go to California back in March.

CP: Yeah.

WP: And COVID took quick- took care of that- supposed to go here in February. And we'll see.

CP: Yeah, exactly. And I know that you have thought about going over the summer, too. But you guys were so backed up at work, because- and I'm going to touch on this. Now, at the beginning of COVID when people were kind of like hoarding supplies and stuff like that, there was the big scare about a meat shortage. Now you as a butcher, how did that impact your job?

WP: Well, the scare that had happened, and I have to give the Cheeto man [President Donald Trump] this credit. One good thing I do know of him doing, is when the big meat shortage hit- what had happened was all of the meat in America is produced- I mean, not all- majority, good 80, 90% is done by three or four big businesses. I'm not gonna say any names because well, monopolies. And, but when the meat shortage happened- what happened was these plants were not ready for any kind of COVID- like nobody was ready for it.

CP: Right.

WP: So big plants, and these plants, hire mostly unskilled laborers. So, it's guys that sit there making one cut all day long. Like they cut this part off a bone and then throw it to the next guy, all day, all day. And so, all of a sudden, you got all these guys go on unemployment because they're all minimum wage workers. They're unskilled labor- laborers- minimum wage- factory workers, and all of a sudden unemployment's offering them \$600 a month on top of unemployment to stay at home. Damn right. I mean, they'd be dumb not to.

CP: Right.

WP: In fact, that's what most countries were doing at the beginning is "here, stay at home. Here's money. You don't need to work. Here's money. Stay home. Let's get a handle on this." 'Merica [America] said "keep working." Like when I got t boned last year. "You still coming to work right?" "Yeah. Be there in an hour. Let me get my car towed." And- Ooh, but yeah. I'm sorry, getting blown up on my phone, emails. Then- yeah, like I don't, but anyway, the- these plants all of a sudden short of workers, well- in the 1950s, there was a similar situation. And they broke it up. It was a- there was a- oh my God, what do you call that- antitrust, I believe?

CP: Yep. Yep.

WP: Anti-trust legislation was passed through, and they broke up big meat and local butchers got growing again. And then in late- the early- mid 80s, they got rid of all of that- the administration that was running the show at the time was very friendly to the big businesses, which then put- since the 80s, there's about 30% of the butcher shops that were open in the early 80s are- is what we have now, about 30% of that number. So, people like- shops like mine, where we do farm livestock, shop, slaughtering, the whole kit and caboodle. Out here, there's actually a lot of us, it's kind of cool. We have a lot of competition, and we have a lot of rivalry, and it breeds really good work. And it fosters a great environment for competition. And like, it's- it's wonderful. You get some really great guys, and you get a lot of skilled guys. Problem is though, you've got so few nationwide that the butcher- and I'm only a apprentice myself, I'm not- couldn't do a beef by myself, but I'm getting there. But guys that are even at my level. Like most people that cut meat are what we in the industry call box cutters, which is they pull a loin out of a box, put it on the table, cut the steak out, portion it out as steaks. And that's all they do. Well, there's a lot more to getting a cow to the table. Yeah, there's the slaughter process, the skinning- you have to- when you debone it you have to know where those cuts come from, where to cut the bone in the animal so you can separate it to get the cuts, a lot of work to it. And not very many people know how to do that these days. So, when the- there was a meat shortage, problem was there was no one to pick up the slack for the big guys. And what ended up happening is all of these farmers that typically out- they're outsource ranches for Tyson, Hormel, Swift, whoever, and they sell their cattle and their pigs to them to go get slaughtered. Well, they've got no one to cut the animal. They're not going to buy the pig. They're not going to buy that cow. So, these farmers were just sitting on these animals. And in some places, they actually went through and had to put down thousands of pigs and beef, which is millions of dollars for anyone who ends up seeing this and doesn't- doesn't know that, it's a lot of money. And the end then- for a lot of people, not just the farmer- you've got the farmer, you've got the company that's cutting it up, you've got the end supplier- I mean, it's a huge ripple when one beef falls and breaks its leg and can't be sold. Like I mean it just ridiculous, huge ripples. So now you put that on in terms of thousands- millions of animals, you got a problem. So, the Trump administration did start an anti-trust investigation back into big meat. So, I give them credit for there, that's a good thing- that's good, smack on big business. Because with all those farmers having all those animals, they

have to start selling them on Facebook, and Craigslist, and in newspapers, and I've heard some crazy stories. We took part in some crazy stories. [laughs] We had guys going down to Minnesota, and picking up hundreds of pigs at a time and dropping them off to us 30 at a time. Well, our typical- it takes us a week to process 12- 15 pigs. And that's a day of cutting 15, if they're normal sized pigs- since COVID, everything's gotten bigger, because everything's been-bouncing around here. I apologize. It's a lot of stuff happening in the butcher world.

CP: Yeah.

WP: So, with when the farmer started selling off animals to the small owner, small owners filled up all the butcher shops. There's a shop not far from here that's booked out till 2022. We're booked out till the- actually March now. We are now booked out to March, which we've never been where people call us and they're like "when can I get an animal- a animal in?" March. "Well come on. You can slide one beef in-" no, we got no room. Our cooler is so jam packed. As soon as- we've got our guys doing on the farm two times a week. Mind you, we're cutting faster than we've ever thought possible. When I started at the business we were doing- two beef a day was really pushing it. And now we're doing three a day and the beef are probably 30% bigger. Because the- outside of that whole, "can I get a beef in? When can I get beef in," not til March- is those animals- generally when a farmer has their animal, the way it works is they feed it one type of food until a certain point, and then they'll- "alright, it's got three months left before we kill it. Now we're gonna give it the good fatty stuff." And it's called finisher and it finishes out the body, gives them a little more fat, a little more marbling. That way the meat stays leaner up until that last little chunk, and then it gets a little bit of marbling- really neat how they've got that all figured out now. Problem is, once you put them on finisher, you can't take them off. Pigs, especially, because pigs do not diet well. They become cannibals. You take them off their finisher, and they start trying to eat each other to make up for that change in diet- that lack of food- lack of calories. And because they grow exponentially based on what they're eating. Like, if you give a pig a lot of fatty, rich foods, it's gonna throw like a friggin rocket. If you give it a bunch of lean stuff, it's gonna stay about the same size. Then- so they don't- they don't go backwards well. So, you know, these pigs and all these beef that are were supposed to be scheduled- supposed to be done in- say they planned to do them in July, but we're just now getting to those animals. Middle of November, we're doing stuff that was scheduled- that they wanted it done in July, but had to push it back to now. So, where the beef would typically be hang weight 800 pounds, they're now hanging at over 1000. Which is great. I mean, that's more money for us. That's more work for us. That's- business is good. But it also means there's more money going around for everybody, it means the cost of having a quarter beef goes up, you get more stuff. But also, with a lot of that fat, we have to throw it away. It's all non-edible.

CP: Yeah.

WP: I mean, you could request it and we'll bag it up for people for like making tallow. But for the most part, it just ends up in a rendering barrel. And people are paying then for something they're not getting. Because at that point, they're getting paid- they're paying for the processing,

not the actual meat itself. So, it's- it's- it's been a boom for our business. For sure. Like I mean, we're booked out. Like I said- and it's going for about every week we go in, it goes about two weeks further out. So, it's not slowing down [laughs] anytime soon. And that's great for us. And I've noticed a lot of the other small businesses in the area are, ba- that have- businesses in the area, especially newer businesses that are adapting. They're adjusting their fire, they're- "alright, so we need to go curbside, cool beans." There's a place in downtown Barron, well Rice Lake- almost said Visalia. I'm not in California anymore- in downtown Rice Lake called The Wicked Whisk. They switched to a curbside option, like day one. And the owner is one of our customers- we were talking about it and he's like, "I don't regret it for a second. We're do- so busy." Because they showed the consumer they care. Like the only people that really complain about not being able to come in, I'd say about 90% of them are wearing the exact same hat. Which it's- it's silly cuz you're like- I'm not saying that all of Trump's supporters are stupid, but a lot of them are, and a lot of- maybe a lot of stupid people are Trump supporters. Maybe that's what I'm trying to say. Not all Trump supporters are stupid, but a lot of stupid people are Trump supporters. Go get on Parler. [laughs] That one's- that's a different conversation. See, these interviews are dangerous because everything in this world is so integrated. Like people can't just have like- you can't look at something and go, "that's good or bad." Because then you got to be like, "well, it's not as bad as-" just no. Is it good? Or is it bad? Like there is no middle ground on murder.

CP: Right.

WP: Or like, I guess the middle ground on genocide is murder.

[both speaking-unclear]

WP: Like some things you don't need a middle ground, some things are just straight, "yes and no." And this COVID deal. I hate calling it that too. Because it's not- I mean, America is the only place making it a deal. [laugh] And I don't, it could be because I'm- I was in the military- being- very common joke in the Marine Corps is "hey, man, you're wearing the same- hey man I got the same boots. Or holy crap our shirts, we match." Very common. So, conformity- and real quick, I- I feel there's a point I need to make here. Like, and when I say I'm okay with conformity, this is also coming from a guy that wears a "Don't Tread on Me" hat. [The Don't Tread on Me symbol has become a recognizable indicator of Libertarians in the United States]. Like, I am very much about individual rights. But if we're going to be a country that is so focused on hyper-nationalism, as a good thing, then can we at least agree that conformity is part of that and just try that for a minute? Like, our culture is so nationalized, which is terrifying to me- like that's Hitler. Hello. Nationalism is bad. For- being proud of America is good. I mean, I am a very proud American, I'm a patriot. I'm all about pride in one's country. But I would more- rather be proud in my species. And right now, I'm not proud of either. Which sucks.

CP: Yeah.

WP: Like, I've been a nihilist most of my life. [laugh] Like I've always really seen the negative and expect that the world's gonna burn anyway. But I never- I thought it would be like one or two people's dumb decision that led down it, not our entire species walking off the cliff like [unintelligible]. And I know that all the other countries are terrified because it's mostly here in America. And no, it's not our whole species, so I hold hope. But I don't like being on the Titanic right now.

CP: I can relate to that. [laugh]

WP: [laugh] Like, I feel like I should be playing a violin or something, because I know we're going down. Like- and I don't try to claim to be a smart person or an intelligent person. But I can't be- people can't be so dumb to not see what's going on. Like, I can't be that much smarter than everyone else around me. Like, I refuse to believe it. Like, I feel like I'm being lied to by the whole world.

CP: Would you say that's, like, one of the more difficult things that like, has come out of this pandemic is that- I know for me, like my faith in humanity, and you've seen it happen, like- just kind of, like, tanked over the last couple of months, especially- I'm just like, the election this year, other things that have gone on and then the pandemic- and how it seems there are so many people that are uncaring about the health of others.

WP: Oh, absolutely. Absolutely. Like, and, I've been privy to some incidents that really shook my faith in humanity while I was serving overseas. I partook in a few things that shook my foundations of my faith in humanity. So, it was shaky to begin with. But I- it was shaky to begin with, but what I've seen is far worse than what I ever dreamed possible. Like I remember 9-11 vividly, and I remember also the- how- I remember walking down the street and seeing Old Glory hanging in front of every single building, every single house, flags stuck into the ground, stickers. But- and, I said it back then, it also- we had a uniform people to hate. Uniformly across the board all of a sudden everyone hated [sigh] anybody that was olive brown. Because I know plenty of people that are of In- from, from India, Indian descent, and people that are Sheik, guys that had nothing to do with Iraq, Iran, Pakistan or Afghanistan, getting harassed, assaulted, abused, just because they were Middle Eastern. But America was super proud. We were taking care of each other, we were on it. Because we had somebody to hate. And- and back then I thought I was just being a delusional high school kid going, "oh, they're just- they're just like this because they got somebody to hate, and I'm an angsty teenager." And then I grew up and then this happened, hell I grew up and got out of the Marine Corps in 2008, when I left active duty and discovered [laugh] while I was gone, America had destroyed America. There was no jobs, there was no housing, there was no car- get- life is garbage here, what happened? And- ended up having to bounce back into the Corps for a little while, simply because there were no options. That was terrifying as- when you join the military, and you're told, "oh, there's gonna be jobs." Then you get out and there's not. So, our whole generation has kind of gone through some weird sh- stuff. We've gotten to see just about- think we've gotten to see the most varied U.S wars in

one generation. And now CO- a great depression, a pandemic that we are winning. Wisconsin's winning- we beat New York's numbers, didn't we- the percentage?

CP: Yeah, we did. I don't remember exactly what those are. But yeah, where- our percentages are, our per capita cases is higher than New York's was during the middle of the first peak.

WP: Like their highest- Yeah, it was just terrifying to me. I laugh. I do laugh. I don't know what else to do. Because if I don't laugh, I kind of just want to cry.

CP: Right.

WP: Cuz it's depressing to me. I mean, I have- there's another thing that this whole deal is definitely- I feel like the Vietnam vets when 9-11 happened, and they saw all that death, and it triggered a lot of repression to come rushing up. I have never felt more Marine Corps than I have over the last few months. I know- depression, anxiety, PTSD has been- daily- I've been having to maintain a higher level of medication. And I know a lot of other guys have been in the same boat. The VA is overloaded with cases of anger problems and all kinds of stuff coming to the surface now that they have to sit there and look in the mirror all day, because they can't go to work and distract themselves. Again, I'm lucky as hell that I've been able to stay working and keep myself busy. But I know just for veterans, this has been a uniquely trying time. The 22 has gone up to 27. From what I've heard of recent counts- the 22 being veteran suicides a day. 27 is the- now the national average, which is way too many. And I know just across the board, suicides- and I wonder if they're being added to the statistics because they should- of people that are- this whole COVID has caused, there's depression and anxiety to get to a certain point to where they take their own lives. I feel that sits under the same bubble as like earthquake- crush- drops man's house- man gets out of the house, but his insulin's in the house and then he dies of his diabetes. It's still a earthquake-related death.

CP: Right.

WP: I feel like a lot of these suicides that have been popping up all over the place, should definitely be added into some of those statistics.

CP: [both talking - unclear] make that happen.

WP: But they won't. Because anytime- science- [sigh] either they need to teach people how the scientific method works, or stop trying to use the scientific method to explain things on the news. Because the more they try to use science to explain what they're doing and like- explain to people what they're doing, the more people will go, "Oh, well, that didn't work, they don't know what they're talking about." That's h- how science works. You get like, "okay, this sh- this could work. Let's try it. It didn't. All right. Well, this could work too. Let's try it," until you find something that works. I mean, hell, 409. [409 is a common household cleaner] There's a cleaner that everyone uses, because it took them 409 times to get the compound to work. [laugh] Like

that's a household name. But people don't know science. And I think our biggest problem with the COVID- the whole pandemic- with America- and I think it all boils down to the public education. People don't know enough. They've got the world's information at their fingertips, and they only use it to find the information they want.

CP: Yeah, that yeah, definitely. So, you touched a little bit on the education system, how people just don't understand how science works. You've touched a little bit on like, the mask thing and like, generally caring about other people, in general. So, what do you think are some of the other issues that have been triggered by or exacerbated by COVID-19?

WP: Oh, I mean, look at anything on the news. Everything on the news. It was the- see, I gotta choose this sentence carefully, because I wanted to say riots, but the riots were not- any rioting- as far as I could tell from most of the people- witnesses that I saw- that I've talked to- that were in those- some of the bigger cities, and several different unaffiliated news sources. Generally, what I got from it- the riots were part of some other situation that was trying to take advantage. And there's been a lot of that. There's been a lot of people trying to take advantage of the imbalances caused by COVID. I mean, scammers have gone up through the roof, trying to get people's freaking stimulus check money, and high end bank accounts, and it's getting silly. But the- I feel a lot of people- for the first time in a long time, a lot of people have had to sit there and look in the mirror. And by having to look at yourself and look at your situation and look around and be- like being at home for a month. A lot of the bigger cities that had to close down Minneapolis, St. Paul, where there were a lot of big protests, because people've been out of work for months. When you're out of work for months, and everything's closed, if you live in a- pardon my language, but if you live in a shithole, because your situation- you work 40 hours a week, but you can barely afford your shithole. And I've been in that situation. And it's- that- when you're stuck, when you go to work- that's how you get out of your shithole.

CP: Yeah.

WP: And I'm using that word aggressively. Because a lot of people don't really understand how other people are living.

CP: Yeah.

WP: Thankfully, I've had the experiences of my life to where I've got to live in really nice conditions and really bad conditions. And now I'm more on the right side, which makes me happy- but the people in the really bad conditions- it's easy to block out how bad things are when you're spending 50 hours a week at work, to afford to have the bad- t- terrible conditions. So, if you're never there, you're the- so when you're there, you're sleeping. You eat, sleep, go to work, eat, sleep, go to work. So, all of these people that are in these multi hundred thousand dollar homes that work 30 hours a week going, "well if you worked harder you- you could get out of that situation-" no, you can't. Only reason I was able to get out of it is because of the generosity of friends and a ton of luck. Like a ton of luck and timing, it- but most people don't get that. Hell,

most people my age if they're trying to get out of that situation, especially if they have children, god forbid.

CP: Yeah.

WP: Because you're stuck. Not that I'm gonna have any problem against having children, I love children, I want children. I don't have any now, which definitely facilitated my escape from poverty. But on the same token, that shouldn't be an issue. But when you're at home for three months, four months, you're looking around and all you see is your shithole. Inevitably, you're gonna want out.

CP: Yeah.

WP: And when everyone at the exact same time is doing the exact same thing. You start opening your door, looking at the neighbor and going, "this is dogshit, right?" I mean- in barracks life in the Marine Corps. We were in Japan, and power'd go out. Every barracks door opens and heads stick around, like, "did your power go out too?" When it happens to everybody at once, you start noticing. And all of these people are starting to notice. And I- you know that you live in a shithole. But at least it's yours. At least somebody else you know, somebody else is living better than you which- at least somebody is doing good. Like you know your homie gets out of the hood- and now he's living up this way and then he invites you over- I say, homie, I lived in- like the street was actually called South Central. It was super ghetto, shootings, cars getting like- I literally walked outside to my parking lot, and like enclosed parking lot, and found my car to be sitting on jacks, totally stripped. That was one of the times my car got broken into. Ghetto. And I know people out there that have been fighting tooth and nail. A couple of my friends there lost people because they got COVID, and the uninsured are not getting taken care of. Which- so you've got uninsured people getting sent home with full blown COVID symptoms. Well, these people still need to go get food. These people still have to- if you're sending them home, they're not getting paid to not go to work now. So now they have to go to work. Because America, and now you're sending sick people to work. What do we think's going to happen? And yeah, it's definitely, it- it's silly. Like- I don't know any other way to word it other than it's just silly. We've been thoroughly hornswoggled and as far as I can tell, everyone's just getting sick of it. I mean, you look at- look at the election numbers. Look at how many the third party- 3.6%?

CP: Yeah.

WP: I mean, it's been a long time since we've seen it- seen that many people go, "you know what the system is- eff this system." Especially in a year where- another one of those- vote this person or that person will get elected- years.

CP: Yeah.

WP: God, I'm sick of that system. I'm just- I was really kind of hoping we'd actually get an educated person in office for once- and we need to quit electing- the leaders of our country need to stop being educated 40 years ago- 30 years ago- because I'm sorry, if you've got a 30 year old education that has not been polished at all since then, you might as well not have the education, because- unless we're talking basic mathematics, it's probably obsolete now. I mean, history, that changes daily, science, that changes daily, like mathematics is the only thing that's constant. And, like economics, how are you gonna have a 70- an economics degree from the 70s and be telling people how to run a country right now? Like, and people are dow- like, "Joe, he's so smart. He went to college." I think he's got a Bachelor's. As far as I know, you're probably more educated than he is.

CP: [laugh] I mean, that's kind of a- to me- that's kind of scary. Because every day, even though I work my career every day- I'm working right now. Hey, I'm a historian- And I'm like, I still feel like I'm super dumb- like every day like, the more I learn, the dumber I feel. [laugh]

WP: That's how it's supposed to work. I'm pretty sure Einstein said that. Pretty sure Stephen Hawkings agreed. That's like the one thing they agreed on. And- oh god, all of our smart people are dying, that's the problem. Rest in peace, Ruth.

CP: Yeah.

WP: Or actually, that's not what she would want to hear. She's- I don't know what the proper- the Judaism term for- go with God. Sure, we'll go with- the "You did great work, your memory will live on." I think that's the proper phrasing. That was probably- probably some bad comments, but- my process.

CP: [laugh] I think you did pretty good. But we're actually coming up on an hour pretty quick here.

WP: Oh, that was fast.

CP: Really quickly. But I, you covered like, everything that I was going to ask [unintelligible]

WP: Do you have any more key questions that I missed, I just rambled. I'm sorry.

CP: I would say like if- maybe you could give it like another two minutes. What do you think the government- what was something that you noticed about like local government, state government and federal government? And how did you- what were your reactions to that?

WP: Okay, so I got a couple of those. California, the most Democrat, blue state in the country, went ahead and did the most Republican thing of all time, which I thought was just- they made it up to the county governments what they were going to do with COVID, handling COVID was based at the county level, which is- you're talking about a landmass that big, I couldn't have seen

it done better. Ironically, all the- when they did that all the hard right people just called them libtards, and, oh, you stupid Democrats. Literally the most Republican thing you could do, is give all the power to your small government. Like that is actually what the party is aimed at. And they got mad at them for it. [sigh] But I love that California did that, because of the fact that you do have counties like LA, and then counties like Tulare, where you've got a completely different set of rules. Because you've got cities of millions versus cities of 10,000. And how COVID is going- you're gonna have to treat COVID- and your restrictions are extremely different. Where in a c- metropoli- major metropolitan area, everybody stay the hell in their house, there's not enough room for everyone to walk around. In a city of 100,000. No, go- go- go drive over to the- to the McDonald's and get you some fast food, drive through. Go to the Pork n' Belly and have you a burger outside. Sure. Small, smaller cities. Sure. Bigger metropolitan areas, no. It makes sense. Wisconsin, on the other hand- I feel really bad for [Governor] Evers, because all that man has done since this has begun is try to help, and try to take care of people, and all the people have done is threaten his job, life, and family. Like I almost want to go pitch a tent in his front yard with my AR and say "fuck with this dude, and get shot." Because this dude is trying to save you. It- ooh, here we go. For our Christian friends, it reminds me of a Bible story, where this donkey is carrying all this stuff. And this man is trying to get it to go. It stops. So, he's kicking the donkey and pulling its rope and punching it and swearing at it. And finally, the donkey stops and looks at him and goes "ay, there is an angel standing five feet that way with a sword. If we keep going forward, he's going to kill you. Let's not go forward." And Evers is this donkey. He's just trying so hard and people are abusing the shit out of him for it. And again, I got lucky with my shop where we saw it coming, and we locked down. I've had it in my- my family here- the people that have taken me into the community. Now I've got two- three co-workers with it, which again, I call my family, and I've had a couple of my extended family out here catch COVID. In fact, we just- it's possible out- could have been an outbreak at a birthday party because someone didn't know they were COVID, but they weren't feeling well and went to a birthday party. If you're not feeling well, stay home. If you may have been exposed, stay home. My best friend is currently at our family's dinner- house for dinner this weekend- I chose not to go because I may have been exposed. So, I'm avoiding people that don't need to be exposed to me. My niece, who I haven't been able to see in two days now, because- I can wave at her from a distance- but I'm not going to chance getting someone else sick. And it doesn't require a lot of effort. And that's- and our government- our federal government's just been- I mean, since 2016- has been a nightmare. Like I mean, it's- they handled the COVID about as well as you and I predicted they were gonna. And it's- that's that. The state government's trying to do what it can, but state to state we're seeing different things- but in most states that are actually trying to stop the spread, or slow the spread at least, it's just being hit with massive fight back. Like, people get so mad about the masks, and you know what the masks are literally the least you can do. Because the best thing is for everyone stay the fuck home! [laugh] I'm sorry, I've had, tried, to tried not to- keep my- my cuss words down. And yeah, just stay the fuck home. If we could just get on- the whole planet, as a species- get on the same page with this. Like, we've already gone through all this stuff that doesn't work. I don't know why America is doing this the long way. Instead of trying something that might, instead we're trying everything else that might possibly, maybe,

even just a little help, first. And then maybe circle back around to that shut down thing, if we have time.

CP: Right.

WP: God that sounds very Bill Murray. [laugh] But yeah, for real, that, it's just been [ding] a, what just dinged at us?

CP: That was my email. [laugh]

WP: Time is up. Hour's up, go away, Wade! Oh, no. It's been a- yeah, I was not impressed with the Cheeto man. [President Donald Trump] I'm glad he's gone. I am terrified that- well, nothing is gonna get done for four years. Two years at least. 2022 is really what matters. The media likes to put all the focus on the big presidential election, but how about we put a little more focus on the guys that are actually running our country? So again, anyone sees this, I don't care who you vote for, vote. Every election, all the elections, because it's like- I had a coworker go, "what if I go vote for Trump-" I don't care! Go vote for fucking Trump. Just go vote! I did not serve, I did not lose brothers for you to sit there like a jackoff and not do this. Hell, be happy you're not in Australia where if you don't vote, they charge you 10 bucks. I don't understand how compulsory voting's not a thing. Especially considering we've got a civil- if the draft card is a thing, you should have to vote. If jury duty is a thing, you should have to vote. If we've got young 18-year-old boys and girls running around in some backwoods country, getting their tails blown off for our ability and our rights because- yes, it's all government. It's all political. It's all about money. But that's not what they're fighting for. They're fighting for your right to do these things. Honor that. Don't honor the fact that they're being manipulated into fighting some big oil war, like we were. Like we knew what we were there for. But that's not why we were there.

CP: Right? Yeah.

WP: And- honor that. I mean, at the very least honor that and put a damn mask on. We got 18-year-olds running around in gas masks, and gas mask suits MOPP 4 [military gear, Mission Oriented Protective Posture Level 4] in 100 degree weather right now, and a neck gaiter [cloth that can be used as a neck covering for warmth or pulled up for a mask] is going to choke you out to death? No, I guarantee you it won't. You may or may not have to edit this out. So, I'm just going to put the pause in there so you can if you need to edit it, but I've recently proven myself that you can have at least 45 minutes of sexual activity, with a mask on, and not die. [laugh] So if you can do that, you can wear one in the damn Kwik Trip for five minutes. Like, that's the stuff that gets me, is people acting like simple fixes are the end of the world. And I really- I wish we would have had this kind of recording technology when they- so in case you didn't notice I am in a vehicle, when they introduced these things [jiggles seatbelt] did everyone act like this? Like, I need to find somebody old, like really old, that could give me a good opinion. Cuz it blows me away like- and I think the difference is seatbelts are supposed to save you. This [shows mask] is to save somebody from you. I mean, how many Americans scream "I'll do anything for my

country! I'll shoot anybody!" But the moment you tell them to put on a piece of protective equipment to save somebody in their country, now you're asking- now you're messing with their liberties. Liberties that- if you ask them if they served, their story would start with, "I would have served but"- "I was gonna enlist, but"

CP: Right.

WP: And those would be- for anyone watching this again, I like the fact that somebody might actually see this at some point. That's who the Proud Boys are- they're- they're the guys who "would have served, but". Don't get confused by all the camouflage they wear. They're not us. I just had to get that out to a public forum. Sorry.

CP: All right, well, I'm gonna go ahead and wrap this up. But thank you so much.

WP: And thank you for having me on- on your show here.

CP: Yeah, you have some really- really good insight and some really good things to say. So, I'm really glad that you were able to- to figure- we were able to figure this out and make this happen.

WP: Yeah, Zoom! We zoom.

CP: Alright, I'm gonna have you stay on. I'm gonna stop the recording. But again, thank you, thank you very much.

WP: Of course. Thank you.