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THE AXE FILES

The Axe Files - Ep. 199: Mayor Eric Garcetti

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Axelrod: [00:00:00] Eric Garcetti always always good to see you. Great to be plenty of stuff to talk about. But I I never really got the full story of your exotic family history. And of course I read up a little bit. Get ready for this but I didn't know the whole story about your grandfather. And and and that whole side of the family in Mexico and what happened so let's start there.

Garcetti: [00:00:30] Well I've joked before. First of all it's great to be with you. And welcome to L.A.. Thank you. I'm kind of an average Angeleno in many ways and only in America kind of guy. Average Mexican American Jewish Italians. I think everybody because of my last name figures I'm 100 percent Italian.

Axelrod: [00:00:48] So my question is Why do you hate the Irish.

Garcetti: [00:00:50] You know it's interesting I actually have some Irish in me. I knew I knew you were going to pull out. My great great grandfather fled Ireland because he didn't want to be a priest married a nice Mexican American Girl and in Arizona, Juanita Bane my great grandmother great great grandmother and the rest is history. I I. My father's parents both spoke Spanish as a first language. My grandfather was born in Mexico. My guess you'd call him a dreamer. Even though they didn't use that term back then but when he was one year old my great grandfather died in the Mexican Revolution. Rumor has it he was a judge who was hanged and his wife his widow picked up my grandfather in her arms and crossed the border you know as we see echoed today you know fearing for her life wanting to make sure her son survived they went through Texas and came to L.A. he married my grandmother who was second generation already Mexican American one of 18 children to the same two parents from Mexico. So basically every Latino in Arizona is my cousin because they grew up in a small mining town called Superior. And she has every brother and sister in the world grew up there and they came when she was in high school L.A.. So really that side of the family is Mexican of Italian Irish Spanish and Indian blood. My mom is Jewish and her grandparents and then parents who were born here. They were all of Polish Russian Ukrainian descent. So I kind of navigated borders growing up.

Axelrod: [00:02:23] And they've been here for a while or did they come over during the war.

Garcetti: [00:02:26] They came during the pogroms. You know when Jews were being enlisted.

Axelrod: [00:02:30] When my dad came over.

Garcetti: [00:02:31] Right in the beginning of the 20th century. What's interesting is my great grandfather who was born in Poland was a tailor here in L.A. on the east side of town. His son then followed him. Harry Roth who dreamed of being a piano player something that I think has been passed down to me and.

Axelrod: [00:02:51] We should note you were listening to jazz on vinyl when we walked into your office. And there's a piano in the corner.

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Garcetti: [00:02:57] There is a piano in here I tried it's my escape when I have 5 five minutes between a meeting. But he was in the Depression no opportunities to become a pianist so he became a tailor. Like his father and named a clothing company after his dad called Louis Roth suits and suits right here in L.A. Union Company one of the first Jack Valenti was one of his customers. And when Jack Valenti was tapped by President Johnson after Kennedy was assassinated to go to D.C. He said I know a guy out in L.A. who makes a great suit and my grandfather became tailor to the president the United States to President Johnson. And that would be a nice story it would end right there. But it goes further he was opposed to the Vietnam War and he had to make a decision when Johnson was considering running again in 68 whether to speak out and lose his most important client.

Axelrod: [00:03:46] Or just cut the sleeves a few inches short.

Garcetti: [00:03:50] Whatever it takes or or not speak out and keep them. And so he took out a full page ad in The New York Times that said President Johnson as your tailor don't run for re-election. Please get out of Vietnam. And my wife and I will contribute I think ten thousand dollars to your retirement. And you know I grew up kind of learning to speak up and speak out for what you believe.

Axelrod: [00:04:12] That wasn't well received.

Garcetti: [00:04:13] So I don't think he stayed as a customer. But you know he was somebody who followed his conscience so.

Axelrod: [00:04:19] That was literally speaking off the cuff.

Garcetti: [00:04:21] Yes.

Axelrod: [00:04:22] I had to I'm sorry.

Garcetti: [00:04:24] David Axelrod. He'll be here all podcast.

Axelrod: [00:04:26] Yes. Try the veal. Your dad became a widely known figure around the country in the 90s. Gil Garcetti he was the he was the district attorney here during the OJ Simpson trial. But you were not here right you were overseas at the time.

Garcetti: [00:04:48] I was I mean before that I think a lot of people think I grew up with politics I didn't. My father had been active in Eugene McCarthy's campaign out here with my mom. But he was just a line deputy district attorney prosecutor I grew up. Nobody knew the name Garcetti. My mom worked and philanthropic worlds here investing in the city. And so it wasn't till I graduate from college that my dad ran and won for district attorney. And by then I was studying abroad in England and so I was away for a lot of that but I came back helped him in his reelection campaign in 1996. And you know was really proud of seeing the things that he did to highlight domestic violence. I think when he saw the OJ trial and OJ being on trial come up he said this is a moment to raise awareness about something he grew up in a home where there was some domestic violence. He knew that 100 percent of the people on death row at least in the state had grown up with violence in the household and he really wanted to do something

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about it. It taught me like never miss an opportunity in the midst of even you know all the chaos that was that case.

Axelrod: [00:05:54] Now had you been. You said politics wasn't a big thing but had you thought of yourself in a political context.

Garcetti: [00:06:02] No not really I grew up in the San Fernando Valley which is everybody's seen it on TV it's literally where the Brady Bunch was filmed and you literally like right in the middle of things. It was very kind of middle class everywhere anywhere existence. We had the GM car factory that shut down when I was growing up. We had people who had factory jobs and who had lost them. And I learned kind of growing up in L.A. this limitless potential because L.A. is this place where anything's possible. But it's also a place that reflected kind of middle America on the coast of California. But no I thought I would do something you know maybe in music. I was interested in music or potentially doing something in human rights activism where I had spent time in Africa and I lived in Southeast Asia working with some of the Democratic resistance in Burma.

Axelrod: [00:06:55] Yeah I know I saw it. That's interesting you must. Yeah that must be painful now watching what's going on.

Garcetti: [00:07:01] Absolutely we had Rohingya who we are working and living in the jungle four days journey from Bangkok over the border into Burma. It was called the liberated areas and there was a shadow capital and a lot of the students and ethnic minorities like the Rohingya and other groups like the Koran and other ethnic groups had fled to the jungle after the government had cracked down and shot and killed so many pro-democracy students and others to see. Now you know what's happening inside a new and a newly resurgent Burma against the Rohingya is absolutely heartbreaking I still have connections back to that country.

Axelrod: [00:07:37] What is your sense about what's happened with Aung San Suu Kyi Nobel Prize winner was.

Garcetti: [00:07:45] I think you know I've learned through life never make too much of a hero of anybody. Everybody's full of flaws and I think that Aung San Suu Kyi unfortunately for the Burmans who are the ethnic majority. There's always a tortured history with some of the folks who are ethnic minorities the Burmans themselves lay claim to plenty of oppression over the years into British rule and under the Japanese. But unfortunately there's sometimes been a lot of overreach where these ethnic minorities are completely forgotten or even worse atrocities with rape with murder with burning down villages is not unique to the Rohingya and it does sadden me that some somebody who won the Nobel Peace Prize and somebody who we had is such a hero hasn't been able to stop that.

Axelrod: [00:08:31] And do you think she is. Complicit or is she responsive to the.

Garcetti: [00:08:41] Well somebody. Somebody once told me once you're in government whether you did it or not you're responsible for everything. Yeah so.

Axelrod: [00:08:48] Spoken like a former city council member.

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Garcetti: [00:08:50] Exactly. If you don't fix it it is you.

Axelrod: [00:08:52] Yeah. You were at the London School of Economics and you were working on a Ph.D. on ethnicity and nationalism which both of which are both topics they related and they seem very germane now. What would cause you to settle on that. And and what caused you not to finish it.

Garcetti: [00:09:17] Well you know I was in England I had spent time in high school in Ethiopia the northern part of Ethiopia between the two famines in the medical relief mission trying to help women and children who had been left behind. And it planted a seed in my head that I wanted to go back to to north east Africa the time in Burma working with these ethnic minorities some of who had been promised their own countries by the British in colonial times and had been fighting 50 years for independence or for autonomy really I think led me that pathway as well as my own background where I'd like I said kind of navigated culture very fluidly since I was born. It's part of living in L.A. It's part of being an American I think and part of just my own your family. Exactly. And the thing that probably convinced me most to do this is I was in Oxford in 1993 President Clinton had just been sworn in. He came to visit us in Oxford and I remember he greeted us. I was lucky enough to be a Rhodes scholar like he was and at a place called Rhodes House he came to introduce himself to all of us. And I knew I wouldn't have half a second to say hi. So I wrote him a letter the night before saying Please intervene in the Balkans and help the Bosnians out who are being you know victims of genocide at the time wrote this long letter. The reasons why it's naïve looking back on it I said you know stop Serbia. Help us do something for these people. And I realize that ethnicity is usually this thing that is used by political leaders to oftentimes turn us against one another that if you look at the history of the Balkans Croats and Bosnian Muslims and Serbs had intermarried for years but their leaders some of them who wanted to create these sanitized histories said No we've always hated each other and we have to kill everybody who's Muslim or kill everybody was out to kill everybody who's Serb. And it taught me the lesson that we think ethnicity can be linked to a very ancient things but they're more often than not manipulated by political leaders. And I never imagined the times we're living through now how resonant that would be but true history is much more complicated. We as a human family have always interbred traveled the world mixed with one another. We don't have these purified races of human beings or even ethnic groups. And here in America we know that most because we don't have an ethnic nation we have a civic nation that is encompassed white and black and Latino and Native and Asian folks for hundreds of years. And I think it's important for us to look at that to try to make sure we aren't manipulated in the wrong way to figure out why certain leaders do that. And I probably.

Axelrod: [00:12:00] Have any in mind?

Garcetti: [00:12:02] Well we see I think at the national level. One thing that our president gets which is universal. People do yearn for identity. They want an emotional connection. I think what we're sold though is a very perverse identity that is an exclusionary one but we can't just talk to people simply about economics and jobs and policies. We have to create a sense of belonging again and a sense of Americanism. There's an exhibition at the Whitney Museum right now and I saw somebody on Instagram had an antiwar poster from the 60s that had a torn American flag and then it had. A thread stitching it back together saying heal America. I think to be an opponent at that time of the war instead of saying I don't believe in America. It was the opposite.

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We believe so deeply in America. Let's heal it. And I think that that's missing from our conversation. How will we heal our identity and belonging in this nation.

Axelrod: [00:12:56] You know it seems to me that there are as you say there's great political currency and exploiting some of these suspicions passions resentments differences. But I will say that and that's why I was interested in your studies because you know it seems to me what's happened with Trump is it is a symptom of something that we've seen not just in America but you see it in Europe. And you know we see these we see all over the world movements toward national tribalism. And so I'm I'm interested in your sense of why that is because it's not unique to us.

Garcetti: [00:13:47] No. And I think history shows that this happens usually when things are very unsettled. Sometimes that's economically. You look at between the two wars in Germany or something and when there was inflation and a great depression. But even now in times of economic plenty it's still an unsettling time. Technology is changing the nature of jobs the insecurity about those things that used to route us. And so that's the moment when ethnic identities whether they are inclusive or exclusive can come in and have resonance with people. Our challenge is to get back to what America has always been striving for which is a more inclusive version of that. But we had a presidential candidate who literally started his first speech telling us who the enemy was in ethnic terms Mexicans who are rapists and murderers. Some of them might be OK he said. And that's literally the seed that he planted at the beginning his first speech as a Mexican American. Like I couldn't believe myself I mean it was. I know you know the judges and district attorneys and mayors and doctors and business people and living in Los Angeles like it was something so foreign to me. My family's experience. But but he wasn't wrong that people need identity they need belonging. We need each other. But how we define our family is going to be critical in these insecure times people not just here but around the world will reach for that.

Axelrod: [00:15:11] A lot of this is being driven by technology.

Garcetti: [00:15:13] No question.

Axelrod: [00:15:14] And that technology is not just not just changing our economies at a really frenetic pace leaving some people in a position to do very very well and many others as you say unsettled but also in communications which allows us to create our sort of virtual reality worlds that feels like we're like we're really siloed in a way that we haven't been.

Garcetti: [00:15:41] We've never had more of an ability to reach out and to widen our communications and we've never had more of an ability to tune people out and narrow it. It's kind of one of the ironies of this moment that I can literally you know be talking to anybody around the world via Facetime and engage with somebody in a much more immediate way than ever before. And at the same time I don't want to listen to anybody but the people who share the exact same opinions as me over and over again. I can close off the world.

Axelrod: [00:16:05] Yeah. And too many people are doing that. Let me.

Garcetti: [00:16:09] Listen to the Axe Files

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Axelrod: [00:16:10] Exactly well that's mainly the antidote that I recommend to everyone I meet you. You came back here. We've talked about all of your forays around the world. So then you came back here I know you were teaching and ultimately you run for the city council which seems a long way from you know your studies your globalism and so on and I know you said L.A. is the world in a way but what prompted you to run for the City Council.

Garcetti: [00:16:45] Well I think you're right. I mean when somebody said you're done international development in human rights work and you taught international relations what are you doing running for city council. My first response was always have you looked at L.A. It is you know the district I was seeking to run for had little Armenia in it it had historic Filipino Town it had Thai town and you know it was on the border of Chinatown. It was probably 50 percent Latino from multiple countries. It really was the United Nations. But secondly I think when somebody suggested it to me and I was the underdog. I was running against somebody who had served as the councilman in that seat before and almost become mayor a sitting state legislator. I mean it was a stacked field that I probably was

Axelrod: [00:17:24] You do have a good political name.

Garcetti: [00:17:26] Well interestingly enough my dad ran six months or seven months before me for re-election got tossed out two to one by the voters of L.A. County. So it wasn't [crosstalk].

Garcetti: [00:17:41] But I loved the experience because when somebody suggested to me I realized what Eleanor Roosevelt said when she was writing the Universal Declaration of Human Rights she said after all where do human rights begin. I'm paraphrasing not in distant places faraway lands but in places so small they're not found on any human map. The places we work places we live the places we study and worship. And I realized that all the things I wanted to do to make a better world if I didn't have roots to a single block and a single street and neighborhood that didn't really matter for much and I think so many young people come to me wanting to get involved in politics and like should I go to D.C. and intern on Capitol Hill. I always say no. Find a community that needs you. There's no shortage of applications for internships but in some community in your local community or wherever you want to put your roots down there are people who need you. Much more than Washington D.C. does in this nation has always been a collection of local communities in word to D.C. not vice versa. And so I got a pair of shoes took them off only at night walked holes through them knocked on more doors and gotten a run off and surprised myself and others and got elected in 2001.

Axelrod: [00:18:53] Yeah you know it's interesting what you say because you know I started I grew up in New York City and I started covering local politics in Chicago when I was a city hall bureau chief for The Tribune. And then when I became a. Consultant I did the media and strategy mostly for mayors races around the country because it seemed to me like that was the most vital politics.

Garcetti: [00:19:22] Long before now and everybody saying oh now cities are so much more important mayors are important. With all due respect I think that's always been the case. I mean the third largest economy in the world now is Los Angeles. I mean you can count GDP. But you know nations are the accidents of history and war and conquest states in the United States are kind of arbitrary lines but cities organic since the old ancient Athens city state that's where people move to because they want to. And by that measure Tokyo is the biggest economy in

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the world. New York is second and L.A. is now the third largest economy in the world to 18 million souls. It's you know the number one port in America airport in America. It's this huge political and economic organism and to me that's not brand new. I think that's always been since the beginning of history.

Axelrod: [00:20:11] All this talk of economies remains we've got to take a short break and we'll be right back with Mayor Eric Garcetti beyond those sort of scale of Los Angeles because there are big cities and small. And what is it about local government and local politics that is so visceral and so real to people. Washington's a little a tenuous to even Sacramento's a tenuous but when you're a city councilman I mean there's no escape here right there.

Garcetti: [00:20:46] On the accountability side. You're absolutely right people will find you at the grocery store they'll talk to you at the diner they'll while you're taking a walk you know they'll say excuse me and I know you're with your family but you know they're never [crosstalk] No absolutely. She's very patient and loving. But you know it's it's an amazing experience because you know if you don't fix that thing you will have to suffer through it. If you don't pave that pothole you'll drive over it. If there's not a park in your neighborhood to play out you can't take your daughter anywhere. But if you do do those things you actually see the benefit. It's a very immediate and visceral thing. Secondly I think cities have tremendous levers of power. And when people right now are feeling so disenfranchised because of Washington I always say why are you ceding all the power that you have. Don't see the power you have before you try to exercise it in the Port of L.A. brings in 43 percent of the goods that come into America. That's something under our local control. If we want to implement the Paris climate accords I've helped 382 other cities take the same pledge that we did. I chair a group called climate measures Washington can't stop us from buying electric cars or changing our building codes or creating 100 percent green electricity and our utility that we control. We kind of are building America and local communities not vice versa and there might have been a day in the 60s and 70s I told President Obama this when I was elected mayor. He convened the Class of 2013 at the White House and there in the Roosevelt Room for a couple of hours he went city by city through asking us what we needed and he asked me to start. And I said in the 60s and 70s people were leaving and fleeing cities and they came to Washington so that Washington could help save America's cities. I think it's vice versa right now. It's the cities of America that will help save Washington.

Axelrod: [00:22:28] You know you concentrated on the few issues particularly when you were in the city council. One was parks. You mentioned parks before the other was crime and particularly youth crime. Why did you choose those two.

Garcetti: [00:22:46] You know quality of life comes down to the kind of opportunities and great public spaces. There's a there's a caricature of L.A. that we live these solitary lives in our cars and never see one another and certainly.

Axelrod: [00:22:57] I think have spread that.

Garcetti: [00:23:00] Usually comes out of either Chicago or New York. But the reality is Angelenos love being outside we have great weather we can do it three hundred sixty something days a year probably. And and yet while we have these amazing soaring parks and we have the most beautiful topography of a city in America where you have Griffith Park and the

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ocean and you have these amazing vistas for a lot of kids and families who lived in the denser urban core they didn't have a park within walking distance. And I had the densest district in the city of L.A. So we more than tripled the number of parks from 14 to sorry 16 to 48 parks in a matter of like eight or nine years. And I wanted to show that didn't matter if you didn't have a lot of land you could scrap and you could figure out a way because then that brings people together that's healthier outcomes for the kids better education. We did it with school so it was just all around something for quality of life crime was. And I think that's the first responsibility of local government. I had very low income neighborhoods that had had traditionally extremely high crime and we did things like reduce our graffiti by like 90 something percent. William Bratton Bill Bratton who used to be our chief here said I know when it's your district but I look across the street it's all tagged and the program you brought in which enlisted over a thousand block captains just to tell us where it was so we could get it painted out quickly helped us bring that down and then people wanted to come out and go to the park or go shopping or revitalize that empty storefront you know in their own neighborhood. So it led economic revitalization when we focused on kind of crime from that and kept kids instead of just being cops and we tried to identify those kids that would have gone into gangs that would have committed crimes and really identified them early on and gave them a different pathway.

Axelrod: [00:24:39] In the midst of serving in the council. You enlisted in the Naval Reserve. You were 34. That is admirable service is admirable it's also been the subject of some conjecture about an ambitious young guy wanting to get his mind to get his service credentials down for future political pursuits. Why did you decide to join the reserves and what did you what have you gotten out of that experience.

Garcetti: [00:25:18] It was a very visceral decision. I usually have a check which is will I really regret not doing this. And I had wanted to join. Ever since I had spent time in Burma I had a colonel from the United States Army who had been the U.S. military attache to Burma during the crackdown. He was the guy who I was with in the jungle doing these trainings Bob Helvey his name a real kind of West Virginia Reagan Democrat who was a tough as nails air cavalry Vietnam vet and he said look you care about democracy and you care about human rights and you care about her now relations he said if you want to make an impact in those areas you better join the intelligence and or military field at some point you need to. And so I thought I do that then in the early 90s and then I won Rhodes scholarship and life kind of took off. And after 9/11 it just rang in my ears even more kind of a patriotic call. A lot of people fewer and fewer who serve. My grandfather got a citizenship from serving in World War II. He wasn't a citizen yet. Even though as I mentioned he's kind of a dreamer and have lived here since he was one year old and volunteered to go to the Pacific Theater. Uncle served in the Navy and so I decided to join the Navy to become a intelligence officer. Which kind of combined both those things that I cared about. It has been an extraordinary experience. I'm still in the what's called the standby reserve but it's been nearly 12 years total.

Axelrod: [00:26:41] Never never made it to Iraq or Afghanistan.

Garcetti: [00:26:43] No. Didn't get my ticket punched. I was ready to go. During the recession a lot of other people were volunteering ahead of me just for their own economic reasons I think among other things. But I have a lot of folks that did and earned the kind of credit for the work that we're doing. I can't speak in great detail was the same as what folks were doing deployed

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abroad. It was not just training to deploy. We were doing real time intelligence work that contributed to the global war on terror.

Axelrod: [00:27:12] And it was at all useful to you when you became mayor because L.A. is obviously a highly sensitive target being as vital a part of our country as it is did having some background from your service proved to be useful at all to you.

Garcetti: [00:27:31] Yes I mean on all sorts of levels I have a fluency a respect for and a knowledge of of Navy of joint operations my last unit was a DEA unit Defense Intelligence Agency and one of the skills I was trained as a strategic briefer is all about learning how to listen. And I think in politics we too often teach people how to talk or expect them to give great speeches but we don't have a lot of good listeners especially at this moment when the American people need that. And so there is definitely that overlap between how I was trained as an intelligence officer and the skills that I use now. But it was just very important to me you know that that we don't just have others do that work that we ourselves especially those of us who will make decisions know what it's like behind the scenes and to me the greatest feeling in the world. I was city council president in charge of all sorts of people and then I'd go and I'd be a junior officer and it was my middle management experience that helped inform how I am as an executive. Now to be able to say hey you're not always I watch a lot of people get into politics at a young age. You're in charge of everything. Nobody ever teaches you how to be one of those middle level guys.

Axelrod: [00:28:41] I had this discussion with a colleague of yours Pete Buttigieg in South Bend Indiana. Who are your friends. He's in the reserves and did go to Afghanistan and talked about that very thing that you know now you're not the mayor anymore. And it was.

Garcetti: [00:29:01] Part of a team.

Axelrod: [00:29:02] Humbling and enlightening. I should mention that we met back in 2007. We did not.

Garcetti: [00:29:12] Weather was a little colder then.

Axelrod: [00:29:13] Speaking about humbling watching an Angeleno trudge through the snows of Iowa was quite a sight. But you were there. What made you decide to. What made you decide to support Obama who at the time was I was.

Garcetti: [00:29:29] Going to lose.

Axelrod: [00:29:30] Well some of us knew better but many thought that.

Garcetti: [00:29:35] I had been introduced to Barack Obama by mutual friends who said hey we see a lot you guys have in common. He's kind of it from a mixed marriage you are too. He's a Harvard law school you got to study as a Rhodes scholar. You know you guys kind of think alike. You remind me of each other etc. and I met this guy when he was state senator in the contested primary for the Democratic nomination for Senate didn't even out here. And we hit it off. And whenever I go to D.C. I'd call him and we had I was easy to connect with him sometimes and members of my own congressional delegation we sat down and kind of

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dreamed together talking about Latino and African-American relations about sustainable energy. And when he ran it was no question. I was heading up something called Democratic municipal officials at that time which was the Democratic party's organization for all mayors and local officials in the country. It was a forgotten little caucus and I built it up to a fully staffed million dollar a year budget organization. And I just loved that he spoke at the local level. He spoke about community. He was a community organizer. And so I figured I was gonna support him for that race. I mean I'd support him but he would win the next time this is going to be his first presidential run or something if we had a shot and I said he came out here. It was the 15th anniversary of the L.A. riots and he spoke at First AME which was the main church here. When those riots were burning the city down. And I got some message to him beforehand about some things to talk about. And he wove it beautifully together to this audience wasn't even a full church. You know maybe half felt Stevie Wonder dropped by and played a song and I rode with him afterwards and I said look I want to get involved in this campaign I want to be your chair out here in California. I think we can build something big. And in that crowd he said OK you're my California chair and we were off to the races and some six months later seven months later I was in Iowa. And what I loved about walking door to door in Iowa is exactly what you said I remember knocking on the door once and said excuse me and my name is Eric I'm visiting here from Los Angeles. And Iowans being so generous. They said I don't care what candidate you're campaigning for if you're out here from L.A. I support him. And they invited me in. I got another vote for Barack.

Axelrod: [00:31:54] So make a note. Future campaigns. Tell all your workers that they're from L.A. You ran for mayor in 2013. I came out for that and and that was a bit of a there was a little bit of a lingering hangover from the 2008 primaries there. Your opponent that supported Hillary. A lot of the Clinton folks on that side. But you managed to overcome that.

Garcetti: [00:32:30] Yeah it wasn't expected like the first city. I've never been expected that when I've kind of been the outsider whenever I run. Not only did the Chamber of Commerce not support me the County Federation of Labor didn't support me. I think because I was newer to it and I understood some of that. But I didn't really have the establishment and in some ways that's probably what propelled me to victory. I remember listening to conservative talk radio and when I was in the runoff with my opponent at the time who's now was and now is a good friend again they said well we don't trust either of them they're both commies but at least he isn't bought and paid for by the establishment so we're voting for said. There was a real kind of sense of of what I've accomplished in the neighborhoods had represented people could see with their eyes that the neighborhood of Hollywood had turned around and some of the core parts of L.A. and my proposal was look if you like what I've done here I want to do this and bring the city back to the basics a city should round well and there was a feeling that we weren't doing basic city services anymore. Yes do the big and progressive and visionary things but fix the crap in my neighborhood first pave the streets open a park trim the trees like that's what the job description says. Make sure there's cops on the beat. That 911 calls are answered the trash is picked up and I think a lot of times we in politics get so far away from what this is really about. This isn't about the game it's not about the sexiness it's not about the fights it's actually about producing things that matter where people live.

Axelrod: [00:33:52] Yeah well that's an interesting perspective that mayors have because it is a cliché but you know there aren't particularly partisan ways of doing the basic things that need to

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be done right. Although you do have to raise the money to do them you just you just championed a few revenue raising issues. Talk about that.

Garcetti: [00:34:16] We had you know the same night that President Trump was elected and many people were scratching their heads all the way to crying in corners nationally out here in L.A. We had an amazing night. We passed five different measures one to improve our community colleges which I helped make L.A. the biggest city to have free community college one to expand our parks and then to on homelessness and went on transportation the homeless measures were to build housing and to provide services. Cities around this country and particularly the West Coast are seeing an explosion of homelessness and these were the two biggest measures in U.S. history and then the biggest of all these was something called measure which is 120 billion dollar transportation package the largest times to in U.S. history at the local level. And just forget the numbers it's 15 new rapid transit lines in L.A.. Fixing our freeways and kind of doing the most basic things like paving our our streets. It's about 700000 jobs and it's going to last not just for like a one off. Oftentimes we vote for these things and there's a few jobs. These are going to be careers for people in the middle class who might have in the past been building you know bombers in World War Two on the assembly line in South L.A. without a college degree can now build rail cars on some of these rail lines have a good union jobs have benefits healthcare and part of it to me was first and foremost let's fix the traffic in L.A. It's the worst in the country. Second.

Axelrod: [00:35:42] You see it's not just the Chicagoans who say.

Garcetti: [00:35:46] It's we know it and we've got to fix it. And then second let's provide good middle class jobs. And I'll tell you I can get as nationalist about the economy as anybody. I'll tell you something that when we passed that and I started looking at how we're going to spend it the Port of L.A. which is as I mentioned the number one port in the country the airport where we're doing more renovation more investment than any airport in the country. There's not a single American company that builds port equipment for the rail cars. There's not a single American company that builds a rail car anymore. So this is a moment and part of my gospel that I'm trying to spread across the country is let's pass these things at the local level of Washington's incapable and then second let's invest in American workers by creating American companies that can do this stuff that we know how to do. Sometimes we're creating the technology exporting it to other places and they're getting the benefit of it. We should and I think it's a real pathway to rebuild the middle class in an insecure moment. These are jobs you can't offshore these are good jobs and they actually produce something we all need.

Axelrod: [00:36:44] You know this well I'll get to that. I want to get to the whole national scene in a second. One of the issues that's obviously come to the fore particularly because of the presidential election is immigration. And you among other mayors have had been battling with the administration over their position on so-called sanctuary cities first of all I read that you don't use that phrase sanctuary cities why.

Garcetti: [00:37:18] Because nobody has a definition of what it means. But I say is if sanctuary city means that our police officers do their work separate from ICE here for a whole host of reasons that police chiefs from the most conservative ones in 1979 when this started to more enlightened ones that we have now have said is good policing and we are sanctuary city and proudly so. But most people hear that term as it's been constructed and they say oh there's

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these cities that say please come in here criminals. If you're undocumented we're going to give you bonus points. And that city doesn't exist so I'm not going to play into somebody's caricature. I'm going to talk about what good policing entails. I could talk about what good economies are built on and how family unity is important too and I'm too pro family to break up families. I'm too pro economy. In a city where 63 percent of our businesses are started by immigrants to roll that back and I'm never going to stop listening to our police officers who know how to bring down gangs like S13 who know how to win the trust of our immigrant communities and have done that since a guy named Chief Gates here in 1979 started that policy and he wasn't exactly known as a raving liberal.

Axelrod: [00:38:20] What has been the experience with there is this portrait that the president has painted of immigrants and crime what has been the experience here. You didn't have a problem with MS 13.

Garcetti: [00:38:32] Right. And we've had our gang crime is cut more than half over the last decade. We've been extremely successful because we have trust in immigrant communities. You know unlike CSI usually cases aren't cracked by have the trust of the community. In other words the communities are working with police right because some grandma some abuelita says hey that's the apartment I trust you LAPD. That's the apartment where I saw drug dealing going on are those are the bad guys over there. If she's worried about what those cops are going to do to her or to somebody living in her apartment building she's not going to give that information. And those gangs can operate freely and prey on us. My worry about the Trump administration's policies is not just that they're immoral they're impractical and if you talk to any police officer they will here in L.A. they will mirror this is that if you have limited resources and ice does they need to do their job. I want them going after the bad sharks in the sea. I want their divers if you will going after and finding those guys and getting them out. But what they decided to do unlike past policy which is go after the bad guys is now they're throwing a net into the ocean and picking up a bunch of minnows and saying look how successful we are and the shark is getting away. We don't have enough resources there's two million people who are here undocumented. So from a practical perspective find the ones that are dangerous take the other ones who like my grandfather came here seeking opportunity and are contributing and find a quicker pathway to make them even more American than they are today. And your economy will prosper. The communities will continue to become safer and you'll put your resources where we need them. Otherwise it's literally letting the bad guys get away.

Axelrod: [00:40:04] We're going to take another short break and we'll be right back with Eric Garcetti the other big immigrant issue that's that's coming to a head right now is DACA.

Garcetti: [00:40:18] Yes.

Axelrod: [00:40:18] And these 800000 kids who registered under the Obama executive order who were brought here by their parents and who were protected by this order and whose fate is now up in the air because of President Trump because President Trump has canceled that order. You must have a disproportionate share of these young people here. How. How significant an issue is this in the community.

Garcetti: [00:40:53] This is huge for Los Angeles. These are doctors these are teachers. These are folks we had dinner here at city hall were invited to these dreamers to come here. This is

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something that a majority of Republicans and Democrats are for making sure they have a pathway to permanent citizenship. And it's my grandfather this is really personal for me. We didn't use those terms. We didn't have those programs but because he like some dreamers do today was able to enlist in the Army. He was able to finalize the last step in becoming an American. I wouldn't be here were it not for that. We couldn't have won that war if we hadn't done that. And. The inaction right now in Washington around dreamers is unconscionable. Put your vote where your mouth is and we have enough. We know a majority of both houses of Congress have said that they are for this. Even the president and so don't hold them hostage because of a wall or because of anything else. Get that work done. And now think about this practically not just morally here in L.A. And every study showing. If these folks are pushed back in the shadows because you can't deport 100 percent of everybody who's here undocumented just don't have the people power. That drags down the wages for the rest of us who are citizens. Because you're competing against somebody who works under the table who doesn't have benefits less than minimum wage when they work. You know in a legal way that helps everybody's wages not just theirs go up. And we've shown that time and time again and so we have two billion dollars of taxes they pay four billion dollars of economic activity. Let's just be competitive with the world. You know the mayor of Seoul Korea come visit me and he said we need to be more like you. So what do you mean. He said you know we've been very successful in South Korea. My city is very dynamic but we're not diverse enough and it's your immigrants and your diversity which is your competitive advantage in the world today. Others can see it from the outside in. We need to start with.

Axelrod: [00:42:44] You can see the Japanese economy and the price that they've paid for for not welcoming immigrants. And you know our own economists economists will tell you if we have to rely on our native born population we're going to look lose lose out.

Garcetti: [00:43:05] People are insecure but let's find real opportunities for them instead of blaming folks further insecurity that secure borders. People need to have that for a nation to function. But you know if a co-worker in West Virginia is losing work the solution has nothing to do with the dreamer in Los Angeles. In fact we should be creating better jobs for him or her in LA in the last four years we've created 20000 green energy jobs in four years in town that's 1 percent of the nation's population. There's only 54000 jobs in coal in the country. I mean imagine if we were actually applying some real. Responsive policies to people who are facing economic insecurity because guess what. The moment you make that Dreamer's all here illegally again that person didn't get a job.

Axelrod: [00:43:52] So should Democrats in the Congress insist on a solution to the dock before they vote for a budget.

Garcetti: [00:44:04] Absolutely. Absolutely.

Axelrod: [00:44:05] Even if it meant the government shuts down.

Garcetti: [00:44:07] I think that this is one in which there is bipartisan support. And if that bipartisan support slips past the deadline that the president has called for action and that congressional leaders have said there will be action. That's absolutely fair play to do. And I think they should.

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Axelrod: [00:44:23] Another story that is current as we sit here today is the Senate just passed a tax bill the House has passed a tax bill. Both of them would end the deduction for state and local income taxes and limit the Senate bill would limit. I guess both bills would limit property taxes deductions to ten thousand dollars. This is a this is a city and a state where there are high taxes that are deductible. It's one of the ways you pay for all the things you're talking about. How much of a blow would this be to Los Angeles into California.

Garcetti: [00:45:07] It's going to be terrible. And in turn bad for America because of that. Los Angeles isn't some disconnected island. And we're not unique. I think the American Dream is predicated on four things. It's a decent job getting a decent house a good education and healthcare. This tax bill has the unique skill of being able to hurt all four with jobs eliminate something called private activity bonds. The 15 billion that we're spending at the airport creating good American jobs just the financing that will become half a billion dollars more expensive overnight fewer jobs more congestion. I said think the Republican tax bill next time you're stuck on the tarmac at LAX. Secondly on education you can't deduct your your debt. We want more higher education we're going to make it more difficult. Third on health care we know what this will do. Driving more people off the rolls with the end of the mandate all of our having you know the Congressional Virgile million will be without health care. And then fourth on housing this takes away federal tax credits to be able to build affordable housing in the private marketplace by the way which we badly need and many communities need to build housing so it's not just about states that have higher taxes that are blue states. And they said.

Axelrod: [00:46:19] Although that did you'd think that that factored into the calculation. I mean they needed to find savings in order to. Satisfy the requirements of the rule that allowed them to vote.

Garcetti: [00:46:33] No question.

Axelrod: [00:46:34] on a simple majority.

Garcetti: [00:46:35] It makes it absolutely more politically palatable but it's so perverse. I mean the middle class tax cuts here the per capita average income is twenty thousand within a year. Those people will have higher taxes within three years. Anybody 50000 under will have higher taxes and by 2027 all of our tax breaks sunset while the corporations keep theirs. That's crazy. That's an American. And I'll tell you something that has nothing to do with ideology. My greatest worry as a mayor is when the economy is at full steam and you put this much money out there back out there in corporate hands it risks inflation and inflation usually leads to a recession. I'm truly worried that not only will this make the building of things this country needs more difficult education less accessible housing tougher to find that we will lose jobs because of this that we will head into recession because this is such an ill timed ill conceived tax break for corporations making record profits.

Axelrod: [00:47:29] So not growth but recession you think is the result of this.

Garcetti: [00:47:32] Absolutely. I think we risk that.

Axelrod: [00:47:35] You travel around you're traveling around the country. I want to ask you about why in a minute. But the thing that I hear all the time is and you hear this when parties

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lose but that the Democratic Party doesn't have a message. And what is the message that the Democratic Party. What do you think the message of the Democratic Party should be.

Garcetti: [00:47:56] I think we need to be a lot less obsessed with a message to the Democratic Party and more obsessed with an agenda for American people and we get caught in this trap of who. Who cares who the chair of our state party is or our national party even though Tom Prez's a dear friend. That's not where the average American wakes up worried about we fall into these traps of what do we need to say as Democrats. I don't really care. I care we are talking about as Americans if we happen to be the Democrats saying it better. Great people will elect us. But people come to us because they're like that guy. Understands.

Axelrod: [00:48:26] Let's stipulate that. But whether you say it's the message of Democratic Party or the message that we that Democrats should be projecting to people or or leaders should be projecting to people what is that message.

Garcetti: [00:48:40] Well first you have to speak I think some plain English again and everybody gets caught in. Language that doesn't resonate. And I think the language that will resonate is about that. That clear pathway to taking the most insecure times in our lifetime and providing people with some stability and some identity stability in their lives an identity of belonging to an America. And what those values are we instead get caught in micro identity we get caught in programs people don't care about policies they care about their lives. And so when I travel the country right now I'm trying to promote local solutions to national problems that it's in local communities that we know how to create jobs. We know how to invest in things that people drive over and need to visit and that are crumbling right now. We know what the middle class looks like and we know how to protect it. And I think that people who are seeking to represent folks Democrats or anybody else need to speak to people's insecurities and give them pathways to more stability to making college you know something accessible to making a decent place to live in their hands to being able to make sure there's a job a career. Forget jobs careers for the next 40 or 50 years. And the difference about what we're producing here in Los Angeles is we're not finding solutions that will last for 1 or 2 years we're actually reengineering a great American city to provide that sort of prosperity for a generation or two.

Axelrod: [00:50:07] We've never elected a mayor president you are clearly thinking about it.

Garcetti: [00:50:15] That's what I read.

Axelrod: [00:50:18] I haven't seen your letter to the editor objecting so I assume that drafting it so. But tell me what your answer is to people who say look this is a job that requires more now you could point to the incumbent and say he didn't bring a wealth of. National government experience to the office. But but it seems like a leap to some people.

Garcetti: [00:50:47] Well look I would say this first and foremost to my constituents my number one job and 95 percent of my time is spent on being mayor of L.A.. Bill Carrick who's my local mayor is once told me you might have to bleep this but he said do good shit. And the next thing we'll take care of itself.

Axelrod: [00:51:04] It's a podcast.

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Garcetti: [00:51:05] I do believe that like you better just do good work and stop thinking about your own future and the next step will take care of itself. I could have run for governor a month ago. I turn that down not because of some other big plan but.

Axelrod: [00:51:19] Too small for you?

Garcetti: [00:51:20] No my work is undone here. Governor California is a great honor an amazing position but discount all of those rules that people give you. People said that to Barack Obama. I'm sure people said things to Donald Trump but nobody's ever elected a black president. Nobody's had that I am in charge of a constituency and my fellow brothers are mayors that are bigger than states. Many times this is bigger than 23 states. I was governor of any of those 23 states I don't think people would dismiss that. We ran a port an airport municipal utility not through authorities but direct and chair transportation authority that's 10 million people which is bigger I think than 43 or 45 states. So it's not a question of whether mayors could if I did.

Axelrod: [00:52:02] The experience thing will be more important to people now because Donald Trump didn't have experience?

Garcetti: [00:52:06] People want results and people want people who have produced results. You know Mitch Landrieu is a good friend. People floated his name. He'd be an excellent president.

Axelrod: [00:52:13] [crosstalk] running across him somewhere in the snows of Iowa.

Garcetti: [00:52:20] We're close friends and I'd be honored if that were the case. I genuinely think I hope even if I'd never did that we have mayors that run for president because they are ready. I trust people like Megan Barry in Nashville to get stuff done. I trust people like Michael Hancock in Denver to get things done. Pete bouda judge in South Bend Indiana is a great American leader who's ready to step into almost any position. And so I think Americans are fed up with the old rules and many of the old kind of roots and they're certainly fed up with a lot of the leadership coming out of Washington D.C. right now that is all about turning ourselves against one another and producing no results or a party that is increasingly defining itself by what it takes away from Americans. Think about the Republican agenda. Take away your tax breaks take away your immigration status take away your health care. I mean it's literally about takeaways when we used to be a country that was about what we give to folks and I think that's a message for Democrats or anybody else to make a contrast in cities we don't take things away. We have to do things produce things and add things.

Axelrod: [00:53:25] You said earlier that you wish that the Democrats Democrats shouldn't be about we made mistakes in the past but being about micro identity and programs. And it sounded like a critique of the last campaign. Do you think that was the mistake that was made in the last campaign.

Garcetti: [00:53:43] I didn't intend it that way. I think that we've seen though quite often we get caught in our micro identity whether that's geographic. Whether that's in the policy areas we're really good at answering a 40 point answer to a difficult policy question given the context giving the studies when people are like are you going to do something for me. I go door to door still

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now in between elections. Something I love doing and I tell my staff members when they come to work for me it's the heart head and gut check. When you knock on someone's door and you bother them enough they open the door and realize you're not campaigning or trying to convert or robbing them or robbing the homeless in L.A. We have low crime. They generally don't think that they don't want to know do you have a heart that connects with what their problems are. If you convince them of that they'll take you to the next step which is OK. Now David that you're a decent person. Do you have an idea. Do you have a brain of what you can do to fix this problem. And you better have some good ideas thought out. But then the third thing which is more important than either of the first two is they want and then go OK. You care about my problem. You have some ideas about my problem but do I trust you to actually see it through. Do you have the guts to get something done and it was the cliché after the election. All these voters who people said well Trump they kind of dismissed the head and the heart. But at least he's going to do something. And you don't have to look for that. I think with people who are mayors and governors that we have to do things and I think also increasingly we have to be able to communicate that way.

Axelrod: [00:55:12] You know you. Some of the critiques of you is that you're exceedingly cautious.

Garcetti: [00:55:21] That's an old trope now I mean that's the largest measure in U.S. history on transportation when we raise the minimum wage made community college free. You know when I wouldn't raise those.

Axelrod: [00:55:32] Pretty popular things to do.

Garcetti: [00:55:33] When I went to raise the minimum wage we had folks from Labor saying go slow don't do that now and I said I don't care like this is too important to me and it's not just about union labor. This is about everybody earning the minimum wage going after the Olympics people said was stupid you know taking on you know when somebody withdraws from the Paris accord to get 383 cities together around this country representing 70 million Americans that it's not actually an easy thing to do. I love jumping into the fray taking on folks and I think maybe the first couple of years because we are focused on doing things like actually paving our streets in what city should do. That was early but I think that's more the echo chamber than what people think.

Axelrod: [00:56:12] The number of the people who you mentioned earlier and you use your time your fellow mayors around the country are younger and you're in your 40s. Do you think there's a generational issue in the Democratic Party you've got you know you've got some very prominent leaders who are looking at running for president in 2020. Vice President Biden Bernie Sanders even Elizabeth Warren who are will all be in their 70s. And do you think that there is a generational play here for for younger candidates.

Garcetti: [00:56:47] I think it's one of those clichés I don't really buy into it. Look at how popular Maxine Waters is with the younger generation that Bernie was. I mean I think there's a younger.

Axelrod: [00:56:55] Bernie is popular and.

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Garcetti: [00:56:57] There's these young souls and older ages and those old souls of people who are very young who feel like they're already you know get off my lawn and 90 years old when they're in their 20s. No I don't buy into that. I don't buy into most of these divisions of the coast versus the Heartland. Bernie people versus Hillary people the generational stuff. What I will say is it's always important to breathe new life and new ideas. And I'm looking for people whether they've been in for 40 years or been in for one year who look at their their work as their first day on the job. When I just got reelected I told people this is not my second term in office this is my second first term and we better look at everything despite all the successes we've had. I mean L.A. is on fire. We reduced our unemployment in half. More visitors more residents more jobs. I mean all the things that we can say proudly said that doesn't mean we've been doing anything right. How can we do it even better. And I think the Democratic Party that is one critique give we have to really think differently. People have not always looked to organize parties and they've kind of they rise and fall all the time that's not new but more than ever people distrust institutions. So how are we going to build up kind of that old fashioned organizing model that will sustain itself and speak to people and not be about our power but their power. That's the version that we've got to figure out. And people don't feel that it's their power. And I think they're going to find that with the Trump administration they were sold a bill of goods that was about their power. But what has he done to actually improve their lives.

Axelrod: [00:58:20] And what about Washington itself. And do you think that there is there is something in not being from that political environment.

Garcetti: [00:58:30] You know Mitch Landrieu was out here. He said there is some congressional folks who are saying hey why don't you come to D.C. with a group of mayors and we just want to listen to how you talk about change in your communities. We've had amazing representatives in D.C. who have to play defense every day. We're going to do it. Yes.

Axelrod: [00:58:45] Yeah. You should give them like a Rosetta Stone or they can.

Garcetti: [00:58:50] But they have they've been having to play defense. I mean credit to them everyday they're getting five you know onslaughts on the White House that they do have to answer to and they're playing good defense but somebody out here has to stay on offense and I think we are in our cities.

Axelrod: [00:59:03] So you are traveling broadly and it feels like you're already in your own mind made a decision. What is your timetable for disclosing whatever decision.

Garcetti: [00:59:14] I don't have one. I'm not very focused on a timetable or what comes next I'm focused on.

Axelrod: [00:59:19] If you want to run for president. You'd have to do it after certainly after the next next November.

Garcetti: [00:59:26] But that's what I'm focused on. Flipped the house in 2018 and you know and find the solutions that are working around the country. We started a new organization called accelerator for America that is all about what's working in towns like South Bend OR Dayton or Nashville or Los Angeles and helping other cities more quickly get those things passed. I'm more interested in getting a couple hundred billion dollars of infrastructure passed through local

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city referenda quite frankly than what comes next in my political career. If we do that that's the kind of legacy to leave behind and as a mayor we always have good panels good studies but nobody helps us get things done quickly and that's what I'm focused on organizing and helping my fellow mayors to you.

Axelrod: [01:00:07] You could see the skeptic would say the cynic I guess this would be more than skeptic Accelerator for America to say give me a break. This is a vehicle for you.

Garcetti: [01:00:18] Now I don't think anybody's going [crosstalk]

Garcetti: [01:00:23] Nobody's going to look back and say wow you know somebody who starts a think tank action tank for local level. No nobody cares about that politically. I care about it deeply because it will have a long term lasting effect. But I think part of the reason people are so cynical about politics is everything that you do is always about some future thing. Don't get me wrong. Eyes wide open it's important to prepare for the future but what America needs right now is some stitching together some repair and some way that we can take local communities and help them.

Axelrod: [01:00:56] But you know just what is wrong. What is actually wrong with saying yeah I think I could do that. And so if I have the opportunity I'm going to take it.

Garcetti: [01:01:06] I may. But I think it's right now too much of a distraction of stuff that's more urgent to me it becomes 100 percent the conversation we elect the president and literally the next week on TV who's going to run in four years instead of what does this country need. I like most Americans get very close to.

Axelrod: [01:01:22] The system we have requires almost a four year run up to the thing unfortunately.

Garcetti: [01:01:26] That's fine. For those who whose life is prognosticating. But America actually needs people between those four years who are focused on solving problems.

Axelrod: [01:01:34] Well I accept that but I have to tell you that the road to the White House passes through the Axe Files here everybody has to fess up right here.

Garcetti: [01:01:43] I will come back. If I get on that road.

Axelrod: [01:01:46] OK.

Garcetti: [01:01:46] Promise.

Axelrod: [01:01:47] We look forward to having you back. Mayor Eric Garcetti always good to be with you.

Garcetti: [01:01:52] Great to be with you. Thanks.