



**Nancy Koehn: The Nature of Leadership | Oct. 10, 2021 | LTIS Episode 2**

Narrator: Hello and welcome to “Legislatures: The Inside Storey,” a podcast from the National Conference of State Legislatures.

Your host is Tim Storey, the executive director of NCSL. Tim talks with legislators, journalists, academics, political analysts and others about the ideas and policies shaping state legislatures today.

Tim’s guest for this podcast is Nancy Koehn, a historian at Harvard Business School where she holds the James E. Robinson chair of Business Administration. She is a prolific writer, the author of dozens of journal articles and several books. Her most recent book was “Forged in Crisis: The Power of Courageous Leadership in Turbulent Times.” It explores how five great leaders deal with crisis. She is also frequently quoted in the press and shares what she’s learned studying leaders for more than two decades.

In this wide-ranging discussion, they talk about the qualities of great leaders, the nature of courage, whether a great leader needs a vision and much more. Koehn also shares her favorite books and movies, some of which might surprise you.

Here’s their discussion.

Tim: Hello everybody listening to “The Inside Storey,” the National Conference of State Legislatures podcast. We are starting to get a few episodes in the can, and I am delighted that you have somehow clicked this or found this in your podcasts. And sincerely, authentically super excited to be chatting with Nancy Koehn. You’ve already heard something about her background. She is

incredibly gifted and world respected as one of today's leadership scholars and theorists and historians.

So, Nancy, thank you for joining me and being on the NCSL podcast.

Nancy: Pleasure to be here.

*Time Marker (TM): 1:59*

Tim: So, let me just say I'd like to just take a second to know a little bit more about you. We know your bio. We are incredibly impressed. I mean, your body of work just speaks for itself and, of course, you authored I think what has become kind of an establishment book on leadership: "Forged in Crisis: The Power of Courageous Leadership in Turbulent Times." We're going to talk about that.

But just to get to know a little bit more about you that maybe isn't in that. Where are you from? Where did you grow up? This is a national podcast. You came from somebody's district who might be listening to this.

Nancy: I came from a lot of different districts. I was born in Chicago. I spent my early childhood in Champaign-Urbana in central Illinois. My parents then moved our family to Orono, Maine, where the University of Maine is. My father was a faculty member there. And then they moved to Dallas, Texas, University Park, so I was part of a Dallas district in Texas.

Then they moved back. I spent my high school years back in central Illinois, different district. Ed Madigan was my congressman then. Someone on this podcast will know him. He was a Republican member from Bloomington, Illinois. So, I was a member of that legislative district. And then I went to college at Stanford, so that's Northern California. And then across the country for graduate school to Cambridge and assorted places in Middlesex County, and that's where I've been for most of my adult life. I've been at Harvard for a long, long time.

Got a job after I got a history Ph.D. at the business school, a very odd duck – historian, European history goes to the Harvard Business School where I taught business history for a fair number of years and political economy and macro-economics. And then got very interested in leaders, individual leaders. I was always a biographer at heart, and I started studying leaders from the past. Because I was at the business school, it wasn't for the sake of the past; to use the lessons they had learned for the present.

And I've been doing that work studying leaders in crises for about 20 years. So, that's a rough roadmap of my journey. An interesting piece for me is that I've always been a pretty serious athlete and I took up horseback riding, which I'd never done before, in my 40s. So, I've now become a very serious equestrian. I've learned a lot about leadership riding and jumping a horse. So, if we get to an interesting sidebar, that will come into our conversation as well.

Tim: Well, I hope we do because that sounds cool, not to mention that I feel like whatever pursuit we're wound up in, if you step back a little bit, there are lessons there about leadership whether you're an equestrian or you're a diver or you volunteer at the food bank. There is probably something there.

Boy, am I excited about this. I have a great fondness for Chicago. My wife is from Michigan and spent a bunch of time in Chicago, so I love that city, so I don't know where exactly those breaks were, but I love that you're of Midwestern origins, but also New England and the west as well as Texas. You've really got a flavor for the U.S. and probably the world.

*TM: 05:22*

Tim: So, you've been at Harvard now for how long?

Nancy: Thirty-some-odd years in graduate school and teaching, and I have a degree from the Kennedy School as well in public policy. I worked for a year on the Hill for Gary Hart when he was a senator from Colorado. And then I did a master's and a Ph.D. in history at Harvard. So, I've been here forever.

Tim: You also dropped something in there which is you understand a legislature. You probably understand most legislatures. But, of course, the U.S. Congress is one legislature. We live in the world of the other 50, at least domestically. There are legislatures all over the world, as well as the territories, who are members of NCSL. We're going to talk a lot about leadership. We're going to dive in, in just a second.

*TM: 06:04*

I do wonder. Again, trying to think about that path you took, did 25-year-old Nancy Koehn or 21-year-old Nancy Koehn think that she would be at Harvard for 30 years and be truly an established leadership expert? I'm not blowing this up. You are really in a high pantheon. I truly believe that. What would your younger self say about your future self?

Nancy: Lincoln said, I think in 1864 when it was clear that the war was going to die down; this was right before the election, but this was when the military advantage was clearly on the side of the Union... he said: "I frankly confess I had no grand plan. I navigated point to point." And that's really been a big story in my life. I didn't set out on this kind of GPS track. I set out point to point. I was interested in history, so I got a Ph.D. in history.

I was interested in public policy, so I went to the Kennedy School. And over the ensuing years after my formal education stopped, I started putting pieces together. The navigating point to point, largely an act of weaving or interlacing. And then to be able to offer that knowledge, because I work with practitioners like the folks listening to this podcast. I work with people, not primarily academics at all or theoreticians. I work with people who get stuff done in the practical world.

I work with doctors, I work with state legislators, I work with philanthropies, I work with businesspeople, I work with government officials. I work with people who get stuff done and who I try to offer lessons, insights, tools, behaviors to, and that for me is exceptionally gratifying.

*TM: 07:58*

Tim: Well, that's music to our ears of course and what a great setup, because that's why I feel massively fortunate that you're giving us this time.

So, let's jump in. Often as just a fun exercise I'll google leadership. And I did it today and, according to google, and I don't know how their algorithms work, but there were 20.3 billion hits for the word leadership in google. 20 billion pages on the internet that you could click into that would somehow give you something about leadership. There are libraries built on leadership, right?

What does it mean to you? Somebody who is established and spent so much time in this world.

Nancy: So, I guess the first thing I'll say is I don't study systems. I study individuals and small groups of individuals. I study a leader and his or her team. There are lots of colleagues of mine at the Kennedy School and the Business School who study systems – what happens in a crisis, what has to happen to the system of leadership and then the organization or cross-organizations when you suddenly have increased levels of volatility and uncertainty, complexity, ambiguity.

I, instead, focus on the individual and the that that person directly influences, who then go out and influence other people.

The second thing to say about the work I do – I'm interested much less in external influences on leaders than I am on leaders and how they lead themselves and their teams, and then the impact that has externally. So, I start from the inside-out as opposed to the outside-in. Again, much more of a focus on individual and small group agency. Margaret Mead once said "Never doubt the ability" --the American anthropologist—"of a small group of concerned citizens to change the world. Indeed, nothing else ever has."

So, my work starts from that place, and I've seen it over and over and over again.

And I think the third thing to say about my work is ultimately I think it is rooted in a kind of inspirational idea about leadership. It's not that there aren't lots and lots of lousy leaders. It's not that even leaders don't have lots of weaknesses and moments of despair. They make lots of mistakes and fail; most great leaders fail more than they succeed. And that's part of why they can succeed so markedly with such lasting impact because of what they've learned from failure.

But I start from this definition of leadership that I stumbled on I want to say in 2007; it's not worth going into how I found it. But I think it's very powerful and it has really stayed firmly in place at the center of my work since I stumbled on it. It's from an American writer--we were talking about him before we started--named David Foster Wallace, who was not a leadership observer or a leadership scholar. He was a writer and a reporter. He wrote this in an essay he wrote about John McCain when McCain was first running for president way back in 2000.

And he said--he was talking about leaders as opposed to phenomenon of systemic leadership--he said, "Real leaders are individuals who help us overcome the limitations of our own weaknesses, selfishness, laziness and fears and get us to do harder, better things than we can get ourselves to do on our own."

So, think about that. That's like saying leaders, and I've seen this play out over and over across hundreds of contexts and many, many different years and places and situations. He's saying leaders help us raise the bar for ourselves, and acting with a leader, usually in concert with other people, we get past the boundaries, we break through the fences of laziness, fears, weaknesses, selfishness, and we do something harder and better than we perhaps knew we could even do. We certainly couldn't have done it all by ourselves.

I love this definition of leadership and it describes so much not only of what we've seen as courageous leadership throughout history including our own time, it also describes-- when you ask individuals as I do in some of my coaching work, and I've done small groups and in larger groups: Tell me about your lifeline. These are often very high-achieving people. Tell me about your lifeline. What were the important junctures on your journey and the people at those junctures?

They will all tell you to a one the people that really meant something to them were people who helped them do harder, better things than they knew they could get themselves to do. A coach, a rabbi, a mentor at work, a teacher, a manager.

So, in my eyes that's a very powerful definition of leadership.

Tim: It could not apply more than in our world. I mean, whether it's the speaker of the House, the Senate president or a committee chair, they're all leaders; even the freshmen members are leaders; they're leaders in their districts. And the staff, many of whom will be listening to this, have key leadership roles. So, when you put that David Foster Wallace out... I have to do a quick parenthetical... I got about three pages into "Infinite Jest" and gave up. But I did love his ... he was a great journalist.

Nancy: I couldn't agree with you more. His fiction was very hard to read. His nonfiction is much more accessible.

Tim: Right, so any time I hear that, all I think about is that some day I'm going to figure that book out.

*TM: 13:32*

Tim: But anyway, it begs the question: How do you do it? You've looked at these great leaders, and by the way, I'm a huge fan of Dietrich Bonhoeffer. So, when I heard you put Dietrich Bonhoeffer, I was like holy cow, who would do this, especially in that group? It's sort of one of these things is not like the other in your group of five, which our listeners haven't even heard yet.

But how do you get people to do things they don't want to do? And they're like... like you said, his quote: I'm lazy or I'll lose my seat, or I'll lose my big donor, or I could get fired. How does a leader overcome those things?

Nancy: So, let me frame this with regard to Dietrich Bonhoeffer, since you mentioned him for those listeners who don't know him. The last book I published... I'm actually at work now on a new book on three civil rights leaders during the 1960s and the lessons they learned in a different kind of moment and different kind of crisis, but with lasting impact and achievement.

“Forged in Crisis,” my last book, was about five stories, five leaders in crisis and how they navigated through the crisis and what they learned, because they got better in crisis. I start the book with leaders are not born, they’re made, and they’re often made more rapidly, and they’re made much better in a crisis than in stable times. And Dietrich Bonhoeffer, who was a Nazi-resisting clergyman during the 1930s in Berlin and became a double agent working to try to kill Hitler at the very end of the 1930s. Just an astounding story.

But one of the ways, for example, let’s take him as an example or to take John Lewis and how he enlisted people to join a struggle in which there were all kinds of reasons to get involved say in the freedom rides, or not to get involved in Mississippi summer of 1964, which was a hugely coordinated effort to register Black men and women in Mississippi and to educate Black men and women and children in Mississippi, etc.

Each of these people who had faced the obstacle that many leaders today don’t, which is join us and you may get killed—that’s a pretty big obstacle--they used a couple of different, really important if you will incentives. I don’t really like that word, but they did a couple.

First, they appealed to an unmistakably worthy mission. And in both cases and in lots and lots of cases, it has a moral anchor to it: this is the right thing to do even though it’s scary and you’re threatened by folks in power by trying to change things, this is the right thing to do. It was a worthy mission – let’s just use that term without making it too heavy and moral. It was a worthy mission. So, that was really important.

The second thing was there was this extremely important appeal to why at this moment it was critical to do it. So, there is a time element to getting people to move through laziness. Why now? The fierce urgency of now we heard Martin Luther King say over and over in the middle of the Civil Rights movement. You hear people saying it right now with the climate crisis. Now! Now! Tomorrow is too late. Yesterday would have been better. But now, unmistakably now. So, this is a moment.

And I think third, this appeal that somehow join a worthy mission and discover your own kind of better, stronger self as part of your destiny. John Kennedy talked about this: “Ask not what your country can do for you. Ask what you can do for your country.” All kinds of really smart, effective leaders have appealed to the collective “we” and the element of service that is not just about a selfless kind of investment on the part of people joining a movement; it’s about join, discover fellowship in the process of doing, and discover the strength and satisfaction and raising of your game in that piece.

Everyone on this podcast who went into public service understands what I’m talking about here. But you have to name it. You have to keep putting it before people, especially in today’s 24/7, nanosecond, reactive zeitgeist. Everything we do is not a transaction and everything we do is not just for us. And we are not just here to maximize our individual immediate self-interest. There is something higher, better, more lasting and more satisfying that is available to us.

*TM: 18:27*

Tim: I kind of hear you saying that they invoke legacy. Is that fair to say? Like what would their legacy be?

Nancy: I think there's a piece of legacy, but that's only a small piece of it. Join and discover yourself. So, let me just give you an example that's very fresh, hot off the press, fresh on my mind.

In the early 1960s when a whole bunch of Black and white students in lots of Southern cities, but most predominantly and publicly, in terms of news media coverage, in Nashville, began sitting in on lunch counters trying to end desegregation at places like Kresge or Woolworths or lots of other stores where you could buy a shirt, but you couldn't have a hamburger if you were Black. So, they began sitting in.

And they were almost immediately arrested even though they were all very well trained in nonviolence. They were arrested. Not the hoodlums and not the white supremacists who were beating them up; the Black students were arrested and the white students who were a part of this were arrested. And for each of these people, especially the Black Americans, it was one of the most frightening things that ever happened. Their parents had spent their lifetimes saying don't get arrested. The shame, the potential danger. I mean, they were in great fear of being arrested.

And as soon as they got arrested, the sense of we're all in this together, we're being arrested for the right reasons. Never mind that the laws are wrong. We're being arrested because we're trying to do the right thing – it strengthened them. It actually made them better as activists, as change agents than if they hadn't been arrested. That kind of self-actualization, that kind of self-discovery: I am stronger, more committed, more interested in being a force for good than I ever knew, that's exactly what Wallace is talking about. And that's a superpower. Those are the ruby slippers. And leaders have to help people understand how to put them on and click those red heels together.

*TM: 19:44*

Tim: Yeah, good metaphor. I like how you framed this earlier about how you like to look at great leaders through history and figure out what they did and how it came together. What are the common traits? It seems like too obvious of a question. But are there things that are across when you look at Rachel Carson, Dietrich Bonhoeffer, John Lewis, whatever? Are there things you've come...

I actually do a little presentation; it's embarrassing to tell you this almost, but like the 10 things great leaders do. I think some other person would say: I've got seven things, and they'd be seven different things. But what are the things you think great leaders do that help them be successful?

Nancy: Let me start with a couple of qualifiers. This is not really what I do, but I'm going to answer the question and it's a good question, a very fair question.

First, great leaders come in all shapes and sizes. So, Rachel Carson, who for the podcast listeners who don't know her work, wrote a book called "Silent Spring." It was published in 1962 and it changed the world massively and in lasting ways. It was a hugely important book. I think the most important book published in the 20<sup>th</sup> century in terms of external impact.

It was a book about pollution and the terrible harms of organic synthetic pesticides. And it resulted in the creation of the EPA and the Clean Water Act and the Clean Air Act. It founded the modern environmental movement; it created it. One woman: shy, retiring, an introvert, no handlers, no speech writers, no aides, changed the world.

So, you contrast her with someone like Frederick Douglass, who also changed the world: the abolitionist, escaped slave in the 19<sup>th</sup> century and the most important Black leader of the early part of the 19<sup>th</sup> century in America and without whom Abraham Lincoln could never have had the political capital to issue the Emancipation Proclamation. Douglas was dynamic, charismatic, extroverted, extremely interested in networking for his cause.

So, styles, shapes, ways of showing up vary massively across leaders and that's really important to say at the beginning.

The second thing to say about what traits, what characteristics, what behaviors do great leaders manifest, the second thing: most of I think the best aspects of great leaders are learned, not innate. They're learned. It's not that there isn't a huge component of nature in the making of all of us. It's just you've got to stick that together with nurture, right, the mileage that we all chalk up as we walk our path. So, a lot of this is learned.

And that leads us to the first characteristic, or first trait, or even behavior. One: you use your experience as a classroom to get better as a leader. So, all great leaders get better. Churchill was better in '42 than he was in '41. Lincoln was a lot better in January of '65 getting the 13<sup>th</sup> Amendment through the House of Representatives, than he was in 1862. So, they get better, and they commit to getting better. So, that's really important. I will use my experience and the world I encounter to make myself better and to improve, increase, strengthen the impact I can have in moving my mission forward.

That leads us to characteristic or trait or honed skill number two: you need a great deal of self-awareness to be a great leader, especially in a crisis, because you need to be able to talk not just to the head, but to the heart of your people, and you need to understand that, especially in a crisis.

Thirdly, great leaders understand the power of their mission. It's not just a platitude they spout out. They understand how to make it sing for people, make it real, make it resonant, make it seep into the pores of a country or a company. So, the ability to embrace a mission and help others do it is absolutely essential.

Fourth, great leaders have a muscle that the access called resilience and they learn how to keep accessing it. That has to do with how you frame a very difficult situation. Resilience is the capacity in face of usually unexpected great difficulty to find clarity, to harness the difficulty and actually make something good of it. We call that lemonade out of lemons. And that begins with the idea that if I can do that, I can keep making that muscle stronger. So, great leaders get better the more difficult stuff you throw at them.

Five, characteristic number five: You need an enormous amount of emotional discipline. It's not enough to have emotional awareness. You need emotional discipline. What do I mean by that? Forbearance is the old-fashioned word. By that I mean--this is more important today that it was



five years ago because we're now living in a regurgitating culture that's just spitting up stuff, and so it's so much noise and so much stuff. Way TMI. We don't need to know most of what we're hearing and seeing, even on the part of leaders.

What great leaders understand is that I will show up on my Twitter account, on a podcast, in the chamber, on a phone call, in a Zoom meeting in service to my mission. And that usually means more in terms of what I'm saying, and I certainly understand that my whole presence is part of the way I'm communicating with the people who follow me. And I have the ability to sift through what is dignified and relevant and what is not, and to choose to rise above the junk that other people are spewing out to help people focus on what's important in a respectful, serious, mission-focused way. That's forbearance and discipline.

And it's incredibly important, whether you're Ernest Shackleton, who was the first story in "Forged in Crisis," who is this explorer who has got 28 men marooned on a floating iceberg off the coast of Antarctica in 1915 with no communication device. He's got to show up every day. This was true of John Kennedy in the Cuban missile crisis talking to the American public. He's got to show up every day like we've got it. Not all is well, but we are navigating through this. Do not panic. He didn't say that; he can't say that.

It's like Abraham Lincoln – four score and seven years ago. Right? Framing the stakes of the Civil War and then giving everyone a job to do. "As we the living are here dedicated." That kind of forbearance is absolutely essential.

One last characteristic that's really important. Real leaders understand--this is back to the kind of emotional toolbox that they keep improving, they keep using--understand that actually you really have to force yourself to continue to face forward pretty quickly. So, if you're focused like lots of high achievers, highly controlling, highly successful people--I know the people on this podcast because I work with them all the time--you're really focused on what you did wrong because most high achieving, highly controlling, highly successful people are actually very hard on themselves, and you're back here, why did that go wrong, oh, my god, what did I do? And caught in those grooves of the record, you can't face forward and learn quickly from what you did and move forward.

So, great leaders develop the idea--Lincoln is a great example of this who made many, many more mistakes particularly at the beginning of the war--to like say, OK, that's a no-no; I'm not going to do that again. But now, on to the next thing. And that is really important. It's like the old, I think it's Matthew, the wonderful line, He who plows by looking backward at the row he just plowed, harvests no crops.

So, you have to be able to face forward, quickly learn from your mistakes, and face forward. And that's particularly true when you have roiling crises like we're involved in right now.

*TM: 28:51*

Tim: I wish the podcast were two hours long. You probably don't. But I do, because I'd like to go into every one of these characteristics in greater detail: well then, how do you develop self-awareness? How do you develop resiliency? How do you develop experiences?

I was thinking of Dag Hammarskjold, the UN secretary general from decades ago, who said the key is to just say yes, to go do stuff, and fail and learn and fail, but the trick is to dive in and do things. Anyways, we don't have time to do that. So, what I think I hear you saying ...

Nancy: Let me just say one thing that is important, and that has to do with walking into the fear. So, go do stuff. Well, Nelson Mandela, who knew one or two things about fear, said several times but in different ways, said this; it's really an important quote and it's very useful. He said: "Courage isn't the absence of fear. Courage is the willingness to walk into, take the first step into the fear and then discover in taking that step and taking the next one and the next one--each one gets easier--that you can triumph over it. But you can't do that until you actually walk into the fear.

So, get stuff done also means the first step towards a big, really important, but oh my god so big, where do we start kind of mission – you've got to take that first step. So, the civil rights leaders learned this. John Kennedy learned it, Churchill learned it, Katherine Graham learned it when she published the Pentagon Papers at the Washington Post in the early '70s. You've got to take the first step into the fear. You can't get stuff done until you do that.

And that, again, begins first with a leader reckoning with him- or herself and then putting the right or the left foot forward into the fear.

*TM: 31:10*

Tim: What I think I hear you saying is that there is no set of traits, like leaders have these things. You can have some amalgam of all these things and leaders come from all kinds of backgrounds and do this.

And I know we're already running short on time; we'll have to wrap up here pretty quick. But let me ask you this question of the fear of: What good is it to be a dead hero? How do you push forward when you know that your... You know, no one writes about the leaders that fail because they failed, and we never heard from them again. Except you're saying all leaders fail, right, and they keep going. Maybe that's the key.

Nancy: All leaders fail. I mean, Lincoln failed at an electoral level. Let's just cut to the chase. On an electoral level – Lincoln failed many more times than he succeeded. That's important to remember. We forget that he failed in his first run for the legislature; he served five terms eventually. He failed in two, maybe we can even count an aborted attempt, three efforts to win the U.S. Senate seat; I'm talking about the national legislature; failed three times. And then won the presidential election.

He had to recover from all those failures. And by the way, he in the process helped form a new party, the Republican Party, when it was really clear--this was in the 1850s--that the Wig Party didn't have the brief for the future. And he was willing to take... the Republicans didn't think they could win the first time they ran a presidential candidate in 1856; they didn't; but they thought they could win the second time and boy did they, and they took lots and lots and lots of congressional seats and seats then in the state legislatures.

So, we've got to be careful. It's not failure necessarily forever; it might be one electoral cycle or was for the Republicans. But they were on the side of the future, and they could see it. And it made a huge difference.

*TM: 33:14*

Tim: Being on the side of the future – I feel like there's a quote there someday of how to...

Nancy: Because that's important. And there is nothing in our world--podcast viewers can't see, but I'm holding up my phone right now--there's nothing in the immediacy of so much of the way that we interact today, which is five seconds long, often coming off our emails or our social media or our texts or everything else being pushed in our phones that helps us understand five months from now, much less two years from now.

But history moves forward, and it doesn't move forward only in five-second intervals. Right? And the victory doesn't go to those on the five-second interval, even though we think it does.

*TM: 33:59*

Tim: I mean, that smartphone you're holding up is less than 15 years old. I've been the last few days at a meeting of legislators and lobbyists and others, and everybody pulls out their phone at some point. So, we're in the midst of this transformation, and how we convince people what you just said, that there's nothing in there that's going to solve the problems of the future.

Hey, let me pivot just a second to vision. Everybody talks about vision: great leaders have vision. Is that an absolute thing? Did Rachel Carlson, did Bonhoeffer or Douglass or any of these folks, did they know where they were going before, or do some of them just try to do good from one day to the next and get things done? Talk about vision and explain how important you think it is.

Nancy: So, I think most leaders I've studied had a worthy purpose. Was that a vision? I'm not sure, in the way we use that word. It was like: What do I need to be doing right now? But was that purpose about we're going towards X in the next 36 months? Not usually. Right? Lincoln, by the way, was just beginning with some detail to think about what a reconstructed United States would look like at the very end of the 1864. And he was killed too early for us to have a sense of the concreteness of that vision other than that he was likely to try to give Black American men the right to vote, and to try to pass citizenship--and the 14<sup>th</sup> amendment were Lincoln's legacy, as well as the 13<sup>th</sup> amendment ending slavery, 14<sup>th</sup> giving citizenship to Black Americans, and then the 15<sup>th</sup> giving suffrage to Black male Americans.

But he was so busy navigating through the Civil War for a big purpose, which started off in 1861 as being let's keep the Union together on the basis on which it was founded in 1776 or 1787, depending on how you wanted to date it. Let's keep it together. But that purpose changed in the middle of the war when it became a purpose to end slavery. That was a gosh-almighty good purpose and Lincoln embraced it wholeheartedly when he issued that emancipation proclamation. Not matter what you can say about Lincoln hemming and hawing on slavery publicly before then. He was all in. All in. Most people have no idea.

So that's navigating through a really important moment on behalf of something undeniably worthy and good. That's not exactly what we usually talk about as a vision, and I think it's important to keep this in mind right now because honestly, there are so many so many high stakes waves that we're trying to sail over or through on the sea of public policy and public citizen action in the world today that I'm not sure we need a vision, we need to figure out how to navigate through those for the right reasons. And in doing that, good things will happen.

We have to navigate through global temperature increases for the right reasons, but we have to start first, get stuff done. And we don't have much time in several of these theaters, interrelated theaters. We don't have much time. So, is that a vision or is that saying with God as my witness, we're going to get through these crises in a way that builds last lasting decency for lots of people.

*TM: 37:40*

Tim: What a wonderful way to sort of bring this to a close. I'm going to ask you a couple of quick-fire things like: What are your favorite books, two or three books that everybody says it feels like a trope in podcast world. But yeah, if you're saying hey, you want to be a great leader, read, of course, "Forged In Crisis," and then after that, what else would you read?

Nancy: My favorite book in the whole world is "Middlemarch," a Victorian novel by George Eliot. It's actually a book about one's journey and the making of one's stronger self. And what happens if we don't do the work on ourselves to become what we're meant to be? That's my favorite book.

I guess second on the list might be the modern library edition of Lincoln's writings which, if people haven't ever seen it before is just a great single volume from soups to nuts of Abraham Lincoln's, some of his best writings, a lot of great letters. You can open it anywhere and get some great stuff out of it, and it's a good read. So, that's probably my second.

And third is probably, you know, "Henry V," the Shakespeare play, which by the way, is completely and utterly about real leadership and the making of a leader and the impact of that leadership.

*TM: 38:4*

Tim: OK. And then just quickly: What about movies? Are you a fan of "Lincoln" and Spielberg and Doris Kearns Goodwin's version of Lincoln? If you don't have time to read a book immediately, maybe you could download a movie on Netflix.

Nancy: I went in prepared to hate it when it first came out. This is a book, it's not really based on Doris' book at all, it's based on Tony Kushner's brilliant second run. He wrote two huge screenplays and the second one is what became the movie. If you haven't seen it or you need a refresher on Mr. Lincoln--I went in prepared to hate the movie. I absolutely loved it. I've probably seen it 25 times. When I need a little quick Lincoln shot, turn on that movie. I love that movie. I love World War II movies and I love Harrison Ford thrillers and I love every James Bond movie ever made.

*TM: 39:43*

Tim: Private Ryan or what about World War 2 movies?

Nancy: I actually just watched the “Guns of Navarone,” which I hadn’t seen; “A Bridge Too Far,” “D-Day.” Where do we start. The last two great modern movies about Churchill: “The Darkest Hour.” Right in the bullseye World War 2 movies, and many of those were made some time ago, but there are a bunch of really great. “Saving Private Ryan” is a great movie, but there’s another 25 great movies. “Stalag 17,” oh my god, that’s a fantastic movie. So, when in doubt, there is a lot of real leadership and inspiration from a lot of those movies.

Tim: “Schindler’s List,” for example, good grief.

Nancy: “Schindler’s List!” “The Diary of Anne Frank.” I mean, there’s just... it was a global crisis and people rose to the challenge. You know, Lincoln said in 1862 in his annual address to Congress in December; he was talking about the Civil War: “The dogmas of the quiet past are inadequate to the stormy present. As our case is new, so we must think anew.”

And that’s what happened in World War 2. A crisis rose, there was no playbook that we could rely on from a more stable time. The dogmas of the quiet past were inadequate. We must think anew and act anew. And you saw that all over, right, if you will, the map of World War 2 and that is what’s called for now. We must think anew, we must act anew.

Those kinds of stories are incredibly inspiring because they’re real and because they’re a map of what we’re capable of in another moment when almost everything is up for grabs here for the next couple of years.

Tim: Well, you have inspired our listeners. I can say that with confidence. I am incredibly grateful for you. I know you’re massively busy and have big things, so thanks for giving us a little bit of your time. We hope we can bring you back with our legislative folks one of these days. You’ve been with us a couple of times before. So, we’ll look forward to that and my goodness, Nancy, that was fantastic. Thank you again.

Narrator And that concludes this episode of our podcast. We encourage you to review and rate our podcast on Apple Podcasts, Google Play, Stitcher, or Spotify. We also encourage you to check out our other podcasts: “Our American States” and the special series, “Building Democracy.” For the National Conference of State Legislatures, thanks for listening.