

THE UNIVERSITY OF CHICAGO INSTITUTE OF POLITICS & CNN PRESENT

THE AXE FILES

The Axe Files - Ep. 129: Pete Buttigieg

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[00:00:05] UNIDENTIFIED FEMALE: And now from the University of Chicago, Institute of Politics, and CNN, "The Axe Files" with your host, David Axelrod.

DAVID AXELROD, "THE AXE FILES": The name Pete Buttigieg is hard to say and was largely unknown before his recent race for Democratic National Committee Chair, in which the South Bend Mayor raised a lot of eyebrows with his compelling candidacy. Just 35, he already has an extraordinary story and great insights into the politics of our country. And particularly that part of the country of that was so instrumental in electing Donald Trump in the last election. We sat down and talked about all of this with Mayor Pete on a recent visit to the Institute of Politics.

Mayor Pete of South Bend, now everybody calls you Mayor Pete, referees and -- which is nobody quite knows how to pronounce your last name. So if nothing else comes from this pod cast, let it be that everyone in-- within the sound of our -- range of our voices will know how to pronounce your name.

PETE BUTTIGEIG, MAYOR OF SOUTH BEND, INDIANA: Yes, Buttigieg.

AXELROD: Buttigieg.

BUTTIGEIG: That's it, Buttigieg. Say as if it rolls off the tongue.

AXELROD: Like Buddha and jij (ph).

BUTTIGEIG: Yes, exactly.

AXELROD: I knew that but I wanted you to hear -- I wanted you to say it. It's a Maltese name.

BUTTIGEIG: Over there it's like Jones. It's a very common, if you see the name anywhere you know you're dealing with somebody from Malta.

AXELROD: And that's where your family is from?

BUTTIGEIG: Yes, my father. He came over in the 70s to work on his education. He went to Binghamton in Upstate New York and then he became an American citizen after that. And met my mom pretty soon after that and then I came on the scene.

AXELROD: And what was your mom doing?

BUTTIGEIG: She was -- She grew up as an Army brat in Southern Indiana and then Texas and a few other places. And they were both junior faculty in New Mexico. She did linguistics and needed English and they were in Las Cruces, New Mexico. I think they called it "Sticker Bush State". I don't know, what's actually good in New Mexico State University. And then they were - - that's how they met sometime in the late 1970s. And then the first tenure-track job, either one of them got, it was up in Notre Dame and so they came, I don't think expecting to settle in South Bend for very long, but they are still there.

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AXELROD: And what was -- tell me about growing up in South Bend. Obviously Notre Dame is a huge --

BUTTIGEIG: Yes.

AXELROD: -- influence in the community.

BUTTIGEIG: Yes, I mean, it's a great town. It's a great place to grow up. I think people though who haven't seen it maybe aren't aware of the history. So, it really didn't grow up around education, it grew up around industry. And you know, at the end of the street, I lived on as a little kid. It was this huge, towering, crumbling factory. Actually it was a brewery, Drewry's (ph).

It just got torn down a couple of weeks ago, but it had been quiet since the '70s or '80s. And as a kid I didn't understand that crumbling factories wasn't just kind of something any city would have. You know, we lost the 20,000, 30,000 people after Studebaker stopped making cars in the '60s. And so the town very much had that feel of trying to figure out what it was gonna be if it wasn't to be an auto town anymore. And at the same time, you know, I had a great childhood there. My boyhood revolved around this triangular park by our house.

Generally, I have much to it. It didn't have a swing center or anything. But it's just a great -- you know, it was a good place to have a sense of neighborhood, and then a sense of community, and I'd ride my little bike to downtown, which didn't have a lot going on but there's a place I could use my own money to buy something.

AXELROD: Enough going on, but not enough to get you into trouble.

BUTTIGEIG: It's about right. Yes.

AXELROD: Did you -- Was there a sense of division between those folks who made their living from the University and the folks who lived in the southern South Bend where factories were closed and people were being displaced?

BUTTIGEIG: Yes. I think football culture, kind of brought everybody together. So, you know, our next-door neighbor's, he was a cop. And he and my dad would go to the football games together, until I was old enough for him to bring me in. There was never a sense of kind tension, I think, or hostility, but there was a sense that the two were totally separate. That the University was doing its thing and the city was doing its thing. And they just happened to be co-located. And that started to break down a few years ago and has really changed now.

It's one of the best things we have going for us as a city, is that the university has really stepped up and I think recognized its leadership role in helping the city move forward and cities reached out in return.

AXELROD: Now you are a student politician, you were the class president, and valedictorian, which probably pissed a lot of people off. Nobody likes perfection, you know. But what attracted you to that and were you interested in politics generally?

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[0:05:09] BUTTIGEIG: Yes, you know, I always cared about politics. My parents were very politically-conscious. They were never politically involved or connected in a direct way, but they cared. I mean, it was dinner-table-talk all the time and, but I was pretty well into high school thinking I was going to be a pilot. I thought that was gonna be my thing, an airline pilot. And I thought that was a very good lifestyle that -- to aspire to.

Something hit me right around, I guess, junior or senior year that made me start thinking that -- that maybe I could do public service. And then college really lit a fire in that regard. But, I'd say most of my -- actually I didn't realize that being good at school could lead to you also doing well in politics. So that's strange as that sounds.

I always saw politicians as more kind of -- so you know, I was kind of awkward and shy, and I saw politicians as the kind of, you know, confident-backslapping types which is not how I saw myself. But over time and that -- I've also seen Bill Clinton saying, you know Rhodes scholar in office who was relatable but also brilliant, intellectual. Made me realize that maybe I could, kind of make it all that up and be useful that way.

AXELROD: You wrote this essay in high school. I met you when you're getting this new frontier award from the Kennedy library, as for your -- for your leadership in South Bend. And, I learned that you had -- This was the second time you had picked up an award from that crowd. The first time was when you were in high school and you wrote an essay and of all things, the essay was about Bernie Sanders.

BUTTIGEIG: Yeah, that's right. I like to say, I'm like a hipster. I like to say that I'd, you know, knew about him before he was cool. Not a lot of people were talking about Bernie Sanders, but I don't know how I found out about him. But I just thought he was really interesting. We had this guy who you know, called himself a socialist and survived, and you know, wore his ideas on his sleep. But also seemed to be capable of working with Republicans, actually even more than some Democrats were -- that that was what really I thought was interesting.

It was that early lesson that often, you know, conviction politics can actually make you more convincing, not less with independence and folks on the other side of the aisle, because at least they know that you're motivated by values even if your values are different.

AXELROD: He -- What -- Were you surprised to see them emerge in this -- in this letter?

BUTTIGEIG: Oh yes, I never could've imagined that he would be, you know, a senator. Let alone a --

AXELROD: Maybe he read your essay and he considered, it's the --

BUTTIGEIG: I doubt he needed my essay for anything but, yes, it was really something to watch. You know what 15 years later, watch that happened.

AXELROD: You went to Harvard and you got involved in the Harvard IOP, then you're president of the Harvard IOP. By then were you -- was it your thought that public service was the way you wanted to go?

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BUTTIGEIG: Yes, I kind of -- by then I had it down to either that or journalism. And I spent a summer actually here in Chicago, working for a TV station. And I enjoyed that. But the more I got into it, the more I felt like the real chance to make a difference was in politics. I don't know if I understood that at the time I'm running. I certainly didn't understand that be -- that would involve running for mayor of my hometown.

But I really caught the bug there. You know, the Institute there was really designed as a living memorial to JFK. It kind of designed around this idea that something happened to him when he was in college. That inspired him to want to serve and his idea that politics could be noble and it should be. And I think that really got -- got into my bones when I was there. And plus, it's just magical. It's a, you know, kid from Indiana to see, you know, senators and governors and, you know, prime ministers coming to speak at this institute and just kind of soaking it up.

AXELROD: We -- I should give credit -- where credit is due. You know, I'm on the board of the IOP at Harvard now, really was the inspiration of this Institute of Politics at the University of Chicago. And the vision of the Kennedy family was that these institutes would replicate themselves all over the country so that young people at universities across the country, not just the elite universities, would be inspired to think about their careers in politics, and in public service. We still had long ways to go to propagate large numbers of them. But I'm shameless about stealing all their good ideas.

BUTTIGEIG: Their ideas we're stealing.

AXELROD: So, you did get involved in a campaign, you with Jill Thompson.

BUTTIGEIG: Yes.

AXELROD: Was, Jill Long.

BUTTIGEIG: Oh, that's right. Yes.

AXELROD: When I first worked for her, she was one of my early clients. Ran for Congress in Indiana, a very long shot race. I think it was a special election in 1989.

BUTTIGEIG: Yes.

AXELROD: And I remember calling her and I said that I'm David Axelrod. I'm a political consultant and I want to call you and see what you are up to, and how I could get involved in. She said well right now, I'm vacuuming my house. So if you want to come over here and pick up the vacuum, you could give me a hand.

BUTTIGEIG: That sounds like Jill.

[0:10:09] AXELROD: But she ended up winning her, and we -- an upset race and she was a very successful politician in Indiana.

BUTTIGEIG: Yes, yes, so she had to. By the time I got to know her, she had left Congress and was trying to come back and was running in, what 2002. So I came home for a summer from

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the -- must been after my sophomore year, and tried to work on -- did work on the campaign. And just learned a lot about retail politics and what running for Congress was like. And I got lost, a lot of illusions about the glamour of it all, just realizing how much of it was just getting out to, you know, parades in small towns and -- we got a great time. And she didn't make it but, you know, it was that rare exception to the midterm rule when, you know the Bush White House didn't really see a big hit in Congress in that kind of unusual period into 9/11.

AXELROD: Right.

BUTTIGEIG: The buildup to the Iraq war, it was a kind of confusing time, I think politically. But it's great for me to be involved at every competitive congressional race and -- in my hometown.

AXELROD: And you headed down to Arizona and worked for John Kerry down there?

BUTTIGEIG: Yes. As soon as I got out of college, I'd -- I knew that I had some kind of job coming on the Kerry Campaign where I couldn't figure out what to do, and they didn't really call much. So, I moved to Washington and then two or three days later, after graduating, got a phone call from Arizona saying, "I hear you're my new research director" and I said OK, I'll get there. And I said, how soon can you come? I think it was on a Monday. He said, can you work on a Friday? I said, I'm not sure. Do I need a car? She said yes. Buy a car tomorrow, start driving and you'll be here in time to work on a Friday. So that's basically what happened.

And we realized toward the end that Arizona wasn't going to happen for John Kerry. So for the last few weeks, they put me in some of my colleagues in New Mexico and, it was fun organizing the Southwest. Completely different from anything I knew in Indiana.

AXELROD: How so would, what did you learn down there?

BUTTIGEIG: Well, Indian country for one thing, and the significance of the native vote. It was also frankly, the first time I really understood voter suppression and voter intimidation, because you know, the native vote is arguably the most reliable demographic for Democrats right up there and sometimes surpasses African-American vote in terms of just how high the percentage is. But also, a lot of folks who are very suspicious or uncomfortable around power for understandable reasons. And we picked up stories of a vehicle, white SUV with a star on the side or something like that, with a couple of guys in suits, glaring at people, that we just set up next to a voting location. And pretty soon, word would go out through the reservation that, you know, people are being watched and that would really affect turnout. And it was the first time I understood how that sort of thing worked and how it might impact election outcome. So that was a dark lesson. We had a lot of fun too, and it was interesting campaigning in those wide, open spaces. But learned a lot from that campaign.

AXELROD: You did a masters degree in between you went to -- is that when you did your Rhodes --

BUTTIGEIG: Yes, yes, Chesson teases me, and my partner that it's not a real graduate school because I was doing a second BA. Apparently there's this funny custom at Oxford that if I show up and give them 20 bucks or something. It'll be converted into an MA but just for resume honesty, it's another BA. But yes, it was a PPE program, so philosophy, politics, and

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economics, and really rigorous.

Actually, I had no idea how hard it was going to be. But, you know, with the community of Rhode scholars and other Americans who are studying there, really enjoyed it, learned a ton, and that was another -- that was the first winning campaign, I guess, I was involved with. Because I spent the summer of '06 at home working for Joe Donnelly, who was in what was then his first running -- his first winning race for U.S. House.

AXELROD: Yes, and ultimately, then he got elected in the United States Senate. We're gonna talk about that in a bit because he is one of the candidates who is up and exposed potentially in the midterm election. And then you worked in the Obama Campaign in 2007-2008. You were --

BUTTIGEIG: Yes.

AXELROD: -- one of the frongs (ph) in Iowa.

BUTTIGEIG: Yes, I took some -- I was -- I've been in McKinsey consulting and I just couldn't stand that I wasn't involved in that campaign, so --

AXELROD: You spent three years there, right? McKinsey.

BUTTIGEIG: Yes, yes, somewhere between two and three years, that I --

AXELROD: I should stop before we get to the campaign because I don't want to sail through your life here. What did you learn and -- yes, what did you pick up there?

BUTTIGEIG: A ton. I went there straight at Oxford and, I thought it would be good for me to do mass for a living for a while. And so I did a lot of analytical work. Stuff that doesn't sound that interesting, like grocery pricing, for example. I spent months working on grocery pricing which is actually fascinating. I had to build a whole database, and that was when I learned about how big data works. Relational databases, a lot of stuff that's surprisingly -- has served me well as mayor and in the campaign world. And learned how to work under a huge amount of pressure to do things when everybody.

[0:15:12] The big difference with politics at that was that, everybody could generally agree on what the aim was. Like there's a number on a sheet of paper and if it goes up, you're doing well. And if it goes down, you're not. And that kind of clarity of purpose and sort of simplicity, I thought it was really something useful from the private sector. And, so I did a lot of studies and we worked on energy efficiency stuff, it was actually the first -- my first travels to the war zones, we're at McKinsey as well, we're doing some economic development work there. The only reason I couldn't stick with it was I had trouble caring about something because I was being -- because it was my job. Because I was being paid to care about something. And so even though I loved the -- I thought the work was fascinating. I love my colleagues, certainly paid very well. But I remember a moment in particular when I was working on this client studying, I got up to get a cup of coffee and I thought, I don't care. Like, you know I care about my professionalism and doing a good job for the client, but I don't actually care about this work the way I did. You know, the political work or other things I got to do, and that's when I realized I

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needed to do more with public service.

AXELROD: So did you quit to go to Iowa?

BUTTIGEIG: No, I just took a little time off. So, I rounded up a couple of friends from college and we all hit the road and, we're sent to -- we said, you know, just send us wherever. And we wound up in three or four counties in South Central Iowa, Ringgold, Decatur, Union Counties. Really low income, some of the poorest counties in the state. But these are really wonderful communities and, you know, we're just knocking on doors like everybody else, and you know, at one point we're dispatched to the Dairy Queen because we were told that was the main social gathering place for the town we were working.

And yes, just live that primary well at caucus, I guess, all the way up to caucus night when I found myself in this middle school. It just felt so American, the caucus went on. I don't think it was --

AXELROD: Caucuses are -- I mean, it takes a big hit elsewhere.

BUTTIGEIG: Yes.

AXELROD: Because people resent the power that the Iowa caucuses have, but there's something really incredibly inspiring about a presidential race being reduced to a level where candidates actually have to meet with us, with people in groups of, you know 10 or 5 or -- and really campaign at the ground level and then this whole process by which --

BUTTIGEIG: Right.

AXELROD: -- you know you try Marshall votes and it's really a -- I think it's a great process.

BUTTIGEIG: Yes, it was really instructive, and I think our goal there was to get one vote or something like that. You know, it was mostly --

AXELROD: Yes, because of the math of --

BUTTIGIEG: Yes, it was still worth picking up.

AXELROD: Of caucuses, yeah.

BUTTIGIEG: And then, and then as we left those ...

AXELROD: How did you do?

BUTTIGEIG: We did, yes, I think we're in Murray that night. It's just like a tiny town. And if I remember right, I think we walked away with the vote which was what we were shooting for. And, but it would -- the thing I remember most for some reason is this, this Middle School basketball.

AXELROD: By vote, you mean like a delegate to the county or --

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BUTTIGEIG: Exactly, yeah.

AXELROD: The arcane process that ultimately arrived, said --

BUTTIGEIG: Yes.

AXELROD: That was all the national convention.

BUTTIGEIG: With a second choice logic, all this time where I have just been dealing with the other (inaudible). But yes, just felt -- I don't know, it was very uplifting to see. And --

AXELROD: We should point out that one of your Harvard classmates, maybe roommates, I'm not sure. Eric Lester was my assistant in the White House, and he had just gotten out of Harvard and volunteered.

BUTTIGEIG: Yes.

AXELROD: And got a job as a baggage handler on the campaign plane which is how I was -- figured if Lester could get my bags to the right place. He could get me to the right place.

BUTTIGEIG: Yes. I mean, what I love about that --

AXELROD: Now, he's a State Senator for Massachusetts.

BUTTIGEIG: Yes, yes, what I loved about Eric is that he is -- again, he's doing very good work in the community in Western Massachusetts in many ways. Not that different from South Bend. But what was great about him was that, you know he is -- you get certain ideas about yourself when you come out of a place like Harvard. And you know, he was assigned to handling luggage and rather than fuel, kind of slighted or that that was beneath him like he devised some color-coded back taxes.

AXELROD: I still have the back tax, you know?

BUTTIGEIG: He like had the best luggage handling system in campaign history. So, and just threw himself into it, then obviously luckily for him, caught your eye and went on to great things.

AXELROD: Yes -- No, well. It -- There's a lesson in that for young people who are aspiring to this work. Just jump in.

BUTTIGEIG: Yes.

AXELROD: And do whatever you can and if you have an instinct for it, you're going to catch people's attention. One of the things that happened in 2009 according to bio-stuff that I've read is you were moved by some of the experiences you had at the doors, that are made of decisions to enlist. Tell me about that.

[0:20:06] BUTTIGEIG: Yes, yes, so you know I'd always thought about serving the

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military. There is a family tradition, and I was -- I was never cut, it's kind of never a good time. You know, I was going to colleges, I was going to grad school, I was working and then -- but I was realizing I wasn't getting any younger. And if I was gonna serve I had to step up. And the thing that really put me over the edge were those days in Iowa. And the reason was that, I was, you know, you'd knock on these doors. And more than once, a kid. I mean, to my eye, like a child, would come to the door and we'd start talking and the kid would say, he was on his way to basic for National Guard or Army and began to feel like this, these low-income towns were just emptying out their youth into the military. And I thought about, you know, I could count on like one hand the people I knew in college who wound up in the military. And you know, having been steeped in Kennedy lore --

AXELROD: When there was controversy at Harvard about the ROTC and --

BUTTIGEIG: Yes, yes, in fact they didn't have it with my time. We'd had to go to MIT to do ROTC. But I was steeped into Kennedy lore, you know the idea like, when he was in the service in the World War II era, it had this quality of cutting across class. You know, that the military was a place where somebody like, you know, John F. Kennedy would meet -- you know, somebody from a farming community in the South and be on equal terms. And of course, it had a lot to do with racial integration too, over time and in the military. And it was this thing that kind of broke down those barriers. And I thought to kind of the era I was living in and it felt like the reverse was true.

It felt like it was reinforcing those divides that it was low-income and working class and rural communities that were emptying their youth into the military. And, you know people with degrees like mine weren't serving very much. And so, I started thinking, I got to make myself useful too or at least be exposed to the possibility of deploying.

So I marched down to the recruiting office and --

AXELROD: You weren't even in and you were marching, huh?

BUTTIGEIG: Always walking first purposely. Then I got a commission into the reserve and then I'm really glad that I had that opportunity.

AXELROD: We will -- We're going to take a short break and will be right back with Pete Buttigieg.

The decision to enter the military, the cynic would say that there -- was there a political motivation there? You talked about John F. Kennedy. It's a resume-enhancer. I mean, did that cross your mind?

BUTTIGEIG: Not really, I mean it was more of the family tradition. Back when I thought I was gonna be a pilot, I figured it was the best way to get training and then I learned that my eyesight precluded getting in that way. But --

AXELROD: As a frequent traveler. I appreciate that realization.

BUTTIGEIG: Yes, maybe it was for the best. No, I don't know. I have reflected on that. The

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thing I asked myself was if, if it was this damaging politically as it is actually helpfully politic -- helpful politically, would I have still done it? I hope the answer is yes. There's no way to know. There's no way to run that experiment, I guess.

AXELROD: What are the experience -- I quite agree with you, by the way. I mean, it's one more measure of the kind of silos in which we live today and you speak of John F. Kennedy. The thing that distinguished that generation was everyone had fought in World War II. And there was -- This was a common experience that down people together as Americans in a larger community. I think one of the things that helped to dissolve that sort of sense of comedy in our politics with a T, is that that generation passed from the scene and the future generations haven't had that opportunity to mix in that way, what did you learn from your experience?

BUTTIGEIG: Yes, I mean, first of all it did have that affect to just getting all people from radically different backgrounds, and with very different political commitments. And you know, being friends and, not just friends like trusting somebody with your life when you have a totally different outlook on how the world works, and taking each other seriously. You know, a lot of times we'd be you know, sitting around. We had this barbecue grill that we turned into a -- I don't know how to describe it. It was a fire pit. Basically, we'd chop off pellets, toss it into the barbecue grill, light it up and sit around smoking cigars, and just talk about politics and the world.

And you know, I don't know, you just -- you get a better sense of the breadth of America, I think. So I learned a lot about that. I learned obviously about working under pressure and I learned --

AXELROD: You spent seven months in Afganistan?

BUTTIGEIG: Yes, yes it was a seven-month deployment, probably about six on the ground. And my job, a big part of my job actually was just driving. So the rule was in order to go outside the wire, you got to have two people with a rifle qualification and I was one of the people in my unit who had a rifle qualification. So I spent a lot of time just driving my boss around or sometimes I'd volunteer to be an extra rifle on a convoy so that the guy around the motor pool would owe me something. So I could get a vehicle later on when I really needed one, because the chocolate chip cookie bars only got me so far out there.

[0:25:08] But, I guess that was the other thing you learn. And the way where it is really is a lot like campaigns. It's just the improvisational quality of it all. You think of the militaries as very orderly command-and-control thing, but you got to have to feel it's like everything is kind of on the fly. And the informal networks wind up being even more important than the formal ones. And the other thing I learned there was, you know, because I was driving around the capital at Kabul, it kind of reinforced my sense of how important cities are. Because, you know, they don't have a lot of the things that we try to provide in a city like South Bend. You know, they don't have clean, safe drinking water. Or, you know, obviously, you know, safety in the way that we do, or even trash pickup. I mean, you see what happens when you don't have trash pickup. And it's, you know, kids and sheep, you know, picking through trash on the side of the road.

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It was funny in training they tell you, supposed to be in combat train and they say, you know, watch out for any piles of garbage on the side of the road, because that's where they hide the IEDs. And then you get out there and you're like, the side of the road is nothing but a pile of garbage. There's not much you can do about it. But, you know, it was a really meaningful experience at a really good unit. Then I came home.

AXELROD: Did you see live action? Did you?

BUTTIGIEG: Yes. I mean they would shoot rockets at our base a lot when I was at Bagram. When I was down in Kabul was a bit different. And then, yes, we had a couple hair-raising moments when I was out in Herat. I mean it's not like I was a Navy Seal, you know, guns blazing or anything like that. But, you know, enough to, yes, a walk to remember.

AXELROD: What did you come away from in terms of your analysis of the situation there?

BUTTIGIEG: Well --

AXELROD: And generally the U.S.'s role in the region?

BUTTIGIEG: So, I was very low on the totem pole there. And I don't know that I ever got a really strategic picture of it all. But I guess the biggest thing I got a sense of is, I used to have the sense that we were very temporary. You know, you -- when you fly, especially over the Afghan mountains, you'll look down on the Hindu Kush. And you can just picture like empires being smashed like egg shells on these mountain ranges over hundreds of years. You know, back to the Anglo Afghan wars.

And, you realize how deep and long lasting some of these issues are. And I don't mean to say I'm discouraged. I mean I think we did a lot of good. And I think it's good that we acted. And it's certainly a good thing that the Taliban is -- I mean if you look at the indicators of well-being in Afghanistan compared to the years of the Taliban, it's a very good thing that they're not there anymore.

We also get a sense we can't just rollup with our ideas on how things ought to work and expect in a matter of few years with a, you know, even billions and billions of dollars. So we just kind of sort things out. Because there's, you know, just profoundly different ways of doing things. And you have to have a certain regard for that.

AXELROD: When you see some of the stuff that's gone on now, relative to the travel ban and some of the policies of the Trump Administration, do you look at it through the prism of someone who served over there?

BUTTIGIEG: Absolutely. I mean, the one thing I can't shake is thinking about the civilians that we served with. So, some of the units that we partnered with had embedded Afghans as interpreters or fixers. And I spent a lot of time with them. One of them we started a fantasy football league. We had a fantasy draft. And this one guy, he had no concept of how the game was played. We had to explain to him why a kicker was not a good first choice for that. We wound up doing better than I did.

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Partly I think, because he didn't think he knew any better than the numbers. And he just went by the numbers. But anyway, when you think of these guys -- and not only just good guys, but these guys really took serious personal risk by getting involved with us, with the coalition.

And the same was true in Iraq, which I visited once as a contractor, right? I didn't serve there in uniform. But, you know, there were a lot of Iraqi, some of whom came to South Bend actually, as refugees. And some of whom came on these special immigrant visa programs as a way of supporting the people who put their lives on the line to support us. And, I just think it would be very hard to look them in the eye right now, knowing that these travel bans are going on, to basically say that we don't have any regard for the risk they've taken. Or that we paint a wall with one brush, so we think an entire country is a risk to us based on, you know, mostly based on prejudice.

AXELROD: You came back.

BUTTIGIEG: Yes.

AXELROD: And you ran an -- what some would term as kind of audacious race for state treasurer in Indiana in 2010. What, were you 26 then?

BUTTIGIEG: Twenty -- yes, I think 27 when I started the race in 2010, yes.

AXELROD: What moved you to do that?

[0:30:03] BUTTIGIEG: Well, basically I really just didn't like the work that the state treasurer was doing. So, you know, state treasurer in my view ought to be a pretty technocratic job. But we had a state treasurer guy named Richard Murdoch who was in office. And who ran that office like an ideological outpost. And he did this really awful thing, which is, he used the fact that when the president rescued the auto companies in particular, Chrysler, which accounts for thousands of jobs, directly and then even more indirectly in Indiana, in northern Indiana.

AXELROD: Yes.

BUTTIGIEG: He -- I don't want to get into this technical finance stuff. But basically, he used the facts that Indiana pension funds had Chrysler bonds as a basis to go to court and try to block the rescue from happening. In other words, an Indiana-elected official tried to liquidate Chrysler where thousands of people in our state worked. He was that ideological. It would've been devastating for -- You know, we had Howard County, Kokomo where were Chrysler has a transmission plant. That place alone would have seen unemployment rates approaching 30% or more. I mean depression level. It would have killed communities.

And he's doing this, because basically he's mad at the present. He doesn't like the UAW. And I thought, you know, there's got to be a better way. So, I asked who is running against this guy? And to my surprise, I was kind of naive. I didn't understand how appeal it was maybe. People said nobody. So, I started running. And eventually I took a leave from -- well, no actually. I quit. I quit McKinsey and went to every chicken dinner.

Yes. There, you had 92 counties in Indiana. I made it to 89 of them. And I just spent down on

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my savings, because I've been kind of living like a grad student while being paid like an MBA when I was in McKinsey. So, I have enough saved up that I could spend like a year just campaigning. I got my health insurance with the navy, because I joined the reserve by then. And just learned so much about politics, you know, going to these county fairs and sticking your hand out and talking to strangers and trying to get them to vote for you. We did -- I think our record was five parades in a day.

Of course, I also learned fundraising and media and just all that stuff. We had a tiny team. I think that our maximum, our paid staff was maybe three, covering the whole state. But there's no better way to learn how to run for office than to run for office.

AXELROD: You could not have picked the worse year.

BUTTIGIEG: That's right, 2010.

AXELROD: To run 2010. Not only as you learn all those aspects of politics, but you learned what it was like to be on the wrong side of a way.

BUTTIGIEG: Got clobbered. Yes. Yes. I had my head and it's -- It was really galling to know that hundreds of thousands of people voted against you. And especially for a down ticket race, you know. And we didn't have that much money in the end, so --

AXELROD: On the other hand, the reassuring thing about down ballot races is, people don't really know much.

BUTTIGIEG: Yes.

AXELROD: So, they're often voting partisan inclinations, and so.

BUTTIGIEG: Yes. That's comforting.

AXELROD: Yes. I'm just trying to spare your ego here. And then you came home to South Bend?

BUTTIGIEG: Yes. Yes. So, I had moved back to South Bend. And I got this fixer-upper of a house that was vacant, kind of close to where I grew up. And I was kind of licking my wounds, figuring out what to do next. And, should I try to pick up orders for the Navy or try to get back to McKinsey or something like that? And that was when the mayor announced he wasn't going to run again. And that was the first open seat in 24 years.

Joe Kiernan had been mayor and then he became Lieutenant Governor and Steve Luecke became mayor for about 15 years, longest serving mayor in history. And there's this open seat. And this big kind of brewing struggle between two factions of the Democratic Party over what the primary was going to look like and who was going to be the nominee.

And, you know, I had spent so much time, especially when I didn't live in South Bend. Whenever I ran into an old friend who is from there, we'd spend so much time, you know, over a beer or coffee talking about our hometown and what was happening there and what

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would it take to really get it going again. That I began to realize that, especially since economic development was something I knew a lot about, that I could make myself useful.

And so we ran and ran in this five-way primary. And I think to a lot of people's surprise, probably including my own, wound up winning the primary. We got a majority in May. And then, went on to the general election, did well there too.

AXELROD: Yes, 74%.

BUTTIGIEG: Yes.

AXELROD: Yes. That's good anywhere. That's not just in South Bend. That's a good outcome. So talk about mayoring and what you've been able to do there.

BUTTIGIEG: Well, it's the best job in the world. It's my hometown. And the town was really struggling. I had kind of a crisis of confidence. So we knew we had to do a lot of work right away to make sure that the administration was tuned up well. But also just to make sure that the community felt like we had a direction. And we started to work on that right away. I got an amazing team, just rock stars who were willing to help out.

[0:35:14] AXELROD: How much of your analytics background and some of the stuff that you did a McKinsey help? And did you attract people who have those skills?

BUTTIGIEG: Yes. Definitely. I mean they gave me a mentality around, you know, performance management, and making sure that we really worked on things where we could see the impact we were having. And, you know, and I tried to really bring that to the -- I know it sounds a bit nerdy. But just that kind of metrics-based, you know, looking at what you can measure and holding yourself accountable for whether it's working. I think is really powerful and a really important part of why things started to go well for us as a city.

We -- probably the most ambitious thing we did was, when I took office, nobody could tell us how many vacant abandoned houses there were. There were so many. So we started counting. And we did this really rigorous analysis and determined there are about 1300 of them and figured out the different market strata and neighborhood conditions. And it came out of it after about a year of analysis with an almost child-like goal, which is as I said, let's address a thousand houses and a thousand days and just rally the community around that. Anyways, it's just --

AXELROD: What does that mean addressing them?

BUTTIGIEG: Well, I mean either fix them up or turn them down. You know, fix the ones we could. But, we knew that a lot of them were physically collapsing. And so the important thing was to make sure that people didn't have to live next to a collapsing house. And so, with a combination of stepped-up code enforcement and we put together a lot of funds for demolition, we were able to save over 400. And the rest we got rid of. And there's vacant lots now, which is not a perfect outcome. And we're still working on how to make value out of those lots of land.

But dramatically better, especially for people living in the neighborhood than having those

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crumbling houses. And I think it really lifted the morale in the city. And also just coming together around the goal that was that ambitious, because we didn't -- we weren't sure we could pull it off. But I sense that, you know, if we stretched, we could do it. And we had to get creative.

But the biggest thing, what makes it come to mind is, by publishing this very -- publicizing this very clear goal, such that it would be very obvious if we failed. It created a certain motivating power on my team, and on the community, and on me, to do whatever it took to make it happen. And I'm not sure enough it happened.

AXELROD: You also took the old Studebaker plant that I guess have been kind of laying dormant.

BUTTIGIEG: Yes.

AXELROD: And turned it into kind of an incubator.

BUTTIGIEG: Yes. It was used just kind of a warehouse. And I think it's only, you know, there were acres and acres of Studebaker factories. Most of them had been torn down. This one was still there. It's this stout, six-story, fifth of a mile long. It's 800,000 square feet, it's enormous. And it's kind of cool. I mean it's brick, it's got windows. It's not like the way factories looked today. But it was also, you know, really all the windows, you know, half the windows were smashed. And it was kind of a symbol of what we are up against as a city.

And so, we partnered with an entrepreneur who would figure out a way to -- it turns out that the way these, just the geography of it, where all these plants were sitting is on this really rich concentration of fiber-optic cable. Because when they laid out the cable that makes up the Internet, it had to, you know, it has to go somewhere. People forget the Internet is still a physical thing. And so, it followed a lot of the old railway and highway right-of-ways, because that's where you could get the conduit. And there's this conduit, there's this area in South Bend, south of downtown where we have cold weather and cheap power. Both of which are very useful if you're in the data center business.

And also all this fiber-optic connectivity makes it a perfect place to put these data centers. And then, we had this entrepreneur figured out a way to suck the heat that comes off these computers. He spent tons of money cooling them off. Figured a way to suck up the heat and then put it into the HVAC system of the building. And buy down the cost of, you know, offices. So, this thing is on track. And that'll be the largest mixed-use technology center in the Midwest. And it's a long project. It's taking years, but already bearing a lot of fruit.

And also just fun to symbolically, right, to turn this thing that was a symbol of what we were up against, and what we were down on economically, and turned it into a symbol of our future.

AXELROD: You now have talked about this. But, you know, we just saw a big debate and even a debate within the party. And we'll get to the party debate in a second about the issue of trade. And there's no question that throughout the Midwest, that part of what has happened in the manufacturing, there's a lot of jobs over the years, have been shipped overseas.

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BUTTIGIEG: Yes.

AXELROD: Because of labor cost and environmental standards and so on --

BUTTIGIEG: Right.

AXELROD: That made it more cost-effective for companies to do that. But it seems more and more like the challenge is today, is how do we keep up with technology and the fact that robotics and automation are now becoming more and more precedent pressured carrier into staying.

BUTTIGIEG: Yes.

AXELROD: It's OK. Will stay but we're going to automate a large portion of our plant.

BUTTIGIEG: Right.

AXELROD: So, you get the plant, but not the jobs.

BUTTIGIEG: Yes.

[0:40:11] AXELROD: And I know that you've been thinking a lot about that.

BUTTIGIEG: Yes.

AXELROD: How do you deal with that as a political issue? And how you deal with it as a societal issue?

BUTTIGIEG: Yes. I mean, it's an existential question, especially for communities like ours in the industrial Midwest. First of all, there are ways to win. I've tried to be very level with the community about what will and won't happen. And what won't happen is another company coming in and employing 20,000 people and manufacturing the way Studebaker did. But what we do have is a lot of companies that employ maybe one or 200 people at a time. And the way it works is kind of marching up the value chain.

So, finding industries where -- or products where because of small intellectual property or security aspect or something about the application or the service that some reason why it does need to be made in the U.S. And, when it is made in the U.S., I can sell why it ought to be made in South Bend, because we have great land, labor, utilities, taxes, we're very competitive, and we're a great community.

But, there's a bigger picture, which I think is demonstrating that there is a role for American workers to play in a modern and globalized economy that's not just the role of victim. And so, really highlighting some of these jobs that are being created, again, much less labor intensive than it used to be, you know, a hundred people instead of a thousand for a certain level of output. But the jobs it does create, they're good jobs, they pay well. And there's a level of security there.

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What we have to do at the same time, I think, is figure out how to -- we're still fighting the last war. I mean, NAFTA happened a while ago. And a lot of the jobs that were lost then, it would be very hard to bring back no matter what because of automation. We have some things ahead of us that we got to get on top off. Take automated driving, which there are a lot of reasons mayors are very excited about. It's fascinating actually from a land-use perspective. If you don't need so many parking lots from an economic perspective, if families assets don't have to be tied up in owning a vehicle, because you can have an automated one picking you up. But --

AXELROD: Public transit becomes less expensive.

BUTTIGIEG: Yes, absolutely. But what does that mean for millions of people.

AXELROD: Right.

BUTTIGIEG: Who -- not only who drive.

AXELROD: A looming crisis. Yes.

BUTTIGIEG: Yes. But this one we see coming.

AXELROD: Right.

BUTTIGIEG: So, unlike, you know, I understand why some people were surprised by the impact of what happened in the '90s, the automation and the globalization then. This one, we can see it coming.

AXELROD: Yes.

BUTTIGIEG: What are we doing about it? There's shocking, there's a little --

AXELROD: And there's a cause to driverless government too, you know. So -- and we're going to -- in the interest of entrepreneurship, we're going to take a short break.

BUTTIGIEG: All right.

AXELROD: And we'll be right back.

You got reelected in 2016, I guess, with the --

BUTTIGIEG: '15, yes.

AXELROD: '15 with 80 percent of the vote.

BUTTIGIEG: Yes.

AXELROD: But in the midst of that campaign, you wrote an op-ed that got quite a bit of attention in which you disclosed the fact that you're gay. And let me just read a part of it.

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I was well into adulthood before I prepared to acknowledge -- I was prepared to acknowledge the simple fact that I'm gay. It took years of struggle and growth for me to recognize that it's just effect of life, like having brown hair and part of who I am. But it's clear to me that at a moment like this, being more open about it could do some good for a local student struggling with her sexuality. It might be helpful for an openly gay mayor to send the message that her community will always have a place for her. And for a conservative resident from a different generation whose unease with social changes partly rooted in the impression that he doesn't know anyone gay. Perhaps a familiar face can be a reminder that we're all in this together as a community.

Talk to me about that and your decision and your journey --

BUTTIGIEG: Yes.

AXELRDO: -- that you hint at here.

BUTTIGIEG: Yes. I mean, it was a long journey for me. I really admire people in college or even high school who figure that out about themselves and are able to come out, because I was -- no, I mean, I spent years. If willpower alone could make somebody straight, you know, and if somebody who was able through willpower to do a lot of things, I would've -- you know, especially when you begin to realize you might have political aspirations and you want to serve in the military at a time. You know, when I've joined the military that was not -- you cannot be out and serve at the same time.

But, a certain point, I realized it was really dumb to try to fight this. This is who I am. And I wasn't getting any younger. And I didn't want to have kind of a double life. I think the deployment helped me, you know, it was 2014 when I deployed. And I think it helped me realize you only get to be one person. Because when I was there, I was trying to kind of keep people from figuring out that I had a day job as mayor, because that just complicates things when people know that about you.

But I realized very quickly, you only get to be one person. And, I also think it was important me to do it before another election to have people know about that when they went to the polls.

[00:45:00] And so, I just did it. I mean, on some level, it's frustrating. You know, straight people don't have to come out. Let alone put in the newspaper. But I knew that if I didn't, it would be -- it would just be even, you know, even more complicated, or messy, or people would say that I was -- who knows? So, I just did it. I just wrote up this article and put it out there.

And, the really touchy thing, you know, I didn't do it for any reason besides that I needed to do that and get on with my life. But the really touching thing is I had people approach me later and say that, you know, something along the lines like, "I am that kid. I was that kid in school who, you know, feels safer or better able to, you know, be who I am because you wrote that or because you came out."

My hope is, you know, 20 years from now, the way this works is you just, you know, just on your way to a charity function and your date is the same sex and people notice that and does that, right? You don't have to come out.

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AXELROD: Been a pretty remarkable stretch in social history these --

BUTTIGIEG: Yes.

AXELROD: -- these last few years relative to this issue.

BUTTIGIEG: Yes.

AXELROD: We've seen enormous amounts of change. That must have been moving to you as someone having gone through this --

BUTTIGIEG: Yes.

AXELROD: -- journey.

BUTTIGIEG: Yes. I mean, when I was first wrestling with this and also realizing I wanted to be in public service, I thought it was an either or. Never would have crossed my mind that you could, you know, if I -- even when I was in college, which wasn't that long ago.

AXELROD: We had Barnett Frank on this podcast. And he spoke about that about when he was a young politician.

BUTTIGIEG: Yes.

AXELROD: And there would be gay couples at his events. And they would go home. And he would go home alone, because he felt he had to choose between his political life and his personal life.

BUTTIGIEG: Yes. I think that was the sense until very recently. And we didn't really know what kind of thin ice, you know, I was walking onto either. But it was fine. That's the thing. You know, so the next day, I remember going to my first event, it was like a bike to work event. And, it was the same day that article came out and I showed up and talked about biking to work and there are all these TV cameras. And they're asking me all these questions. Including some really --

AXELROD: Not that interested in biking to work probably.

BUTTIGIEG: Yes, exactly. And they're asking me all these questions. You could see on the looks of the face. Some of the reporters were embarrassed they were asking the questions. Others like couldn't wait to get to me. And it's really insulting questions, too. Like, you know, is this because like the Republicans have something on you that you're coming out when you are?

And I just talked about, you know, biking to work. And anything else I had to say was in the essay. And then, I went to my next event which is, I think we're cutting ribbon on the Soup Kitchen. And we were talking about hunger. And they asked all these questions and I told them a lot about hunger. And eventually, they realized this wasn't my thing. This is, you know, I'm going to do mayor stuff. But this is just part of who I am.

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And then, I think a lot of people actually were -- most interesting thing to me was people who were a little older. Maybe a little more conservative who found it as an opportunity to demonstrate that they were accepting, you know.

AXELROD: Because South Bend is a fairly conservative community.

BUTTIGIEG: Yes, especially social, you know. I mean, it's more, you know, democratic than not. But that's largely part of the labor tradition. The Catholic labor tradition that is not known for being, you know, on the leading edge of social change. But I think it also helped the people knew me already. Yes. And so, it was just amazing.

AXELROD: As you said, I mean, it was --

BUTTIGIEG: Yes.

AXELROD: -- you were the guy they knew.

BUTTIGIEG: Yes.

AXELROD: And that made it easier to make that -- to embrace that reality.

BUTTIGIEG: Yes. Yes, I think that's right. And I mean, the same way that I was -- I found myself coming back is the sort of -- you know, sort of the communities relative who is in the military deployed. You know, now is sort of the community's gay son or something.

AXELROD: So let me -- let's talk a bit about the Democratic Party. You talked about this race for mayor and there was a factional fight and nobody -- well, you walked into the same kind of fight just in the last few weeks in your --

BUTTIGIEG: Yes.

AXELROD: -- race for DNC chair. By the time you got in, there were two well-established candidates.

BUTTIGIEG: Yes.

AXELROD: Tom Perez, who had the support of the sort of Clinton-Obama faction.

BUTTIGIEG: Yes.

AXELROD: And Keith Ellison, who had the support of the Sanders faction. What made you thought there was a -- think that there was an opportunity there for you? And why did you feel important to do?

BUTTIGIEG: Well, you never --

AXELROD: Some people would say you have a better job now, but.

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BUTTIGIEG: Yes, that's probably true. It's you never grow up hoping to be chair of a national party, at least I've never met anybody who sits on his mother's knee and says I want to chair the DNC one day to really --

AXELROD: Unless they want to get spanked.

BUTTIGIEG: It's really a painful job.

AXELROD: Yes.

BUTTIGIEG: But it -- and it never crossed my mind before the Trump election. But, it was this moment where it seemed like the party is figuring out where it's going. And the party's also really struggled to connect, especially with parts of the country like where I'm from.

[00:50:03] And, there was this factional struggle like you said, you know, it was coming to be regarded as kind of a proxy fight between wings of the party, which I think is so unhelpful, because these so-called wings have like 98 percent similar values and --

AXELROD: But you're right about one thing, which is, you come from that part of the country that is suddenly a fascination because of the Trump vote.

BUTTIGIEG: Yes.

AXELROD: And what did Donald Trump do in South Bend?

BUTTIGIEG: You know, our county went 50-50, which is crazy. I mean, by our historical patterns, it really should have been a county that --

AXELROD: And why do you think that is?

BUTTIGIEG: Well, I think part of it was turnout. Part of it was this sense that nobody was really talking to us. That, you know, the message of the campaign, especially the Democrat -- on the Democratic side was about the individuals. You know, the whole theme of Hillary's campaign, I'm with her. We had their T-shirts and our buttons, I'm with her. And then, when it became clear that he was going to be the nominee, it was more and more, I'm against him was the message. And the person at home was saying, "OK, like who's talking about me?"

And he was doing that. He was speaking to people. It was all bull, but he was speaking to people. And I think that really mattered, especially in a community that has been really kicked around by economic conditions. And so, you know, you had this wave. And it was in especially, you know, industrial communities where you had -- he's really going after our people to some extent. And to the extent we've always been able to count on a lot of folks aligned with labor, for example, and a lot of working-class voters.

He had this message about fairness and unfairness that should be the bread-and-butter of the Democratic Party. But we just didn't really get into it, every time he said --

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AXELROD: Yes, the game's rigged against you.

BUTTIGIEG: Yes. And every time he said that. You know, instead of us saying, you know, "Like, yes, the systems got -- the system is very unfair and here's how we would fix it." We sounded like we were the party saying, "The system is perfectly fine." And we missed an opportunity to talk about what we know best, which is how to make sure that economic and political structures are more fair. It's what Democrats are supposed to care about most. And we had fairness as a theme kind of stolen from us, I think, with devastating effect.

AXELROD: Do you think the things that he's doing now relative to trade, the strong arming of corporations to get them to keep their factories here, some of the immigration stuff? Do you think that's resonating with voters in your area?

BUTTIGIEG: I think to some extent, symbolically, you look at the carrier thing. And even if, you know, if you peel behind the surface of it, it's -- you know, it's a lot of smoke and mirrors, lot of those jobs still aren't coming back. But -- plus it's an absurd way to run economic policy, you know, like personally go -- mayors can do that, personally go, you know, one deal at a time.

AXELROD: It is suppressant as mayor.

BUTTIGIEG: But -- yes, yes, in a way it is. Except that like mayors do real stuff. Like, you know, it's a lot of symbolic, a lot of gestures, I think, on his part. But those gestures say something, right? So even though like the carrier thing, for example, may be hollow. It shows that or creates the impression that he cares.

And so, I think that does resonate. The immigration stuff, I mean, the frustrating thing about that is a lot of people are being led to believe that their problems are being created by immigrants. And this is not true.

You look at the math. You look at, you know, what actually happens when families a lot of whom pay taxes but can't collect benefits or -- in our community look what actually does to support a place like South Bend, for example. We're about 15 percent Latino. I don't know, almost by definition, how many of them are undocumented. But what I do know is that there's a lot of people who have come and are, you know, rebuilding neighborhoods that were on death's door after Eastern European immigrants moved out decades ago.

And this just completely misses that. But, unfortunately, it's not that hard to give people someone to blame, especially when you're talking in abstractions. And even though most people I know have never -- you know, are not able to personally point to a case when they were harmed by an immigrant, or when they witnessed voter fraud, or when they benefited from some economic gesture by Donald Trump. In the abstracted, it kind of looks good. And yes, we got to take seriously the power that this symbolic action has in a place like Indiana.

AXELROD: And in terms of strategy for the Democratic Party, you -- by all accounts, you made a good accounting of yourself in the -- if you can, by all accounts, make a good accounting. But --

BUTTIGIEG: Yes.

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AXELROD: -- in the race and came out enhancing the process. But Tom Perez walked away as the chair. What advice would you give him about how to proceed and how to proceed, particularly in communities like yours?

[00:55:07] BUTTIGEIG: Well, my hope is that he, first of all, recognizes that we need to have a presence in every kind of community, including ones where it's very uphill. Because if you think only one cycle at a time, you may never invest in counties or states that could in fact turn blue with sustained attention.

AXELROD: On 2008, nobody thought Indiana --

BUTTIGEIG: That's right, yes.

AXELROD: -- would go blue --

BUTTIGEIG: It was extraordinary.

AXELROD: -- and it did. And --

BUTTIGEIG: Right. But the campaign in -- the -- you know, the president campaigned in Indiana and it worked.

AXELROD: Right.

BUTTIGEIG: And, you know, even in areas we're never going to win, it really matters. If you're adding -- if you're doing the math across the state, it really matters in some of these right counties, whether they go 80-20 or whether they go 60-40. Even if we're not going to win either way because that allows you to, you know, get put over the top by more Democratic areas.

So I think showing up everywhere is really important. I hope there is a resistance to the appeal of silver bullets whether it's data or demographics. The idea that anything is going to save us without us really doing the work.

And my hope is that he will direct the party towards working from the bottom up, recognizing that -- you know, the DNC is always vulnerable to this gravitational force, makes it treat the presidency like it's the only office that matters. But really it's everything from school boards to county sheriffs, all the way up through state house, especially state houses.

I mean, I think that the state level of government is where people can really get away with murder. I think ALEC, the think tank, which doesn't even do Federal policy, is now the most powerful one in the country or always has made the most powerful --

AXELROD: Well, we've seen a shift of 1,000 legislatures since --

BUTTIGEIG: Yes.

AXELROD: -- across the country, 33 legislatures today in the hands of the Republican Party.

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BUTTIGEIG: That really matters.

AXELROD: So pretty big shift over the last 10 years. Coming from Indiana and understand that your Senator Joe Donnelly.

BUTTIGEIG: Right.

AXELROD: Your former congressman, who you worked for, faces a tough reelection in 2018. There is this group that formed that says that any member of Congress who -- or politician who cooperates with Trump in any way, who cast a vote in favor of a policy, who cast a vote in favor of an appointee, would be a primaryed. That seems problematical when you have 10 Democrats running in states that are red states, Joe Donnelly included.

BUTTIGEIG: Yes.

AXELROD: You don't have to handle that promise chair.

BUTTIGEIG: Right.

AXELROD: Because you're not going to be the chair, but since you're in that chair, I'm going to ask you.

BUTTIGEIG: Right.

AXELROD: Right across from me. How should the party deal with that challenge?

BUTTIGEIG: Yes. I mean, the problem is it's profoundly self-defeating. If it leads to -- you know, if it makes that much harder for us to be back these Republican majorities, look, I think the way to think about it if you're a committed progressive, is to support in any given constituency, the most progressive candidate who can actually win. And I will say there's another way to square the circle, which is as Bernie Sanders demonstrated by his support among certain people who want to vote in for Trump, that the kind of left-center spectrum we're working with is beginning to crumble.

And that there are positions, you know, economic populist positions or even some other positions around criminal justice, for example, that actually really resonate with independents or libertarians or people who would have budgets --

AXELROD: Koch brothers are working hard on the Criminal Justice reform.

BUTTIGEIG: Yes. So, you know, it's not as simple as saying you should be this far left, you should be this far of the center. But I think one of the big problems in Democratic politics as an ideology is this organized completely around Republican politics and ideology.

And the only way we take somebody's measures to evaluate how vigorously they oppose or how closely they imitate in Republican policies rather than just deriving our policies from our values. And then supporting or opposing people and ideas based on how they map to that.

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But I think, you know, back to your question, look, we've got to recognize that there's going to be a diversity of opinion within the Democratic Party. And that, you know, a Democrat in Indiana, this is going to be a little different than a Democrat in Portland, and that's OK. This part of what makes our party robust and strong. But if we want to win, we've got to concentrate our efforts on the opposition, the real opposition.

And that is, congressional Republicans, and this president that they enable.

AXELROD: What about you? You're obviously talented, skilled politician and public official, but you're in a state that's a very difficult state for Democrats. What the -- how do you advance your career in public service?

BUTTIGEIG: Well, I'm pretty optimistic about our state for Democrats. You know, we've had more Democratic governors than not in my lifetime, I think.

[01:00:00] We've got, you know, a Democratic senator, I was there when the president turned Indiana blue, President Obama in 2008, so it can be done.

The good news for me is I'm young and relatively young. And I have this job that I really love. So it's not like I'm in a hurry to do something else. Certainly don't need to do something different, being mayor of your hometown is the most -- it was hard, it's really hard. But it's so rewarding. That time is kind of on my side. I know we can't do it forever.

But I think time is on my side. And I think that, you know, I found so far that if you just keep your head down and really try to do whatever it is you're doing very well, the future will take care of itself. And if you don't, then really nothing else matters.

AXELROD: Well, Pete Buttigiege, thank you so much. Thanks for being at the IOP. And for (inaudible).

BUTTIGEIG: Thanks, it's a pleasure.

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