

Getting Curious with Jonathan Van Ness & Mayor Michael Tubbs

JVN [00:00:00] Welcome to Getting Curious. I'm Jonathan Van Ness and every week I sit down for a 40 minute conversation with a brilliant expert to learn all about something that makes me curious. On today's episode, I'm joined by Stockton, California Mayor Michael Tubbs, a leader in the movement for Guaranteed Income and the subject of the new HBO documentary "Stockton On My Mind," where I ask him: How Do You Mayor? Welcome to "Getting Curious," this is Jonathan Van Ness. On this week's episode, we have an incredible guest. And I'm just so excited to welcome you. So I don't want to build it up too much. Welcome Mayor Michael Tubbs. How are you?

MAYOR MICHAEL TUBBS [00:00:36] I'm so good. Thanks for having me.

JVN [00:00:39] So you, I've just got to watch your doc, your new documentary on HBO. I just have, like, chills on my legs and my forearms, just thinking about, about your story and, and just how much changes you're making as the mayor of Stockton, California. So welcome.

MAYOR MICHAEL TUBBS [00:00:55] No pressure, Jonathan. Thank you.

JVN [00:00:58] So, I mean, we've spent a lot of time on "Getting Curious," thinking about, about down ballot races and about how important those are to, you know, to community and to our local lives in a way that is so much more meaningful than a lot of, like national politics, in ways that we don't often get to think about. And a lot of those policies, you are really on the cutting edge of, one of them being guaranteed income. What does investing in a community look like to you? And that's, that's really kind of where I wanted to start.

MAYOR MICHAEL TUBBS [00:01:34] Well, thank you for the question. It's what I think about every day. And part of it, as someone who was born and raised in Stockton always thought I would leave the community and never come back. So I think investing in a community, I think part of it is just being very present and spending the time to build relationships. I think all the things we're doing in Stockton on the policy level and on the programmatic level, and on the improving the community level are important, but it's all really rooted in investing the time of the messiness of relationships. The people, I agree with on most things and people I agree with on very few things.

And just take spending the time to invest in building the trust, but also learning the lives of the people I represent. A lot of that is done by doing more observing and listening than talking. And I think another way of investing in the community or the way I approach it is

sort of using all the resources, all, like giving everything so all the time, energy, love, flaws, connections, networks using all that in service of improving the community. And then that translates into what I, how I try to govern in terms of understanding that investing in a community isn't investing just in buildings, or investing in infrastructure or investing in new development. Right, really investing in community means investing in the people and doing everything we can to invest directly in the people. And that's why we've started this income program. That's why we have the scholarship program. That's why we're doing the work to reduce gun violence, because it comes from understanding government is nothing more than people. So the most important investment in the community or in the government has to be made in people but in all people, and particularly the people who have been divested in for so many years.

JVN [00:03:19] Yes. OK, so let's talk about that. I, I very much. It strikes such a chord with me of the like, you know, I come from a town that I wanted to escape and you know, never go back to. And I, I feel that. I think that so many people share that sentiment. It's like, gosh, if we could get more people to, like, go, because so many smaller cities all across the country grow these incredible people like yourself. And also not to give myself a compliment, but like myself.

MAYOR MICHAEL TUBBS [00:03:48] Absolutely yourself.

JVN [00:03:49] And then so many of those places. And then so many of those places are inhospitable, not welcoming to people that have been passed over, divested in, you know, not welcomed. And so then we have these incredible, like coastal cities and then a lot of cities in central, you know, smaller places, whether it's central California or, you know, middle of America, a lot of these incredible innovative leaders that have been, you know, huge parts of the community, they leave and they don't get to come back. And that's such a loss.

So how can we make this a more enticing community to bring in young people and families and innovative leaders and, you know, things like that? How did that happen for you? You grew up in Stockton, and I kind of want to hear about, I think so many people think of California as this like liberal bastion, but actually like San Francisco, L.A., San Diego. Yes. But then, like Central California is kind of its whole own thing. And how you kind of got involved in local politics, because winning the seat of mayor or winning the office of mayor wasn't your first win. And correct me if I'm wrong, but you are the youngest mayor ever of Stockton. Right?

MAYOR MICHAEL TUBBS [00:04:52] I'm the youngest mayor of a city of more than 100,000 people ever. I was elected at 26.

JVN [00:04:58] I love titles so much, they-. I'm sorry you just had to take your earphone out of your-, I hope I didn't cause hearing damage, but that's so cool. You're the youngest mayor of a city over 100,000 people ever.

MAYOR MICHAEL TUBBS [00:05:12] When I was elected.

JVN [00:05:13] In the United States.

MAYOR MICHAEL TUBBS [00:05:14] Yeah, in the United States.

JVN [00:05:14] That is so cool. But you were a city councilor, but you were elected to the city council at 22.

MAYOR MICHAEL TUBBS [00:05:20] Yes. So I, I started. So as you mentioned, born and raised in Stockton. But like so many young people in communities like Stockton, I was, I was told literally that to be successful means I had to leave. So I oriented myself towards doing so. I think part of it is because I didn't grow up in the part of Stockton where I have fundraisers at now, I grew up in the part of Stockton where a lot of the work is happening on the south part of the city. The other side of the tracks, my mom had me as a teenager. My father was incarcerated. So poverty was real. And the issues we're talking about were really real. And it didn't give me a lot of affection for the city, I actually kind of hated it. I hated the violence. I hate the lack of educational attainment. And I just knew I had to get out. And then my junior year in college, I was interning for President Obama's White House, and my job was to work with mayors and councils. And that was the first time I saw how at a local level that mayors and councils, although not perfect, can actually do things and effect change and see the change in real time.

And that's when I thought it be cool to support candidates in Stockton because my mom and family were still there. But then while there, one of my cousins, Donnell James II, ended up being a victim of a homicide at a house party. And that is what kind of made me think about going back. And part of it was just survivor's guilt. Feeling just really guilty in that I had gone to Stanford. I worked at the White House, partly because I came from Stockton and told the story about the challenges it took to, to, to to lead to go from Stockton to those places. And I was thinking, well, how is Stockton actually better for my personal success?

And then as a spiritual person, I thought, well, maybe all this stuff is happening because God wants me to do something to, to improve Stockton. So that's why I decided to run for city council. I appreciate you saying that because it's not just you wake up and you become

mayor. That took time in the trenches, when no podcasts with superstars and no, no limelight, but really just behind closed doors and noonday meetings, learning the community, learning how to govern. In that four years of city council was the only reason why I was prepared to run for mayor at 26.

JVN [00:07:24] My agent, one of my agents, loves to say to me that we always think of these like overnight successes or overnight celebrities, but no one ever sees the like 15 or 20 years that it took of work for you to get to this like overnight, you know, sort of thing. So that, I always am aware of, you know, of kind of, that people have a lot of journey in getting where they got, but that story is just an incredible one. And the initiative that you have taken, I think, I mean, I could honestly spend like the rest of the podcast really talking about that. But I'm, I also want to talk about just how much, how much of what you're doing kind of is on the cutting edge of the country.

And it's just so interesting how you are so well positioned to be the person talking about so many of these issues like guaranteed income and also how the changes that mayors and city councils can usher in so quickly. So, so much of what's happened in some of the face of the protests that have happened and talking about defunding the police. And we've seen city councils in these last few months reshape budgets and do things that are so local and so, what's the word? Like targeted like it, it's so-. Which I just think is so great.

So how does that? I was, when I was doing some of the research for this, I was kind of writing like, I'm holding this up for listeners to know. It's like I was kind of writing like a family tree of like how city government works and trying to kind of figure out, you know, what budgets look like and what, you know, kind of who's at the top of the totem pole. So I wrote, like, mayor. Then I wrote beneath that on one branch, police chief. And then on another branch, city council. So is that accurate? That like the mayor is kind of at the top and then, like, the police chief is kind of operating right below that, then the city council is kind of like the Congress.

MAYOR MICHAEL TUBBS [00:09:15] Yeah, well, in theory. In theory, but Stockton, like Sacramento or, like, San Jose in California, there's another role called the city manager that does the day-to-day work. So the mayors, and in a sense is more like the chair of the board, and see, you see manager is more like the CEO. But because the police chief is usually there longer than the mayor and the city manager, so they report, but they have their own base of power because they have more longevity, because they're not, they're not term limited. They, police chief is, most for four, 10, 15, 20 years. And then the city council, they're part time, but they vote, their vote matters just as much as mine. So it's a really interesting mix of more sort of using influence and more using the bully pulpit and helping to set priorities than actually having hard executive authority. Like, so Mayor

Garcetti is lucky in that sense because in L.A., because he has executive authority, but in most cities in California, power is so diffuse and that's why people get frustrated because they come to the mayors, say, "Do this today," and usually, my answer is, "If it's a good thing and it's not being done. It's not because I don't want to. It's not because I don't agree with you, it's because there's a process, there's a system or I don't have the authority."

JVN [00:10:37] So I was just watching this other documentary on Netflix about, like, ICE and immigration. And it was basically kind of asserting that, like, the system, the system is set up so big and so complex so that some of the ICE offices that are, like, actually doing the, like, detaining and deporting, it's, like, they're able to say, like, absolve themselves of some of the evils of that system because they're like, "Well, I'm just doing my job, you know, I'm," but the system, the systems are set up like that. So that is harder to diffuse them and dismantle them.

So how, what do you say to people that are so frustrated? And you are someone who has, you mentioned earlier, father incarcerated. You had a cousin who was ki-, the victim of homicide. Also having grown up in issues of poverty, I'm sure that you had interactions with law enforcement that made you, like, you said, like, kind of hate this city and resent the city. So it's like you understand that frustration, but you also understand, you know, kind of how these systems work. So, and I wasn't trying to compare like government to ICE, but I guess I'm just saying, like, what do you say to people that are frustrated? Like, and when protests don't work and when, you know, people in Asp-, or in Aurora are still getting like protest, peaceful protesters are getting like, beat, you know, where do you, you do the frustration? Is it just a matter of patience, patience, or?

MAYOR MICHAEL TUBBS [00:11:55] No, no. I tell people all the time that anger is a, if you're not angry seeing a lot of the injustices in our society, you're, you're dehumanized. You should be really angry seeing kids in cages. You should be really angry seeing people killed by police. You should be really angry seeing homelessness and poverty. That's like a baseline, that's necessary but not sufficient. And protests are important. We have to protest and push and create this space for the actual policy change. I tell people all the time, "I'll be completely honest with you. We may not agree on everything. I'll let you know kind of this is where we're at, this is where I see it." And this is how you get it done, because, I mean, I ran for office because I was angry.

My, my cousin was murdered and I sat there and said, OK, well, what can I do with all this rage I'm feeling? And I just decided to challenge, channel that into being part of the system and not part of system in terms of allowing the system to continue, but part of the system with an orientation towards kind of making the changes and make it so that when

folks are protesting, they're so on the inside, that does not have to be protested against. Someone on the inside who gets it. Someone on the inside, who needs kind of protesting, pushing to make the changes that we deserve. But it's tough because, I mean, these things are very, it's, it's exhausting. And it should have been changed yesterday. So saying, "Wait for tomorrow or wait for to-," I get why people are upset. But we also live in a pluralistic democracy where there's a lot of people protesting, but there's also a lot of people who are OK with the way things are. And oftentimes the people who are OK with the status quo actually vote more than the people who want change, which, which makes the incentives different.

JVN [00:13:33] Oh, wait, what? Say that again. I need that to sink in more.

MAYOR MICHAEL TUBBS [00:13:34] Yeah. I would say if you look, I just the data in terms of who votes and who doesn't. The people who are OK with the status quo, who are OK with the way things are, vote. They, they, they vote disproportionately. They have a disproportionate stance to who's elected and what laws are on the books and the people who are upset and protesting, some vote but don't vote in the numbers that, as we should. If we're so upset and we want to see something change, we know that the vote's not perfect and it's not a panacea, but it's a powerful tool. And I know for in my case that oftentimes peo-, like what my political consultants will tell me. "Do, you, your-. Is this an issue that voters care about? Will voters, do voters see this as important? Or voters think you're not thinking about them." It's because a lot of the issues around poverty, around police reform, some voters do care about it. But a lot of folks who are really deeply impacted, don't vote as regular. And because of that, they're not usually seen by other folks whose job is dependent on getting more, the most votes. And that's what I'll try explaining to people like, "Look, you may not like any of your choices, but you have to make a choice or the choice will be made for you. And I can guarantee you, you'll hate that."

JVN [00:14:47] So you have taken a lot of different approaches in your role of Mayor of Stockton to kind of implement some changes that have gotten a lot of attention that are really cool. And one of the things is, is the guaran-, this idea of guaranteed income. And one thing that I didn't understand was the differences between guaranteed income and universal income, because I think the first time I heard of universal income was from Andrew Yang and his presidential campaign. I never really heard of it before that.

And also like in interviewing some District Attorneys on the show, and then just like other research that I've done, so often, what we see, who we see incarcerated, are like people who are engaging in crimes of poverty, like we're stealing food because we can't feed our children. And when you look at some of the racism and sexism that goes into some of the

reasons why people are committing crimes of poverty, it's like, that's why we need to kind of defund the police. And that's why we need to kind of invest. So I understand that.

But I think that so many people don't understand how those things are linked. And so I'd love to hear about implementing some of these changes. Well, one, what's the difference between guaranteed and universal? And how has Stockton benefited so far from implementing these changes?

MAYOR MICHAEL TUBBS [00:16:03] Yeah, so, and these are great questions. So universal is this idea that everyone gets the same amount of money regardless of need. And some of the arguments for that is this idea of stigma, the fact that, oh, these people need this, these people don't. And also this idea that a universal basic income should be part of the national commons. Like this is something that we all get for being American. If it helps some people more than others, that's fine. If you don't need it, you can donate. So that's one school of thought.

The other school of thought is around a guaranteed income, which is really a targeted intervention around helping those that we know need it, with the resources we know we have. So an example of that in Stockton, we've given 500 dollars a month to 125 families who look like the city but all live in a zip code at or below the city's median, meaning that there's probably no one in the program who's in the top one percent of earners in Stockton, but there are a lot of people who are making 70K, 80K, 60K, who were often excluded from government programs who are benefiting.

And I think universal, universality is a great goal and I don't think that's something to lose sight of, but to your point, particularly given the crisis we're at now with Covid, what seems to be more politically feasible is something that's guaranteed, something that's for folks who make 100K or 125K and below. And knowing that we're at least, if we're giving to everyone, we're at least helping the people who need it the most. And part of that frame for me comes from studying Dr. King and studying the Black Panther Party, who, all taught-, who, number three on the Black Panther Party's platform is a job guaranteed or a guaranteed income. Dr. King talked about this, and where do we go from here?

And I think for me, my willingness to pilot the basic income or guaranteed income came from a hatred of poverty and a hatred of scarcity, for the points you mentioned, this idea that most crimes are, there are some crimes that are heinous and by folks with severe pathological mental illnesses and things of that sort and that, that's different. But the vast majority of people in our prisons are in prison because they were poor. Because their environments were poor, because their schools were poor, because the job opportunities in their communities were poor and they made poor choices accordingly. So, so I think what

we've seen in Stockton is that for the 125 families, it's made a world of difference. It's been a difference between having dentures and not for some people.

During Covid, it's been the difference between having, having to go to the food bank or not. For one person, she told me that because of 500 dollars, she actually was able to stay home when she had symptoms because she said, "If I didn't have the 500 dollars, I don't have paid time off, I would have had to gone to work even though I had a cough, even though I had a fever. Because, I mean. Whether I have Covid or not is an unknown, but what is known is that the bills are due. I have to eat, and I have to have lights." And I think for the city. It's been helpful just to see all of us reflected in a policy that's not about saying some people are good or some people are bad, but are saying the way the economy has been working, hasn't just been working for working people.

And then on the, on the, on the crime front, we've taken the same frame with our crimes reduction work. So we've seen a 40 percent reduction in violent crime in the last three years, and a lot of it has been through looking at kind of violent crime as a public health issue and understanding that the guys who are most likely to be victims and perpetrators of violent crime also don't have high school diplomas, don't have jobs, are food insecure, and are housing insecure. So when the programs were running, it's called Advanced Peace, which finds and identifies guys who are most likely to be victims and perpetrators and provide some cognitive behavioral therapy and case management and goal setting, but also after six months provides them with a fellowship with a stipend to continue making the good choices.

And I've just seen and I came in honestly, Jonathan, as a skeptic of basic income or guaranteed income, saying, like, it can't be that easy or people need to work. But what we've found is that people are working and working themselves to death, working as essential workers, and it's still not enough. And we can afford to do a guaranteed income. And I'll be quiet after this. We can afford to do a guaranteed income because we spent, we spent two trillion dollars in 2017 giving tax cuts to people who don't need it. And Kamala Harris has a bill right now. V.P. nominee Harris has a bill right now that says you can reverse those tax cuts and give every family making 125,000 dollars or less, 500 dollars a month like today. Like it's feasible. It's possible. It's an expenditure that's already in our budget. So I'm sorry for that long ramble, but I get really passionate about this.

JVN [00:20:47] Don't ever apologize for that. That is. No. No. That is just, it is so important. So that brought up a lot of things. We had a guest on it "Getting Curious" to talk about family separation at the border and how upsetting that was. And then basically she said, you know, but this, this country has been dealing with family separation since way before this administration and what's been going on at the border. And she was like, it's

mass incarceration. And I was like, "Well, how do you mean?" And she was, she gave me the statistics on Black children in America. The, the chances that a Black child has of having one of their parents be incarcerated before that child graduates high school. And then what those same statistics are for white kids. And it was wildly disproportionate.

And so when you think about, well, not you, but I just feel like when people think like, "Well, why do we need scholars, a Stockton scholars program?" Or "why is it important that we, you know, employ people that were at one time incarcerated?" And the thing is, is that for people that were either incarcerated or are children of people who are incarcerated, your chances of, like, meeting that goal-setting training, if you didn't have a parent around your chances of being taken under the wing of someone who is like doing something that was maybe, I just feel like your chances of like falling off of a path to success very much go up when one of your parents is dealing with a previously incarcerated situation.

And so with that being said, it's like as mayor and as someone in a position of power, and also, I think it was so interesting when you said right before that, you know, you are a skeptic of guaranteed income, at one point, you yourself experienced an evolution and journey there. So I'm curious about that. And also, how can we convince or show other people why this is so important?

MAYOR MICHAEL TUBBS [00:22:25] Yeah. So the journey. So I remember, I remember studying it and being interested about it in college, then my staff came up to me with it. I said, well, you know, you have, I mean, we all grew up in a society that has all these tropes about sort of people. In particular types of people, in terms of people being lazy or not working hard enough or not being able to make good decisions with their money, etc. And I was like, well, 500 dollars, is that even enough? How is it going to be used? Like it's not going to be like forever, it's only going to be for 18 months. But then before we, before we gave money, we spent a year in the design process. And I spent a lot of time listening to people. It became apparent after my first listening session that A, I was dumb and that B, like people are actually really, really, really smart in terms of making decisions for themselves and their families.

And then I reflected on my mother and my aunt and grandmother who raised me and how the issue with money in our family wasn't because they didn't know how to manage money, it was because they didn't have money to manage. So they had to go to the check cashing places sometimes. So they had to use credit cards to pay for this and that, so they had to incur all this debt, not because they were recklessly buying yachts and private islands, but because they were trying to buy uniforms, because they're trying to buy braces, because

they were trying to get glasses and things of that sort. And then I realized that that's actually not just unique to my family. That is all the families I talked to.

There was a person, usually the mother, who had great ideas for, oh, 500 dollars could pay for this bill. 500 dollars. I remember one lady, I'll never forget it. She said, 500 dollars will help me in the summer. And I was like, not the winter? Like why would that, how would that help you? She said, Well, Mayor, my kids come home from college in the summer. She says, every year I get anxiety because my bills go up, my food goes up, but my money doesn't. And I don't want them not to come home, but I have to, I'm in a paying, keep, catch up the rest of the year because of the time they spend at home in the summer. She said, that 500 dollars will be enough for me to relax in the summer. And I was, like, wow. And then other people talked about that just anxiety and stress that came from working incredibly hard and not being able to pay your bills. And that really resonated with me as well, like, wow.

This is about giving people the agency to be human, to breathe and to actually have dignity. Like we talk about this dignity of work all the time. But dignity can't be attached to work first. It has to be attached to our personhood and our humanity. And if that was the case, the folks would go to work and be treated with dignity. With wages that pay and with benefits like your employees and with, like, paid time off and sick leave, etcetera.

I think in terms of getting other people to buy in, well, we've launched recently is a group called the Mayors for Guaranteed Income. It's a group of about 20 plus mayors, like, LA's mayor, Atlanta's mayor, Oakland's mayor, Compton's mayor, Pittsburgh's mayor, Long Beach's mayor, like, all these mayors, Melvin's, Carter of St. Paul, Jackson, Mississippi, all these mayors from across the country who are interested in trying to pilot like we've done in Stockton the concept, to kind of create more stories and create more opportunities for people to see that just like you would spend money well, and maybe one time, like, you might buy you a nice pair of shoes or a nice watch. And I don't think that's a sin either. I think that you should be able to enjoy life a little bit. You shouldn't just work and only pay your rent, and that's all you get to do. So they are committed to piloting something.

And I think the more stories we get from people whose experiences resonate with the vast majority of people in this country, the more policymakers will see, like, "Oh, wow. Folks actually need this money. 'Cause I think, last thing I'll say on this is that a lot of policymakers, necessarily aren't bad people, all of them, but a lot of them are so disconnected from the vast majority of people. They don't have conversations with people who aren't of their social class, who aren't wealthy, who don't own homes.

JVN [00:26:27] So. OK, all right. So I have way more questions about guaranteed income and how you guys did that and more questions, but we're going to take a really quick break and we'll be right back with more Mayor Michael Tubbs after this. Welcome back to "Getting Curious." So this, you know, when we think about the economic disparities and the wealth gap between like that, Black families, white families, homeownership. I mean, I feel like I have a pretty good grasp on some of those things. I feel like, I hope that most listeners do, would understand what redlining is and would understand what the cost, the opportunity costs of not being able to get into schools and so many other things. You know, why that wealth gap is the case.

But I'm curious about in this, in this case of this pilot program, where does the money come from? How do we decide who gets, who, what gets a zip code? What happens if, like, if the constituent or the person didn't pay taxes? What if someone's living in poverty, but, like, what if they like, you know, made 500 dollars on Venmo or something and they've been in and out of homeless shelters. Like what if, like what if they don't know how to file to get onto the, how do you implement it?

MAYOR MICHAEL TUBBS [00:24:40] Yeah. No, thank you. So for all the listeners who like to nerd out, you can go to StocktonDemonstration.org, there's an 18 page discussion paper that was written by people way smarter than me. And you can read, peruse. And I'll, but in layman's terms, essentially, we decided that we wanted the program to be as universal as possible while also making sure we reach the people who needed it. So our research team, Dr. Baker and West, they came up with this idea that, what if we use census tracts because we found that 75 percent of everyone in the city of Stockton lives in a zip code where the median income of their zip code or census track is at or below the city's median. So he said, that'll be the only qualification. You have to live in what the census tracks, that's at or below the city's median, which is like 70, so 75% of the city qualified.

And then from there, they used some kind of algorithm that balance sort of age and race and employment status, etcetera. So it looks like the diversity of the city of Stockton and also the diversity of experiences. So there's people who are working, people who aren't, people who make more than 70K. Not many, but some. And people who are making less than 40. And then in terms of the questions around, we spent a long time thinking about kind of benefits and questions because I've been very clear from the beginning, I'm not in favor of any basic income or guaranteed income proposal that would get rid of the existing safety net and just get everyone the same. I just don't think that's equity. So I said, ours has to be additive.

JVN [00:29:13] So basically that just means that, like, does that mean when you start to bring up the idea of guaranteed income, then like some of like Republican or conservative

people are like, well, we'll give you that. But then that means like no more Medicare and no more like, like, AIDS Healthcare Foundation or like government or like Planned Parenthood. Like we're gonna take this money from current benefits?

MAYOR MICHAEL TUBBS [00:29:30] Yeah. And that's why, I said from the beginning, let's just be very clear. Because you know the trap with that. And let us be very clear. I don't want to gut the existing social safety net. I just want to add to it, because we always add to things. Like we just added it. So we spent a lot of time giving waivers and talking with sort of different, we weren't able to get any kind of federal waivers. But in terms of the things our state administered, we are so thankful for our partners at the county, at the state, for providing waivers for families who may make a little bit more than the cut off for things. And then we also had a couple of social workers do onboarding, some before anyone sign on to the program, they sat with a social worker, and if, who looked at all the, if they were on benefits because most people in the program aren't on any benefits, but some are.

So looked at all the benefits they had and really sort of made sure they understood the trade offs and the concessions. And we got to wait for this, we got to wait for that. You may not, this and that. Just make sure everyone walked in knowledgeable, which I think was super important. And what was interesting, Jonathan, what we found is that some people actually opted out because they say, you know what, this is too important for me. But more people opted in and said, yes, I may lose my food stamps after this program, but I don't need food every month. The issues is that, that some of these benefits are so prescriptive when people's needs are fluid. So the need may not be food every month, some month it maybe an emergency, you need liquid cash to be able to do things.

And I was like, actually, it was a big learning insight for me. And then the money distributed out of debit cards. And through the debit cards, we're able to kind of track, sort of how, how spending is done. But not in an individual way, like. "Sally spent all her money on this." But in just the aggregate. So our research team is now, whose evaluation will come out next year, is now able to make trades. We're also very lucky that a woman, Carole Tollen, saw the original money, excuse me, came from the Economic Security Project, co-founded by Chris Hughes, one of the co-founders of Facebook, Natalie Fosters and Dorian Warren who gave that million dollars for disbursements. And then we were able to get money from Robert Wood Johnson for research and then their program was suppose to expire in July.

But philanthropist Carole Tollen was so concerned about Covid and its impacts on people and said, you cannot stop the program in the middle of a pandemic. You have to at least extend it to January. We're lucky enough to extend the program to January and then the research will come out next year that we'll talk about further three research questions. A,

what impact does a guaranteed income have on feelings of health? B, what impact does it have on sort of feelings of connection to community? And then three, the one that everyone cares about, well, how is the money spent? How are people spending money? What are spending choices?

JVN [00:32:19] OK, so here's the thing. I am like very naturally and pretty much always have been an extremely progressive person. But I come from, like, a city that voted for Trump. Like 2 to 1.

MAYOR MICHAEL TUBBS [00:32:32] What city?

JVN [00:32:33] Quincy, Illinois. It's like a rural city. Yeah. So it's like I feel like, you know, both, well my grandfather, he's, like, not alive anymore, but he would just, like, watch Fox News like 12 hours a day and get super pissed off. And I used to like, go pick up my grandma every Friday. So like, I like, I know like what they-, and I still get Fox News things, like, I'll read stuff on my phone just to know what the other side is saying. And so I always kind of think about like, well, what's this like hardcore racist propaganda machine going to say about this? And so many of those people I feel like are kind of, like, the issue of, like, not being able to get things like this passed. So when we think about the three research things that have come out, I think about, like, what does it do for crime reduction? What does it do for like, like does it do like, like do people, like, like does this-? Because I would imagine that like a universe or a guaranteed basic income, like, would reduce crime and would reduce, like, all sorts of, like, police dispatches and like all sorts of shit, but like will the research cover that too?

MAYOR MICHAEL TUBBS [00:33:33] So unfortunately, because of budget constraints and also because of sample size, we weren't able to answer all the questions, particularly that very, very good question. And that's why I'm excited about the 20 other mayors who are going to do a pilot because they'll be asking a different set of questions that will kind of paint a mosaic of, OK, well, it could do this. It could do this, it could do this, it could do this. And what's fascinating about this idea and it's funny because there's a, one part, so we have a storytelling cohort, which isn't a part of the research but where we get the anecdotes from. And one of the people is a staunch, like, Trump supporter and then Michael Tubbs hater. Like I'm just like the worst person. But she talks all the time about how she's knows she's doing good things with the money, but she's not sure about everyone else in the program.

JVN [00:34:21] So she's one of the people receiving the money.

MAYOR MICHAEL TUBBS [00:34:23] Yes, yes.

JVN [00:34:24] Yes.

MAYOR MICHAEL TUBBS [00:34:25] She's getting the money. She's like, "Oh wow, this is helping me this, I still support Trump. Michael Tubbs, he's still a crazy liberal and I'm not sure the other people in the program know what they're doing with their money." But I think that's powerful because, well, we know is that economic insecurity is not a partisan issue. That you look at Appalachia, the poorest country, cities in, the poorest states in this country are all Republican states.

JVN [00:34:50] Yeah.

MAYOR MICHAEL TUBBS [00:34:50] And this was a power to help those folks tremendously. So that's what I think the storytelling is going to be very important.

JVN [00:34:59] Well, as Ashlee Marie Preston says, which I think is so smart. She says, you know, white supremacy eats its own young. So it's like, you know, lots of, it's something that affects, you know, 'cause really white supremacy is the one percent having one percent. But they don't give a fuck if you're white or Black to get into this one percent. It's like, it's all about like, it's a money and power issue. And I think that so many white folks hear the words "white supremacy" and they're, like, "Well, I'm not racist. I don't have anything to do with that." But really, it's like it's kind of like the intersection of race and poverty has more of a thing. It's like white people are victims of white supremacy. Black people are victims of white supremacy like everyone. It's a whole fuckin' wheel that's like fucking everybody up. Except for this like really tiny, little bit of like separate hardcore billionaires, you know.

MAYOR MICHAEL TUBBS [00:35:48] No, no. But I appreciate that, though. I think we do have to be intersectional and understand the way that class and race intersect and also, race, or at least how America has used race was to perpetuate kind of a permanent servitude class, like, Black folks were made less than, made less than human to perpetuate slavery, which was a racial caste arrangement for economic gain for wealthy landowners. Right? So I think to your point, and that's what's so frustrating oftentimes in conversations with, with, with, conversations in the progressive movement is you can't separate class from race. We could talk about them both. And we can also understand that race and class are linked. And also race, as you say, racism is also real. Right? And I think, I appreciate you following that up. I think people think you have to choose one or the other. It's like, no, they both reinforce each other and they both are deeply intertwined. It feels like it takes more effort to try to isolate them, then to fight both evils at the same time.

JVN [00:36:53] And also if it, if it, if the report doesn't, like you can still run, like, because you had mentioned earlier that, like, violent crime rates have gone down in the last three years as you have implemented this, this program. So there's ways that, you know, when we're looking at crime and probably money spent on policing at the same time, there's still ways that we can probably deduce that and research that, you know, after the fact, which is really interesting.

I think another thing that I would love to talk about is kind of what you've done with, with really thinking about employing incarcerated, formerly incarcerated individuals and, and how important that is, because I know in California, you can be formerly incarcerated, but still vote. But in places like Alabama, you know, if you have a felony, like, you're not voting. And I think that is such, that is a really vicious un-American like, like it's, it's such a problem. I think the stigma around a formerly incarcerated individual is so high and stigmatization in anything is so damaging. So what are some of the benefits and the lessons learned about what, about what that does for community safety?

MAYOR MICHAEL TUBBS [00:37:04] Yeah, well, I think part of it is that as communities, we have to understand that everyone's our neighbor, including folks who may have criminal backgrounds, including folks who may have committed harms, and that we also can have a conversation about accountability. And people should be held accountable for their actions. But we also have to be smarter and recognize that to the point you've been making this whole conversation, that these choices don't happen in a vacuum. They happen in an environment that's created by the policy choices we collectively make. In terms of what we invest in versus not, in terms of what communities have resources or not. But it's no surprise to me that crime is harder, is higher in communities with bad schools and those jobs. Like that's just, it's, it's, it's a logical inference. And the people committing those crimes, did not create the communities that don't have jobs and don't have good schools.

So in Stockton, we've been having this conversation about sort of what does it take, how law enforcement can't be our answer to poverty. It's a very insufficient and lackluster answer to poverty that law enforcement can't be our answer to mental health issues. That law enforcement, in and of itself cannot be the answer to the crime. That's necessary, but not sufficient, and that the best way to keep our communities safe is to provide all those other inputs we know that work. So part of that has been our strategy around reducing violent crime. 'Cause we spent hundreds of millions of dollars over the past 30 years on arresting people and incarcerating people and over-policing certain communities. And we just haven't, hadn't seen the reduction that was worth the amount of money that we spent.

So then 2014, while I was on city council, we started a program called Ceasefire, saw some success. And when I became mayor, we started the Advance Peace Program and those two together, which are pennies on the dollar. In terms of what we spend traditionally on law enforcement, in working in collaboration with the intelligence our law enforcement partners are able to gather has shown a reduction. I think for the community, it's been instructive that we can get to safety, but it means allocating our dollars in ways that we know prevent things from happening. You don't call a cop before a crime happens. You call them after a crime happens. But we have no sort of spending strategy around the prevention side, which is all these other things. So we've been trying to do that in Stockton and we see in particular with gun violence and homicides. That's not perfect. But it's working that people respond positively to opportunity that some people actually do want to do better, provided they have the resources to do so.

JVN [00:40:42] So as a mayor, what do you think about the defund verse reform idea of policing?

MAYOR MICHAEL TUBBS [00:40:51] Yeah, I think it's a, I think it's a false dichotomy. And I think part of the issue is that I would love to live in a society that doesn't need law enforcement. Like that would be a goal, and that's the dream. But we're just not there today. So while we build to that society where there's not people being victimized, because I think part of the issue is that, it's not all the time, but there are, like, dangerous people. There, there is a need to have a system of accountability and punishment for folks who are committing harms. Like that we don't want to victimize. We don't want children brutalized. We don't want any of that. So we have to have some law enforcement. But at the same time, that can't be the only thing we fund. So I just approach it as to, let's fund all the inputs we think we need to be safe.

So what we're doing right now in Stockton as a concrete example is right now are, we're looking at our dispatch calls. So I was like, let's look at our 9-1-1 calls and let me know what people are calling for, because I think part of the issues as society, when we see anything, we think of calling the cops. When we see someone who's schizophrenic at a restaurant or someone who's having a mental health breakdown under the freeway, we call the cops. When there's a homeless person in our neighborhood, we call the cops. When there's, whenever there's anything we call, when there's a dog stuck in a tree, like, we call cops for everything.

And I think once we have that data, in terms of how much of our calls actually need an armed police officer to go to and how many of our calls need a social worker, need therapists, need a mental health clinician. Then we can have an informed conversation about what do we fund. So I don't think that it's a dichotomy between defund the police

and reform the police. I think we just have to fund what works. Get to the result we want, which is a safer community. At the same time, we do have to have a conversation about just reform, like, police also have to be held accountable. Like, it's not a just system, where there's consequences and punishments for everyone else. But when a law enforcement officer does a bad thing. It's really hard to fire them. It's really hard to prosecute them. It's very hard to hold them accountable.

JVN [00:42:58] Yep.

MAYOR MICHAEL TUBBS [00:42:59] That, absolutely, 100 percent has to change. And those are some of the things we're working on as well. I was just appointed to the Post Commission for the state, which is the agency that comes up with the standards for, for police officers. I think I'm one of two non law enforcement people on that, commission of 15. And everyone else is either a retired sheriff, retired police chief, retired police officer. Now, I'm looking forward to those conversations 'cause I'm sure I'll learn a lot. I'm sure there'll be some disagreements, but I'm sure we'll walk away, again, closer to where we want to be in terms of having a society where everyone is treated equally in the eyes of the law.

JVN [00:43:40] So one thing that I feel like noticed, or I notice a lot and I'd need to work on is this like, sometimes when I interact with people online or try to have, like, political conversations with people. It's like once someone shows me, you know, their ass, so to speak, or like once they've really said something that does not align with what I feel or, you know, what I know to be true and correct. I have this knee jerk reaction to kind of like block, pull away, not gonna interact with you, like you don't deserve my time. I get, I can get very inflamed. And I just got to interview this incredible psychologist who is a survivor of the Holocaust. And she was telling me in her work, you know, that love equals time. T-I-M-E.

Like, in order to, you have to say, tell me more. You have to not have that knee jerk reaction, it was reminding me a lot of what you said and coming back to your hometown of Stockton, becoming a mayor and really showing at the time the good, the bad, the messy, all of it, so that you can really develop that deep connection and that love. But when you have those, I'm sure you're a human, you, you deal with those knee jerk reactions, there's just, like the lady who's, like, "Yeah, you're still a liberal snowflake and I hate you, but I will take the 500 dollars and like, MAGA, go Trump." So it's like, how do we lean into, how can we be better about listening to, being in a relationship with folks that we may disagree with? How do we know when it's not worth our time and to pull away, or is it always worth our time and we always lean in? What do you, what about that?

MAYOR MICHAEL TUBBS [00:45:09] Yeah, well, no, this is such a, you're the first person that's ever asked me that question. It's such a good one. So for context, in Stockton, my city council is four Republicans and two Democrats. And to get anything done, I need four votes, which means I had to make a conscious effort early on to make a decision. Is it, am I more concerned about the work or my feelings? Because this work in politics is all about coalition building, and I mean, when I was in community organizing, they taught me no permanent friends, no permanent enemies, just permanent issues. And I tried it. And I'm not perfect as some people. I'm sorry, I just can't. But I do my best to try to build the coalition needed to get something done, which includes people I may agree with on no other issue but this one or not.

And I also think that particularly in our society and I think part of this comes from my faith tradition is just understanding that we're all infallible. That we've all learned and we have to leave room for grace and growth. And what I found is that there's so many people in my community who are staunch supporters, who are friends, who if you looked on paper or looked at some of their past candidates that they supported, you would say, no way. And part of it is in relationship. I've also found the relationship you're in will help change minds and change hearts and change policy. And I think, like right after this, I'm doing a press conference with a bank, but also a family in our community that's incredibly philanthropic, but it's a Republican family. And the press conference is about Black Lives Matter and creating a Juneteenth fund to support Black-owned businesses in the city of Stockton. And that's only happened because I've create the space where we can have conversations, where after the protest, they feel comfortable calling me and saying, hey, like, "We see what's going on, it's a little bit scary, can you help explain this Black Lives Matter? Of course. Black Lives Matter. Help me understand."

And I think, I think part of is being open. And not that it's fair or not that you have time, not that you have energy, but be open to be a teacher. And I think I reflect on this how much I've grown as a person from people who were patient and didn't counsel me when I was stupid and young and just regurgitate what I was taught about limited worldview. So to answer your question, I think, it's a decision you have to make around whether this conversation, whether this person actually wants to change or is open to change. Whether to talk to this person that regardless of problematic views or relationship you want to form there, or is this relationship important for advancing a goal? Is this part of the coalition you need to build?

But no, I get. I mute, I can't block people on Twitter anymore, thanks to Donald Trump. So I just have to mute people all the time because some people are just nasty and some people just bots and some people aren't people but the trolls who are trying to distract and take your energy. So I think it's, part of it's just figuring out, is this a person who I like or I could

like? Or is there something about this person that could be helpful? But then sometimes you just have to be like, I just can't. I can't. I'm not, I'm not God. I can't save everyone. So I'm going to do what I can. Longer answer than you're probably looking for, but that's kind of how I think about it.

JVN [00:47:19] We're gonna take a really quick break, and we'll be right back with more Mayor Tubbs after this. Welcome back to "Getting Curious." This is Jonathan Van Ness. That was such a good answer. It is so hard to do that sometimes to like kind of make those decisions of like when to lean in and when to kind of pull yourself out.

MAYOR MICHAEL TUBBS [00:48:39] One of my favorite scriptures says, "Some plants, some water, but God gives the increase," meaning that you have to do everything that maybe sometimes, like, you know, maybe my job was to plant the seed, but I don't have time to water this seed, to nurture this seed. And maybe somebody else will come along for the conversation. So I will also tell people, don't feel like you have to do everything, that maybe your one engagement, your one question, your one statement was enough and that was enough to spark a seed in someone else or some other experience will help them. You're not responsible for reforming people, but you are, I think you should love everyone and give everyone the benefit of the doubt. But we can't give your energy to everything, if that makes sense.

JVN [00:49:21] Absolutely. So one thing that Stacey Abrams said to me, which I thought is, I've thought about it so much because, like I had said something on Twitter a few weeks ago about how I felt like Joe Biden's marijuana policy doesn't go far enough because basically, you know, he says he wants to, I said that I would, how much more excited would people be for him if he wouldn't move to not only expunge state convictions, but also legalize it nationally because, or nationally, because letting states decriminalize is already what we do. And that's one of his, it's his fourth, but that's his fourth point is like, you know, I want to leave it up to states. And that's already a thing that's possible. And we've already seen that when we leave things up to states, it's like, OK, well, then if marijuana is decriminalized, well, having like a pipe and a lighter isn't.

So, if you have the paraphernalia, honey, like, it's jail and like, you know, places like Alabama and Texas and Florida. That's like. No, like, I feel like it just needs to be legal federally because we can't leave it up to an already racist institution, which so many law enforcement agencies are, to keep using marijuana as a cudgel to, like, throw folks in jail. So a lot of people were really mad with me for saying that, and I didn't, like I was very clear that I support his candidacy and I support him for president.

And I want them to go farther because I think especially, you know, with marijuana reform that has been something that has separated so many families, cost us so much money, caused so much disease and sadness and destruction for what? Like for nothing. And so I feel very personally, like, riled up about marijuana reform. And what Stacey said was, is, you know, so often people get mad about fighting over these crumbs and how we're going to fight over the crumbs instead of saying, like, well, why don't we have the cake?

MAYOR MICHAEL TUBBS [00:50:59] I think part of it is understanding that progress is not perfection. In that look at the baseline. And be, never be content, but be happy when things are getting better. Because now you're in a better position to push for where you actually want to go. And I just learned that from governing. There's been so many things that I'm like, ah, we should be here. But I'm like hey, we're at B. So we're closer to Z, than we were with A. And I know for some people, the pace seems slow. But what's your alternative? To be mad and nothing changes. And I think that's also a luxury to just be upset and to just tweet and just be angry and just counsel people. That's a real luxury because there's a lot of people who's very lives and livelihoods depend on decisions.

And appreciate, know when we're trying to get to the North Star, if things get a little bit, get a little better, I think that's part of it, is really understanding how this thing works, that there's no magic wand, that it's messy. It's a people thing. It's a coalition thing. And that you have to keep the goal in mind and you always keep the goal in mind. But understand that we're talking about a 4-, a country that's been around for 400 years. That's not gonna change in 4 months. That's not gonna change in 8 years. That's not gonna change in 12 years.

But we can get closer to making the changes we deserve, if we push every single day and understand who do we fight and when do we fight and where to fight, because everything can't be a war. And, and even in war, you don't win every battle. That in fact, strategically, sometimes it's better to lose some battles. And there's all, every story of war talks about how the eventual victor didn't go and defeat it. They lost sometimes or they retreated sometimes or they did some things that they're like, oh, I don't want to do.

So I think we have to approach it the same way and just really understand that the things we're fighting for are so important, which is really a country with dignity for all people, that we have to be in it for the long haul. And we have to understand which of our, which, if we're talking about politicians, are you more likely to get what you want out of a Joe Biden, comma, Harris administration or Donald Trump Mike Pence administration? That's like a slam dunk answer. So you go hard to November. You support Biden Harris. And then the day after they're sworn in, you're protesting, you're advocating. You're, you're making demands. You're making demands, and that's how this thing works.

JVN [00:53:30] So one thing that I've heard you say, you mentioned earlier, that you are a spiritual person. And I've spent a lot of time recently thinking about this, about elected leaders and spirituality. The reason that I was thinking about it, ever, is because of the way that we so clearly see people's religious beliefs seeping into the way that they legislate. Whether that's with abortion or gay rights or, you know, those are the two that kind of pop out to me the most. Last week, one of 45's advisers said that the Lord made executive orders for when Congress can't legislate. And that really sent chills down my spine because that feels so "Handmaid's Tale" to me that we have, you know, national advisors saying that the Lord made executive orders. How do you extrapolate your faith and what's in your heart from your legislative mind?

MAYOR MICHAEL TUBBS [00:54:23] Yeah, well, I just think my faith is rooted in the ethos of love, right? And love for all people, concern for all people. And wanting the best for all people. So even as a Christian, when we think about kind of abortion, for me, it's this idea that God gives people free will and the agency. And God gives people autonomy and God gives people the facilities to make decisions for themselves. And there's no government official or government person that should interfere with that right. Because that's a God given right. Right? And I think, when I think of even kind of gay rights and gay marriage, it's this idea that God created all people. And God is a God of love and God's not a God that wants the majority of homeless children to be gay because they're kicked out of their homes. Like God actually hates that.

And God is not a God that wants people unable to see their spouses when they're dying because they happen to be gay. He's adamantly against that. And God doesn't want people murdered because they're trans. He, he's, he's, he's against, he, some people, my wife calls God, they, are against that. And so for me, I think, I, I. I'm not, I don't try to legislate with my interpretations of case by case precepts, but I do try to legislate with kind of my understanding of kind that the ethos of God being love. And also this idea when Jesus said, "As you do to the least of these, you did to me."

Right? When I was hungry, when I was in jail, when I was naked. And I think part of the perversion that's happening on the right is that they really perverted faith. So now faith in public life, faith in public discourse has become a dirty word. It's become, oh, my gosh. Like you, you believe in, and it's like, no, that's not. What they're practicing isn't faith. It's white supremacy. It's, it's idolatry, and it's using something as beautiful and universal as religion and faith to, to enact their own wants and desires of God and society in their image. And I would say my faith tradition also teaches me that that's wicked. And that's not what this is about. So not sure if I even answered your question.

JVN [00:56:43] No, it did. It really did. You know, and I guess my thing is as someone who is like, I don't know where my faith is. I don't know. I think I believe in a higher power, like I. Like, I'm really pretty sure. But I just feel like, we are all, because I feel like then these, these people on the right can say, well, "I'm using my faith in God to inform what I think the like-, well my faith in God says that we should not have gay people like." So it's like I just like when we start using, like, our idea of God on the left, versus it's like, why is he even in this conversation? Like. Because I thought that, like, we are supposed to do, like, a church and a state thing. And I just wish that like we could fucking do that. But not you, 'cause you're everything. But I just feel like, you know, not really. It's like I just don't understand. And I guess it's more.

MAYOR MICHAEL TUBBS [00:57:29] I think part of is that as difficult as, as, it's very hard to divorce your experiences where you talk about are not the decisions you make. I think my experience as a poor Black man in this country and as a Christian informs how I, and, but I think what you're, what I'm hearing and I agree with you, your experience can't be the only thing. Like your experience should be a bridge, not a moat. Like experience should be a bridge to other experiences, because I don't know what it's like to grow up as a queer kid, non-binary kid in the Midwest. But I do know what it's like to be Black. And I use that as a bridge to understand. Even if I don't understand your experiences, I won't, I will empathize about, yo, like that, that's jacked up. Like, how do we, how do we fix it? I think that's what's necessary. Is not leaving your identities or divorcing yourself from who you are, but understanding that your identity, your experiences have to be a bridge for you to understand other people's identities and experiences.

JVN [00:58:28] Yes.

MAYOR MICHAEL TUBBS [00:58:29] And you're not, you're not absolute.

JVN [00:58:30] Right. Oh, yeah. Yeah. That's gorgeous. I like that. OK. I love that. OK. Last question. So you are as two kids who grew up thinking, like, "I might get out of this town some day," and like, you know, and then and you return to your hometown, you're now like, you know, a massive part of the community. And also someone who I think is on the cutting edge, like I've already said, of change, which I just think is so incredible. What is your hope for other people, other young people that are, maybe don't even see that as an opportunity? Like, "I could never go back to Des Moines. I could never go back to Stockton. I could never go back to Tallahassee, wherever. Little Rock." What is your hope for those people to maybe open that up as a possibility in their future?

MAYOR MICHAEL TUBBS [00:59:09] Yeah, I think my biggest hope is for people like you, people like me, people like everyone listening, see yourselves as a leader. Like, see

yourselves as having, been worthy of being in the position to do things. And not because you're perfect, not because you have all the answers, but because you're just as worthy as the people who are currently making the decisions.

I remember when I decided to run for office, part of it was I realized that, worst case scenario, I'm as smart as everyone else who's doing this. Like at worst case, at the very worst, I'm not going to be the worst person. And that's enough for me to feel confident that well, hey, if, it's not going to get worse, let's do it. And I hope for people to understand that change is a communal process that it's not going to be, I think, Stacey Abrams said in the DNC, that democracy, we don't represent saviors. We represent representatives. And each and every one of us have to do, has to do our part. So I think folks should consider going back to their towns because you would be surprised at how welcoming and how excited your town will be to have you. I've just seen the amount of young people who have come back to Stockton and how they've been embraced, even though they may be a more progressive, they maybe a little more liberal than folks are used to, but they've been embraced as leaders and as important.

And at your town, like, know the Calvary isn't coming. The Calvary is not coming, that we are all we have. So if you really are concerned about your town and you have the time and energy, consider moving back there and doing the hard, non-glamorous, not sexy work of building community. And the blessing is that, you won't reap all the benefits, but the kids coming up after you will. And they'll grow up and like the kids who grew up in Stockton now, grow up in Stockton, not perfect, but a lot different than the Stockton that I grew up in. And I'm so excited and happy for them. And because we invested with them with a scholarship program. Where if they graduate with a 2.0, they're guaranteed a scholarship. So many of them are now saying, I want to leave Stockton, but come back and so that they have a vested interest, and so to answer your question concisely, your towns need you. But if you don't go back to your town, your country needs you. And everyone has to do their part to, to, to, to lead in the ways that they can and to be reflective of the society we want to live in.

JVN [01:01:41] Mayor Michael Tubbs, I want to vote for you for something someday, so I hope it's like a governor of a state that I live in or, like, president or something. You're just an incredible leader. I know you have a press conference to get off to. I am just so grateful for your time and your work. And I think we have like literally one minute left. So this is, so then this is the play on the podcast, where I call it like Yogi recess, where it's like, you know, if we missed a certain, like, series that you really wanted to get to, like but we didn't teach, you know, like pigeon today. You really want to open up my hips. Is there, is there anything? What would you like? Whether it's as we head into this election, is there? What would you like to leave listeners with?

MAYOR MICHAEL TUBBS [01:02:23] Yeah, I would like to leave the listeners with this idea that the world we live in has been, it's man made and woman made and they made, it's created. It's a world that's been created by the actions of people. Good or bad. And with that comes an awesome responsibility to actually not give up our agency in this moment, but to exercise agency. Even if we don't know if what we're doing is going to work, even if we don't know if it's going to turn out the way you want to turn out, because what we do know is if we do nothing, nothing changes. If we, if we're just angry, we'll just be angry for four more years. And again, voting is necessary, but not sufficient. But the most important thing in terms of priorities is to make sure Joe Biden and Kamala Harris are president and vice president. And even if you support someone else in the primary, even if they're not where you are on every issue, what we have right now is just so antithetical not just to democracy and not just to progressive politics, but to like humanity.

Like what it means to be human and see everyone as fully human. And we have to work, work, work 'til November. 'Til November, make sure Joe Biden, Kamala Harris are elected. And then when that happens, we don't give up. We don't rest on our laurels. We don't become disillusioned when they don't do everything we want them to do. But we continue the fight. We take a yogi break, stretch, then we continue to fight for the things we care about. Right? Because that's how it works out. I'm an imperfect politician. There's times where I make decisions that folks who love me deeply, deeply disagree with. And they have to push and prod and, but I don't know. I love my wife. We don't agree on everything. Like I don't know of any relationship or any interaction with another human being where you agree 100 percent of what they do and what they say all day everyday. So that can't be a disqualifier.

But hold on to our values. Let's fight like hell. But we won't get to, we won't we, we will see no success in the next four years if Joe, if Joe Biden, Kamala Harris aren't president, on a national level. There's no way we'll get anything done that actually helps people with a Donald Trump and Mike Pence administration, which means that we have to fight like our values, like our way of life, like our dreams for our country, depend on it because they do.

JVN [01:04:48] So in your work with other mayors that are doing the Guaranteed Income Pro-, Projects. It's like California's going to go, we know California going to go for Kamala and Biden, but in places like Florida, Kentucky. What's your sense of young people? Do you think that people are really, do you think that people are, got it together for understanding the importance of that presidential vote?

MAYOR MICHAEL TUBBS [01:05:12] I think, you know, that's why I appreciate the way you use, you use your platform. And I think that there's a lot of people do. But there's also like

active measures going on right now to make sure folks don't vote. Like actually, like, taking out postbox and I actually like making, purging voter rolls, which means that we have to go double time and make sure for the five counties we know that determine the presidential election that we are there on Zoom, talking and calling and conversing with people about how, not that their vote is important. 'Cause I think when we tell people their vote is important, that's kind of dehumanizing. It makes them transactional or makes them a means to an end. We don't care about you. We want your vote. But no, it's like you're important. Your life is important. Your, your, your, your experiences are important. And because of that, your vote is a reflection of those things and your vote is important. I think that little change in messaging is so necessary, can we just tell people, we need your vote. We need your vote. We need you to vote. We need you to vote. So OK, after our vote, what happens? Am I disposable? Right? I think it's, like, no we need you.

JVN [01:06:16] We need you.

MAYOR MICHAEL TUBBS [01:06:16] And because we need you, we need you to vote.

JVN [01:06:20] I can't think of a better way to end it. That was real, that was gorge. That was really good.

MAYOR MICHAEL TUBBS [01:06:26] Thank you.

JVN [01:06:27] It really was. Mayor Michael Tubbs, thank you so much for your time. I'm so appreciative of you. And I know that we got to talk about, but you have an election coming up, I mean you're, like, way ahead in the polls, it's like totally fine. He's like probably like a dumb Republican that everyone hates. So you're, like, totally fine, right?

MAYOR MICHAEL TUBBS [01:06:40] I don't know if he's dumb. He's a Republican. And people, some people like him. And I mean, my city is very ideologically diverse, so we're working hard. Well, we're going to work hard 'til November. I'm hopeful we'll be victorious.

JVN [01:06:51] I feel like you will be. I'm, I mean, so much so that, like, I literally even ask you about it, but like you are ahead in the polls, right? It's fine. It's fine. It's totally fine.

MAYOR MICHAEL TUBBS [01:06:57] We're ahead. But for example, I wasn't endorsed by the police union, partly because I'm a big proponent of reforms and doing better. So it'll be a race, but we'll see.

JVN [01:07:07] Now that's the best way to end it ever. Thank you so much and have a good press conference. Thank you so much, Mayor. I'm really appreciative.

MAYOR MICHAEL TUBBS [01:07:12] Thank you.

JVN [01:07:15] You've been listening to Getting Curious with me, Jonathan Van Ness. My guest this week was Stockton, California Mayor Michael Tubbs. He's the co-founder of Mayors for a Guaranteed Income, and the subject of the new HBO documentary "Stockton On My Mind." You'll find links to his work in the episode description of whatever you're listening to the show on. Our theme music is "Freak" by Quiñ - thanks to her for letting us use it. If you enjoyed our show, introduce a friend - show them how to subscribe. Follow us on Instagram & Twitter @CuriousWithJVN. Our socials are run and curated by Emily Bossak. Getting Curious is produced by me, Erica Getto, Emily Bossak, Rae Ellis, Chelsea Jacobson, and Colin Anderson, with associate production by Alex Murfey.