

## NAME

C101 RNC and DNC.mp3

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## DATE

September 28, 2025

## DURATION

26m 12s

## 5 SPEAKERS

Archival

Nick Capodice

Hannah McCarthy

Boris Heersink

Marjorie Hershey

## START OF TRANSCRIPT

**[00:00:00] Archival**

So the Trump campaign is pretty much taking over. The Republican National Committee, at least for senior staffers, were fired yesterday, according to two sources familiar with the matter.

**[00:00:09] Archival**

DNC put out a diss track, uh, directed at Lara Trump, the co-chair of the RNC, who released her own music the same day as Cowboy Carter. Just play it real quick.

**[00:00:21] Archival**

The RNC met in Houston last week to install a new pair of leaders selected specifically by the former president.

**[00:00:30] Nick Capodice**

You're listening to Civics 101 I'm Nick Capodice

**[00:00:32] Hannah McCarthy**

I'm Hannah McCarthy,

**[00:00:34] Nick Capodice**

And today we are talking about committees. Not the ones in Congress. That was another episode we did. Today. It is all about the RNC and the DNC,

**[00:00:44] Hannah McCarthy**

But we're not talking about the other RNC and DNC, the Republican and Democratic National Convention.

**[00:00:52] Nick Capodice**

Yeah, I can't believe we finally done it. Hannah, we have hit an initialism that is exactly the same as another extremely relevant initialism. Rnc and DNC are short for both parties national committees as well as their national conventions.

**[00:01:06] Hannah McCarthy**

And if anyone out there wants to know about the national conventions, we did an episode on those a while back and we will put a link to that in the show notes.

**[00:01:14] Nick Capodice**

You know I like that episode a lot.

**[00:01:16] Hannah McCarthy**

Oh, thank you.

**[00:01:16] Nick Capodice**

Partially because it features the copyright free banger known as stomps and claps. Man, it gets you going. You know, let's do this. And you know what? You know what? I feel bad for anyone who clicked on this episode thinking it would be about the conventions, but the committees are connected to the convention, so they'll get a little shout out today. But for the rest of this episode, when I say RNC and DNC, I am talking about the committees.

**[00:01:41] Hannah McCarthy**

Okay, Nick, can you put the kibosh on the claps?

**[00:01:45] Nick Capodice**

Alright, claps kibashed.

**[00:01:45] Hannah McCarthy**

let's get to the committees. What are they and what do they do?

**[00:01:51] Boris Heersink**

The national committees are. The only organizations actually represent the entirety of the party across all 50 states.

**[00:01:57] Marjorie Hershey**

The national committees have had a long history in which their role within the party is certainly increased, but it's increased in very different ways between the Republicans and the Democrats.

**[00:02:10] Boris Heersink**

My name is Boris Heersink. I'm an associate professor of political science at Fordham University in New York.

**[00:02:14] Marjorie Hershey**

My name is Marjorie Hershey. I am a professor of political science emerita at Indiana University. I specialize in political parties and campaigns, and I've been doing it since God was born.

**[00:02:28] Nick Capodice**

Marjorie and Boris are two of the few political scientists who write about the national committees, and people don't write about them a whole lot, because they're one of those things that you forget about for a couple of years, you know, like outdated voting machines or the census, and then suddenly, wham, everybody cares all at once.

**[00:02:46] Hannah McCarthy**

Well, we care especially about the census, bless its little decennial heart. What do these committees do?

**[00:02:55] Nick Capodice**

They do a lot of things nowadays, but that is a relatively recent phenomenon.

**[00:02:59] Boris Heersink**

They start out as just organizing national conventions. So for the first couple of decades, that's basically all they do. They get together once every four years, a couple months before the convention starts. They figure out, where are we going to meet, what are the rules? They invite people to be part of it. Afterwards, they sort of shut down everything again, like they pay off all the bills. They make sure that everything's sort of arranged well, and then they sort of, you know, go in hibernation for a couple of years, and then during the next election cycle, they get back.

**[00:03:27] Nick Capodice**

They're kind of like a big circus, you know, they just like roll into town every four years. They got this big whiz bang convention in the summer, and then everyone packs up the tent. Now, there are hundreds of staff in these committees nowadays, but long ago they were much smaller.

**[00:03:43] Marjorie Hershey**

The national committees in the past really were just the national chair and his or her briefcase. They moved wherever the national chair moved. They really did very, very little. This began to change in the Republican Party, particularly in the 1960s, because the Republicans at that time had been the minor party for a good 30 years. They were really tired of being in the minority.

**[00:04:13] Archival**

The latest figures show President Johnson nearly 41.75 million, Senator Goldwater nearly 26 and one quarter million.

**[00:04:20] Nick Capodice**

And the chair of the RNC, Ray bliss, frustrated with the failed attempt to elect Barry Goldwater, thought the RNC should do a little bit more. And what bliss had noticed is that interest groups were raising a lot of money using this newfangled thing called computerized direct mail.

**[00:04:40] Archival**

Friend and foe agree. The NRA's power to scare congressmen lies in its ability to mobilize its members in any congressional district at the touch of a computer button.

**[00:04:52] Nick Capodice**

And he thought, hey, could we, the Republican Party, do the same thing?

**[00:04:57] Marjorie Hershey**

You get mailing lists from various groups that you think have some affinity with you and your candidates for the Republicans, gun owners, business people, groups like that, and you send computerized messages to them at that time using postal mail that stirred them up. You know, something with an opening paragraph that would say something like, you know, while you are reading this paragraph of 5000 children will be killed in the womb and the only way you can. Do something about it is by sending \$100 to this particular organization.

**[00:05:37] Nick Capodice**

So the RNC starts to raise a ton of money this way, and they start to win more elections.

**[00:05:42] Hannah McCarthy**

And did the DNC look at this and basically say, I'll have what she's having.

**[00:05:47] Nick Capodice**

They didn't, at least at first, to be honest. They were going through their own issues at this time, the majority of Democrats were insisting that the party should stand for civil rights and LBJ's Voting Rights Act.

**[00:05:58] Marjorie Hershey**

That ran into real, headlong objection from a good chunk of the Democratic Party, which was the South. The South had been a little more than a third of the national democratic vote, really, for decades and decades, the South was not in the slightest enthused because the the South constituted the white South. So there was a bit of a revolt inside the Democratic Party in 1964 over civil rights. And the Democratic National Committee finessed that revolt by saying, okay, we'll we'll do a couple of minor steps now, but we promise that after 1968, we'll set up a reform commission, and we'll do more to get more voices heard.

**[00:06:49] Nick Capodice**

The DNC instituted reforms that made the convention more representational. So they told these states, hey, you can't just send white delegates to the convention. You have to send a diverse slate of delegates.

**[00:07:03] Marjorie Hershey**

And for quite a long time, for about 20 years after that, the Democrats kept readjusting their national rules for nominating a president every four years because somebody objected to the last batch. Finally, in 1980, when Ronald Reagan won very substantially and then won reelection in a landslide, national Democrats looked around and said, you know, this isn't working, but we'd better start raising money like the Republicans do. We had better, um, focus more on increasing our financial muscle. And that will help Democratic candidates more than perhaps even the increasing representation within the party will.

**[00:07:52] Nick Capodice**

And just like that, the DNC and the RNC became fundraising powerhouses.

**[00:07:58] Hannah McCarthy**

To be clear, when you say the Democrats did this and the Republicans did that, do you mean the DNC and the RNC? Is the party, the committee.

**[00:08:10] Nick Capodice**

Sort of.

**[00:08:11] Marjorie Hershey**

There are three different groups of what might be considered the party, the Republican Party, for example, there is the National Committee and the state committees and the local parties. Those are what we call the party organization. Every election district in the country, in theory, has its own party organization. The party organization is basically the the bones of the party. It's what survives from one election to another.

**[00:08:46] Nick Capodice**

You know the thing I reference too much Hannah

**[00:08:48] Hannah McCarthy**

Are we talking the musical 1776 or The Cremation of Sam McGee?

**[00:08:52] Nick Capodice**

No. Uh, the thing about the Senate being the saucer that cools the house.

**[00:08:57] Hannah McCarthy**

Yeah! That thing.

**[00:08:58] Archival**

Let us suppose that this this teacup is our federal government as it exists.

**[00:09:03] Hannah McCarthy**

Since the Senate has a longer time and only two members from each state, it cools the hot tempered, reactionary chamber of the house. I will say the only thing about the saucer idea is that, you know, people don't pour hot tea into their saucers anymore, so who understands it?

**[00:09:20] Nick Capodice**

That's a fair gripe, Hannah. But just so, the National Committee corrals and cools all the hot tea of the hundreds of state and local committees. But to your question, like what is the party? There are two additional groups outside of the organizations. The second group that Marjorie talked about is the party in government.

**[00:09:41] Marjorie Hershey**

You know, if you were to ask people, what's the Republican Party? They might well say, and with good reason. Donald Trump, um, he has no party organization, office, but what's called the party in government. The folks who hold elected and appointed office in government are also a major part of the party. And when people think of the party, they often think of those folks. And that party includes not only people like presidential and congressional candidates, but the party in government includes, for example, judges who identify as Republicans and who we may have, in fact, seen this year, on occasion, some people ruling in certain ways that reflect their partisanship.

**[00:10:29] Nick Capodice**

And the third chunk of the party is the party electorate.

**[00:10:33] Hannah McCarthy**

As in me and you.

**[00:10:34] Nick Capodice**

Me and you and everyone we know. Hannah. People who identify as Republicans, Democrats, libertarians, what have you.

**[00:10:41] Hannah McCarthy**

But I don't feel that we are the party, aren't we, as voters, the target of the parties? They not. We choose a party platform, run campaigns, write and pass laws, etc.

**[00:10:56] Nick Capodice**

that is true, except for one massive exception.

**[00:10:59] Marjorie Hershey**

Party leaders in the party organization don't choose who are going to be their candidates. There are an awful lot of people who think they do, who are still under the impression that somehow there's a boss somewhere who's sitting in a smoke filled room who says, this is going to be the candidate. And by the way, steal as many votes as you can.

**[00:11:19] Archival**

The US Democratic Party is in turmoil as the convention to nominate Hillary Clinton as their presidential candidate gets underway today. Supporters of her rival, Bernie Sanders, have taken to the streets in a row over leaked emails, appearing to suggest that party insiders had tried to scupper his campaign.

**[00:11:36] Marjorie Hershey**

It hasn't been the case for almost a century because the so-called bosses don't have anything to boss with. They can't give the nomination to anybody. It's the primaries who decide who the party's candidates are.

**[00:11:54] Nick Capodice**

Now we can't really talk about this, you know, on a podcast. But Hannah, do you have any, like, brand loyalties?

**[00:11:59] Hannah McCarthy**

Uh, I guess I do. I don't know, I don't know if I want to state an endorsement for any of them at the moment. Why do you?

**[00:12:08] Nick Capodice**

I have a few, and I swear I am not looking to secure advertisers here. I think I can get away with this. Uh, none greater than diamond crystal kosher salt. I have been proselytizing this salt for about a decade, and I'll talk about salt and cooking with anybody as long as they can stand. But like the people at diamond Crystal decide how to shape the box and how big to make the box and all that stuff. The committees, these national committees are responsible for the party's brand.

**[00:12:34] Boris Heersink**

Yeah So party brands are the basic idea that the average voter sort of has, at any given moment in time of what you can sort of expect if you vote for Democratic or Republican candidate. And so if we were to go out on the street and just talk to random people about sort of like different policies, that the Democrats have, different policies that Republicans have, some people might have no idea what we're talking about. Some people might have really intricate knowledge of, like, all the different intra party debates and disagreements that that exist about different issues. But a lot of people probably will have a rough idea where the Democratic Party sort of falls on abortion or on health care. Uh, and they'll have a rough idea of where the Republican Party falls on those same issues or on taxation or on the role of government or things like that. And that rough idea is a really helpful tool, because it makes it a lot easier for us to vote.

**[00:13:28] Nick Capodice**

Most people have an idea of who they're going to pick for president before they step into the voting booth, but when you're in there and you're looking at a few dozen other names for a few dozen other offices, you might not know too much about who they are and what they stand for. But that party brand makes it a little bit easier. Because you trust a brand, you're going to pick someone with an R or a D next to their name.

**[00:13:53] Boris Heersink**

Now, that might not be the best way to vote, and maybe we should do a better job as voters. Um, but, you know, it's time consuming to inform yourself about candidates and about all the issues and all that. Um, and often the shortcut of sort of knowing I'm a Democrat, I like the Democratic Party. I'm going to assume that the candidate they come up with is better for me and vice versa for the Republican side is, uh, you know, pretty appealing to a lot of voters. It saves a lot of time. Um, the issue that the parties have, and this is where sort of the political science angle comes in, is that it's really hard to have a permanent party brand because issues change. Uh, the people that vote for the party change the people that the party is trying to get to vote for them changes. And so what that understanding is with that image is that we have the party is never sort of set in stone. And so the parties have to continuously work to try to explain to us what their brand is. Um, and they're also continuously competing with all types of other sources that are trying to also basically do the same thing.

**[00:14:57] Nick Capodice**

We've got to take a quick break, and when we get back, we're going to talk about the waning in the powers of these committees over the last few years, as well as the recent shakeup in leadership at the RNC.

**[00:15:07] Hannah McCarthy**

But before the break, we don't use a computerized mailing system, but we do send out an email, which I guess you could call a version of computerized mailing. Anyway, every two weeks we send out extra credit. It is our free newsletter where Nick and I talk about whatever the heck is on our minds at any given moment. Sign up for it at our website [civics101podcast.org](http://civics101podcast.org).

**[00:15:40] Hannah McCarthy**

We're back. We're talking about the RNC and the DNC. And Nick, can you sort of break down what happened within the RNC? A few weeks ago, somebody was ousted, right?

**[00:15:52] Nick Capodice**

Yeah.

**[00:15:53] Archival**

It's official. Donald Trump has solidified his takeover of the Republican National Committee. Ronna Romney McDaniel, a Trump loyalist, has stepped down as chair after being pushed out by Trump. The man replacing her is North Carolina Republican Michael Whatley, an election denier who still embraces the big lie.

**[00:16:12] Hannah McCarthy**

Now who chooses who is in charge of these committees?

**[00:16:15] Nick Capodice**

First off, the head of a committee of the party that's in power is usually picked by the incumbent president. Joe Biden chooses who chairs the DNC. It's currently Jamie Harrison, who Biden picked in 2020, but the party not in power. Here's Boris Heersink again.

**[00:16:33] Boris Heersink**

This is a pretty extreme version of it, actually. This year, when a party is not in the white House, usually the national committee chair is independently elected by the committee, and that normally gives the committee chairs a little bit more power and a little bit more freedom to essentially do what they want to do. This year is really weird because, um, the previous national committee chair for the Republican Party just resigned.

**[00:16:53] Hannah McCarthy**

Would it be fair to put giant air quotes around the word resigned?

**[00:16:58] Nick Capodice**

I don't think anybody would challenge that particular pantomime, Hannah. Uh, because, yes, on February 26th, 2024, the chair of the RNC, Ronna Romney McDaniel, resigned. After that, there was a brief scandal over her being hired as a paid contributor at NBC. Nbc quite quickly decided to un hire her. But going back to the RNC, it wasn't just McDaniel who resigned. Here is Margie Hershey again.

**[00:17:27] Marjorie Hershey**

Former President Trump conducted a purge of the Republican National Committee. He decided that although in 2020, the Republican National Committee was very helpful to him and certainly tried to be very helpful to him, that it didn't do enough. And so he not only installed a new head and co-chair of the Republican National Committee, the co-chair being his daughter in law, but he also fired or said they would have to reapply for their jobs, at least 60 staff members. And of course, there are others who stayed. But using his term, bloodbath, there was basically a bloodbath within the Republican National Committee.

**[00:18:11] Boris Heersink**

And so the current heads of the RNC are essentially Trump people who are essentially going to help co run the campaign from the RNC, which is quite unusual nowadays. It used to be more common, but it's pretty pretty uncommon now.

**[00:18:25] Hannah McCarthy**

So the RNC is planning its convention this July. The DNC is planning it for August. This is when the parties unveil, usually their platform, when they tell Americans what they are all about this election, do committees create the platform?

**[00:18:45] Boris Heersink**

Sort of. So the platform is created by the national convention. Um, and so the delegates at the convention, um, have like sub committees that deal with those things, they vote on it. And the convention as a whole has to approve the platform. So the Republicans in 2020 decided not to have a platform. They basically reused the 2016 platform, which was when they were in opposition. So the platform criticized the incumbent president, uh, who was Barack Obama, for doing all types of bad things. Um, in 2020, the Republicans basically just said, yeah, that same thing applies, uh, which is very weird.

**[00:19:24] Nick Capodice**

And we don't know if the RNC is going to continue to just quote the 2016 platform in 2024. It's completely up in the air what they're going to do.

**[00:19:33] Hannah McCarthy**

Last thing I want to know, Nick. And it's sort of on the branding conversation that we had earlier. I feel like I have a pretty good handle on what the Democratic and Republican parties stand for, but I don't necessarily credit that to these committees. I think I credit to the thousands of things that I see each day in the news and hear on the radio, see on TV, see on social media.

**[00:20:00] Nick Capodice**

You're absolutely right to see it that way. Hannah, Boris said that this is a major, major alteration to how committees are involved in elections.

**[00:20:08] Boris Heersink**

Definitely things have changed. Right. And so one of the big things that have changed, and this is sort of with my book is about is that for about almost a century, you have national committees that are trying really hard to, um, sort of set the tone of what we think about when we think Democrats or Republicans. Right. And there's not an easy way to sort of set that image in our minds. Like they can't just go to us and press a button and say, like, this is now what you think of when you hear Democrat. And so the only thing they can do essentially, is sort of throw ideas at us and hope that it hits. And the way that national committees can do that is through publicity.

**[00:20:49] Nick Capodice**

The committees do ads, they mail stuff to people. The DNC even had a magazine for a while

**[00:20:55] Hannah McCarthy**

A magazine??

**[00:20:56] Nick Capodice**

A magazine, and that took a lot of work.

**[00:20:59] Boris Heersink**

If you want to put out a magazine, you need money, you need knowhow, you need technological sort of skills. You need staff to actually do all that work. And if you do a good job of that, you might be able to put out something that 100,000 people read every, every month. Now, with social media, you can reach 100,000 people in seconds for free. Um, and so the competition has become much stronger in terms of the publicity side of trying to sort of compete with other politicians. So you've got lots of politicians that are really popular on TikTok and Twitter, or it used to be Twitter talking heads, pundits, um, your Tucker Carlson's other people on Fox News or MSNBC. Um, all these actors are sort of also signaling to voters what they think the party brand should be. And for national committees, it's just become really, really difficult to compete with that. So one of the things we've really seen over the last couple years, basically the last decade or so, is that both national committees have kind of accepted that and have moved into a different direction now in terms of what they specialize in.

**[00:22:05] Hannah McCarthy**

What exactly are they specializing in if they have handed the reins of party branding over to social media and the pundits?

**[00:22:14] Nick Capodice**

They are specializing mostly in data collection these days. These committees have an unprecedented amount of data on voters. They know their party affiliation, who they've given money to if they voted at all in elections, not to mention myriad pieces of demographic information. They study us, and they do that to learn the best way to convince us how to vote.

**[00:22:37] Archival**

So when we talk about the DNC's data storage capabilities, what kind of information is being stored? Oh, everything. You can imagine the entire voter file from across the country. This is every voter and a record of whether they voted in the past. It's also all of the field data that the people who knock on your doors are collecting. The people who call you are collecting...



**[00:23:00] Nick Capodice**

And the last thing I want to touch on Hannah is about that. It's about voting. So you can protest. You can run for office yourself. But the vote, that vote in every election is a crucial part of civic participation. And what do we do if that vote is suppressed? Now, Marjorie said the national committees would not endorse attempts to stop people from casting their votes. However, the committees might not stand in the way.

**[00:23:31] Marjorie Hershey**

The party organizations really don't have the power to enforce small d democratic rules on their activists or their base, or their even their state parties. They can urge they can provide incentives, they can motivate. But in the end, if somebody wants to say, we're going to do everything we can to keep this group from voting in local elections. The National Party can say, well, you know, that's not a great idea. But on the other hand, if it helps us elect candidates, we're going to be a little loath to object to it. And that's something we all need to pay attention to because, um, democracy does not enforce itself. It is enforced by the people who accept its rules. And, um, we are in a time period when those rules have been seriously questioned by a number of people. And if we want to keep them, uh, you know, there have been any number of countries that have been democracies and lost them. We have the advantage that we have 200 plus years worth of experience with a democracy, but that doesn't guarantee that we will always have one that's, uh, that that's up to the eternal vigilance of the folks down at the grassroots.

**[00:25:04] Nick Capodice**

All right. You heard what she said. Pay attention. And remember, she's been doing it since God was born.

**[00:25:16] Nick Capodice**

Well, that's the RNC and the DNC. If any of you out there ever want to hear me talk about salt, or you want a recitation of The Cremation of Sam McGee, I'm your man. This episode was made by me. Nick Capodice with you Hannah McCarthy. Thank you. As always. Christina Phillips is our senior producer. Rebecca Lavoie our executive producer. Music in this episode by Hanu Dixit, Lobo Loco, Makiah, KieloKaz, Jesse Gallagher, Alexandra Woodward, Peter Sandberg, Spring Gang Fabian Tell Lena House, Scott Holmes, Twin Musicom, Cooper Cannell, and the guy I'd want to be the chair of MY committee on music, Chris Zabriskie. Civics 101 is a production of NHPR, New Hampshire Public Radio. That's why Civics 101 is proud to be a sponsor of flaky, delicious kosher Salt by My salt product.

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