ENCORE: Cities Leading the Way

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Ariana Brocious: I'm Ariana Brocious.

Kousha Navidar: I'm Kousha Navidar.

Ariana Brocious: And this is Climate One.

Ariana Brocious: Right now, it can feel like there is a real lack of climate leadership - and action.

Kousha Navidar: The Trump Administration has actively rejected any attempt at addressing the climate crisis.

Ariana Brocious: Yeah, the climate story in the US does feel bleak. Federal rollbacks, court fights, and headlines about us stepping back from global commitments like the Paris Agreement - again. Even the language federal officials are using is dismissive.

Kousha Navidar: That is all true, **...** and it's also true that if you zoom in a little closer, you start to see where action is absolutely being taken. Where? Cities.

Ariana Brocious: Right! And that matters, because about **80%** of Americans actually live in cities.

Kousha Navidar: I mean, case in point, we both live in cities.

Ariana Brocious: True, though Tucson and Brooklyn are very different cities…

Kousha Navidar: Ayy, whattya you talkin' 'bout?.

Ariana Brocious: It’s Sa-waa-row cactus NOT Sa-gwa-roh cactus! While federal leadership has abandoned climate policy, many city leaders have stepped up.

[music change]

Kousha Navidar: today we’re talking to some of my favorite types of politicians: Mayors. They are really there on the ground: where policy talk meets action.

Ariana Brocious: Right, cities don’t have the luxury of debating whether climate change is real. They’re managing the impacts from it in real time. In fact, when the federal government announced it would withdraw from the Paris Agreement, hundreds of American mayors made a very public stand and said: we’re still in.

Kousha Navidar: And not just in the US. **Globally**, mayors have doubled down. On clean energy standards. On electrifying buses. On planting trees. The list goes on.

Ariana Brocious: So what does that climate leadership really look like at street level? What can a mayor actually control? And can city-level action meaningfully move the needle even without federal support?

Kousha Navidar: Eric Garcetti served as mayor of Los Angeles from 2013 to 2022. Then he served as Ambassador to India under President Biden. Now he’s Ambassador for Global Climate Diplomacy for C40, an international network of nearly a hundred cities representing nearly a quarter of the world’s economy. What’s remarkable is that nearly three quarters of these cities have already peaked their emissions.

In my conversation with Ambassador Garcett, he highlighted the progress LA has made in the thirteen years since he began his first term as mayor of Los Angeles.

Eric Garcetti: Los Angeles owns the largest municipal utility in the United States, the department, Los Angeles Department of Water and Power, helped build the Hoover Dam, famously stole water from the Owens Valley, et cetera. And when I came in, about 2% of the power we generated for the people of LA was renewable. 2% and we are now past 60%. By the end of the decade we'll be at 97% and by 2035 will be 100% renewable. So almost in the time that I've had my career in public service, I've watched it go from virtually zero to all the way to one hundred.

Kousha Navidar: Yeah

Eric Garcetti: Which to me is incredible. I mean, to see those days where we have in the state, not only solar as the main driver of our power, but then storage being the number two, which people never thought would happen. When I became mayor, though, really looked at the five zeros, you know, zero carbon electricity, which I just talked about. Zero carbon transportation, zero carbon buildings, no waste. And no wasted water. I think waste is the one furthest behind, and all of us really have to contend with how we're going to get a recycling or reuse regime that works for everyday people. And that actually isn't just us throwing it into a bin that makes us feel good, but never gets recycled. Zero water takes the longest. But we're gonna recycle a hundred percent of our water. And we're on track to do that and I'm really proud of that 'cause that will almost give us 50 to 60% more water in LA. Droughts will never keep us from being able to sustain population growth and life. But we've done that in a smart way too, where people are planting native plants and doing the right things for, you know, their neighborhoods. But it's those other three that are really where the bang for the buck on the global climate crisis is gonna come from. And, you know, I see it in the buildings that we're building. I'm really proud of the progress that LA's making on new construction.

A lot of great programs to take existing buildings and put everything from insulation that we subsidize, or do things like retrofitting their homes and reducing their power consumption. I mentioned how well we're doing on the electricity and transportation, you know, is I think. Probably the underperformer too right now, because we just don't have enough options. We need to be able to buy electric vehicles. This country's policy to move away from EVs recently makes it even tougher to find those buses in particular that will be a big part of that transition. But that said, from growing up in Los Angeles where we were the smoggiest city in America with the worst pollution and reducing those emissions by over 90%, I think that's real tangible progress. That means my daughter will grow up with lungs closer to a hundred percent their capacity. Unlike my generation, which studies show is probably about 85% our lung capacity.

Kousha Navidar: I wanna step in for a second because that that statistic, that trend of going from, you said virtually zero to, I would say virtually a hundred percent is really striking. What were the hard decisions that you had to be made to make that possible?

Eric Garcetti: I'm so glad you've paused there. 'cause we hear numbers all the time in climate, you know, tons of CO2 or percentage of renewable. And people don't realize there's a huge human struggle to organize, to get votes to work through the science with scientists and other people. And then, you know, the bureaucrats or the officials who actually run departments have to implement the things that policymakers put as goals that may or may not be realistic.

Kousha Navidar: And everybody's a human in that conversation, right? Like everybody,

Eric Garcetti: A hundred percent.

Kousha Navidar: change is so hard. Yeah. Sorry to interrupt. Go ahead.

Eric Garcetti: No, don't worry. Activists, I think sometimes think it just, as long as you say yes, it will happen. But even after you say yes, you need a lot of really good technical people to make that happen. You know, I'll go back to one story. In 2000, I think two or three, we were voting to renew our coal plant that I believe was either Navajo, which was on Navajo territory in the southwest or one of the other neighboring ones in the southwest. 'cause Los Angeles imports a lot of this dirty coal burning power that was predominantly in Indian land. And I kind of was like an early environmentalist. Nobody was against this. Our city legislative administrator who's kind of the shadow 16th council member, and the most powerful by far said, I bet you're an environmentalist. You're gonna vote against this, but don't worry, we got this cooked. And I turned to another young council member, we were both in our early thirties and said, don't you wanna vote against this? His name was Alex Padilla, he's now our senator. And the two of us said, yeah, let's start organizing. And then suddenly we got 3, 4, 6, and it's a 15 member council. I think by the end of it, we had nine votes that voted to divest for the first time from coal, and this chief legislative analyst came up to us and said, wait a second. How did you guys do that? And to me, that was a real turning point because everybody inside the department thought environmentalism was a fringe part of running utility. You know, we will do a little bit. It costs a lot. And you know, there were three or four times in that time when I was actually a council member where we had to say, I know it's more expensive today. But I'd always argue the long term cost of living cheaply in the short term have to be assessed. It's not about the next year's budget. And so we were buying solar. We even did a feed in tariff, which is when people can put solar on top of big industrial buildings, and we pay the landowner so they have a stake in it. You know, probably three or four times what solar power costs today. Everybody always says though, if you hadn't done that though, there wouldn't be the predictability to bring down the cost. So that now when we opened up the largest solar and battery storage construction project in the nation's history for utility, when I was a mayor, that was cheaper than a new gas plant. You know, there's these moments in which you need to convince the people inside a department who

might roll their eyes. Okay? These lefty politicians or whoever wanna do things, but they don't really know how to run a utility. And I love LA because we have the utility under our direct control, but we also have experts. And I think it was convincing them. The second thing I'll say is we involved the national government, back when it was a positive partner for these things. So the National Renewable Energy Lab actually ran over a million scenarios with their supercomputers looking at the predictability 'cause people wanna make sure the power doesn't go off the cost, make sure that they can afford it and making sure that it was a hundred percent renewable. And they gave us the statistical and analytical confidence to say this will work. And that's what finally allowed us to move to it.

Kousha Navidar: And I'm always interested in that connection between the environmental cause, but also like the human connection, kind of, what you're describing. And I'm happy that you brought up EV infrastructure too, because you push hard on building electrification, which we talked about building on EVs in LA. You have a wide scope too, so where do you see cities and I'm not just talking about LA but cities in general, actually moving the needle towards decarbonization. Where do you feel like they're falling behind at the same time?

Eric Garcetti: Well, let me give a hopeful message first because I think a lot of people are feeling down, and the first time this president was elected in the first term, I was chair of something I'd co-founded with two other mayors called Climate Mayors, which was the group of, you know, mayors by the way, who were yes, Democrats non-partisan, like in cities like LA. And also Republicans and we had, you know, a few dozen folks who were looking at climate solutions together. And the day that the president announced he was gonna withdraw the United States from the Paris Climate Accords, the only country in the world to do that. It was one of those days where we had a real fork in our emotional journey. We could get depressed. Go into a corner, ball up and cry or what we decide to do the second is we could actually pick up the phone and started calling people. And I was actually in Wisconsin at the time and I started calling a few mayors saying, Hey, if he's out, can we say we're in? In other words, cities will pledge the science and the methodology and the goals of Paris decarbonization, and we'll show America moving forward despite the federal government, not because of it. And at the end of that week we got to like a hundred, and then a week later it was over 200 mayors. And then we had calls coming in from people saying, my constituents are bugging me to sign onto this thing that you're doing. I just put me down 'cause it's too much pressure to take. And by the end we had 737 mayors in 48 of the 50 states signed on this amazing coalition that one mayor said. You know, if Hillary Clinton had been elected president, I bet we would've been pretty lazy about this. In some ways there's this moment in dark times where we light the light and we realize our own agency.

And no federal government one you like or dislike can take away most of the tools for things like building codes for things like, you know, the electricity, if you have a public utility that you, the mix that you wanna put in there, a lot of the regulations you have and your transportation policy. So if you wanna install electric vehicle chargers, as Los Angeles has done aggressively. We have the streets that we control the sidewalks. I drove my daughter to school today and saw EVs plugged in on the street so that renters who might not have electric chargers have a place to charge and can get an electric vehicle

Kousha Navidar: Like on street parking, you're saying?

Eric Garcetti: Exactly

Kousha Navidar: would've loved that. I used to. I used to own an EV and I did street parking in San Francisco actually, and I was like, man, I just wish that I had that. Yeah, sorry, go ahead. Yeah. It's tough.

Eric Garcetti: No, I, you know, I got my first EV in 1998. It was a GM EV one the movie who killed the electric car. I'm in It when GM made the boneheaded decision and we were begging them to buy them, to crush all of these. And we did a mock funeral at the Hollywood Forever Cemetery here in town, and I think I said something like, they're gonna have to you know, pull this out of my dead cold charger. But they did take the cars back and I've been driving EVs ever since. And so when we see good policies at the national level, like we did in the Biden administration to install electric charges, but none of them actually got installed, it wasn't just a federal problem. It really is a local problem that in our local areas we didn't have the leadership where people say, we will take parking spots that today are for anybody and make sure that those are ev parking spots and put chargers there. We will take public parking lots and land and make sure that this infrastructure gets done. It was our own local opposition, in some ways, that slowed down that pace and didn't get those EVs in place. And then with our metro system here, we also have a really aggressive electric bus program. And we've installed these superchargers for for instance, right by me a couple blocks away is the busiest BRT, Bus rapid transit line in America, which goes through the heart of the San Fernando Valley where I grew up and where I live, a place that would be the sixth largest city in America, and they supercharge at the end of the line and go right back. And so it's quiet, clean transportation in a place where I grew up with the worst smog in America.

Kousha Navidar: I wanna go back to

the climate. Pledge of your bid with the 2028 Olympic Games. 'cause they were built as the first climate positive Olympics. was the climate positive part of it, part of the Olympics pitch?

Eric Garcetti: A hundred Percent. LA's always been a games changer. Not a game changer, but a games changer. We've, you know, in 1932, we invented the Olympic Village, the podium the photo finish some of the first

Kousha Navidar: Oh, that's so interesting.

Eric Garcetti: crazy stuff. We even renamed 10th Street here 'cause it was the 10th Olympiad. Olympic Boulevard, which a lot of people don't know, that's why it's called Olympic Boulevard. In 1984, you know, 76 Olympics in Montreal had almost bankrupted the city. People said it's dead. There was boycotts in Moscow, boycotts coming to LA, and we launched a private sponsorship model. And brought in the first wheelchair race and save the Olympics, saved the US Olympic Committee, et cetera. And so we kind of said in our bid, we would make this the most sustainable games ever. Even carbon positive because every game says they're gonna be the greenest, but that's really in the operations. You know, like maybe they'll recycle a little bit more or have a couple displays that are about environmental activism. In the city, we, the most radical thing we did is we said we're not going to build an Olympic village. We're not gonna build any new facility because the Olympics had gotten to this thing where in order to get the votes from the Handball Federation or the delegate from Senegal, they want something and you wanna build it and you say, okay, I'll do that. Or they're building rail lines that get from the Olympic Village to the main stadium. But no actual person after the Olympics needs that line to exist. A waste of carbon, a waste of construction, and empty buildings and stadia sometimes afterwards. So we used UCLA's campus, which has amazing dorms and a food system that already works and already has sports facilities as the Olympic Village, we said we will use existing facilities or even more radically in the case of something like canoe kayak, which we didn't have. We're gonna go to, another state. Oklahoma City where it's already built and the best national, course is already there. So we thought about how we could really put it in the, not sprinkling over the Olympics, but the bones of the Olympics. And now the Los Angeles Clean Tech incubator is leading pledges from companies, whether it's electric chargers, whether it's the utilities, pledging to stand up of a hundred percent renewable power for the excess power we need to do. We're confident we're gonna give more back to the grid than we're gonna take

out. And that's really exciting. I think it shows that games can work and go back to the ideals of what the Olympics are supposed to do about inspiring

Kousha Navidar: Yeah, and I think there is that kind of like micro macro thinking where, you know, so many of us are told how to repurpose things we already have in our own lives. It kind of sounds like that at a large scale, right? Like you have a facility you can already use, go use that facility. I think that's really cool. UCLA's campus, I hear their dorms are actually really good.

Eric Garcetti: Yeah. I, yeah. It's not like when we went to college and, you know, nobody wants to borrow the drill from next door to their neighbor. They want to go out and get a drill. We're like borrowing stuff from Paris that's getting shipped here from the Paris games. We're going next door. Like all of this is really the most sustainable model in living, I hope.

Music: In

Ariana Brocious: Coming up, being a member of C40 - a global network of climate conscious mayors - comes with real responsibilities.

Eric Garcetti: This isn't just an affiliation, it's not like a social club of mayors and cities, you have to have plans, adhere to plans, show progress, or you get kicked out of the club.

Ariana Brocious: That’s up next, when Climate One continues.

Ariana Brocious: Help others find our show by leaving us a review or rating. Thanks for your support!

Music: Out

Kousha Navidar: This is Climate One. I’m Kousha Navidar. Former mayor of Los Angeles, Eric Garcetti, now serves as Ambassador for Global Climate Diplomacy for C40. And he says that this global organization of cities addressing climate change is making real progress, despite a lack of national-level leadership. Garcetti sees this playing out both on the local level and on the international stage – like at the annual UN climate conferences known as “the conference of parties” – or “COP.”

Eric Garcetti: Well, cities are the superstars. On one hand, if you go to the COP, I was down there in Brazil and you see Petro states blocking anything. Our country not there officially. And really, you know, no commitments made. On the other hand, when you compare that, there's only one country on track for the science of the Paris Accords, that's Denmark. Congratulations, Denmark. Always first in class A plus, but only one country of all of the countries are on track. But when you look at cities, 73% of those hundred largest cities have already capped their carbon, and 75% of them are on track or ahead of the Paris science, and here's the best statistic of all those cities are moving five times faster per capita at decarbonizing than the global average. So those a hundred biggest cities, which are beasts, managed, trust me, I've managed one. They're like countries. Don't tell me if you're a national Prime Minister or president, you can't do it. We are proving it by decarbonizing across the board. We haven't talked about ports. For instance, they started a green ports initiative to decarbonize ports, which are huge polluters globally. We looked at, you know, the ways that we can move and change even things like as simple as city zoning. So that people live closer to where they work, encourage the telecommuting, all those things that, you know, add up. And I'm proud that we are showing that sort of work. And cities really are the examples. Not to shame countries, but I hope to inspire them.

Kousha Navidar: Why do you think that is? Why do you think it is that these big cities move five times faster?

Eric Garcetti: Well, I'm kind of prejudiced. I think that, you know,

Kousha Navidar: Well, I asked you to, I asked you to come here, so please go ahead.

Eric Garcetti: Yeah, I mean, mayors and cities move at the speed of real time and real complaints, by the way. You'll hear it at the supermarket if you're not doing something, but you know when the pandemic hit, I was chair of C40. It's the only network, by the way, of those hundred largest cities, mayors. On any topic in the world. And I think it was my second Zoom call, I didn't even know what Zooms were still. And 'cause it was that first week of the pandemic and I called them all together, kind of felt like an Avengers movie or something with all the world's mayors crossed different time zones. And we were in, I think, 60 different cities of those hundred, which was remarkable. And the mayor of Seoul told us about, you know, drive through testing for this new disease that was out there, the mayor of Milan. And if you remember, that's where the first kind of real big peak was. People were dying in northern Italy, told us how to ready our hospitals so that people wouldn't die in the hallways. I mean, it was very sobering, very dark, but very powerful stuff. And the next day we started implementing this stuff. And my successor, mayor Sadiq Khan, who is now the chair of C40 and the mayor of London, an amazing friend and individual. Went to brief Boris Johnson, if you remember him, when he was still a Prime Minister and was describing this call and what mayors were instantly doing. You know, we built up the largest testing and vaccination sites in the world here in LA based on that kind of drive through technology that we heard. And Boris Johnson turned to his cabinet and said, why aren't we doing any of this? And they said, sir, don't worry. We're collecting the best practices. We're gonna put it in a report. We'll get it to you in a week or two. You can start talking to national leaders around the world about this. And Boris Johnson said, that will take weeks and people will die. And so I use that example because I think mayors, I always say, good mayors borrow, great mayors steal. We're friendly and competitive. If I hear a good idea or see something on a trip to another city, like if I see the greening of cities in Mexico City or the bus Rapid Transit lines that are there or in South America, or you see a breakthrough in clean air like Sadiq Khan is doing in London, I wanna do the same thing in my city. We move at the speed of tomorrow. And so we try and if it doesn't work, we're not scared to fail and fail forward. We're not always like waiting for somebody else to do it. I think national leaders inherit a bureaucracy that's slower and they're just by nature. More cautious. Mayors are kind of more in the best sense entrepreneurs, cowboys go for broke folks.

Kousha Navidar: Yeah, that makes total sense. You're able to pivot quickly. I, I.

Eric Garcetti: And you have to cause your constituents demand.

Kousha Navidar: Right. You hear about it in the shopping market. You're now serving as C 40 Ambassador for global climate diplomacy. So when you're at a dinner party I doubt you got the question, Hey, what do you do for a living? That's what I ask other people. But for you, when somebody's can you explain C40 for me? How do you describe the work?

Eric Garcetti: I describe a network, which is kind of, in my opinion, the tip of the spear of climate action. We are the ones doing work, inspiring work, organizing work, and it's accountable work. I always explain this isn't just an affiliation, it's not like a social club of mayors and cities, you have to have plans adhere to plans, show progress, or you get kicked out of the club. I mean, imagine a United Nations that was like this. Imagine you could no longer be a United Nations member if you didn't live up to your pledge in Paris or to, you know, give development aid or whatever. Obviously we can't do that with nations, but we are a really, I think, great model of how you can stretch

further, you know, beyond your reach. But also we are the ones that are quickly innovating and sharing. We're kind of an ideas laboratory that if London has a breakthrough and is giving backpacks with air monitors to kids so they can literally take their individual air quality where they walk to and from their home to school. Like how do we spread that in more places? Freetown in Africa is figuring out a way to plant more trees than anybody else. How can we get that citizen involvement that sustains those trees after they're planted and they don't just die? It becomes a place to share information, a place for accountable action. And when you,look at the numbers. It's bigger than almost every other nation in the world. When I was chair, I got to be able to go to Glasgow, to the COP. And we didn't just look at the hundred cities. We expanded that through our other partner organizations, And we took a thousand cities who held themselves to going to carbon neutrality by 2050. And when the UN put that together, they said that would've been the fourth or fifth largest emitting country in the world's pledges. And we are the only organization on the stage with prime ministers, kings, presidents, et cetera. The only non-national leader allowed to make that pledge. So now today, I'm in that system being the negotiator with the UN saying, will you join, for instance, something called CHAMP, which is a long acronym, which I don't have to say here, but it's basically a national government saying, we'll work with our states, provinces, regions, and cities to achieve our national goals. Seems elementary. But once they make that pledge, it works both ways. You can take all the credit for what cities or states are doing and at the same time you might pass great legislation like we've seen in this country, but federal government isn't capable of implementation of much. 'cause that's just not what a federal system like here or India or Brazil or other places have. I get to do those negotiations, but then second, I get to inspire people to say in these 15,000 cities, here are solutions. Here's the financing by the way, that we need to get not just the national governments, but local governments. And don't forget local governments are financing ourselves. We can quantify how much taxpayers at the local level are already putting into climate change. And then the last one, which is something got back to when I was mayor, we can prove the economic benefits. You know, LA outpaced every other big city in America. Bloomberg News did this analysis: the investments we had made in water, in, in electricity and transportation, and they said probably 60 to 70% of the job growth was green industries, green jobs and the green transition. So I always tell people like, I don't care if you believe in this. Your constituents are feeling the impact of climate change. But even if you're just a hard-nosed person looking at jobs in your city, we can make the case of why this is important. And C40 doesn't just do that in a macro sense. We look at economic justice and what are the communities that are left behind and how can we get those jobs to go into the poor areas of any city. So it's really larger than just climate. It's about economic justice, economic stability, health and safety as well as getting these goals.

Kousha Navidar: Can you think of an initiative that comes to mind where it kind of hit all those buckets where there was that knowledge sharing, there was the on the ground advocacy justice it kind of puts it all together for you.

Eric Garcetti: So we have a whole initiative on clean air in our cities and we make pledges in the central district to make them oftentimes car free or single passenger car free. Those are immensely politically difficult things to do. Mayor Hidalgo in Paris, closing down the freeways that were on the Seine so that people can walk and bike there. Mayor Khan in London, as I mentioned. In South America, we have a number of these cities, so we have a whole initiative just around let's take the urban core of a city back and make sure that they are clean air zones. And whether it's the truck traffic, whether it's the single passenger cars, whether it's not enough investment in public transit, not walkable or bikeable communities, those I think are the ones that are really giving people hope in the short term that the climate movement isn't just about things that our children's children hopefully will inherit when carbon peaks and it comes down, but that will actually give relief right now to the quality of life. Extend the life of people. You know, I've been living in New Delhi for the last two, two and a half years, and it's the worst air in the world. I mean, growing up in Los Angeles

in the seventies, eighties, I thought was bad. Most machines stop at 500 on the air quality index. In India, they cap there, but at the embassy we have ones that can keep measuring up. We had a day where I believe it was the highest measurement in any city in human history at any time, 1,738,

Kousha Navidar: Wow.

Eric Garcetti: and it's estimated that in New Delhi, if you work outside or don't have air filters in your home, which the overwhelming majority of people don't, that probably your life is gonna be cut 10 years short if this air quality stays in place. We saw it in Beijing and China did great work to turn that around. And I gave lectures at Peking University about how LA had done it and how governance and popular participation is there. But when you look at that C40 initiative on clean air in the core of our cities, that's really about saving lives today, not about saving the earth tomorrow.

Kousha Navidar: You had mentioned trying to do the work during a more hospitable administration. My words, not yours, but trying to put this action into place and the US federal government has oscillated dramatically on climate commitments, to put it mildly. So how do American cities maintain credibility with international partners when the policy just like shifts under your feet, how do you approach that?

Eric Garcetti: Two things I would say. One is I always remind my international friends, there's the show, and then there's the actual statistics and sometimes the show. Don't get me wrong, there's damage happening with the policies that the show is about, like that wind is suddenly bad or that we shouldn't have EVs. And we're ceding the future, by the way, competitively to other countries when we do that. We're shipping jobs literally outside of America. But then I also say the substance, you know, the actual actions in places that aren't just California run by, you know, a democratic government or cities that are generally more liberal, more traditionally pro environment. But places like the Permian Basin in Texas, which is a solidly red state a place that is run by Republicans with the largest oil basin in America is being decarbonized aggressively with solar. And wind with corporate investments that aren't political. You know, I think there's a clash that'll happen between the show and even people on the political right, that know that this is where the world needs to move. It's where markets are moving. I have friends who are investors in this space who said there's never been more deals and they've never been cheaper. So keep on badmouthing environmentalism and we'll be able to buy it for even less and do it more quickly. So that's point one. Point two is when I was down before we started the actual COP in Brazil, that was up in the Amazon. We were in Rio a week or two before with all the cities of the world looking at the sub-national level.

We had American states there and regions and states and provinces from around the world. And of course the biggest delegation of subnational leaders was Brazil 'cause they were hosting. But the second biggest group, Kousha, was Americans, and I think that so many of my foreign friends said, this is awesome to see so many Americans not only showing up to say we're still here, but to say what they're doing, which is as aggressive as it would've been two years ago. Sometimes there's some limits, some micro handcuffs that we put on us. But, you know, the federal government isn't our partner and that's too bad. That's their loss. But again, we haven't ceded the power we have. We haven't stopped the plans that we have. We haven't stopped protecting our people who are experiencing the frontline of those fires and those floods, and the damage and the lack of being able to get, you know, insurance in a home in Florida or in California. And we see that the future is being written around the world and we want to join with those people. And we want a country to emerge at the national level. We hope in the future that will build on all of the great foundation that we're laying. So I think a lot of our international friends left there, surprisingly optimistic about American leadership. Obviously not at the top. Not at the top, but leadership has always existed from the side and from behind, and all power. The point at the top is not the most important piece, it's the base underneath.

Kousha Navidar: There's this other element to that I always have on my mind, which is kind of the inequity of those who contribute versus those who suffer to climate change. I feel like it's a great opportunity to get to talk to somebody who's worked on all different angles of that, because my understanding, at least, is that developing countries that have contributed the least to climate pollution are like tragically the ones that face most of the effects. And there's a huge power imbalance. So when a leader from like a richer, more powerful country works with leaders from less powerful countries, what's the best approach there? How do you navigate that?

Eric Garcetti: Well first you have to co-lead. Don't just talk about it, but do it. And so when I was chair of C40, we implemented that we would have co-chairs now from the global north and global south. Terms I don't love, but for shorthand, so it's not just Sadiq Khan, who is our chair, but also our co-chair is Yvonne Aki Sawyerr, who's the mayor of Freetown Sierra Leone, and we said we put a majority of our funding. Then second, put your money where your mouth is after you share power, share money. We're putting majority of our funds into the global south, A, 'cause it's the right thing to do from justice and B, because that's where population growth and economic growth will be. So if they can do it better and not go through what London did in the 1800s in New York, in the early 1900s in LA in 1980s, you know, if they can have clean air while they're industrializing, if they can get economic growth and not have to have the suffering that we see, that's the right thing for them and a good thing for the entire world. Then I think third, it's also looking at how we can find those solutions that are indigenous to those areas in the developing world. When I was ambassador for instance, one of the first trips I took in India was to Ahmedabad, which is the capital of Gujarat in northwest India. And I talked with a group, there's an incredible women's association of tens of thousands of chapters called Sewa. That's self-help basically for women. And there's a lot of construction workers in India that are female. Not so many here in the United States. And I was talking to a brick layer, a woman who said, it's so hot on the hottest days here, and it regular gets above 120 there. She said, even with gloves on, I can't hold the bricks. And because of that. I can't work and because of that, my family can't eat. And we looked at a model where they kind of came up with and we got some capital in from you know, the west to be able to fund an insurance for jobs that are climate sensitive so that she can get paid those days and feed her family. And then she pays a small bit when she does work to go into that insurance so that she can make sure her family survives. So I think, you know, finding those solutions that are actually coming out of places like Africa that are coming out of parts. And by the way, the developing and developed world are not just geographical split. They exist inside our own cities. So my experience knowing that in South LA there's no shade, whereas of course in West LA there's a lot of shade made, shade equity, a big part of my agenda. And so I say this methodology is good not only across the world, but within cities too.

Kousha Navidar: Yeah. I don't like the term bottom up. I try to think of it as you go to where the people are experiencing what's going on and you ask them what would help, but like where you go for ideas I think is so crucial too. So I appreciate that you said that.

Eric Garcetti: Yeah. I mean it's maybe bottom out because the bottom is always, you know, the one that has the foundation like we talked about, that allows the top to put a few things on there. And don't get me wrong, national leadership is critical. It inspires us when it's good. I. It can pass legislation that can enable that base to widen even further and to be strengthened even stronger. But yeah, we don't have to show prime ministers, we don't have to show presidents the solutions. We just have to be able to do them ourselves. That's all we're asking from our national leaders to, to join with us in what we're already doing.

Kousha Navidar: I am delighted to hear you say that because that is a perfect segue into my last question, which let me know if you feel like you can answer this. I would love a hopeful message right now. So ambassador, please indulge me. Diplomacy is it for 2026? I mean, it's just, it's easy to look at the world, and think that like global diplomacy in general, climate diplomacy specifically is

breaking down, I guess, what's the conversation that needs to happen at the global level to get diplomacy back on track? If you think it is off track, I don't know, but just like, how do we make diplomacy live?

Eric Garcetti: Well, it's both off track and it was ending its kind of lifespan that this incredibly stable building we've been living in which, you know, post World War II had like international diplomacy. And by the way, American democracy, very stable. We didn't have to do much. They were always gonna be there. Remodel it ,change the pipes every so often. Suddenly is on fire. And maybe it's 'cause somebody's thrown a Molotov cocktail in there, but I would argue even if he hadn't, this building needed to come down. The diplomacy and development and even bureaucracy has slowed things down at a time when the crises we have require a faster pace were slower than ever. And so diplomacy for me, I'll tell you if there's one lesson I've learned in my two and a half decades in public service. It's about relationships. Nobody teaches this in the classroom, but it's about the relationships and the feelings that we have as human beings. And I always say when I'm giving a speech, I want somebody to know something they don't know, feel something they haven't felt, and do something they wouldn't do. And those last two, I think diplomacy, if we can get people to feel again, and we're seeing diplomacy, that's all about. You know, it's, there's no win-wins me doing well doesn't mean you're doing well. So I'm gonna be the bully and I have more power, so I'm gonna take something. That's just not the way that community, families neighborhoods, cities thrive. We know we have to all because I can be the mayor, but if I don't fix traffic, I'm stuck in it. If I don't, you know, deal with somebody who's unhoused, that person's outside my residence. So there's a real accountability that comes from local leadership and diplomacy. I think at its best, is about those relationships and what we give. True power, Kousha, is not what we hold onto and what we hoard, but what we're willing to give up and share. And it's the same thing with diplomacy. So I do think that there is the cracking open or maybe a return to that basic human thing that's not naive. It's not idealistic. But it is relational because if anything ties us together, it's those borderless problems. It's health and it's climate. And we're certainly lived through a pandemic that, you know, we knew that a virus didn't care about borders, and we're experiencing too that this climate crisis doesn't care as well. And if we're gonna survive and we all want to, let's figure out a way to be a little bit more understanding and to share in that power that we have. And that's the kind of diplomacy I hope emerges.

Kousha Navidar: Eric Garcetti is C40 Ambassador for Global Climate Diplomacy and former mayor of Los Angeles and former Ambassador to India, Ambassador. Thank you so much for hanging out with us and for all of your work.

Eric Garcetti: It's been a real, joyful conversation. Thank you.

Music: in

Kousha Navidar: Coming up, Phoenix Mayor Kate Gallego is taking on one of the hottest issues around the country.

Mayor Kate Gallego: We have one of the biggest concentrations of data centers anywhere in the world, and I'm trying to make sure that as data centers come on, they do it in a way that minimizes impacts to our community and to our environment and maximizes benefits.

Kousha Navidar: That’s up next, when Climate One continues.

Music: out

Ariana Brocious: This is Climate One. I’m Ariana Brocious.

Phoenix is on the front lines of the climate crisis. It's one of the fastest growing cities in the country, and one of the fastest warming. In Phoenix, extreme heat isn't an abstract threat that could happen in the future, it's a public health emergency happening right now.

So what does climate leadership look like when your city regularly tops 100 degrees?

To Mayor Kate Gallego, it means redesigning streets, rethinking building materials, grappling with the energy and water demands of a booming tech economy, and dealing with the heat.

Mayor Kate Gallego: We are actually the first city in the country to have a permanent part of our city government that's focused on heat. In our case, it's the office of heat response and mitigation. We have an all of government approach, so from our fire department to our planning department, we try to find solutions related to heat. Our fire department has been national leaders in supporting people with heat related medical emergencies, and this could be everything from someone experiencing homelessness to someone who is hiking and has heat stroke or doesn't bring enough water. Uh, so we now have some pretty advanced cooling techniques, and then some pretty basic ones like pre-positioning ice in key areas.

Ariana Brocious: Ice, just to clarify, in the moment we're in, you mean frozen water?

Mayor Kate Gallego: We position frozen water. We are trying to change our built environment, so we're trying to incentivize shaded walkways and paths. even, our Office of Public Arts has worked on shaded public art installations that create a wonderful environment for people to enjoy the beautiful city, but have a little bit more comfortable shaded walkways or canopies. We are trying to look at new building materials that make sense as well as new paving materials. So we have a cool pavement program

Ariana Brocious: Yeah, so for people who don't know, this is, uh, basically painting them, with a reflective material that takes the heat that gets absorbed, uh, normally by asphalt and, and sends it back up. It does sound like a really neat program. I have read also that it can make the surrounding area hotter for people, even though it can lower the temperature over the asphalt. So how is it panning out?

Mayor Kate Gallego: So we find it, it's most effective if we look at things like urban heat island and overnight heat temperatures. One of our challenges is that the natural Sonoran desert environment cools a lot overnight with native conditions, but with manmade conditions including black asphalt that does keep the heat in just as way, you'd stay hotter when you're wearing a black T-shirt than a white T-shirt. And overnight we're seeing the lows aren't getting as cold as they used to. So we are trying to use the cool pavement to try to bring down that overnight temperature and be more like the natural Sonoran desert environment, which is so well adapted for hot summers.

Ariana Brocious: Mm-hmm. When we're speaking about survivability in the hot months for people, average people in Phoenix, are there interventions that your government has worked on that help people with basic affordability of things like air conditioners? I mean, that is really kind of an essential thing to have here.

Mayor Kate Gallego: Yeah, so we actually just had the whole city council convene around energy affordability, which is so important. We're trying to do everything from helping people navigate high summer bills, to helping people get more efficient appliances, and then also trying to build better in the first place and make sure that we have the most energy efficient homes and public spaces.

Ariana Brocious: Right. So like most parts of the country, Phoenix is seeing higher energy bills.

That's being driven by a lot of factors, data centers, and their demand is one factor. I'm curious in specific terms, what are you doing? What is the city council doing? Is it putting money into bill, payment assistance? Um, you mentioned building materials. Is it education? Like what are the ways you're helping reduce those bills?

Mayor Kate Gallego: So we were so successful during the Biden administration. We pursued often with partners, a lot of those federal dollars, and were really trying to promote some of the great programs that included energy audits and, and helping people with Federal assistance. Uh, we got a wonderful solar for all grant in Arizona that we were very excited to help bring down people's bills. So it was like an incredible progress in that area. Unfortunately, we have seen a pause in a lot of that funding. It's being litigated. So we're, I think we're still hopeful that there might be a chance to deliver on those programs, which really had the chance to be lifesaving for some of our residents. We do know that certain residents such as, , people in manufactured housing tend to have larger challenges around the heat. And so we're trying to particularly target those areas, including going out in the community and sharing what rebates are available, what bill assistance is available, and every year we make changes and learn more.

Ariana Brocious: Yeah, it's really critical because a lot of those homes, mobile homes, manufactured homes, don't have insulation or very little and can really be little ovens honestly, in the summer. I wanna pivot and talk a little bit about population. Phoenix is the fifth largest city in the country. Uh, you've said that the population numbers aren't the important metric. It's how and where you grow. your office had an achievement in, in securing the semiconductor $65 billion chip manufacturing facility. How do you reconcile things like the economic development that brings, with the water and energy demands of big tech?

Mayor Kate Gallego: We have limited resources and we have to be smart. So we are trying to prioritize the areas that will have the most benefits for our community, including creating quality jobs. Phoenix has traditionally been very tied to the real estate sector, and so we wanna make sure that we are a diverse economy that has a bunch of different options. We know every sector goes up and down. And so the cities that have the most diverse economies tend to be able to weather single events more effectively. The 2008 real estate crisis hit Phoenix incredibly hard. I know so many people who lost their homes, fought with their spouses over, over money, got divorced. You know, really were devastated by the real estate crisis. So we are trying to build a more diverse and sustainable economy. We've made big pushes around climate tech, trying to attract solar companies, advanced vehicle technology, bioscience as well. One of the things that I have grown very concerned about in terms of tech is we have a very large number of data centers and I would like us to see some changes in that area. We wanna make sure that as data centers come on, they are responsible water users and that particularly with the amount of power they use, they think about everything from emissions to the water used to generate power. That's been a big challenge for us in our community. The utility that serves us at City Hall had committed to taking coal out of their portfolio. And because of the huge demand and energy, particularly driven by data centers, they're delaying that. So that's of concern to me. We have one of the biggest concentrations of data centers anywhere in the world, and I'm trying to make sure that as data centers come on, they do it in a way that minimizes impacts to our community and to our environment and maximizes benefits. we need a race to the top, right? We want higher standards. We wanna reward the companies that care about emissions, climate change. We wanna put data centers where they're the biggest benefits.

Ariana Brocious: Yeah, let me jump in there because I, I think this is a discussion happening all over the country, I know that you've been working on developing regulations to help keep data centers from having negative impacts on the surrounding communities, and I'm wondering if those are sufficient so far. I mean, can you give us a little bit more detail about what you're asking of these companies?

Mayor Kate Gallego: We have regulations for all of our large water users where they really need to commit to sustainability and work with our water services department on conservation. So that applies to all large water users. On data centers. We've recently asked them to come to the council and get a special use permit. We look at a variety of different impacts, including areas like cybersecurity and noise, in addition to the, the type of concerns that you and I have been talking about, unfortunately there's been some real challenges around that. We have had data centers that have suggested they might litigate with us over whether we have the ability to do that. And in some cases, uh, some of the wealthiest companies in the world have questioned whether it's fair to ask them to do landscaping. They've found that to be overly burdensome. So this is a real debate right now.

Ariana Brocious:, there's this idea that you could co-locate energy production and energy consumption. So these data centers could pay to supply their own solar panels, which is probably the most cost effective and reasonable thing in a, in a state like Arizona, to just sort of power their own needs and thus they're not gonna be impacting other electric users as much. Is that something that either is on the table in discussions you've had or you've seen any developers bring forward or that you've put forward?

Mayor Kate Gallego: So I would say Google has done one of the better jobs really trying to bring on new clean energy in Arizona. They've invested in both solar and wind. And to me it seems they are really new projects that the market has helped drive on. But overwhelmingly, we're seeing the new data centers come on with fossil fuels as the main power, some coal, but predominantly. Natural gas. Some of these power plants have water sources that I don't think are the most appropriate. When you look at other parts of the country in mayor world, the mayor of Lansing, Michigan has gotten a lot of attention because he, he helped bring a data center that took its waste heat and put it into a district heating system and helped reduce the need for other heating technology, so brought down residents' bills and I think offset some greenhouse gas emissions. So that would be an example of putting a data center where there might be more benefits for the community. , We don't have a lot of need for additional heat here, so we're more interested in district cooling, but I think there are real opportunities to be strategic and maximize benefits with these data centers.

Ariana Brocious: Mm-hmm. Apart from data centers, which Phoenix Innovations do you think are most transferable to other hot and arid cities in the US and globally?

Mayor Kate Gallego: I think we need to be smart about looking at our built environment, in our case, many of the solutions we use are solutions that the Native Americans who founded our community used smart building orientation. We know planting desert adapted trees can make a huge difference. Phoenix is part of American Forest program around tree equity. So we look at our city and the different economic zones and try to make sure we really think about equity and, and for communities that haven't always received their fair share of investment, that we really look at prioritizing trees in those areas. We're trying to plant trees where people are more likely to be walking, so that might be like between the school and the library and be intentional about creating cooler, comfortable corridors. So those solutions seem to make sense in so many communities and even in our divided times, we really feel like trees can bring people together. Uh, we are one of the sunniest big cities in the country and have had, uh, great success with investing in solar energy. We've done some cool projects where we put solar at public housing and then helped our residents bring down their bills. They also created more shaded parking, so popular program and, and we try to find win-wins where we reduce emissions, but also have other benefits to our community.

Ariana Brocious: Conversely, have there been lessons that you've taken, I know you were chair of, of climate mayors last year, um, that you've learned about, you know, in conversations with other mayors, other cities that you've adopted in Phoenix?

Mayor Kate Gallego: When mayors get together, there can be a little bit of shared ambition and, and perhaps a little bit of that race to the top that I mentioned in the, the context with data centers. So sometimes I'll see someone else's tree and shade plan and my $60 million commitment might need to get a little bit more ambitious. I have learned from mayors all over the world, so Mayor Aki Sawyerr in Freetown did a great tree planting program where she had local residents get training and lead the way and invest in trees in their community and get paid to maintain those trees. So you get to educate your residents. They get to improve their local neighborhoods, and you're creating jobs. So that was a great example where I, I learned from a project that was in Africa and was able to bring that to Phoenix and it's so popular and people feel such an ownership, Even if the tree's in public space, if you plant a tree, in some ways it becomes your tree. And then the more people who know how to maintain trees for our desert environment, which does have some pretty intense monsoon storms, the more we can take care of the city's investment, 'cause we want, when we plant a tree, we wanna make sure it's healthy and thriving.

Ariana Brocious: Right. So we're in an interesting, contentious moment politically in terms of, of national politics. And you touched on sort of the, the, I dunno, we've called it whiplash honestly, in climate policy from a federal level that we saw from the Biden administration to the current Trump administration. So what leverage for climate action does cities have that national and international bodies don't?

Mayor Kate Gallego: We have had enormous support from our voters when we've asked them to do local funding. So we have gone to our voters for everything from a sales tax to support busing to general obligation bonds that included green infrastructure and heat. That's not just true in Phoenix. I'm talking to a mayor from coal country in Ohio who went to the voters and got strong support for renewable energy. So I think the fact that we're the branch of government that's closest to the people can be really helpful. When I talk to the people of Phoenix, they want smart, sustainable water policy. They believe in taking advantage of the wonderful sun that we have and solar energy here, and it's been great to see that support directly from the voters so that maybe our secret sauce for local government is building coalitions, partnerships, and. From local funding to local implementation, engaging in the solutions that make sense.

Ariana Brocious: And beyond local government. What's the political strategy for maintaining momentum on climate action? When the government at the federal level is working so hard to roll back climate advances, climate policy,

Mayor Kate Gallego: One of the key issues for us in our community still is affordability. So the more we can do to help people reduce their energy use or use less water, that can be very helpful. Or find more affordable investments, which could be things like rooftop solar, but we really have had to understand the context we're in and and look at solutions that meet the moment around affordability. We also are really trying to, to modernize tax codes and, and fairness really matters in our community. So right now with data centers, they get a very aggressive subsidy around their sales tax, which is a key funding for us in local government. So can we maybe say, you know, sales tax supports our firefighters. And it is a lot more complicated to fight a fire at a data center than your neighborhood coffee shop. Yet your neighborhood coffee shop is paying a higher sales tax rate. Should we look at fairness and try to incentivize good policy through tax policy that treats the big guys and the little guys evenly?

Ariana Brocious: Yeah, so I hear what you're saying. You're saying, you know, there's ability at the local level to form more consensus to reach people on the issues that they really care about. And I'm wondering What lesson can we take from how climate mayors work together and share information?

Mayor Kate Gallego: cities. Have this really special relationship with each other where we're

willing to share good ideas and best practices. So, you know, I can talk to my fellow mayors about cool technology they've invested in, whether it's their new electric fire truck or a great energy management system that saves a ton of money and energy for their city and, and everyone's been willing to share. I think that's true for people in their everyday lives. So, would encourage folks, you know, get tips from your friends just as I get tips from my fellow mayors and learn. You know, don't be afraid to talk about, do you have a cool app that's helped you with your smart thermostat and really manage your own energy use? Or do you have tips for the best bike path and way to navigate around town? I think we can all learn from each other and there's that spirit at the city level right now.

Ariana Brocious: Yeah, I love that. Lessons from each other. Kate Gallego is Mayor of Phoenix, Arizona, and former Chair of Climate Mayors. Thank you so much for sharing your thoughts with us on Climate One.

Mayor Kate Gallego: Well, thank you so much. It was good to have a fellow Arizonan 'cause there are things we just do differently.

Ariana Brocious: Daylight savings not a thing here, you know?

Mayor Kate Gallego: Thank you

Ariana Brocious: Hey, it's Kousha and Ariana. It is the end of our show, and we have one more thing to share with you. Our climate. One more thing. Kha, what have you got?

Kousha Navidar: Okay. I saw a really cool article. I think people will dig. Oh, that's actually a pun I realized, but you'll get in a second. So, uh, right now underneath every single, uh, field, underneath every single forest on the planet, it turns out there are these really vast fungal networks that kind of act like the planet circulatory system when it comes to carbon capture. Because this fungal network pulls down, draws down the equivalent of 13 billion tons of carbon a year, and that represents about a third of all fossil fuel emissions.

Ariana Brocious: Whoa.

Kousha Navidar: And until very recently, Ariana, we did not know that this fungal network was so vast and captured so much carbon, but recently a scientist named Toby Kiers just won what they call the Nobel Prize for the environment for mapping out out all of this network. And what I loved, and this goes back to the Punte beat at the beginning, uh, her, her quote that I loved in the article is when she said A bag of dirt contains a galaxy. I just love that line.

Ariana Brocious: Hmm. Yeah, that's really amazing. I did not know that. And it, uh, it makes me think about the power of these systems all across the world because we know, for example, the oceans have already sequestered and captured a ton of the carbon that we've emitted, and that's helped keep our planet less hot than it would be. Um, so now it sounds like there's another system, or yet another system that's working on behalf of the whole planet. And so we should protect that first. And do you happen to know, did the article say, is there a way to like increase the carbon sequestration of fungal networks?

Kousha Navidar: the fun guys? Uh, that's a good question. I, I kind of, I was wondering the same thing.

Ariana Brocious: Can you make them more fun?

Kousha Navidar: I don't know. Maybe we should ask Toby to come and tell us. I, I, I, I don't know.

It seems like at the very least you have to protect it. But it'd be an interesting next step, um, if it hasn't happened yet, which I'm sure some folks are thinking about right now.

Ariana Brocious: Hmm. All right. Well that's our show. Thank you so much for listening, and we wanna say a special thanks to the listeners who have left us a voicemail on our Speak Pipe, and you can do this too. We love hearing from our listeners. We love to know what you're thinking, what ideas you think we should explore. You can leave us a voicemail just on your browser by going to our website, climate one.org/hello and finding the Speak Pipe logo and just hitting record.

Music: In

Kousha Navidar: And that's our show. Thanks for listening. You can see what our team is reading by subscribing to our newsletter – sign up at climate one dot org.

Kousha Navidar: POD version: And that's our show. Thanks for listening. Talking about climate can be hard, and exciting and interesting -- AND it's critical to address the transitions we need to make in all parts of society. Please help us get people talking more about climate by giving us a rating or review. You can do it right now on your device. Or consider joining us on Patreon and supporting the show that way.

Ariana Brocious: Climate One is a production of the Commonwealth Club. Our team includes Greg Dalton, Brad Marshland, Jenny Park, Austin Colón, Megan Biscieglia, Kousha Navidar and Rachael Lacey. Our theme music is by George Young. I'm Ariana Brocious.

Music: Out