

Paul: [00:00](#) Ladies and gentlemen, welcome to the first ever Angry Americans event with our very special guest, Mayor Pete Buttigieg.

Crowd: [00:07](#) [Applause 00:00:10].

Pete: [00:11](#) Thank you.

Paul: [00:13](#) So, people have come from literally all across America to see you for this first ever event. And first off I just want to say thank you.

Pete: [00:23](#) Sure thing. Thanks for having me.

Paul: [00:24](#) Thank you for being here. And I said it backstage, but thank you for being an inspiration. I really think you're inspiring people of all backgrounds across this country, beyond politics. You know, we were both in the military, and your leadership example and the way you've carried yourself and the way you've redefined leadership I think is really important.

Pete: [00:44](#) I appreciate that.

Paul: [00:45](#) And I don't normally start off the interview with a ton of compliments, but...

Pete: [00:48](#) I'll take it.

Paul: [00:49](#) I think it's well deserved, and we're grateful. The first question I usually ask of all guests, and I'll ask of you, Mayor Pete, is what is your drink of choice? Your adult beverage of choice, as we sometimes say in the military. And your team told me Macallan.

Pete: [01:05](#) Yeah, I love it. I love a good single malt. So Macallan... I mean, making me pick one is difficult, because I like the smokier ones too. I've been renewing my relationship with Talisker from the Isle of Sky, which is pretty good stuff. But this is always a good way to end the day, so.

Paul: [01:20](#) Do you remember when you got home from Afghanistan what the first drink you had was?

Pete: [01:24](#) Oh, that's a great question. We stopped over in Germany on the way back and kind of eased us back in with beer, good German beer. Because we were in... We were somewhere in Bavaria, I

think. I don't remember exactly what it was, but I remember being damn glad to have it.

Paul: [01:39](#) Well, we'll jump around and talk a little bit about current events, but we're sitting here right now on the west side of Manhattan. And as you were coming in, there was some doubt about whether or not you'd be able to make it in because they had shut down the Holland Tunnel. There was a shooting in Jersey City, which is like six miles as the crow flies from where we are right now. I know you're still getting up to speed, but I think it's a timely and important topic to start with because this show is about so many people in this country that feel like they don't have a voice. Many people who are independent and unaffiliated and Democrats and Republicans, and they're angry because they're paying attention. And it's a righteous anger, and they want to do something positive about that. And I don't think there's any issue that defines this community and maybe presents a chance to unify this country like shootings.

Pete: [02:29](#) Yeah.

Paul: [02:30](#) So any top line reactions or thoughts?

Pete: [02:33](#) Yeah, I mean, as we speak, information is still coming in, but it appears that at least one officer was lost, and it's a reminder of the dangers that officers and first responders face every day. Don't know that much about the other circumstances, but it's also part of a pattern where we have come to accept being the only developed country where things like this happen on a routine basis. And the really unfortunate thing is this has been treated as a partisan issue, and it's very much a partisan issue in Congress.

Pete: [03:04](#) It's really not that partisan of an issue among the American people, at least when it comes to the basics around gun violence: the importance of programs to reduce and prevent gun violence, the importance of universal background checks for guns, and red flag laws when somebody is a danger. This is something that not only a vast majority of Americans, but a vast majority of Republicans and a vast majority of gun owners, agree with the mass vast majority of Democrats that we ought to do these things. And anytime you see something command such a majority among the American people, we've got to do something here... And fail to get a majority among the American members of Congress, it shows you that something is warped or twisted in our system.

Pete: [03:45](#) I think the tide is turning, because I think America has had enough, and a lot of the arguments are starting to kind of fade away before the simple fact that we know there are steps we could take that would save lives. Not every life, but save thousands of lives in this country. And we've got to do something. And there's no excuse to just wring our hands and say we've got to keep tolerating living in a country where unfortunately these kinds of incidents, whether it's a mass shooting or the kinds of day to day shootings that are taking lives in communities around the country, including my own, or the the side of gun violence that gets talked about far too little, which is suicide... We just can't go on the way we're going right now.

Paul: [04:27](#) So you are the second candidate to join us on Angry Americans. The first was Tulsi Gabbard, the only other post 9/11 veteran, the only other person who served in uniform that's running for president. So I credit both of you for leading by example coming on this show, but also driving a conversation and redefining what it means to be a veteran. And I want to get into that with you, Mayor. But when you think about that issue in particular, many veterans are gun owners, but many veterans also understand guns and understand the role that they can play responsibly and counter productively in our society. Are we as veterans in a unique position to be bridge builders on this issue because of that familiarity? And personally, how do you view your service as shaping your perspective on gun ownership and the extension of it on everything from mass shootings to suicide?

Pete: [05:17](#) Yeah, I'll say this: from the first moment that they took me to the armory for the first time... and as you know, there's a ton of paperwork and everything's under tight control... You learn that two things are associated with firearms in the military. One of them is accountability and responsibility, and the other one is control and making sure that you know what you're doing, you know what happens to and with weapons, that you know how to use them at every stage in terms of your own personal responsibility to handle weapons responsibly.

Pete: [05:49](#) And in terms of the fact that the Army, Navy, you name it, the military as an institution makes sure that nothing falls through the cracks. I mean, I can't think of a more uptight part, even relative to the way the intelligence community I was part of can be, about a lot of different things. Just the rigor of the expectations in and around the armory that everything is by the book, I think reflects the fact that there's an awareness that

with this kind of deadly force comes a huge amount of responsibility.

Pete: [06:21](#) And I think responsible gun owners in the civilian world in America, as a general rule, understand that. And it's why in families it's so important to make sure that there is responsible storage, that there is education about responsibility. And yet, even though we do that in the military, families should, and as a general rule, do that at home, you don't see that happening in our broader American family, as a country... Where we would, in the same way that a unit would or or that that an individual should, say, "Wait a minute. These kinds of firearms shouldn't be with people who've demonstrated that they can't responsibly have them."

Paul: [07:03](#) So you are... If elected, you'll be the first post 9/11 veteran in history to serve in the White House. You'll be the first... I believe the first person who served in uniform... The younger George Bush served the national guard, the first veteran who had served in combat since his father. The first Bush, I believe, but your path into the military was kind of an unusual one, and it's one of the questions I am, as a service member, dying to ask you, because you were mayor.

Pete: [07:31](#) Right.

Paul: [07:31](#) You were mayor. You had gone to Harvard, and you decided you want to join the Naval Reserve. Can you talk us through that experience where you walk into a recruiter's office and say, "Hey, I'm the mayor, and I'm here to sign up for the Navy"? How did that go down? That's not the normal path.

Pete: [07:47](#) So, yeah. First of all, I want to qualify my service. I would be the first war veteran since George HW Bush. But also, my service was nothing like George HW Bush. I mean he, he undertook unbelievably courageous actions, as did his generational contemporary President Kennedy. I'm not trying to put myself up with them, but I do think there's some value in having a commander in chief who has had that experience of being deployed into a war.

Pete: [08:15](#) So I was in the reserve when I became mayor. I'd already made that step. But I remember when I got to my unit and then... It was around the time that I became mayor that... You know, folks have Google. A lot of people in my unit, they don't care. You don't spend a lot of time checking on what your fellow service members' day jobs are. And if anybody asked, I'd just

say I worked for the city, because I just didn't need to have that conversation, right?

Paul: [08:43](#) Right.

Pete: [08:44](#) Then of course, word gets around, and folks have fun with it. And so when the deployment happened, it was really important to me that that not get out any more than it had to because I wanted... Like every reservist does. The real standard you're holding yourself to, I think, as a reservist is you hope that no one can tell that you're a reservist versus an active duty member, right? If you've done your training right, then you should be interchangeable, and it's a kind of point of professional pride. And for some of the people I served with, that was true. I don't think they ever understood that I had a day job, but I was in an intel unit. People are going to Google the new guy, right? And I got so much shit. I mean they call me the Honorable Lieutenant, right? Was a lot of that. I mean, you can imagine. It's inevitable and irresistible, I think.

Paul: [09:27](#) But it also makes you a high value target, right? You are more valuable to the enemy if they snatch you up versus, you know, Johnny Six Pack who might be in the back of a Humvee. Was that a consideration for you and for your unit?

Pete: [09:43](#) It crossed my mind. Yeah, for sure. I'm not sure that... I mean again, we've also got to put things in their place, right? I mean, mayor of South Bend, Indiana certainly is considered very important around South Bend, Indiana; I'm not sure in the geopolitical grand scheme of things it mattered much.

Paul: [10:00](#) But the enemy has Google too.

Pete: [10:02](#) No, that's true. Yeah. And I wondered about that. You know, we were always careful to, you know, you take your name tape off if you're with civilians and you don't have to be identified. And tried to make sure that I cut as low a profile as I could over there, for that reason. But of course, you know, mostly you're just thinking about how to make sure you're minimizing all of the different ways you're a target when you go outside the wire. And I was not... You know, I wasn't combat arms, but the reason I was outside of the wire a lot was that I was a driver, we call it a Military Uber.

Pete: [10:31](#) I was basically responsible often for getting people in gear in my unit to the airport and back or around the city of Kabul. Or occasionally we do a road trip to [Bagram 00:10:40] and back.

And so you think about how to try to be comparatively low profile, but you're in a Land Cruiser, you got body armor on. You can throw one of those scarves on, but you're not really fooling anybody. Right? And so you just got to keep your wits about you. There were occasionally times that I'd go out of uniform and just have a polo shirt and kind of try to be super low profile, but that had its own sets of risks.

Paul: [11:03](#) Yeah. And I know you've talked about it a bit, but do you remember the moment you actually signed the paperwork? And you know, we recognize as service members, especially at a younger age, it puts a profound sense of responsibility on people when you sign your service members group life insurance. I remember the moment I signed my insurance and dedicated it to my nephew who was a teenager at the time. "You get killed. Who's going to get the money?" Right? You have to make that decision. But do you remember the moment you signed the paperwork? And I'm really curious about who the heck your recruiter was, right? Like, what was the reaction of that recruiter, and how did they handle... Even as a Harvard graduate, right, it's not a normal thing for someone to walk in to... If you walked into a standard recruiter's office or if you did it in a different way, but that, that experience for you at the time, what did it feel like and what were you thinking?

Pete: [11:51](#) Yeah, so it was a classic story of ups and downs dealing with military bureaucracy, right? So when I first felt that tug in, I think, 2008 and started talking to a recruiter, one of the things that I thought... I hope they'd be impressed that I'd been to Harvard, because I thought that would help me, you know, get accepted to the officer program. But most of all I hope they'd be impressed that I'd studied Arabic when I was there. So I'd mentioned this to the NCO who was there at the recruiting station. Couldn't tell whether that really mattered to anybody or whether it was helping my package when I went in to try to get picked up for intel.

Paul: [12:28](#) Is it like a strip mall? You walk in a strip mall, "Hi, I speak Arabic"?

Pete: [12:32](#) Yeah, literally.

Paul: [12:32](#) "And I went to Harvard, and I'd like to join the Navy"?

Pete: [12:34](#) I mean, I think I was probably a little cooler about it then that, but yeah, something like that, right? And I remember a couple months later my package got handed to a Lieutenant and she

said, "I see that you had a minor when you were at Harvard in aerobics. Is that something you think is real?" And I was like, "Oh, shit." And ironically, years later I wound up as the command fitness leader in my unit. So I don't know whether that was connected or not.

Pete: [12:56](#) I remember some... There are some of those moments where you just feel it. Before the deployment, I remember the moment I wrote my "just in case" letter and put it in an envelope. The moment of taking the oath actually was another classic anticlimactic big Navy moment. So I had pictured, you know, Richard Gere at the end of... Isn't it him, An Officer and a Gentleman, right? This emotional moment. Or at least like, me having my hand up standing next to a flag. So I've been emailing back and forth with this recruiter as we were going through all the paperwork. Finally the weekend came, and she was out of Detroit; I was in South Bend. I travel constantly during the week, so it, had to be on the weekend or on a certain date and she didn't want to come all the way to South bend, and I didn't want to go all the way to Detroit. So she proposed that we meet at a Big Boy Diner in Battle Creek or somewhere kind of halfway between South Bend and Detroit.

Pete: [13:47](#) And then we got there and it was closed, and we wound up at a coffee shop nearby. And she was like, "Okay, well if you want to put your right hand up and do the thing you can." I was like, "This is my moment. Give me my moment," you know? So I'm a little jealous of friends who've managed to arrange to do their commissioning on a, you know, on the deck of the Intrepid here in New York or stuff like that. But it was still meaningful for me. But maybe not one of those kind of movies style moments, those cinematic moments that you envision when you decide you're going to go serve your country.

Paul: [14:14](#) Everybody's got their recruiting enlistment story. Everybody thinks there's going to be F-14s flying overhead and salutes by fireworks and all that, and that rarely happens. But Mayor Pete, going back to a question that we ask of all the guests on Angry Americans, when you were growing up and you were making those travels around the Midwest, Mayor Pete Buttigieg, what was your first car?

Pete: [14:34](#) Hmm. So, the first car I was allowed to drive was my parents' 1992 Buick LeSabre. It was blue. It was enormous. I mean, just so big. And obviously not the coolest in my parent's LeSabre. But I'll tell you, it really handled well in the snow around South Bend, because there's just so much metal there. The first time I

bought a car, it was a Taurus. It was a 2005 Taurus, and I kept it through most of the time I was mayor. At one point, the interns nicknamed it the "Chick Magnet," and that's when I realized they were making fun of me. And it was good car, too. I don't know, someday I'll get a sexy car, but I'm mostly that utility. Now I've got a Chevy Cruise, which is, you know, I'm happy to have/

- Paul: [15:24](#) The Beast would be a pretty sexy car. That is the vehicle that the president rolls around in.
- Pete: [15:28](#) Yeah. I wonder what it has more mass to it. The Beast or that LeSabre, because it'd probably be a fair fight.
- Paul: [15:35](#) Well, yeah. Speaking of of fight, we are here right now, shifting gears, we've got to talk about what I think many of us in the veterans community and many in America think should be the top story in America right now and seems to be pushed to the back with the impeachment drama unfolding, with now the shooting in Jersey city. But this week the Afghanistan Papers were released, which basically came out in the Washington post and basically formally confirmed for us that the government and government officials had been lying about the war in Afghanistan for almost two decades. I know you're going to have policy positions on it; I know you're going to have a response in the press, but how did you feel as an Afghanistan veteran yourself when you saw that headline or you were on your phone or wherever you were, how did you feel when you got essentially confirmation that government had been lying about the war you were sent to fight in?
- Pete: [16:37](#) Yeah. Well, angry. Let down. You go... Even when you're not too sure about the politicians appointed or elected above you, you still have some... You rely on some sense that the people in that chain of command above you have your best interests at heart, that they care about the truth, and that they're doing their best to do the right thing. Because I'll tell you, everybody that I was immediately around, definitely my OIC and the enlisted folks that I was in charge of, were people who got up in the morning and set out to do the right thing. And to see that that broke down somewhere way, way above where we were in the chain of command, and to think about the moments when I felt like I had to weigh the consequences of the comparatively little decisions that I was making, but they weren't little to me, right...



Pete: [17:44](#) If we needed to get some gear from Kabul to Bagram, kind of risky; I didn't have an MRAP or anything like that. I'm in an SUV. It's got its armor, but, you know... it's a risk. And I'm thinking, "Okay, I can take the gunny sergeant, who has done this a whole bunch of times, and ask him to come up with me." Because there have got to be two long guns in the vehicle, right? It's got to be me plus one. And I can ask him to come, but he's just a couple weeks from going home. He's got four boys at home with Mrs. Gunny, seven, eight, nine and 10 years old. And I can ask him to do it, knowing that he's the best qualified person to do this with me. Or I can ask an enlisted sailor that I know who doesn't have kids, but also isn't as comfortable and prepared doing the kind of work that you need somebody to do as your eyes and ears when they're in the vehicle with you on a movement like that. And that decision only involved three people, but you feel that decision, because you know the moral weight of it.

Pete: [18:53](#) You feel so much this decision affecting that tiny number of people, and then you think that there are folks making decisions affecting thousands and thousands of people that have that same-

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Pete: [19:03](#) Is affecting thousands and thousands of people that have that same life or death quality except multiplied by every day, every service member is deployed. And they don't have that, they don't show that same sense of seriousness about a fidelity to the truth and the calls that they've got to make. And it's infuriating.

Paul: [19:22](#) So you've pledged to wind down the war in Afghanistan. Has the release of what's now being called the Afghanistan Papers changed your plan if you were elected commander in chief? And for all of us who've served, all of us in America, every president says they're going to wind down Afghanistan at this point. Why should we believe that you can actually do it?

Pete: [19:47](#) Yeah. Yeah, I mean one thing we've learned is just how difficult it is for America to unwind itself in this conflict. But we've now gotten to the point where there are people there now who were not alive on 9/11. I thought I was one of the last guys turning out the lights when I left years ago and we're still there and we can't go on like this. And now that we see just how much fecklessness and dishonesty there was as the mission drifted from responding to 9/11, to securing the counter

terrorism environment, to at times feeling like we were shouldering the responsibility for Afghan becoming a prosperous liberal democratic society. We've got to draw a line around what our mission objectives are. I believe that we can and must end our large scale involvement. I'm also realistic that we're probably going to have to have some kind of diplomatic intelligence and spec ops capability there for a while to make sure that it doesn't become, once again, a place where there's an attack on the American-

- Paul: [20:51](#) When you say a while.
- Pete: [20:53](#) Yeah.
- Paul: [20:54](#) A while is a term we've heard for a while.
- Pete: [20:58](#) Yep.
- Paul: [20:59](#) What does it really mean? What does it mean to the guys and gals who have done 10 tours and want to know if they're going to do 12 tours or 14 tours? You are a meticulous planner.
- Pete: [21:09](#) Yeah.
- Paul: [21:10](#) Your entire career shows tremendous foresight and you're a strategic leader, but break it down. Do you have an act... can conditions change on the ground?
- Pete: [21:22](#) Yeah, what I was going to say, but-
- Paul: [21:23](#) If you're elected president, what's the... you have to set expectations, right? And I think one of the things I hear about you a lot is that people say, "I like him". They feel like they can trust you. But our commitments overseas are kind of where the trust of politicians goes to die.
- Pete: [21:37](#) Yeah. For good reason.
- Paul: [21:38](#) Yeah.
- Pete: [21:38](#) Yeah.
- Paul: [21:39](#) So can you put more meat on the bone? And what's the promise you can make, especially to the folks in the military about what to expect really.

Pete: [21:46](#) Yeah. So I'd break it down into two pieces. There's the several thousand people on the ground presence that we have now that I thought I was part of the last throes of, and that we just to wind down. Can I impose a clock on it? I can't. As a political candidate, making a promise that's going to lock in my presidency isn't responsible. But what I will say is it's got to be fast. It's got to be as fast as we responsibly can in a framework that is not just going around the Afghan government to the Taliban, which is what I've observed this administration often appearing to do, but one that actually has all of the relevant parties at the table. And again, we're going to have to leave aside the idea that we're going to be the guarantors of peace and prosperity.

Paul: [22:33](#) But Mayor Pete, what is fast? So fast to some people is a week, to some people in the Pentagon fast is five years.

Pete: [22:41](#) Yeah, it's not going to be a week. But if this is dragging on beyond my first year, we're going to have a problem. Now again, some kind of light footprint like we had in Syria, that could be years. But the whole point of looking at what happened in Syria is that a remarkably small handful of people were able to form that line between what was going on and chaos. And we need to set ourselves up to where all we need is that light specialized touch to make sure things don't go off the cliff, versus making sure that everything trying to have these outcomes that we haven't been able to deliver in the better part of 20 years with thousands and thousands and thousands of people on the ground.

Paul: [23:30](#) It feels like you wake up some days and the world's on fire, whether it's Northern Syria, Afghanistan, Jersey City, and we cover a wide range of issues on this show and this community. When I asked them, what makes them angry? It's everything from school shootings, to infrastructure, to the losing ways of the New York Knicks. There's a lot to be angry about in America right now, but you already touched on Afghanistan, Mayor P. Buttigieg, what makes you angry?

Pete: [24:00](#) What makes me angry is when people in a position of leadership or trust encourage those they lead to look at other human beings, often fellow Americans, as something other than human beings. I think that the root of most social evil is when a person becomes capable of looking at another person and seeing something besides humanity. And we are seeing more and more of that in our country, and it is lethal. This will not get better without a radically different, I'm not just talking about a

president who ideologically agrees with me, I'm talking about a radically different understanding of the responsibilities of political leadership. And in particular the fact that just as political leaders have the capacity to divide and frighten, and frankly us into being more fearful and small and backward looking, that the better part of leadership is the ability to do the reverse.

Pete: [25:06](#) It's harder, but you can use not just the tools, the pulleys and levers of government, but just the voice that you get in leadership to build out a sense of belonging that makes people just a little more secure, just a little more open and just a little more decent. And time is running out for us to do that. And if we can't do that, then I am worried that the American project will meet its end in my lifetime. That's the sense of urgency I feel about this. When you look at racial divisions, when you look at the poison that is being introduced into our politics, I believe we will live to see whether America rises to the occasion and gets over this or whether it takes us down.

Paul: [25:53](#) Mm-hmm (affirmative). And I think many people, especially listening now, share that concern. And we've wanted this show and this community to be on some levels... it's a signal flare. Especially around the issues of national security and defense, and many Americans feel that tremendous sense of urgency, but they also are concerned about what looks like a democratic field that's eating their own. Especially independence and unaffiliated's who are looking at this saying, "Can you all please just get your shit together and figure out who's going to take on Donald Trump". Maybe there's going to be a Game of Thrones moment where you're John Snow or someone else becomes John Snow and they all rally around you, but before they do the criticism you face often is about experience.

Pete: [26:43](#) Mm-hmm (affirmative).

Paul: [26:44](#) Right? If elected, you'll be the youngest president in history, younger even than Teddy Roosevelt, right? But when you think about the experience of the last eight months... when I was on the radio in March, I was explaining to people how to pronounce your name.

Pete: [26:57](#) Right.

Paul: [26:58](#) Now it's December and you're leading in Iowa, you're leading in New Hampshire.

Pete: [27:02](#) Right.

Paul: [27:02](#) On a-

Pete: [27:03](#) I think people are still having trouble with the name a little bit, so.

Paul: [27:04](#) Yeah. On a very basic level, you've been living this life that is extraordinary, and experience that's been extraordinary. You and your husband had been thrust into this spotlight. I had David Bellavia on the show a couple episodes ago who had received the medal of honor, and his entire world has turned upside down. He's standing at the halftime of NFL games and he's on television shows, and it's this catapulting of his experience and his life in a way he never could have imagined. What has this been like for you, man? How do you keep grounded? How do you keep up on the news? I don't even... I came in and talked to you, I don't know how you can even understand the 19 things that happened since we've been sitting here for 20 minutes. But on a human level, how do you process all this from being in South Bend to now duking it out with Joe Biden and Kamala Harris in front of tens of millions of people.

Pete: [27:57](#) Yeah, it's heady. It's an out of body experience sometimes, but a couple of things keep it from swamping you as a human being. The first is a team, right? So if I had the single handedly be on top of everything that was going on in the world, I would break. But there are hundreds of people who make sure that everything from my relationship with a county chair in Iowa who's this close to coming around to endorsing me, to ensuring that we have a reasonably sophisticated understanding of the latest developments in the Afghanistan peace talks, there's somebody there who is on top of it, who knows more about it than I do, and who can help me stay informed and on time and aware and make everything work. So that's part of it.

Pete: [28:46](#) Just like in I think any profession, certainly in the military, you got a team that can make or break you, and we've got a fantastic team. The other thing is to have people in your life whose relationship to you doesn't revolve around politics. So that's where my marriage is so important. Chasten is going to care the exact same for me whether I'm president or not. And when we were getting into this race, when we were weighing doing that final gut check, where our theory of the case checked out, the team checked out, the politics checked out, and the question was just, are we really deep down ready to do this? He

said, "I support this if we make sure of two things, that will always be ourselves and keep our values, and we'll find somewhere to have some fun along the way". And that's what we've been able to do.

Pete: [29:35](#) Not that it hasn't been hard, both in terms of testing your values sometimes, and in terms of testing your capacity to make it fun sometimes. But we've been able to do that. And so there are those moments when I'm at home, not to mention the dogs, right? So talk about something that keeps you humble, right? They don't care if I'm running for president, they don't care what happened in the last polls. Two weeks ago they got into some chocolate, and so Chasten and I had to make sure that we basically forced fed them enough hydrogen peroxide to make them puke, I don't know if you know what the standard procedure for if your dog gets in chocolate-

Paul: [30:12](#) No, I don't.

Pete: [30:12](#) ... so-

Paul: [30:13](#) Please enlighten us.

Pete: [30:13](#) You need to get the chocolate out of the dog very quickly because it can be toxic. And so, I'm in the backyard, we're counting number of times, each one of them has puked until it's satisfactory. I'm... I won't take you into the most gory details, but let's just say it brings you right back down to earth. To go from being on national television debating for the highest office in the land to making sure your dog's okay, and those are kind of the moments that just put you in your place. But it's a heady thing as it should be. We're talking about a moment of unbelievably high stakes, and when you put yourself forward at my age or at any age, obviously there's something very audacious about doing that. But I also think it's that coming from a younger generation is really helpful right now. In fact, it's happening around the world, they just voted in a... there's a new prime minister in Finland, I think she's 34. I'd be 39 taking office, same as Macron, who is increasingly the adults in the room and a lot of these multinational gatherings, right?

Pete: [31:21](#) Certainly relative in many cases to the U.S. president, where age has not turned into necessarily wisdom or judgment. New Zealand has a remarkable leader who I think also younger than I would be taking office, so this is happening. Even the leaders that we're not so happy with, like Kim Jong Un, are younger than 39. So we're seeing this moment of among world leaders,

good, bad and indifferent, of a new generation arriving on the scene, and it's usually the kind of thing that the U.S. would be leading, we're playing catch up this time. But I'll also say this from a more political standpoint, every time my party has taken office in the last 50 years it's been, every time we've won in the White House, it's been somebody who is new on the scene and had not run for president before. Somebody had a message about bringing people together around higher values, and somebody who represented advancement generationally.

Pete: [32:19](#) And I think that's important to think about, because there's so many folks I talk to, not just diehard Democrats, but a lot of independents who say, "You know what, I don't care which one of you it is, but it better be the one who's going to win", and I think we should think about that. But the other thing that I'm trying to do in building this movement, is to reach out to independents. Reach out to what I like to call future former Republicans who, I try to be very transparent about the fact that we're not going to agree on everything and I'm very clear on my values and I'm not going to budge on the things we believe in, but we don't have to agree on everything to agree that we need a big change. And I've seen a lot of people who are ready to cross the aisle and be part of that new American majority.

Paul: [32:56](#) We're getting deep into experience and I'm not a person who will be looking at the age necessarily of a leader. I've learned that, I think many of us who've lived a bit and especially been overseas in places like that, know that heroism and leadership can come at any age. But on the question of experience, there's something else that I know that there are only two experiences in life that you only understand if you've had them yourself, and it's combat and parenthood. So, you have a plan for almost everything. Do you and Chasten have a plan for children? And if you don't or you do, what is your answer to someone who might say, "I can't vote for someone to be commander in chief who doesn't have kids"?

Pete: [33:44](#) Well, we're thinking about it. Chasten is designed... I'd like to think I'd be a decent dad. Chasten is designed to be a dad. He's just born to do it, and so it's in our future for sure. It's in the, going to happen zone, as a friend of mine would put it. I've made some professional choices that have complicated our ability to do it right away. But it's definitely in our future, and I'm excited for it. I mean, talk about a whole different level from having the dogs, kind of keep you down to earth, is that kind of responsibility. I'll also say that some of the conversations around experience in this race sort of skip over the whole thing

about being in the military. And I think that is a very important experience that I've had, as is the experience of being mayor of a city of any size at a time when... I think we're finding that local leadership is where we're increasingly raising our expectations, because our expectations of Washington have collapsed.

Pete: [34:45](#) And if we can get more of the rigor that goes on in local government, just the fact that... here's one thing to think about, you never see a local government, like a city, shut down the government because of a partisan disagreement. It's unthinkable. I mean cities deliver water, you need water to live, so we just figure it out. You don't get to make up your own facts. You don't get to print money. You just have to do things. And I think we need that attitude, and orientation, and leadership to come to Washington before it starts happening the other way around

Paul: [35:21](#) In the last debate I felt like you kind of clicked it up a notch, because the question is who can beat Trump? That I think is a question for people of all political parties right now. And the question of experience will be one that folks will ask about you, but the question of toughness, fight, they go low, we go high, sometimes maybe you need to go a little lower than the Democrats had been going lately, because it seems like they're often fighting each other more than they're fighting Trump. You're in New York City, he claims this is his home. There are some buildings in this burrow that probably have more people in them than the entire city of South Bend, Indiana. So the ferocity that he is used to, and that he is bringing to this is different. Why should folks believe that you can take him down?

Pete: [36:17](#) Because his tricks don't work in the same way on me. You can already tell, he's got a nickname for everybody, but he can't settle on one for me, he doesn't talk about me much. And the reality is in order to contend with somebody like him, it's not going to work to just have an equal and opposite version of him. And first of all, morally, the implications of that are problematic, but also it doesn't work. Because if you're on his show, if you're playing his game, even when you're winning, you're losing, because it's his game. And this is going to be an incredibly important discipline for the nominee to have, that I intend to bring to that debate stage. In other words, when he does something wrong, you've got to confront it. When he lies, you got to say what the truth is. You have to return fire for sure.



Pete: [37:08](#) We also can't... yet we have to deny him the power to change the subject, that's been his most important power. And the reason he needs to change the subject, even if it's to himself by doing something that nobody thinks is good, the reason he keeps needing that is because he doesn't have answers on how to make our lives better. We've got an economy where the Dow Jones is off the charts, people are actually dying more and younger in the United States now. Those two things should not even be possible to happen at the same time, but they are. It is harder and harder to be able to save for retirement and healthcare and education. We have better answers on how to make life better in the every day, and we got to make sure we have an election that's not about him, but is about you. And the more we let it be about him, the less we're talking about you. The more it's about you, the more we might-

Paul: [38:01](#) Can you do it though? Because I hear the Democrats keep-

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Paul: [38:03](#) The more it's about-

Pete: [38:03](#) Can you do it though? Because I hear the Democrats keep saying that, and then he pardons war criminals and then he abandons the Kurds or he just decides to start tweeting about something else. I get the aspiration, I get what you want to do, but it's really a two-part question, can you snatch the mic back from him? that's the hard part. And I think an essential part of that strategy is, can you actually get the Democrats together? Bernie last time took it all the way, Tulsi is doing her own thing, you've literally got all these different tribes that are often, in my view, warring with each other more than they are with Trump. How are you going to do it? How are you actually going to get them all together? And maybe it's even tougher as a newcomer.

Pete: [38:50](#) In some ways yes. In some ways no. I mean, I've found even in local government, it served me really well that I hadn't come out of any of the civil wars that produced any of my competitors or some of the folks that I was dealing with, that I just came from a different place. And I think that's especially useful in a moment like this. That's the first thing.

Pete: [39:10](#) The second thing is there's no longer just this vague idea of a wolf at the gates, especially for Democrats. But honestly, for independence and a lot of Republicans of conscience who just hate what they're saying in the White House, the wolf is through the gates eating our chickens, it is there, you can see

what's happening, and this is a state of emergency. And in the right hands, that can have a unifying power.

Pete: [39:29](#) A third thing is you'll notice that my policies are designed to advance big solutions to big problems, and do it in a way that can unify rather than polarize. So whether it's the way I'm approaching healthcare, a way to make sure there's no such thing as an uninsured American, but without the division of the American people that would be associated with some of the more extreme approaches or any number of other issues. What I'm doing is building that American majority, not just for political reasons, but from a governing perspective, to actually get this done. In other words, I'm asking voters to measure the boldness of an idea, not by how many people it can piss off, but by how much it can achieve. The bigness of an idea, not by how many trillions of dollars it costs, but by what the outcomes are going to be like. That, in addition to the fight... Look, I don't mind fighting this guy. I'm frankly looking forward to some of the contrasts we'll be able to draw.

Paul: [40:27](#) You came after him especially in part by doing what he does, which was weaponizing the military rhetoric. He's a draft dodger, you went to Afghanistan, you started calling him out on that [crosstalk 00:02:39], but it's an amplification, right? Part of what he has mastered is the populism of many issues, but especially of the military of veterans' issues. He says the VA is better than it's ever been and he's going to have war criminals literally stumping on the speech with him. How much are you going to push that? How much are you going to relaunch-

Pete: [41:00](#) A lot, in a way that's not about him, it's about us. So for example, we got a puncture this... He thinks it's pro... Well, I don't think he even believes it, but he acts like it's pro military to pardon a war criminal. And when he does that, by the way, he's playing into one of the worst slanders of service members that you and I hear from time to time, which is that there is no difference between a war fighter and a war criminal. So he is tarnishing the uniform in countless ways, which is of course why the military itself doesn't have his back on this, but knows that it was wrong. So what we do is we poke a hole in that real quickly, we show why that's not pro military, why it's not pro America, why it's not patriotism.

Pete: [41:42](#) But then we get into what patriotism is, what it means to lift up a love of country that begins with the understanding that our country is made of people, that you can't love a country if you hate half of the people in it. We build a new and better

patriotism than the shop worn and thin one that he is selling. And sometimes that means it got punched if there's just some bullshit on his part that we got to just deal with. Most of the time it means pivoting very quickly from that into what it is we're actually building so people can see that it's better.

Paul: [42:17](#) You've been redefining patriotism, even redefining activism, you've been redefining family, you've been redefining what it means to be a Democrat. You're going to be around a long time, no matter what happens next fall, but if you don't win, what do you want to do?

Pete: [42:37](#) I'm in it to win it. And I'll tell you-

Paul: [42:40](#) I know that's the answer, but if you had to choose, and let's assume VP is off the table, would you rather be VA secretary or secretary of state or go back to South Bend? I mean, have you thought about what you will do? You have a plan for everything, you literally have a plan for everything, and so what would be your plan if you don't win?

Pete: [43:06](#) The plan is to make myself useful. And the way I see I can do that now, as improbable as it is, not what I had in mind when I ran for mayor eight years ago, but is to seek the presidency and use it to guide America through these changes that are coming our way. But at each turn in my life, I've thought about how to make myself useful and sometimes that takes you to really unexpected places. I never would've thought that making myself useful involved going home to South Bend. The whole time I was growing up the message in a place like South Bend was if you want to make something of yourself, get out, which is what I did, only to realize the more time I spent after I left, that I belonged, that I was from somewhere and I had to go back. And in the same way it took some time for me to understand why it was so important that I'd make myself useful in my country's uniform, you never know what that's going to mean a year, or five, or 10 years from now, whether it's as president, as ex president or as something else.

Pete: [44:07](#) But what I know is that we're at this moment where the condition of the country and the demands of the office call for something different, and I believe it's exactly what I have to offer. And my job is to get out there and talk to as many voters as possible. And if they agree with me, then comes the hard part where I have to go make good on it.

Paul: [44:31](#) I appreciate that. But I also don't think you're up there going VA secretary would be as cool as being secretary of state. There is a landscape out there that I think is important for people who are looking at government service, who are looking at politics to understand because the longevity of you is in part what I think inspires a lot of people too. In many ways, you're going to inherit the kind of moderate constituency that Biden's got. At some point Biden's going to be gone. And a lot of those folks who are looking for a more moderate place in the democratic party and beyond are going to look to you for leadership, and you have an opportunity to really inherit, I think, that mantle, especially for folks who aren't Democrats and will never be Democrats and will never leave the Republican party. So they're going to look for, and maybe I want to take this to a place because it gets to competence, and that's one issue that Democrats have often had a challenge with is governing.

Paul: [45:33](#) And maybe the best example for the veterans in the room, especially at the VA, I have been very critical of Barack Obama. I think he blew it on the VA. The entire Obama administration, the only a cabinet level secretary to resign in scandal was Eric Shinseki, the secretary of the VA. So I think in many ways, the VA can be the place for Democrats to prove government works or to show that government doesn't work. When it's great, it's the GI bill. When it's bad, it's the Phoenix scandal. So I want to make sure, at least on behalf of the veterans I ask you... I've heard your plan on VA, I think you're detailed, you're being thoughtful about it, but leadership matters, especially in that job. So are there any names on your short list that you can share for who would be the secretary of VA if you're elected president?

Pete: [46:16](#) No names, but I'll tell you the qualifications after.

Paul: [46:19](#) I know you're going to tell me that, but-

Pete: [46:22](#) It wouldn't be responsible for me to name names right now, but I'll tell you the kind of person we need.

Paul: [46:25](#) Okay, please.

Pete: [46:26](#) We need somebody, first of all, who is completely committed to the mission and is not interested in pleasing some of the constituency. Right now you see under under this president a lot of folks who see this as an area where they can get a slice and benefit personally. And they have the ear of those who are making policy around veterans. I'm looking for somebody

whose only commitment is to veterans and to the country. I'm looking for somebody who has demonstrated that they know how to undertake really complicated organizational challenges. I'm looking for somebody who's going to tell the truth because one of the biggest problems that can happen in a government unit, a business, certainly in a military unit, is when somebody doesn't want to tell the commander the bad news. And there's going to be more bad news before there's more good news in a lot of the stuff going on over there, and I'm looking for somebody... And there are different ways you can do it, but who has authenticated those other things I was just talking about by the choices they've made at difficult moments in their life. There are plenty of people out there who might be up to it, there may be some people I have not yet met who could be up to it, but what I'll tell you is that this can't be left off to the side any longer because this is how America keeps a promise that is supposed to be a two-way promise between those who serve and the United States. And that promise is supposed to last a lifetime and we've got to do better.

Paul: [47:54](#)

I think it's important that people understand... I think it's often overlooked that you're redefining many things, but you're also redefining what it means to be a veteran. You're smart, you're thoughtful, you're a well-educated person. You're not just shooting guns and blowing stuff up and throwing punches. There is a negative stereotype of veterans that we are either incredible soaring pillars of superherodom or that we're broken and we're conned, like somehow we got conned into the military and we all love George Bush, we all love Donald Trump. But you've really redefined and shown a dynamism that I think is very, very important. And I want you to know that from me and from many of us who see that, showing that we can do anything. And I think older generations may be understood that, but especially right now with the civil military divide where it is, you are redefining it in such an important way what it means to be a veteran.

Paul: [48:54](#)

And I think you're a social movement leader. Beyond the politics, the way you're influencing kids and the way you're showing people what's possible is really at the core of what the American dream is supposed to be all about. And that I know is what's bringing a lot of people to you. But you also bring a positivity that is infectious. I see it around your team, I see it on your social media, I see it in your husband, there is an energy of positivity. So the last question I ask of all of our guests is, Pete Buttigieg, what makes you happy?

Pete: [49:29](#) Being around people that I love and coming to know things that are lovable in people that I've either just met or that I didn't see it before.

Pete: [49:42](#) Look, the world, the city, the country, it's made of people, and the reality is that every human being is capable of a lot of good things and a lot of bad things. And what matters in leadership is what it draws out of us. And one of the extraordinary things that happens in a political campaign, especially the kind of hands on part where you're out there just meeting folks and having the experience sometimes hundreds of times a day of somebody coming up to you and mentioning whatever is the most important thing in their lives, gives you a sense of what people care about. And there are just these flickers where you see what makes somebody wonderful. And I get it the most when I'm at home with Chasten and with friends and with family, but sometimes I get to see it in strangers too. And that just fills me with happiness.

Paul: [50:43](#) And it fills other people with happiness. And I think it's coming at a time where politics is not a place we go for happiness.

Pete: [50:50](#) Right. We've got to change that because politics will be what we make of it. And right now it sucks and, if we allow that to continue, it's just going to snowball. It's up to us. People forget that. It is completely up to us and now's the time. There's never been, certainly in my lifetime, to shift this and turn it around and it's not... That kind of sense of hope is not from my youth. It's from my experience. It's from seeing that huge changes are possible if you have the right level of awareness and energy and courage. And I see a moment shaping up that as bleak as our politics can be in 2019 that we could set ourselves up so we can look back at 2020 and actually feel some measure of pride.

Paul: [51:44](#) There is an event happening this weekend that gives America a special pride and it's when army plays Navy. It's the one time when I think... People say the Cowboys are America's team, I think that's bullshit. Army and Navy are America's team. And all you Cowboy fans can take a seat, because they really are, and we'll see that this weekend. It's about the purity of sport and it's about patriotism in its best form, but it's also about student athletes and it's about leadership and it's the one game where everybody's rooting for both sides. And I'm going to be rooting for Army, you're going to be rooting for Navy-

Pete: [52:19](#) Navy's got to win.

Paul: [52:21](#) You said you've never been, but are you going to make a prediction?

Pete: [52:24](#) Well, I mean I got to go Navy all the way. It feels like a good year for Navy.

Paul: [52:30](#) It is a good new year for Navy. I mean, rooting for Notre Dame every time Navy comes to town, you're nervous.

Pete: [52:36](#) Yeah, a little bit. Yeah, because they always bring their best game and they got this unique offense. It's fun to watch and yeah, I feel good.

Paul: [52:45](#) It's a gift to America every weekend and I hope folks will watch it and enjoy it, even if you're not a sports fan. I hope you go-

Pete: [52:51](#) One of these days I hope I get to go.

Paul: [52:53](#) Well, if you're not going this year, then you may be going for the first time as commander in chief next year.

Pete: [52:58](#) Sounds like a great way to-

Paul: [53:00](#) Trump's going this weekend. It'll be interesting to see if Navy boos him after all the shit he's done to the Navy in the last couple of weeks. They won't boo him, they'll keep their military bearing, but he will be there. But America will be watching and it will be a gift, which takes me to our last point, which is the giving of the gifts. This is part of the tradition. And your staff probably didn't fully brief you on this, but we give every guest three gifts, three kinds of gifts since the beginning of the show. And as we thank you for many things, I want to present you with a couple of gifts. The first is some American made, by the veterans of Oscar Mike, angry Americans merchandise made in the USA. You guys can give it up for Oscar Mike.

Pete: [53:42](#) All right.

Paul: [53:46](#) Give it up for veterans unless you hate America. Thank you very much.

Pete: [53:49](#) It's a good workout shirt. I like it.

Paul: [53:51](#) And then the other quiz I was informing your staff about is since the show started around Easter, you're our 37th guest or our 37th episode, we've asked every single one to choose... If you

had to choose a color of peeps, Mayor Pete Buttigieg, yellow, blue or pink, and why?

Pete: [54:12](#) That's got to be yellow.

Paul: [54:14](#) Why?

Pete: [54:15](#) Well, accuracy for one thing, I mean, right?

Paul: [54:19](#) Accuracy?

Pete: [54:20](#) Yeah, it's yellow. That's such a Mayor Pete answer. Birds are yellow, those kinds of birds I assume. I don't know. Yeah, I'm going to go ahead... Plus, you got to start with the basics, like the fundamental peep. Like if you had to pick one for the dictionary picture, it's got to be yellow, right?

Paul: [54:37](#) Sarah Jessica Parker called them the OG of peeps.

Pete: [54:39](#) There you go. Yeah.

Paul: [54:41](#) And I think your answer is a close second. That was a very good answer. And lastly, every show we talk a little bit about whiskey, and I go to the same liquor store and I look on the shelves for something that inspires me given our guests. Now, I don't know if you know about this brand, this is called Clyde Mays' Straight Bourbon whiskey, and the reason I chose it is because you're a man of precision and attention to detail. If you look in the fine print, it's the only whiskey I've ever seen that's distilled in Indiana.

Pete: [55:13](#) There you have it.

Paul: [55:15](#) Did you know about that?

Pete: [55:16](#) I did not. We've got a great a place in South... A veteran owned business in South Bend actually, called Indiana Whiskey, but probably hasn't made its way to the shelves around here yet. This looks... Look at that color on that.

Paul: [55:27](#) It's good.

Pete: [55:29](#) That's great.



- Paul: [55:29](#) So going forward, that may be your beverage of choice than Macallen, especially if sanctions make it too expensive for Americans to consume in the next couple of months.
- Pete: [55:38](#) Wonderful. Thank you very much. That looks good. I'm looking forward to that.
- Paul: [55:42](#) But Pete Buttigieg, I want to thank you most of all for your leadership. In the Army, we about leadership being about duty and respect and selfless service and, outside of politics, I think you've been putting your butt on the line and you've been showing the kind of courage that Americans root for. And no matter if they're Republicans, Democrats, everything in between, even if they don't vote for you, I think all of America is rooting for you. And it's good to have someone to root for. And I'm very, very grateful for your leadership, grateful for your candor and your time. And wish you all the best. And thank you for joining us here on Angry Americans today.
- Pete: [56:21](#) Thanks. It was a great visit. I appreciate it. Thanks for your work.
- Paul: [56:24](#) Thank you.
- Speaker 2: [56:25](#) Ladies and gentlemen, please give it up for Mayor Pete Buttigieg.
- Paul: [56:33](#) All right.

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