



2026 GLOBAL CONFERENCE

LEADING IN A NEW ERA



CONVERSATION WITH CITADEL'S KEN GRIFFIN

Announcer 00:00

Thank you for joining us. The session will begin momentarily. Thank you for your patience. Please welcome Sarah Eisen, anchor at CNBC, and Ken Griffin, founder, CEO, and co-chief investment officer at Citadel.

Sara Eisen 00:39

Thank you. This has become a nice tradition. This is, I think, our third time doing this together at the Milken Conference.

Ken Griffin 00:46

Third time's a charm.

Sara Eisen 00:47

Okay. So, I hope you're in the mood to talk, Ken. Always, right?

Ken Griffin 00:55

Sounds great.

Sara Eisen 00:57

Well, what's new this year is we're in a war.

Ken Griffin 01:00

I feel like I'm being lured into a trap. You sort of have that sense of—

Sara Eisen 01:03

—Never—No, just an intimate fireside conversation with our friends. So, the war, I did want to start there. Obviously, that's top of mind, and I feel like investors here are trying to figure out what the economic and market implications are of this war, heightened geopolitical risks, higher oil prices. So far, the market feels optimistic about it. How are you thinking about all of this?

Ken Griffin 01:32

So, we're going to go from the smiley introduction to the war. All right. Let's go from a happy moment to a depressing moment, all in 30 seconds.

Sara Eisen 01:42

Yes. Is it depressing?

Ken Griffin 01:46

It is. There's an active war in the Middle East. There are thousands and thousands of casualties, and no matter how one wants to view the moral justification for the war, it is still a humanitarian crisis. And I applaud the President for having the willingness to actually try to ensure a nuclear-free Middle East. I don't think he has made that case strongly to the American people, but we should all sleep better knowing that he has set back the Iranians in their nuclear ambitions for years, if not decades, over the course of his time as president.

[Applause]

Sara Eisen 02:31

This room agrees, but the war is not popular broadly in America.

Ken Griffin 02:34

Like I said, I don't think the President has made his case publicly strong enough. I think if you take a step back and think about—I'm a bit older than you are, and I look a lot older than you do.

Sara Eisen 02:47

Not that much.

Ken Griffin 02:49

Thank you. But when I was a child, there would be those drills in school where you would get under the desk and effectively pray to God as a nuclear weapon was going to strike your city and hope you were going to live in some fantasy world. And we have grown up, children today have grown up post the end of the Cold War, without that fear. It's remarkable. And a nuclear Iran would put into question the safety and security of the people of our nation. So, I applaud the President.

Sara Eisen 03:21

You think he's doing the right thing?

Ken Griffin 03:25

Look, I think that they have made many good decisions here, but they have encountered something that they did not anticipate, which is a military capacity in Iran and a commitment to the preservation of their regime that is completely different than what they saw in Venezuela. In some sense, the extraordinary success in Venezuela almost certainly led all of us to believe that we could have such remarkable success in Iran. And Venezuela is one of the great political and foreign policy accomplishments of this decade. If you think about it, overnight, a regime that was adverse to the interest of the United States disappeared.

And Venezuela, which is one of the great oil-producing nations of the world, or potentially one of the great oil-producing nations of the world, is now firmly in our orbit. It was a remarkable strategic outcome. Alright, so why hasn't the war in Iran impacted the stock market more? Well, first of all, there is a sense that the worst-case scenarios are off the table. The Iranian military has been successfully contained, but they have not been defeated. In this stalemate situation, the price of energy's clearly gone higher. The United States holistically is largely shielded from that. Now, the consumer, not, but fuel efficiency much higher than it was 30 years ago, dependency upon automobiles for transportation less than 30 years ago on a per capita basis. Our economy is so much bigger than 30 years ago. Our ability to withstand this price shock in oil is much greater than it is in any time in the history of our country. So, we have that. The other thing that we have is, due to American ingenuity, we're energy independent. Now, we still need to import products, and we export raw crude. But the United States, as a net energy consumer, is now energy independent from the rest of the world, which is just—everyone forgets that fracking did not exist 20 years ago, and it has literally freed our nation.

Sara Eisen 05:39

Game changer. Yeah.

Ken Griffin 05:43

And we can't even name, in most cases, the person who invented this technology. It's like-

Sara Eisen 05:49

—Do you know?

Ken Griffin 05:50

Actually, I don't know right this second. And it's killing me. But talk about unsung heroes.

Sara Eisen 05:55

Yeah.

Ken Griffin 05:56

We know the name Steve Jobs. We know the name Bill Gates. But the name of the engineer who developed fracking eludes me at this moment. Right? And it literally has changed the entire trajectory of our nation.

Sara Eisen 06:10

We also have an AI boom, which is helping.

Ken Griffin 06:13

We do. We do. But I think it's a broader boom. I think it's a technology boom again. AI has created within the C-suite an embracing of digitization again. Like a re-analysis of both our business processes, how we conduct business, how we use technology to further the interests of our business, how do we re-engineer our processes to be modern in the context of today's technology. And AI plays a role in that transformation. But I think the biggest transformation that's taking place is that corporate America is

taking a step back and saying, "How do we use technology to further our business interests?" I'll give you a concrete example. I was with a group of seven or eight of the world's largest companies' CEOs, and we were doing around the table, I sort of set these games up. Everyone share with me the story of how you're using AI to transform your business, because I want to know. I got six or seven extraordinary stories of how these CEOs were transforming their businesses, all of which involved technology, none of which involved AI.

Sara Eisen 07:23

What does that mean?

Ken Griffin 07:24

That means that the subtle details of how the problems were being solved, they actually didn't know. But it doesn't matter. What they do know is that they've empowered their technology teams, they've empowered the people within their businesses that work on optimization and logistics to embrace technology more aggressively, and they are transforming their businesses on the back of doing so.

Sara Eisen 07:50

So, add it all together, and it sounds like a very—it sounds like you agree that the outlook is okay, and we can withstand the oil shock, the geopolitical shock. Stock market is at an all-time high, I think 5 percent higher than it was before the war.

Ken Griffin 08:05

Well, you made the question a bit different there.

Sara Eisen 08:07

Okay.

Ken Griffin 08:08

Okay? We can withstand the energy shock—many of the developing nations around the world cannot.

Sara Eisen 08:15

That's right.

Ken Griffin 08:16

And that risks materially reducing global GDP and will have knock-on effects here in the United States if this stalemate persists. Right? So that's an important point. The United States, as an economy, directly shielded from most of the adverse consequences of the war, but if you're Pakistan or Bangladesh and you've had a curtailment, a literal curtailment of the availability of energy, your economy is already taking a major hit. And that will spread across the developing world as energy continues to become more and more scarce. That will create the conditions for a global recession, and the United States will unquestionably feel some of that pain if this persists for six months or nine months or 12 months longer. That will happen.

Sara Eisen 09:07

What about the inflation problem? We see it, prices at the pump. How long-lasting and how severe of a problem do you see with inflation? Because there's a big debate. Is this short-term, or is it more persistent?

Ken Griffin 09:21

So, have you been to McDonald's recently?

Sara Eisen 09:25

Can't say that I have.

Ken Griffin 09:27

Okay.

Sara Eisen 09:27

Have you?

Ken Griffin 09:28

Oh, yes. I haven't had a McDonald's Coke since this morning.

Sara Eisen 09:33

Oh. You have Coke at McDonald's in the morning?

Ken Griffin 09:35

Absolutely. Do you have coffee?

Sara Eisen 09:36

I have coffee.

Ken Griffin 09:37

Okay, you have your sin, I have my sin. So, \$2.50 for a Coke, and before the Biden administration, it was 99 cents. The United States has endured prolonged and persistent inflation now for six years. And in some sense, the rise of gasoline prices at the gas station, it's like a triggering event. It just brings back to all of us the fact that the purchasing power of the dollar has declined so precipitously for six years now. What do you pay for eggs in New York City today?

Sara Eisen 10:18

Well, they're not as high as they were in the last, I don't know, year. They've come down a little bit, but still high.

Ken Griffin 10:25

Seven, eight, nine dollars?

Sara Eisen 10:26

Eight bucks.

Ken Griffin 10:27

Okay. For a dozen eggs?

Sara Eisen 10:28

Mm-hmm. The brown ones.

Ken Griffin 10:31

The brown ones.

Sara Eisen 10:33

That's what we got at home.

Ken Griffin 10:34

I could make so many jokes there. I'm going to sort of skip that moment. So, the big picture is—

Sara Eisen 10:39

—Do you buy your own eggs?

[Laughter]

Ken Griffin 10:46

In a typical week, no, but I have been spotted at Target shopping for groceries.

Sara Eisen 10:51

Okay. That's good.

Ken Griffin 10:56

So, big picture is, I think everybody in our country, when we see a price shock in any of our day-to-day commodities—gasoline, for example—it's just deeply triggering. And I think that there's just a general apprehension of how much more purchasing power are we going to lose because of the economic policies that we're pursuing in Washington. And I think it's very important that this administration and that the legislator continues to stay focused on how do we strengthen the purchasing power of the dollar. How do we make sure that Americans' paychecks go further?

Sara Eisen 11:32

How do you do that? What would you like to see?

Ken Griffin 11:34

Well, deregulation's a big help.

Sara Eisen 11:36

Well, they're doing that, right?

Ken Griffin 11:37

They're doing that. That's an active focus of the administration. Increasing productivity is a big help. People forget that what happens in a highly competitive economy like ours, if AI lets companies run their businesses more efficiently, or for that matter, if technology lets their companies run their business more efficiently, ultimately, that value accrues back to the American people, both in the form of their dollars go further at the cash register, and number two is wages ultimately go up. There's a constant focus. Why is Washington focused on the word productivity? Or why do economists always talk about productivity? Because higher productivity is the path to prosperity.

Sara Eisen 12:19

Yes.

Ken Griffin 12:19

And we need to increase productivity in our country. We do that through deregulation. We do that through investments in research and development. We do that through educating our children to be the future leaders and scientists and engineers that our country needs. These are all mechanisms that we use to increase productivity. And I got to tell you: America needs to profoundly increase productivity over the

years to come.

Sara Eisen 12:44

So do you think the Fed will be able to do anything this year?

Ken Griffin 12:47

I think the Fed this year is probably on hold. Core inflation is still running above target, and now the risks have tilted to the upside of it on inflation, given the energy price shock and the labor market strengthening again. So, from that vantage point, I think the arguments that we saw, and it's hard to believe, just eight weeks ago, 10 weeks ago, that we needed to cut rates further this year, are looking a bit dated at this point in time. It's good to see the strength in the labor market starting to pick up again.

Sara Eisen 13:20

You think that's happening, that's real? Because some people are worried that as more AI adoption grows, there will be more layoffs and that we're near full employment.

Ken Griffin 13:33

So we are near full employment, which means it's hard to create jobs because virtually everybody is employed. AI adoption at some companies will cause some jobs to disappear, and I worry about that. For example, if you translate books from English to French or French to German, that job's been largely eliminated.

Sara Eisen 13:55

Yeah.

Ken Griffin 13:56

And those are people who've had careers. You could be 55 years old and have been a translator for 30-some years of your life, and that job just disappeared. And we don't do enough as a country to help people go through those mid-career shocks that come with technology transformations. Just as we, as a nation, let people down when we outsource manufacturing to China. So, we need to focus on how does one, with dignity, gain new skills mid-career. But having said this, AI will create a plethora of new jobs in ways that we've never even thought of. Take a step back. How many web designers did you know when you were a teenager?

Sara Eisen 14:35

None.

Ken Griffin 14:36

None. How many video game designers did you know when you were a teenager?

Sara Eisen 14:39

None. No social media influencers either.

Ken Griffin 14:41

No. Miami would have no business.

Sara Eisen 14:45

Yes.

Ken Griffin 14:47

LA would be sort of in the same boat.

Sara Eisen 14:49

Yes. Now Miami has a lot. It has influencers, it has Ken Griffin, and it has other companies.

Ken Griffin 14:55

It has Palantir, our newest big win.

Sara Eisen 14:58

Did you convince Alex Karp to move to Miami?

Ken Griffin 15:00

I did not but I was there at Alex's opening celebration party, and I gave him a big hug, like, "Welcome to Miami. Whatever I can do to be helpful." And I hope that he felt as warmly greeted as I was when we moved to Miami several years ago. It's been wonderful to be in Miami as a fast-growing business.

Sara Eisen 15:19

Speaking of warm greetings, I wanted to do this interview outside your apartment. But I thought it would be creepy and weird. So how did you feel about the mayor's little video?

Ken Griffin 15:37

It was creepy and weird.

Sara Eisen 15:40

Agreed.

Ken Griffin 15:41

I mean, knock, knock, knock on the window. Like, huh. Mayor of New York City.

Sara Eisen 15:47

Oh, knock on the screen, yeah.

Ken Griffin 15:48

Yeah, on the screen. That's just—

Sara Eisen 15:50

—How many times have you watched that video?

Ken Griffin 15:51

Three. Three. I had to go back.

Sara Eisen 15:55

What are you going to do about it?

Ken Griffin 15:56

I couldn't help myself.

Sara Eisen 15:57

You had to what?

Ken Griffin 15:58

I had to go back and look at it again. You literally look at it the first time, and you're like, "You got to be kidding me." Okay? And then the second time, you're like, you know what? This has gone from creepy to actually not really creepy. This has gone to frightening.

Sara Eisen 16:10

Yeah.

Ken Griffin 16:10

Because the CEO of UnitedHealthcare was killed just a few blocks from my house, and anything that creates an agitation in the extremist on either side of the aisle is a frightening dynamic. If we look at what happened in DC—

[Applause]

Sara Eisen 16:31

It's scary.

Ken Griffin 16:32

If we look at what happened in DC just a few days ago, political violence should have no room in our country. And I've had my differences with President Trump over the years. I've also had a lot of wins with him, but the idea that he has survived three assassination attempts is just incomprehensible. Could you imagine the state of mind that you would be in having survived not one, not two, but now three separate crazed people trying to kill you?

Sara Eisen 17:03

No. I was there on Saturday. I was traumatized just being under the table. And they weren't targeting us.

Ken Griffin 17:11

No, but if you were collateral—

Sara Eisen 17:12

—But he was ready to come back and do the speech—

Ken Griffin 17:15

—And that's one thing you have to admire, right? The resiliency of this man to get back on his feet when, frankly, most people would just cower in fear. That imagery from that assassination attempt during the presidential campaign is—

Sara Eisen 17:34

—Oh, yeah. In Pennsylvania—

Ken Griffin 17:35

—Yes. Such a powerful moment.

Sara Eisen 17:37

So, what are you going to do about Mamdani?

Ken Griffin 17:41

So first of all, for New York Public Schools, I'm happy to buy a copy of "Animal Farm" for every ninth-grader.

Sara Eisen 17:51

Yeah. That's fair.

Ken Griffin 17:53

And Mayor Mamdani, you can just shoot me an email, give me the delivery address. I'll get them shipped right away. But I think that the children of New York, first of all, they deserve an education, which he seems to not be aligned with me interest-wise. His pushback on, for example, the gifted program is truly a sign of not being gifted. *[Laughter]* How are we going to compete with the Chinese, with the sharpest people in India, when we do not develop the God-given talents that our gifted children have in America? We celebrate celebrities like there's no tomorrow, but frankly, the economic capabilities of this country, if you look at the Silicon Valley and you look at this AI revolution, it's a handful of people are critical to the entire narrative that is driving this boom in America. And these are the gifted people who are not just from our country, but from around the world, who have come to the United States to be on the leading edge of, as my son puts it, this is the Manhattan Project of his generation.

Sara Eisen 19:05

Right.

Ken Griffin 19:05

And when Mamdani shuts down the gifted programs that educate the future engineers that will create prosperity in our country, he leaves all of us far poorer. But New York public schools have struggled now for several administrations. How about we give Success Academy a chance to open more schools in New York?

Sara Eisen 19:22

Absolutely. No, you've been a big supporter.

Ken Griffin 19:23

Right. If you want to actually raise the standard of living for New Yorkers, raise the skills that they have to bring to the job market.

Sara Eisen 19:29

This is the charter school in New York that just does incredible job.

Ken Griffin 19:33

The charter school in New York that actually, as a charter school system, outperforms the most affluent communities in all the state of New York with the demographically most challenged population in the city. And there are five Success Academies opening in Florida in the next two years, where her work is embraced by our political leaders who want to see the children in Florida have an education and to have a bright future.

[Applause]

Sara Eisen 20:04

So, Ken, you left Chicago several years ago because of bad policy and crime and mismanagement. What will you do in New York? You are planning a \$6 billion office building at 350 Park.

Ken Griffin 20:20

So, I said earlier that Americans are triggered by inflationary signs, like higher gas prices. I think for myself, I think looking at what Mamdani just did to me, and more broadly is doing to the city of New York, is triggering of the trauma I went through in Chicago. Chicago went through a renaissance during most of my 30 years there, and then under the leadership of JB Pritzker, Lori Lightfoot, and the current mayor, has just devolved into a state that has lost its way. Violent crime being the biggest problem. And I wish I had the image to put up here. There are 25 bullet holes in the ground floor of the building that I lived in.

Sara Eisen 21:05

Bullets?

Ken Griffin 21:06

Bullets.

Sara Eisen 21:07

Bullet holes.

Ken Griffin 21:07

Bullet holes, like impacts from bullets. And across the street was a beautiful Dior store, and they would shop at that store at night by driving a van through the front window, and then 50 people would run to the store, empty the shelves. That store was across the street from me. They tried to carjack my security driver outside my front door, and there were probably five homicides within 500 yards of where I called home.

Sara Eisen 21:33

Lovely.

Ken Griffin 21:34

So—

Sara Eisen 21:36

—So time to leave—

Ken Griffin 21:37

Time to leave. I had a colleague stabbed outside the front door of our building. I had a colleague's house burned down by an arsonist. I could just go on for the next 10 minutes about muggings, about bullets flying through people's cars. It became impossible to recruit people to Illinois because the question would be posed, "I love the job, I love the people, but will my family be safe here?" And you couldn't look somebody in the eyes and go, "Your family will be safe here." The best you could do is, "I hope they will be." And this is really a story of the progressive left. Rahm Emanuel as mayor, I think he did an extraordinary job of helping to deal with the issues that we had in our public schools, that we had with crime on the streets. One of the things that we did in Chicago that I'm really proud of is we used digital technology to forecast where crime could occur. I helped to fund this work. And we would actually pre-position police officers in these crime hotspots. We brought murder rates down in one of the most difficult neighborhoods by 50 percent in less than two years. That's lives saved. That's both political leadership, thought leadership, and execution from our police department. And we saw the JB Pritzkers and Lori Lightfoots of the world dismantle these gains that we were making that were really improving the lives of people who depend upon good government to make their lives better.

Sara Eisen 23:18

So where does that leave us at 350 Park?

Ken Griffin 23:22

That leaves us with the fact that we went to Miami and revised our building plan to make it a bigger office building.

Sara Eisen 23:29

You're bailing?

Ken Griffin 23:31

So, what do we do with 350 is still a point of discussion internally, but what is no longer a point of discussion is that Miami is now—when we moved from Chicago, there was a debate between New York and Miami. It's unquestionably true that we made the right choice. I'll leave it at that. It's unquestionably true that we made the right choice. And now what the mayor of New York has made clear to my partners, and principally my New York partners, is that we need to double down on our bet in Miami because we want to be in a state that embraces business, that embraces education, that embraces personal freedom and liberty. And that embraces people having an opportunity to live the American dream, and a dream of earned success, not a dream of redistributive handouts that leave people dependent on government for

their lives and their livelihoods in a way that takes away dignity and honor.

Sara Eisen 24:38

Miami, America. This is America 250. I know you've been thinking a lot about that. You are clearly a patriot. I think you've acquired your second original Constitution. You think a lot about leadership and what makes this country great. It's how you grew your two amazing businesses, Ken. So how are you thinking about what the future of this country looks like when it comes to political leadership? It's so divided, it's so toxic, and as you said, there's a lot of discontent.

Ken Griffin 25:09

Look, the polarization in our country is not good. It's not good. And part of this is a side effect of gerrymandering, and I almost wonder, are we now gerrymandering states? We're in California, one of the greatest states in our nation, but the proposed bill to have a wealth tax on billionaires means that Larry Page's child is now in my child's class in Miami. And we've seen a mass exodus of business leadership from California to Texas, to Florida. Mamdani's making it really clear, New York doesn't welcome success. Are these states trying to push away from their populations those who really do believe in the merits of capitalism, the merits of a free society, the importance of education? To me, it feels like Illinois has been very successful with this undertaking. If you've opposed JB Pritzker, you probably left by now. You've had enough. It's just not worth it every day. What did it feel like in Chicago with JB Pritzker as governor? It felt like being a salmon swimming upstream to die.

Sara Eisen 26:10

That's a nice image. Mm-hmm.

Ken Griffin 26:23

Yeah, isn't it a nice way to end today? But it felt pointlessly hopeless. Now, the great news is most of my friends from Chicago are now my friends in Miami. It's like we still all get together and have pizza together, and we play cards together, and we go do things together. So that's been a nice upside of this. And a number of those friends, people would tell you they were diehard JB supporters until the price of the progressive policies hit them personally. There's only so much capacity that we all have to deal in a lawless society.

Sara Eisen 26:55

But how do we make sure at the country level that this goes right? Because we are in a fight. We're in a fight with China, this technology revolution. There's so much at stake.

Ken Griffin 27:06

So, somebody posed this question to me recently, and I talked about it in the context of education. The issue of education, for example, should no longer be thought of as a blue state versus red state issue. It needs to be thought of as a national emergency, because you're spot on right. If we, as a country, cannot align on the importance of education and cannot be willing to adopt the best practices across the country nationwide, we will lose that competitive dynamic with China. And where in America, for example, is one of the great shining stories of education?

Sara Eisen 27:43

Miami?

Ken Griffin 27:43

Mississippi.

Sara Eisen 27:44

Oh. Why?

Ken Griffin 27:47

Mississippi put in place both a new program to teach children phonics—shocking concept, a bit like going back to the past—and ending social promotion. Mississippi is now top 10 in America in education, and adjusted for demographics, is number one in the country. But we need to look at which states are taking which steps to really educate our children and to push those programs across the country. Likewise, we need to understand what creates vibrant and thriving cities. For example, in the North, the presence of a world-class university is very important to economic vitality. Northern cities anchored by great universities have been able to thrive over the course of the last 30 to 40 years. Those without such universities have generally struggled, and struggled in a profound way. We, as a country, need to take a step back. What works to create prosperity and productivity? And we need to embrace those concepts and push them across our country. We need a little less polarizing rhetoric from Washington and a lot more focus on just

thoughtful problem-solving.

Sara Eisen 29:06

Yeah, education. And now educating them for the new world of artificial intelligence. What's the single factor you look for when you're hiring someone new at Citadel out of school?

Ken Griffin 29:15

What do I want? I want people who have high aspirations, tremendous perseverance, and grit. Show me an athlete who did well academically. An athlete because they know what it takes to win, and they have had to experience loss. And when they excel academically, you know that they know how to manage their time, and that they'll have the grit and the perseverance to use their mind to excel and work. And in particular, I want people who are lifetime learners, because today more than ever, the rate by which you'll have to learn new skills on the workforce will be profoundly higher than even 20 or 30 years ago. Think of all the change that we've seen in our lifetime. Now, play our lifetime of change back at 2x the speed. That's what your college graduates of today are going to face.

Sara Eisen 30:15

Well, Ken, I know, as always, we've all learned a lot from you today, so thank you for your candid thoughts always. I'm glad you were in the mood to talk. You always are. It was certainly a treat for me, and I hope for everybody in the room. Thank you, Ken.

Ken Griffin 30:29

Thank you. Thank you so much, Sara.

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