

Episode 162: “The Death of Democracy” with Michael Pack

- Speaker 1: Welcome to The Bill Walton Show, featuring conversations with leaders, entrepreneurs, artists, and thinkers. Fresh perspectives on money, culture, politics, and human flourishing. Interesting people, interesting things.
- Bill Walton: Welcome to The Bill Walton Show. I'm bill Walton. For those of us [00:00:30] who care about liberty in America and who care about preserving our constitutional Republic, we've got to be concerned about the pervasive size and growth of what's come to be called the administrative state. It's the vast apparatus of unelected bureaucrats who run all the federal agencies and whose jobs are protected by the powerful civil service system. They're the bedrock of what's come to be known as the deep state. [00:01:00] And what's happened is its typically evolved into a fourth branch of the Federal government we have and it's largely unchecked by Congress, the presidency and even our judiciary. And this is a phenomenon that we all need to recognize, we all need to think about lines of action to do something about it if we can. And for an up close and personal look at the deep state at work, my friend and recurring guest, a returning guest, Michael Pack has a very revealing story to tell.
- [00:01:30] As most of you know, he's had an incredible career as a documentary filmmaker. His most recent was Created Equal: Clarence Thomas In His Own Words. And among those many other accomplishments, he was also CEO and president of the Claremont Institute. But what we want to talk about today is his experience as the first Senate confirmed CEO of the U.S. Agency for Global Media, also known as USAGM. [00:02:00] Of course, it oversees all the government communications, broadcasting networks, including Voice of America. Michael, welcome.
- Michael Pack: Good to be back.
- Bill Walton: You've got a story to tell, you wrote about it brilliantly. You wrote a piece called The Death of Democracy, which was a very riveting tale about what happened after you became... Actually even before you became confirmed as the head of the agency.
- Michael Pack: Yes. In a piece in The Examiner in the last week or so.
- Bill Walton: Washington Examiner.
- Michael Pack: The Washington [00:02:30] Examiner. And I called it The Death of Democracy because this fourth branch of government so which you so clearly describe had no intention of following what Donald Trump or any of us, his appointees wanted to do, they just had no intention. They thought he shouldn't be president, they knew better and they had no intention of doing what he wanted to do. And that's just not democracy. The American people elect a president and good or bad, dumb or smart, capable or not capable, [00:03:00] he's the

president and the American people have empowered him to fulfill what he said he would do. But the government bureaucracy had no intention of doing that. So that's not really democracy anymore.

It may be a little overstatement calling it the Death of democracy because I think we could bring it back, but it's not democracy when the elected president doesn't have a chance to implement his agenda. And my own case is a very small microcosm of that. We saw it all on a bigger scale with [00:03:30] Donald Trump's battles with the FBI and Russia collusion and many other things. But in my own case, as you say, I was asked by the White House to run this agency by government standards.

Bill Walton: Well, you were asked in March of 2017 just after his inauguration.

Michael Pack: That's right.

Bill Walton: And it took how long to get confirmed?

Michael Pack: It took three years and three months to get confirmed.

Bill Walton: Yeah.

Michael Pack: So I didn't walk in until June of 2020. I think it's close to a [00:04:00] record. Four years must be the absolute record, but the Democrats largely were able to block me as well as other people inside the government that didn't think I should take this position even though Donald Trump has selected me. So it took a very, very long time and it was itself, a bruising battle. Donald Trump had to personally intervene, which he shouldn't have to do with this level of appointment. The bureaucracy there had spent those three years in three months [00:04:30] preparing to block me.

Bill Walton: Well, didn't, they hold a council of tribal leaders right after his inauguration saying, we're going to do everything we can to block Donald Trump's agenda.

Michael Pack: I have been told that, that's true and it would not be surprising. And this was before even I was appointed. So it has nothing to do really with me personally and I don't take it personally. So that's right, they're ready to block him. They felt he just didn't know the right way to deal with the media, he was the wrong person, [00:05:00] they needed to stop him. And so they schemed and worked with Democrats on the Hill and others inside the White House and other offices to block my nomination and they did a very good job. I think they hoped to block it all the way through to the next election and they came very close. But it surely didn't stop once I got there. Every single thing I did, they blocked and they blocked it overtly.

Bill Walton: So you walked into the [00:05:30] office on what day?

Michael Pack: Mid-June of 2020.

Bill Walton: 2020. And what'd you find when you got there?

Michael Pack: Well, it was the middle of COVID. So actually, hardly anybody was there.

Bill Walton: It was deserted.

Michael Pack: It was deserted.

Bill Walton: That's not so bad.

Michael Pack: In an agency of 4,000, the only ones working there were the 10 or so I brought in. Otherwise, the building was largely deserted. I think this actually made it even easier for these people to conspire. They didn't have to confront me, it was hard to have oversight, it was [00:06:00] hard to even meet these people. So COVID made it all the harder, but I think it would've been hard under any circumstances. The very first thing I did which the law that created my position explicitly empowered me to do was change the heads of networks, which is a logical thing to do.

Bill Walton: There were five networks.

Michael Pack: Five networks.

Bill Walton: Voice of America. And then there was what? Cuba?

Michael Pack: Voice of America, Cuba broadcasting, Radio Free Europe/Radio Liberty, Middle East Broadcasting Networks and Radio Free Asia. [00:06:30] And they're one of the biggest media organizations in the world. They reach over 350 million people a week in 70 languages. They have a budget of \$850 million, almost a billion dollars and for a media organization, it is huge and it's very, very influential abroad. They're not supposed to broadcast here. So the Democrats, they managed to burrow in, they've had it their way for [00:07:00] decades and they had no intention of letting such a huge media operation be returned to its actual legal mandate, which is to be fair and balanced. It's supposed to reflect the views of the American people broadly considered, not to be the instrumentality of one party or the other. It's supposed to promote American ideals like democracy and freedom around the world, but having had no oversight more or less [00:07:30] for a long time, the agency had drifted very far to the left and it was largely a mirror of what was going on in the rest of left leaning media from CNN or the New York-

Bill Walton: Yeah. We had a Chinese dissident on the show about three years ago and his interpreter was a very senior official with Radio Free Asia. I won't name names because maybe he's already outed himself, but he had only terrible stories to

tell about what was being broadcast and [00:08:00] that if Americans knew what face they were presenting to China, they'd be appalled.

Michael Pack: That's right. There are real problems, especially in the two Mandarin services. That's Radio Free Asia has one and the Voice of America has its own Mandarin service and indeed the person who I had forced out as head of the Voice of America, Amanda Bennett, who's now Bidens nominee to have my job famously cut off a [00:08:30] interview with a Chinese dissident, Guo, midway against the promise and it was rumored or at least alleged that she did it under pressure from the Chinese government. So it was a big scandal, there were people on both sides. It was one of the many scandals under her watch which is why it's shocking Biden and wants to reappoint her. But so when I came, we were not in the midst of-

Bill Walton: Or [00:09:00] not so shocking.

Michael Pack: Or not so shocking. So we were in the midst of an election, right? So one of the things they have to and they covered the election as they should, but in keeping with the Voice of America charter and the law governing all five of them, they were not supposed to be tilted towards one or the other. And pretty early on in my time there, we found an ad, essentially a Biden ad that appeared in the Urdu service. So this is a service that's supposed to target Pakistan [00:09:30] and it seemed to be just a pro Biden piece and it seemed to be focused on Americans appealing to them to vote for Biden and it was a shocking violation of the VOA charter and law. I think I might be worth it for your listeners and viewers to see and hear it.

Bill Walton: Okay. I think I've got this queued up here. Let me take a look.

Speaker 4: I will end the Muslim ban on day one, day one. Hadith from the Prophet Muhammad instructs, whomever among [00:10:00] you sees a wrong, let him change it with his hand. If he is not able, then with his tongue. If he is not able, then with his heart.

Speaker 5: Make no mistake people, 2020 is our year. Let's dive into it in 2020 vision. We can see clearly that America is fighting for its very soul.

Speaker 4: We all come from the same root here in terms of our fundamental basic beliefs and I just want [00:10:30] to thank you for giving me the opportunity for being engaged, for committing to action this November. It matters. Your voice is your vote, your vote is your voice. Muslim Americans' voices matter. I'll be a president who seeks out and listens to and incorporates the ideas and concerns of Muslim Americans on every day issues that matter most to our communities. I will include having Muslim American voices as part of my administration.

Speaker 5: But getting out the [00:11:00] vote, getting our families out to vote, getting our elderly out to vote, getting our Masjids out to vote, getting our neighborhoods out to vote. So let's do our part.

Speaker 6: And join the largest Muslim voter mobilization in America.

Speaker 5: The million Muslim votes campaign. Let's roll up our sleeves, let's make our voices heard because we've got the means, we've got the numbers and we've got the power. (singing).

Bill Walton: [00:11:30] Oh my. This was part of the Voice of America? And who was this broadcast to?

Michael Pack: It's supposed to be broadcast to Pakistan but because it's on [00:12:00] the VOA website, you can get it anywhere and I believe that they were really targeting Muslim American voters. You can see it has the VOA logo on it at the end. It's based on a Biden speech and a Biden campaign ad cut together without any context. It violates not only the VOA charter, but possibly other laws, a real disgrace and we only found it because a whistleblower called it to our attention, it had already been up for a week. [00:12:30] We asked them to take it down which the VOA leadership, which they did. But then we found later there was still an audio version up for another week or so but egregious as this is, Bill, what really I think tells you a lot about the administrative state is what happened after.

So look, this violates the charter, it violates the law, it's completely wrong in every way. In fact people at the VOA [00:13:00] acknowledged. So we just felt and it wasn't the first time this had happened. They had done something similar equally egregious in the last election, they had run this famous de Niro spot where he called... This is in 2016 where he called president Trump a dog, a pig, I want to punch him in the face also with no context. And when Republicans complained, they took it down and that was it. This time I felt we should launch an investigation to find out how this happened and make sure it didn't happen again, after all, the election was [00:13:30] ongoing.

So I launched an investigation, one of our lawyers working with one of the political lawyers I had hired, one of my political appointees working with the in-house people to find out who did it and how did it get on the air and why was it not caught and who approved it and what should happen to them and what disciplinary actions. You do something this wrong, there should be some sort of consequences or it will happen again as was proved by the fact there were no consequences for the De Niro ad and it did happen again. [00:14:00] So we did launch an investigation and the internal people recommended a series of disciplinary actions, including firing the contractors that are responsible, but also looking into why their supervisor didn't do anything and different levels of-

Bill Walton: You had nine people working with you out of a total of 4,000.

Michael Pack: That's right.

Bill Walton: This was a lonely fight. This is The Bill Walton Show, I'm here with Michael pack who was head of the [00:14:30] U.S. Agency for Global Media and we're talking about the fact that many of the people there thought they were in the business of electing Joe Biden president and not representing the United States to the rest of the world.

Michael Pack: So we conducted this investigation. We did as largely run by career people, because as you say, there were 4,000 of them and only 10 of us and we did discipline these people in various ways. Some [00:15:00] of it included a few weeks with of leave without pay, not horrible stuff but we wanted to send a message. Well, all of them then declared this was a violation of their First Amendment rights. Many of them sued the agency, the contractors that actually did the video, they hired back.

Bill Walton: Their First Amendment rights and they were employees of the Federal government?

Michael Pack: They were employees of the Federal government and not only that, would a journalist at CNN sue the president of CNN [00:15:30] for talking to them about what they did on the air and this isn't CNN, this is the government and I wasn't telling them what to do. I simply asked that the law be upheld, the law, the VOA charter and now federal law. And I didn't tell them what report, I just said, "Don't violate the law." So they sued in court, they won. The judge felt their First Amendment rights were being violated and it's shocking. [00:16:00] And they had a lot of support from the Hill, people on the Hill complained, including Republicans.

Bill Walton: Republicans complained that you were taking action to?

Michael Pack: Yes. They bought the idea that this was telling journalists what to report, even though it was not. So it was one of the many.

Bill Walton: Let me understand the charter though. The journalists, I guess are supposed to be neutral. Of course we know that's not true, neutral observers and reporters on events [00:16:30] and not take a political position. This ad looks it was actually produced by the Biden campaign.

Michael Pack: It certainly does.

Bill Walton: Was it produced internally or did they just pick it up from?

Michael Pack: Yes. It was produced internally.

Bill Walton: But nevertheless, it could have been a Joe Biden ad.

Michael Pack: It certainly could have.

Bill Walton: So clear political point of view. Does VOA operate under the same journalistic standards as... Well, that's hard to say, the New York Times?

Michael Pack: But the difference really is, Bill and this is important [00:17:00] is that the VOA unlike The New York Times who can write whatever they want, they're a private organization protected by the First Amendment. The Voice of America, as you say, is part of the U.S. Federal Government and it is limited by law, by Federal law in a different sort of way. And part of that is the VOA Charter and it states that all reporting will be accurate, Objective, comprehensive. Will not [00:17:30] tilt towards one party or another, will reflect the views of the American people broadly and this is the law confirmed many times by Congress. So The New York Times can do any biased things it wants, or CNN as well. It would violate the ethics of journalism, but not the law. This violated the law.

Bill Walton: One of the problems that when this was set up in the 50s and 60s to combat communism, that Americans generally had a pretty [00:18:00] favorable view of themselves and felt we had to project an image of American democracy and freedom and constitutional government to the rest of the worlds as an example of how they could live and to show them really, a beacon of freedom. And then what's happened though, is I think we've got so many people on the left who don't like America, don't like that America and they see America as a fairly flawed place. Bringing back the New York Times, they think the 1619 Project [00:18:30] is what America is and everything started with slaves arriving on the coast of Virginia in 1619. That's the image of America they want to project to the world.

Michael Pack: Indeed and that is a very big problem in these agencies, very big.

Bill Walton: I'm just thinking about you as a filmmaker, as a programmer, as a promulgator by ideas, which ideas are we going to be-

Michael Pack: That's right. There was a piece for instance, a five part series, I think it was about Black Lives Matter targeted to Africa and [00:19:00] it was very positive about the Black Lives Matter movement and it was happy to portray America as a racist society but A, I don't think that's true and B, how does that fulfill the goal of promoting American ideals abroad? It was an unbalanced portrait of BLM, let's put it that way. But you're right, there's a problem. The only thing Donald Trump or the White House ever told me, and this was before I came there by way of what to do was bring [00:19:30] it back to its glory days. And he meant precisely what you say, Bill, which means when it was fighting communism, when it was a beacon of liberty, when people like Václav Havel and Lech Wałęsa would point to the Voice of America and radio Free Europe/Radio Liberty as lights in the darkness.

That is what we should be, that is our mission. And all I wanted to do was bring it back to that. That is its mission, that is the law. [00:20:00] I had no intention of making it tilt towards Republicans, it simply shouldn't tilt but they portrayed that differently and the attacks were endless and the attacks were on many fronts. This was just one of many similar issues, both relating to bias and corruption inside the agency, things they had done wrong, some relating to security failures.

Bill Walton: I Mentioned civil service protections. When you come into an agency as a political [00:20:30] appointee, you have almost no degrees of freedom about who you hire and fire.

Michael Pack: No, that's right. There were seven or eight people involved in what was a major security problem inside the agency. I again launched an internal investigation, including hiring and also hired an outside legal firm to find out who was responsible and even to get people to be fired because of security [00:21:00] problems are nearly impossible and they have all been rehired back. So I want to return to the bigger issue you brought up at the very beginning, Bill, what to do about the administrative state. I could do so little in this agency of 4,000. There were 10 of us and we're outnumbered. So what could happen at the State Department, at the FBI, at the DoD. I think it's a cautionary tale.

Bill Walton: Don't forget the Justice Department.

Michael Pack: And [00:21:30] justice, yeah.

Bill Walton: Justice may be among the worst.

Michael Pack: It may be, it's a tough competition. Having gone through this and having been unable to even affect the small change of bringing this agency back to its legal mandate, I become very skeptical of the ability to change the administrative state by the next president. As you say, they are a totally unelected branch. It's most of the [00:22:00] bureaucracy and my own bureaucracy, I'd have to say that of the agency of 4,000, a lot of people maybe at the bottom and the worker part of it, the technicians, the sound people, the cameramen. They may have been split politically but the middle and senior management was pretty uniformly both Democratic and activist. So how to fix that going forward, I hear some solutions from friends of mine, [00:22:30] other conservatives that think this can be fixed and I am skeptical of those solutions having now been on the inside and I think it's worth going through them so we know what we're going to face next time.

Bill Walton: This is The Bill Walton Show, I'm here with Michael Pack, and I'm going to sit back and with bated breath, learn how we're going to fix the administrative state.

Michael Pack: Well, I leave that to others. I just want people to understand the problem.

Bill Walton: Yeah. One of the various ways that people talked about because one of the reasons [00:23:00] apart from the fact I think you're an extremely interesting filmmaker and human being. One of the reasons I want to do this show is that this people talk about term limit, Congress. Gee, we got to throw people out of Congress because they've been there too long and they've developed ways of the swamp. That I think is a problem that was 20, 25 years ago.

Michael Pack: Yeah, that's right.

Bill Walton: What's happened is it's metastasized so that the Congress has delegated almost all of their power to [00:23:30] the administrative state. And so the real action is focusing on what's happening there.

Michael Pack: Well, that's right. It is often said-

Bill Walton: And I think everybody who cares about political change has got to focus on that fourth branch of government.

Michael Pack: That's right, that is right. Most of the laws that we experience day to day come from the administrative state. EPA laws or other regulations or IRS rules. They all come out of these administrative agencies, very little out of Congress [00:24:00] because as you say, Congress has, I think unconstitutionally, delegated a lot of its legislative functions to these agencies. So because it's convenient for them, they don't have to answer for the consequences of it. They can just blame these agencies and the judiciary hasn't reined them in, they defer the agencies in a couple of key Supreme court cases.

Bill Walton: Is that the Chevron [00:24:30] deference?

Michael Pack: Chevron and Auer. So they need to roll that back. And the other one is the executive branch itself has to get.... These agencies are largely often not even responsive to the president as is the case of my agency. But what Republicans always say is we'll fix it at the next election. Unlike Donald [00:25:00] Trump, this next time, we'll hire people who are way better, there'll be more professional managers. They'll know more about managing, they'll know more about the government and they'll just have skill a skillset better than the Trump choices. But I'm skeptical that there is such a group with such a skillset. I don't know what skillset it would've taken to create that change in my agency. There's no good management or great skill that can change a bureaucracy [00:25:30] that outnumbers you 400 to one and is dead set against you.

Bill Walton: Well, as somebody whose run a few things, one of the tools you need in your kit is you need the ability to fire people.

Michael Pack: Yes, you need to fire people.

Bill Walton: You need to be able to change people.

Michael Pack: And they have to believe you can.

Bill Walton: The charge against Trump he'd just run a small real estate boutique, he was an entertainment guy, hotel guy that didn't understand [00:26:00] how to run an organization. He should have come in with a team of pros and they're going to make the trains run on time.

Michael Pack: That's right, that's right.

Bill Walton: You think structurally, even if he had that, it wouldn't have made much difference.

Michael Pack: I think it's still worth trying to do better in these areas, but I don't think it would've turned the tide. I don't see how it could. I was able to bring in 10 people to my agency and it was the end of the Trump administration and it was in fact hard to attract talent. But even if I had the 10 most talented people in the [00:26:30] world, they'd be up against these people who had spent years preparing to block us and had on their side, the media, which was totally in their camp and the Hill and the courts and whistleblower organizations that are funded by the left and they have all these institutions backing them. And they have these vast numbers.

Bill Walton: Including the media.

Michael Pack: And especially the media. So I don't see how another 10 wiser, better, more [00:27:00] talented, more competent people would've done that much better. What talented and competent people actually tend to do in reality in government is make what is in fact, the reasonable compromise which is to not fight because you're better off as a government bureaucrat, not making the fight. It was horrible eight months that I was there. It was just attacks in the media, attacks on the Hill, attacks internally all the time, all day long. What people usually do is [00:27:30] make peace with the bureaucracy and they say, "Well, you my top lieutenants, you run 95% of bureaucracy and I'll do a little project." That's conservative. In my own case, I could have done we'll do a couple of documentaries on issues that I think are important. And then would go, "Okay, you do these 10 documentaries and we'll do these 1000s of hours of programming daily."

Bill Walton: Let us run hate America ads the rest of the time.

Michael Pack: That's right. And you do these little things.

Bill Walton: [00:28:00] Head pats.

Michael Pack: And that's why people make that deal. Because then you get to hire in your little project, a whole bunch of other conservatives who then say great things about you in the conservative media. And when you leave, you say, "Well, I did my

best and I did this thing and people like it." And you don't get attacked by the liberal media, a nice thing, you don't get attacked on the Hill. People like you, you've made friends, it's the smart thing to do. So smart people end up doing the smart thing and that is why Republicans in spite of campaigning [00:28:30] to eliminate departments, have never eliminated them going all the way back to Ronald Reagan who campaigned on eliminating the newly created Education Department and simply didn't do it, expanded it. And Bill Bennett who ran it, didn't do it and he's a very smart, competent manager.

Bill Walton: We've eliminated no departments and we've eliminated no programs.

Michael Pack: Yeah, indeed. So why do we think we're going to do it again?

Bill Walton: Okay. So that isn't going to work. I've heard another one about the FBI, [00:29:00] another alternative is, "Well, we just move it to Kansas and we get the bureaucrats out of Washington."

Michael Pack: Well, that might be appealing, but it would be the same people. They'd be happy to be in Kansas. The other thing I hear a lot is, "Well, we're going to eliminate a huge number. Right away, we're going to eliminate 25%, 30% and that'll send a big message." First of all, it's not easy to eliminate 25% of anything. [00:29:30] The normal way to do a reduction of force in the government is to assign it to the senior managers to figure out who to eliminate and they usually get rid of the good people and keep the bad people and they keep their friends.

Bill Walton: So the same civil senior managers you were fighting with-

Michael Pack: Yeah, that's right.

Bill Walton: Would be the ones that would tell you who to get rid of.

Michael Pack: How else can you do that? But even 25%, the numbers would be huge to create the change. It's not just firing people. Would you be able to fire [00:30:00] 25% of people and bring in 25% new people? No, you would just fire them. So even if you shrunk it, you wouldn't change the complexion of it.

Bill Walton: Did you at times think about whether there's any sort of civil service reform that would've been possible? Some context, civil service rules came into place after the administration of president Grant.

Michael Pack: Led by Teapot Dome.

Bill Walton: And there was all sorts of cronyism, reportedly and people getting jobs and paid off for this, that, or the other. Now fast forward [00:30:30] well over a 100 years later, and we've got a new kind of cronyism.

Michael Pack: That's right.

Bill Walton: So we've got a corrupt system now, we had a corrupt system then. How do you fix today's corrupt system?

Michael Pack: I believe it does need another major reform. That's not my area of expertise but I do think this and I ended my article with this. I don't think there will be this reform if the American people don't demand it as they did after other after Teapot Dome and other scandals.

Bill Walton: Well, that's why we're talking about this now.

Michael Pack: [00:31:00] Yeah, that's right.

Bill Walton: People don't understand, this is the problem.

Michael Pack: They have to demand it. If they say we want you to do this and it was clear. I think because they are losing their democracy, they're losing their the Republican form of government promised to them and they should demand that it be returned to them. That's the only way it'll happen. Then there could be a reform. If there were legal reforms, if Congress, the courts and the Federal government started to actually address this problem and treat it seriously, then it would happen. [00:31:30] And I think the American people have to see that it's fundamental. And even if you're a Democrat, you have to still believe in this process. Now it tilts towards what you believe in but it's still not the form of government that you were promised in the constitution. So I think the American people simply have to rise up and demand it. Not rise up, through the electoral process.

Bill Walton: Do you know how unusual you are as a former head of one of these agencies to be as candid as you are [00:32:00] being about it.

Michael Pack: I know, I'm probably breaking some rule here. That's right.

Bill Walton: Well, not my rule, but so many as you mentioned, they get along to go along when they want the next job in government.

Michael Pack: They do, do that.

Bill Walton: I suspect you're not looking for your next job in government.

Michael Pack: I hope not to walk through the door of another government building ever.

Bill Walton: So bringing in the super managers, we don't think that works. Just getting rid of people, you can't do that because of the way it'd be implemented. Civil service reform is one way to go, but you got [00:32:30] to develop a political will to do that.

Michael Pack: That's right, you really do.

Bill Walton: And is it analogous at all to what's happening to the schools? Because if you look what happened with schools, the silver lining to the lockdown was kids were sent home. The parents looked over the shoulders as they were on their computers and they said, "Oh my goodness, what are you being taught?" And then they came and started demanding changes and I think parents are now waking up to it's not just school boards, it's the teachers, teachers unions, the curriculum developers, the consultants and all the people [00:33:00] in that establishment. It looks a lot like the Federal bureaucracy.

Michael Pack: I think it is a lot like that. It's these experts that think they know what your children should learn, what's the truth about race in America, all these things. I think it is definitely analogous to it and as long as there's a movement. That movement responding to CRT came along demanding that the government get back to its constitutional principles, then I think that would happen. I agree with you, Bill, it's very analogous.

Bill Walton: [00:33:30] Well, you think and I agree that we've got to focus more on the cultural issues if we're going to make any difference.

Michael Pack: Indeed. That is my actual area of expertise and in that area, I'm more optimistic, in fact. As you say, I'm a documentary filmmaker and in the area of nonfiction television and maybe nonfiction television and small movies about politics and history, there's a really a Renaissance on the left. There's more documentary programming on the air than ever before on [00:34:00] Netflix, on Amazon, on Hulu, on HBO, on Showtime and almost all of it or virtually all of it is on the left or some is apolitical. But on the left celebrating the 60s, celebrating talking about race in America from the point of view of the left. If we let one, the left tell the stories about America's past and present, they will dominate the culture as they have been doing. But that [00:34:30] I believe that we could take back if we are willing to make the films and television and music and other things. That if we are willing to engage in the culture, unlike government, that's a relatively free market. We can participate in it and we on our side simply have not.

Bill Walton: Well, the cultural, the media, the Hollywood, the filmmaking world looks an awful lot though like the other worlds we've talked about.

Michael Pack: [00:35:00] Indeed, indeed.

Bill Walton: If you're a conservative kid and you want to make conservative documentaries, or even worse, you want to make up a feature film or a streaming series one of the cable networks, you're not going to find it.

Michael Pack: Yeah, you're not. Ans the reason for that is that I believe is that as you know, the left since the 1960s said they were going to engage in a long March for the institutions. They announced it, they talked about it, Herbert Marcuse and

others that picked up that call and that [00:35:30] is what they did. And they did it starting with the university but now also including as you say, Hollywood and the news media and the documentary world and all these areas. So over the last 50 plus years, they have poured in tens of billions of dollars a year into culture to making cultural works and we on our side have maybe poured in tens of millions. So there's a gap of 10 billion a year over 50 years.

Bill Walton: What does Netflix [00:36:00] spend a year on film?

Michael Pack: It's very hard to tell but they spend a lot.

Bill Walton: It's a couple billion, isn't it?

Michael Pack: Yes. PBS alone is 2.5 billion a year, PBS alone. So over these many decades, they not only have produced a lot of I'd say very high quality product, an interesting product, but they've also created as you implied in your question, all these institutions that support that product including streaming service likes Netflix and Amazon, including funding services, including [00:36:30] funding entities and using foundations like Ford and MacArthur but also government, NEH and CPB and as well as private funding. And they have funding, they have distribution, they have every film school in America is on the left training the next generation of left leaning filmmakers. So they have taken over and used all these institutions. So you're right, a young conservative documentary [00:37:00] producer or feature film director has few places to go. But that wasn't true before the 60s, we can replicate what they did. It won't be fast, but we can replicate it and we can replicate it faster because we see what they've done.

Bill Walton: How did you work your way through the system because you've made some extraordinarily interesting nuanced films that are "conservative". They're not red meat conservative but you had a very successful [00:37:30] career working in that infrastructure. How did you do it?

Michael Pack: Well, I began in the 70s, already a different era and I had made these contacts inside public broadcasting that have always helped me. And in fact, they've been pretty good to me and they were very enthusiastic about the Clarence Thomas film, but my films and this is another failure on our side. When we do make a film maybe because we have so few of them, they're often very strident propaganda and they are [00:38:00] telling people what to think.

Bill Walton: Are you describing Steve Bannon?

Michael Pack: Well, he's a friend and I don't want to describe him.

Bill Walton: I know we both like Steve Bannon but nuance is not his middle name.

Michael Pack: No, it's not. And another filmmaker I like, Dinesh D'Souza. He makes these very strong films and I think films that appeal to the base, there's a place for them.

The left has them too, Michael Moore. But I have tried to make films that don't do that, that appeal to the people in the center that want to know about things and I [00:38:30] think that's the way that we can be successful in culture. Not only by making these films that are advocacy, but by trying to make films that tell stories that aren't told, the Clarence Thomas film is a good example. I chose to tell that story and I think I let him tell his story fairly.

Bill Walton: It's a brilliant film.

Michael Pack: Other people on the left had fairly recently before we made that film made a film about Ruth Bader Ginsburg. They chose a different story. [00:39:00] America benefits from having all these stories told and now we only have half of them told. We can tell these stories and you don't have to exaggerate the Clarence Thomas story to make it a compelling story and there are many such stories and we need to tell them, and Hollywood used to do that all the time. Hollywood itself told stories about America and its view of America is part of what made the rest of the world want to be like America.

Bill Walton: Swinging back to where we started with VOA [00:39:30] or the rebranded name of it, Agency for Global Media. Is there a Chinaman's chance? That's probably the wrong proverb actually. There is a Chinaman's chance. Sorry. Is there any way to reprogram that organization, because you think about the billion dollar budget they've got and the opportunity to fund the thing you're talking about. If we have a strong Republican president in 2024, [00:40:00] is it worth another shot at that agency?

Michael Pack: I think we have to try and although I would not want to run it again, I would try to help anybody who has the temerity to try. I think we have to try, it's mission that's really important. We're in a battle of ideas as you say with China, but also Iran and Russia and North Korea and we need to fight for our ideas. They're aggressively promoting their view of how the world should run.

Bill Walton: Well without getting into specifics, generically, how would you create [00:40:30] a conservative culture machine?

Michael Pack: Outside of the government?

Bill Walton: Outside of the government.

Michael Pack: One thing we are expanding. We recently got a grant to expand our company and including a training program to train young filmmakers to make films that are fair and not strident but that tell important stories that are missing. And so I think that training piece is important and we're going to make films, but I [00:41:00] actually believe, Bill, America needs a competitor to Amazon and Netflix that is a broad based entertainment streaming service. We have some streaming services that are pretty political that do well, Fox Nation.

Bill Walton: But it's all political and it's very repetitive and it's not very entertaining and it doesn't win hearts and minds.

Michael Pack: That's right.

Bill Walton: If you don't buy it, you're not going [00:41:30] to watch it.

Michael Pack: That's right. And this is beyond my own capacity to do, but we need entrepreneurs to go out and launch a competitor, a broad based entertainment competitor to Amazon and Netflix so that as you say, young filmmakers including the ones we're training, have a place for their product to go where people where the American people feel they can turn for more patriotic, more traditional entertainment and that would be sufficiently [00:42:00] interesting that people who are not necessarily Trump supporters would go to look for programming.

Bill Walton: Seems to me the cost of production and I've been involved in a couple feature film productions, the cost of productions drops way down when you consider what equipment costs and what we can do with handhelds and things that. You don't really need the full accoutrement of a Hollywood studio to make a pretty interesting film. So production cost, I think you can probably raise money. [00:42:30] To me, the biggest issue is distribution.

Michael Pack: It is The issue and we can make a dent in that. I think it's important to launch a competitive streaming service but the left is-

Bill Walton: I'm always looking for lines of action. Maybe we should just do that.

Michael Pack: Maybe we should. But the left also has these distribution companies or people are looking for ways to maximize it. When we were distributing Created Equal, we have a distributor that did very well by [00:43:00] us, but they're not particularly attuned to our mission. Whereas if we were for instance, making An Inconvenient Truth about global warming, we would have plenty of places to go where people would want to help us distribute it and promote it and get it out in schools and would do that as part of their not philanthropic mission and part of their larger goals. So we need to build many of these institutions. I think the biggest institution [00:43:30] would be a broad based entertainment streaming service, but there are other institutions that can be supported and built if there's a sufficient interest on the right to do it. I think they cannot do it on the cheap.

The left to their credit has put the time, energy, talent into it. As I said, they spend at least 10 billion a year in it, we spend nearly nothing. I think we could do okay with one 10th of everything, but not one 100th or one 1000th of everything. [00:44:00] They have a pool of people who've made whatever, \$10 billion in Silicon valley that want to take one billion of those and try to help make the world better as they see it through film and television and are willing

to want to make money but are willing to lose it. We have very few people like that and we need to get the people out there who understand, who see the world as we do, who have had the resources to see this problem and try to use some of their resources to address it.

Bill Walton: [00:44:30] Okay. I think I've figured out who should run this. I think I'm looking at him.

Michael Pack: Oh yeah. I don't know if I should run it but I would be happy to be part of providing content.

Bill Walton: Okay. We've got to follow up on that.

Michael Pack: Yeah, yeah. We go to.

Bill Walton: We're out of time. Michael Pack, it's always interesting talking with you. We've covered about 10% of what we thought we wanted to talk about, but I think we've covered the right 10%.

Michael Pack: I think so too.

Bill Walton: [00:45:00] And my takeaway is that conservatives need to think a lot more about culture, filmed entertainment and all sorts of avenues and get our large donors to really focus some money there.

Michael Pack: That's right. I think that would be a great message to take away from this.

Bill Walton: Okay, Michael. Thank you.

Michael Pack: Thank you.

Bill Walton: Thanks for joining. You've been viewing, watching, listening to The Bill Walton Show. We're available on all the major podcast platforms and on YouTube and Rumble. And you can also subscribe [00:45:30] to our show on thebillwaltonshow.com and we'd welcome your comments because they inform us with all the new things we do and we're getting a lot of great ideas from you. And thank you. And thanks again, Michael Pack and we'll be back soon.

I hope you enjoyed the conversation. Want more? Click the subscribe button or head over to the billwalton.com to choose from over a 100 episodes. You can also learn more about our guest on our interesting people page and [00:46:00] send us your comments. We read every one and your thoughts help us guide the show. If it's easier for you to listen, check out our podcast page and subscribe there. In return, we'll keep you informed about what's true, what's right and what's next. Thanks for joining.