



Life in Brief

Hometown: Seattle, WA

Current Residence: Mequon, WI

Education:

- BA, University of Wisconsin-Milwaukee, 1975

Family:

- Married to Janet Riordan
- Three children, two grandchildren

Work History:

- Editor-at-Large, The Bulwark, 2019-Present
- Host, The Daily Standard, 2018
- Contributing editor, The Weekly Standard
- Contributor, NBC/MSNBC, 2016-present
- Host, Indivisible WNYC, 2017
- Editor-in-Chief, Right Wisconsin
- Radio show host, WTMJ, 1999-2016
- Radio host, WISN, 1989-93
- PR for Dave Schulz, Milwaukee County Executive, 1988-89
- Editor-in-Chief, Milwaukee Magazine, 1984-88
- Managing editor, Milwaukee Magazine, 1983
- Staff writer, Cleveland Magazine, 1982
- Reporter, The Milwaukee Journal, 1976-82
- Journalist, The Northeast Post, 1975-76

Past and Present Board and Advisory Roles:

- Member, Knight Commission on Trust, Media & Democracy
- National Advisory Committee, Democracy Fund
- Board Member, Stand Up Republic

Quick Summary

Former conservative radio host and Wisconsin Republican kingmaker who gained national prominence as a leading voice in the Never Trump movement and created the Bulwark website as a messaging arm for like-minded conservatives

- Love for journalism and politics heavily influenced by his father
- Self-described “recovering liberal” who criticizes both political parties for inflexibility and for alienating those who reject status quo
- As conservative radio host, cultivated significant influence in Wisconsin GOP politics – quickly becoming a go-to stop for Republican candidates; drew significant attention to issues like school choice
- Became national figure after refusing to support Donald Trump
- Co-founded the Bulwark with Bill Kristol, which has become a leading mouthpiece of the Never Trump conservative movement
- Considers himself a “political orphan” in the era of Trump after exile from conservative movement whose political identity has changed many times but whose conservative principles have stayed the same

Approach and Motivations

Outspoken proponent of traditional conservative policies and defender of principles over partisan consensus

- Beliefs rooted principles of liberty, free markets, limited government, constitutionalism, and the defense of American institutions at home and abroad
- Describes himself as conservative contrarian, voicing opposition against consensus and status quo if it deviates from conservative principles

Personal responsibility on issues like education

- Favors self-reliance over government intervention
- Often applied to education policy, where he supports policies empowering parents to make school choices for their children

Policy Positions and Areas of Focus

Outspoken on education policy, and conservative principles like privacy and personal liberty

Reforming Secondary & Higher Education – Critiques emphasis on political correctness and prioritizing self-esteem over knowledge

- Believes a key problem with education is that holistic learning and personal feelings are given precedence over rigorous academics
- Contends education system is too resistant to criticism and reform
- Argues campus diversity doesn't extend to intellectual or political diversity
- Fervent proponent of school choice; major role in public awareness campaign in 2006 resulting in Wisconsin Gov. Jim Doyle reversing his opinion and supporting it

Erosion of Privacy – Wrote book arguing freedom from unauthorized intrusion is at risk

- Believes right to privacy is being diminished by technological change, government and business intrusion, and oversharing
- Particularly critical of media invasiveness and infringing personal privacy rights

Never Trump Conservatism – Leading voice in movement of conservatives allied against Trump

- Believes traditional conservative principles have been eroded by conservative leaders and media elevating hard-liners with fringe views (birthers, xenophobes, and alternative-reality media); views President Trump as extension of this
- Uses the Bulwark platform to highlight other like-minded voices on the right to critique Trump policies and abandonment of conservatism by the GOP

Public Employee Unions – Gave significant airtime to Gov. Walker during union battle

- Critical of teachers' unions for being too political; focused more on fundraising than issues relevant to education

- Supported Gov. Walker's push to weaken public employee union bargaining power in 2011 and provided platform for critics of unions to express views

Core Communities

"Never Trump" Conservatives – Conservative figures who refuse to support Donald Trump

- Features several Weekly Standard colleagues including Bill Kristol, John Podhoretz and PJ O'Rourke, on the Bulwark website and podcasts
- Tim Miller, former communications director for Jeb Bush and anti-Trump PAC advisor, is a contributor to the Bulwark and frequent guest on his podcast
- Rick Wilson, GOP media consultant, is a friend and frequent Bulwark podcast guest

Wisconsin Republicans – Close ties to majority of influential Wisconsin Republicans prior to 2016 election

- Wisconsin GOP consultant Deb Jordahl knows him as a radio host and through his volunteer work with local charities
- Frequently had Paul Ryan on his radio show and viewed him as the future of the GOP until his refusal to condemn President Trump
- Considers Reince Priebus, a Kenosha native, a friend but has been critical of his support for Donald Trump
- Considers Gov. Scott Walker to be a friend and influences his policy; was one of his most vocal supporters during recall election and union fight

Wisconsin Journalists – Lifelong ties starting with father through his career as a beat reporter and radio show host in Wisconsin

- Bill Lueders is a longtime friend who wrote for the Isthmus and Milwaukee Magazine
- Joel McNally, former columnist and colleague at the Milwaukee Journal, considers him a friend

Core Communities Cont.**Wisconsin Education Community – Allies in school choice advocacy**

- Radio pundit and communications consultant Mikel Holt worked with him to produce an ad in support of school choice
- Worked closely with members of the Bradley Foundation at the time, who pushed for vouchers
- Frequently discussed school choice on his show with several local Milwaukee city and county officials and members of the school board

Selected Publications

Wrote books about conservative policies and education; has focused his work at the Bulwark on criticizing GOP in Trump era

Books – Often critical of higher education, lack of personal responsibility, and culture of dependency

- *How the Right Lost Its Mind*, 2017
- *A Nation of Moochers: America's Addiction to Getting Something for Nothing*, 2012
- *The End of Privacy: The Attack on Personal Rights at Home, at Work, On-Line, and in Court*, 1999
- *Dumbing Down Our Kids: Why American Children Feel Good About Themselves but Can't Read, Write, or Add*, 1995
- *A Nation of Victims: The Decay of the American Character*, 1992
- *Profscam: Professors and the Demise of Higher Education*, 1988

Articles – Critical of President Trump and the future of the GOP

- "[The Problem with Joe Walsh](#)," *The Bulwark*, September 2019
- "[What's the Endgame of Trumpism?](#)", *RealClearPolicy*, February 2019
- "[Donald Trump's Crab Bucket Moral Universe](#)," *The Weekly Standard*, May 2018
- "[A Guide for Frustrated Conservatives in the Age of Trump](#)," *NBC News*, October 2017
- "[Charlie Sykes on Where the Right Went Wrong](#)," *New York Times*, December 2016

Financial Disclosures and Donations

Donates seldomly to GOP candidates and PACs

Wisconsin - Governor

- \$500 – Friends of Scott Walker (R-WI)

Federal – Select WI candidates

- \$500 – Ron Johnson for Senate (R-WI)
- \$250 – Ribble for Congress (R-WI)

Federal - PAC

- \$250 – Swift Boat Vets & POWs for Truth

Media Appearances

Since 2016, provides commentary critical of Republican members of Congress, conservative media, and President Trump

Television – Often is the conservative voice on cable news providing perspectives contrary to ones asserted by GOP establishment

- [MSNBC](#) – Meet the Press, spoke alongside columnist George Will about how the definition of patriotism has changed in the GOP, May 2019
- [CNN](#) – Reliable Sources: Criticized conservative media for abandoning conservative principles to embrace President Trump, September 2017

Print/Online – Discusses how conservative principles no longer align with Republican party, and conservative media's role in the rise of Donald Trump

- [NYTimes Magazine](#): In an interview, spoke about how President has changed the GOP and exposed vulnerabilities of the party, August 2017
- [Politico](#): Discussed his long history in Wisconsin politics and the conflicts he experienced questioning support for Donald Trump, August 2016

Speaking Engagements

Frequently speaks about future of conservatism post-Trump and media falsehoods

Academic Institutions

- Speaker on overcoming partisan politics, University of Wisconsin-Parkside, March 2019
- Panelist at event hosted by the Annenberg School at UPenn discussing media and politics hosted by, April 2017

Conservative

- Spoke at Wisconsin Institute for Law & Liberty about post-2016 conservatism, October 2016
- Moderated panel on political correctness in higher education at Conservative Political Action Conference (CPAC), March 2016

Events/Conferences

- Speaker on the future of conservatism in America, Aspen Ideas Festival, 2019

Profiles Others Have Written

Profiles tend to focus on career as radio host and, more recently, his rise as a leading conservative critic of Donald Trump

Michael Cummins, "[Charlie Sykes' inside account of the right-wing crackup](#)", *Isthmus*, September 2017

- Local profile detailing accounts from others about his transition out of Wisconsin politics

Kurt Chandler, "[Charlie's Bully Pulpit](#)," *Milwaukee Magazine*, July 2000

- Comprehensive profile on rise to prominence in Wisconsin and his critics

Hobbies

Sports

- Fan of Wisconsin professional sports teams, including the Green Bay Packers, Milwaukee Bucks, and Milwaukee Brewers

Info From Formative Years

Father's career, love for politics, and contrarian self-identity were profoundly influential to development of his own career and political identity

- Raised in liberal household and originally identified as a Democrat
- Father, Jay Sykes, was biggest inspiration and influence. Described father as a contrarian Democrat; modeled his contrarian conservative approach off of this
- Talked to father about politics a lot and volunteered with him for Eugene McCarthy's 1968 presidential campaign, igniting his interest in politics
- Converted to Catholicism at 18, shaping pro-life views, and ran against Assemblyman Jim Sensenbrenner in 1974 as a pro-life Democrat
- Alienated from Democratic Party due to his stance on abortion and the violence of the anti-war movement during Vietnam
- Lack of party identity has been a consistent theme throughout his career

Family Background

- Born in Seattle, WA and moved to New York state when he was three, then to Fox Point, WI in third grade
- Father, Jay G. Sykes, was a lawyer and journalist who later ran for Lieutenant Governor
- Mother was Katherine B. (Kay) Sykes
- Has daughter from his first marriage to Christine Libbey
- Ex-wife is Diane Schwerm Sykes, a judge on the 7th circuit court of appeals and was on the short list of Trump SCOTUS picks
- Wife, Janet Riordan, is a singer and actress