

“Not sorry at all”: Trump and Rockbridge County

Kylee Sapp
Journalism Honors Thesis
April 13, 2018

Introduction

This documentary originally set out to tell a tale of desperation in Rockbridge County, and to chronicle the stories of people who believed that Donald Trump would be their key to a better life after years of economic downturn. It wanted to look at people who firmly believed from the get-go in the views that Trump espoused during the campaign and who saw a piece of themselves in him. He was someone who had pulled himself up by his bootstraps, with the help of a “small loan” from his father, and fulfilled the American Dream.¹ Trump rallied the forgotten parts of both parties, and this documentary wanted to find them in Rockbridge County.

As with many journalism projects, the end result looked very little like the proposal. Instead, this documentary followed a slightly different group of people: those who did not support Trump from the outset but who, on Election Day, went to the polls to support him, reluctantly or not. Each of the three people this documentary follows has different views about Trump. Monte Jessee still isn't a fan of him as a person, but is happy with his decision. Jan Lowry started to get on board sometime between the Republican National Convention and the election. Cher McCoy supported him once he got the nomination but in hindsight wished she had much sooner.

In the primaries, Trump got 13,300,472 votes overall, less than a quarter of his total on Election Night.² This number, of course, does not account for the fact that several states hold caucuses instead of primaries, and that people likely voted in the general election who did not in the primary. However, this cannot account for all of his vote gain. This means that crucial to Trump's election were voters who originally wanted anyone but him, but who went out and voted anyway because of reasons like party loyalty. One could make this argument about any presidential election, but what makes this story worth telling is that Trump is not just any president, and this wasn't just any election.

¹ Nick Gass, “Trump: My dad gave me a ‘small loan’ of a million dollars,” *Politico*, October 26, 2015. <https://www.politico.com/story/2015/10/donald-trump-father-loan-1-million-dollars-215154>

² “2016 Republican Popular Vote,” RealClearPolitics, accessed April 12, 2018. https://realclearpolitics.com/epolls/2016/president/republican_vote_count.html

Each of the three people featured in some way represents a portion of Rockbridge County. Monte Jesse owns a gun store, has been here most of his life and believes strongly in the value of hard work. Cher McCoy owns the Pack and Mail, has lived all over the country and was raised a Democrat. Jan Lowry retired here after an overseas teaching career with the Department of Defense. Each represents a piece of the puzzle, although they do not complete it. Each voted for Trump, reluctantly or not, and each supports him now.

Crucial to Donald Trump's win were people who believed that he was their only choice, even if it was a poor one. They were loyal to their party, tired of the Obama presidency and couldn't stomach the thought of voting for Hillary Clinton. Many also argued that they were tired of career politicians, believed in some kind of term limit and thought that Trump would bring a breath of fresh air to the White House. They hoped that since he was a businessman, he'd be able to turn what they perceived as a failing economy around, which was big on their to-do lists.

This documentary argues that Donald Trump's ability to understand what Americans cared about the most—immigration, national security and the economy—and then to build a platform on it was crucial to his shocking election night upset. His willingness to work on these issues while in office has boosted his support among voters in this area, even as his approval ratings remain low.³ But his success cannot entirely be explained by his policy. As much as the election was a success on Trump's part, it was even more a failure of the Democratic Party to hold their base and appeal to middle-class Americans. If Trump keeps up his momentum, and has continuing success with policy like building his wall, repealing the Affordable Care Act and maintaining peace with North Korea, and the Democratic Party fails to bounce back, it is entirely possible that Trump could win another four years come 2020.

³ "How popular is Donald Trump?" FiveThirtyEight, accessed April 12, 2018. <https://projects.fivethirtyeight.com/trump-approval-ratings/>

The documentary itself is set up in three sections. First, it examines the backstory of the three major characters, because Trump's election did not just happen because of current conditions. It was a product of years of disillusionment. Second, it looks at the reasons that Trump appealed to voters during the primaries and the general election. Third, it discusses how voters feel about his first year in office.

This paper first examines the conditions that exist in Rockbridge County itself. It, too, looks at the backstory of the three major characters. Then it examines in much more detail the major issues Trump voters were looking to be addressed. Lastly, it looks at how the Trump administration has addressed these concerns.

Rockbridge County

Rockbridge County closely matches the demographics of people who propelled Trump to victory. Nationally, people aged 40 and older tended to vote for Trump.⁴ Excluding Lexington and Buena Vista, 13,095 of Rockbridge County's 22,307 residents, or just under 60 percent, are above this age group.⁵ Fifty-eight percent of white voters voted for Trump.⁶ Rockbridge County is about 95 percent white.⁷ Interestingly, Clinton led only in households making an annual income of under \$50,000.⁸ According to the US census, the median household income in Rockbridge County in 2016 was \$52,478.⁹ The county unemployment rate currently matches Virginia's at 3.3 percent in February 2018, a sharp decline from 4.1 percent the previous month.¹⁰ Mohawk Industries is the largest employer

⁴ Skye Gould and Rebecca Harrington, "7 charts show who propelled Trump to victory," Business Insider, November 10, 2016, <http://www.businessinsider.com/exit-polls-who-voted-for-trump-clinton-2016-11/#while-polling-before-election-day-showed-that-voters-with-less-education-were-flocking-to-trump-which-shows-in-the-exit-polls-he-still-saw-a-good-amount-of-support-from-voters-with-higher-education-7>

⁵ Virginia Employment Commission, *Virginia Community Profile Rockbridge County*, 2018, http://virginialmi.com/report_center/community_profiles/5104000163.pdf, 6

⁶ Gould and Harrington, "7 charts."

⁷ *Virginia Community Profile Rockbridge County*, 2018, 7

⁸ Gould and Harrington, "7 charts"

⁹ "Quick Facts About Rockbridge County," United States Census Bureau, Accessed April 9, 2018, <https://www.census.gov/quickfacts/fact/table/rockbridgecountyvirginia/PST045216>

¹⁰ *Virginia Community Profile Rockbridge County*, 2018, 14

in the county, followed by Rockbridge County Schools.¹¹ Fifty-one percent of county residents have a high school diploma or less.¹²

Buena Vista also closely matches the demographics of Rockbridge County, although Southern Virginia University means the city has a large student population. Its 40-and-above population makes up about 47.5 percent of the city.¹³ It is also majority white.¹⁴ However, Buena Vista differs sharply from Rockbridge County in that its median household income in 2015 was only \$29,109.¹⁵ Unemployment stood at 3.6 percent in February 2018,¹⁶ and SVU is the city's largest employer.¹⁷

Because of Washington & Lee and the Virginia Military Institute, Lexington has a high student population. Only about 34 percent of Lexington's population is 40 or older.¹⁸ It, too, is majority white.¹⁹ Lexington's unemployment rate is comparatively high, at 4.7 percent in February.²⁰ The median household income in 2016 was \$34,464,²¹ and W&L and VMI are unsurprisingly the city's two major employers.²² Lexington Mayor Frank Friedman referred to them as Lexington's "factories." Only 34 percent of Lexington has a high school diploma or lower.²³

It comes as no surprise that Donald Trump won Buena Vista and Rockbridge County by as much as he did. Both are reliably Republican. In fact, Trump won Rockbridge

¹¹ Ibid. 22

¹² Ibid. 39

¹³ Virginia Employment Commission, *Virginia Community Profile Buena Vista city*, 2018, http://virginialmi.com/report_center/community_profiles/5104000530.pdf 6

¹⁴ Ibid. 8

¹⁵ "Quick Facts About Buena Vista City, United States Census Bureau, Accessed April 9, 2018, <https://www.census.gov/quickfacts/fact/table/buenavistacityvirginiacounty/PST045216>

¹⁶ *Virginia Community Profile Buena Vista City*, 2018, 14

¹⁷ Ibid. 22

¹⁸ Virginia Employment Commission, *Virginia Community Profile Lexington city*, accessed April 9, 2018, http://virginialmi.com/report_center/community_profiles/5104000678.pdf, 6

¹⁹ Ibid. 7

²⁰ Ibid. 14

²¹ "Quick Facts About Lexington City," United States Census Bureau, Accessed April 9, 2018, <https://www.census.gov/quickfacts/fact/table/lexingtoncityvirginiacounty/PST045216>

²² *Virginia Community Profile Lexington city*, 2018, 22

²³ Ibid. 39

County with a higher percentage of votes than any Republican has won in the previous four presidential elections. He won 61.9 percent of the vote, which is best compared to George Bush's 57.8 percent in 2000.²⁴ Trump faced similar conditions to Bush in that both were campaigning after eight years of a Democrat in the White House. He also won Buena Vista by almost 10 percentage points more than Bush did in 2000 – 59.4 percent to Bush's 49.6, although he won by 2.5 percentage points less than McCain did in 2012.²⁵ Lexington, on the other hand, is consistently blue. Hillary Clinton received 61.4 percent of the city's total vote, which is 6.3 percentage points higher than Obama won in 2012, although about .8 points fewer than he won in 2008.²⁶

This thesis focused only on Rockbridge County, Lexington and Buena Vista. However, it is interesting to note that in all of the counties and independent cities directly surrounding Rockbridge County, which include Allegheny, Amherst, Augusta, Bath, Bedford, Botetourt, Highland, Nelson and Roanoke Counties, as well as Covington, Roanoke and Salem cities, Trump either received the same percentage of votes as Mitt Romney or increased his lead. Both Covington City and Nelson County were reliably blue before the 2016 election but ultimately voted for Trump.²⁷ Although the reasons for this are outside of the scope of this documentary, it is an interesting observation nonetheless.

Poverty continues to be a problem in the Rockbridge area. Rockbridge County, Lexington and Buena Vista all have household incomes far below Virginia's median \$66,149. The state has an 11 percent poverty rate.²⁸ In Rockbridge County, the poverty rate was 12.3 percent, and 11.8 percent of people under 65 do not have health insurance.²⁹ Lexington's poverty rate is almost double, at about 22 percent, and about 10 percent of the population is uninsured.³⁰ However, Lexington's poverty statistic is likely somewhat

²⁴ "Elections Database," Virginia Department of Elections, Accessed July 2017, http://virginalmi.com/report_center/community_profiles/5104000678.pdf

²⁵ Ibid.

²⁶ Ibid.

²⁷ Ibid.

²⁸ "Quick Facts About Virginia," United States Census Bureau, Accessed April 9, 2018, <https://www.census.gov/quickfacts/VA>

²⁹ Census Bureau, "Rockbridge County"

³⁰ Census Bureau, "Lexington City"

inflated because it includes some college students, who report little to no income.³¹ Buena Vista's poverty rate is slightly lower, at about 16 percent, with just under 10 percent uninsured.³² In 2016, the official United States poverty rate was 12.7 percent.

Both Sam Crickenberger, Rockbridge County's director of community development, and Monte Jessee, said Rockbridge County is a great place to raise a family. In fact, that's why Jessee moved back after spending some time doing what he referred to as "work for Uncle Sam"³³ and working in retail property management in the Richmond area. He refused to go into further detail about what work for Uncle Sam entailed. Jessee said he's seen it change over the years as people from elsewhere have come to retire. "Some of that's good, some of that's bad, because everybody's sets of values are a little bit different, so may not line up with your way of thinking. And so we've seen it not become the actual little town that we grew up in. It's getting bigger," he said.

Neither Jan Lowry nor Cher McCoy are from Rockbridge County. Lowry and her husband fell in love with Rockbridge County when they brought their daughter to tour Washington and Lee University. "We, as many people that I've talked to since, came down the Shenandoah Valley and said 'ahah, this is it,'" she said, in an earlier interview. She and her husband, Mike, like the area because it's small, conservative, and has three colleges, which bring with them cultural amenities like plays and concerts. McCoy visited the area after her stepfather passed away. The rest of her family had been here for about 10 years, and McCoy said after his funeral, she packed up her store in California and was back within 30 days to stay for good.

The 'Good Old Days'

Part of this documentary argues that Donald Trump's election was not solely a byproduct of the current political and economic conditions. Trump's slogan "Make

³¹ "Poverty in Rockbridge," Washington and Lee Shepherd Poverty Program, Accessed April 9, 2018, [https://www.wlu.edu/shepherd-poverty-studies-program/academics/community-academic-research-alliance-\(cara\)/rockbridge-community-profile/poverty-in-rockbridge](https://www.wlu.edu/shepherd-poverty-studies-program/academics/community-academic-research-alliance-(cara)/rockbridge-community-profile/poverty-in-rockbridge)

³² Census Bureau, "Buena Vista"

³³ Jessee refused to elaborate on what this meant

America Great Again” harkened back to an earlier time in many people’s lives that they’d like to get back to. To that end, this documentary begins by looking at where people came from. Due to time constraints and how the message of the documentary changed over time, much of the original “where we came from” footage got cut. Nevertheless, it remains an important part of the research done. Donald Trump’s election was a culmination of political and social factors spanning long before he was even on the political stage, and it is necessary to document what may have led to his popularity.

Jan Lowry

Jan Lowry grew up on a farm in Nebraska. Her parents had grains, cattle, hogs and chickens, and she and her four siblings were expected to work, although they did not have to use the heavy machinery. The school she went to was so small that it contained kindergarten through twelfth grade and her graduating class had twelve people in it. Post graduation, she went to Concordia Teacher’s College in Seward, Nebraska. “Always wanted to be a teacher. That’s all I wanted to be,” she said. “Back in the late ‘60s, early ‘70s there weren’t as many choices for women that there are today.” Growing up, she liked to play school with her siblings.

Lowry planned to teach at a parochial school, but her senior year she married her husband, Mike Lowry, and followed him around the country for a little bit, picking up teaching jobs where they went. She got a Fulbright scholarship to teach abroad in England for a year, during which time her husband got a part-time job at a nearby American Air Force base. There, they learned about the Department of Defense Dependents Schools. Once back in the United States, they applied and spent five years in Panama and 15 in Germany, after which they retired back to the United States when their daughter was getting ready to start college.

When she was in Panama, Lowry said she came face to face with poverty in a way she never had while living in Nebraska. She said the Panamanians were always trying to work for their money, even if it meant coming up to stopped cars and cleaning their

windshields or selling roses. “They just weren’t sitting on the street corner expecting handouts. They were doing something,” she said. Her experience being face-to-face with poverty in Panama reinforced the values she’d learned growing up: that you present yourself well and work for a living. She still carries this attitude today.

Lowry considers herself to be far right, and believes that the government should stay out of as much of private life as it can. She is opposed to welfare, a theme that came up several times during our discussions. Instead of government aid, she thinks churches and other charities should take on more of the responsibility to help those in need.

Lowry’s background is important in that it shows a person who grew up learning to work, and believes that people should work for a living. She also believes that the government should stay out of the private sphere as much as possible. Both of these attitudes combine in a frustration with almost every aspect of the Obama presidency and a refusal to vote for what she saw as being four more years of the same. It is unlikely that the Democrats ever would have gotten Lowry’s vote – the closest she came to the left was almost voting for Jimmy Carter – yet this still reveals a frustration with the Democratic Party that led to Donald Trump’s election. This is discussed in further detail below.

Monte Jessee

Monte Jessee moved to Rockbridge County from Maryland in 1975, when he was young. He said it was a “great place to grow up.” His father always emphasized hard work when he was a child. When Jessee was young – he can’t remember how old, but thinks he was eight or nine – he was playing a video game when his father left for work. Before his father left, he told Jessee that by the time he came back, Jessee needed to take out the trash and wash his mother’s car. Jessee spent the whole day playing video games. His father came home, saw that none of the chores had been done, and threw Jessee’s TV and the video game out of the house. The next day, he made Jessee bury a gutter pipe. By the time Jessee was done, his hands were bleeding from blisters because he’d refused to wear gloves. “To this day I’ve never forgotten it,” he said. “It was the best thing my dad ever did for me, was to instill that get up and go to work value into me.”

Jessee worked a lot as a teenager. Before he even had a driver's license, he would ride his lawnmower – which his father bought with the understanding that Jessee would pay him back – to neighbors' houses to mow their lawns, balancing a gas can and a weed eater across his knees. Jessee said this “get up and go to work” attitude has been his mantra ever since. His father rested only on Sundays, which is the only day Jessee's store is closed.

Jessee went to Liberty University, after which he spent some time working for “Uncle Sam.” He spent 20 years in retail property management, overseeing operations in four big shopping centers. When his company sold the portfolio, they offered to move him to Idaho, but he declined. At this point, he had moved back to Rockbridge County from Richmond, and was commuting to Staunton for work. His friend owned High Country Outfitters at the time and offered to hire him. Once his friend decided to sell the business, Jessee and a partner bought it. In 2014, Jessee's partner sold him the other half of the business, and Jessee has been running it ever since.

There are three parts of Jessee's story that inform his politics. First, similar to Lowry, is his attitude that people should work for a living and work for their welfare, although he recognizes that some people are physically incapable of doing so. He is frustrated by people who get disability because they are overweight, and told a story of a man who is on disability because he eats McDonald's for every meal and is overweight. The second aspect of his story is his time working for Uncle Sam. Although Jessee never went into more detail, it is clear from other aspects of his interviews that he cares deeply about the United States military and its actions abroad. This came out both when he discussed the Obama's red line in Syria and when he talked about how Benghazi was the reason he wouldn't vote for Hillary Clinton. Third, Jessee is now a small business owner, is affected by regulations and said they are “beat to death with taxes.” All of this informs how he votes.

Cher McCoy

Cher McCoy was raised by a single mother in Maine and New Hampshire. “There’s a bridge that separates the two states so I claim both of them because I spent just as much time on one side as the other,” she said. Her mother worked at the Portsmouth Naval Shipyard and then for the state department. McCoy moved a lot, and has lived in New York, Illinois and up and down California. She worked in sales for years, and claims to be the first woman one company had ever hired in a sales position. In that position, she said she was “number one in the country and...I was making pretty good bucks.”

When her German shepherd passed away, she decided to change careers and bought a pet store. She learned as much as she could about the products she sold and liked to help customers with pet diets. She found many were coming in that had behavioral problems, so she went in the dog training business as well. “I do save a lot of dogs from being euthanized because I get a lot of calls that say to me, ‘if you don’t fix this then I’m gonna put the dog down,’ ” she said.

She moved to Lexington to be near family after her stepfather passed away. Her mother and sister had already moved to the area, and after McCoy came for the funeral, she said she was back for good within a month. Originally she opened up a pet store to do her dog-training business out of. Her husband ran a trucking company as well, but was only planned to continue it for about another year when they bought the Pack-and-Mail. McCoy said they were looking to buy a business he could be involved in too, because it had taken her years to learn the animal business and he wasn’t interested. She also wanted a store that she could continue to run her animal business out of. The Pack-and-Mail came up for sale about a year ago and fit their bill.

McCoy said it’s not easy running a small business. Regulations make it difficult, and competition from big box stores like Amazon and UPS make it hard for her business to survive. But she said people in this area are loyal to small businesses, which is part of the reason she has been able to keep this one running.

She was raised as a Democrat, but left the party because she felt like Ronald Reagan better understood what running a small business was like. She liked the breaks that she got better under the Republicans. Once she got to Lexington, she got involved with the local Tea Party Movement while it was here, because her sister got her into it. She did educational programs for members.

McCoy's politics are important because she, like Jesse, is a small business owner and says she is hit hard by regulations imposed on her, like her Lexington city license, which she said is based on how much money she made the previous year. More importantly, however, McCoy left the Democratic Party she was raised on because she felt left behind by [it](#).

Issues that Got Trump Elected

The Economy

Many conservatives were disappointed in what they say is slow economic growth experienced since the recession, and were tired of hearing that one percent growth was “the new norm.” In hindsight, Trump's appeal to the middle and working classes isn't altogether surprising. The recession hit the middle class hard, and many families never truly recovered. Wages have barely grown: total median annual income was highest for the average middle class family in 1999, and since 1973 has only increased 13 percent. In fact, the effects of the recession were so great that the number of families who considered themselves middle class dropped from 63 percent in 2001 to only 51 percent in 2015.³⁴

In light of these numbers, Sarah Jaffe argues that politicians have greatly underestimated how much middle class families have actually been able to recover from the recession. This is why Clinton's response to Trump's slogan – “America is already great” – didn't resonate with those who felt left behind by the economic recovery. For

³⁴ James Freeman, “Why Trump Won,” *The Wall Street Journal*, June 6, 2017, <https://www.wsj.com/articles/why-trump-won-1496788008>

them, America has not been great for some time now.³⁵ Rather, Amanda Taub argues that Trump appealed so much to them because his message was “We’re losers. We don’t win anymore, but I’m going to make us win.”³⁶ The middle and working classes saw Trump as someone who would finally give them the economic improvement they’d been waiting for.

However, it is hard to argue that Obama and the Democratic Party were at fault for the financial troubles of the last decade. In a 2011 Atlantic article, Michael Hirsh argued that Obama simply inherited the economy, and that situations would have been similar under McCain. The economy at that point was far worse than any of his predecessors had faced and was likely to be much longer lived because it was caused by a financial collapse.³⁷ Instead, Hirsh argues that Obama’s failure was one of leadership. JPMorgan Chase Chairman Jamie Dimon called confidence the “secret sauce” to any economic recovery.³⁸ His stimulus package “fed GOP suspicions that he was just another Big Government liberal.”³⁹ Further, although it did succeed in creating or saving three to four million jobs, as it said it would, it did not do enough – the labor market needed about 11 million jobs.⁴⁰

Writing for the *Wall Street Journal*, Greg Ip argues that although some Obama-era policies likely did hinder growth, it was certainly not to the magnitude the Trump campaign claimed. Like Hirsch, he argues there were macroeconomic factors outside of Obama’s control, such as the financial crisis and the large aging population in America. Further, Obama’s macroeconomic policies, like the stimulus package, car manufacturer

³⁵ Sarah Jaffe, “The Democrats’ Deadly Error,” *The New York Times*, November 9, 2017, <https://www.nytimes.com/interactive/projects/cp/opinion/election-night-2016/the-democrats-deadly-error>

³⁶ Amanda Taub, “Why Americans Vote ‘Against Their Interest,’” *The New York Times*, April 12, 2017, https://www.nytimes.com/2017/04/12/upshot/why-americans-vote-against-their-interest-partisanship.html?em_pos=small&emc=edit_up_20170412&nl=upshot&nl_art=1&nlid=74726581&ref=headline&te=1

³⁷ Michael Hirsch, “How Much is Obama Really to Blame for the Economy?” *The Atlantic*, August 15, 2011, <https://www.theatlantic.com/politics/archive/2011/08/how-much-is-obama-really-to-blame-for-the-economy/243598/>

³⁸ Ibid.

³⁹ Ibid.

⁴⁰ Ibid.

bailouts and support for the Federal Reserve, likely helped with recovery. However, Ip argues that the regulations on businesses, coupled with increased disincentives to work, may have slowed growth.⁴¹

Regardless of whose fault the recession was, it still had real impacts on most Americans. Time Magazine reported that income dropped by 10.7 percent for the bottom 90 percent of earners. Even the top one percent as of 2014 still had not seen their income surpass pre-recession levels.⁴² It is unsurprising that after 10 years of slow or nonexistent income growth, a large portion of America was ready for a change. Whether or not he was at fault, many people saw Obama as at least a factor in their worsening economic conditions. For conservatives who believed that Clinton would be another four years of the same, Trump was the obvious choice.

In a speech in mid-September 2016, Trump outlined his plan, promising to “increase jobs, wages, incomes and opportunities for the people of our country.”⁴³ He called for lower taxes, fewer regulations, tapping into American energy and being part of trade deals that put America first. In the same speech, he argued that Clinton’s administration would be more of the same, and would continue to put a burden on the American economy and the American worker.⁴⁴ It is thus no surprise that Americans – and particularly those who were still suffering post-recession – saw in him a candidate that would finally provide them with the opportunity to prosper again.

All three people interviewed said that the economy was a major issue that they wanted the future president to address. Lowry and her husband invested in stocks years ago in planning for retirement, so the better the stock market is doing, the higher their

⁴¹ Greg Ip, “Is Barack Obama To Blame for Slow Growth? Evaluating Donald Trump’s Case,” *The Wall Street Journal*, February 27, 2018, <https://blogs.wsj.com/economics/2018/02/27/%E2%80%8Bis-barack-obama-to-blame-for-slow-growth-evaluating-donald-trumps-case/>

⁴² Kerry Close, “Ultra Rich 1% Are Struggling to Recover from the Recession, Too,” March 18, 2016, <http://time.com/money/4264052/great-recession-impact-rich-1-percent/>

⁴³ Tessa Berenson, “Read Donald Trump’s Speech on Jobs and the Economy,” *Time Magazine* September 15, 2016, <http://time.com/4495507/donald-trump-economy-speech-transcript/>

⁴⁴ Ibid.

dividend checks are every month. Jesse and McCoy are both interested in the economy from a small-business standpoint. Increased regulations on businesses make it harder for them to operate. Further, the better the economy is doing, the better their business is. Lexington has many small businesses,⁴⁵ and many people in the Rockbridge Area work or used to work for manufacturing plants, so it is no surprise that Trump and his economic plan would appeal to much of this area.

The Affordable Care Act

Hailed as Barack Obama's legacy, the Affordable Care Act meant that many people who were previously unable to get health insurance now could afford it, and wouldn't be denied for pre-existing conditions. Children could stay on their parents' health insurance until 26, and there was no cap to insurance coverage to worry about. Many democrats celebrated it as a victory.⁴⁶

As much as Obamacare saved many Americans, it also angered people, who faced rising premiums with no subsidies available to help with costs. Deductibles for many were also high.⁴⁷ Further, people who previously decided to risk it and not get health insurance were penalized for doing so by way of a tax.⁴⁸ In 2014, about 71 percent of newly insured Americans were on Medicaid, yet about 55 percent of doctors refused Medicaid patients. This means that even though Medicaid recipients are technically insured, in reality they still have little access to medical care. Further, Obamacare forced millions of Americans to buy a different health insurance plan than the one they had chosen, and the Congressional

⁴⁵ *Virginia Community Profile Lexington city*, 2018, 20

⁴⁶ Robert Pear and David M. Herszenhorn, "Obama Hails Vote on Health Care as Answering 'the Call of History,'" *The New York Times*, March 21, 2010, <https://www.nytimes.com/2010/03/22/health/policy/22health.html?pagewanted=all>

⁴⁷ Laura Santhanam, Matt Ehrichs, Jason Kane, "Did Obamacare help or hurt you?" *PBS News Hour*, March 23, 2017, <https://www.pbs.org/newshour/health/obamacare-help-hurt>

⁴⁸ "No health insurance? How much you'll pay," *HealthCare.gov*, Accessed April 13, 2018, <https://www.healthcare.gov/fees/fee-for-not-being-covered/>

Budget Office estimated that by 2021, the number of Americans forced to switch health plans would increase to 10 million.⁴⁹

Virginia in particular was affected by the Affordable Care Act. The state, along with twelve others, chose not to expand Medicaid, which left lower income citizens who normally would have qualified for it ineligible for subsidies to help pay for insurance through Obamacare.⁵⁰ Currently, to qualify for a subsidy, family income must fall between 100 and 400 percent of the federal poverty line.⁵¹ For example, the 2018 federal poverty line is \$12,140 for one person, or \$25,100 for a family of four.⁵² Under the Affordable Care Act, a family with an income below 133 percent (effectively 138 percent) of the federal poverty line would qualify for Medicaid, but since Virginia didn't choose to expand it, those with incomes below the poverty line who do not qualify for Medicaid based on some other factor are left without affordable insurance.⁵³

Both Jesse and McCoy said their insurance went up because of the Affordable Care Act. Pre-Obamacare, Jesse was paying about \$640 per month for his family of four. After the Act was passed, his insurance almost doubled, and he had to pay \$1,100 per month. "And now you're making a decision, am I going to get insurance or am I going to pay my mortgage? And that's an easy call to make if you're me," he said.

McCoy was also opposed to the way Obamacare was passed and the lack of transparency through the process. "I didn't like the fact that if a government can force you to buy insurance, then they can force you to buy broccoli or anything else," she said. Obamacare was written into a tax in order to be passed, and she did not like this because it's not how it was originally presented. However, she did say she liked that people with

⁴⁹ Scott W. Atlas, "How Obamacare fails the poor and middle class," CNN, March 4, 2015, <https://www.cnn.com/2015/03/04/opinion/atlas-obamacare-poor-middle-class/index.html>

⁵⁰ Suzanne Sheridan and Mary Looney, "Rockbridge Area Health Center Interview," Interview by Kinsey Grant, Polli Noskova, Kylee Sapp and Mac Trammell, May 2017

⁵¹ "Medicaid expansion & what it means for you," Healthcare.gov, accessed April 9, 2018, <https://www.healthcare.gov/medicaid-chip/medicaid-expansion-and-you/#lowincomes>

⁵² "Poverty Guidelines," U.S. Department of Health and Human Services, Accessed April 9, 2018, <https://aspe.hhs.gov/poverty-guidelines>

⁵³ Healthcare.gov, "Medicaid Expansion"

pre-existing conditions could get health care (McCoy herself had cancer in 2009), but felt that should have been only a partial fix, rather than something the size of the ACA.

Although he eventually failed to do so, part of Trump's campaign promises was to repeal and replace the Affordable Care Act, which appealed to Americans like Jesse who had seen their premiums rise more than they could afford. It also appealed to those who felt it was not the government's job to control their healthcare and whether or not they were insured. McCoy argued it cannot be compared to car insurance, because a person could choose not to drive, and thus not have to be insured. Particularly in Virginia, the Affordable Care Act hurt many low-income voters who were left behind by the system. Therefore, Obama's legacy, meant to help people, turned many voters off from the Democratic Party because they were vehemently opposed to it and saw their premiums rise.

Immigration

Trump's "build the wall" chant is perhaps the most well known of his campaign, and it was met with resounding support from his base. In Rockbridge County, there is a very small immigrant population,⁵⁴ but residents had mixed emotions about how the issue of illegal immigration should be handled.

Monte Jesse believes people should immigrate to the United States legally, both because undocumented immigrants are "a burden on our services" and because undocumented immigrants are susceptible to unfair working conditions because they are not covered under labor laws. "It's the opportunity for Americans to take advantage of those people. They're not covered by these employment laws. They go to work in a freaking sweatshop making 2 bucks an hour. Nobody should have to do that. And so they would if they were legal then they would get those protections," he said. He said he supports legal immigrants "100 percent," and will "give you the shirt right off my back."

⁵⁴ Census Bureau, "Rockbridge County"

Jessee also believes that there should be a path to citizenship for immigrants covered by DACA, because they were brought over as children and had no say in the matter.

Jan Lowry said people should be held accountable for their role in allowing undocumented immigrants into the United States. Businesses that hire undocumented immigrants should be punished with more than a fine that they could easily pay. People who are stopped trying to cross the border should be immediately sent back, instead of “just, okay, take their name and let them loose.” When it comes to DACA, Lowry would ideally like to “send them all back,” but recognizes that isn’t feasible. So she’d settle for some type of path to citizenship, with a time limit on how long the process could be delayed.

Cher McCoy is concerned that undocumented immigrants are being treated better than veterans. She also doesn’t agree with the concept of sanctuary cities, and believes that Oakland in particular is putting ICE agents and police officers in danger.

Before evaluating Trump’s plan for immigration, it is important to first look at immigration statistics. According to the Pew Research Center, there were 11 million undocumented immigrants in the U.S. in 2015, down from 11.3 million in 2009. They make up about 3.4 percent of the U.S. population. Further, the number of undocumented Mexican immigrants in the U.S. in 2015 had declined by 800,000 from 2009. Unauthorized immigrants constituted 5 percent of the U.S. workforce. About two-third of undocumented immigrants in 2014 had been in the country for a decade or more.⁵⁵ Although it is difficult to determine whether someone arrested is in the United States illegally, studies show that undocumented immigrants are significantly less likely to go to jail than those born in the U.S.⁵⁶

⁵⁵ Jens Manuel Krogstad, Jeffrey S. Passel and D’Vera Cohn, “5 facts about illegal immigration in the U.S.,” Pew Research Center, April 27, 2017, <http://www.pewresearch.org/fact-tank/2017/04/27/5-facts-about-illegal-immigration-in-the-u-s/>

⁵⁶ Julia Dahl, “How big a problem is crime committed by immigrants?” CBS News, January 27, 2018, <https://www.cbsnews.com/news/illegal-immigrants-and-crime-how-big-a-problem-is-crime-committed-by-immigrants/>

Trump's immigration policy was multifaceted. Most notably, he wanted to build a wall that Mexico would pay for, deport undocumented immigrants with criminal records and increase restrictions on legal immigration.⁵⁷ Throughout his campaign, he portrayed undocumented immigrants in a negative light, particularly those from Mexico, and called them "bad hombres."⁵⁸ He played on the fears of Americans and constantly cited the example of Kate Steinle, who was killed by an undocumented immigrant, as a reason to crack down on immigration, despite actual crime rates being low, as discussed above.⁵⁹

Trump also wanted to restrict immigration from majority-Muslim countries, again playing on fears of terrorism after the 2015 San Bernardino, California attack.⁶⁰ He promised to "suspend immigration from areas of the world when there is a proven history of terrorism against the United States, Europe, or our allies."⁶¹

Supreme Court Justice

Jan Lowry was the only person interviewed to bring up the fact that there was one open seat on the Supreme Court. In February 2016, Justice Antonin Scalia passed away, leaving open a seat that Republicans in Congress refused to fill, despite Obama nominating Merrick Garland.⁶² This was quite the gamble on their part, as Hillary Clinton was likely to nominate a much more liberal judge if elected. Further, it was speculated that there would be at least one or two more open seats during the course of Trump's first term.⁶³ For

⁵⁷ "Donald Trump on Immigration," Council on Foreign Relations, accessed April 10, 2018, <https://www.cfr.org/interactives/campaign2016/donald-trump/on-immigration>

⁵⁸ "Final presidential debate updates: It was Trump's best debate, but Clinton still won," *Los Angeles Times*, October 19, 2016, <http://www.latimes.com/nation/politics/trailguide/la-na-trailguide-third-presidential-trump-on-immigration-we-have-some-bad-1476927107-htmlstory.html>

⁵⁹ Holly Yan and Dan Simon, "Undocumented immigrant acquitted in Kate Steinle death," CNN, December 1, 2017, <https://www.cnn.com/2017/11/30/us/kate-steinle-murder-trial-verdict/index.html>

⁶⁰ Council on Foreign Relations, "Trump on Immigration"

⁶¹ Council on Foreign Relations, "Trump on Immigration"

⁶² Tom S. Clark, Sanford Gordon and Michael Giles, "How liberal is Merrick Garland?" March 17, 2016, https://www.washingtonpost.com/news/monkey-cage/wp/2016/03/17/how-liberal-is-merrick-garland/?utm_term=.332cc175e0ff

⁶³ Peter Jacobs, "Trump is reportedly talking about Supreme Court justices' health issues, privately predicting he'll be able to appoint 4," *Business Insider*, October 15, 2017, <http://www.businessinsider.com/trump-supreme-court-ginsburg-sotomayor-appointments-kennedy-2017-10>

Lowry, getting a conservative on the Supreme Court was a priority. “We had just gone too far to the left with a lot of our decisions,” she said. “A lot of our laws were being made in the courts, rather than the Court approving laws.”

American Power Abroad

Critics and fans of President Obama consider his “red line” in Syria to be a massive failure and to have ruined U.S. credibility abroad. In 2012, Obama drew a “red line” for Syria. On August 21 the following year, nearly 1,500 civilians were killed in a chemical weapon attack by the Syrian military. Many considered this act to have clearly crossed Obama’s red line, but instead of immediately ordering strikes, Obama recommended military action but left it up to Congress, which was ultimately opposed to a counterstrike.⁶⁴

In an article for Politico, Derek Chollet, the then-assistant secretary of defense for international security affairs, argued that Obama’s actions were ultimately for the best. Secretary of State John Kerry made a comment about Assad admitting to having and surrendering his chemical weapons to avoid an attack by the U.S., and Russia took this comment seriously and wanted to pressure Assad to turn over his weapons. Assad complied. Ultimately, Chollet argues, this was a win for Obama. Despite this win, it was seen in the U.S. and abroad as weakening Obama’s credibility and thus America’s position of power globally.⁶⁵

Monte Jessee compared Obama’s response to Syria with Reagan’s response to Gadhafi. “For the longest time, nobody messed with us. And so, I remember when Gadhafi started to swell up a little bit, and President Reagan said ‘uh-uh,’ and we blew his house up, and we never heard another word out of him,” Jessee said. Jessee, like many Americans, is concerned that Obama’s red line signaled to other countries that they could do “whatever they want,” because the United States won’t follow through on its threats.

⁶⁴ Derek Chollet, “Obama’s Red Line, Revisited,” Politico, July 19, 2016, <https://www.politico.com/magazine/story/2016/07/obama-syria-foreign-policy-red-line-revisited-214059>

⁶⁵ Ibid.

Jan Lowry felt that Obama was making the country look weak when he went abroad and apologized for what America has done. She recognizes that the country has made mistakes in the past, but believes America hasn't done anything worse than other countries have, and there's no need to keep apologizing. She also felt that Obama was weakening the military.

Although Obama ultimately achieved his desired result in Syria without having to resort to force, which Chollet argued could have made the situation much worse, it was still viewed as a failure. It follows, then, that those who were tired of feeling that America was losing respect worldwide would have voted for Trump, in the hopes that he would restore some of the lost respect.

Regulations on Small Businesses

Both Jessee and McCoy own a small business in Lexington, where they said regulations are hurting their profits. McCoy specifically complained that the cost of her business license in Lexington is based on her profits the year before. "They tax you by your brain, and it's quite unfair," she said. Jessee said small businesses are "beat to death with taxes."

The United States Chamber of Commerce published a report last March that said federal regulations cost the economy \$1.9 trillion a year. The report found that "Over the last 60 years, the U.S. population increased by 98% while the federal regulatory code increased by 850%, including some 6,081 final rules published between 2015 and 2016."⁶⁶ Further, regulations hurt small businesses much more than they hurt larger corporations. State and local governments have their own regulations added on to federal ones.⁶⁷ Small

⁶⁶ Sean Hackbarth, "How Regulations at Every Level Hold Back Small Business," U.S. Chamber of Commerce, March 28, 2017, <https://www.uschamber.com/series/above-the-fold/how-regulations-every-level-hold-back-small-business>

⁶⁷ Ibid.

business owners both in the area and nationally were hoping for some relief from the regulations they faced.

Social Values

During the focus group, Ann Jones and Mike Lowry brought up the idea of social values during the Obama administration. Lowry expressed frustration at the response to people who disagreed with Obama.

“If you disagreed with President Obama on stance, you weren’t disagreeing on stance, you were immediately a racist. If you weren’t a racist you were xenophobic. If you weren’t xenophobic you were a homophobe. It was insult, insult, insult,” Lowry said. He brought this idea up again when discussing immigration. He said that it’s hard to have an honest discussion about immigration laws and the need to do something to tighten border security without being immediately labeled a racist. This was in part why he voted for Trump. He was hoping to get away from the name-calling rhetoric.

Ann Jones also expressed concern about the values in the country. “It was starting to be wrong if you didn’t believe the way the previous administration believed. And it was becoming widespread in the country that if you didn’t believe that, you were wrong, and you didn’t belong here. You were somehow hurting the country,” she said.

This frustration is not new, and was seen time and time again throughout the campaign as Trump and his supporters pushed back on the idea of political correctness. In an *Atlantic* article in February 2017, Conor Friedersdorf said that many people who supported Trump did so in part because they were tired of having to be politically correct. “A small portion of those voters were itching to engage in hateful speech. In contrast, many others merely hoped that if elected, Trump would govern as a hard-headed businessman who spoke plain truths about problems that the United States faces,” he wrote.⁶⁸

⁶⁸ Conor Friedersdorf, “The Politically Correct Presidency of Donald Trump,” *The Atlantic* February 8, 2017, <https://www.theatlantic.com/politics/archive/2017/02/the-alt-political-correctness-of-donald-j-trump/515856/>

Even former candidate Bernie Sanders recognized this phenomenon. "[Trump] said he will not be politically correct," he said. "I think he said some outrageous and painful things, but I think people are tired of the same old politically correct rhetoric. I think some people believe he was speaking from his heart and willing to take on everybody."⁶⁹ Sanders said that Trump recognized that people were tired of the "status quo politics," and appealed to that idea. He told the Americans who felt left behind by the Democratic Party that it was okay to believe the way that they did.⁷⁰

Failure of the Democratic Party

Above all, Trump's election was a failure on the part of the Democratic Party for years to appeal to moderates and independents. In his book, *The Once and Future Liberal*, Mark Lilla, a Democrat himself, argues that the Democratic Party has become too individualistic and not nearly inclusive enough of those in the middle of the political spectrum.⁷¹ He argued that liberalism "is considered, with some justice, as a creed professed mainly by educated urban elites cut off from the rest of the country who see issues of the day principally through the lens of identities, and whose efforts center on the care and feeding of hypersensitive movements."⁷²

Liberals today argue from the standpoint of identity – "I feel A because I belong to X group" – rather than by backing up their arguments with reason. This alienates those who do not belong to these groups.⁷³ Further, it seems that some liberals are under the impression that anyone who wants to be a part of their movement must agree with them

⁶⁹ Robby Soave, "Bernie Sanders: Donald Trump Won Because People Are Tired of Political Correctness," Reason, December 13, 2016, <https://reason.com/blog/2016/12/13/bernie-sanders-donald-trump-won-because>

⁷⁰ Ibid.

⁷¹ Mark Lilla, *The Once and Future Liberal*, (New York: Harper Collins Publishers, 2017)

⁷² Ibid. 10

⁷³ Ibid. 90

on everything. He gives the example of feminist pro-life groups being scorned at the Women's March for their views on abortion.⁷⁴

Cher McCoy was raised as a Democrat, but switched parties to vote for Reagan and never considered going back. She liked Reagan because she felt he better understood what challenges she faced as a small business owner and wanted to cut back regulations to make running a business easier for her. She also said the Democratic Party of today isn't what it used to be. It has moved farther left. Scott Risser, who also participated in the focus group, said he used to be a Democrat as well. He left the party because of their hypocrisy. He thinks Democrats are only focused on short-term power and winning the next election.

On top of years of discontent with the party, the Democrats ran their own controversial candidate. Had someone less polarizing than Hillary Clinton run for president, it is entirely possible the Democrats could have won a third term. Lowry said she saw a Clinton presidency as being four more years of Obama. This would likely have been the attitude no matter who the Democrats ran. But all three I interviewed failed to find something they liked about Clinton.

McCoy was disappointed in the collectivist attitude of Clinton and the Democrats. "It takes a village to raise a child? No it does not. It takes two parents, or one sometimes, and they do it very nicely, you know? I've not been in jail. I'm doing alright and I was raised by one parent," she said. McCoy also felt Hillary was a hypocrite for helping Bill cover up and discredit rape allegations against him, and then turning around and saying the women who were accusing Donald Trump of rape should be believed.

Jessee was mostly concerned about Benghazi. He recognized that it was not entirely her fault, and that much of what she said during her hearing was taken out of context.

⁷⁴ Ibid. 119

However, it happened on her watch, and he said he'd never get over it, even though he recognized that attitude was probably wrong.

Trump's election did not happen in a vacuum. He appealed from the beginning to people who were tired of mainstream politicians, felt left behind by the economy, and were on board with his extreme rhetoric. Once he got the nomination, Republicans started to flock to him for many reasons: they were concerned about the economy, national security and immigration; they could not stomach four more years of Democratic policy; and they could not stand Hillary Clinton. Had the Democrats run a better candidate, and had the party been more open to moderates, it is entirely possible that Donald Trump would not have won the election.

The Primaries

None of the three people interviewed for this documentary, nor the five interviewed for the focus group, supported Donald Trump from the beginning. In fact, most supported Ben Carson. One of the reasons Carson was so appealing was that he was not a politician – Jesse, Jan Lowry, Ann Jones and Barbara Risser all cited this as reasons he appealed to them. Jesse also liked him because he was “quiet,” and “probably the smartest guy on the planet.” Jan Lowry also appreciated that Carson was “one of those true American success stories” – he was raised by a single mother and went on to be a brain surgeon. Cher McCoy supported Scott Walker, whom she claims to be her cousin. She wanted him to win primarily because they were family. In hindsight, she said, she wished she supported Trump sooner, but did not believe him capable of winning.

Although like Carson, Donald Trump also came from a non-political background, he was not a favorite among many Republican voters. Jan Lowry referred to him as a “bored rich man who needed something else to do,” and said he “wasn't polished.” Conservatives did not take him seriously, did not think he was capable of winning and, in some cases, worried he was a plant to throw the election to Hillary. This is a good indicator that much of the reason that Trump won was because conservatives refused to vote for Clinton – a

failure on the part of the Democratic Party to run a candidate that would appeal better to moderates.

Drain the Swamp

By the time the 2016 election rolled around, conservatives were tired of career politicians. Monte Jessee thinks Washington ruins people, and compared it to putting a frog in a pot of cold water and turning the heat up to boiling. Without realizing it, the frog gets cooked. Ann Jones said politics should be a service, not a career, and compared it to the military – you do your time, and you get out. Barbara Risser was ready to see something new and refreshing. Part of Trump’s appeal was clearly his background in business, rather than in politics. Several people interviewed talked about how they hoped he would bring his business background to the office and translate it into economic policy that would help the economy grow faster than it recently had been.

Roger Jarrell, former chairman of the Rockbridge Area Republican Committee, said that part of Trump’s appeal came from the fact that he was not a politician. He said many people in this area felt that politicians were not doing enough for them. “I think people felt sort of disaffected, and not engaged in the political process. They didn’t feel that there were any particular politicians that spoke to them or their core values. These were folks, many of whom were unemployed or laid off in previous election cycles,” he said. Trump’s non-political background appealed to people because they thought he would be a change from the mainstream politician that was doing nothing for them.

The Election

Even as late as Election Day, major news outlets were predicting Hillary Clinton’s victory. *The New York Times*’ interactive election forecast, which combined a variety of state and national polls, predicted on November 8 that Clinton had an 85 percent chance of being elected. According to *The Times*, 538 gave Clinton a 71 percent chance on Election

Day, and Larry Sabato's Crystal Ball leaned toward a Democratic victory.⁷⁵ Despite this, at 2:47 a.m. on November 9, CNN called the election for Donald Trump.

Trump won this election by appealing to white, uneducated rural voters,⁷⁶ more so than any presidential candidate since 1980.⁷⁷ Clinton put them into a metaphorical "basket of deplorables." She called them "racist, sexist, homophobic, xenophobic, Islamophobic – you name it."⁷⁸ Although there was certainly a portion of Trump's base that subscribed to the white nationalist beliefs he espoused,⁷⁹ a good portion voted for him because they felt he was their chance to improve.⁸⁰ It is not surprising that Trump appealed to Rockbridge County voters. The area is filled with blue-collar workers, and several factories, like Dana and HDT, closed down in recent years. Although unemployment is low, Sam Crickenberger said that does not mean that wages are high, as evidenced by the median household incomes in the Rockbridge area. It makes sense that many blue-collar workers in this area were attracted to Trump's major promises, especially considering the alternative was Hillary Clinton. What is particularly fascinating is the group of people who voted for Trump because he was better than the alternative, but who now support him and are happy with his first year in office.

Trump's First Year

All of the people interviewed, including the focus group, are still happy with their decision to vote for Trump. This is somewhat surprising, considering that, as of April 11, 2018, FiveThirtyEight reported Trump's approval rating at 40.8 percent.⁸¹ The same poll shows that his approval rating has never been above 50 percent, and hit a low of 36.4

⁷⁵ Josh Katz, "Who Will Be President," *The New York Times*, November 8, 2016, <https://www.nytimes.com/interactive/2016/upshot/presidential-polls-forecast.html>

⁷⁶ Gould and Harrington, "7 charts"

⁷⁷ Emma Green, "It Was Cultural Anxiety That Drove White, Working-Class Voters to Trump," *The Atlantic*, May 9, 2017, <https://www.theatlantic.com/politics/archive/2017/05/white-working-class-trump-cultural-anxiety/525771/>

⁷⁸ Amy Chozick, "Hillary Clinton Calls Many Trump Backers 'Deplorables,' and G.O.P. Pounces," September 10, 2016, <https://www.nytimes.com/2016/09/11/us/politics/hillary-clinton-basket-of-deplorables.html?mcubz=0>

⁷⁹ Green, "Cultural Anxiety,"

⁸⁰ Freeman, "Why Trump Won."

⁸¹ FiveThirtyEight, "How Popular is Donald Trump?"

percent on December 16, 2017.⁸² In contrast, Gallup polls show that Obama's approval rating held at 49 percent or higher his first year in office, and never fell below 40 percent during his entire presidency.⁸³ Despite the low approval ratings, those interviewed for this documentary believe that Trump has accomplished a lot in his first year, and are excited to see him do more over the next three. Many hope to get the chance to vote for him again in 2020.

The Affordable Care Act

Trump campaigned on the promise to repeal and replace the Affordable Care Act. He ultimately failed to do so last summer, but when his tax bill passed it included a repeal of the individual mandate, which he referred to as repealing Obamacare itself. The Congressional Budget Office estimated that this repeal would mean 13 million fewer insured in the next decade.⁸⁴

Congress repeatedly tried to repeal and replace Obamacare last spring, but was ultimately unable to do so because of Republicans who opposed the bill. Several drafts were created from both the House and the Senate, but even Republicans failed to agree with one another on what the correct measures were.⁸⁵ Congressional Budget Office reports continually estimated bills would leave tens of millions uninsured over the next decade.⁸⁶ Senators Susan Collins (R-Maine) and Lisa Murkowski (R-Alaska) continued to oppose versions of the bill. The effort to repeal Obamacare finally died the morning of July 28, after John McCain gave a dramatic thumbs-down vote to the bill.⁸⁷

⁸² Ibid.

⁸³ "Presidential Approval Ratings – Barack Obama," Gallup, Accessed April 10, 2018, <http://news.gallup.com/poll/116479/barack-obama-presidential-job-approval.aspx>

⁸⁴ Cristiano Lima, "Trump boasts of individual mandate repeal in GOP Tax Bill," Politico, December 2-, 2017, <https://www.politico.com/story/2017/12/20/trump-individual-mandate-repeal-tax-bill-308286>

⁸⁵ Rachel Roubein, "TIMELINE: The GOP's failure to repeal and replace ObamaCare," The Hill, September 26, 2017, <http://thehill.com/policy/healthcare/other/352587-timeline-the-gop-effort-to-repeal-and-replace-obamacare>

⁸⁶ Haeyoun Park and Wilson Andrews, "The C.B.O. Did the Math. These are the Key Takeaways From the Senate Health Care Bill," June 26, 2017, https://www.nytimes.com/interactive/2017/06/26/us/cbo-score-of-senate-health-care-bill.html?emc=edit_nn_20170627&nl=morning-briefing&nlid=74726581&te=1

⁸⁷ Roubein, "Timeline"

Despite conservative support for repealing the Affordable Care Act, a report by The Upshot found that those who voted for Donald Trump would likely lose the most in tax credits and subsidies under the House's health care plan. The report found that "the voters hit the hardest – eligible for at least \$5,000 less in tax credits under the Republican plan – supported Mr. Trump by a margin of 59 percent to 36 percent."⁸⁸ Although those interviewed for this documentary likely would not have been hit as hard, many conservatives across the country would have lost out if the bill had passed.

Conservatives do not blame Trump for Congress's failure to repeal, and many see the repeal of the individual mandate as his ability to circumvent Congress and the Democrats and continue to accomplish his campaign promises. Cher McCoy said she blamed Republicans for scrambling to throw a bill together. "I think the majority of them thought Hillary was going to win and they didn't have to hurry up and get a plan together. And then when Trump won, surprisingly, to some of them that would have worked on that had to scramble and couldn't do it in time," she said.

Tax Plan

Trump supporters love his tax plan. Monte Jessee said that although it did not help him as much, his employees saw a difference in their paychecks at the beginning of the year, which indirectly helps him. He said when his employees make more money, they're happier to be working for him and inspired to work a little bit harder. Jessee is happy that they are able to see an increase in their paychecks without him having to make a cut elsewhere. He said he understands that the tax breaks for his employees are temporary, according to the current bill, but it will be nice for a little while.

Cher McCoy only has one employee, and she and her husband do the rest of the work in her store. But she said her employee also saw a difference in her paycheck from

⁸⁸ Nate Cohn, "Trump Supporters Have the Most to Lose in the G.O.P. Repeal Bill," March 10, 2017, *The New York Times*, <https://www.nytimes.com/2017/03/10/upshot/why-trump-supporters-have-the-most-to-lose-with-the-gop-repeal-bill.html?rref=collection%2Fsectioncollection%2Fupshot&action=click&contentCollection=upshot®ion=rnk&module=package&version=highlights&contentPlacement=1&pgtype=sectionfront>

the start. McCoy is also a fan of Trump's promise to eliminate two regulations for every new one imposed, because she feels regulations are hurting her business. Jan Lowry told a story about how when she went to get physical therapy on her hip, two women were talking about how they were better off because of the plan.

But the people who ultimately benefit from this tax bill are not average Americans. Tax cuts for individuals and families expire in 2025, and although it is possible that these tax breaks will be extended when the time comes, it isn't a guarantee, and individuals could face a large tax increase in the future.⁸⁹ NPR reported that in 2018, the average household earning between \$50,000-\$75,000 per year would see a tax cut of around \$870, which is only a 1.6 percent increase in income. Because the bill is set to expire, that average cut would only be about \$160 come 2027.⁹⁰ Further, low-income families could also lose out on money from the Earned Income Tax Credit because of changes in the way inflation is calculated.⁹¹ Big corporations and multimillionaires are the true winners from this tax bill. The top tax bracket dropped from 39.6 percent to 37 percent. Corporations saw their tax rate cut from 35 percent to 21 percent, and, unlike the individual cuts, this tax cut is permanent.⁹²

The Economy

Many conservatives give Trump credit for the growing economy, although since he has only been in office for a short time, he cannot take credit for all of it. The job growth is a continuation of an Obama-era trend of 75 months of uninterrupted growth, GDP was already on the uptick and unemployment had been falling long before Trump took office.⁹³

⁸⁹ Jesse Drucker and Alan Rappeport, "The Tax Bill's Winners and Losers," *The New York Times*, December 16, 2017, <https://www.nytimes.com/2017/12/16/business/the-winners-and-losers-in-the-tax-bill.html>

⁹⁰ Danielle Kurtzleben, "CHARTS: See How Much Of GOP Tax Cuts Will Go To The Middle Class," NPR, December 17, 2017, <https://www.npr.org/2017/12/19/571754894/charts-see-how-much-of-gop-tax-cuts-will-go-to-the-middle-class>

⁹¹ Drucker and Rappeport, "Winners and Losers"

⁹² Ibid.

⁹³ Evan Horowitz, "How much credit can Donald Trump take for the strong economy?" January 30, 2018, *The Boston Globe*, <https://www.bostonglobe.com/business/2018/01/30/how-much-credit-can-trump-take-for-strong-economy/ZDRYbRAR8wVhSoYgcs8NqL/story.html>

Yet his supporters praise him for the job growth and declining unemployment numbers, and argue that he is the reason the economy is starting to do well.

However, as Trump continues with his presidency, he can start to take more and more credit. Evan Horowitz, writing for the *Boston Globe*, argued Trump deserved credit for the tax cuts, as that plan included many of his promises. The increase in stock prices can also be partially attributed to Trump. Additionally, Trump appointed a new chairman to the Federal Reserve, so its decisions can be credited to his administration as well.⁹⁴ If the economy continues to grow as his presidency progresses, he will be able to take more and more credit.

Methodology

I spent the fall term meeting and talking with people who might be willing to be part of my documentary. Although I personally knew and worked with many people who had voted for Trump, I felt I could not feature them in my documentary because of my previous relationship with them. So I was limited to trying to find people through recommendations of people I did know, which was not an easy task, considering my only connections to the community were through Southern Inn, where I worked. I was reliant on asking coworkers for the contact information of their friends and family who might talk to me, and none of them actually got back to me, even after some pushing.

The people I did find I got in touch with through Roger Jarrell, the former chairman of the Rockbridge Area Republican Committee, and Emory Cox, a Washington and Lee student who'd campaigned for Trump. A few of those people put me in touch with others. Unfortunately, because of my limited ability to get in contact with people, I never did find people who had been hardcore Trump fans from the get-go, which is what I'd hoped for. However, the people I did choose to feature – Monte Jessee, Cher McCoy, Jan Lowry and Kris Lewis (who ultimately fell through) – I felt all had a compelling and interesting story to tell.

⁹⁴ Ibid.

During winter term I met more and more often with my subjects. Schedule permitting, I tried to meet with them every three weeks or so, although Cher McCoy and Kris Lewis were particularly hard to schedule. I only filmed the last meeting, but was recording the second-to-last, so that I would know what to ask on camera, but wasn't putting subjects on camera before they were ready and comfortable with me.

I also unfortunately was unable to find someone who worked in manufacturing and was affected by either recent factory closings or new factories coming in. Since this is a big part of the demographic in this area, and a major reason people voted for Trump, I tried to supplement this with expert testimony from Sam Crickenberger, the Rockbridge County director of community development, and Frank Friedman, a long-time city-councilman and the newly elected mayor of Lexington.

Kris Lewis was my blue-collar worker. He works long hours for a pest-control company and on the side owns and operates his own car detailing business. His wife is a manager at Sheetz and he has two daughters. Particularly interesting was his assertion that he wanted to be as informed as possible when it came to the election, so he did a lot of research at what he described as a fairly unbiased source – Info Wars. Unfortunately, I was not able to meet with him as much as I would have liked to because of the nature of his job. On many occasions we'd have a meeting scheduled, only for a last-minute pest-control appointment to come up, and we'd have to reschedule. In the weeks where I was seriously filming interviews, Lewis' job got increasingly busy, and although we made an effort, there was never a good time for the two of us to get together. Eventually, it got to the point where I had to make the call that it wasn't going to happen. I needed to focus on what I had and putting the script together.

I also put together a focus group winter term. I reached out to others of different age groups, but ultimately I ended up with five older white people, because they were the only ones able to meet with me during the scheduled time, or who even returned my inquiries. Although it unfortunately was not a good representation of Rockbridge County,

older white people do make up a significant portion of the population here,⁹⁵ and also were more likely to vote for Trump.⁹⁶ I had not planned to do this when I originally proposed my documentary, but it proved to be interesting. I got five other perspectives that I originally did not have, and several of them brought up ideas that none of my main subjects had, like the idea of conservative values not being allowed anymore, or that any criticism of Obama automatically made you a racist. This provided the final piece necessary to shape my actual thesis: that it wasn't just Trump's policy that attracted voters to him; it was also a complete failure of the Democratic Party to appeal to moderate and middle-class voters. This was the first feeling of "left behind" that was expressed in the course of my documentary, and it was still a valuable exercise, despite the lack of diversity in the focus group itself.

Conclusion

Donald Trump's election came as a shock to many people, but in hindsight, it is rather unsurprising. A majority of the country was tired of slow economic growth and post-recession recovery. They felt that Obama and the Democratic Party were leaving them behind and not catering to what they felt was important. They were concerned about immigration, and about the possibility of undocumented immigrants taking American jobs. Americans were ready for a change, and Donald Trump promised to bring that. At the same time Trump was espousing policy that appealed to moderates and conservatives, Clinton was a polarizing candidate herself. She was seen as dishonest, not really for women, and people thought she would just be a continuation of Obama policies that they felt hurt them. The 2016 election was Hillary's to lose, and lose she did. Although Trump's approval ratings remain low, his supporters are enthusiastic about his accomplishments the accomplishments of his first year, even though many of them voted for him only reluctantly. This paper detailed some of the larger issues, although there are certainly more that are outside of the scope of this project. Regardless, it is clear that Trump continues to do better than expected. For many Democrats, it is easy to dismiss Trump

⁹⁵ *Virginia Community Profile Rockbridge County*, 6

⁹⁶ Gould and Harrington, "7 Charts"

voters as racist, or uneducated, or uninformed, or any number of categories. But this documentary concludes that it is important to listen to those who voted for him, and try to understand their motives for doing so. Democrats can build a better platform by trying to understand the struggles of the middle class, and politics could be less polarizing by trying to understand the other side.

Works Cited

- Atlas, Scott W. "How Obamacare fails the poor and middle class." CNN. March 4, 2015.
<https://www.cnn.com/2015/03/04/opinion/atlas-obamacare-poor-middle-class/index.html>
- Berenson, Tessa. "Read Donald Trump's Speech on Jobs and the Economy." *Time Magazine* September 15, 2016. <http://time.com/4495507/donald-trump-economy-speech-transcript/>
- Chollet, Derek. "Obama's Red Line, Revisited." Politico. July 19, 2016.
<https://www.politico.com/magazine/story/2016/07/obama-syria-foreign-policy-red-line-revisited-214059>
- Chozick, Amy. "Hillary Clinton Calls Many Trump Backers 'Deplorables,' and G.O.P. Pounces." September 10, 2016.
<https://www.nytimes.com/2016/09/11/us/politics/hillary-clinton-basket-of-deplorables.html?mcubz=0>
- Clark, Tom S.; Gordon, Sanford and Giles, Michael. "How liberal is Merrick Garland?" *The Washington Post*. March 17, 2016.
https://www.washingtonpost.com/news/monkey-cage/wp/2016/03/17/how-liberal-is-merrick-garland/?utm_term=.332cc175e0ff
- Close, Kerry. "Ultra Rich 1% Are Struggling to Recover from the Recession, Too." March 18, 2016. <http://time.com/money/4264052/great-recession-impact-rich-1-percent/>
- Cohn, Nate. "Trump Supporters Have the Most to Lose in the G.O.P. Repeal Bill." March 10, 2017. *The New York Times*. <https://www.nytimes.com/2017/03/10/upshot/why-trump-supporters-have-the-most-to-lose-with-the-gop-repeal-bill.html?rref=collection%2Fsectioncollection%2Fupshot&action=click&contentCollection=upshot®ion=rank&module=package&version=highlights&contentPlacement=1&pgtype=sectionfront>
- Dahl, Julia. "How big a problem is crime committed by immigrants?" CBS News. January 27, 2018. <https://www.cbsnews.com/news/illegal-immigrants-and-crime-how-big-a-problem-is-crime-committed-by-immigrants/>
- "Donald Trump on Immigration." Council on Foreign Relations. Accessed April 10, 2018.
<https://www.cfr.org/interactives/campaign2016/donald-trump/on-immigration>
- Drucker, Jesse and Rappoport, Alan. "The Tax Bill's Winners and Losers." *The New York Times*. December 16, 2017. <https://www.nytimes.com/2017/12/16/business/the-winners-and-losers-in-the-tax-bill.html>
- Elections Database." Virginia Department of Elections. Accessed July 2017.
http://virginialmi.com/report_center/community_profiles/5104000678.pdf
- "Final presidential debate updates: It was Trump's best debate, but Clinton still won." *Los Angeles Times*. October 19, 2016.
<http://www.latimes.com/nation/politics/trailguide/la-na-trailguide-third-presidential-trump-on-immigration-we-have-some-bad-1476927107-htmlstory.html>
- Freeman, James. "Why Trump Won." *The Wall Street Journal*. June 6, 2017.
<https://www.wsj.com/articles/why-trump-won-1496788008>

- Friedersdorf, Conor. "The Politically Correct Presidency of Donald Trump." *The Atlantic* February 8, 2017. <https://www.theatlantic.com/politics/archive/2017/02/the-alt-political-correctness-of-donald-j-trump/515856/>
- Gass, Nick. "Trump: My dad gave me a 'small loan' of a million dollars." *Politico*. October 26, 2015. <https://www.politico.com/story/2015/10/donald-trump-father-loan-1-million-dollars-215154>
- Gould, Skye and Harrington, Rebecca. "7 charts show who propelled Trump to victory." *Business Insider*. November 10, 2016. <http://www.businessinsider.com/exit-polls-who-voted-for-trump-clinton-2016-11/#while-polling-before-election-day-showed-that-voters-with-less-education-were-flocking-to-trump-which-shows-in-the-exit-polls-he-still-saw-a-good-amount-of-support-from-voters-with-higher-education-7>
- Green, Emma. "It Was Cultural Anxiety That Drove White, Working-Class Voters to Trump." *The Atlantic*. May 9, 2017. <https://www.theatlantic.com/politics/archive/2017/05/white-working-class-trump-cultural-anxiety/525771/>
- Hackbarth, Sean. "How Regulations at Every Level Hold Back Small Business." U.S. Chamber of Commerce. March 28, 2017. <https://www.uschamber.com/series/above-the-fold/how-regulations-every-level-hold-back-small-business>
- Hirsch, Michael. "How Much is Obama Really to Blame for the Economy?" *The Atlantic*. August 15, 2011. <https://www.theatlantic.com/politics/archive/2011/08/how-much-is-obama-really-to-blame-for-the-economy/243598/>
- Horowitz, Evan. "How much credit can Donald Trump take for the strong economy?" January 30, 2018. *The Boston Globe*. <https://www.bostonglobe.com/business/2018/01/30/how-much-credit-can-trump-take-for-strong-economy/ZDRYbRAR8wVhSoYgcs8NqL/story.html>
- "How popular is Donald Trump?" FiveThirtyEight. accessed April 12, 2018. <https://projects.fivethirtyeight.com/trump-approval-ratings/>
- Ip, Greg. "Is Barack Obama To Blame for Slow Growth? Evaluating Donald Trump's Case." *The Wall street Journal*. February 27, 2018. <https://blogs.wsj.com/economics/2018/02/27/%E2%80%8Bis-barack-obama-to-blame-for-slow-growth-evaluating-donald-trumps-case/>
- Jacobs, Peter. Trump is reportedly talking about Supreme Court justices' health issues, privately predicting he'll be able to appoint 4." *Business Insider*. October 15, 2017. <http://www.businessinsider.com/trump-supreme-court-ginsburg-sotomayor-appointments-kennedy-2017-10>
- Jaffe, Sarah. "The Democrats' Deadly Error." *The New York Times*. November 9, 2017. <https://www.nytimes.com/interactive/projects/cp/opinion/election-night-2016/the-democrats-deadly-error>
- Katz, Josh. "Who Will Be President." *The New York Times*. November 8, 2016. <https://www.nytimes.com/interactive/2016/upshot/presidential-polls-forecast.html>
- Krogstad, Jens Manuel; Passel, Jeffrey S.; and Cohn, D'Vera. "5 facts about illegal immigration in the U.S.'" Pew Research Center. April 27, 2017.

- <http://www.pewresearch.org/fact-tank/2017/04/27/5-facts-about-illegal-immigration-in-the-u-s/>
- Kurtzleben, Danielle. "CHARTS: See How Much Of GOP Tax Cuts Will Go To The Middle Class." NPR. December 17, 2017.
<https://www.npr.org/2017/12/19/571754894/charts-see-how-much-of-gop-tax-cuts-will-go-to-the-middle-class>
- Lilla, Mark. *The Once and Future Liberal*. New York: Harper Collins Publishers. 2017
- Lima, Cristiano. "Trump boasts of individual mandate repeal in GOP Tax Bill." Politico. December 20, 2017. <https://www.politico.com/story/2017/12/20/trump-individual-mandate-repeal-tax-bill-308286>
- "Medicaid expansion & what it means for you." Helathcare.gov. accessed April 9, 2018.
<https://www.healthcare.gov/medicaid-chip/medicaid-expansion-and-you/#lowincomes>
- "No health insurance? How much you'll pay." HealthCare.gov. Accessed April 13, 2018.
<https://www.healthcare.gov/fees/fee-for-not-being-covered/>
- Park, Haeyoun, and Andrews, Wilson. "The C.B.O. Did the Math. These are the Key Takeaways From the Senate Health Care Bill." June 26, 2017.
https://www.nytimes.com/interactive/2017/06/26/us/cbo-score-of-senate-health-care-bill.html?emc=edit_nn_20170627&nl=morning-briefing&nid=74726581&te=1
- Pear, Robert and Herszenborn, David M. "Obama Hails Vote on Health Care as Answering 'the Call of History.'" *The New York Times*. March 21, 2010.
<https://www.nytimes.com/2010/03/22/health/policy/22health.html?pagewanted=all>
- "Poverty Guidelines." U.S. Department of Health and Human Services. Accessed April 9, 2018. <https://aspe.hhs.gov/poverty-guidelines>
- "Poverty in Rockbridge." Washington and Lee Shepherd Poverty Program. Accessed April 9, 2018. [https://www.wlu.edu/shepherd-poverty-studies-program/academics/community-academic-research-alliance-\(cara\)/rockbridge-community-profile/poverty-in-rockbridge](https://www.wlu.edu/shepherd-poverty-studies-program/academics/community-academic-research-alliance-(cara)/rockbridge-community-profile/poverty-in-rockbridge)
- "Presidential Approval Ratings – Barack Obama." Gallup. Accessed April 10, 2018.
<http://news.gallup.com/poll/116479/barack-obama-presidential-job-approval.aspx>
- "Quick Facts About Buena Vista City. United States Census Bureau. Accessed April 9, 2018.
<https://www.census.gov/quickfacts/fact/table/buonavistacityvirginiacounty/PST045216>
- "Quick Facts About Lexington City." United States Census Bureau. Accessed April 9, 2018.
<https://www.census.gov/quickfacts/fact/table/lexingtoncityvirginiacounty/PST045216>
- "Quick Facts About Rockbridge County." United States Census Bureau. Accessed April 9, 2018.
<https://www.census.gov/quickfacts/fact/table/rockbridgecountyvirginia/PST045216>
- "Quick Facts About Virginia." United States Census Bureau. Accessed April 9, 2018.
<https://www.census.gov/quickfacts/VA>

- Rouben, Rachel. "TIMELINE: The GOP's failure to repeal and replace ObamaCare." *The Hill*. September 26, 2017. <http://thehill.com/policy/healthcare/other/352587-timeline-the-gop-effort-to-repeal-and-replace-obamacare>
- Santhanam, Laura, Ehrichs, Matt, and Kane, Jason. "Did Obamacare help or hurt you?" *PBS News Hour*. March 23, 2017. <https://www.pbs.org/newshour/health/obamacare-help-hurt>
- Soave, Robby. "Bernie Sanders: Donald Trump Won Because People Are Tired of Political Correctness." *Reason*. December 13, 2016. <https://reason.com/blog/2016/12/13/bernie-sanders-donald-trump-won-because>
- Taub, Amanda. "Why Americans Vote 'Against Their Interest.'" *The New York Times*. April 12, 2017. https://www.nytimes.com/2017/04/12/upshot/why-americans-vote-against-their-interest-partisanship.html?em_pos=small&emc=edit_up_20170412&nl=upshot&nl_art=1&nl_id=74726581&ref=headline&te=1
- Virginia Employment Commission. *Virginia Community Profile Buena Vista city*. 2018. http://virginialmi.com/report_center/community_profiles/5104000530.pdf
- Virginia Employment Commission. *Virginia Community Profile Lexington city*. accessed April 9, 2018. http://virginialmi.com/report_center/community_profiles/5104000678.pdf
- Virginia Employment Commission. *Virginia Community Profile Rockbridge County*. 2018. http://virginialmi.com/report_center/community_profiles/5104000163.pdf
- Yan, Holly and Simon, Dan. "Undocumented immigrant acquitted in Kate Steinle death." *CNN*. December 1, 2017. <https://www.cnn.com/2017/11/30/us/kate-steinle-murder-trial-verdict/index.html>
- "2016 Republican Popular Vote." *RealClearPolitics*. accessed April 12, 2018. https://realclearpolitics.com/epolls/2016/president/republican_vote_count.html