# Beyond Red vs. Blue in South Carolina

**Bob Gatty:** [00:00:00] Hey, guys. Welcome to the Lean to the Left podcast, where we support progressive politics and focus on the key social issues that confront us all. I'm your host, Bob Gatty.

Our guest today is Sam Gibbons, a Republican candidate for Congress in South Carolina 2nd Congressional Districts, one of the reddest in the very, very red Palmetto State.

It's a rural district that borders Georgia. But Sam isn't your ordinary Republican candidate. First, he's a Marine veteran, not a politician. Second, he's not MAGA, and he's not a fan of Donald Trump, and he strongly opposes the war in Iran. Sam served with the 2nd Marine Logistics Group from 2011 to 2012 in Afghanistan.

He graduated from the Citadel in 2014 with academic honors and is a civilian instructor for the Future [00:01:00] Soldier Preparatory Course at Fort Jackson. He and his wife have two kids. The incumbent congressman, Joe Wilson, is 78, and he's represented the district for 25 years. I suspect Sam thinks there needs to be a change.

Meanwhile, Sam previously served on the Reform Party National Committee and helped organize the No Kings rallies at the State House. My guess is that he's running in the June 9 primary as a Republican because he'd have a hell of a time winning as a Democrat.

Sam, tell us what you're up to, buddy

**Sam Gibbons:** A lot of my friends are calling it good trouble. I'm calling it I'm running on principles. Th- this is a red district that I'm in a- and as you said with the intro I've... I work in the pipeline to get people into the Army.

I've helped hundreds of people get into the Army. And I do [00:02:00] not think that we are facing a just war. It's just war.

So it is committing lives that I have helped i- in a way that is inconsistent with my values, and I feel honor driven to stand up for those people that give up their voice when they join the military.

So there's a lot. There there's a lot of layers to this. But that's the start.

**Bob Gatty:** Meaning what? A lot of layers meaning?

**Sam Gibbons:** So there is the layer of this is the district that I grew up in.

**Bob Gatty:** Yeah.

**Sam Gibbons:** A lot of my fa- Like, I grew up working class on job sites. My, my family lean- leans red.

A lot of my friends that I grew up with lean that way as well. So if you look at politics as culture, I have a lot of the culture from the right.

Not all the policies, but the identity politics-wise I'm a bit of a poster child in many regards. So that's one layer.

But the other layer is, you're coming from this Reform Party background. There's some [00:03:00] fiscal conservatism that's in there, right? There's, strong national defense, strong borders that are in there as well. So there's definitely some conservative side or, more right-leaning to it.

**Bob Gatty:** Sure.

**Sam Gibbons:** But then the other side is obviously, I don't... I've voted in the Republican primaries, right? Because if the way that gerrymandering works, if you want your voice to be heard, your best bet is gonna be through the Republican side, especially- ... in a district that leans as red as mine currently does.

**Bob Gatty:** Right.

**Sam Gibbons:** It's a little bit of force in that as well.

**Bob Gatty:** So- How do you feel about what Donald Trump has been doing to this country?

**Sam Gibbons:** There's a lot of words for that. I think abhor is definitely a certain, i- is one. I can't stand it, and whenever I say I can't stand it, it went from me posting online saying, "I don't like this," to organizing with No Kings about this as well.

5051 SC is I sit as [00:04:00] a state liaison. We're not a true organization. We're really just a chat room of people that work to get stuff done, but it's been my name on about seven, eight or so of the permits at the South Carolina State House, and we've had successful events.

We've had thousands, sometimes tens of thousands of people show up and leave happy.

**Bob Gatty:** That's amazing that you've been leading the No Kings rallies here in South Carolina, Typically, that's identified, those are identified with the Democrats

**Sam Gibbons:** We have a lot of third parties and independents within this.

Oh, okay. Sure. Don't get me ... and when you, when we say leading, nobody has a true leading role, right? I just happen to be in a position to speak for a lot of people. ... But we are what you would call decentralized. Nobody's compelled to do [00:05:00] anything that they do not feel comfortable with doing.

**Bob Gatty:** Right.

**Sam Gibbons:** And that's just the way we operate. So leading I think is a little generous for the amount of work that other people do. I am a liaison. I simply transfer information from one level to the next.

**Bob Gatty:** So what was your thought when Trump said that he was gonna kick the shit out of Iran and bomb the hell out of them and all of that?

**Sam Gibbons:** Just what are we doing? Whenever I joined the Marine Corps, I r- I was reading books Shake Hands with the Devil which is on the Rwandan genocide, right? The UN general that was stuck in the middle of that. I've read the Rape of Nanking, where the Japanese Imperial Army, marches into the Chinese capital, shuts the gates and percent, proceeds to butcher people.

We've read Night. A lot of people in South Carolina have read Night. It's a part of the curriculum. And so when you read stories of genocide and Holocaust and the horrors that the [00:06:00] military can just be ... that can be wrought upon a civilian population, and the president and the secretary of defense are almost gleefully talking about how many people they're going to kill- it's disgusting. It ... Hegseth loves to talk about warrior ethos, but I- You know- ... so often it's like murder ethos ...

**Bob Gatty:** you're not in the Marines now, but if you were-

**Sam Gibbons:** No, sir ...

**Bob Gatty:** if you were still serving and the order came down to do what Trump says, shoot to kill, bomb the hell out of them, if you were in a role where you would be called upon to do that, what do you think you'd have done?

**Sam Gibbons:** I with my current thought process, I would resist in some capacity, right? Like as a unit leader your job is [00:07:00] obviously, yes, follow orders, but man, you're also accountable to your people, right? I think there's a veteran group that I've been doing some podcasts with, 5051 Vets.

They've had, ... And I was just yesterday, sorry, Wednesday with some of the people that did the action in DC the other day that got arrested.

**Bob Gatty:** Okay.

**Sam Gibbons:** The No War group. And they're very much about there's veterans about face. There's avenues that you can go to become a conscientious objector.

There's avenues and pathways out for people that are in the military- ... that do not agree with what's going on. Because we talk about these as I think moral injuries.

**Bob Gatty:** Right.

**Sam Gibbons:** Maybe not physical, but things that last with you, and, certainly the suicide rate in the military is atrocious, and I just don't see how this is going to help it when we are messing up and bombing schools full of little girls.

Or again, just murdering civilian populations. Like- if you [00:08:00] look at the 2001 AUMF, since that point in time, in those 25 years, a million people, about a million people died due to direct combat, and another three million died from the after effects, famine, disease, food insecurity, those types of things.

War is hell on a civilian population, and it should be a last resort, not a not a first pick.

**Bob Gatty:** What's your feeling about Hegseth and the way that he's managed things, and especially how he's gone after Senator Kelly?

**Sam Gibbons:** I find him to be problematic. I don't see him as a particularly effective leader.

I do know that there's a lot of lower enlisted guys that really like some of the things that he does.

**Bob Gatty:** Oh,

**Sam Gibbons:** yeah. Which, if you put it from their point of view you got an overweight boss that's giving you a hard time about you being in weight, and so it's fun to watch him get his little butt out there and run- circles on the PT track because it's the same standard that's being held.

**Bob Gatty:** Right.

**Sam Gibbons:** So there's definitely [00:09:00] things about him that people that are enlisted really but a- as far as in his position, I think that he is deeply problematic.

He's ... The bravado I miss James Mattis, man.

**Bob Gatty:** Yeah.

**Sam Gibbons:** I miss Mattis- Yeah ... a lot. Mattis was very calm. He was very about business, a- and that type of leadership, I think is what you want in an officer.

Let the enlisted be the ones that, that, are a little bit more verbose and have that bravado.

But I think as an officer, you should be about business ... because it is business.

**Bob Gatty:** Senator Kelly signed that, that message telling members of the military that they had an obligation not to follow an illegal order.

And so Hegseth took away his pension, and has been trying to do everything he can to [00:10:00] discredit the guy.

And I'd just like to have your thought about- How you reacted to that?

**Sam Gibbons:** I thought it was petty. It, it- ... it is exceedingly petty. Instead of looking in the mirror and be like why would people think that we would be issuing illegal orders?"

Just doubled down and said how could you dare say something like this?" It's because you are removing transparency. You're kicking people out of the ... You're kicking the press out of the Pentagon. You're making it harder for the public to know what is going on with the military.

And let's be ... Like, there was nothing secret about Iran. They projected that. They showed exactly what they were gonna do. So I think his attacks on Kelly are honestly I consider it a sign of weakness. Why are you concerning yourself so much about this?

**Bob Gatty:** Good point. Good point. Okay, so you're a registered Republican.

You're running as a Republican candidate in a very Republican district. But you're not [00:11:00] a MAGA supporter, are you?

**Sam Gibbons:** No, sir.

**Bob Gatty:** Why?

**Sam Gibbons:** I live by a code of honor, right? So from the Marine Corps to The Citadel, they're very big in this idea of honor, the honor code. Do not lie, do not cheat, do not steal, and do not tolerate those that do. Okay. And a- and the other values that kind of feed into that, you have fidelity, right?

Fidelity from the Marine Corps. Faithfulness, right? True allegiance to the same. When you make a vow- ... whether it's to your wife or to your country

... certainly you should uphold those vows.

**Bob Gatty:** Right.

**Sam Gibbons:** Right?

**Bob Gatty:** Okay.

**Sam Gibbons:** You have duty, okay?

**Bob Gatty:** Okay.

**Sam Gibbons:** Servant leadership. The Citadel was huge on leadership or servant leadership, where you need to look out for your subordinates.

Your job is to make sure that they can do the mission. Because once you're a leader, you're not doing much. Your subordinates are doing the work, and your job is to [00:12:00] facilitate that so that they can do the good work. What does Trump do? Top-down, right? And the last one is- Yeah ... is transparency, right?

You need to be transparent in who you are and what you're doing and why you're taking certain actions. Trump likes to yell at reporters, "Shut up, piggy." So just to recap on that those values of fidelity, duty, and transparency, FDT, really lead into why I don't see him as a person to be a leader.

**Bob Gatty:** You certainly nailed it when you talked about fidelity, when you talked about telling the truth, not lying. The man has lost count of all the lies he tells. You can't believe a word he says.

**Sam Gibbons:** No.

**Bob Gatty:** How many wives has he cheated on?

**Sam Gibbons:** Enough. He had a whole scandal about paying somebody off for that.

Honestly, I see him as a snake oil [00:13:00] salesman. He has sold a wonderful lie to a group of people. And that's part of the reason that I'm running as a Republican, 'cause again, this is the party that I grew up with. These are people that I grew up with and I love still.

And I just feel like they've been sold a lie. And again, who else is going to speak to that?

So I want to speak to that and offer an alternative that just does not seem to exist.

**Bob Gatty:** What's your realistic goal? Do you have... Do you think you have a chance of winning?

You're running against a 25-year incumbent, for crying out loud.

**Sam Gibbons:** He's raised about $670,000 this campaign cycle. I did a little video where I went through his campaign finance. Yeah. He's got a lot of moneyed interest behind him, 'cause again, he's just been in power for so long. I think realistically the goal is to say, "Hey, man, thanks for your service. It really is time to pass the torch." 13 congressional terms is what? Triple what most people want to see- ... for, essentially term limits. A- and just say, "Hey, it's time to pass the torch." If he [00:14:00] resigns or if he has another health scare, that is, I think, the pathway to victory.

Otherwise, I think we can at least force a runoff election. If I can get, the other gentleman that's running against him got about 25% of the vote last time. If I can somehow get about 25, 26% of the vote of people that are just tired of the status quo- ... and tired of the lies- then I think we can at least force a runoff, and that is that's a major statement to be had.

**Bob Gatty:** If you force a runoff, then it's anybody's ballgame, right?

**Sam Gibbons:** Oh it's definitely a lot better,

**Bob Gatty:** yeah, for sure. Absolutely. Yeah. All right. What other concerns do you have nationally that you would deal with if you were in Congress?

**Sam Gibbons:** My degree was in international politics. I'm very concerned about our international situation. Okay. In particular tariffs. Free trade was maybe not the best for us in all circumstances, but this, the trade wars that we're engaging with I [00:15:00] think are deeply hurting American consumers, and I don't necessarily know how much they're really benefiting American business, right?

We import a lot of stuff. We're not a producer as much as we are a service provider, right? So if you think about it, you and I make, or I make my living really with my voice as a teacher. I don't really produce a product, I produce a service, right? And yet my house is full of stuff.

Where does that stuff come from? Other countries. How does it get here cheaply? No tariffs. So I just, I don't think that his vision and what he's doing is coherent with American manufacturing capacity and just where we are in the world, right? We have moved beyond manufacturing. Why are we competing with lower level developed countries for manufacturing when we should be pushing to what is the next part?

Which is- ... I think automation. Which has its own issues, but again, why [00:16:00] are we not going forward? Why are we trying to go backwards? So I would definitely look at the tariff situation. I think that is a major one. It also in- influences our world standing. A- and I would say beside from that kind of coming a little bit more...

No, we could stay international. People don't like all the migration. Why is there so much migration? It's push factors, right? There's whole degrees that study this. When people live in crappy areas, guess what they want to do? Leave. Yeah,

**Bob Gatty:** yeah.

**Sam Gibbons:** So if we are contributing to areas being in kind of chaos and turmoil, then of course that's gonna increase migration coming to the United States.

So- ... again, restoring USAID in some capacity was huge in making sure that parts of the world that are in positions to send people to search for better lives- ... have sufficient resources to keep people there I think is a positive benefit for the world itself. Well- Go ahead.

**Bob Gatty:** I was just gonna ask you, I mean- As a [00:17:00] Republican, Republicans are all about supporting business generally.

And businesses in the United States many, especially here in South Carolina, rely on immigrants- ... to do a lot of the work.

And he's k- he's kicking these folks out willy-nilly.

**Sam Gibbons:** Yep.

**Bob Gatty:** And I... I was talking to a CEO of a of a manufacturing company last night at dinner, and he's a Republican, but he's not happy with what Trump is doing with immigrants.

Feels it's cruel. That's just one thing The other, but the other part of it is what he's doing to businesses who have re- that have relied on these immigrants for labor all these years. Yeah. And now that's gone away and, eh, I lived in Maryland for a long [00:18:00] time, and Maryland is known for its crabs.

Not the kind you get if you do something wrong when you're having sex, not that kind of crabs. Hard shell crabs and soft shell crabs that are delicious to eat. And but the people that pick those crabs generally are immigrants.

And they are the areas where the crabs generally come from are hardcore Republican areas.

And yet he's taken away these crab pickers. And that's gotta cause a big problem for those crab companies up there in Maryland. I don't know. I I'm just guessing, but it's got to. And that's just nat- that just is an example. You're talking about farmers that rely on people to pick the crops and all of that.

Out and on. The building industry. My [00:19:00] house was built largely, it was by an American company, but that American company hired mostly Latinos that were- ... construction people.

I don't know how many of them were immig- were illegal or not illegal, and nor did I care. They built a beautiful home for me and and they did it at a very reasonable price.

And I hired some of those folks to do a patio for me after the house was built, and they did a great job- ... and they did it at a very reasonable price. And those are the folks that Trump is trying to kick out of this country. Why?

**Sam Gibbons:** He plays a lot, a- and going back to one of the reasons that I just do not particularly care for him, he plays a lot towards negative emotions and hate.

**Bob Gatty:** Yeah.

**Sam Gibbons:** A- and xenophobia runs deep. With- ... within most societies if we're being honest, right? There's always this kind of- ... fear of outsiders. And so he's playing into that, and he does a lot of scapegoating. But [00:20:00] again, it doesn't have to be real. It's just a feel- it's an emotion.

They're really, the Repub- so much of what Trump does is it runs off of vibes.

**Bob Gatty:** Yeah.

**Sam Gibbons:** It's just, "I feel like this should happen." And so- Yeah ... no, I don't know if there's a deeper level of thought to it. It certainly creates chaos. And necessity is the mother of invention.

I would say. A- ... and so a lot of people are having to problem solve around the conditions that he's creating. And- ...

**Bob Gatty:** you

**Sam Gibbons:** know, maybe positive benefits are coming of those. But at the same time it's the cruelty that I don't understand the way in which we are treating people because people are people, right?

I've taught the students of those workers, and do you wanna know what? They are often wonderful students. Sure. They care. They do what they're supposed to do, right? They don't cause trouble in the cl- like, it, people are people. Why are we treating them so poorly? Especially when they are contributing. A lot of those- ... individuals had what, TINs from the IRS? They were paying taxes in some [00:21:00] capacity. Yeah.

**Bob Gatty:** Yeah.

**Sam Gibbons:** If you wanna talk about the farmers have been hit doubly hard.

**Bob Gatty:** Oh, yeah. The

**Sam Gibbons:** cost of work-

**Bob Gatty:** Absolutely ...

**Sam Gibbons:** and the increase in fertilizer prices from the Strait.

Yeah. So what has Trump done for farmers lately other than, especially here in South Carolina, caused everything to go up, caused all their inputs to go up?

**Bob Gatty:** Exactly right. All right how about- concerns locally that you would deal with if you had an opportunity as a congressman?

**Sam Gibbons:** So Wednesday night, I was also in a little short webinar on Dominion Energy's rate hike, right? So that's one of the things that I kinda dove into yesterday on my Facebook, did like that classic COVID era screen share, right?

And recorded a Zoom clip, and just kinda showed people, "Hey, here's where Dominion Energy is going to ask for a 12% increase in prices," right? Both of

residential, and also 5% commercial, and 14% industrial. Okay? So Dominion Energy's gonna increase their prices, which means, again, inflationary [00:22:00] pressures.

Dominion is a public monopoly, they can't just increase prices. It has to go through essentially some sort of quasi-governmental agency to approve.

**Bob Gatty:** Right.

**Sam Gibbons:** So I just did a video on that. So that's something that I have interest in, because again- ... that is energy prices, and that- ... is a key component that everybody needs.

**Bob Gatty:** That's

**Sam Gibbons:** a good

**Bob Gatty:** one ...

**Sam Gibbons:** so that's at least one example for you

**Bob Gatty:** Now tell me a little bit about the 2nd Congressional District. What's... I know it's rural. I know it's Republican. Tell me more.

**Sam Gibbons:** So it's definitely rural out there towards the Aiken side, but I'm more on the Columbia side. Oh, okay. And so if you go, if you look into the district, it hooks around the capital.

That little hook around the capital, that actually grabs Fort Jackson, and Fort Jackson has a fairly sizable population. There's 40-ish thousand recruits on Fort Jackson at any one time. Essentially the 2nd Congressional District houses Fort Jackson, one of the Army's, or the Army's largest single training installation in the [00:23:00] United States. It also goes down to what I've heard people refer to as Fort Eisengordon. Is it Eisenhower? Is it Fort Gordon? Which Gordon? The first Gordon, the second Gordon? We don't know. Fort Eisengordon right down there in Augusta, right? So it doesn't go into the fort, but essentially the people that work on the fort have the ability to live in around the end of the 2nd Congressional District in Aiken.

So yeah, there's... It hi- I think it's Interstate 20 runs through it, right? So that's a pretty big corridor that connects Columbia to to Atlanta. ... It also reaches down

there to Orangeburg, and I actually had last week an opportunity to go speak at Claflin University in Orangeburg.

And actually ran into one of my former students, a senior. Did you really? I done... Yeah. Yes, sir. What...

**Bob Gatty:** I was gonna ask you, what exactly do you teach?

**Sam Gibbons:** So whenever I was... i've had two parts to my teaching career. Eight years were in high school, and I taught social studies. Okay. So human geography [00:24:00] was a large part of it to ninth graders.

So- ... I'm really excited to sit down and do a dive into the demographics of- Okay ... of the second congressional district. Because that was part of what I would teach my students, is how to analyze and understand demography, right? The study of- Sure ... human populations. But I also taught stuff like ACT prep, High School 101 government, econ.

I taught sociology. Oh ... and that was, like I said, eight years at at Drew High School in Columbia. Okay. The last two years I've been teaching at the Future Soldier Preparatory Course. Okay. And so that one's really focused around really just reading, writing... not even writing. Reading, word knowledge, arithmetic, a- and math, right?

So like-

**Bob Gatty:** Okay ...

**Sam Gibbons:** word problems and math. Okay. So the content is much lower, but I get to engage with adults that are seeking opportunities within the military, and there's actually a really diverse population there as well, which is fun to teach. But- Oh, that's great ... that's the two parts to my teaching career so far.

**Bob Gatty:** Oh, [00:25:00] that's great. That's great. It sounds to me like you would bring a hell of a good vibe to the United States Congress if you get, were able to win. How do you feel about what Trump has done to the Republican Party?

**Sam Gibbons:** Ooh, I'll be blunt. I think he's bastardized it. He's made it about him.

**Bob Gatty:** Yeah.

**Sam Gibbons:** He, what one of his Lara Trump, right? What is he daught- she's a daughter-in-law, right? She immediately found her way into, the top leadership. I think he has ... He staged a coup with e- it's a coup within the Republican Party, and nobody's really standing up and fighting him.

Save Massie.

Right?

Right. There's a very few, a very small group of people that are actually willing to stand up to him, and he just ... the prediction from a lot of people early on was like, "Hey, this man is just- he's going to continue this because this is essentially his defect."

And, people went along with it because he had the popularity behind him. But at some point in time, [00:26:00] he just continues to just blunder and- ... upset portions of his base, and the cracks are forming, and somebody just needs to be the one that says, "Enough."

**Bob Gatty:** Yeah. Now, how do your friends and family and associates feel about all this stuff you say about Trump?

**Sam Gibbons:** My associates are, depending upon the group that we're in, largely in agreeance, right? Okay. Especially whenever you get people that start having college degrees and stuff like that. There's-

**Bob Gatty:** Right ...

**Sam Gibbons:** I- if you've done some social work and abusive people, you look at Trump and you're like, "Ugh."

Cl- he's an abuser. He's an abuser. The way that he speaks to people is abusive.

**Bob Gatty:** Yeah. Yeah.

**Sam Gibbons:** I don't know what else to say. Yeah.

**Bob Gatty:** But do you have do you have do you have people that you're friendly with that have moved away from being friends with you because of your position about that?

**Sam Gibbons:** Not really.

**Bob Gatty:** [00:27:00] Really? Good.

Good.

**Sam Gibbons:** No, 'cause- That's

**Bob Gatty:** good to hear ... '

**Sam Gibbons:** cause I don't I don't take it from this really... I try to ground everything within some sort of reason, right? Tether it to a value, right?

**Bob Gatty:** Right and so you can

**Sam Gibbons:** disagree with the assessment, but it's "No, I think that he, he does this because this is what I believe, and this is counter to what I believe."

**Bob Gatty:** Okay. All right. You got anything else you'd like to add to this discussion?

**Sam Gibbons:** I think that a lot of Americans are ready for real change. And by real change, actual power to the people. We are a intelligent country when we allow ourselves to be.

Okay. I highly encourage people to step away from the hate and the social media-

**Bob Gatty:** Okay ...

**Sam Gibbons:** because that is... It's going to take us to a breaking point. And part of the reason that I've engaged in all this organizing is the thought of a kinetic engagement within [00:28:00] the United States is terrifying.

Because again, we are a very dependent country on the flow of the economy that we've created, and if any of that stops, even for a short period of time, the chaos, the... You're not gonna be able to put it back in the bag, right? It i- is going to result in deaths of a lot of vulnerable people, right?

So how do you avoid that, but not avoid that in a way that enables bad things? You have to stand up to it early, and you have to encourage people to do that.

And it takes a lot of courage- ... to stand up and say "I'm going to stand against you, but I'm not going to be hateful. I'm going to be firm in my values."

"And you will have to come to, to understand that." So be brave. Be brave in your values because that's what I'm trying to do. I'm trying to... I am just a person. I am not special. I am just doing what I want other people to do, and that is to stand up for what they believe in.

**Bob Gatty:** All right, Sam.

With that, I think [00:29:00] we'll close this up. I appreciate you being with us- Yes, sir ... on the Lean to the Left podcast. And I gotta tell you m- I, you have my best wishes for success down there.

**Sam Gibbons:** Appreciate

**Bob Gatty:** that ... you really do. I hope that you are able to to pull this off. You certainly need to get rid of a guy that's been there all these years.

And I, I don't know very much about Joe Wilson, but he's pretty much of a Trump hardened, die in the wool guy, isn't he?

**Sam Gibbons:** I don't... I can't necessarily say that he is.

**Bob Gatty:** No, really?

**Sam Gibbons:** He... his Trump flag came down the other week after... The Trump flag came down, the MAGA flag went up, right? 'Cause Joe Wilson was an early Tea Partier.

But I don't know if he's... I think he... the ideology that Trump ran under, I think he's very much in that.

But I don't think he's just in it for the man.

**Bob Gatty:** Oh, okay. Okay. All right. That's fair to say. All right, my friend. Listen, thanks very much. Thanks for being with us.