



## Seattle Metro Chamber – Under Construction with David Bley

**Marilyn Strickland** Welcome to Under Construction. I'm your host, Marilyn Strickland, CEO of the Seattle Metro Chamber. In each episode, we take you behind the scenes with the people and companies shaping our evolving region. Today our guest is David Bley, who is with the Bill and Melinda Gates Foundation, and serves as Director of the Pacific Northwest Initiative. Welcome, David, and thanks for being here with us today.

**David Bley** Thank you for inviting me.

**Marilyn Strickland** So, when many of us think about the Bill and Melinda Gates Foundation, for some of us, two issues come to mind. We think of global health and we think of education reform. Can you talk about what the foundation is up to these days and then tell us how your position folds into that work?

**David Bley** We're about helping create opportunities so that everyone can have a healthy and productive life.

**David Bley** And we mean that really quite literally. And how you go about doing that depends a lot on context. That is where do you do the work? So I would answer it differently in terms of our global work than I would right here in the region. And when you think about the work overseas and globally, where we're facing the most extreme problems, where literally every day, lives are on the line. The family looked at that -- and their first impulse when they decided to invest their fortune back into society, where the money came from, was they literally saw kids that were not surviving past age five.

**Marilyn Strickland** Right.

**David Bley** They saw diseases that had been solved and controlled in the United States, like polio, for 50 years. I was born in 1954. That's the year they discovered the vaccine for polio. And I'm lucky. My generation, the year I was born, I never had to worry about that.

**Marilyn Strickland** And it's interesting because I know folks who are from your generation. Which isn't that much different than mine. But I know folks your age who actually have siblings or know people who actually did have polio.

**Marilyn Strickland** And so, in many ways, we kind of take some of these things for granted.

**David Bley** Right. We do. And what struck Bill and Melinda from the start was, frankly, how immoral it was that there were still people suffering from totally preventable diseases. So when you think about what do we do. How do we advance opportunity for people overseas that has historically been around disease, health, illness. That evolved over time into, what are the root causes? So why do kids under five die? Why are people unhealthy? And that leads you past just prevention on the health levels and cures on the health levels, to things like agricultural productivity and income for farmers. The status of women and girls overseas. So their learning curve has been intense. And that's why it's not a simple elevator speech about what they do overseas.

**David Bley** Here at home, we ask the same question. So why is it that some kids here are born into circumstances where they are on the gravy train? They're going to make it. No matter what happens to them. They will get through college and they're gonna, the ones that are going to get the great jobs here in Seattle. And what few of us ever consider are kids born into other circumstances.

**David Bley** Why is it they're having a harder time living healthy and productive lives? And you look at the school districts here. South Seattle, the six suburban school districts. And you look at the 125,000 kids that go there. And if you just look at the data, I know people think we're just absorbed, totally as geeks. They're just looking at numbers all the time. But numbers tell the story.

**Marilyn Strickland** Yes, they do.

**David Bley** And when you talk about these kids, 125,000 kids. If you look at those kids that are low income and not white. Very diverse communities out there. And that's what about 70 percent of the kids, 70 percent of the 120,000 kids are not white and they're not affluent. And roughly one out of 10 of those kids living here in Seattle will get a credential after high school.

**Marilyn Strickland** Well, yeah it's interesting, too. What we're talking about really is health outcomes and life expectancy. And if you take a map of most major metropolitan areas, you can look at the difference in life expectancy by neighborhood and by zip code sometimes.

**David Bley** It's totally predictable, yes.

**Marilyn Strickland** It is predictable. And you know the predictors: education, access to a job that has health care. You know, all those determinants that you're, that you're discussing. And you know you touch a bit on this. But you know, what do you think the foundation has learned from its work overseas in global health that you think is really applicable here in the Pacific Northwest? Because you're in charge of the Pacific Northwest Initiative. So what are some of the learnings that you've had globally that you're applying locally?

**David Bley** Well, first of all, it's the kind of philanthropy that Bill and Melinda have chosen to practice. Which is, as opposed to charity.

**Marilyn Strickland** Right.

**David Bley** Which is a very good form of philanthropy. You're keeping people alive in shelters and food banks and we do do some of that. But what they're really aiming at is long-term change that is sustained over time.

**Marilyn Strickland** The structural issues.

**David Bley** Yeah. And so, since we put so much emphasis overseas on things that seemed preventable, the technical solutions existed. And yet they weren't being applied. One of the lessons is a little more abstract but that if you aren't actually understanding thoroughly the structures and the systems in these societies that prevent people from getting to the cure - - then even with the best solutions, you still can't get to them. And it's no different here in the United States. So partly, it's just how we go about approaching our work, and we're looking at root cause and we're looking at structural and systems barriers that prevent these children we referenced earlier as to why they don't get out of high school into college. The other thing that we've learned overseas, not a huge surprise, but many of the solutions lie with the people that you think you're trying to help.

**Marilyn Strickland** Interesting.

**David Bley** So one good thing to do which shouldn't surprise us -- is to listen.

**David Bley** And we do too little of that. And we've made some of those mistakes ourselves at the Gates Foundation. Where we thought for sure, we knew the problem, we knew the solution. If people would just take our money and do what we tell them to do, everything will be just fine.

**Marilyn Strickland** No, and I don't think that's necessarily unique to, you know one organization. Because often people with really good intentions will say, 'I want to help this population. Let me come in and tell you what you need.' As opposed to listening to the folks themselves with the lived experience and having them express what they need.

**David Bley** So we've learned all these things the hard way, you might say. The other thing that we've come to appreciate--and I referenced this earlier around data and numbers, because we're famous for being absorbed by this--is that it's really important to understand the problem before you design the solution.

**David Bley** And so, in health and disease, which I don't do here in Washington state, they have scientific method. You know, they actually do use data. It's a very disciplined and rigorous approach to problem solving. And I would say in the United States -- generally speaking, as we've attacked social problems over the decades that I've been doing this, we have not applied that kind of rigor that you see in public health or in scientific research. And so we're getting smarter. Because we're uncovering things that we thought we knew that we don't know.

**Marilyn Strickland** Right.

**David Bley** And therefore, as you listen to people, you actually come up with a different set of solutions as well.

**Marilyn Strickland** Interesting. So, I want to switch gears a little bit because I want to talk a bit about you. One of the purposes of this podcast is to get to know the people behind the organizations. And so tell us a bit about your childhood. What led you to choose your area of study. I know you have a degree in urban planning and a Master's in Public Administration. And anything else that really influenced you growing up?

**David Bley** Sure. When people ask me to describe myself, I typically use the word 'lucky.'

**Marilyn Strickland** OK.

**David Bley** And that's lucky on, along many different lines. But if you start at the beginning I'm lucky because I was born into a loving family -- in a healthy, stable community in the north shore of the suburbs of Chicago.

**Marilyn Strickland** Interesting.

**David Bley** So we reference diversity a little bit earlier. And I was born into a place where if my parents hadn't told me, I would think everybody in the world was white and wealthy. And so it's an interesting start to my personal journey. Is that I grew up in great circumstances. My parents moved to the suburb because the public education system was considered the best in the nation.

**Marilyn Strickland** And many with with the means to do that. That same decision.

**David Bley** And I was a little boy. So I don't remember all these things. But when we moved there, I assume we had a lot of money. Because the people around me had way more money than you could imagine. And the children coming out of the hospital newly-

born were heading to Harvard. I think that's what they thought my path was too. But in fact, as I look back on things, I realized that I was solidly middle class in a sea of tremendous prosperity. And you might reflect on Seattle today. Actually. A lot of people that have lived here a long time think of themselves as middle class in a growing wave of prosperity. And suddenly even middle class people feel they're not a part of this. They can't afford to be here. That was kind of the circumstances into which I was born as well.

**David Bley** So as I grew up in the Chicago area, and all my friends were heading off to the Ivy League, I was the countercultural guy. I had long hair when they had the short hair. They grew the long hair, I cut my hair. And eventually I headed out to Evergreen State College in Olympia. Which was a good fit for me. One they had no grades. I loved that. Because I was at best what you might term an indifferent student. But also it allowed me to discover myself and I am now totally rooted in the northwest. I've come and gone from here various times but my journey. I think what I remember most are my parents, my three brothers, where I grew up, and the fact that I saw a contrast between my middle class life and this incredibly wealthy people. And twenty miles to the south in the inner city of Chicago. This was the 60s right. So we were still in the civil rights movement. We were in the anti-war movement. The women's movement. And while I lived in a very calm, stable place where I might have chosen to ignore all of that, I had three older brothers who were very politically active. So they, they chose not to let me think that the world looked like the one I was raised in.

**Marilyn Strickland** Yeah. So your family members did not allow you to be complacent about the good fortune into which you were born. And where you were surrounded.

**David Bley** And one, one memory is the year 1968. Is, was not a great year for America. Martin Luther King was assassinated that year. As was Robert F. Kennedy. And I was only 14, so I could have been playing video games if they existed at that point. But they didn't. But that made such a vivid impression on me. Because I was living in the lap of luxury -- 20 miles from where inner cities were literally burning down because of what had happened.

**Marilyn Strickland** Well you know it's interesting David. Because I've had a few guests on here and you probably are about the third person who referenced the death of Dr. King as a seminal moment when you were growing up. Such an interesting thing that all three of you have raised that issue. So going back to the Bill and Melinda Gates Foundation. Can you tell us more about it? I think sometimes we think oh yeah. Bill Melinda Gates Foundation. Seattle icon. Big philanthropist. Global and local stage. But tell us more about the organization itself. You know, how many people do you employ? What types of jobs are there available at the organization? And then again I'd like to hear more about your Pacific Northwest Initiative.

**David Bley** So the Gates family's chosen to resource people like me incredibly well. And I fully appreciate that. We're located as you may know kitty-corner to Seattle Center across from the Space Needle. And a campus that was built five or six years ago, maybe longer now. There are about 1,200 of us that work on campus plus a variety of contingent staff

and consultants. There are another 400 or so Gates staff working overseas in Europe, Africa, and Asia. And the range of jobs is probably greater than one might think.

**Marilyn Strickland** Right.

**David Bley** Because when you think about the scale that we operate at, which is roughly about \$5 billion dollars a year in grant-making. So it isn't just a bunch of the smartest people in the world, the experts who know how to cure malaria sitting around just thinking all day long. Although there are people like that.

**Marilyn Strickland** Yes, there are.

**David Bley** But most of them are not that. Most of them are people that actually are required to get the work done. What I mean by that is once we've decided what problem we're trying to solve and what our role might be, yes you have those grant-makers the smartest guys in the world and gals. But behind the scenes at least half of these people are just in operations. They're making the campus go. They're the people that move the workflows around. So you have a whole group of operations people, is what we call them, who are not content experts. They could work at any business. They just happen to work in philanthropy and most of them are very passionate about it. But there's this whole range of skills and opportunities that exists.

**Marilyn Strickland** And I think it was important to point that out. I think you know people have a notion in their mind of who works at these organizations. And it's like any other large organization. You have people who work in accounting and finance and communication and operations. And so a whole broad swath of employees. Do you think that the organization is doing a good job when it comes to recruiting a diverse and inclusive workforce?

**David Bley** That's a very hard question because I don't think you can ever say yes in this world.

**Marilyn Strickland** OK.

**David Bley** You know, we're swimming in a sea of racism and sexism and a lot of other isms. So no entity is immune from any of that. And that plays out both in our interpersonal level on my team, a team dynamic, as well as our relationships with external partners. So these issues of diversity and inclusion and equity matter. Fundamentally matter here. If you were to look at the demographics, you would actually see a pretty diverse workplace if you just counted people. Their skin tone and their gender.

**Marilyn Strickland** Right.

**Marilyn Strickland** You still would probably see differences about who's in charge and who's not in charge. But you would also see a really serious effort at continued diversification along all, all lines.

**Marilyn Strickland** So you've been at the foundation for over a decade now. And we know that the Metropolitan Seattle area has changed a lot. And even there've been changes around the world. So can you talk about some of the most significant changes you've witnessed in the populations that you serve? Or even in the way that you do the work.

**David Bley** Here in this region?

**Marilyn Strickland** Yes.

**David Bley** Yeah. It's been a phenomenal change. Since I got off an airplane in 1972 and went to the woods in Olympia. You know, when I got here this was pretty much thought of as a pretty homogenous, white place. And it isn't that anymore, fortunately. First of all, in terms of just racial diversity, we've moved to incredibly diverse place. You look at the seven school districts we work in. And 70 percent of those kids are not white. It would not have been that way 20 years ago. And it probably wouldn't have even been that way 10 years ago. These demographic shifts have been radical.

**Marilyn Strickland** Do you think part of that can be attributed to the fact that there are more private schools and some people just don't want to send their kids to public school?

**David Bley** In Seattle School District at least, where families tend to be more prosperous. Yes. They are opting out to some extent. We have probably the highest rate of parents putting their kids in private and parochial schools of any other major school district in the United States.

**Marilyn Strickland** Interesting.

**David Bley** So people do opt out of these systems. Which is a really interesting question. I would say the other diversity that's occurring now is the unaffordability. So as we diversify and actually we see these trends of far more low income people. Concentrated in specific neighborhoods. They're all getting pushed south. And the notion of shared prosperity is, is just a dream in this city. One I think many of us aspire to. But I would say that's also what's changed. This used to be a blue collar city and a middle class city.

**Marilyn Strickland** And you know one thing that I think I read an article in The New York Times a few years ago. And it talked about you know, housing patterns inadvertently creating segregated schools all over again. And so you know, how do we find a way for middle income people to be able to afford to live in various neighborhoods? Because that does have an impact on the population, the students who are in our public schools and you work so closely with the school districts.

**David Bley** Yeah. And those residential settlement patterns where families choose to buy or rent their home.

**Marilyn Strickland** Yes.

**David Bley** You use an adjective, inadvertent. And I might challenge that. Because if you look at the history unfortunately, it was really driven by public policy. Around decisions. Around zoning.

**Marilyn Strickland** Yeah.

**David Bley** And land use. Around literal redlining. Both in terms of people who are not white but also as a Jew. I'm Jewish. I lived in a suburb next to a suburb that had covenants on their houses that did not allow Jewish people to buy the homes.

**Marilyn Strickland** There are some covenants that were uncovered even during my time as mayor in Tacoma in some neighborhoods which essentially said that I could either be a servant or I. Yeah I mean it's interesting to think about some of these things that were actually -- homeowners actually agreed to this. And that's what they wanted in their neighborhood.

**David Bley** Right. And so all that stuff's illegal now thankfully. And there was a long civil rights fight to pass laws around fair housing and such. But the legacy of that still lives on and you can see it.

**Marilyn Strickland** Indeed. So I want go back in your career a bit pre-Gates Foundation. Because you have a pretty interesting CV here. So you worked in banking. You worked in intergovernmental relations for one of our former guests Mayor Norm Rice. And even in, in community enterprise. So talk a bit about some of the various roles you had. And how has that experience informed the work that you're now doing at Gates?

**David Bley** It's a great question. And it's a long answer so stop me if it's too long. And it's very relevant. I have three sons who just are leaving the house so they're all trying to figure this out themselves. And they ask Dad, so how did you get there?

**David Bley** And I would say I never had a blueprint or a roadmap. I used the word lucky earlier about lucky to be born into the family and the place I was born into -- and I would just say my whole career has been a series of lucky things. And that's both preparation and opportunity. It's not equally distributed. I realize all of that. But for me the journey from Evergreen State College was to the University of Washington where I got an urban planning degree as an undergraduate and I was actually a land use planner in the city of Bellevue. This is when it was a sleepy suburb and I was counting trees basically. I learned fairly rapidly that I was not cut out to be an urban planner. And prior to that when I was in college I was actually a community organizer as well. And I found I didn't quite have the skill, talent and energy to stay that angry all the time to be an effective organizer. So I had

ruled out planning and organizing. And I was lucky enough to fall into a graduate fellowship at Seattle University for people that would commit themselves to public service. And I got my MPA from SU at the Institute for Public Service. That's still there. I fell into another opportunity at the federal level when Jimmy Carter was president. And it was a management training program for people with MPAs who were wanting to work in the federal government. And the cool thing there was they had a whole list of jobs in all the agencies you could imagine and you got to pick the one you wanted. And this doesn't much exist anymore. And I picked the Department of Housing and Urban Development in Washington, D.C.

**Marilyn Strickland** Who was the secretary of HUD at the time?

**David Bley** A very famous guy. Sam Pierce. He was one of the first African-American Cabinet members. And probably the only one under Ronald Reagan. Because when I got there Jimmy Carter hired me but Ronald Reagan was in power by the time I got there. Different government.

**Marilyn Strickland** Interesting transition.

**David Bley** And I worked at HUD for a couple of years writing rules and policy. And learning a lot. Everything I describe, I have no regrets. I have learned so much everywhere I have gone. But that led, somewhat out of desperation, because I was out of my element in that administration and their urban policies. And I called Mike Lowry's office. Mike the congressman from Seattle who became governor. And I simply introduced myself to somebody on the phone and I said I really need a new job. And this is what I know. And they said, well it's funny because we have a vacancy. And maybe you should come in and meet the Congressman. And so I worked for Mike for seven or eight years until he lost to Slade Gorton in a Senate election -- doing banking. Savings and Loan Crisis was a big deal.

**Marilyn Strickland** So this is still around housing.

**David Bley** Yeah, the late 80s. Yeah I worked on homelessness the first federal policy act called the McKinney-Vento Act was something that Lowry drove. And I was the guy staffing him. And then Mike ran and lost for the Senate and Jim McDermott came in. The next congressman from Seattle. And I didn't know Jim but I -- and I unfortunately was getting a divorce at that time. I was ready to come back to Seattle. But Jim was nice enough to hire me for a year. And we worked on something called Housing Opportunity for People With AIDS Act. So AIDS was a much different situation back then. And there wasn't a lot, a lot of federal policy. And eventually though I really was ready to come home to Seattle. And I did. And that's when I hit banking. And that led to both City Hall and Norm Rice. It led to ultimately housing finance .Fannie Mae. And then a wholesale Housing Bank. And I moved from advocacy and regulatory affairs to being the chief operating officer and never -- having gone to Evergreen, I didn't have any banking courses there. So again this time, good fortune. Being in the right place at the right time. Being open to learning and growing.

**David Bley** And I learned that banking was not my thing.

**Marilyn Strickland** But you learned to understand how that affects access to housing.

**David Bley** Because money matters. Money matters a lot whether you like it or not. And understanding how those systems and structures are organized. It was a great addition to how I understood public policy. And from there I went into the nonprofit world. So that was the third leg of the stool. Public, private and nonprofit. The only thing I hadn't done was philanthropy -- other than some corporate philanthropy. And I worked for the Enterprise Community Partners on the East Coast but lived here in Seattle.

**Marilyn Strickland** So tell us. What is the Enterprise Community Partners?

**David Bley** Yeah. They actually have an office here in this region. That's where I worked. And they focus on both low income housing, finance and development -- and then neighborhood developments of lower income neighborhoods like the Hilltop in Tacoma. Same thing. And I worked there for a couple of years and it was through that work I started to get know people at Gates Foundation.

**Marilyn Strickland** Interesting.

**David Bley** And the rest is history. I've been at Gates for 12 years.

**Marilyn Strickland** That's great. So let's talk a bit about and you've touched on this -- the whole conversation about inequity in communities. And I know that this specific program about the building community philanthropy partnership with Philanthropy Northwest that was launched back in 2012. Can you talk a bit about that and talk about why that work is so important to you personally?

**David Bley** So building community philanthropy was our notion of how do we create greater awareness and potentially even a movement within philanthropy that was both responsive to the fact this is a very diverse state. And my team does not only focus on Seattle and King County. We work across the state. And I cannot pretend nor would I claim to know what to do in Yakima or what to do in Ferry County. So we were humble enough to know we needed to work with people from those communities. We also were humble enough to feel they may have different values than we did whether we like that or not. And we also said to ourselves if you're going to drive change in, in other communities -- who's there to influence things? And in most communities, they don't have this kind of wealth.

**Marilyn Strickland** And sometimes not the infrastructure.

**David Bley** Yeah, there's very little. They don't have the nonprofits. Governments are much smaller. Much more limited powers. So we thought to ourselves and we said there are community foundations, pretty much everywhere in the state of Washington. They're not

as big maybe as the Seattle Foundation or the greater Tacoma Community Foundation. But they do exist across about 90 percent of the state. So we said -- if I don't have 100 staff to go live in each of these counties and do the work, then who do we need to know in these places? And who would be feel common cause with us? And it was the community foundations and the United Ways. So we first of all asked them if they would actually take some of our money and re-grant it into the things they thought were important to their community. And secondly, we invited them to a learning network essentially where we all said what could we do as philanthropists to be more effective in driving change? And in being responsive to the needs of the people we want to help.

**Marilyn Strickland** Well, you know this is really interesting. Because I think sometimes when we think of the Bill and Melinda Gates Foundation, we often kind of restrict our notion of the service area to recall up and down the I-5 corridor in the Puget Sound -- but you just talked about going even beyond them. Can you talk about some of the projects or efforts or initiatives you funded outside of the metro Seattle core?

**David Bley** The second one that I think has real promise is called the Rural Alliance in central and eastern Washington, so this is, this existed before we came along. We did not dream this up. Smarter people than us. And it's roughly 60 school districts. All very rural, some very remote. They're all educating children now. And if anything the inequities in rural areas are tougher than you see in Seattle. With no resource.

**David Bley** So they came together voluntarily to say well what can we learn together? And share some practice and ideas about how do we get these kids through high school and into college. Because even in farm-country parents want their kids to get educated and have opportunity. And yet the graduation rates in many of these places are even lower than here. So they came together to help each other and we've simply invested in them so that they now have money to actually hire staff. To go do some research on their own. To partner in this with other states sometimes that have similar rural issues. So those are really the two most promising things outside the I-5 corridor from my point of view.

**Marilyn Strickland** That's great. So let's go back to. Let's bring it back to Seattle now. And you know one of the reasons that we have this podcast is to hear thoughts and opinions and ideas from some of our leaders. And you know when you talk to folks I'd say I've been in this job for just over a year now. And the housing crisis whether it's affordability for middle class families or the homeless situation that tends to rise to the top. Can you just give us your thoughts about you know why or why is this issue so hard for us to solve?

**David Bley** Well it's because we live in a market based society. So housing production like everything else in our economy is driven by supply and demand. That's not a bad thing. And but supply and demand don't always necessarily keep up with each other. And when the supply of land is limited and you need more housing the market forces say it's going to cost more and the cost of constructing, developing new units is astronomical now. We know that with your home buyer or your renter you see the same thing. And so it's not unique to Seattle. If you know the only way to solve this, actually, given that, would be to

say let's stop growing jobs and let's have a depressed economy and I'll guarantee you rents will come down.

**Marilyn Strickland** They will.

**David Bley** But we don't want to create the other problem either. And so the question is how do you grow with grace? Given the way governments operate in these markets and there's a limited set of tools for a mayor. And I think Mayor Durkan is using every one of them she's got in the toolbox. But the reality is without state but particularly federal involvement as historically has been the case through things like the low income housing tax credit and rental subsidies. It's pretty much impossible I think for a local community to solve this on their own. So the best you can do is manage the problem. And I would suggest is that Seattle manages better than most. For example the voters here for 30 years have taxed themselves through property tax levies for affordable housing. So they have stepped up to this. But we just can't keep up with demand.

**Marilyn Strickland** No and it's interesting. And I you know, I've said this on a lot of, with a lot of my other guests that you know we never in our wildest dreams expected growth to happen at this rate. And we just were not prepared for it. And so I think to your point you know and also too. Government alone cannot build enough housing to meet the demand. And so you know how do we do the best we can with the tools that we have. But to your point earlier too, like you know we don't want the opposite of the good economy because we've been there before and it's not pretty.

**David Bley** Yeah. And one day we will face that again. And you've been through this as a mayor in Tacoma so you know the balancing act.

**Marilyn Strickland** Oh and that recession was deep and long. I do remember.

**Marilyn Strickland** So let's talk a bit about education. Because we know that the Gates Foundation has been very, very engaged in you know education reform and then also just in general. So are there any specific programs or efforts that you really think should be highlighted? Because in many ways you again the amount of work that the Gates Foundation does is so deep and broad. But what's going on in education right now when it comes to Gates?

**David Bley** We put a lot of our money on education for the reasons I referenced earlier which is that's one of a few pathways to opportunity for everybody especially people that are at the bottom end of the economic table here. It's proving to be very, very difficult and complex set of opportunities and challenges. We've done a lot of great work that I'll describe in a second but I would say all of these dimensions of Seattle and its change over time. The diversity the prosperity the lack of prosperity that all gets played out at our public schools.

**Marilyn Strickland** Indeed.

**David Bley** Because every kid shows up at school regardless of their background.

**Marilyn Strickland** Right.

**David Bley** And so it's not surprising that as a community institution a school might in fact be having a difficult time adapting to these changing society and changing demographics. So that's my root cause analysis. These are not stupid people they're not evil people. They're just struggling with some big changes and the way we used to educate kids is not necessarily the way we will or should.

**Marilyn Strickland** That's right.

**David Bley** And by the way a lot of the schools were designed for people like me born and raised in the suburbs. The world was built for me. The world was not built for kids that don't necessarily speak English to start with or are living under incredible stress and adversity because they don't have stable housing or their parents are working a couple jobs and you don't see their parents a little bit. So the question to me is not whether or not we know how to educate children. We do. I'm a product of that. The question is do we know how to educate the kids that are showing up at public school -- because about half or more of them are our kids that the systems were not designed for.

**Marilyn Strickland** And you talk about the systems, and we talk about the structures and the institutions. And there are so many institutions that touch a student's life before he or she even walks into the building every day.

**David Bley** Yeah. And so they're, first of all, there's no silver bullet. I think Bill and Melinda and me hoped there was. But after 17 years of this we know there isn't. We've left something of a legacy that will matter if we were to stop today. But we're not. But for example the public policies around what do we expect from our schools. What does a well educated child look like and how do we know if they are?

**David Bley** And those are the big fights we saw around words like common core. So what should we teach the kids? How should we teach the kids? And by the way what kind of assessments do you need to make sure that we're living up to our promises with the kids? All of that has proven to be very, very controversial as well as technically difficult. And it strikes at the heart of our values as a society. So that whole area of education reform tends to be on fire often and it was no different in Washington state. But I would say the 12 years I've been working on this here in this state -- the state level policy framework is far more reflective of what people believe will work for kids.

**David Bley** So good progress at the state level, the McCleary financing solution because school finance is essential to this. The jury's still out on that but the jury doesn't look pretty good. A lot of districts are finding it very difficult to provide quality education with the level of financing that came through McCleary. And I don't understand it well enough

myself yet to know really what the answer is. But that's something else the state has to get clear. But then let's assume for a minute that the policy is fixed and the finance is fixed then you get down to this classroom and to the schools. And so as some examples we work in what's called the Road Map.

**Marilyn Strickland** Yep. The Road Map projects.

**David Bley** With seven school districts. Seattle and then the suburbs to the south around the airport. That was a community-driven effort. It was our belief that nobody really understood just how far behind so many of these kids were. So the first thought -- this was seven or eight years ago -- let's just actually make sure people know what's going on in these schools. Because the only other people that really know were the teachers right principals and a few of us that cared.

**David Bley** So there's been this community-wide effort for a long time just to say we can and need to do better. Because as I mentioned earlier, only one in 10 of kids who are poor and not white are likely to get a credential by age 26. They're not set up for the jobs that the Boeing's and the Amazons and the Microsofts are creating here. Community awareness and will was so fundamental. And you saw that in Tacoma when you were mayor too.

**Marilyn Strickland** Right. Well yeah I mean we had our own version of the Road Map project. It was a collective impact model and everyone in the community came together and said everyone has a role to play in education. Even if you don't work in a school. And it's the same thing with the Road Map project.

**David Bley** Same theory.

**David Bley** We're working in five elementary schools in Renton, Washington right now. We're, through the University of Washington. They've introduced a new early math approach and combined that with some other approaches around social emotional well-being of the kids and integrating those things together and a school where this has happened is Lake Ridge Elementary School.

**Marilyn Strickland** No, and I'm going to tell you why that I think that's so important. Because you know there are a lot of technical aspects about education. But you know kids need the basics. They need to feel loved and they need to feel safe. And that speaks to the social emotional stability. And you know we often talk about education in the context of preparing the workforce which is absolutely important. But you want them to be responsible adults who contribute positively to communities. And if that in my opinion is the desired outcome then all the other things that we talk about will be part of that.

**David Bley** I would agree. And there's a normal human development path that all human beings go down regardless of your skin tone or your income right or your zip code. And yet when you have schools and systems designed for only a certain proportion of the kids,

why would we be surprised if a kid can't see their own identity? They can't see themselves in that school setting. They don't feel they belong there.

**Marilyn Strickland** And how does that affect them feeling loved? And safe.

**David Bley** So on what basis would we think their capacity to learn is being enhanced?

**Marilyn Strickland** Absolutely. And one thing I will say that you know -- and I talk about this a lot because my husband's an educator. He's an administrator and the number of counselors that we have. The ratio of counselors to students is just atrocious. And I think if we're willing to invest in that, that can also help a lot. So I can do five podcasts on education if I wanted to and I know that is such a core part of what you do at Gates.

So I want to switch a bit now as we start to wrap up and ask you some of our lightning round questions. Getting to Know You Better, David. So what would people be surprised to learn about you?

**David Bley** Well I think I mentioned in my personal story growing up in this really privileged town with a great school system. And odd as it might sound, I was the only guy to ever drop out of high school in that town.

**Marilyn Strickland** Interesting. What happened?

**David Bley** What happened was my brothers. They made my school seem so irrelevant because the world was on fire around me. And I wanted to be a part of changing the world. And I didn't see why high school had anything to do with the path I wanted to take.

**Marilyn Strickland** Interesting.

**David Bley** But I have smart parents who didn't panic and behind the scenes they got my brother to come home and convince me I was really being stupid and talked to the school and they found a way for me to go back and to graduate in three years rather than four. So we found a good solution.

**Marilyn Strickland** That's great. So what are you reading right now?

**David Bley** I'm laughing because the last book I completed. Which is unusual for me I am reading about 50 books at a time.

**Marilyn Strickland** That's not unusual.

**David Bley** They tend to be nonfiction because you don't actually have to read the ending. I just finished a biography of Joseph Stalin.

**Marilyn Strickland** Interesting.

**David Bley** Almost 900 pages. And the sad thing is it's a trilogy. So there's two more volumes each 900 pages.

**Marilyn Strickland** Are you going to finish them.

**David Bley** I don't think so.

**Marilyn Strickland** All right let's switch to something about music. So you know with all of our technology everyone has a playlist. And mine varies on my depending on my mood and what I found and so what's on your playlist right now.

**David Bley** I'm terribly eclectic. Totally eclectic.

**Marilyn Strickland** That's great.

**David Bley** Yeah. I think what, I was just looking at my phone to see what I was just listening to. A lot of Dizzy Gillespie right now.

**Marilyn Strickland** OK.

**David Bley** And so that's what gets me energized is this Afro Cuban Jazz Moods and a song called Manteca.

**Marilyn Strickland** Very cool. I love it when people actually drop the names of artists and songs. Because when I listen to the podcast and I want to go look it up now and I want to listen to it, it's very cool. So do you have time at all to even binge watch anything?

**David Bley** Oh I come home really tired and the TV goes on. I'm no different than you.

**Marilyn Strickland** So what are you binge watching right now?

**David Bley** Well I have to admit it is mostly what my wife turns to. And right now we're into The Voice, because it's musical, it's competitive. But they're really nice to each other.

**Marilyn Strickland** So sweet they're really nice to each other. I love it. So, baseball season just started. And every time someone comes up to bat, there is walkup music that accompanies them. So what is your walkup music when you come up to bat?

**David Bley** I don't have a song but it would probably be Chicago Blues.

**Marilyn Strickland** OK.

**David Bley** Because that's what I grew up around.

**Marilyn Strickland** Very cool.

**David Bley** So I still listen to a lot of of that. And like Sweet Home Chicago is a song actually. That's an example of a high energy song that would wake me up.

**Marilyn Strickland** So I have to do a bit of this because you're talking about being from Chicago. So I've had the opportunities you know during my time as mayor to travel to a lot of U.S. cities and I have to tell you Chicago was one of my favorite places. And there's just something about the scale of it -- the accessibility of a down to earth part of it. What do you miss most about Chicago even though you're now Seattle's your home?

**David Bley** Yeah well compared to Seattle it is both more livable. It's bigger oddly but it feels at a different livable scale. Each neighborhood is distinct. They have this Midwest thing where people tend to be pretty nice to each other. A little more humble. Not so cool. So I think that's what I like. And I often wonder why I didn't move home to be honest.

**Marilyn Strickland** Interesting.

**David Bley** But I'm not going to. I love Seattle.

**Marilyn Strickland** No. You belong in Seattle. This is your place. OK. So I like to end these with different questions -- and so I tell folks like everyone has a mantra, philosophy. What are your words to live by David?

**David Bley** They might be trite. It's the golden rule. Do unto others as you would have them do unto you.

**Marilyn Strickland** Simple, straightforward and very, very authentic.

**David Bley** Yeah. And if we just treat each other with a little more respect and dignity that would go a long way toward solving some of our problems.

**Marilyn Strickland** Indeed. All right well David -- thank you so much for being our guest today.

**David Bley** It's really been fun. Thank you.