

Alan Jaspen  
Poli 204 Metro and U.S. Politics  
Professor Lavery  
May 2nd 2021

**TRANSCRIPT OF INTERVIEW BETWEEN ALAN JASPEN AND CLAUDIA BALDUCCHI,  
DATED APRIL 24th, 2021**

Alan Jaspen was in the Macalester Class of 2023 and a sophomore during the time he took this class. Claudia Balducchi was previously the Mayor of Bellevue, Washington from 2014 to 2015 and since 2016 was a Member of the King County Council from the 6th district. Due to the Coronavirus Pandemic of 2020-2021, this interview took place remotely over zoom, and not in person. This interview was transcribed with the help of otter.ai.

Claudia Balducchi 0:08  
Morning.

Alan Jaspen 0:10  
Good morning.

Claudia Balducchi 0:10  
How are you? Nice to meet you.

Alan Jaspen 0:14  
Nice to meet you.

Alan Jaspen 0:19  
I'm Alan. I am you know, Gerry Hughes' nephew. And you know Gerry and Steve.

Claudia Balducchi 0:27  
Very well, yes.

Alan Jaspen 0:29  
And have you been to 41st? recently? 41st Legislative District Democrats?

Claudia Balducchi 0:37  
Not since 2020. Not this year yet. But yeah, last year, I went a few times.

Alan Jaspen 0:45  
This is for my class Metro politics. But this year, the main overarching thing has been COVID. And like, how cities struggle with COVID. And you were the former mayor of Bellevue, but now you're on the county council.

Alan Jaspen 1:18  
So I think the first part (of this interview) is going to be about COVID. This (class) is all about cities. But how has the county worked with cities and the State? With things like vaccines or other such...what's the role of the county when it works together with the city in the state?

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Claudia Balducchi 1:50

Yeah. So I do have both points of view, so I can speak a little bit to (what) the city's role is, but also the county's. The County has two primary functions, because we are the local health authority. Public health, Seattle, King County is a department of King County, it also belongs partially to Seattle. So it's a little unique, but it is the public health agency for all of King County. So we have authority to do things like order health orders, the most the ones prior to COVID. The ones that people are most familiar with are quarantines. The health officer can order a quarantine, he can order mask mandates, that sort of thing. The state can also do that. And when the state does that, it's binding on us. But often health orders are localized. So our role has been to, in one sense, make health directives. In another sense, it's to provide support. So public health is the healthcare provider that fills gaps that the private health care system, and even the public health care system doesn't fill. So we are responsible for things like HIV/AIDS tracking, and we've always had a large vaccination program. It used to be for people who are traveling overseas primarily. So for COVID we were responsible for a lot of the early testing and tracing, trying to contain the virus back when we thought it was just an outbreak in Kirkland, and we could manage it. We supported the city of Kirkland at first because they were the site of the first big outbreak here, and indeed in the whole country. And then the CDC also comes in so the federal government, the state government, in the county overlap a lot. And when somebody else steps in, we tend to step back or just play a supporting role.

Alan Jaspen 3:53

And I know that the governor with his phases. It's all by county. Like this county is in phase one, this county is in phase two. So even if one city is doing good, if the majority of the county is doing bad, then it gets sent back to phase one.

Claudia Balducchi 4:15

That's exactly right. Yeah. And that's probably going to happen to us in a few days. The county will step back a phase because our case numbers and our hospitalizations are too high. One thing I will say is our big thing right now with vaccinations is like right now everybody's doing vaccinations. Private clinics. The federal government has a partnership directly with pharmacies where they just send vaccines to your local Bartells pharmacy, and we have nothing to do with it. The state has nothing to do with it. The state gets a big allocation, several 100,000 vaccines a week which they then parcel out to various places. And what we do is we receive vaccines, usually from the state. We do mass vaccination clinics, mobile vans that go around. That program went primarily to home care facilities for elderly people. But again, mostly for people who don't have their own insurance or don't have access to health care, otherwise, we're primarily there for people the health care system doesn't serve well. And of course, with COVID, that's a lot of people. And that's a lot of people who are very high risk of getting a disease. So, we're part of this very intricate web of services, and tiered levels of authority in often making orders and regulating. That's kind of where we sit on the org chart of life.

Alan Jaspen 5:49

One thing that I learned in classes is Home Rule versus Dillon's Rule. How much local

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autonomy states let cities have, because the Constitution grants states...the states go round, unless we (the federal government) say so, the states have discretion, discretion and autonomy. And for this, with COVID, it seems like I've been hearing a lot from the States, but (do) the cities (have autonomy and discretion, aka the tenth amendment)? That's just one connection with class.

Claudia Balducchi 6:36

Tell me if I don't answer the question exactly right. But what your question made me think of was, what cities have largely been doing is asking for help, offering help, and using their resources to support the economy. So asking for help is, "Oh my god, we have an outbreak or we've got a whole bunch of seniors living in group homes. Our firefighters would happily drive the mobile vans. Would you please give us some vaccines, King County, and work with us." So they asked for help, they offered help, our firefighters. And then they have either money in their budgets or because they got special allocations from a higher level of government for COVID relief. And then they allocate that to grant programs to small businesses, to people in need, to whatever they do. When you think about what cities do, Seattle is the biggest and therefore gets the most attention, and also has the most resources. So it's really easy to find things that Seattle has done. And then other cities often copy those. So they did an immigrant Relief Program. They early on, ordered. They did regulatory things like limited the amount of surcharge that hailing companies like Uber or Lyft could put on their cars, because so many people were ordering food in, that the companies were gouging the drivers. They, yeah, they did a lot of stuff like that. And so cities can do little things, but Seattle is the most active by far. Most cities look to the county or the state because they're not big enough to make a really big difference.

Alan Jaspen 8:17

And I heard from Steve that, he said that mask compliance in King County is very high. And I was wondering if you knew why mask compliance in King County is very high.

Claudia Balducchi 8:32

I have a theory. I think this is all going to be the subject of a lot of grad students studies or graduate school studies for years to come. But we are, as as a group, we tend to be very trusting in public health and pretty darn compliant. Like I don't know. Were you born and raised here?

Alan Jaspen 8:55

Yes.

Claudia Balducchi 8:55

Yes, I was not. When I came here I was stunned at how people really waited for the lights to change before they cross the street. I come from New York, where that'll get you hit by somebody coming behind you. Like "what are you standing there for lady I'm crossing the street." And so we're rule followers, man, we believe in authority, and we do it. In a way we're

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also very independent, we expect to have a lot of engagement in our government, everybody wants to be consulted. So we have very high vaccination rates, the highest in the state by far. In fact, yesterday, a guy from the governor's office told me that they're hitting the ceiling in other counties where they're not using vaccines at all. They've vaccinated everybody in other counties that wants to be vaccinated and a lot of people do not so they are going to start shipping their vaccines to places where people want it. And he jokingly said, so please don't put this in your report. He jokingly said, "Okay, King County, we're relying on you. You need 95% vaccination rates, you're going to get herd immunity for the whole state." I said "we will take the charge." We just were very high vaccination compliance rates very high mass compliance rates. I think we just fundamentally are trusting that the science is leading the charge and that it's safe. And that that's the way to get out of the the epidemic. But that's the theory, it remains to be tested.

Alan Jaspen 10:18

Thank you. My next couple questions are kind of, the long term influence of the pandemic, and how has COVID changed the priorities of the county and just government in general?

Claudia Balducchi 10:40

Yeah. So there's some really great examples of it. And my favorite one is this, we're at least five years into a declaration of emergency around homelessness. So five years ago, the Mayor of Seattle, the county executive declared an emergency. And some actions followed on that, but nothing you could probably remember right? It didn't make a huge splash. COVID hits, and suddenly, it becomes like the emergency part, like people start acting like it's an emergency because people living on the streets are very susceptible to a communicable disease, will get sick, will be less likely to not get good health care, therefore, they'll die at higher rates. I mean, it becomes a life safety emergency that everybody gets. And we sprang into action. We bought hotels, We leased hotels, we stood up massive tent sites we got from the military. And we started moving people off the streets and mainly out of congregate shelter. So sleeping on the floor, sleeping on a cot in a big room. Not good during an airborne communicable disease outbreak. And so we put people in hotels, and we learned very quickly that when you give somebody a room with a door, they relax, they feel less anxiety, they do better with whatever they're working on. Like if they're in treatment for some kind of substance abuse, they do better. They stabilize, and we're like, "this really works." Like this isn't just a roof overhead, this is actually mental health, it's good for people's mental health, which is good for them. So we're not going to go back to the way we were doing it before. We're going to continue to use the single room occupancy. So that's going to change.

Alan Jaspen 12:34

That is very interesting, just like the psychological effect of a single room. Wow, that makes you feel like a human.

Claudia Balducchi 12:47

Yeah, I think it's about safety. I think it's about how you can really sleep. When you feel secure, that nobody is going to be able to take your stuff or hurt you in your sleep. And your body can

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relax. It's just an animal thing, right? You when you sleep, you want to feel safe. And if you can close and lock the door. So yeah, also its dignity, right? You're treating people with enough dignity, to give them the privacy to manage themselves and not be under surveillance all the time. So that's one thing. I think there's going to be social things that change as well, this isn't so much a government answer. It's just a people answer. We talked about transportation. So we run the transit agency, the bus service, and our ridership goes down 80%. Immediately, our fares are off. So our fares are down 100%. But yet, we see that people in certain parts of the counties continue to ride the bus the whole time, because they have lower paid jobs, which are also now essential jobs, and they have to keep going to work. So we learn something about where we need to provide more service, because that's where people who really rely on our service are. In South Seattle in South King County.

Alan Jaspen 14:02

Because South King County is more diverse. It has the marginalized groups.

Claudia Balducchi 14:10

Yeah, more diverse and lower income, more immigrants. Lots of things very clearly show up on demographic maps in South King County. Yep.

Claudia Balducchi 14:20

And then there's a lot of assumptions going on, that I think nobody really knows the answer to yet. And that is, "hey, it turns out, we can all work from home." And it's a lot cheaper than building more freeways and better for the climate and everything. And so maybe people will go back to work in the jobs where they can work from home. Maybe those tech workers and office workers and government workers who work at desks will not go back. And so why keep putting money into a light rail system, for example, because nobody's going to ride it. And so we're having those debates now. I don't know exactly what the end result of that one looks like. I'm pretty sure whenever, we will still use congregant shelters, but we're going to shift dramatically to single room occupancy, for housing people in homelessness. In transportation, it's a little more unclear, but something's gonna change. I don't believe people won't go back to the office. I mean, for example, Amazon's already announced that they expect everybody to go back to the office soon, actually. And so I think our commuting patterns are going to return to what they are, I think we will still have people who are reliant on transit, and we owe it to them to have a really good system that works very well. By the way, a good system to me means I can walk out my door, I can walk a reasonable distance, not too far. And then I can get into a bus or a train without having to check the schedule and know like, I have to be there at this time, or else I'm going to miss it. Like, it's going to come frequently enough that I can just show up, like the subway in New York and wait, and it'll show up eventually. And then I can connect to other things to get me to lots of different places. So I don't think that's going to be as dramatic of a change. But there are definitely people who are predicting that transit is, as we know, it is dead, and it will never be the same and everything should change. But that's a question mark, in my mind.

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Claudia Balducchi 16:13

How do we operate just as a government? So a city council and county council, we're a legislature and we do our work by having public meetings, we're required by law to do our work in the public. And so a lot of us, King County included, have rules that we have to meet in public, we have to be together, we have limited exceptions for people to call in. And occasionally in an emergency situation. Well, now we've seen that not only can we have public meetings, and not ever be together, we're getting more people showing up at our meetings and providing testimony, and input. And it's more substantive and on point.

Alan Jaspen 16:58

It's more accessible.

Claudia Balducchi 17:00

It's more accessible, but people are using it exactly the way you would want. They call in and they're on topic, they've got a really good input. Like, it's been such an improvement in public testimony for the people and for the electeds.

Alan Jaspen 17:17

In person, people aren't on topic as often?

Claudia Balducchi 17:20

Oh my gosh, in person, when we only allowed in person comment, we often had two or three people that would show up. They were the same people every single week. And they would talk about whatever the hell they wanted to talk about. Because it was just a thing they did. There was just this one particular guy who came all the time. I haven't heard from him since the pandemic. But now we get 10, 15, 20 plus people. And they're all calling because they've got something of substance to say about the thing we're about to do. It's amazing how it changed. And so I've already said as the chair, that I don't ever want to go back to full. We should allow in person testimony, but we shouldn't require it, we should always provide an online option. Because in this big sprawling County, where it's so hard to get bodily down to downtown Seattle and park and you know, go through security and all of that. We should absolutely take that lesson and continue to make it this accessible. It should be this easy for people to contact us when we're having our meetings. That's been an amazing improvement.

Alan Jaspen 18:21

Where were the in person meetings?

Claudia Balducchi 18:24

We are in the county courthouse in downtown Seattle on the 12th floor.

Alan Jaspen 18:29

Yeah, like me, for example. I'm in Issaquah. I had to go to Seattle once for jury duty. I parked at the park and ride next to Bellevue College and I took the bus and I was actually impressed by it.

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Buses aren't that great, they only come like every 20 minutes, but once you get to Bellevue or Seattle, the public transit is better.

Claudia Balducchi 19:00

And to go to downtown Seattle, the lines are pretty good in the early mornings, like in the peak periods. You know, we're in the same building that you would have gone to for jury duty.

Alan Jaspen 19:12

But you know, King County is really big. I think south of Snohomish, I don't know where the border with Snohomish County is, but like, it's big. If there's like Renton and Redmond and Kirkland and Auburn. Auburn is in King County, that's like a 40 minute drive at least. And to say to people, you have to go to Downtown Seattle. It's bad enough, in the 41st, when we had in person meetings, like for everybody in the 41st to come to Tyee Middle School or wherever. And King County is way bigger than one legislative district. And yeah, before they were like 30 people in person. And now, the 41st regularly has like 60 people. One time there was 100.

Claudia Balducchi 20:07

Yeah. And it's different, right. And there's something, there's something different about not being in person. And I think it's.... With an organization like the 41st. And committee meetings that we have. I think occasionally doing it in person is healthy. But you should always allow an option for people to participate remotely, because that just removes a barrier, like every barrier is going to hit some people more, it's gonna make it more difficult for some than others.

Alan Jaspen 20:34

Yeah, people probably don't think about it,

Claudia Balducchi 20:37

Yeah, people with more flexible schedules, people with more money, people, you know, that's not as big of a deal to them. But people who have to punch a clock or have childcare responsibilities, it's a big deal, so we should make it as easy as-just turn on your computer. And then we have to work on digital access, right? Then there's people who can't do this (Zoom) either. Right?

Alan Jaspen 20:42

Do you think going forward, even after the pandemic is over, do you think you'll want to have the majority of your county meetings online?

Claudia Balducchi 21:07

I think we'll have them as a hybrid. I'd suspect that when members feel safe, they will probably want to have the council members all be in the same place. But that we would allow individuals to call in either council members or members of the public or staff. I think it will be a hybrid, some people in person, some people calling in.

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Alan Jaspen 21:28

The other thing besides the pandemic this year that's been focused on is the long term, this reckoning of systemic racism. So what have you, how has King County reacted to what's been happening with all the reckoning of systemic racism this year?

Claudia Balducchi 21:52

Yeah. Well, we are, we've been on a, I won't say a 10 year journey around racial equity and social justice, where we're... County executives and others over the years have created workgroups and we have resources, training, all sorts of things that we do to try to incorporate racial equity in everything we do. And so we've made some progress in that regard. And then this year hits. So it's not like we didn't start this effort this year, but definitely ratcheted up by a lot of public interest, ratcheted up by a lot. So we've been working on trying to get really good law enforcement oversight. That's one of our efforts. There is an independent agency within the legislative branch that's headed by an executive director. It's called the Office of Law Enforcement oversight. And they have, they're in our charter, they have the ability to investigate things that are happening with the police, especially incidents of violence, especially fatalities. They have the ability to review their policies and procedures and make recommendations. They don't have a lot of power, but they have influence. And we've been trying to get to a place where they can do everything they need to do. But as you may know, from studying this, under our state law, our unions that have a lot of a lot of autonomy, and law enforcement unions have been able to demand to negotiate all of these changes. And they often stand in the way of things. Like we still don't have body cameras on our police officers because they haven't been able to negotiate an agreement with the unions. So one thing we did was, it happened that the year before last was a 10 year update to our charter, that it's our Constitution.

Alan Jaspen 23:52

The King County charter?

Claudia Balducchi 23:54

Yeah, the King County charter, we're a home rule County. So we have a charter. And we had a charter commission, as we were required to do and they made a list of recommendations, several of which were in the area of law enforcement. So we put those on the ballot last year, several of them. So we got subpoena authority for law enforcement oversight folks. So the sheriff's office can no longer say "you can't have that information." If the overseers wanted, they can issue a subpoena that the sheriff has to respond to. We changed the nature of the department itself. It's currently headed by an elected sheriff. But we put on the ballot, a measure that passed that changes that to an appointed sheriff, which used to be the case. We've gone back and forth over 150 years in how we do this. But what it effectively does is it takes the sheriff's office from this independent body with an elected head to become another department in the executive branch. So it's really becomes the Department of Public Safety.

Claudia Balducchi 24:55

Interestingly, the argument for electing a sheriff or anybody, a judge, anybody, is direct



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accountability to the people. But it's a very specific kind of direct accountability. It's once every few years, you have this giant thumbs up or down performance review, if you will. It doesn't give you a lot of granular "I don't like what the sheriff did with that, and I want them to do that differently, I want to change that." The voters can't do that. The executive can do that. So now with the department, we're reporting to the executive. And the council being able to, you know, sort of take action by ordinance. The theory is, at least, that there will be more accountability and more ability to drive equitable practices there.

Alan Jaspen 25:41

So it sounds like the choice that you have to make between accountable, direct and appointed. You have to make this choice between granular-being able to make granular decisions-and choosing between that and having someone directly accountable to the general public.

Claudia Balducchi 26:05

Yeah, I mean, it's a trade off, right? Because that direct accountability is definitely lost. When you appoint the sheriff. The executive then becomes accountable to council members, it's indirect accountability. But if the sheriff is doing things that are causing too many people in the public to get too angry, they can be fired when they're appointed. You can't do that with an elected sheriff. In fact, right now, there's a big push to fire the sheriff. Right now there's people, mainly families of people who have been killed by our sheriff's deputies, have been pushing the council and the executive to get the sheriff to resign. And although many people have told her, she ought to resign, she ain't going and there's nothing we can do about it. So that was another thing we did. Change the method of selecting the sheriff.

Claudia Balducchi 26:54

And then the third thing was... The last time the county changed to an elected sheriff, somebody raised a question and said, "Well, wait a second. So we want to elect the sheriff, direct accountability, good government," they argued at the time. "But what if the executive and the council are vindictive, about having their authority taken away. Can't they by ordinance, just say, we're going to take all of your functions and put them over here? So you'll be an elected sheriff, but you'll have no department, you'll have no power. " So they passed a charter amendment companion at that time. That said, only the voters can change the duties of the sheriff's office. So we put one on the ballot last year that said, the executive with a vote of the council, can change the duties of the department. That passed as well. So we are now standing up a citizen advisory committee that has advocates for race and equity officers from the union, various people from different walks of life to advise us, what recommendations do you have about how we can do policing better, now that we have this power to change things? And some of the ideas that are probably going to end up on the table are "Do 911 calls for service belong in law enforcement?" "Can we separate that from law enforcement so that our Crisis Response isn't like, what's the cliché, when all you have is a hammer, everything looks like a nail?" Maybe we can think about Crisis Response very differently, and respond with community based services, Human Services, psychological services, social services, and law enforcement when appropriate. But if you could just have a much wider toolbox that would work better, goes the

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theory.

Alan Jaspen 28:53

That's what "Defund the police" is about, to redistribute the funds to others, the (mental health) counseling and all the other services.

Claudia Balducchi 29:04

Right. I suspect that what we would probably do in King County, because it's much more our way is make the pie bigger and fund lots of other stuff. But yes, and then there's the demilitarize, I'm off. I'm off your question a little bit here. But it's amazing. It's amazing how much military gear law enforcement has accumulated in the post 9/11 era. All the programs that allowed surplus gear to be given for free. So they all have tanks and body armor and like, amazing stuff. It sends a wrong message that this is a military force in some ways. And so but that's not...

Alan Jaspen 29:41

Oh we can go there. This is like, this doesn't really have any structure. It's open discussion.

Claudia Balducchi 29:52

Okay, so that's one of the things that I think we're all very interested in is, can we really send a message by de-militarizing the police. I mean their gear and their training and their like. I don't know if you're familiar with one of our former Sheriff Sue Rahr, who went on to run the criminal justice training commission, and then retired, came up with a theory or she adapted a theory. I don't know if it was somebody else's. But she's been a really big popularizer of this theory called Guardian policing. So what she claims after a lifetime in law enforcement is that police have adopted a warrior mentality. "We're out there to fight, we're a band of brothers, we keep each other safe. And we fight the bad guys." And the Guardian mentality is "We are here to maintain a peaceful community and protect the community." And so there's a whole series of things that flow if you adopt that frame, from who you hire, and what their mission is, where they serve, like much more community policing of people in the communities of their own communities flows from a guardian mentality. Training, you know, guardians, don't ride AP carriers down the middle of the streets, in their towns, and they don't have, you know, drones circling over here. It's more of a total transformation of what it is.

Claudia Balducchi 31:22

The last thing I would say in this zone before I stopped and let you ask me another question is, in our budget last year, the executive proposal, we passed funding for two new approaches to how we react. Because a lot of what we do at King County is we react when a crime has occurred. We do a lot of upstream stuff. Well, let me talk about that, too. But we do a lot of upstream stuff, but also a crime has occurred, and something must be done, regardless of the socio historical factors that led to that crime occurring. It's happened and now there's a victim, we got to do something, right. So what we're going to do is we're going to create a program in the adult justice system and in the juvenile justice system, that trains and supports community

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based organizations, so that we can defer persons who committed a crime, it can even be serious crime, and the prosecutor can defer charges and say, I'm not going to charge you, you are off. But you go and you work with this community based organization that, in theory, is a group of people who are culturally competent in your culture, who hopefully are from where you're from, so that you're in your own community, and you're being supported by people...The message that it sends when you go to that group is "these are your neighbors and your friends and your family. And they're trying to help you succeed." Not "this is a judge with a gavel and a set of bars in the next room that are going to lock you up if you screw up," right. So we're testing out a new theory of how you prevent recidivism and create justice.

Claudia Balducchi 33:01

The last thing, the really last thing on this is, we also just sent in the ballot. A renewal for what we call our "Best Starts for Kids" levy, which is a very large, but with a now called promotion and prevention levy. And it is meant to put a lot of resources very far upstream, like supporting prenatal and postnatal maternal care so that babies get a great start in life. Early education programs for kids in school up to age 24, because the latest cognitive science suggests that our brains are still developing through the age of 24. Like 18 is not some magic number where you're suddenly fully formed. And also support healthy communities. The idea being, if you really provide the structures to help people stand up and, you know, do well on their own and support their independence and their success. You end up with less people in crisis systems like justice, like emergency rooms, like mental health. So those are some of the things that we're doing. And there is a huge emphasis on equity in that program, we really put money right into communities of color, we try to advance their leadership, we build the programs that we fund with the community, as opposed to saying, "here's a program, here you go." It's like, "What do you need? How do we support you?"

Alan Jaspen 34:24

Is this just a program or is this only a proposal for a program?

Claudia Balducchi 34:28

It is a program. It's existing, it's been going on for six years, and this is a renewal. The first renewal was up this year.

Alan Jaspen 34:34

And what's it called?

Claudia Balducchi 34:35

It's called Best starts for kids.

Alan Jaspen 34:38

Okay. Because if you have the best, yeah, if you have the best start, you won't need, you know, all the early childhood is critical for having a successful life. Yeah.

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Claudia Balducchi 34:54

We've learned so much in the last several years about brain development that we did not know before. And it all points to how critical those early years are. Although I'll tell you I did know something a while ago, and I quote this a lot. The State Office of the Institute for Public Policy does some really great research. And they did a meta study some years ago of all the intervention programs that we do nationwide in criminal justice, like ways to stop recidivism. So they looked at human services programs, and things in jails and prisons, etc. And what they found was that almost any intervention does some good. All of them except for one. Scared Straight programs. You ever heard of that? Those? They were very popular in the 70s. Scared straight.

Alan Jaspen 35:40

D.A.R.E? Yeah, but like, Is it like saying that, like, drugs are bad?

Claudia Balducchi 35:46

D.A.R.E was not, I don't know if D.A.R.E was part of the study or not. But every program if they were, they had...

Alan Jaspen 35:54

Yeah, negative reinforcements doesn't really work,

Claudia Balducchi 35:58

Negative reinforcements don't work. And that was what happened with the scared straight thing. Those people were more likely to end up in the criminal legal system. But the ones that had the absolute most protective factors were pre and postnatal nursing programs, like the moms did better, the kids did better. And the protective factor was, I forget what the numbers were, but it was off the charts. It's like, Wow, you really can't invest early enough. Like you got it. You start very, very early to help people get off right. And yeah, It's something we've known.

Alan Jaspen 36:33

So preNatal support? What does that look like?

Claudia Balducchi 36:38

Making sure moms have education, know what to do, how to care for an infant, have good nutrition or getting their prenatal health checks and being...So that the baby, when it's born, is healthy and ready to thrive, and the mom is ready to care for the baby.

Claudia Balducchi 36:54

Wow.

Alan Jaspen 36:56

And something I would like to touch on briefly is, one of your priorities is affordable housing. So if you could really quickly touch on that, and how you're working with that crisis and how you're

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trying to combat it.

Claudia Balducchi 37:12

Yeah, sure. So I live in Bellevue, and I live in East Bellevue. It's not far from your Uncle and Steve. And this community that we all live in was an affordable community, once upon a time. Post war in the last century. It's hard to not notice that people can't afford to move here, pay rent, or buy the way they could when I did. Couple decades ago. Seniors are having a hard time staying in their homes. And so it became something that I became really concerned with and started studying more and looking broader. And this phenomenon of "Drive till you qualify." Have you heard that cliché? That's where you're gonna have a job or school in one place, but you can't afford to live there. So you drive further and further and further away until you get to a place where you can afford to live. And then that becomes your commute. And those distances grow larger and larger and larger. And they can contribute to a number of problems like people with the least income having to spend the most time tax, they have to put in the most time getting where they need to go. Traffic, pollution, all of the stuff that comes with that. Not having easy access to all the systems of support that people need. And then of course, you have like exclusive communities. You know, you have haves and have not communities. And I just don't think that's healthy for society. I think that we do better when we are able to be more integrated.

Alan Jaspen 38:53

And closer too. There's a whole bunch of studies on the negative physical effects of ultra long commute, like you have like stress, heart, inactivity.

Claudia Balducchi 39:04

Yeah, yeah, right. Right. Right. That's, that's great. Absolutely. So and then just from a government standpoint, we put all this money, so much money into building roads and bridges and making them ever wider and providing trains. I mean, I love the train. And I think it's critically important. But we're where it would be healthier and better and cheaper. Like all of those things, if people can afford to live closer to where they want to be naturally because their families are there or their jobs or whatever. So it just became something I became really concerned with. And this contributes mightily to our homelessness crisis. Although I just recently started working more on homelessness. I was focused on just the cost of housing, just the housing market. So you know, I don't want Bellevue to be an exclusive community. I want my son to be able to live here, I want people who have come here for jobs to be able to live here, I want the elders to be able to stay living here, despite the fact that their property taxes are going through the roof because their property values are going through the roof.

Claudia Balducchi 40:11

So we did a study, we kicked off a study at King County with a large group of city representatives. I wanted every level of government to be bought in. I wanted tiny little cities, big cities, the county and the state is pretty bought in. There's a lot of leadership at the state level on affordability, including some of our reps here. And so we found that, you know, in a very gross sense, jobs had grown. We've been in a booming region with a few notable exceptions for

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a couple decades now. And jobs have grown almost in a straight up line. And housing has stayed flat, although we've had some housing growth, but it has not kept up. And so there's this gap and it gets wider. And we projected, there's been a number of different projections that are all different from one another. But ours was that by 2040, that gap would grow to about 244,000 housing units short of what we would need to have a healthy housing market. Healthy housing market is defined as a certain level of affordability, we numerically defined it. And what this leads to is what we call cost burden in the business. And that is where it's, it's a kind of random number, but it's a standard number used in housing theory that you should spend 30% or less of your income on housing. If you spend more than 30% of your income, you are called cost burdened. If you spend more than 50% of your income on housing, you are called severely cost burdened. And those people are very much at risk of homelessness. That's like, one medical bill, unanticipated medical bill, one missed rent payment, one missed paycheck, one broken down car away from "I'm on a downward spiral where I might end up losing my housing." , It took a lot of neglect to get to this place. And it's gonna take a lot of different things to fix it.

Alan Jaspen 42:07

So the question is, how do we build 200,000 houses or something like that?

Claudia Balducchi 42:12

So there's a lot of different things that need to be done, because we've never built that much housing in that amount of time around here ever. But you do it in a number of different ways. First of all, there is subsidized housing, we need more subsidized housing. People cannot afford it, the land is too expensive. Well, we need this and the government can subsidize in a number of ways. We own a lot of land, the government. We can dedicate some of that land for free to allow housing to be built. And that makes it naturally more affordable. But if we do that, we should also require it to be more affordable if we're giving something away. We can allow other institutions to provide housing where we don't. Right now there's a big debate in Bellevue about letting the churches use..A lot of churches on an awful lot of land. And they're having a hard time staying, keeping their doors open. So this is kind of Win Win, where churches can build housing on their land, make some money, but they can also afford to make it very affordable, because they're not trying to get rich off of the land, they just want to stay open.

Claudia Balducchi 43:21

We work on removing costs. So an example, counties and cities all require new housing to hook up to their sewer systems. And they have to pay what's called a connection charge, which is like, everybody in Bellevue has contributed to the sewer system that exists. If somebody new comes, they haven't contributed, but they're going to use it. So we charge the developer a fee to say "You're going to kick in for this enormous and expensive system we built and continue to replace and expand." So those charges can be really expensive, they can be \$30,000 for an apartment building. So that actually impacts how much it costs to build. And that's just one example of ways in which government charges make it more expensive to build. So we look for ways to decrease those and say, "if you will provide some of those units in that apartment building at a low and an affordable level, we will give you a break." There's property tax breaks,

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sewer charge breaks, so regulatory breaks.

Claudia Balducchi 44:21

Just allowing the private sector to do more building. And this is a little more controversial with some people because they think that, "they're going to make a profit, they're going to make money." Yep, Yes, they are. They are going to make a profit and make money as the private sector building has always done. But if you up-zone some areas and allow two houses on a lot. That's like what they taught me. The accessory dwelling unit debate. If you allow a second house on. My lot is big enough for a second house. I would build it, I would rent it. The builder would make money, I would make some money. Somebody would have a smaller house here in Bellevue that they can afford to live in. So we can allow that. The city doesn't allow it right now. So lots and lots of different approaches like that are necessary to add up to the kind-

Alan Jaspen 45:02

Like in your backyard?

Claudia Balducchi 45:04

Yeah, well in our side yard. Yes. Right in the properties here in Lake Hills are much bigger than the houses. But because we're not allowed to do more than one. What people do is when this 50, 70 year old house gets too old, the new owner, I won't do it, the new owner will scrape it and build a 5,000 to 10,000 square foot mini mansion, right? And that won't be affordable, and it'll still only be one housing unit. So it's a missed opportunity. And then I guess densification is a big opportunity. And we're doing that primarily around transit stations. So massive upzoning to allow lots of new housing around transit stations. Sound Transit has a program. It didn't exist when I first joined the agency that now is very robust where we are. We are incentivized to take land that we don't need anymore. We buy chunks of land, where we have massive construction sites. And then when we're done, we don't need the construction site anymore. So we work with cities and the private sector to offer that land for affordable housing. We've had a guy once, a couple 1,000 units under construction now that way. So it's small and big rocks, and you have to pile them all up until you get to the top, until you get what you need.

Alan Jaspen 46:28

I realize that we're a little bit over. I just have short, like wrap up questions. One is what..

Claudia Balducchi 46:37

Oh, I'm sorry. I didn't even realize the time. I've got somebody waiting. I'm just gonna text him and then we'll, we'll finish up here. Hold on.

Alan Jaspen 46:45

Just real quickly, what would you say is required to have a successful career of public service?

Claudia Balducchi 47:00

Oh, boy, um, as an elected official? Or?

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Alan Jaspen 47:03  
Yeah.

Claudia Balducchi 47:04

Okay. Um. There are many different ways to do it, right. Like, there's no one right way. I can tell you what my way has been. Well, I don't know that this is the way to be successful. But this is what I do. So I'm just going to speak for myself. There are any number of big challenges and opportunities in a society at any given time. And I find that people often in government want to nibble around the edges. Because to go right at the heart of a problem is often controversial. And it makes people mad, right? It makes some people mad, like change is hard. People don't want the neighborhood to change. They don't want a bunch of little cottages in the backyards because there'll be more traffic and parking. "It's not where I grew up. I don't want that like that." But for me, doing this is about "Okay, somebody's got to run right into the middle of that burning fire and trying to figure out how to put it out, or how to make it bigger, whichever thing you're trying to do." And that's what I try to do.

Claudia Balducchi 48:07

I was told when I first ran for office "Don't ever say Light Rail. People in Bellevue hate light rail. If you say Light Rail, they won't elect you. Say high capacity transit. Like, let's pretend we're not talking about light rail." I find that being really direct with people has gotten me very far. When I tell people exactly what I think, yep, about a 10th, one out of 10 people will get irrevocably mad at me and never speak to me again. Probably never vote for me again. But most people appreciate it. Even when I'm telling them something. "Hey, I really think we need to do this. And I know you don't think that's right. But let's keep talking. Let me explain to you why I think it's important. Why I think it's important to up zone." Like your uncle and I. We disagree on a number of things. But we've remained friends all these years because we can talk about it and debate about it and have you know.

Claudia Balducchi 49:03

Not that I share his politics. But that was sort of the style of somebody like John McCain, like he branded himself as a straight talker. I think we need more of that in politics. I think less hiding behind slogans and things that fit on bumper stickers and yard signs and more, "Hey, let's really grapple with this challenge. And if we need to talk about taxes, we need to talk about taxes. If we need to talk about things that are scary and make people angry, like transforming the police. Like that's a bit of a label. But I think it's a true description of what we're doing. So yeah. I don't say defund the police because I don't think we're going to defund the police and I don't want to shine people on. I don't think we're going to take the police's money away. I think we're going to tell them that we want them to spend it differently, and that we're going to spend more money in other places as well. But the idea that we're going to defund them is probably wrong because they need a lot of stuff they don't have right now, like better training. And frankly I would love to see us hire people from communities to police those communities, and then they will need financial support to do that. So anyway, that was a long way of saying, I think that being really



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open and honest and direct about our problems and how hard they are to solve and working on them together. That's how I prefer to do politics. I think people believe that won't get you elected, that you have to kind of hide what you're really all about. I don't know. I've done perfectly well, and I haven't really hid much of what I'm about. So that's my pitch for an effective elected official.

Alan Jaspen 52:12

You probably have your next thing. So it's been great. It's been great talking to you. And I've learned a lot. Thank you for your time.

Claudia Balducchi 52:23

I thank you for doing what you're doing. And I hope it's helpful. If you have follow up questions, please don't hesitate to email and if you think "What did she say" or "I forgot to ask." I'm around. I'm happy to answer.

Alan Jaspen 52:35

Okay. Thank you.

Claudia Balducchi 52:37

Thank you. Have a good rest of the day.

Alan Jaspen 52:39

You too.

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