

The Politics Classroom  
Host: Professor Floros  
Ep. 2022.12: No One Should Have Life Terms...Except Tenured Professors  
In the Classroom: Professor Chris Bonneau, University of Pittsburgh, Political Science  
Recorded on March 29, 2022

**Professor Floros:**

What is the point of incarceration? Is it simply about punishing folks convicted of a crime? Are harsh sentences supposed to deter others from committing similar offenses or protect society from people the courts have deemed dangerous? Or is it an opportunity to help a convicted offender emerge from incarceration, with skills and tools that may prevent them from re-offending? And, who gets to decide what an offender's sentence should be? I'll investigate these questions and more with judicial politics expert Professor Chris Bonneau. So, let's get started in The Politics Classroom recorded on March 29, 2022.

**Intro Music:** Three Goddesses by Third Age

**Professor Floros:**

Welcome to The Politics Classroom, a podcast of UIC Radio. I'm Professor Kate Floros, a political scientist at the University of Illinois at Chicago. You can find me on Twitter @DrFloros and find more information about the podcast, including further reading on topics discussed with my guests at [thepoliticsclassroom.org](http://thepoliticsclassroom.org).

It is my pleasure to welcome Professor Chris Bonneau into the Classroom today. Professor Bonneau is a full professor in the Political Science department of my alma mater, the University of Pittsburgh, where he teaches American politics with a specialization in judicial politics. Professor Bonneau received a bachelor's degree in Political Science, Theology and Humanities from Valparaiso University, master's degrees in Political Science from Ball State University and Michigan State University, and a PhD in Political Science from Michigan State.

Professor Bonneau is the author or co-author of many books, book chapters, and articles, and it would take me the entire episode to list them all. Some highlights include the co-authored books "Voters' Verdicts: Citizens, Campaigns, and Institutions in State Supreme Court Elections" and "In Defense of Judicial Elections," as well as the co-edited book, "Judicial Elections in the 21st Century." Adding to his extensive publications, Professor Bonneau was the co-editor of the journal State Politics and Policy Quarterly, a reader of AP government and politics exams, and president of the University Senate at Pitt. He teaches courses in Pitt's Inside Out program, which brings Pitt undergrads together with incarcerated students in a classroom set in a correctional facility. He has also, served on many exam and dissertation committees, including my methods exam committee. Professor Chris Bonneau, welcome to The Politics Classroom.

**Professor Bonneau:**

Good to see you again, Kate.

**Professor Floros:**

I ask all my podcast guests about their career path, because I think it's important for undergraduates, especially, to understand that careers unfold in numerous ways. So, what sparked your interest in political science and judicial politics, especially. And why did you wanna become a professor?

**Professor Bonneau:**

Yeah, that's a good question. So, my story has, um, a lot of luck and a lot of fortunate breaks. Um, I didn't have a plan really. So, I was always interested in civics and government, um, and interested in politics. And, and as a kid, I volunteered on campaigns and, and did those kind of things. Did my undergraduate work, as you mentioned, at Valparaiso University, which was a poor choice for me for a number of reasons, but I did have the fortune of having some, some really excellent professors in political science. And so, I chose that as a major and at the end of my undergraduate, I was like, "Mmm, what do I do now?"

And so, I considered law school for about 30 seconds and decided that wasn't, that wasn't the path. And so, they, my professor said, "Well, why don't you try graduate school?" And so, I didn't really know what graduate school was. I didn't know what it would entail, but I was like, "oh, I can keep going to school." Which is something I've done every year, since I was five years old.

**Professor Floros:**

Sure.

**Professor Bonneau:**

So, let's keep going to school. Didn't get any into any PhD programs initially. And so, I was like, okay, now what do I do? And Ball State had a one-year Master's. And so, I went there for a year and did that. And then the next year was fortunate enough to get into several programs, went to Michigan State, which is known for its program at the time in, in judicial politics and within political science, I was always interested in the courts just cause I think the courts are the most important branch of government for a variety of reasons, which we can discuss.

And I fell into judicial elections, cuz I was assigned as a first semester graduate student to work on a State Supreme Court database project with, with Professor Melinda Gann Hall. And I just kind of was assigned there and did well and stayed with it. And so, I, I got a lot of good luck falling into place that turned out well.

**Professor Floros:**

So, what I'm, what I'm really curious about with what you're doing right now is the Inside Out program at Pitt. So, if I understand it correctly, it brings undergraduates from the University of Pittsburgh to a correctional facility where they have class with folks who are incarcerated there. And so, I've heard of offering college courses in correctional facilities, but this program is more than that because you're bringing in the undergraduates from Pitt. So, can you tell me a little bit more about the program and how you got involved with it?

**Professor Bonneau:**

Sure. So, the program started in 1997 at Temple University. It's part of an international consortium. Um, there're Inside Out facilities across the US as well as in the UK and Australia. So, I was actually picking my kid up from daycare, driving home. And there's story on NPR about this. This is probably in 2015 and it caught my ear. I was like, huh? That sounds interesting. And so, I went home and looked up the program, whatever, and saw about it and thought it would be something that would be really cool. So, I got the University to pay for me to go to a, a training, um, in 2016 where we spent a week being trained.

I'd never been inside of a prison before. So, we read a lot of stuff about pedagogy. We spent three days inside of a prison working with some incarcerated guys who had gone

through the program already, but who were there basically helping us train, um, that was at a, actually, a federal prison in West Virginia.

So, then went back to Pitt and it turns out there were some people in the English department who had also, gone through this training a few years prior, which I didn't realize. So, I got together with them in the fall of 2016, and we decided that we should try and launch something like that here.

Fortunately, there was a state prison in Pittsburgh, right on the North Shore, about five miles from campus. So, I was like, perfect. We'll get in there. We'll meet with the, the prison superintendent, we'll get in, be easy commute. And so on. Did that was great. We're all set to go. And then at the end of January of 2017, they announced that they were closing that facility in Pittsburgh, and so, we had to scramble to find another prison. Well, the other prisons are about hour, hour 15 minutes away.

**Professor Floros:**

Oh, wow.

**Professor Bonneau:**

So, we ended up first finding a home at Fayette, which is about an hour plus south of Pittsburgh. We've subsequently expanded to Somerset and Laurel Highlands, which are Southeast of Pittsburgh.

So, the pitch is that we have 16 Pitt students and we have the prisons recruit 16 incarcerated students for us. And we just have class. We provide, um, through this project, which, the Pitt Prison Education Project, which is kinda like the umbrella organization. We've raised money. We've gotten Pitt to give college credits for the incarcerated students for free

**Professor Floros:**

Mm-hmm

**Professor Bonneau:**

Um, so, the, so, we've got guys who have earned 15 college credits so far, who've taken these courses

**Professor Floros:**

Nice.

**Professor Bonneau:**

So, they can then transfer if they get out or whatever, they can use it for parole. And so, we just go in, we pay for all the books; we pay for all the supplies. All the prison needs to give us is a room and 16 guys. And yeah, we just have, we just have normal class.

**Professor Floros:**

And so, is this like on a Saturday or something that you all drive down?

**Professor Bonneau:**

No, we do

**Professor Floros:**

So, how does that work?

**Professor Bonneau:**

Well, you can do it a couple different ways. You can do it, a block during the day, which is hard cuz students have other classes, whatever. I've always done it at night.

**Professor Floros:**

Okay.

**Professor Bonneau:**

So, a night class, so, one night a week. So, we leave campus around 4:15, class starts around 6:00, but, you know, with the prison could be from 6:00-7:00. And they throw us out at about 8:15, and then we drive back. So, it's a six-hour commitment basically. But if you do it as a night class, students have fewer conflicts.

**Professor Floros:**

Sure. And have you noticed a difference in the students who sign up to these classes, the Inside Out classes, versus your regular judicial politics classes?

**Professor Bonneau:**

Yeah, absolutely. So, you have to be committed to this, right? This is not something you can just show up when you want. This is not something where it's an easy grade or, or anything else because of the time that's involved, and you have to be there every week. Interestingly, is disproportionately women. I had one class that was 14 women, two men. I think the most balanced class I had was 12 and four, which is interesting.

**Professor Floros:**

That actually doesn't surprise me at all.

**Professor Bonneau:**

The other thing is I have zero issues motivating these students because they're committed and they want to do this. And so, I have zero issues, right? It's a self-selected group of people who want to

**Professor Floros:**

Yeah.

**Professor Bonneau:**

Who want to do this. And so, there, there's students, actually, I end up being probably the closest to, in terms of writing letters of recommendation, advising them on jobs and, and things like that because we spend so much time together.

**Professor Floros:**

Do you fight over the radio?

**Professor Bonneau:**

We do not. So, there are two ways to do transportation. So, some of my colleagues in English department will rent the bus or a van. The thought of, honestly, driving an hour and 15 minutes on a bus after teaching a two-and-a-half-hour class. No. So, we carpool. To get to know students better, what I do is, I drive one of the car, so, I always drive myself obviously, but then I will drive one carpool each week, like once during a semester. So, I get to have some extra time with, with those students who are in that pod.

**Professor Floros:**

Okay. So, can you talk about the benefits to both the Pitt undergrads and the incarcerated folks of having this type of mixed class?

**Professor Bonneau:**

There are a couple things. Let me start with the incarcerated guys. Um, when I say guys, cause we're only in male prisons. There are two women's prisons in Pennsylvania, the closest one's an hour and 45 minutes away. So, it's, we just can't do it, sadly. So, the benefits of the guys. There aren't a lot of educational programming beyond adult basic education in the prison system.

**Professor Floros:**

Okay.

**Professor Bonneau:**

And so, they can get their GED, but that's basically it. Right, they may be able to do some correspondence courses, but there's nothing like live instruction. A lot of these guys have never been exposed to a college class before they've never had the chance to succeed. They've never been given the opportunity. And I've had guys in class, who could clearly succeed in the Pitt campus, but they could easily have a B average on the Pitt campus, but they never got the chance for a variety of reasons. And so, it's providing them that opportunity. It's allowing them to succeed academically. It improves morale. It can set them up with, 97% of people who are incarcerated are gonna be released. Right? It shows that they're doing more than just a bare minimum. They're actually trying to improve themselves and trying to get to a point where they can leave prison in a better situation than, than when they went in.

For the Pitt students. Pitt students are relatively privileged lot and a lot of them don't have experience with the criminal justice system. A lot of them don't have experience with people from different backgrounds, people from different socioeconomic status, and now they're in a room wi-, with these folks, and the quality of discussion, the perspectives that are brought are, are unlike any other perspectives you would get in the Pitt classroom. And so, you, you're having discussions about things like the school-to-prison pipeline, or about racial discrimination from, from people who have quite literally lived it.

**Professor Floros:**

Yeah.

**Professor Bonneau:**

And you know, that kind of, of engagement with scholarly literature from a personal perspective and lived experiences, is invaluable for the Pitt students.

**Professor Floros:**

Have you had incarcerated students who have gotten out and gone on to college? Have you been doing it long enough?

**Professor Bonneau:**

Yes. I've had some that, that I've gotten out. I have a few, I'm still in contact with. One, um, during the pandemic, because you could, haven't been able to go into the prisons, I would have come talk to my classes. He actually just won a municipal election to be Judge of Elections in his, in his district.

**Professor Floros:**

Nice.

**Professor Bonneau:**

So, he's, um, he's on disability, right? So, he's not working, um, for reasons unrelated to his prison sentence, but yeah, he bought a house. He's giving back to his community. He volunteers to come talk to my class whenever I want. And so. A lot of them, it's hard to keep track of what's

**Professor Floros:**

Sure.

**Professor Bonneau:**

You know, some of the guys are never getting out or they're not getting out for a long time. So, you know, it's the kind of program that breaks down barriers and, and really, I think can help show the, the importance and, and the power of education.

**Professor Floros:**

Now I would not imagine that you have any discipline problems in this program in terms of danger to the students, but I'm also assuming that you have to sign a million waivers.

**Professor Bonneau:**

No

**Professor Floros:**

No?

**Professor Bonneau:**

No. So, we have an MOU between the university, so, Memorandum of Understanding between the University and the Department of Corrections. I don't make my students sign a waiver. I always tell my students, I said, you should tell your parents you're doing this. Don't ask them; you're an adult, but you should tell. The incentive structure is such that the prisons have no incentive to give us people who would be a problem. And we have no incentives to cause a problem.

And in fact, the guys who are selected for the classes are fiercely protective of them, such that, I mean, they will say to me, "we'll do whatever we can to make sure this stuff, and like nothing will ever happen to this class. Like, we're not gonna do anything that would cause problems." Someone said, "I'm well aware of the fact that it takes one person to lose privileges for 2200 people."

**Professor Floros:**

Wow.

**Professor Bonneau:**

Now we've had some issues of people violating rules about contact or whatever, and those have been handled, you know, cause there's no outside contact and, and so on, but I've never felt unsafe. There are no COs, no correctional officers, in the room. It's just us, but there are cameras everywhere. And you know, again, they're not gonna give us people who are gonna be problematic, right? That's not in anyone's interest. And I tell my students, "You are more safe inside of the prison with all the security you have to go through and everything else than you are walking across the street on Fifth Avenue.

**Professor Floros:**

Yeah. Okay. So, the two classes that you've taught in this program are Race and the Criminal Justice System and Mass Incarceration.

**Professor Bonneau:**

Correct.

**Professor Floros:**

So, can you just give an example of something that you learned while teaching either or both of these classes that you didn't know or have perspective on until you started doing this?

**Professor Bonneau:**

Yeah, that's a great question. So, maybe there are a couple things. First of all, right, I had never been in, before doing trained, ever inside prison before, so, I'm always learning, but I also am aware that it's a sanitized version. Everyone wants to put their best foot forward. So, a great example is, um, we were ending class one day and the COs came in and said, "okay, it's time to leave," and he's like, "Pitt students to the door, prison students stay put." He called them "inmates." I don't use that word. They hate that word, but, but that's what he referred to them as.

So, Pitt students start getting up and, and some of the incarcerated students get up, shake hands, cause we sit in groups of four, two Pitt students, two incarcerated students and we rotate every week so you're sitting with different people. And so, they're shaking hand, whatever. And this guy loses his mind. He's like, "what part of sit down did you not understand?" Like and just started screaming at them and treating them like... The Pitt students were horrified. Horrified. Right, there were a lot of emails, text about that, whatever else. Go in the next week and start class. And one of the guys raises his hand and he says, "I'm so glad that happened last week cuz now you all get to see how it is when you're not here."

**Professor Floros:**

Mm

**Professor Bonneau:**

He's like, "All that stuff of everyone being nice and smiling." He's like, "Uh-uh. (signals disagreement) It's different when the lights are off." And that was really, I think that was illuminating in the part. The other thing I, I, I found I've I've learned is really interesting is the vagaries of discipline and the, just the capriciousness, like you know about it. But, you know, so, for example, each cellblock has somebody who's in charge, right? A, a correction officer in charge. And so, the incarcerated students have to be released to come to class. Sometimes they're just not released cuz the guy didn't feel like it

**Professor Floros:**

Seriously?

**Professor Bonneau:**

And so, we'd call over, like, I'd have someone call over. And because I taught at night, it was the second shift. The superintendent wasn't there, the assistant superintendents weren't there. And so, the COs who were in charge can do what they want. And so, sometimes the guys would come over, other times, they just couldn't come to class. Why? Cause they weren't let out. Power trip.

**Professor Floros:**

What does it involve to let someone out and come to the program? It can't be that much.

**Professor Bonneau:**

No, but there's resentment that these guys are getting free education, or why are we giving free education to guys who have broken the law, right? So, there's resentment amongst some of the correctional officers, I would say most correctional officers, and us, and I, I tell my students, "We are not gonna do anything jeopardize this program. So, people are gonna make comments and complain about whatever. They may subject you to searches, and you're gonna smile. That's, now, if they ask you something inappropriate, I need to know. But if they, you know, are just generally rude or whatever else, we're just gonna smile and keep on because we're about this. And if we, if we're a problem, then they can shut us down." And so, there were times where there were inappropriate things that I went directly to the superintendent. I was like, "We're not continuing." I've threatened to pull 'em, right. "We're not continuing if this happens," and then it gets fixed.

**Professor Floros:**

And the problems are with the staff of the facility, not with the, the students.

**Professor Bonneau:**

Almost always, almost always. No. If I have a problem with the, with the incarcerated student, they just get removed from class. That's happened one time. I've taught five classes inside prisons, and I've had that happen once.

**Music Interlude:** Head Over Feels by Tiger Gang

**Professor Floros:**

This is The Politics Classroom, a podcast of UIC Radio. I'm Professor Floros, and my guest in the classroom is Pitt political science professor Chris Bonneau.

Okay. So, switching topics, your research and teaching focus is on judicial politics, and you've done a lot of work, as you said earlier, on judicial elections. So, close listeners of this podcast probably know that I am not a fan of judicial elections, especially retention elections, but I'm nothing if not open minded. So, if you would, could you please make the case for the benefits to society of judicial elections?

**Professor Bonneau:**

Sure. So, I'm not, I'm gonna put retention elections separate cause retention elections are not elections. Retention elections are referendum.

**Professor Floros:**

Okay.

**Professor Bonneau:**

Right?

**Professor Floros:**

And so, we'll talk about that in a minute then.

**Professor Bonneau:**

Right. So, the benefits of society of elections is, we know that Democratic judges and Republican judges see the law differently.

**Professor Floros:**

Okay.



**Professor Bonneau:**

Right? No one would dispute that. We know that ju-, we want judges to be independent, but we also want them to be accountable because if they're not accountable, then they can just do whatever the heck they want. And we've seen that in the US Supreme Court.

**Professor Floros:**

Okay.

**Professor Bonneau:**

What they can do, what they want. So, how do you devise the system? Right? And every system has problems. If you stick with an appointment system, you are giving up power to select judges to elites, either political or legal elites. I mean, you can do that. Or if you have elections, you have power to the people and you have transparency and you have judges have to be explicit about their views and what they stand for.

And that's not to say they're prejudging cases, of course not, but it's not believable for judges to say they don't have a position on, say, abortion. Right, because if that's true, they shouldn't be on the bench, cuz they obviously are not a thinker and so why not have the politics out front? Why not be transparent? Why not give the people a choice? And then in our society, in our federal system, we have this US Supreme Court, and the federal Constitution is a backstop. States are supposed to experiment with different policies. No, I'm not gonna say that judicial elections work well all the time. No election does. And certainly judicial elections aren't for everybody. When I give talks in states that appoint judges, they're horrified at how some states select judges, and that's fine, that's not for them. Okay. But for states that have decided otherwise there are ways to do elections better to make sure that they allow judges to be both independent and accountable. So, if we're gonna do them, let's do them right.

**Professor Floros:**

Does part of doing it right, is that a decision whether it's a partisan or a nonpartisan election?

**Professor Bonneau:**

Sure. That's part of it. Right? So, we know again, Democratic judges, Republican judges see the law differently. Why would we not tell the people who's endorsed by which party? Of course we should. Nonpartisan elections invite all kinds of errors. First of all, fewer people vote in nonpartisan elections. So, you have a decrease in voter participation. If we're gonna have elections, we should want maximum voter participation. We also want maximally informed voter participation. So, why would we remove an important cue from the ballot from voters? We certainly wouldn't think about doing that for Congress or for governor or president. Why would we do that for judges? Right? This notion that judges aren't political or don't have political views is nonsense.

It's not to say they're just like legislators. They're not, they have different constraints. They have different bounds. Legislators can do whatever they want. Courts are nominally bound by Constitution, Texas statute, and so on, but cases that get before most states Supreme Courts, just like the US Supreme Court aren't easy cases.

**Professor Floros:**

Yeah.

**Professor Bonneau:**

Like, what is an unreasonable search and seizure? Smart people can disagree.

**Professor Floros:**

Yeah.

**Professor Bonneau:**

People who can look at it as broad or narrow as to what is unreasonable. Who's to say? So, let's open it up. If it were easy cases, they wouldn't have got this far. These are cases that involve judgment, that involve discretion. So, let's be transparent about it.

**Professor Floros:**

What level of campaigning do judicial candidates actually do? Like I, I'm not sure if I've ever seen an ad for a judge.

**Professor Bonneau:**

Oh, well, you should. Illinois' a bit wonky. We can talk about Illinois in a minute. At the trial court level, almost never. 85% of trial court judges are uncontested. So, you could actually make a case that trial court judges should not be elected. At the state supreme court level, all the time. I mean, the record set at the time in 2004 was in a Southern District of Illinois: \$9 million were spent, um, in southern Illinois in District 5. The, the Gordon Magg/ Lloyd Karmeier race because control of, partisan control of the court was, was at stake. You routinely have multimillion dollar races for state supreme courts cause these are policy making judges. And so, you'll see all kinds of things. Now Illinois' wonky because they'd use districts and their 10-year terms, and then they keep their jobs based on retention elections, and three of the seven come from Cook County, which are always gonna be Democrats.

**Professor Floros:**

Right.

**Professor Bonneau:**

So, you may not because, the way things are in Illinois, you may not actually have had an open seat, state supreme court race that you voted in because of the long terms of office.

**Professor Floros:**

Yeah.

**Professor Bonneau:**

And the retention elections for, for those judges.

**Professor Floros:**

Okay, so, what else do we need to do to do it right? What else does that entail?

**Professor Bonneau:**

Yeah, so, I think we need transparency in campaign financing. So, the more transparency we can have for open records and campaign financing is right. We need to hold them at the same time as elections for other offices. So, they need to be held in November or even number years when people are voting. You don't wanna hold them, so, Wisconsin holds them in April. I mean, if you want a recipe for something, no one to vote, have it in April.

**Professor Floros:**

Yeah.

**Professor Bonneau:**

No one's thinking to vote then.

**Professor Floros:**

Oh, oh no. The mayoral race in Chicago is in February.

**Professor Bonneau:**

Yeah, no. That is a recipe for low voter turnout and these races are too important for that. I also think that depending upon what you want, if you want more accountability, you'll have shorter terms of offices. But if you want some kind of independence, have longer terms of offices, like 10 years, 12 years.

Another option you have is to term limit judges. Maybe allow them to run for election, but if you're concerned about the corrupting influence of donors and, and campaign money, don't let them run for reelection. So, if Illinois, you have seven judges have a single 14-year term, and every two years, one judge is up who can't run for, for reelection. Again, states can decide how they wanna make, how they wanna make that balance, but those are some things that would preserve some measure of accountability and independence. No state does that, the single term, for example. They should, but they don't. Someone should play around with it and see.

**Professor Floros:**

The laboratory of democracy, the states?

**Professor Bonneau:**

Exactly.

**Professor Floros:**

Yeah.

**Professor Bonneau:**

Exactly. No, we have all kinds of, so Illinois, for example, in retention elections, you need 60% of the vote.

**Professor Floros:**

Yeah.

**Professor Bonneau:**

Just to keep your job. New Mexico, it's 57%. Cause apparently they couldn't decide between 55 and 60. Just on 57. So, you have these things that are, that vary by, some states do districts like Illinois, most do statewide. There are, I mean, these variations, which are, which are important.

**Professor Floros:**

So, talk to me about retention elections, because I personally think they're stupid and

**Professor Bonneau:**

Yeah, well, they're ineffective.

**Professor Floros:**

Okay. Tell me why.

**Professor Bonneau:**

So, it's two things. They're both ineffective cause no one loses, voter participation is lower, and to some extent they're unfair to the incumbent and here's why. When you're running for retention, you're running against nobody. At least when you're running a general election, you have an opponent. You can contrast. Here, you're running against some kind of ideal

judge, but you have no filing deadlines. So, for example, if I'm running for reelection and you're challenging me, I know if you're gonna challenge me by a certain date, cause you have to file the paperwork.

**Professor Floros:**

Mm-hmm.

**Professor Bonneau:**

Now let's say I'm running for retention and you're unhappy with me, and you wanna take me out. Two weeks before the election, you dump \$2 million into a negative ad buy against me. I'm screwed. I have no chance to get my message out. I haven't been raising money cause I don't think I'm challenged, cause I don't have a campaign. It's like a sneak attack. So, how do I respond? And what do I respond to? Like my vote on one particular case or a couple of particular cases? Like I'm running against some kind of ephemeral perfect alternative as opposed to compare and contrast, right? Elections are about choices.

**Professor Floros:**

Hmm mm. (agreement)

**Professor Bonneau:**

We're not giving voters a choice. We're gonna, voters a choice of this person or not this person. Or, if I'm a voter, I may not wanna vote for you cause I don't like you as a judge. The person that comes in after you could be even worse.

**Professor Floros:**

Well, so, that's the thing. If a judge is not retained, is there then an election for that seat or somebody is appointed until the next election?

**Professor Bonneau:**

Depends on the state. Usually someone's appointed until the next election, but depends on the state. So, retention elections for all kinds of reasons are problematic. The fact that people don't lose. So, that gets into the more selections of how these people get on the bench to begin with? It turns out they're usually appointed by the governor, but based on constraints by judicial nominating commission who gives the governor a list of three or four names who he can appoint from. Who's on this judicial nominating commission? Well, they're unelected, they're accountable to no one. Usually it's some combination of appointments from the legislature and the bar association, and maybe the governor's office.

Most states have rules that like only half can be lawyers and the others are supposed to be citizens, but who are we getting as citizens on these commissions? We're not getting someone who's working retail at Costco. We're getting doctors. We're getting business people. Not to say these are bad people, but these are elites.

**Professor Floros:**

Yeah.

**Professor Bonneau:**

Right? These are social and economic elites who are only looking for a certain kind of experience.

**Professor Floros:**

Mm-hmm (agreement)

**Professor Bonneau:**

and a certain kind of judge. It's completely skewed.

**Professor Floros:**

Okay. So, we do not elect federal judges.

**Professor Bonneau:**

Correct.

**Professor Floros:**

Should we?

**Professor Bonneau:**

It depends. Depends on what you want. So, I don't know of anybody who would say that the current system is working well. Right? In the current system, we have appointment by the president, confirmation by the Senate, and every fight becomes Armageddon. What would electing, let's just stick with the Supreme Court cause I'm agnostic about the lower courts. What would electing US Supreme Court do? Well, it'd do a couple things. First, it would take it out of presidential politics...

**Professor Floros:**

Right...

**Professor Bonneau:**

completely. It would lower the stakes of each vacant seat. Cuz you know that if you, especially, if you had term limit that every two years, something else would come up. Even if you didn't have elections, if you just had a, a single 18-year term, it would take it out of presidential politics. Cause again, it would be regularized it wouldn't be boom or bust.

**Professor Floros:**

Right.

**Professor Bonneau:**

You know, like it can be, you could, if you want to split the country in the regions, you could do that. And so then you'd have regional representation, which is important, cuz there's some issues like for example, water rights,

**Professor Floros:**

mm-hmm

**Professor Bonneau:**

um, land, which are far more important out west than they are in the east.

**Professor Floros:**

Right.

**Professor Bonneau:**

Um, I can still remember giving a talk in Idaho and someone told me about the importance of this, this water rights decision. I was like, what do you water rights? She turned the faucet on and you're like, no, no, no, no out here. Right. And I learned a lot. I was like, oh, damn. You'd also have ideological variation as well, right. The judge from the Northeast would almost certainly be left of center.

**Professor Floros:**

Mm-hmm

**Professor Bonneau:**

The judge from the south almost certainly right of center. And again, there are different kinds of, of issues. It would make a Supreme Court almost certainly less elite, as opposed to having, you know, you know, regional diversity being all five boroughs of, of, of New York. (Professor Floros laughing) Um, well, four boroughs, we don't count Staten, right? So, they would have those effects. The other question, right is, would it be better than what we have? I don't know. But, would it be worse?

**Professor Floros:**

Okay. So, given that there is a va-, or there will be a vacancy on the Supreme Court at the end of this session, and we just went through the nominating or the confirmation hearings of President Biden's nominee, Katanji Brown Jackson.

**Professor Bonneau:**

Mm-hmm.

**Professor Floros:**

She basically did not answer any substantive questions...

**Professor Bonneau:**

Mm-hmm

**Professor Floros:**

...only process questions. Problematic? Right decision?

**Professor Bonneau:**

Both. It's the right decision, cuz that's what everybody does. It's... (Professor Floros laughs) Right? So, I mean, if she chose to deviate from that, it would be newsworthy, but this is what every nominee does. It makes the hearings to be a bunch of theater.

**Professor Floros:**

Right.

**Professor Bonneau:**

Right? It makes people just wanna score points. Uh, but they're not interested in answers. You know? I mean, I, I give Judge Jackson, as well as anyone else who's gone through that, you know, kudos because you know who's gonna vote against you already.

**Professor Floros:**

Right.

**Professor Bonneau:**

So, why you even bother trying, but Ted Cruz was never gonna vote for her.

**Professor Floros:**

Right.

**Professor Bonneau:**

I mean, she tried to convince him, but you know, its wasn't gonna happen. Usually for me, like when that happens, it's like, alright, keep going. You've got your time and then we're

gonna move on because it doesn't matter what I'm selling. You're not buying. But it is problematic, I think, for Supreme Court justices, not to give their views on the law.

You don't wanna weigh in on specific cases, in specific factual cases, because either the person's lying, and they said they haven't thought about this, they don't have views on this. Right, so, either lying, or if they haven't made these thoughts, they shouldn't be on the Court. Why do we expect these judges to go? You don't want just-, no justice comes in, no judge comes in with a blank slate. And we know this. If you ask attorneys at trial court level, when they walk in, see who's sitting on the bench for a trial, they either feel really good or they feel dread.

**Professor Floros:**

Right.

**Professor Bonneau:**

Because we know this stuff matters. Who are we serving by pretending? The people know it matters. The people know that Amy Coney Barrett would never have been nominated by Joe Biden. And Katanji Brown Jackson would never Donald Trump. Why? There's only one reason. And so, but we pretend like, oh, they're these blank slates. And they're... No, you want them to be

**Professor Floros:**

Who pretends that?

**Professor Bonneau:**

The candidates, right, and the process. The very fact that we have this kind of process where you don't answer anything and that's acceptable. Why do we even have hearings if it's not just a showoff and, and fundraiser? This, that's not interested in getting information. You can tell because they have a 10-minute wind up to a yes or no question. I mean, so, I picked on Ted Cruz earlier; let me pick on Cory Booker. Cory Booker was basically just leading a cheering section, which, I get it. I understand why. I understand what he was doing, but did we learn anything?

**Professor Floros:**

Okay. So, one of the issues that I alluded to in my introduction is the idea of sentencing...

**Professor Bonneau:**

Mm-hmm

**Professor Floros:**

...and who makes that decision. And I think that a lot of people just say, of course the judge, but there are sentencing guidelines that are determined by, depending on which kind of court, by the state legislatures

**Professor Bonneau:**

mm-hmm

**Professor Floros:**

and by, I don't know, does Congress set those?

**Professor Bonneau:**

Yeah, but that is, you were sentencing commission mm-hmm

**Professor Floros:**

So, even the sentencing for various crimes is political.

**Professor Bonneau:**

Mm-hmm. Yeah, absolutely. And, and so, we know that certain defendants are more likely to serve longer times, um, than others. And we know that how a judge assesses aggravating or mitigating factors, you know, can have a huge effect on, on sentence length. You know, sentences in general, you know, it gets to the point of what do we think the point of incarceration is? And so, one of the things that I think is problematic is life sentences. Not to say that you can't have a life tail, that is X number of years to life, depending. But if I just say life without parole, and that's the sentence. We can do that as a society, but it really says that at that point, the person is irredeemable, is not able to be part of society, and should never be given that chance. Seems like a bad public policy to me.

That's not to say that everyone should necessarily get out. I mean, I am not a prison abolitionist. I do believe that there are some people who need to be incarcerated and maybe forever. But we shouldn't ever give up, you know, and say that that's not gonna, that that's the end. There used to be juvenile lifers, right? So, people who were sentenced to, you know, life as a juvenile and the Supreme Court threw that out.

And in fact, I testified at a resentencing hearing, for one of my students who was a juvenile lifer, who was gonna be resentenced. I testified to his resentencing hearing and the person that I experienced in class and the person who I engage with, it's totally different than the person he was when he was sentenced to life as a juvenile. And we know, at age 17, these kids, their mind is still developing. They're, they're making bad impulse decisions, doing all kinds of things. Why we would say life and that's it to me is inherently bad public policy. So, I think, you know, things like the First Step Act and starting to rethink our sentencing things that, yes, there's a, there's a role for punishment. There's a role for making amends, but there's also a role for rehabilitation and we need to reinvest, right?

If we want people to come outta prison better than when they went in, that we need to invest in things like education and training and job placement, housing, all these other things. Because without that, then they're just in the system. And when you're in the system, it's just a, a cycle. You get out, you can't get a job, you can't get housing. So, what do you do? Well, you end up doing things to get you back into the system. You know, it's not a recipe for success.

**Professor Floros:**

Obviously, this is a much bigger issue, right? If there was investment in neighborhoods and schools and housing and jobs, that fewer people would end up in the system in the first place. Right?

**Professor Bonneau:**

Right. Well, we get that right with the school to prison pipeline. I mean, when you were an, I were in school, if there was a fist fight, no one got arrested.

**Professor Floros:**

That's right.

**Professor Bonneau:**

The principal separated you. You got detention maybe. There were no cops in the school or that. Now there's a fist fight. The cops are there. Now you've got assault. Now, all of a sudden you're in the school to prison pipeline, right? You're in the system. I'm not saying what there shouldn't be consequences, but it seems to me that a fist fight among high



schoolers is not something that rises to... But once you get law enforcement involved, it's a whole 'nother level. It's a whole different thing. And we're seeing that. And so, which schools tend to have higher police presence? Well, inner city schools where we have, um, a lot more African American students.

**Professor Floros:**

Yeah. So, you were talking at one point about, when you were talking about why elections are a good thing. It was to hold people accountable. And so, I'm wondering what you think should happen with Clarence Thomas' wife, her association with January 6. Right? Because the Supreme Court makes its own rules.

**Professor Bonneau:**

Correct.

**Professor Floros:**

If they were elected, they couldn't do that, right?

**Professor Bonneau:**

Mm-hmm.

**Professor Floros:**

But the fact that they're not, I guess, technically there's nothing to make him recuse himself.

**Professor Bonneau:**

Correct.

**Professor Floros:**

But I mean, he should.

**Professor Bonneau:**

So, there's an example, right, of how too much independence can be a bad thing. (Professor Floros laughing) Right? Well, seriously. I mean, people always say, oh, we wanna justices to be independent. Yeah. But not that independent. Right? Because if you, if I'm independent from everything, again, I can just do whatever the hell I want. I can say that 14th amendment doesn't apply to women. What are you gonna do about it? Right. So, there's a level of, right, you wanna strict the balance between independence and accountability, such that you have, you know, healthy levels of each. I think with the, with the Clarence and, and Jenny Thomas situation...

**Professor Floros:**

And let's just, I'm sorry, let's just recap for one second for folks who aren't paying attention. So, if I understand the story correctly, Justice Clarence Thomas, who is on the Supreme Court, his wife is an activist and, uh, consultant, and she had a lot of contact with folks who were leading various groups involved in January 6 and that she herself has publicly stated that she thinks that the election was illegitimate and that Biden isn't the real president.

**Professor Bonneau:**

She texted Mark Meadows after the election.

**Professor Floros:**

Oh, right.

**Professor Bonneau:**

You know, encouraging, Trump's chief of staff, encouraging Trump to fight it. Yes.

**Professor Floros:**

And now there are a bunch of things that are coming, there has been, and there may be to come, questions before the Supreme Court about whether people have to comply with subpoenas and give documents and a whole bunch of things. And so,

**Professor Bonneau:**

Correct.

**Professor Floros:**

Her husband now is going to be a vote to determine

**Professor Bonneau:**

Right.

**Professor Floros:**

Basically, if things that implicate his wife can be, have to be turned over to Congress.

**Professor Bonneau:**

Yeah. So, it's, it's a little complicated, right? So, on the, the previous votes on issues, I don't think is a problem because I'm not gonna assume that Clarence Thomas knew necessarily what his wife is doing. I, I, I think there's a, I think we have to be very careful to assume that the sins of the spouse are visited on the other ones, absent any evidence, right. So, I'm not gonna assume, but I do think that some many people who are claiming that, oh, he knew all the way. There's a little bit of like, you know, sexism going on there that, that I think we just wanna be, we wanna be careful about, right. My wife doesn't know what I'm doing all hours of day, what I'm and, and likewise, and that that's like a healthy marriage. So, (Professor Floros laughing) so, the past is fine.

Now he knows though. And so, now that he knows, I think it's a bad look. Do I think it changes Clarence Thomas' views on anything? Absolutely not. Clarence Thomas was gonna vote the way he was gonna vote on these issues, regardless of whether his wife was involved or not. It's just true. I mean, it's just what he's always done. No one's ever accused Clarence Thomas of, like, changing his mind and pandering. He has very strong views.

**Professor Floros:**

Yeah.

**Professor Bonneau:**

And whether you think they're misguided or not, he sticks to those views. And more so than many other justices, does not care what you think...

**Professor Floros:**

Yeah.

**Professor Bonneau:**

... about his views. I think it's a bad look for the Court. I think it would be better for the Court as an institution if he would recuse. If the Court votes 9-0,

**Professor Floros:**

yeah.

**Professor Bonneau:**

does it matter? If the Court votes 7-2, does it matter? Unless his vote's decisive. I don't see it as the end of the world, but it's a terrible look for the Court. And I think if he's concerned about the way the Court looks and the ability of the Court to make decisions that the public regards as legitimate and fair, he should recuse.

**Professor Floros:**

Well, but we wouldn't know if his vote is decisive until they voted.

**Professor Bonneau:**

Correct, until the year ends.

**Professor Floros:**

After which he would have already not recused himself.

**Professor Bonneau:**

Correct. Correct.

**Professor Floros:**

Okay. And so, Chief Justice John Roberts seems to be very concerned about how the Court is perceived. Is there anything he can do?

**Professor Bonneau:**

No.

**Professor Floros:**

Okay.

**Professor Bonneau:**

(Professor Bonneau laughs) No. He could suggest. He can internally try and sanction, but like, so what could he do? Well as Chief Justice, he could, for example, not give Clarence Thomas opinions next year, right?

As an opinion, like when he assigns opinions, when he's the majority, he could choose like the punish Clarence Thomas by not... All right, so, Clarence Thomas then has to do less work. Is that a punishment? (Professor Floros laughs) Right. I don't know. Clarence Thomas is one vote out of nine. He will continue to be one vote out nine. In, in actuality, no, there's not a thing he. You could maybe move his office to the basement. (Professor Floros laughs) I don't know, but no, there's, there's no mechanism.

**Professor Floros:**

Take away the key to the executive bathroom?

**Professor Bonneau:**

Yeah, right. I mean, okay. The Chief Justice, the thing is that he's the first among equals and in many ways that's right. He has certain administrative responsibilities for operating the Court so on, but he is not able to sanction another justice. He can't force him off the case, or anything.

**Professor Floros:**

Okay. Last thing. When Antonin Scalia died,

**Professor Bonneau:**

mm-hmm

**Professor Floros:**

Obama was president.

**Professor Bonneau:**

Correct

**Professor Floros:**

Republicans controlled the Senate.

**Professor Bonneau:**

Correct.

**Professor Floros:**

And it was not quite a year, it was like 10 months before the 2016 presidential election and Mitch McConnell, who was the, uh, Majority Leader in the Senate, refused to allow hearings to be held on Obama's nominee, saying that in an election year, there shouldn't be a confirmation because it should be up to the voters who sits in the White House and therefore gets the vote.

**Professor Bonneau:**

Mm-hmm

**Professor Floros:**

And there was nothing the president could do because the Senate has to give their consent. Hillary Clinton lost the election. Trump came in, Trump gets the pick: Neil Gorsuch. Ruth Bader Ginsburg dies a month?

**Professor Bonneau:**

Month and a half then.

**Professor Floros:**

Okay. Fine. Six weeks before the 2020 election. Trump is the president running for reelection and the Republicans have majority control of the Senate. And in that six weeks, the Senate confirmed a Supreme Court judge, Amy Coney Barrett or Justice.

**Professor Bonneau:**

Mm-hmm

**Professor Floros:**

What the heck? I mean, obviously that's not the Court. The Court didn't have a say in that. So, if the Republicans take control after the 2022 midterms and something happens to someone on the Supreme Court, Mitch McConnell could hold for two years to leave the seat open?

**Professor Bonneau:**

Correct.

**Professor Floros:**

That's not cool. What can be done about that?

**Professor Bonneau:**

Nothing. I mean,

**Professor Floros:**

Vote for Democrats.

**Professor Bonneau:**

No, I mean, that's nothing can be done about that. Obama tried, right? He, he nominated as bland a person, as centrist a person as he could. And it didn't matter. And you know, when Ginsburg died, nobody was surprised that they, that they rammed it through cuz they could. And that's the, I mean, that's the thing. So, it's a broken system.

**Professor Floros:**

Yeah

**Professor Bonneau:**

Right? It's a broken system. Life terms, right. Nobody should have life terms except for tenured professors. (Professor Floros laughing maniacally) Um, and the way it's operated. Yeah. They could hold it open for as long as they want, because what's the consequence? What punishment did the Republicans face as a result of that?

**Professor Floros:**

I mean, they lost the majority

**Professor Bonneau:**

In 2018. No, no, 2020. So, you're right. Yes, yes, yes. Yeah.

**Professor Floros:**

So, it took four years. For them to lose the majority.

**Professor Bonneau:**

Right. It didn't affect 2016 presidential election. They paid no penalties. So, why would they change tactics? I wouldn't the system as designed is not working in the age of increasing polarization. Right. So, you think about the filibuster, right? Which I generally, so, I generally don't app-, approve of changing rules. I think that that's a bad idea. When you change rules cause you don't have the outcome, but do you really think there are, like, right now, 10 Republicans who are willing to work with Democrats on anything?

**Professor Floros:**

No.

**Professor Bonneau:**

Ten? No. What do you do in that situation? I don't know.

**Professor Floros:**

It's not like the filibuster has been around forever though. It's not original to the country, so, at some point the rule was changed to that.

**Professor Bonneau:**

Well, it's a Senate, it's internal Senate rule, right? But you know, when you have people who choose party over legislation and who aren't willing to work on anything, even like basic things, it's a problem. A lot of us thought that Ginsburg should have retired under Obama.

**Professor Floros:**

Yeah.

**Professor Bonneau:**

And she didn't want to, and under the constitution, that's her right. And for all the great things she did and she accomplished, she bet wrong.

**Professor Floros:**

Yeah.

**Professor Bonneau:**

And she bet wrong in a big way.

**Professor Floros:**

Yeah. What does it say about the Supreme Court when two of the sitting members have credible accusations of sexual harassment or sexual assault against them?

**Professor Bonneau:**

(Big sigh) It's not good. Due diligence was done in both Clarence Thomas and Brett Kavanaugh. We had courageous people step forward and bring credible allegations at significant personal and professional cost

**Professor Floros:**

mm-hmm

**Professor Bonneau:**

and it didn't matter. I think it sends a bad message. I think it discourages other people from coming forward.

**Professor Floros:**

Mm-hmm

**Professor Bonneau:**

I think it's a stain on the Court and obviously it shows that, you know, party ID is a hell of a drug. If I had a dollar for every time, Susan Collins was concerned about something (Professor Floros laughs maniacally) or troubled. Same thing with Ben Sasse. You know, Ben Sasse is always concerned and is always, but in the end, he votes with the tribe because party ID is a hell of a drug. And when it comes down to it, people don't care, but they care about winning.

**Professor Floros:**

Yeah.

**Professor Bonneau:**

It's not about getting it right. And this is, I mean, this isn't unique. I mean, we're talking about the Republicans now because we're talking about the Supreme Court and these specific cases, but you know, Democrats do this too on, on issues. It's not about getting it, right. It's not about making good policy. Those are byproducts. The goal is winning.

**Professor Floros:**

Yeah.

**Professor Bonneau:**

Right. Winning votes, winning legislation. And then if it turns out we got something, right? Well, you know, what a happy coincidence, but that's not what they're doing. It's problematic.

**Professor Floros:**

Yeah.

**Music Interlude:** Head Over Feels by Tiger Gang

**Professor Floros:**

I'm Professor Floros and you're listening to The Politics Classroom, a podcast of UIC Radio. Joining me in the Classroom this week is Professor Chris Bonneau, a professor of political science at the University of Pittsburgh.

Switching gears entirely,

**Professor Bonneau:**

sure

**Professor Floros:**

You were the president of the University Senate at Pitt from 2018 to 2021. I am finishing my second year as an elected member of the UIC Senate. So, given your experiences as president, do you think I should aspire to the presidency of my Senate?

**Professor Bonneau:**

It's a lot of work. And part of it is, it was a lot of work because I took a very expansive view of the Senate. So, we have a Faculty Assembly, which is all faculty. And then we have Senate Council, which is students, staff, faculty, and admin. So, it's bi-cameral and I, as the University Senate president presided over both. So, I was the voice of faculty. But I also, right, was like a liaison and had to work with the administration. So, my view was in the University Senate, anything that, that was student, staff, faculty, admin was my domain.

And so, I tried to take a very expansive view. So, if we're talking about increasing compensation for staff under the University Senate, we're involved in that. I learned a hell of a lot. I think, you know, I mean, I'm biased. I think I was pretty successful. um, but we, you know, navigate through some tough times. You know, I had the whole pandemic.

**Professor Floros:**

Mm.

**Professor Bonneau:**

And now as past president, I'm still in the Executive Committee. And so, I'm still advising, I'm still doing. I enjoyed it, honestly. I felt like I learned a lot. I felt like I was able to get some good things done. I was able to problem solve. I mean, some of the best things were me being able to do case work for people, people who, like, were stuck in some bureaucratic thing with something that I could, you know, make a call and set a meeting and help get that unstuck. I found that, you know, immensely satisfying. I was able to help multiple faculty members with appealing tenure denials that we were successful. And so, if that's the kind of stuff you're interested in, yes. If you're not interested in.

You know, I mean, look, we had a new intellectual property policy passed when I was there. I mean, I wanted to put my eyes out, but you do have a chance to really shaped things. So, our budget, our new budget model, right? I mean, there's a reason why we've only had a pay freeze and no furloughs and no job losses during the pandemic. And that was one of the things that we did right away. We said, no pay cuts or furloughs, no benefit cuts, and faculty can teach from home if they want to, no excuses, no need for anything. Yeah, we

were able, I think, to, to positively affect. There was some frustrations, some things we wish we could have done. There's always, we always want more salary. We always want more resources, but I found it in general to be really interesting and engaging and informative.

**Professor Floros:**

So, as Senate president, did you actually want faculty input on these different initiatives or were you hoping that the voting members of the Senate were sheep who approved everything that the Executive Committee proposed?

**Professor Bonneau:**

That's a great question. So, it depends who you ask, but since you're asking me, I want input from serious people. I want input from people who are interested in governing, not who are interested in pontificating.

So, there are two ways to approach this, right? You can be an ideologist and you can say, you know, if we don't get 5%, I'm voting no or whatever else, or you can realize there are real constraints, and we need to govern. And so, if you were serious about governing, if you were willing to put the work in, if you were willing to be thoughtful yes. I'm not only that I want your input, I actively solicited it. If you were convinced that everything the administration did was part of some evil conspiracy to make your life harder? No, not interested.

That's not to say these people didn't have a voice. They did. They were allowed to speak whatever else. But I will say I didn't take them particularly seriously because I'm trying to govern here and I can't go to the administration, and I won't go, with a list of unreasonable things. Not gonna do it. It erodes credibility with me. It erodes credibility with, with the Senate as an instrument of shared governance.

And they were, we did not always approve everything the administration wanted. There were times we sent stuff back and I told them, you need to, but the other thing you, I would do is I would say, if you fix these three things, we will pass it. I mean, I promise you we will get it through. And they went and they fixed the things and we made it better and we made it more protective of faculty. Some people were still dissatisfied. That's fine.

**Professor Floros:**

Yeah.

**Professor Bonneau:**

But it was better. And so, the answer is yes. I mean, I wanted faculty input from people who, again, were grounded, and they didn't always agree with me. Some people thought I, I was too compromising, that I didn't push hard enough. And on some things I probably didn't push hard enough, but no one knows what doesn't actually make it out in public, right, onto the floor. I, I don't think anyone in the administration would describe their interactions with me as like me being a puppet or sheep. The reason why we agreed a lot when we got out into voting and everything else is cuz there was a hell of a lot of work that went on

**Professor Floros:**

yeah

**Professor Bonneau:**

behind closed doors.



**Professor Floros:**

Yeah. I am a complete pain in the keister because I speak up,

**Professor Bonneau:**

mm-hmm

**Professor Floros:**

because I actually read the agenda before the meeting,

**Professor Bonneau:**

mm-hmm

**Professor Floros:**

and I make notes on things that I have concerns about

**Professor Bonneau:**

mm-hmm

**Professor Floros:**

and I think I annoy people. (laughing)

**Professor Bonneau:**

You, you are not responsible for their reactions. I mean.

**Professor Floros:**

That's true.

**Professor Bonneau:**

You need people who are willing to do the work because otherwise it just becomes a rubber stamp and it's not taken seriously. And then all the faculty are worse off. Before I was president, I was a huge pain in the ass. Well, I still am a huge pain in the ass. I mean, I once kept, it wasn't just me, but we had about a two and a half hour meeting where I was just relentless on an issue with one of the vice provosts, just like a dog with a bone, um, and I would not let up. That doesn't mean, right, that I will, and by the way, they fixed that policy and it got better. Right. And they address the issues. So, you always wanna be productive and there are real issues that require attention. And there are uncomfortable issues that sometimes people don't wanna discuss or that leadership would rather not discuss because it's difficult, but you know, that's the job. And it's one of those things that it was never something I thought I would do

**Professor Floros:**

mm-hmm

**Professor Bonneau:**

in academia. It wasn't something, I certainly didn't think I would do at a relatively young age. I mean, I was the youngest Senate president we had.

**Professor Floros:**

Hm!

**Professor Bonneau:**

Um, by like, a significant amount.

**Professor Floros:**

Right.

**Professor Bonneau:**

But, it was something that I was asked to do, and at the time I felt like I could do well, and I felt like I had an obligation to do it.

**Professor Floros:**

Okay. So, what is next for you? Do you have any interest in administration, or given what it, you were talking about, your role in the Senate, that sounds awful lot like constituent services of a legislator?

**Professor Bonneau:**

Mm-hmm

**Professor Floros:**

So, any of that on the horizon?

**Professor Bonneau:**

Well, definitely not like a legislator. I mean, as I, as I said to someone the other day why would I take a pay cut and a status cut? I mean, no, no, thanks. Um, especially at the state level. Uhuh (*negative*) administration, I'm not opposed if there are opportunities that come up where I might be well suited for, or someone thinks I'm well suited for. That would definitely be something I would consider.

I have no expectations, but I do think the role I played over the past three years, particularly given the pandemic and the closing and reopening and all that thing, you know, I think I have a lot of networks across schools, the university, across departments, um, at all levels of admin. And I think that could be valuable in, in the right position. So, I don't know. It's outta my hands. I don't control it.

**Professor Floros:**

Well, but you could put your own name forward.

**Professor Bonneau:**

That's right. Well, I will, I mean, I will say that when I've been, when it's been discussed, you know, I have not said, "not interested." And so, yeah. We'll, we'll see how it, how it all goes.

**Professor Floros:**

Well, that's fantastic. I wish you all the luck. Professor Chris Bonneau, thank you so much for joining me in The Politics Classroom today.

**Professor Bonneau:**

It was great to talk to you again, Kate. Thanks.

**Professor Floros:**

Professor Chris Bonneau is a professor of political science at the University of Pittsburgh.

We're nearing the end of the semester, but I have some great episodes in the works, so make sure you subscribe to the podcast so you don't miss an episode. You can find links to a variety of podcast platforms where you can subscribe at [thepoliticsclassroom.org](http://thepoliticsclassroom.org). I'm Professor Floros, and I'd love to hear what you think about the show. You can find me on

Twitter @DrFloros. You've been listening to The Politics Classroom, a podcast of UIC Radio. That's all I've got for this week. Class dismissed.

**Outro Music:** Three Goddesses by Third Age