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THE AXE FILES

The Axe Files - Ep. 63: Paul Begala

Released July 4, 2016

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

DAVID AXELROD, AXE FILES HOST: I've met lots and lots of people in politics in my life but no one smarter or more passionate about politics, about public service, about this country than Paul Begala.

Paul as many of you know has been you involved in most or of the major campaigns of the last 30 years on the democratic side, he famously partnered up with James Carville, to win a serious of stunning state wide races. And then, in the 80s and early 90s and then hooked up with Bill Clinton. And Carville and Begala were really the driving force behind the election of Bill Clinton.

In 1992, he served in that administration. He's been the host of cross fire and he's a commentator on CNN and a constant presence in the political dialogue. But, more than anything he is a really, really interesting guy as you can hear for yourself.

So my friend Paul Begala, we have known each other for a quarter century now. But, when you prepare for this podcast, you learn stuff about people that you didn't know.

PAUL BEGALA, POLITICAL CONSULTANT AND POLITICAL COMMENTATOR: You prepared.

AXELROD: I've always thought -- barely, but I've always thought of you as one of the smartest political guys I've ever known. So, I want you to explain to me how one loses a race for student paddy president to Hank the Hallucination. What you did at the University of Texas, Hank the Hallucination bit you.

BEGALA: Yes.

AXELROD: On the writing. How did that happened?

BEGALA: Actually this is -- it was usually instructive for the rest of my career. First up, defeat is always the best teacher. But, the students five years before I arrived the campus at University of Texas, they have abolished student government.

In the sort of nihilistic way of the '70s oh, it's -- we got there at my generation and we'd look around the campus. And back then, this isn't you know 1981-1982. \$7 million a year in student fees we're being spent by the president of the university with no student input.

Well, that's taxation without representation. Power a force vacuum, right. So, the power student government had didn't go away. It went to the campus administration who I did not like. I did not share our values.

AXELROD: Yeah.

BEGALA: So, we actually lobby the legislature. Our state senator then was former Student Body President Lloyd Dogget. They past a law, a bill that we helped push through that said the university can't spend without student input. So, we started getting student input and I was on the committee that helped kind of begin to control those fees. It wasn't enough. So, we have to move to reconstitute student

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government. And we did.

And one of the cartoonists at the school paper creates Hank the Hallucination to run for student body president. Hanks slogan was "Get real" because he was hallucination. So, it was perfect. He won and then, there was -- well, tragically he was cut down in his prime.

AXELROD: Oh, no.

BEGALA: In the script, the comic script there were hits squad going after may the bullet went right through him because he was in the hallucination.

AXELROD: A hallucination, yes.

BEGALA: Well, Hank turned the corner and fights the little girl. He's a big club (ph), you know, sort dinosaur looking hallucination. And he frightened this little girl and she went bang with her little finger and a little play gun.

AXELROD: And that was for Hank?

BEGALA: Of course imagine bullet kills. So, I got ...

AXELROD: Were you at all connected since you were ...

BEGALA: ... I actually was.

AXELROD: Are you connected to that little girl?

BEGALA: No, no I was connected to the comic script guy.

AXELROD: Oh, I see.

BEGALA: Sam Hurt wrote (inaudible) a buddy of mine. We have a few bears. He bumped Hank off. And then, I got all the Hank voters. Why, because I went out on the west Moline, in Moline campus. And I said, if you vote for me, I built the statue of Hank. And here it is and I wave the sheet.

And, you know, with enough inspiration in 11 herbs and spices, you can still go to that spot and see that hallucinatory monument to Hank. But, honestly, I learned a lot. And so, what I learned was government has to deliver for people in the real life. That the people who the denials against Hank, they had a point which is it's just about resume paddy, right. It's just about like looking good to try get in law school. It's a waste of time.

So, what did we do? I'm very proud of this. It's been in papers again lately because there was attacked in the campus. I help create a group call SURE, Student United for Rape Elimination in 1983.

It is still there. And after this tragic murder in campus, it's more important than ever. My wife and girlfriend created a campus recycling which whenever gad until the '80s and a child care center which we didn't have for students. Faculty have one, students didn't.

We deliver on things that actually matter in people's life. And so, student government became popular

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and became cool because rather than sort of symbolism. In symbolic pad, it's rather in resume padding. We thought what the students actually need and we deliver on the sync, didn't hurt that we help kill a bill to raise a drinking age too, that maybe very popular, on campus that we kept the drinking age at 18.

AXELROD: So, then, your -- but then your electoral career ended at the age of 21.

BEGALA: It did.

AXELROD: So, it sounds -- I mean it sounds that you were building a platform to run on here.

BEGALA: Highest office I can ever inspire too. It's Student Body President University. I'm still active there. I mean, last night was e-mailing with the outgoing student body president on campus there. I'm still reelecting my son's student.

And I'm just trilled. I really do believe obviously in government. And I love seeing these kids engage in making the difference. But that was it for me. I never wanted to (inaudible).

AXELROD: Now, as Hank, is there annual memorial to Hank the Hallucination?

BEGALA: There is to be Hank stock which is big party we had but I think now that all of us in late middle age. We can't stop it.

AXELROD: That's over ha. So, you a ...

BEGALE: By the way one of the guys who was -- one of the biggest skeptics the government could do any good, Mark McKinnon.

AXELROD: Yes.

(CROSSTALK)

BEGALA: George W. Bush who proved that government would screw up in one corporative. You have wrong people in charge.

AXELROD: He -- was he Hank guy?

BEGALA: Yeah. He was sort of fading out, you know, I mean there was aging out. He was a couple years ahead of me and had been the editor of the paper. I've seen Mark gets this wrong. He puts himself as the editor time. He wasn't. John Schwartz was. Now, reporter for the New York Times.

Johnny was editor of that paper. Mark had been a year to before that but was always -- back then, Mark was -- he wasn't a Democrat. He wasn't liberal. He was Mark system.

AXELROD: Yeah.

BELAGA: He was way out there. And so, of course he was ...

AXELROD: And he's aspiring song writer, right?

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BELAGA: And an aspiring song writer. But yeah, big Mack (ph) was a great skeptic that government could do any good. And it's still so ironic that he roundup advising George W. Bush.

AXELROD: Well, I want to ask about this because you came -- a bunch of you got together in 84, right. And Lloyd Doggett who you mentioned who's now in Congress and has been for a couple of decades, great populous out of Austin, run for the U.S. Senate in 1984. Tell me who the roster of people were, who worked on that campaign.

BELAGA: You're pretty good. Well, McKinnon actually came and just did that entry. He was looking for a job. And he came in it and did I was trouble aid. I carried the candidate's bags.

By the end of campaign I was (inaudible) because I didn't turn for Lloyd and his state and I was like carries bag and listen to him and I have pretty good year. And so, I was able to write the way he wanted he's speeches written. And that launch me as speech writer. Most importantly, our campaign manager was James Carville.

AXELROD: Yes.

BEGALA: First time I met James Carville is 1983 going into the 84 campaign. And James had never won one thing in life. He was kind of journey man out of Baton Rouge. And I still remember we're in a primary against Congressman Bob Krueger, moderate Democrat.

Congressman Kent Hance, conservative Democrat.

AXELROD: Yeah.

BEGALA: Who got elected House beating George W. Bush. And Doggett was liberal Democrat. Back then, we though the Democratic primary was it. It has been in Texas history until then.

And so, the two congressmen keep saying well Doggett has no Washington experience. It's hard to imagine today that was thing but it was. He could never get a bill passed. He can't deliver for Texas because he's never even work in Congress.

And Carville in the interview say, I think we ought to say we don't need more Washington and thanking Texas. We need more Texas thanking in Washington.

And I knew Doggett would never hire him because James is too unconventional. So, wrote it down thought I'm steal that line. Well, he roundup hiring James and I still stole (ph) in his lines ever since.

AXELROD: And you ended up as sort of Butch Cassidy and the Sundance Kid.

BEGALA: Yeah, and James is -- my partner for now, 30 sum odd years.

AXELROD: Yeah.

BEGALA: I think the best friend you could ever hope for.

AXELROD: Yeah.

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BEGALA: That's business but in all those years, I don't how many countries, how many states never won fight about money. Fight about strategy, fight about, you know, what we ought to do which clients to take? Sure. Never fight about money, which is as, you know, in a partnership, that's usually have these things bust up.

AXEROD: You know in that same year, I manage to Paul Simon's campaign for Senate in Illinois '84. And in that race was David Willhelm who ended (inaudible) your manager in '92 and the DNC chair. Forrest Claypool is a friend of mine who's now the school -- Chief of School system in Chicago. And he's been in a lot of different public offices.

I walked in the office the first day and there's just Thomas Holroyd (ph) guy on the phone, screaming into the phone at some donor saying 500 bucks, 500 bucks. You know you're telling -- you don't give a damn about Israel, do you?

And he hanged up the phone and he just stood there and watched the phone and the phone rang and he picked. So, yeah, you know that's better. So, that was 24 years old rama manual.

BELAGA: That's amazing.

AXELROD: Rama manual and he hasn't change the bit since that...

BELAGA: What a on wrap on him.

AXELROD: But...

BELAGA: But it is great in age like you, I love campaigns. And I especially love the fact that attracts on you people.

AXELROD: Yeah.

BELAGA: That's the love I mess the campaign head quarters. You know when I travel around. I try to go in campaign to people.

AXELROD: So, one of the reason why I started the Institute of Politics because I love being around. These kids give I hope.

BELAGA: Yeah.

AXELROD: They give you hope. But --

BELAGA: And it's just fun. That's the thing that, you know, yes its hard work. And it's heartbreaking. When we work for Doggett was worst defeat in Texas history for Democrat. That's heartbreaking and actually a friend of mine ...

AXELROD: ... is Phil Gramm is that?

BELAGA: It was Phil Gramm. It was Reagan landslide in Texas and we were buried. And Gramm enormous talented but we, you know, we loss. And I still haven't fully gotten over it. But, you need that too. You know the heartbreak but also the camaraderie.

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AXELROD: Well, I mean it's the thing of devoting your self fully to something that has meaning that where the consequences are real and you think you're fighting for something bigger than yourself. Yeah, I know it's addictive.

BELAGA: You know that's right. And I think everybody has that need to be a part of something larger than themselves, and Senator McCain use to say that all the time. It wasn't just you know Senator Obama running saying, you know, yes we can.

The need to be a part of something larger than yourself especially in a country like this they could become so atomized so quickly. So, important to tie people back together. And campaign can do that. Yes, it divides, you know, team A versus team B. But, within that team, the closest friends of my life I met through campaigns.

AXELROD: You mentioned McCain, I want to get back to the -- to your -- the arc of your story. It's kind of sad right now to see what's going in the Arizona because, you know, John McCain made his bones by being the maverick.

BELAGA: Right.

AXELROD: And I think very courageously, and he seems now intimidated that by the Trump movement in his state and Trump obviously said the most awful thing about him that one can say which that he wasn't a hero because prisoners of war aren't heroes. And McCain is not been eager to take him on.

BELAGA: I think that's a shame. And as someone who likes and admires Senator McCain, I feel like you know.

AXELROD: I do as well.

BELAGA: We have a glimpse at the real man who is it really impressive person and a great hero. I think as a strategist, he's betting on a wrong side here. The future of his is not Sheriff Joe Arpaio and former Governor Jan Brewer and Donald Trump, the old angry white people.

That's not the future of his state. And the future of his state is younger and more diverse increasing little Latino. He sponsored essentially the president immigration plan.

AXELROD: Immigration reform yes, absolutely.

BELAGA: He got 31 percent in this Hispanic vote. Not great, but a whole lot better than Romney. He could make a claim based on his record but he's -- for Latino votes. He seems be going the other way. I think that's tragedy.

AXELROD: Yeah, why you know the thing is that he's going to be what 80 -- almost 80 years old. And you want ...

BELAGA: ..he is not loss step though.

AXLEROD: No, no I'm not suggesting that at all what I'm saying is he's earned the right to be John McCain.

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BELAGA: Right.

AXELROD: And he ought to be John McCain. Any ought to win or loss as John McCain it seems to me.

BELAGA: I think this is tape in as June 22nd?

AXELROD: Yes.

BELAGA: Yeah, you're going to see -- I think at some point McCain is going to stand and punch drop in the nose rhetorically I hope. I do. I don't think he can bottle it up.

AXELROD: Yeah.

BELAGA: I think he's actually too authentic. I think he's faking when says Trump is right.

AXELROD: Yeah. You know I think saw his -- the better angels of this nature in 2008 campaign when that woman in Minneapolis or in Minnesota at rally said Obama wasn't American and McCain took her on, in the front of pretty hostile crowd. And I thought that to me was the finest moment of that campaign for him.

But anyway, getting back to you and Carville, you guys then became partners and you both partnered up in some won after another kind of up start campaigns above Bob Casey in Pennsylvania.

You know Carville in my view is one of the great geniuses, political genius of our time. And I've said that and I really admire him but as you point out he didn't start winning until he was like 40 years old.

BEGALA: Right.

AXELROD: And he then never stops to winning. And the first one was that raising Pennsylvania where you took a guy with loss several times before. And you won a really difficult race.

BEGALA: Bob Casey the late governor was one of my heroes. He had run and lost three times before. And, you know, in Pennsylvania the elite's really look down on him. He's a blue collar guy out in Scranton. He was a lawyer. He's a accomplished guy, but his father had been mule tender in the mines in Scranton. Casey's father. And Casey's father fingers had all been broken by getting run over by coal of carts. That he would haul up with the mules.

I mean he was the real thing. He's like a John O'Hara short story. And the elite's all look down and noses at him. They used to call him the three time loss from the holy cross because, you know, he gone with that catholic school in Massachusetts.

Casey award is badge of honor and he thought me this. I say this to my kids all the time. The view from that canvas is highly educational. Mr. Casey used to say all the time. And if you can pick your self up again and put yourself forward, but it was an epic race he was running against Bill Scranton III. And here was Casey a son of a coal miner from Scranton and there was Scranton the son of the coal miner owner from Scranton. It was epic, a very close race. By the way in the primaries Casey defeated a young Philadelphia D.S..

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AXELROD: Named Ed Rendell.

BEGALA: Ed Rendell. And so it was, you know, it was really remarkable race. And we stay close and, you know, when the governor has passed, but he and Mrs. Casey have eight kinds. One of whom, his oldest son is the Senator from Pennsylvania.

AXELROD: And a great guy.

BEGALA: Also a client of mine.

AXELROD: Great, great guy.

BEGALA: Just to bring that.

AXELROD: One of the nicest people you'll ever meet in politics.

BEGALA: He in fact acts. He called me to set up a court. We're very close friends and I'd helped in his campaigning. And he called me when he decided to endorse Barack Obama in the primaries.

AXELROD: Yes.

BEGALA: So Hillary gone a campaign for Bobby so had Senator Obama in Pittsburgh.

AXELROD: Yes.

BEGALA: I was there it was phenomenal. I mean you could, you know, I know people think Obama can out in nowhere. He was a once in a generation talent.

AXELROD: Yeah. I know.

BEGALA: Even then.

AXELROD: I know something about that. Yes.

BEGALA: Yes. And I remember Casey. You know he was torn, he a relationship with the Clintons, but here was this young senator who took time out to go campaign for him and it was electrifying. And it was over Easter weekend. And he called up and said, I went out to that lake house and lake area in Northeast Pennsylvania and he said. And I sat with the girls his four girls. And he said I just, I can't be true to them and what we believe in as a family and not come out now and support Barack.

And I thought that so honorable. By the way he called Hilary. She was accepting on that. She wasn't happy, but the way he conducted himself even opposing my candidate was with such honor. He's just a remarkable guy.

AXELROD: You know there's a post script to that. Sort of that says something about both of them. I think it Reverend Wright (ph) story that broke around that time. And Senator Obama called Senator Casey and said, look I appreciate your offer or support, but if it's too difficult for you, you know I release you from your obligation and Casey said, no I'm with you. I'm with you. I give my commitment and I feel no less strongly. And he ended up spending 6 days on the bus with us in Pennsylvania in 2008. I would

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say that ...

BEGALA: If I didn't do it just for his politics because the states was wiring for Hilary that's right. It was in Hillary state, right.

AXELROD: I was not helpful ...

BEGALA: Right.

AXELROD: ... to him to do. And every single person who was on that campaign would tell you how much they love Bob Casey because he was so warm and so embracing of all of us and so humble. You know he's really an unusual guy. So I won so at that race on that.

BEGALA: So Casey won and put us on the map.

AXELROD: And then you went on to Jersey, right.

BEGALA: We went on Kentucky. Actually he works with Wallace Wilkinson in the next year.

AXELROD: Oh, yes. Wallace Wilkinson in this.

BEGALA: Who became governor of Kentucky defeated John Y. Brown in the Kentucky fried chicken area and the Steve Brasier who roundup being a great governor in Kentucky later.

AXELROD: Yes. A few years later, yes.

BEGALA: But, yes Wallace then came and won. It's the first time we'd ever work for a wealthy candidate it was kind of fun. And then we rolled.

AXELROD: And helpful too.

BEGALA: Very helpful.

AXELROD: Yes.

BEGALA: Then actually we split up. James went off to work in New Jersey for Frank Lautenberg. I sign on with (inaudible) that part the presidential campaign.

AXELROD: Oh there's that. Yes, yes, yes.

BEGALA: And flamed out and as this things happen, you know, went four months without a pay check and.

AXELROD: We were on the opposite side of that one because Paul Simon was my client, yes.

BEGALA: Who if you would have one more week, you don't want Iowa.

AXELROD: Yes.

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BEGALA: He was charging at the end.

AXELROD: Yes.

BEGALA: And he got it. He just project that he was.

AXELROD: He was very authentic guy, yes. Yes.

BEGALA: He was, I want decency, yes. Just a great guy. And you guys would have beat us if you have no one more week. I think.

AXELROD: Yes. Yes.

BEGALA: But as you know these things.

AXELROD: On the other hand I thought give her (ph) might have won that race. And you know he would've been a strong candidate I think.

BEGALA: He would have, but again it taught me. You know just I obsessing these defeats.

AXELROD: Mike Dukakis was the nominee.

BEGALA: Dukakis had more money and better organization.

AXELROD: Yes.

BEGALA: He also ...

AXELROD: And he'd been a governor. He was.

BEGALA: He'd been a governor, but he didn't, you know, unforced errors often kill in these things. Here Dick had decided he was the majority leader, not yet he was Dukakis chair. He was like the fourth highest guy in the House. And had been really gifted inside player, but authentically was concerned about especially trade and, and ...

AXELROD: Which was the issue that you really emphasize, yes.

BEGALA: He run on that, but then at the close of Iowa his campaign organized a charter jet full of lobbyist.

AXELROD: Yes.

BEGALA: Who flew to Iowa to campaign for him!

AXELROD: Yes.

BEGALA: And Paul Simon and Dukakis quite really destroyed us on that like you can't be the outsider candidate.

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AXELROD: It was like an airlift or lobbyist.

BEGALA: It was exactly what it was.

AXELROD: Yes, yeah.

BEGALA: And, you know, at that ...

AXELROD: And he was down on the ways means committees. So he had access to a lot of them.

BEGALA: Right. And that internal contradiction I think you'd positively call it.

AXELROD: Yes. It's hard to be a populous and airlift a bunch of lobbyist within Iowa.

BEGALA: Right. And that's an important thing in politics, right. It's what Shakespeare "To thine own self be true".

AXELROD: Right.

BEGALA: That was not true to Dick's message. And so quite rightly we got hammered for that.

AXELROD: That was one of the who do ...

BEGALA: I was a speech writer I didn't organize that.

AXELROD: Who do you believe me or you're lion eyes kind of thing.

BEGALA: Right. And that kind of authenticity it's why, it's maybe the best short hand of a campaign. Everyone you said it was an MRI of the soul. Dick has a very good soul, but we did something that was really at odds with what we are running on. And quite rightly we got spanked for it.

AXELROD: Yeah. No. I think that's right about presidential races and that I did say that they are MRI's for the soul. I think we're seeing a little of that even today. The higher you go. I always boil it down to what that old man (ph) told me in Chicago which is, the higher monkey climbs in a pole the more you can see his ass. The higher you go in presidential politics the more scrutiny you get.

BEGALA: Right.

AXELROD: The more difficult it becomes as it should be because you are auditioning for the toughest job on the planet. We're going to take a little break here for words from our response we will be right back.

Back with Paul Begala. You, so you reunited with Carville.

BEGALA: I was evicted from my apartment on Captain Hill because Dick didn't pay us for four months. And Carville took me in. He had one bedroom apartment. Tiniest little hovel and yet he took me in and let me sleep on his sofa.

AXELROD: Was this is a basement apartment or.

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BEGALA: It was a basement apartment.

AXELROD: Yes, yeah.

BEGALA: And we stay at bat cave.

AXELROD: This little. Yes, legendary.

BEGALA: Yes. It be came legendary back them. It just needed fumigation and I slept in his sofa which wasn't bad. You had to wrap your self in serine wrap but.

AXELROD: Did you have to watch Andy Mayberry when you rest?

BEGALA: Yes. I became an addict. You're right James was the D.C. Chapter President of the Andy Griffith Show fun club. But I, you know, I never forgot that. You know he took me in when I was literally broke and then he got me a job as Lautenberg press secretary. And Frank was up for election tough race. I had no job and no money, and in fact had to borrow money from my then girlfriend to stay afloat and to keep Carville and Begala up float. So Diane Friday, now Diane Begala went and -- she got a real job. She borrowed \$5,000, a lot money in the 80's. And I realize now at that time that I never paid her back. So at 28 or whatever years of marriage later.

AXELROD: Yes. She asked me to. To ask you by the way when, when that's going to paid off.

BEGALA: She married me for her own money. It was the only hope of being repaid.

AXELROD: Yes. So that was another battle royal the Lautenberg race. He was crushed the old dude when he was a younger dude and then of course came back later in his life. You had a number that talk about campaign to sort of. You had a number of young guys in that campaign who were, who became close associate.

BEGALA: Right, your friend Larry Grisolano.

AXELROD: Larry Grisolano.

BEGALA: He's our political director.

AXELROD: He Greg over there as well (inaudible) Greg.

BEGALA: No, no. John Ansalone (ph).

AXELROD: John Ansalone (ph).Yes.

BEGALA: That was our ...

AXELROD: Who's now up holster for Hilary Clinton.

BEGALA: And Karen Olik (ph) who's one of the top, media consultants. It was deputy of campaign manager. I was the press secretary. My deputy press secretary, a woman name Debbie Sack (ph) was with Columbia University, now a top executive at Columbia, and Neil MacBride who went on to serve Joe

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Bidden for year in the Senate. And then was our U.S. attorney in the eastern district Virginia

(CROSSTALK)

BEGALA: It's pretty talented group.

AXELROD: Kids always ask me, like how do you get to be you? And, you know, and how do you get be Paul Begala and so on. You get to do that by just jumping in and taking on whatever task you can. Find the candidate you care about.

BEGALA: Right.

AXELROD: Find the campaign you're interested in and give it all your all. And you will, if you have a passion for this you will find those opportunities and, but ...

BEGALA: My very first state Senate race, I was still in the college and Doggett was up for the election. So it was '81 and I'm a kid. And I was like, you know the very lowest ranking kind of intern, going to get coffee and sandwiches. And the worst thing that could happen, happened. Our opponent dropped the other race. And of Doggett was jumping around and dancing. The campaign manager got him Russ Tidwell (ph) who was still my friend. I still call him boss. And boss Tidwell. He sees me in the corner fighting back tears

He said, what's the matter, I said this is the only job I could ever get. I'm through. And he said it. I remember he said as long as you can walk and chew a gum you can find work in politics kid. I never forget that.

AXELROD: You guys went on Georgia and work for Zell Miller who was another sort of luminescent personality and ended up sort of on the wrong side of history ...

BEGALA: In the senate. But by far the best governor Georgia ever produced. Really remarkably transformed his state, he created a state lottery which many states did in 80s. But he understood power better than any of the rest of them. I mean it in a way like the founding fathers did. So he locked in all that lottery revenue. Not to supplement or supply existing revenue, but to create a new program, the HOPE scholarship.

To this day, over 90 percent of the kids of the University of Georgia are going free. They're going for free. If you maintain a B average, so there's standards and maintain the B average. You go to college tuition free and if you're here, you can get books free and even room and board free. It has transformed their state and kept the smartest kids ...

AXELROD: And the lottery money is actually gone to education.

BEGALA: Actually it's gone. The only state I know that did it right.

AXELROD: Yes, right. It's always the thing, you know, which is that lotteries are sold as programs for education and then the money is sort of a shell game and the money -- is to enhance the rest of the budget.

BEGALA: That only state that did it right because it's locked into their constitution. It can't be spent on

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other things. Some of it went to pre-K actually what you get. Which also -- so he go them at the front end.

AXELROD: So what happened with Zell Miller because he ended speaking, which convention did he end up speaking at Republican community?

BEGALA: He did spoke -- he gave the keynote address for Bill Clinton in 1992 convention which is still one of the great speeches about what it is to be a Democrat. I'm serious. It ranks up there with Mario Cuomo and Barbara Jordan. It is worth people getting out ...

AXELROD: Skip Barack Obama.

BEGALA: ... probably the best. No, I'm serious. But it's a statement what it is to be a Democrat.

AXELROD: Yeah.

BEGALA: And then what happened I think -- I do and I think his governor record as populous progressive is unmatched in Georgia history. And he got to Senate. He just hated it. He got there accidentally and tragically. He was pretty close to Paul Coverdell, the senator who died tragically. The Democratic governor at that time Roy Barnes really urged him. Because Miller had retired as governor, the most popular figure in the state. Begged him to take it and Zell didn't want to do it, I've never talked to him.

In between that by the way, I was working at the White House. President Clinton had me call Zell on offer him secretary of the navy. Zell was an old marine. He would have been great at it. And I remember him saying, that would be the job of the life but I promised Shirley (ph) that we, you know, stay in the mountains of Georgia and not go off on another political adventure. And he just hated it. Hated the Senate and ...

AXELROD: You know, that's -- that happens to a lots of governors.

BEGALA: Yes.

AXELROD: You know, your -- when you're governor, you actually do stuff. And actually not just governors because I remember Barack Obama walking out of the Senate chambers and then I met him outside the chambers and he said blah, blah, blah, it's all we do here is talk.

BEGALA: Right.

AXELROD: And it would really bothered him that, you know, that the process there was so tedious and ...

BEGALA: And that is a job description and Senate should.

AXELROD: Yes.

BEGALA: That's what the founders wanted. They wanted them to deliberate and to talk, but if you were action an oriented person, the way the president is, the way Zell is. The Senate can be very difficult and he just hated it. And ...

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AXELROD: But how did that turn him into a guy who spoke at the Republican convention?

BEGALA: He just became and ...

AXELROD: Which convention did he spoke?

BEGALA: At the Bush 2004 convention.

AXELROD: Yeah.

BEGALA: He did. And, you know, it really strained our friendship to say at least. Coverdell (ph) publicly broke with him and had donated at the Zell's campaign publicly said I want my money back. It was just a bitter, bitter break.

And I have to say I was thinking about doing the segment and this guy -- I mean, he called me his third son. I mean, I'm really close to him and I was thinking about doing that and I got a call from someone who said, look, you need to never do that, never publicly attack this man. I said why. And the person said because the chances are really good that you'll outlive him and you don't want that on your conscience. This guy has been too important in her life, that person was Hillary Clinton.

She call me up like an older sister. And said to set the politics aside, I'm totally with you and she maintained a relationship and her friendship with Zell. It didn't really reflect in Zell's votes. He voted with Bush almost all of the time. But it was just a human thing. And it was -- today Zell and I really close again and so was James. By the way, he's gone to visit him.

Governors had some health concerns and it was a real blessing not advice that no matter what your political differences are. This is somebody who I love and who I've real history with. He introduced me to Bill Clinton. Bill Clinton would've never hired Coverdell and me if it had him in for Zell Miller. And on top of that, he just personally have been such an important of my life. And I'm really glad that I didn't give in to those kind of more angry impulses.

AXELROD: There is -- there's another reason why Bill Clinton hired you guys. You guys were involved in this extraordinary Senate race in Pennsylvania. In 1991, it was a special election and the Republican candidate was a very, very popular former governor cabinet member and you had Harris Wofford and who was unknown. Former Kennedy administration civil rights official was deeply involved in the civil rights movement as part of the democratic administration but really not highly touted. As a candidate, he was sort of he was thrown in there to be the sacrificial lamb. What happened in that race?

BEGALA: Well, first, you know, Senator Heinz died tragically in a plane crash.

AXELROD: Yes. In a plane crash.

BEGALA: It just the most beloved person of Pennsylvania politics by both sides of the aisle. And that was just horrible. So my client Governor Casey was, you know, tasked by the state of constitution to select a new Senator. And, you know, he though hard about it, he looked at it as I recall General Kelly from the Gulf War. I think he though -- actually though about Richard Trumpka at one point, I though about Lee Iacocca (ph) but settle on Harris who was a friend of his.

Harris had worked for Martin Luther King. Harris wrote a live view (ph) article in the 50s that suggested

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that the civil rights moment should adopt the Gandhi's tactics of non-violent social change. He had -- in 19 years old, he had gone to India and written a book about Gandhi just after Gandhi was killed.

So, he and King became very close at the very beginning of King's public career as a civil rights activist. He was very close of Dr. King and helped to write many of his speeches in books. Then he transitioned and work for President Kennedy through Sarge Shriver who was a great mentor of Harris. So, he represented the kind of the greatest of democratic liberalism. And Casey appointed him to the Senate and we also had a secret weapon. Mike Donlin was our pollster. Mike roundup being a key advisor to Vice President Biden. I know you work closely with him.

AXELROD: Yes, he's part of my old firm now and, you know ...

BEGALA: Yes, absolutely.

AXELROD: Mike is an interesting guy because he started as a pollster ...

BEGALA: Right.

AXELROD: ... and roundup as a media consultant. And he is a brilliant guy.

BEGALA: Absolutely brilliant.

AXELROD: One of brilliant minds in politics.

BEGALA: Our first poll we are 47 points behind. And you did ...

AXELROD: But the margin error, I could have been 43.

BEGALA: It could have been 46.

AXELROD: Yes.

BEGALA: But, you know, you do the battery of issues. This was so instructive. And it was jobs, economy, unemployment, you know, everything was clustered around the recession that was pretty hard in Pennsylvania and toward the bottom at 3 percent health care. It is an open-ended question, three percent health care.

And Donlin and I have talked to Wofford about it. Wofford at that time was Casey's secretary of labor and industry, dealing with all of these factory closings. And Wofford said, you know, the truth is the jobs problem is really a health care problem. It's like all of these plants, all of these guys, they're having such a hard time meeting their health care cost. This was steel and mining and, you know, the brining industry that built Pennsylvania and he said their real problem is health care cost. So the truth is, if you want to do some of that job, you got to do some about health care.

AXELROD: Yes.

BEGALA: And, boy did that wok. And at one point he called me up, I was just turning 30 and I was a campaign manager. And so I was really, you know, under a lot of stress. And Harris was a great guy but like any good person, hated raising money. So, I rode him like a Byrd Mill (ph). He got to raise money

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and earn. So he went to a fundraiser and he called me up, how to go Harris, what you've got. And he said, well, not much money but some really good ideas. OK. Can I swear on this?

AXELROD: Yes, yes. Please. It's a podcast. If you can't swear on a podcast ...

BEGALA: OK. Well turn the volume down if the kids are in the car. Goddamit Harris. I can't fucking spend ideas. I need money. And he said, well, just hear me out. And I said, fuck dude and what. And finally he got me to calm down. And he said an optimologist said to me, you know Harris, your intellectual forbearers were lawyers and they wrote the constitution. That's why there's a right to a lawyer.

But if mine had written it, they would have said they were doctors. My intellectual forbearers, they would have said, well, if a criminal has a right to a lawyer, then a working person has a right to a doctor.

AXELROD: Yes.

BEGALA: And like boom, the light went off and we ...

AXELROD: And you did that end ...

BEGALA: Turn everything around.

AXELROD: Yes. That was ...

BEGALA: And it put health care back on the national agenda in a way it had not been for many years.

AXELROD: You know, it's funny because Senate races and governors races, statewide races paid media really matters.

BEGALA: Right.

AXELROD: I think it matters more than -- I hate to say this to a guy who is now we'll get to it running a super PAC, running ads in the presidential race. But particularly, later in the race, you know, they don't get covered the way presidential candidates get covered.

BEGALA: That's right.

AXELROD: Governor races, Senate races are not MRIs for the soul. And so you have a lot more of an ability and influence those races with paid media. That ad, if that ad will go down in history as one of the most impactful ads, how much did -- when you put that health care ad on, how much did it move the race?

BEGALA: Well, we went up from 47 points behind, we won by 10. It was an upset landslide.

AXELROD: Yeah.

BEGALA: Which -- if we had another week we would've won by 20. And ...

AXELROD: Against the former attorney general, former ...

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BEGALA: A great guy by the way.

AXELROD: Yes.

BEGALA: A fine two term governor and the attorney general of the incumbent president who was at 91 percent because of the Gulf War.

AXELROD:

BEGALA: Our last rally, this is where, again been a campaign manager on a hack. Wofford is a visionary. Wofford was speaking in Washington Pennsylvania, southwest Pennsylvania which is, you know, blue color country. And he got up there and he got carried away and he said, not only we ended defeat Dick Thornburg, but if I win, it would be the beginning of the end of the Bush presidency. Like holy shit Harris. This guy is at 91 percent. Can we just deal with the beloved two term governor we're taking on? And he said I just told the truth boys. And he said, if I win this Bush is through.

AXELROD: Yes.

BEGALA: It's amazing, it was exactly right.

AXELROD: Well, he was right. And so, you then guy -- you guys then took this win, this harbinger of something that was going on out there and you teamed up with Bill Clinton. What was -- what were your meetings with him like when you were talking about doing that race?

BEGALA: Zell Miller called us up. First of Clinton gone to visit Zell in the governor's mansion. He said I'm going to run. This is 91. And Zell says, I'll endorse you, I'll move up my primary so the south will have more say early. I'll move up the Georgia primary. And he had the kind of power to do that and he did. And a kind of in a society, he said I hired this boys and run my campaign. Who are they? James Carville and Paul Begala. And I said I never of them. Zell said that's a good thing. We've had too many people. You know in Washington loosing these races.

This is before Harris Wofford made Carville and I semi well-known. And so, Clinton probably just as the courtesy to Zell called us up and we went to see him. My collection is about September. It was in Washington D.C. one of these hotels on Capitol Hill. And we went in and just sat with Clinton and his friend and lawyer Bruce Lindsey just the four of us for hours.

And it was love at first sight. Because it's a first time a politician had treated me like a voter and citizen first and as strategist second. We talked very little about strategy. He did not say, look, Miller is going to move up the southern primary that'll help and my wife is from Illinois. So actually I'll do better. They're on the people think and, you know, I -- none of that. It was -- I still remember. This was in 1991. So again, my kid is like in 5th or 6th grade, I can't remember. My daughter and she's going to come of age and this new century is coming.

And I'm really scared of definitely what it's going to look like. And he went through the economic problems and the social problem that we had and he treated us like we love our country instead of just like we were hex. And man, it was the best possible way to make me fall in love with him and we did and we walked out.

I remember, I said to James, usually these candidates are sort of often this kind of sort of empty vessels.

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AXELROD: Right. No, no. they said tell me how I can win.

BEGALA: Yes.

AXELROD: Right.

BEGALA: And Carville just said my only question is he too good to be true? Which actually a lot of voters were saying later on when he first, you know, first on singing nationally. Like well, is he too good to be true. But it was -- it really was love at first sight and then we ...

AXELROD: So he came up with a couple of fables to relieve him up their anxiety.

BEGALA: Yes, we did. We found a few imperfections if you look carefully.

AXELROD: So, yes, I wanted just stop you on one thing because you said something that I really believe a. You know, I spent most of my career except for the two years I served with the president operating out of the Midwest. And I always carry with me this lesson that Gary Hart told me when he was running for president.

He said just remember Washington is always the last to get the news. And what I found on the White House and I don't know how you found -- your experience was but I always thought it was very hard to get read on the country from that building. Because you're sort of in a submarine looking at America through a periscope and you have polling and you have focus groups, but you're not out there. You're not down in the -- at the corner. So you're not -- what's the name of the place that you worked out when you were a kid?

BEGALA: Oh yes.

AXELROD: Mr. Court's hardware ...

BEGALA: Yes. In Stanford Texas. Mr. Court probably thought me more on the nail bin. Yes that's a big -- it's why -- in the campaign, the best job was mine. I traveled with Bill Clinton. We went to 48 states. And first if you get a chance to spend a year your life sitting next to Bill Clinton on airplane ...

AXELROD: Yes.

BEGALA: I highly recommend it to greatest education.

AXELROD: Will you able to draw him out?

BEGALA: But as, you know, with Senator Obama at that time, wined up talking -- we talked at religion, you know, we talked sports, we talked about life with my wife and I were having our first baby in the middle of that campaign. It wasn't just, you know, how I can win n New Hampshire. And that -- and then you get out there particularly in the campaign. It's harder in the White House, you're right. I wish tried to travel with him as much as I could even in the White House because you can -- at least I could peel off.

AXELROD: Yes.

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BEGALA: And, I would do that frequently. I go and peel of, you know, and go to like the hardware store in the Courthouse Square, you know, where the candidate and the President is speaking. If he can get out and talk to people, there's nothing like that. And it's a really isolating as, you know, experience.

AXELROD: Yeah, you know, it is. The town itself is a echo chamber and often the echo is wrong about what's going on the country.

BEGALA: That's why I think it helps so much that you're rooted in the Midwest. I'm still rooted in Texas, you know, my son is going to school there, all my families and friends.

AXELROD: Still advising the student government then.

BEGALA: I still talk, yes. But I think that that those initial experiences they cut, they matter. And I still do think about like the guys around the hardware store or Uncle Baster (ph) got arrested so Mr. Corthom (ph) in the hardware store. His Uncle Baster (ph) was our local J.P. justice of the peace.

He'd been on the baton death march. Now, he weren't happy when people drove a Japanese car up to hardware store. It didn't make him a racist, OK? But like understanding like -- I love the coast. But the real America, it really is important to have that grounding.

And so, even you're sitting in a White House, you're still grounded in a real place. And I think that helps a lot.

AXELROD: Speaking of the real America, we have to take another break for our message from our sponsor.

We're back with Paul Begala. Speaking of Bill Clinton, I've spend some time with him as, you know, and I feel likely to have done that.

BEGALA: And you helped reelect in 1996.

AXELROD: But he is, you know, he complicated guy, because I don't think I've ever met anybody smarter. But -- and his interest in policy is deep and rich. But on the other hand there some seems to be -- on the other side there seem to be sort of need this need for approbation, this thirst for the.

And that has created this duality. In fact, I remember James -- Saint Carval Santa Mu (ph) in March '92 when he came through for the Illinois primary, that he was installing Clinton's purchases. The only question there's a stuff that he's willing to lose for. He need to show that there are things that his willing to lose for.

And that approbation seems very important to him. And then of course he had his other. You came back to the White House in the midst of his greatest crisis, which is Wesbell Lewinsky (ph).

BEGALA: Right, just before (inaudible).

(CROSSTALK)

AXELROD: Oh, is that right?

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BEGALA: Yes, back in the beginning of 1997.

AXELROD: Yeah, yeah, the mid-January of '98 when that happened.

BEGALA: Yeah.

AXELROD: But there were also same to allude where he brought Dick Morris into the White House.

BEGALA: Right.

AXELROD: Who had help craft Jesse Helms campaigns and so on. Completely antithetical to your politics.

BEGALA: Right, so I left. I move to Texas. I never publically broke with the president. But I move my ass to Texas. I taught at the University of Texas. I went and to do P.R. with my buddy Jack Martin and Matthew Dowd and Mark McKinnon who public strategist. A group called public strategist. Because life was too short, I just -- I didn't, it was an approach that I was comfortable with.

But my loyalty -- that here's I worked it up. My loyalty to the president was, I could never publically break with him or attack him. It would not be fair given the access ...

AXELROD: Of course.

BEGALA: But I also wasn't going to work with an approach that I didn't think was consistent with my own approach. And so that's how -- and, you know, my time ...

AXELROD: But my question is to you -- how to you explain it in his mind. How do you explain his infinity for -- or willingness to work with brining in a Dick Morris even if it cause him Begala, Cavill (ph) and others.

BEGALA: You know, he just had the worst defeat up to that point.

AXELROD: In the midterm, yeah.

BEGALA: The Democrat had in the midterms. We lose 56 House seats. And I thinks ...

AXELROD: That's not man (ph).

BEGALA: I know, thank god the Obama people set the bar higher. But ...

AXELROD: Roosevelt lost 78 in 1938. I always tell myself that.

BEGALA: Well, and so -- by the way it's the part of the answer what would lose for, right? He went way out there on guns. Most progressive gun law we've ever had, far more than we could get today. The Brady bill a waiting period, a background check, a ban on assault weapons.

AXELROD: Do you think that's why he got ...

BEGALA: Of the 56 seats the NRA's analysis said 19 were because of guns alone, so no. But 19 of

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them we're guns alone. Some of them because he tried to give equal rights to gays in the military, and that cost a huge uproar, right? He want gays and lesbians to be able to served openly and honesty in the military as long as their compromiser don't ask, don't tell.

But he was standing up for gay rights in the early 90s when it wasn't a very popular position. He also raise taxes specially on the rich but some of the middle class.

AXELROD: Right.

BEGALA: To try to get the deficit under.

AXELROD: Which he did.

BEGALA: Which all roundup working -- so those were lots of things that he stuck his neck out on, and paid an enormous price. So when you lose as, you know, that catastrophically. You're kind of see. And so he's looking for other different, better hopefully advice, I don't think it was better but. And Morris had been the guy who would advice him previously, long before ...

AXELROD: And when he came back and won his governors seat back after loosing it.

BEGALA: So to me it wasn't crazy. It just wasn't an approach that I was comfortable with. And so, I was happy to see him reelected. I helped a little on the debates but otherwise don't have much to do with the reelection. As you know, you know, you we're central to that 96 country.

AXELROD: Well, since a kibitzer (ph) but ...

BEGALA: No, you're central. But, you know, I came around for the debates because I like them and he want me to help. But to me that's kind of how he square is, I was in trouble before and this guy him me with the come back and the trouble again maybe you can help me again. To me it wasn't crazy, just wasn't my own approach.

AXELROD. But he steer him sort of to -- for a little bit more to the right, you know, your DOMA (ph) come after that and some other things that really -- and, you know, the era of big government is over and all of that.

BEGALA: Yes, but and I could never defend DOMA (ph) and I don't believe his heart was in it when he signed it.

AXELROD: Well, his renounce it ...

BEGALA: And right so -- it was -- I think the wrong thing to do. But the critical I'm told from people who were in the room. The critical advice that he got at the time from his political team was compromise with the Republicans and cut entitlements so it's not to have a government shutdown. The Democrats is a party government. The government shutdown, it'll be catastrophe for you.

And Clinton listened but rejected and he stood firm against the Republicans attempt to cut \$270 billion, a huge cut out of Medicare.

ALEXROD: Medicare, yes.

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BEGALA: And he stood firm against that. That was not based on political advice. In fact he reject Morris his political advice if the people who are in the room we're telling me the truth. You know, I was living in Austin but, I'm believe that that was the case.

And so, the most important thing, he went with his own values instead of trying to do it was politically expedient, OK? You know, that's a tough thing to do. It roundup working but at the time it was a perfectly reasonable conclusion that a government shutdown would hurt the part of government more than it would hurt the Republicans.

AXELROD: Let's fast forward to this race and talk a little bit about. You've obviously known Hillary Clinton ...

BEGALA: Yeah.

AXELROD: ... for a long time -- said she counsel you on this Sally Miller (ph).

BEGALA: She did it. By the way when her -- when I left her husband and he was not happy with me. She keep calling, she was passing through Austin. She call me up. She liked to see it. And we had all little kids at the time. And she said "Bring the boys, bring down. And I can still see it. She was in her hotel room. She was on the floor playing with the toddlers.

And so, you know, you never see that on campaign trail. She much reserve than her husband.

AXELROD: Yeah, why?

BEGALA: But this how god made here. You know, it is (inaudible) so part of her soul is she have reserve midwesterner. And I wish that -- and I think it will that the process will stripe all of that reserved away and people will see.

AXELROD: You know it's interesting. You know, I wonder if that reserve actually is going to work for her, you know, where I don't think you can hide who you are.

BEGALA: Right.

AXELROD: But if you embrace your reservedness and maybe can explain it. Because part of the contrast that she's trying to strike right now and you're helping her strike it, is between someone who is measured deliberative serious. Versus someone who she and you are arguing is not in Trump.

BEGALA: And this is why she needs you. No, that's exactly right. Think about Senator Obama, right? At every critical juncture and people said "Oh, that's a disaster, that's terrible." He double down on that. He didn't have experience. So said yes, actually but I was right about the war. The most important decision of our time and I was right, so experience doesn't get you anything.

When he said he negotiates with the Iranians and everybody is in the conventional establishment so that was terrible. He double down on it. Hillary is who she is. And I had someone, a journalist recently. Oh, but Trump never uses a teleprompter and saw teleprompter said yeah, you know, Hillary is running for the presidency of the United States of America.

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And as you have said those words can launched armies and move markets.

AXELROD: Right.

BEGALA: And so, yes she's very deliberate about that and I do think she should celebrate that and highlight it because that's who she is anyway.

AXELROD: Yeah.

BEGALA: She's never going to be, you know, her husband would improvise and the state of the Union address.

AXELROD: Yes, yeah.

BEGALA: That's not her. So you got to be who you are.

AXELROD: Yeah.

BEGALA: And I do think that contrast with Trump is really wonderful.

AXELROD: I think her greatest liability is that she seems renaissance (ph) about letting people know who she is.

BEGALA: She is, that's right.

AXELROD: And I think you need to -- that is the price of admission in certain ways when you're aiming for president. People need to know. They want to know who you are. They want to know that you're comfortable in your own skin. And, you know, that's been a challenge for her.

BEGALA: Huge challenge. It is not -- it's hard to explain how much she hates that. It's not how god made her. And it's -- it's challenge. It's not that there's something terrible there. I've seen it. I mean I've had drinks with her, I've dance with her, you know, I had dinner with her whatever. She played with my kids. She was the first person outside my family to call Diane when she had Johnny our first baby in the middle of the campaign.

So, I've seen that part of her. And I've seen her frankly, you know, in the greatest pain you can be in. And so I'm 100 percent comfortable honestly with her heart and her soul.

AXELROD: Great pain (inaudible) to Lewinsky.

BEGALA: The lewinsky thing, you know, when she lose her father. She was -- it was early in the Clinton presidency. It really, really awful moments and she's the person -- to my observation such a stellar character. But is this hard for her to peel that back. It's just not -- she wants politics to be about ideas and about platforms. And she's a got a position paper on manufacturing. And one on child care an one on ...

AXELROD: Yes, yes but in certain ways. It some -- she believe and it's also her body armor.

BEGALA: Yes.

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AXELROD: In a sense. But, you know, and I should say I've seen that side of her as well. She was early patron -- really the patron saint curer of my wife's epilepsy research foundation. And I was the first speaker at our first event and spoke movingly, spend a day at epilepsy clinic, saw these EGs of kids who were going through these horrible storms in their brain and spoke about that meant to her.

So, I've seen that side. The thing that American have seen now is the e-mails stuff. Where is that come from? Is that also come from, I don't want people looking inside my life. Does it come from being attack for ...

BEGALA: Is that maybe. I mean, you know, they really are out together. Their really was a vast right-wing conspiracy. And, you know, we laugh about it. But it was jaw dropping and it's all been well documented now. I mean there was couple of shadowing billionaires and a whole cabinet (ph) of right-wing groups colluding with Kenstar (ph) to try to take out a freely elected president.

AXELROD: Some of those conspiracists are now on her team David Brock.

BEGALA: That's a good point. She's converted a couple of them.

AXELROD: Yes.

BEGALA: By the way, the guy who fund so much. Richard Mellon Scaife fund and admire her.

(CROSSTALK)

BEGALA: Where he ask President Clinton who he tried to destroy speak at his funeral. This was -- this is not a Bill Clinton lesson. He would "link" into me all the time. He'd say I destroy my enemies. I make them my friends. And that's -- what Hillary has been able to do with David Brock who was the most implacable foe. So that I think is a pretty impressive thing.

But what animates that, first off, I do think it was a mistake to have private e-mail. I was a mistake for previous secretaries of state as well.

AXELROD: Yes, you know ...

BEGALA: But they want to run for president. But still if that's ...

AXELROD: Not just that they're running for president. They didn't have their own servers. It was ...

BEGALA: Mitt Romney bought and destroy all the servers in the governors office. And what kind of story was that, nothing.

AXELROD: No, well ...

BEGALA: There is a different standard ...

AXELROD: I was on other so we try to make that ...

BEGALA: I know, why didn't the press pick it up, why? Well, because Romney is a person of great moral

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standing. And he is, he's a very good person.

AXELROD: Yes, he is.

BEGALA: So was Hillary. There is this grinding sense in the president always has been that somehow the Clintons are crooked where I came out Arkansas and I hate it. And it's a powerful bias in the press. It really is. And it something she had to struggle against everyday.

Now was mistake to use a private server? Of course it was, of course it was. She had said that. But, you know, the question is do we ...

AXELROD: Yeah, I think probably I agree. But I think part of the problem is she said in the lot of the different ways with a lot of different tones and a lot -- and a few different explanations. And, you know, it hadn't been well handled.

BEGALA: Right but we ...

AXELROD: I just hasn't been well handled.

BEGALA: That's right. But it's -- I think behind her now. It's been baked in. It cause some real political damage.

AXELROD: Yeah, yes.

BEGALA: There's no doubt about that.

AXELROD: Yes, her number took a dive after.

BEGALA: Sure, but, you know, the question people have to ask is, you know, who's going to fight for me. You know all of that toughness that sometimes people find off footing can be part of an advocacy plan. In other words yes, she's tough, she tough as males. She toughest person I know. And she's going to put that work to work fighting for me and fighting for folks who were poor, folks who were left out. Then that becomes an asset.

AXELROD: Talk about the Trump race. So you guys -- what is you're official title with priorities USA.

BEGALA: I've been adviser. I'm a consultant to the super PAC that's helping to elect Hillary the same one that helps reelect President Obama. This was an amazing thing on election night. 30 minutes after CNN called the race for President Obama. I got a call from Jeffrey Katzenberg our first donor down the L.A. And he says "What do we next?"

And I said Jeffrey I mean you had time to get drunk. And he said there's no time for that.

AXELROD: Maybe he's trying to keep you out of trouble. He probably go about had hallucination

BEGALA: But he said, I hope Hillary runs and I want to be for Hillary. And almost to person I can't think of any Obama donors who we had, who said "Oh, don't want her." I was remarkable how seamlessly that turn. So now I'm helping advice to super PAC. We're trying to do for her what we did, you know, on the margins but we help I think President Obama, which is define the Republican early and with Romney, it

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was talking his business record and looking at it and giving scrutiny and there were some deal there that were really difficult, really savage, real cruel to working people.

And those people spoke out about him. We gave them a voice in a platform. With Trump, he want's to build a wall. I want to build the ceiling, right. He's got his 40, not even 40. 30-35 percent of the vote and it is ironclad. And he's right when he says I can go in Fifth Avenue and shoot somebody, not lost any of my voters.

But, you know, that got him to 13 million votes. As, you know, you need 65 million or 70 million to win. The path between 13 and 70 is full of people who are not in his space, unmarried women, college educated women specially, young people of color. So I want to build a ceiling. And if you look, you know, we've advertising very heavily on the outrageous things that Donald Trump has said about women, about national security and most powerfully about the disabled.

AXELROD: Yes.

BEGALA: And that's building a ceiling. There's only one national poll or less 10 or 12 that hasn't even over 40. And he's got to get close to 50 maybe with 3rd and 4th parties he could win the 49 but that our job. And it begins with simply airing the statements that his made and how it reacts. I know you've seen it.

AXELROD: Yes.

BEGALA: But their family in North Carolina who have a little girl named Grace who has spina bifida and we let them tell their story. We just turn cameras on. And the mom says all the kids are Grace's (ph) know not to make fun of her disability. How can adult not know that? And he dad said well, that moment I got a chance to appear in Donald Trump heart and soul. I did not like what I saw.

AXELROD: You wish to explain with the moment was he mock a reporter from the New York Times who has congenital disability that causes his hands to operate in unusual ways.

BEGALA: Right. He did not mock his reporting, which is fair game. OK, you know, like reporters reporting you can say "Oh, you know, John Doe (ph) is economy (ph) reporter. And he mock and mimic his disability. And it was cruel and as you know ...

AXELROD: I have a child with intellectual disability so ...

BEGALA: 21 percent of us either are disabled of have a family member who is. I certainly do. That's a huge part of the country.

AXELROD: Do you think that ...

BEGALA: But set that aside, set aside that it's a big voting block. It's just a savage thing and this is a window into his heart.

AXELROD: Yeah.

BEGALA: It is, it think that dad was right when he said that.

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AXELROD: No, I think and I said on TV the other day that people appreciate when he kicks the high mighty in the butt. I think they enjoy it. It's different when you're mocking a vulnerable person. Now did you find in your research that move people?

BEGALA: It did, it did, it moves lots of people.

AXELROD: What about women?

BEGALA: Especially women, especially college educated women. I mean, you know, if you're thinking as strategist rather than as family member who's got family who are disabled. If you think as strategist, yes. That his path forward has got to be to do better with people with college degrees, women with college degrees, unmarried women and young people.

He's pretty much killed himself with people with color. His path has got to be maximize a white vote specially when people in college degree. Those kinds of comments and people ...

AXELROD: That you're ceiling.

(CROSSTALK)

BEGALA: I think that build ceiling for Trump.

AXELROD: He doesn't have as famously he doesn't have money right now despite all of his representation about his great wealth. He's not spending money. So you guys are basically going into these battleground states like shock and all. You're running an arrow war with there's no resistance to it.

BEGALA: Right.

AXELROD: How damaging is that?

BEGALA: Well, very, very. I mean ...

AXELROD: What's the absence of money in terms of not just advertising but in terms of the other things that a modern campaign, presidential campaign does. What is that mean in these closely contested battleground states?

BEGALA: It means he can't do the kind of people to people organizing that frankly the Obama campaign perfected.

AXELROD: The mix of data and feet on the ground.

BEGALA: It's that combination.

AXELROD: Yes.

BEGALA: That really was the breakthrough. And I mean hundred years from now people will study your campaign because from the beginning of the democracy we had people to people campaigning. But then, you know, mass communication came around and a lot of us and I was wondering, so what we really don't really need to do field organizing anymore because we can advertise.

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And what you guys did was take the best of technology to make that field organizing so efficient and precise and personal and meaningful, that when someone showed at your door. She wasn't just like knocking randomly.

AXELROD: She know who you are, she know who cared about it.

BEGALA: Oh, my god.

AXELROD: She knew that you were persuadable or that you needed to be motivated to vote.

BEGALA: Right.

AXELROD: And I think those things make a point or two difference and if you're talking about closely contested states. I think that could be very, very meaningful. I can't let you go without asking you this last question, Texas.

BEGALA: Yes.

AXELROD: Hey, there's always the speculation is to when Texas is going to turn purple when Texas is going to turn blue. Do you see that in the near term, the midterm? You've got large unregistered numbers of Hispanic voters and that state.

BEGALA: Texas is not a red state as the great Jim Hightower use to say. It's none voting state. We had in the primaries a Texas had the 49th best voter turnout, 49th. And at one point there were two Texan running. You know and Ted Cruz was on the ballot in the Texas primary. And won the Texas primary and still voter turnout was 49th out of 50. That's by design. The people who are running Texas now, the Republican who have dominated every single race for 20 years and lost single statewide race in 20 years and they're putting in place barriers to voting.

Well, some of your proteges Jim Brown (ph) and Jeremy Bird (ph) and some others have gone down there. And they're doing the lord's work of registering folks and trying to expand the electorate. But it is a long and difficult process. These people have been cut out and written off for so long that it's -- when I was kid it was one party state for the Democrats. Now it's a one party state for the Republican.

And the problem with that is the most committed or they would be committed if we have fully functional mental health system. The most crazy Republicans can dominate that state in the primaries. And so, you're looking for a correction. It won't happen in the cycle to (inaudible), it will take time. But overtime we will be able to I think turn that.

And also takes the Republicans disqualifying themselves. You know, I use to mock Bush. I use to say W. spoke Spanish so he could be ignorant. But he knew that proteges against Latinos was no way to run a political campaign.

AXELROD: Yeah.

BEGALA: And so, he had a very progressive. He was for immigration reform.

AXELROD: Yes.

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BEGALA: He was for bilingual and he -- Rick Perry signed a law getting instate tuition to the children of undocumented workers, of course because you want them to be smart and productive. So that was -- that's why Republicans in Texas and through the Bush and Perry era reliably got 40 percent of Latino vote. That's changing now.

Now there's a new crew and they're running the same kind of hard anti-Latino policies and messages that the national Republicans -- I think Texas will come around. But it takes a long to ...

AXELROD: And may be you got to go down there man, maybe you got to go back.

BEGALA: I go as often as I can.

AXELROD: If you can take Hank the hallucination, certainly you can take on that. Anyway Paul Begala, it's always great to be with you.

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