



Library podcast

An evening of science fiction with Nancy Kress, Jack Skillingstead and Daryl Gregory

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[00:00:38] Good evening Hi everybody.

[00:00:41] I'm back. I'm Stesha Brandon and I'm the Literature and Humanities Program Manager here at The Seattle Public Library. And as we begin this evening I would like to acknowledge that we are gathered together on the ancestral land of the Coast Salish people. We honor their elders past and present and thank them for their stewardship of this land. Welcome to this evening's event with Peter Buda judge presented in partnership with Elliott Bay Book Company. Thank you to our author series sponsor Gary Kunis and to the Seattle Times for generous promotional support of library programs. Finally we're grateful to The Seattle Public Library Foundation private gifts to the foundation from thousands of donors help the library provide free programs and services that touch the lives of everyone in our community so to library foundation donors here with us tonight. Thank you very much for your support yeah. I think

[00:01:39] Tonight's program will include remarks by Mayor Buttigieg and then a conversation between the mayor and Flora. Florangela Davila followed by Audience Q&A and then book signing. Elliott Bay Book Company have books available for purchase and the book signing is going to take place in the lobby which is Off 4th Avenue there. So it's the thing right in front of you on the other side of this wall. Now without further ado I'm delighted to introduce tonight's program. Pete Buttigieg is currently serving his second term as mayor of South Bend Indiana a Rhodes scholar and a Navy veteran. Buttigieg was educated at Harvard and Oxford and in 2015 he received the new frontier award from the John F. Kennedy Library Foundation and the Harvard University Institute of Politics. And he earned the Joint Service Commendation Medal for his counterterrorism work during a seven month deployment in Afghanistan in 2014. And that was while he was on leave from being mayor of South Bend but a judge recently announced that he's running for president and if elected would be the first openly gay president. After his initial remarks Buttigieg will be speaking tonight with Florangela Davila the managing editor at crosscut a veteran journalist Davila has worked for 14 years worked for 14 years as a staff reporter at The Seattle Times.

[00:03:04] She's also been a longtime arts contributor to K and K X as well as cross-cut. Her work has appeared on NPR and in Seattle Magazine and Florangela is also a former faculty member at the University of Washington. Prior to cross-cut she served as the voices of the region director for the Seattle nonprofit for Tara where she launched Ampersand the print magazine and executive produced Ampersand live. And I don't know this for sure but I think she might be the genius behind the very cool and upcoming crosscut festival. Is that accurate. Sort of. Now she's shaking her head. She does want to take credit anyway totally. Tonight they will be discussing shortest way home one mayor's challenge and a model for America's future but a judge's new book is personal and political. Sharing his experiences is an Afghanistan veteran who came out and found love while in office and sharing the hard work he undertook to revitalize his rust belt city.

[00:04:01] I can't wait to learn more so please help me welcome Mayor Peter Buda Judge thanks so much.

[00:04:12] Thank you for coming. Thank you to the library for hosting us. I have to say having been to many cities and many libraries this facility and the activity that goes on here is really the envy of many a mayor and many a city. So congratulations on everything you've achieved.

[00:04:32] I think the sooner we get into a dialogue with our moderator and then then with all of you the better but I was asked to sort of introduce myself and introduce the book and I always feel a bit strange talking about a book while it's here so probably the best thing I can do is read a few very short passages in succession to give you a sense of some of the stories I'm trying to tell and then we can engage in a discussion and cover as much ground as possible. But let me begin just by explaining why I wrote a book The days of a mayor pretty busy and so you're not looking to find things to fill them with. But I felt that this project was necessary long before it crossed my mind that I would be entering a presidential political conversation in 2020 and one of the main reasons is that I felt that we were being sold a certain story about what goes on in the middle of the country that communities and it doesn't just have to be Midwestern ones but communities whether they be rural or communities in industrial or post-industrial areas areas or are being pitched as though the way to our hearts is resentment as though we can't handle change as though we're supposed to always be looking for greatness in the past.

[00:05:44] But that wasn't our experience in South Bend. And so in telling my own story I also wanted to tell South Bend story and give a sense of how a community that was up against a lot over the years could find its way to a better future. So again I'll give you just a handful of passages that are just a quick flavor of what we're up to. The first I wanted to do is just talk a little bit about my generational account because I make it in the millennial generation by about three weeks depending how you count and I've thought I'd say a little bit about just what what I've noticed about being the age that I am to be born in 1982 is to be just old enough to remember the Soviet Union and to have its fall be the first seismic geopolitical event of your lifetime.

[00:06:37] I remember the kid who dominated second grade show and tell with a little chunk of the Berlin Wall Gray and rough on one side but smooth and painted on the other a trophy from his father's business trip to Europe. And there was Miss Martin repeatedly explaining to us why our maps and globes with union of Soviet Socialist Republic spread and impossibly stretched letters across the Siberian tundra were now obsolete I'm young enough that I don't always use a TV set to watch television but old enough that you might catch me using the phrase flat screen TV as if they sell any other kind. Only now can I make sense of the way my grandparents generation used to talk of color TV long past the time when you could find a black and white TV for sale anywhere in America from my freshman dorm room in late 2000. The most high tech thing I did every morning was log on to s Benz WMD u dot com and look at the two inch square low resolution still image from the webcam on their transmission tower aimed at the Golden Dome. Updated every few minutes a grainy but comforting link to home. Web sites didn't have much to them back then. I can see myself telling my grandchildren one day but things moved quickly by senior year I was banging out my thesis on an early model I book a few sophomores in another dorm we're creating a Web site patterned after the face books that Harvard passed out at the beginning of the year so that we could figure out who was who in the dining hall.

[00:08:11] I want to share a little bit. Speaking of Indiana about something that I may or may not get asked about tonight but get asked about an awful lot which is my relationship with our governors.

[00:08:22] On my third Republican governor one of them became well known as the vice president as you might imagine. I view the world a little bit differently than he does

[00:08:42] So you agreed all about that. There's old chapter about that all. I'll actually read the end of the chapter and you can read about all the adventures because I just want to offer my assessment of how we got to where we are now.

[00:08:56] The Fix I'm talking about the fix to the so-called religious freedom restoration act. The fix was not exactly a leap forward in LGBT inclusion an effort failed the next year to actually establish a civil rights policy which meant going forward that in many parts of Indiana people could still be fired for being gay. Embarrassingly we also remained one of just five American states with no ban on hate crimes. But the whole episode showed that trying to appeal to radical social conservatives no longer worked in Indiana because it would run afoul of what most people believed including typically conservative groups like the business community. The controversy crippled Pence's reputation as governor and created an opening for his Democratic challenger John Gregg to mount a credible campaign against him for the governor's office in 2016. What no one could have known then was the future benefit to Pence of establishing himself as a hero to the religious far right. A political martyr almost it made him into a brilliant if cynical choice of running mate for Donald Trump nominating an evangelical heartland governor was the best way for a thrice married formerly pro-choice philandering ex Democrat like Trump to reach out to religious conservatives and begin unifying the fractured right around his candidacy. And while Trump's life story was anathema to everything Mike Pence believed in this was the right move for Pence too if viewed in the cynical light of raw politics. The governor had

lost respect on both sides of the aisle in his home state and was now widely expected to lose his re-election strange bedfellows though they were Mike Pence and Donald Trump needed each other.

[00:10:36] Win or lose teaming up with Trump could give Pence a second political life another part of the book that probably the part I most enjoyed writing is in addition to being something of a love letter to my hometown the city of South Bend. It's also a bit of a love letter to Charleston. My husband who's here somewhere.

[00:10:54] By the way I lost track of various and so really the best chapter is the one that's about him.

[00:11:05] I don't want to spoil it. So you'll have to read it but I want to tell you about

[00:11:09] This moment that led me to him which is me figuring out how to how to come out and then something that was actually maybe even harder than coming out which was dating. So here's part of why that was hard. I had come out of the closet in order to make it possible at last to create a meaningful personal life. I was already well into my 30s and hoping as I've described to have a family someday. The politics were what they were. Now that I didn't have to worry about being spotted or outed it was time to start dating how is a gay mayor or any mayor supposed to go about getting a date. The closer to home I looked the harder it seemed. It could be an ethical minefield. A mayor in his own city can certainly get his calls returned. But there's also the risk that someone will completely misunderstand why you're inviting them to meet for a coffee at chicory cafe or a pint at Fiddler's hearth farther afield friends from college were willing and eager to introduce me to people they knew. But most of the eligible guys in question lived in New York or Washington.

[00:12:20] Most of them I was lost in the expanse of flyover country probably even more remote than if I were overseas since I wasn't moving anytime soon. I was going to have to think closer to home. But when it came to South Bend it wasn't even clear where to look. I thought of the countless local doctors and business leaders of my parents generation who had seemed intent over the years on fixing me up with their bright and lovely daughters. Where were these would be matchmakers now. And how was it did not one of them had a son or nephew. They wanted me to meet my city had never felt so small obviously that part of the story has a happy ending. Let me just end with with a bit from the last chapter. Just a couple of paragraphs that kind of sum up what I was trying to say at the beginning which is what I think is at stake in the story of a community in the so-called Rust Belt that found a future not by looking to turn back the clock.

[00:13:26] Progress could begin only once the loss by which I mean more than anything the loss of our factories progress could begin only once the loss had been fully metabolized.

[00:13:36] Nothing is more human than to resist loss which is why cynical politicians can get pretty far by offering up the fantasy that a loss can be reversed rather than overcome the hard way. This is the deepest lie of our recent national politics. The core falsehood encoded in make America great again beneath the impossible promises that coal alone will fuel our future. That a big wall can be built around our status quo that climate change isn't even real. Is the deeper fantasy that time itself can be

reversed. All losses restored and thus no new ways of life required to defeat this temptation is to see what actually lies on the other side of acceptance not diminished expectations but still greater ones for us. Paradoxically the only way to relive anything like our hometown's former greatness is to stop trying to retrieve it from our vanished past the founders of car manufacturing here would scarcely recognize today's industry as their own. But it echoes their originality and audacity showing that the less we concentrate on emulating our forebears the more we begin to resemble them at their best. So again hopefully that gives you a flavor for what I'm about what I was trying to write about. But at this point I think I'll invite our distinguished journalistic hosts to join in a conversation.

[00:15:08] How's the book tour. How's the exploratory tour.

[00:15:15] There we go. All right.

[00:15:17] It's fantastic. So when you win when you're not exactly extremely famous and you put your name forward for a conversation about the American presidency you're not totally sure what'll happen if anybody will notice or if anybody would care. But I've got to say it's been about a month now and we have been in living rooms in Iowa and New Hampshire and we've been in libraries from Cleveland to Brooklyn to Seattle and the response is incredibly encouraging.

[00:15:41] I just want to say that it's nice to meet somebody who has a more difficult name to pronounce than mine.

[00:15:47] I can I can relate to that Buddha judge.

[00:15:49] That's right. Yeah it rolls off the tongue just like it looks right.

[00:15:54] You should know that Seattle experienced snow apocalypse or Snowmageddon or snow something not too long ago which was a really nice anchor for me as I approached your book because here I was picking up a book written by a thirty seven year old white gay man Oxford Harvard educated and a veteran concert pianist Arabic speaker somewhat I related to you and the fact that you have a dog two dogs I think that was good and I married.

[00:16:37] So that was good. I mean those were the things in common but you but you opened up the book and I knew I know nothing about Indiana. I've never visited I'm from the West Coast. Come see you.

[00:16:48] You opened the book up with scenes and scenes of snow and what what it's like to be in a city and I think you actually talked a little bit about running and like navigating the city both looking at the city through windows and just you're a runner. Yes. And you take us a lot through the book about what that experience is like being so physically close to the ground and seeing all the different facets of the city.

[00:17:12] Yeah in some ways that's the experience of every mayor because by definition the mayor inhabits the city right. So you you you eat what you cook from a policy perspective we also have to be close to the earth kind of metaphorically and literally and I enjoyed writing a lot about snow in the first chapter because snow is for sources great leveller everybody's gotta deal with it. Read a lot of snow where we live but it's also the mortal enemy of mayors right because one botched snowstorm is the end of your career as a mayor. We're kind of familiar with that but

[00:17:45] That's a different story. Our own our own previous mayor. Anyways not touching that

[00:17:55] You're the only child the son of college professors. I also believe that the fact that your father was is an immigrant. When did political action become a calling.

[00:18:11] Well we were always a politically aware family but we were never politically connected or even politically involved. So the table talk at dinner was always my parents had their professors Professor friends there and they're always talking about world affairs did they what did they teach English English and social theory and art. And you know whatever the news of the day was was the hot topic at dinner but I'm not sure I understood that it was possible for someone like me to to really have a role or be part of it at first.

[00:18:42] My my big aspiration as a kid was to be an astronaut. And but I think by the time I got to high school I began to realize that that public service could be a calling. That all these things that my my parents and their friends analyzed at the highest levels and and talked about and debated that that I could actually maybe go do and what I didn't realize though was was that purpose so much purpose for me would come at the local level. So you know by the time I got to college and I hung around the Institute of Politics that they have there and there was a lot about national politics a lot about global affairs almost nothing about the local. And so it was only after I returned home that I realized that actually there was as much adventure and sophistication and complexity and excitement in the backyard politics and as much as much at stake philosophically in how we handled issues of equity and development and in race as there was in any of the national issues that got more attention in the national papers and on TV.

[00:19:44] But after Oxford you took a kind of a fancy job so you could say that in consulting. Yeah. And something with grocery pricing.

[00:19:53] Yes I became an expert on grocery pricing.

[00:19:57] Actually I wrote about how to my great surprise I want to being a very intellectually formative time because I also learned a lot about data.

[00:20:05] You know I was doing math for a living as a consultant and began to understand the complexity and the richness and the power and the pitfalls of using data to make decisions gathering data and live it you know weaving possible futures out of data you talk about sort of that fork in the road of possibly continuing that you could do that live comfortably or run for office right and you turn

home and you felt that the management experience really did give you some formidable strength formidable muscle that you could bring back home.

[00:20:43] Yeah I think a lot of people faced this choice.

[00:20:45] I certainly felt up until that point every turn of my life was very much what you were supposed to do. And I had some powerful institutional brand name that spoke for me in a way Harvard Rhodes United States Navy McKinsey and Company. These are all things that you know these very powerful brand names and they're these institutions that kind of take care of you in a way too. And so the hardest part was when I realized that I could make a difference at home more of a difference at home than it really would matter that it was me and not somebody else there. And I realized that Management Consulting was not for me I remember this moment where I mean I really found it's interesting and stimulating and I enjoyed obviously a good paycheck and and I enjoyed my colleagues a lot.

[00:21:34] But I remember this moment I was working on I think I was on the grocery study and I got up to get a cup of coffee and I just suddenly thought to myself I don't care and I mean I cared about doing a good job for my boss and for the client but I didn't fundamentally feel like it mattered to the world that that this client do better than its competitors in the grocery space. And that was when I began to realize that I had to do something that is just intrinsically important not because a client was paying me to care about it but just because it mattered. And that was when I knew I had to leave the warm embrace of this institution that took care of me and go out on my own.

[00:22:13] When you returned to South Bend what was the situation.

[00:22:17] It was tough.

[00:22:19] In 2011 right around the time I began running for mayor there was a Newsweek article about 10 American dying cities. And I think we were number eight. We were a city that had never recovered from the departure of these auto factories in the 60s. So I hadn't even I wasn't even alive to see them in their heyday. And yet I grew up surrounded by these empty factories and empty houses and which is why I got that idea growing up that success meant getting out only to realize over time that I belonged at home.

[00:22:51] When you see a list like that we we get we're on the other kind of list the most expensive place to live. List the when you see that and we bristle when you saw your city on that list. What did you think it hurt.

[00:23:08] I mean and there were a lot of these dumb lists that come up and where they're good all retweeted them and when they're bad I'll talk about why their methodology sucks.

[00:23:15] But but that one. I mean this wasn't like you know some click bait this was Newsweek and they said we were dying.

[00:23:25] And the reason. If you read the article they said we were dying was that our youth were leaving and that people didn't see opportunity. And I think for us it triggered this question of not just like is our town sleepy or not enough going on but is this community that shaped us going to die and there are two ways to respond. I want us to throw up your hands. The other is to say OK I got to be part of changing that. And by then I was already having conversations with a lot of people around how I might be part of that solution. And and the incredibly fulfilling thing about this this now all going on eight years I've had in government is we did. I mean we didn't fix everything but. But we really changed that trajectory of the city. And what I found was that actually this this kind of counter-culture project of really helping a community like ours turn around was so compelling that I was able to enlist other people people I grew up with and convinced them to come back. People who'd never even been. We had a policy director is a Rhodes Scholar from Seattle who I was able to get to come be part of South Ben's comeback because it was a chance to shape something in a way that was going to impact so many people. Those of us who grew up there and then people who were just attracted to that challenge.

[00:24:44] Can you tell go a little bit more in detail about the transformation that you saw and a little bit about the transformation that you helped.

[00:24:52] Yeah. So one thing we had to do right away was deal with these vacant and abandoned houses.

[00:24:56] There were so many that nobody could even tell me how many there were. And so we started counting and we found that there was something like thirteen one hundred. But also that it was a contagion that the longer they were there the more there would be other vacant and abandoned houses destroying the value of our neighborhoods.

[00:25:12] This probably doesn't compute in Seattle but we have a lot of houses that have become unaffordable because the price is too low. I know this sounds weird but if a house the value of a house falls below forty thousand dollars which you can get actually a pretty good house in South Bend for that much but then it's impossible to get a loan on that because a bank won't get its financial transaction costs back. So we had to really tackle this and what we did was we set a very aggressive goal after a year of analysis and very sophisticated segmentation of the markets and the condition of the houses. I came out with this kind of almost childlike goal which was we're gonna do a thousand houses in 1000 days. And the reason we did it and we put up a Web site where you could see how we were doing. You could tell when we fell behind. The reason we did it was I realized that what was missing more than anything was the the political propulsion. So when I attached myself to that goal it meant that my political future depended on achieving it. And for my team and for the administration and anybody in the community who wanted us to succeed it created this extra forcing mechanism that when we weren't sure how we were going to get something done we just had to come up with something or else I would've been toast. And so I've used that approach in a lot of ways this is talk a lot and this is an idea first popularized I think by Martin O'Malley who had a very performance oriented approach to being mayor of Baltimore that leaders can can add value by making themselves

vulnerable. But part of how you make yourself vulnerable is through data by publicizing the information about how you're doing tracking toward a goal so that if you're falling behind everybody can see it and it creates a new sense of urgency.

[00:26:56] You actually tell some really remarkable stories about putting yourself on the line and that kind of data driven approach. One thing that struck me too is when when you're analyzing how to run a city there is a moment when you also talk about the need for being merciful. And when you have that there are rules. But sometimes there have to be exceptions to rules. I want to hear a little bit more about that.

[00:27:23] Yeah. So a lot I learned over time that a big part of how you earn your paycheck in office is not by handling technical questions that have a right or wrong answer but moral questions or is actually not obvious what to do and so I have a chapter it's kind of a meditation on data. I really work to be a very data oriented mayor and lead a very data oriented administration.

[00:27:42] But with the police shootings can you talk a little bit about that in terms of.

[00:27:45] Yeah it's a great example. So we started installing these these acoustic devices that could hear a gunshot and it's supposed to help tactically because you can deploy police right away before somebody even calls it in.

[00:27:58] Then we thought you know while we're at it we should check what percentage of the time when somebody hears a gunshot they call 9 1 1.

[00:28:05] We figured it'd be like 90. It was like 20 and we started diagnosing it.

[00:28:13] We found the problem was you know police project an air of munitions. And so if somebody heard a gunshot and didn't see the police there right away they didn't realize it was because we didn't know they figured it was because we didn't care.

[00:28:29] They gave up and then I realized I had something that was very hard to count right there on a dashboard form which I can watch that number and find you treat it as a barometer of trust in the police. And it would actually be an indicator over time if that proportion when it's a very grim statistic. Right. We don't have any shootings at all but if we can watch the number rise the more often it happens the more people think there's value in letting the police know especially in minority neighborhoods where trust with the police is a major issue.

[00:28:58] Then I just might be able to quantify how much people are trusting the police. And we started making that right alongside you know more traditional crime statistics one of the things I asked the police to report to us on the reason mercy comes into play is that so efficiency is all about creating rules and following those rules Mercy is about breaking rules.

[00:29:24] Mercy can be in many ways the enemy of efficiency.

[00:29:31] We have a physical place where you can pay your water bill you can walk in and pay your water bill in cash that drove me nuts as a management consultant. It's inefficient you have people making change and all this could be done online and I kind of just want to get rid of it except we have a lot of people who don't have access to online services. We have a lot of people don't have access to banking. We have a lot of people who this might be the only social contact they get sometimes is to go see the friendly person who takes your water bill payment. And so we decided to tolerate an inefficiency because there was a social good that came with it being there. And I think Mercy is about understanding the exceptions to all these rules were created even if it means we're being a little less efficient.

[00:30:21] Some of the time I'd like to know a little bit more about South Bend IN TERMS OF THE what comes across in your book is sort of this this honest to this optimistic approach in terms of your politics and your outlook and your performance. How do you navigate that and hold onto that without being affected and impacted when you have a diverse set of constituents people who are so different than you are a little bit like what you were talking about people who don't have access to computers who don't have that who are completely different how do you govern efficiently and effectively when people's needs may be so dramatically different.

[00:31:09] Well there is a kind of a top down answer and a bottom up answer the top down answer is is kind of the data picture it's the utilitarian side of it. We created a 3 1 1 center which is a campaign promise not just because I wanted it to be easy to know who to call but because we wanted the data so that if it turns out we have this you know outbreak of mist trash pickups in a certain neighborhood we can spot it right away and deal with it. So when very different people have very different problems we can we can detect it across this kind of broad base. But again this doesn't capture everything. In fact this misses a lot. And so we have a lot of low tech solutions to one thing I do every month or two as we do a mayors night out. I just go to a school or a neighborhood center set up a card table and anybody who wants to can get a short one on one appointment with me. And it's kind of exhausting. I'm also an introvert. I mean I'm not that I don't like people but I'm 28 back to back meetings really really wears me down but it teaches me so much about what's at stake because it's one thing to sit in a room and say OK we've got to change this thing for these people. It's one thing for me to say as I did you know we'd be we'd be better able to keep trash rates low if we change it around to where you bring your trash bin to the front so that our kind of robotic armed trash truck can pick it up then to keep having it in the back where a human picture has to come in and you know they have a lot of back injuries and it's an extra full time employee.

[00:32:37] It's another thing for a senior citizen to come sit across from me and say Bring a photo of her front yard which is a slope and say did you think about what you're making me do when I got to drag this stupid trash can down to the curb. And so finding ways to desegregate to to take the average do not just be looking at average but looking the individual pieces that make up that average we can only do that through encounter through narrative. And one of the things I'm trying to do in the national political space is take that same kind of granular ground a narrative approach to reality that I think every mayor experiences especially when it's not one of the very biggest cities where you don't

have a force field of staff and security around you when you go to the grocery and all you want to do is get some toilet paper and beer and get out of there but somebody grabs you by the collar to talk to you about what you did to their trash bin right and find ways to bring that reality and grounded this up to the national level because the other beauty of that involvement in politics is there's just no alternative facts there's a hole in the road and somebody is mad about it. I can't do this Trumpian like it's the best road ever and there's no hole right like people like.

[00:33:56] No it's right there. Fill it. Right. And.

[00:34:00] And I think we need to find ways and I think means are available to do it especially through good political storytelling.

[00:34:08] To take that same humanity and bring it up to the highest levels of American politics when did you start thinking that you want it.

[00:34:17] So I did not think that I'd be doing this now at this age at this stage in life. From this day job this is not something that I would have expected. Charleston sometimes reminds me that on our first date when he was trying to figure out like Do I really want to be dating a politician or not.

[00:34:36] He asked me about the future. And the answer which in fairness to me was honest at the time was you know I'm up for re-election right now if it goes well and I have a very successful second term that I think I might get a shot at running for governor in 2020.

[00:34:52] But what I saw changed what I saw happen is that the world needs the American political structure and the office in particular needs something that that other people can't bring to it it needs something.

[00:35:05] In my opinion my biased opinion.

[00:35:09] It needs voices from different kinds of communities than where most of our politicians come from. It needs voices with that kind of local on the ground experience maybe more than it needs people who've been marinating in the U.S. Congress for 10 or or 30 years.

[00:35:30] And it needs voices from a generation. The school shooting generation the generation is going to be dealing with climate change the generation that could be the first to be worse off economically than our parents if nothing changes.

[00:35:39] And I guess over the last year or two years it dawned on me as we're all figuring out what to do with this presidency and how to make ourselves useful that as improbable as it is there's this funny alignment between what's needed by the office and just maybe what I bring to the table doesn't South Bend still need you.

[00:35:59] So now that is my home. But the whole premise of my campaign for mayor was that we needed a fresh start. We need to change an original reality and new eyes and what a shame it would be if the guy who went around saying that is the last to realize after eight years of really changing a lot of things in the city. But having my own weak spots and things that I will miss or won't pay attention to. What a shame it would be if I were the last one to realize it was time for a fresh start again.

[00:36:30] I want to get back to the year your political ambitions but I want to return to South Bend when you when you look back at your successful tenure as mayor.

[00:36:44] I want to hear about something that didn't work. I want to hear about a failure.

[00:36:47] I want to hear about something that you would do over the next there are some things that we just haven't gotten there yet.

[00:37:01] So much of your book talks about lived experience. That is a phrase that's throughout. And so you learn one learns a lot.

[00:37:12] Oh yeah. And the number of times that I was about to let somebody have it because they were getting in the way of an initiative mind. I mean some things that sound very local and parochial but we're very important like we want to put this road through a neighborhood and I was absolutely convinced that this was the only way to do it and that people were standing in the way of it were resisting growth and I was wrong.

[00:37:32] Turned out I was wrong and I was shown that I was wrong by the involvement of a lot of community activists until we found a better way. There is I mean some of these are comical debates that arise almost literally out of Parks and Recreation. There is a golf course that is like my Vietnam because I was I was trying to get it off the city's books because I wasn't excited about subsidizing golf in that particular property that was outside city limits and I hadn't accounted for why a lot of people relied on that golf course as a place to to walk and to engage with it had nothing to do with golf. There's some very gray. I write about an episode that I wish I could. I believe I did the right thing but I wish I could have done some things differently. There was this very racially sensitive episode involving recordings of alleged allegedly racist comments made by police officers who ended up firing them. Yeah I was basically left with a choice between demoting a popular African-American police chief or essentially setting him up to be indicted. And it was just a no win situation. I think I did the right thing. But it bothers me to this day that our community had to go through that. So you you look this is an exercise constantly and learning what could be done differently and metabolizing that and growing and getting smarter for the next time around so that when there are those goals that we haven't got to yet when there are failures every time somebody gets shot in our city I think that's a failure of the entire American political apparatus from from the mayor on up to the national level. But I also feel like I'm fighting it with one hand tied behind my back because I can't do anything about gun policy in our city. But I know that that's not an excuse. And I believe we've taken steps that are good

ones that have contributed to a reduction in gang and gun violence in our city. But all of this is unfinished business.

[00:39:38] That's the part that makes it hard to walk away from any job I think in public service is the job of course is never done sorry I'm looking through my notes because I had a question about trying to remember the timing you in the intro. You talked a little bit about Mike Pence being the governor at the time and pushing legislation and discriminatory legislation very you haven't come out yet.

[00:40:10] No. What was that like. Bad being

[00:40:17] You. You were worried at the time you write about being worried about the economic impact it was going to have. That it was going to be much harder. Here you are a mayor very caring about your city doing all these things bring it take getting it off of that Newsweek list.

[00:40:37] This legislation is prompting boycotts. And people are refusing to come and conventions and I think that. And CWA is is talking about.

[00:40:49] Yeah. And CWA NASCAR even. You know you're in trouble when NASCAR is disappointed in you.

[00:40:59] And you hadn't come out yet. Yes. And I'm wondering what was that like enduring all of that.

[00:41:06] Well like a lot of experiences it was partly an exercise in compartmentalization.

[00:41:11] So frankly it wasn't my place to react to that as a gay person. It was my place to empower activists and policymakers to stand up and say this is wrong. And as a mayor it was making my job harder because it made our state a laughingstock and it tainted our city by association with the state. But as a person it upset me because you shouldn't have to be part of the LGBT community to recognize that we're all worse off if we live in a world where that kind of discrimination is OK. But the uplifting thing was it turned out that there were enough people Republicans and Democrats who agreed that they compelled the governor to change course. And I think in many ways it reflected well on our state for all the flaws we have in our home state.

[00:42:00] That the pushback was so swift and so intense that in a matter of days he had to back off regarding your flirtation with running for president where you write about doing a report when you were in high school on a fellow named Bernie Sanders.

[00:42:29] When you look at the slate where where are you.

[00:42:34] Where are you in line in terms of Bernie Sanders Elizabeth Warren are you are you are you as left as you can be to appeal to this outspoken younger progressive demographic in the Democratic Party.

[00:42:57] I consider myself to be a strong progressive at the same time I also notice that there's been this pressure to define yourself ideologically. My values I think I'd make them pretty clear and I made clear where I stand on policies. But I also think we're missing the extent to which a lot of people right now are not coming at this ideologically. The number of people in my state who had their choices narrowed down to either Sanders or Trump the number of people in my county who just mathematically there must be lots of them who voted for Obama and Trump and Pence and me tells you that there's some other currents going on here that are really important to understand right.

[00:43:41] I mean the president of the United States doesn't even have an ideology. He has a style maybe but it doesn't mean that he doesn't care.

[00:43:49] Right. Which is part of why the U.S. doesn't have a foreign policy. So I think we need to on one hand I think this is a moment where more than ever we need to be clear about our values. You know part of how I did earn respect and support across the aisle from independents and Republicans in our city was never by pretending to be more conservative than I am. It was by focusing on results and making it clear that my values motivated my actions so if even if people had different values at least they knew that I came by these decisions honestly and and at the same time I think we need to recognize that the habits I think especially across the political professional class and across the press to some extent of trying to fix us all in this kind of matrix of ideologies is less and less suited to the reality we're living in when we have to ask just fundamental structural questions of the Electoral College is a bad idea.

[00:44:43] Is it conservative or liberal to point that out. I just think it's I just think that the person who gets the most votes ought to be president.

[00:44:52] And to me that's a commonsensical position that might be considered bold but it's not coming from a right or left place. It's just coming from a certain view of what democracy means. And I think there are a whole bunch of issues that read that way.

[00:45:07] My last question before we turn it to the audience is a lot of us sit and read books and read listen to music. I was deep into your book and then I got to the part where you're playing the piano and I. I asked Alexa Alexa play Rhapsody in Blue because that is the piece that you were playing. It's a great part in the book and started making me think you're a millennial sort of what's on your iPhone what's on your playlist. But then I realized the question I really want to know is what's your campaign song. Oh

[00:45:42] Well I. We don't officially have one but we're thinking it going with Creedence around the bend.

[00:45:55] I'm looking to Charleston because he's the one who pointed this out at some. You know I'm from the band so that's pretty natural. I think it's got a nice intergenerational quality as a song. It's about you know a place up ahead and I'm going right.

[00:46:08] I mean it's it's kind of how we think about this and got a great guitar lick.

[00:46:19] We'll take some questions from the audience.

[00:46:22] All right. Looks like we have a question right over here yes.

[00:46:27] I wanted to ask that since your campaign is really making a generational pitch. How or. I wanted to know what you think current politicians have been doing that's failing younger voters failing to motivate them and get them out.

[00:46:44] Yeah I think a lot of decisions right now are being made as though the future is somebody else's problem. So part of what I'm trying to do is describe what America could or should look like in 2054 because that's the year that I get to the current age of the current president.

[00:47:02] And I think when when you God willing.

[00:47:06] When you regard that the state of the Union in that year not as a theoretical issue but as your problem then I think you reached different conclusions. I think you have a harder time embracing tax cuts that would for the wealthy as that will not pay for themselves and will create ballooning deficits that will later be used as an excuse to cut services. I think that you especially if you spent half your life with America and or ask about whether we're thinking about the long term when we commit U.S. troops to foreign interventions you know today we're hearing about a peace plan that would get U.S. troops out of Afghanistan in five years I left Afghanistan five years ago thinking I was one of the last troops to be there and that was almost 15 years after we got started climate is an issue that we'll be dealing with for the rest of your life and I think you simply cannot treat it as if you can't just hope it will take care of itself. If you're concerned about how life is going to unfold for us all in the next two years. So there are some very concrete policy implications to an outlook that regards the concerns of the younger generation as as our own and I fear that that perspective is not being taken on board by many of the people in power in Washington today we have a question up here.

[00:48:29] Yeah. Hi. I wanted to ask. I saw in a recent interview you were questioned about packing the court if if elected. Obviously the Republicans have gone to very bold measures to institute their sort of government. What they did with Merrick Garland for instance do you think that it's best to counter that with bold moves like packing the court or finding some sort of middle ground in there.

[00:48:51] So what I would say is the Democrats the idea of fair play has really come back to bite us many times and at the same time we don't want to emulate what we're opposing right. So one of the reasons that I think we need to look at Supreme Court reform to me it's not about.

[00:49:15] It's not just about having a more progressive court.

[00:49:20] I mean certainly the decisions made but as somebody whose marriage exists by the grace of a single vote on the Supreme Court I do think about that a lot. But what I'm really interested in is how do we stop the slide of the court toward becoming a nakedly political institution or at least being seen as such. And so you know one one thing that's been put forward is let's just as the Republicans basically did they basically changed the number of justices from nine to eight for it for as long as they could. And so the answer that someone left her proposing is like well let's make it eleven. It's actually not in the Constitution right. How many how many justices there are which is interesting. I think there are other solutions that might actually speak to that even better. One would be a 15 member court where you have five members appointed by Democrats five by Republicans and then five who can only be seated by unanimous agreement of the other 10 it takes the politics out of it. There's other ways you could do. You could have a rotation off the appellate bench. The point is we've got to do something so that every vacancy does not turn into this apocalyptic ideological battle because that harms the court and it harms the country.

[00:50:32] So I had a question over here.

[00:50:35] See you right here.

[00:50:40] Well first I just like to hear your question. I do want to note we're hearing from a lot of guys so hopefully we can get some balance.

[00:50:47] Sorry go ahead. I'm a guy too I just want to make sure for the next election it doesn't anybody side someone who was my favorite professor in college.

[00:50:57] Fleur Angela I'm sorry I didn't hear the first part second floor Angela's one of my favorite professors in college. Brad I. But back to this. You gave a great talk on TED about how you came to realize that your community had this this awesome awesome kind of natural resource underneath the ground right. This fiber optic cables and how you took that and made something of it. I'd like to hear a little bit more about how you came to realize that that was there.

[00:51:29] Yeah. Thank you for asking that because not everybody is as excited about things like fiber infrastructure as I am. But I actually think it's really important. Right. So it's important intrinsically because part part what we did was we. It turns out the Internet's a physical thing. And you know it consists of fiber links and they had to put them somewhere and where they put them was often on the old railway and highway right a ways that were built up for industrial or other reasons and so as we were figuring out our future as a city part of what we realized was that we had great fiber because it followed these railway lines through the Midwest. We also had these power substations with nothing left to power because the factories had shut down and we have cold weather which can have its virtues because if you have cheap power good fiber and cold weather you're a great place for data centers. Then we started working the harder part was making sure that it was a fertile place for data analytics companies because you create a few jobs by hosting the machines but you create the best jobs by it by having people work on the on the data analytics and we have businesses doing this now.

[00:52:28] The the bigger the theme is the talk that you mentioned and the thing I'm really trying to get across is that we do well when we take what we already have and we fashion it into a new source of value.

[00:52:41] It's not a mayor's coming or a lot of pressure to just make up you know clusters or make up new ways of growing and actually a lot of it has to do with taking what you have and just making something new from it. And South Bend has a knack for that but I think that's something that can be replicated across a lot of American communities. But again the first thing you have to do in order to get there is to acknowledge that that future you're trying to build is not as simple as just rewinding to something you used to have we have a question in the middle.

[00:53:15] It's on.

[00:53:15] You can just talk into Hi. I'm part of Moms Demand Action. And I just you spoke with. Frustration about not being able to impact gun policy as a mayor. I'd like to hear what you would do as president to impact gun violence prevention policy.

[00:53:33] Yeah well first of all the measure that just passed the House would be signed into law right away.

[00:53:38] If I were in charge in camp and you know the background checks are one thing.

[00:53:44] There are a lot of other things we need to do interstate interstate trafficking stronger federal protections.

[00:53:50] Asking where we draw the line on assault weapons.

[00:53:54] I mean the way I come at this is I believe all of those measures by the way are compatible with the Second Amendment right. Somewhere in between a slingshot and a nuclear weapon we have to draw a line that I think is consistent with the Second Amendment because we've already all agreed we can't have a nuclear weapon but allows people to have the rights that they believe that whatever rights are most important to them when it comes to production and sporting and the rest of it. I think we can totally do that. The frustration I think this points actually to a deeper issue which is it exposes the problem with our democracy because if background checks are something that 90 percent of Democrats and 80 percent of Republicans and the vast majority of gun owners can all agree that we ought to do how is it that the Senate can't agree that we ought to do that. That's only possible if our democracy has become warped to where the center of gravity of the American public is not reflected by the center of gravity of the American Congress. And that's why I think we need to entertain structural reforms so we're talking about electoral college or redistricting or the way money comes into politics or any of the other measures that have been talked about because a good measure of whether our system works is that we should get to a place where it's never again possible to have 80 or 90 percent of Americans agree we ought to do something and have Washington incapable of delivering that.

[00:55:27] So thanks for your activism on that we have a question on the upper left. I'm happy.

[00:55:35] I'm from South Bend as well. All right a test and I went home last weekend and me and my mom had a conversation. She is blaring Fox News of course you can imagine where I'm at on that. How do we become decent again.

[00:55:50] What a great question. This is so important because I worry that what's happening right now in our politics and the current president who I obviously am very opposed to I worry about the extent to which he can bring out the worst not only in his her supporters but in his opponents I'm worried about what's happening to us to I see it in a kind of condescension that happens sometimes toward people for my part of the country and we need to look I'm not talking about winning over if somebody votes the way they vote because they're a committed racist. I don't want their vote. I'll never get it. And it just is what it is.

[00:56:34] We just simply have to outvote them but if somebody as many people in my part of the country did voted the way they did because they felt the system was letting them down they wanted to burn the house down and they viewed my party as basically saying the system is perfectly fine which was not convincing because it is not true we have to find some human basis for connecting with people on the other side of that gulf.

[00:57:05] This is only one country I think about a lot in terms of my experience in the military because there were people that I learned to trust my life to and vice versa with radically different political commitments and backgrounds but who did not care. They did not care if I was going home to a you know boyfriend or girlfriend. They didn't care what country my father emigrated from. They just want to know that they could trust me to guard or drive their convoy and get them to where they were going alive. We need to find means to build that same kind of trust among Americans. I think that is the promise of national service. I think that does start to naturally happen when our democracy is more democratic. When our economy is less unequal but there also just has to be some acknowledgment of the role of grace and forgiveness in our politics. And that I'm sorry but you're not a good or a bad person because of who you voted for. All of us are capable of doing good and bad things. And why leadership matters is that it can arouse the best in us and it can arouse the worst in us. And that's been my view is what's at stake in 2020 20 so

[00:58:21] We have time for just two more questions. I'm so sorry. I'm going to take one here and then maybe one from the overflow section up there and then we'll just acknowledge the overflow section.

[00:58:33] Yes. So overflow section here. Thank you. Applause.

[00:58:38] So I know we could be here all night asking questions and so you will have an opportunity if you get your book signed to chat a little bit more. But we've got two more questions.

[00:58:48] Here's one Hi. I did my graduate degree at Notre Dame so I was there around the time that you were elected mayor. And I just wanted to share a little anecdote that I remember of you and then think about how that's.

[00:59:02] No no no it's good. It's good. In 2013 South Bend had its first what we called a pride prom which is when you know the LGBT community got together and everybody that didn't get to have a problem a bunch of adults showed up and had a great time and got pretty drunk.

[00:59:21] And Mayor Pete showed up and his suspenders with his shirt sleeves rolled up. Serving drinks he wasn't schmoozing. He wasn't showing up for pictures. He was he was there to support the community and this is before he even came out.

[00:59:35] And I think really the measure of a leader is what they do for people without being seen.

[00:59:44] And so I just wanted you if you could talk a little bit about how our current president is attacking the LGBT community and what you think could be done.

[00:59:55] You know first of all I remember that event.

[00:59:57] Those are great ones so thanks. Thanks for your hand.

[01:00:02] Look the community is still under attack. Right. I mean on one hand we'll think of it this way. You know bullies specialize in targeting vulnerable people.

[01:00:17] I can't think of somebody more vulnerable than a transgender kid in high school. High school is complicated and intimidating. If you were transgender high school was complicated and intimidating if you were not transgender right. That's that's how it is. And if you just got to go to the bathroom like everybody else and the president of the United States and other politicians are basically giving ammunition to people who can't tell the difference between you and a predator. That leads to real harm members of the military. You know the military is probably the largest employer of transgender people in the country if they're willing to put their lives on the line for this country.

[01:00:54] They have earned our support the lack of a federal equality act that's not just this president.

[01:01:07] That's something that Washington's got to do again I think most Americans get it. We just haven't gotten there yet policy wise so that you can't be fired for it for who you are who you love.

[01:01:17] And so you know I think that what we're seeing for the president just kind of cynical politics but what we need to see from the country is a response. So I'm under no illusions that we're where we need to be in terms of LGBTQ equality. That being said you know look at look at how far we've come as recently as the beginning of this decade when I was getting involved in politics and when I was an ensign in the Navy Reserve you know there are certain things I knew to be true.

[01:01:46] One was that you could either be in the military or you could be out but you could not be both and another was that you could either be in elected politics in a place like Indiana or you could be out but you could not be both and the idea that I came out and was re-elected with 80 percent of the vote and sometimes do interviews in the context of presidential politics sometimes my husband at my side or other interviews where we talked for 20 minutes about issues and it doesn't even come up tells you just that's historic in its own way right.

[01:02:22] It tells you just how far we've come and it gives me faith that we can go the distance.

[01:02:33] So we have one final question from the overflow section. Go for it.

[01:02:37] Hi. Hi. You can see us all the way up here. But I can see you are representative in the House introduced Medicare for All type legislation today. And I was wondering where you stand what your thoughts are in that type of legislation meeting somewhere halfway. What are you.

[01:03:03] Great. So the short answer is yes I believe that this is the direction we need to move in. Let me also say I'm not having a hard time. I'm excited that the representative put that forward and I haven't had a chance to kind of go to school on on the policy structure that she put forward.

[01:03:21] Let me say I think anybody in the 2020 conversation who talks about things like Medicare for all has a responsibility to explain what it would actually take to get there and the version of it that I think makes sense is you take some version of Medicare and you make it available as a sort of public option on the exchange and if people like me are right that this is going to be not only more universal in its coverage but more cost effective because if we get it right there will be purchasing power and rates setting to make sure that we are doing something about the fact that right now America spends more of its medical dollar on bureaucracy and less on patient care than almost any other advanced country. And that this can help if people like me are right about that then it will beat out the corporate options more and more and become a very natural glide path. We could call it Medicare for all who want it on the first day but it becomes a glide path toward a single payer environment which I believe if for no other reason than that most citizens of advanced countries enjoy this. And I don't know why Americans would settle for less and our system has not proven to be better in terms of efficiency or outcomes. I think it's a common sensical position to do that by the way single payer which is characterized as a far left position. It represents a compromise between the left position which is nationalized health care and the right position the far right position which would be to just have total private sector you're on your own.

[01:04:53] So let's stop calling this a fringe idea and start recognizing it as a compromise a public payer but a private provider. Let me end just because I know we're wrapping up by why I think this matters. I think that people on our side of the aisle need to get back in the business of talking about freedom and I think we've been served up a version of freedom where the only freedom that matters is freedom from freedom from government freedom from regulation of freedom from taxes. And we've forgotten that there are a lot of positive freedoms freedom to do things that good policy can support

just as bad policy and bad government can and can diminish it. I just went through one of the tougher moments in my life. We lost my father to cancer recently and two things really got me through that moment. The first was my marriage a husband who took care of my mom and took care of me took care Dad. Toward the end and just lifted us up as a family. But the second thing was that through that whole process we only were think we only had to think about what was medically right for him and for our family. We didn't have to think about money because of Medicare. We were more free to spend those last weeks and months thinking about our family and think about how we loved each other and think about how to help each other through that time. Our freedom was enhanced because of a policy and I want every American to enjoy that same kind of freedom.

[01:06:38] Thank you so much Mayor.

[01:06:39] Pete thank you so much for Angela. That was a wonderful I wish we could stay here all night and just hang out and talk but unfortunately we can't. So those of you who are going to get your book sign up and invite you to come in line up outside that door down the far wall those of you who are heading out you'll exit through the lefthand door.

[01:07:02] Thank you all for coming. Thanks again to Mayor Pete and Flor Angela for being here tonight and. Have a wonderful evening

[01:07:17] This podcast was presented by the Seattle Public Library and Foundation and made possible by your contributions to the Seattle Public Library Foundation. Thanks for listening.