

An Interview with Senator Dina Neal

Perspectives from the COVID-19 Pandemic: Leadership and Learning in Nevada

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Each interviewee had the opportunity to review their transcript. All measures have been taken to preserve the style and language of the interviewee. This interview features Senator Dina Neal, Senator for State of Nevada, and was conducted on 2/4/22 by Makada Henry-Nickie and Magdalena Martinez. This interview covers topics including reflections on leadership, organizational challenges, and opportunities for collaboration.

## **Interview with Senator Dina Neal**

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### **SPEAKERS**

Dr. Makada Henry-Nickie, Senator Dina Neal, Dr. Magdalena Martinez

**Dr. Magdalena Martinez** 00:03

Thanks again, Senator Dina Neal, for joining us today. And just to confirm, are you okay with us recording today's conversation and attributing your quotes and your conversation with us in any type of reports that we put out?

**Senator Dina Neal** 00:18

Yes.

**Dr. Magdalena Martinez** 00:20

Thank you so much. So Dr. Makada Henry-Nickie and I are going to take half and half the questions. And I'm just going to start real broadly, if you could tell us a little bit about your role in the state legislature.

**Senator Dina Neal** 00:35

So I'm currently in the state Senate, was elected in 2020. But I've been in the state legislature since 2011. And I was on the assembly side, I've served pretty much the whole time. Well, I've been on taxation, but I've been chairing revenue for four sessions now. Um, so that's pretty much my area or my bailiwick outside of business policy.

**Dr. Magdalena Martinez** 01:09

And Senator Dina Neal, can you tell us just a little bit about yourself, and how you ended up in running for public office?

**Senator Dina Neal** 01:20

So at the time that I was thinking about running for public office, term limits were coming to, I guess, an end. The member, Morse Arberry had been in Assembly District 7 seat for 26 years, and he was retiring. And we were in the middle of a recession. And I thought I had ideas, economic ideas that could bring to the table in order to move the state forward. And I thought it was important to add my voice to the 63. And so I ended up not even knowing at the time I

ended up being like the first African American female ever to be elected in the Assembly in 2011. I had no idea at the time, and then I ended up - you know, it was like a series of firsts, because it was the first time we ever had Latina females ever elected, but they came in in a group of three, well, actually four, because we had Lucy. So it was one of those historic 2011 sessions. We're the first set of freshmen creating havoc in the building. [laughs]

**Dr. Magdalena Martinez** 02:33

And could you talk a little bit more about how you saw your role during the pandemic, I mean, we still are in the pandemic, but as a state policymaker.

**Senator Dina Neal** 02:43

So I saw my role as, I spent a lot of time like contacting, you know, GOED and trying to offer support and ideas. The NV Grow program that I asked in 2015 to try to help leverage businesses build conversation with banks, I had a conversation with the banks, about, you know, trying to get PPP loans move, after trying to help people understand we did a diabetes zoom, I started reaching out to Walgreens, HHS, because in the early onset of the pandemic, you know, it was a question of 'how I was going to get my medication, how I was going to process the pandemic and be in my house and not be able to leave.' It wasn't this full fledged piece that we see now in 2022. Well, now you can get anything delivered, right? You get ice cream delivered to your house, from 7-11. At that time it was, 'I need my medication, I need access to the hospital, I can't see my loved one.' And so I ended up engaging on those fronts, trying to figure out pathways to help people at least speak to the CEO of a hospital, stay and find out what was going on with the care of their person- of their loved one, medication, and then the businesses and then trying to get... I did some donations for masks, gloves, all those things that everybody else was doing. And then I worked with... I'm in the Hispanic Caucus, we did food deliveries.

That must have been six months out of the pandemic? Every week, going and getting a list of families that had been impacted by COVID and couldn't go to the store. And so, that was actually a really good initiative because it spanned all families, right so you could be Dominican, making sure like there were plantains and different things in the boxes based on the culture that you came from, and then we ended up doing something in the African community working with at the time, Assemblyman Assefa, for the Ethiopian community in the southwest and doing food delivery. And that I think that was everything that I did. Yeah...

**Dr. Magdalena Martinez:** 5:20

I think the Hispanic Caucus did a really good job of really letting people know through different social media outlets too. I always received that - it was just really, really inspiring to see just everybody out there. And I know, some of the federal representatives also went out there a couple of times. So I just wanted to let you know that.

You mentioned also this was on the early onset of the pandemic, do you see your role has it changed now to present time in terms of how, how you advocate and work toward pandemic efforts, relief efforts.

**Senator Dina Neal:** 06:00

I think it's definitely adjusted. But I think my role was adjusted at the end of '21, the latter part of 2021, because, you know, my dad passed December 31, of 2021. And then I just kind of shifted into trying to figure out how to deal with his affairs and his estate. And so I came off of this kind of high role of, you know, I was following the money following the ARP money following, you know, getting in everybody's business.

Probably, I was still getting everybody's business well, until in the session of 2022. But, as since I've been home, I have not, I haven't fully engaged with the information the way that I normally would, because in a normal situation, I'm always following the meetings and reading everything that comes out. Like I talked to Governor's staff. And right now, the only thing that I've been doing is reaching out to Governor's... was not his Chief of Staff, but Bailey Bortolin. To find out like, for different nonprofits that are in my district, or businesses who put in for ARP money, have been following up to try to find out what's the status of their application?

Like, where are you guys at? Are they going to get any funds? I have Richard Steele Foundation that is really trying to get funds, they do Parkinson training. And they are in a position where they may have to close their doors, because early on in the pandemic, we were able to work through the SBA and get him \$60,000. So he could at least pay his lease. And what he was trying to do was purchase the building, so he could get from underneath the lease, but there was no opportunity to find that level of cash. But now we're trying to just keep his programs open, because he serves youth within the community, in my district, and then he runs a Parkinson's program with LaRoe.

And so I've been working with Bailey, to try to get funds. And so we're looking at, we're looking at several different avenues, whether or not it's through Department of Agriculture to continue the food program and the tutoring program that he was doing. But I'm pressing them to help find the money for the Parkinson's program, because it's a really big deal. And the other has been trying to help Mario's market, which is in the west part of my district, he was promised some RDA ARPA funds. And we've been trying to figure out how to get him funds because he wants to expand his market. There's just different things happening like that, those are the main things that I've been involved in. Um, and it's not as much as I used to do at all, actually.

**Dr. Magdalena Martinez** 09:10

Well, I'm really sorry about the loss of your father. I know that he was an important, very important person in your life.

And you started to talk about some of the issues. And for the next question, from your perspective, which groups do you think were hardest hit from the COVID and recession?

**Senator Dina Neal** 09:30

I think it was just in general communities of color. I think Latino, black, Samoan. In my district, I actually, before, you know, the Afghan refugees came over, I have Afghan families. There's direct isolation from information, right. So if it's not on a social media platform, a lot of people, what I learned was that a lot of people were getting their news from social media, not a newspaper. And so the role of trying to help those individuals get information was, um, it was, it was skewed a lot. I mean, we tried to, we had the North Las Vegas elects have weekly meetings with North Las Vegas, trying to make sure that the city government, whatever funds they got, were being used and deployed within the actual community.

So we have weekly conversations for a year and a half. And what turned out in the process was they would listen to us, they would talk to us, and then they would turn around and maybe do some of the ideas or take credit for the idea. So that relationship became kind of weird. Because they were like, we saw it as a partnership. And they saw it as an opportunity to lift the City versus actually engage in the work that was happening.

So when they got their small business funds, we're trying to direct them to specific areas. They had a conversation with the community, they did community meetings at odd times, like 9:30 in the morning. Who's going to come to a community meeting at 9:30 in the morning when you're at work? And I was just like, things, like weird things, like that we're trying to give constructive criticism to say, listen, if you actually want to have a community meeting, number one, do it in a place where somebody is going to show up. Do it at a time when people are going to be there to get the information, and then be responsive to how you can deploy those dollars into the community.

And they pretty much, you know, North Las Vegas did their own thing in regards to what they felt was appropriate, not really listening, when they serve a majority minority city. So, I would say that, you know, those communities were further impacted, because lack of listening to the people on the ground, telling them, here are the areas that need to be dealt with. Like, currently, and I don't even have a solution for this. I talked to Director Whitley about this, because there's still elder, seniors who are in their house that have no capacity to, um, they don't have a

caretaker. So, they don't have anyone who can come in and check on them and make sure that, you know, they don't have an SEIU worker who can come in and help them with daily tasks and things that they have to do. And so they're just kind of on their own trying to figure it out.

There's still an issue within this COVID environment of patients who are released, and then not eligible, not able to go to Walgreens to get their medication, more often than not. And I'm hearing this from, like some pharmacists, that they're literally leaving the hospital, still in like hospital gown, and being dropped off by public transportation, but have no way to leave the pharmacy, because it was a one way access to get to the actual pharmacy to get your medication.

I have a conversation with Walgreens, actually on Monday, because they went to a central system where now if a person has their medication there, instead of it, it can be right there on the shelf for the pharmacist, but they created the central system, which is in Arizona, which then you have to then get this approval from Arizona to release the medication. Which delays the person getting their medication by several days. And it's a complaint because the patient is like, well, my diabetes medication's right there. My insulin is right there. Why can't you just give it to me, like where did this new rule come from?

So I'm speaking to them because it's not patient-centered. And I'm very focused on, in this environment, trying to make sure that people who are health-impacted can have access to the medication and that profit is not running the narrative and that you're actually focused on the human being who is, you're serving for this medication and give them the freakin' medication, because it's right there on the shelf. So I mean, that's what's happening. That's the only, that's the latest thing that I'm involved in. And it's impacting communities of color it is specifically in my district, and on the east side.

**Dr. Magdalena Martinez** 14:54

Mm hmm. I had no idea and I'm glad to hear you're working with these private organizations. As you think about that, are there other collaborative efforts across non government organizations that you've been working with as a policymaker?

**Senator Dina Neal** 15:12

Um, that right now, that's the main one I was looking at. I actually was looking at trying to bring a bill around the policy, this particular policy, but also around elder care. Because they have community, there have community liaisons in the community, right, like we're paying for this we currently have. They're called, like, community touch points. I mean, it's a better name than that. But their role is to engage with the welfare office and engage with age and disability and be a kind of contact, like we funded that in the pandemic. But there's a question on how they access the patient, and how they access the patient in the impoverished neighborhoods. And it's one of the issues that I've been thinking about taking up.

And it's also another issue on, I was going to do something in the next three weeks around estate, like when a loved one dies. Because that's a real thing that's literally happening every day. How do you handle their affairs, because I have a law degree. I've been in the legislature. I know a lot about a lot. But there were a lot of things that I was like, wait a minute, how exactly do you do this? And with older family members who have treasury bonds, who have all these papers that you may not even know what to do with? Like, I had to learn so many things around like quadros. The treasury, how do you do the treasury bonds when there's actually no Treasury certificate? Like, what do you do? How do you locate it? How do you find it? How do you retrieve these assets that parents who grew up in the 30s, 40s, 50s, 60s and 70s put their money in thinking that this is something that'd be passed down to their children? And now you're trying to figure out what do I do? Um, that's, those have been my latest thoughts and ideas and things that I'm going to engage in, in a short order.

**Dr. Magdalena Martinez** 17:22

Okay, that's very helpful. Now, I'm thinking about that. - and in the COVID, recession, what do you wish the different levels of government would have done or could do differently for the COVID Recession?

**Senator Dina Neal** 17:40

I'm going to talk about CCSD.

**Dr. Magdalena Martinez** 17:43

Okay.

**Senator Dina Neal** 17:45

What I wish they would have done is taken the ARP process that they were mandated to engage in at the federal level, and actually listen to the community constituency, and build the programmatic structure around issues that were brought forward. They haven't, I haven't seen evidence of it. What I have seen evidence of is that the \$700 million, or roughly \$800 million private actors trying to get their hands on the money.

And then there is this activity where, rather than giving this money to the schools, there is an act of action to take money from the schools and bring money back into Central. And the question is, for what and for what purpose? Because what we're running into are isolated children who are still heavily impacted by lack of educational consistency. There's academic fragmentation, in a very deep way, we're not engaging those students they're, they're running into being isolated in their homes. Where, because we've opened up the state we don't have a closer eye on those, on those children who are still in a, maybe in an abusive household, can't get to the library, have no access to books, we have completely thrown in the toilet, how children learn.



We're assuming that every child can process information in a digital format, which is not true. And we have stopped having deep down conversations about what to do, because I directly asked my trustee 'why haven't you had a conversation about academic achievement since you been on the board and she was like, there's been no opportunity to have to have that conversation.' And I, and I found it amazing because I was just like, even in the middle of the pandemic, that actually is still number one, and will remain number one. How do we get students to academically achieve in the middle of what is appears to be chaos, what is in the middle of a pandemic, and is still at the forefront. I, my principal... and I wish I could do more, but he's trying to get me on SOT meetings every month, so I can engage the parents there. My, one of my Middle School's teacher reached out to me so I can come in and talk to their group about what's going on' how I'm going to assist' how I'm going to help, because honestly, they're looking for outside help to come in and help drive the narrative of AC on the ground. And I agree with them. I agree with them 1,000%. And I, that's one of the things that I wish the district was actually more responsive, but they're more focused on violating the law than actually doing what they're supposed to do. And it's, it's sad, but it's true.

**Dr. Magdalena Martinez** 20:58

Okay, thank you for that. Let me just pause, Makada, do you have any follow up questions on this or any of the previous questions?

**Dr. Makada Henry-Nickie** 21:06

No, but I'm just going to pull in some different themes that I'm going to dive into in our second half of this interview. So thanks for the offer, Magda.

**Dr. Magdalena Martinez** 21:13

Okay, you bet. So you talked a little bit about this, Senator Dina Neal - in terms of groups in the community or otherwise that you successfully engaged with during the pandemic? Any others that you'd like to highlight?

**Senator Dina Neal** 21:29

No, I can't think of any other group. I mean, I did, I did a veterans event, giving away food with one of the churches in my district for First AME Church, that I did that I don't even know when I did that, January? It was in it was in November, and after Thanksgiving was actually after Thanksgiving. But other than that, I have not fully gotten back out there. I was gonna start, actually, this month getting back out in the streets. I took January, literally to focus on my, focus on my dad's family meetings, um, and just kind of just try to relax and get re-centered. Believe it or not, I mean, I finally reached a burnout level. I don't know after like five years, but...

**Dr. Magdalena Martinez** 22:27

I'm glad to hear that. I'm glad to hear you're hitting a pause. Makada, Senator Neil is one of the most active and engaged policy makers you'll ever meet. You talked a little bit about when you were first elected in 2011. And that was the tail end of the recession, but really not. Because we were dealing with so many effects, even after 2011. From your perspective, thinking about that, were there more effective policies or programs in place to deal with COVID recession compared to the Great Recession? Or vice versa?

**Senator Dina Neal** 23:07

That's a really good question. Because I thought about that, um, I think we were... I think in 2011, during that recession, we were focused on... we were still kind of focused on the same things diversity, actually, we were focused on healthcare, we were focused on the underserved populations, even in 2011. Fast forward to the pandemic. This time, we actually had, at the beginning of the pandemic, we didn't have enough money, and then federal relief came in and then we had enough money to do the service.

The question then became, how do we have the, do we have the capacity, the people to carry it out? That's what we're facing now. Because it's, COVID was hitting everyone, where although you had money, you didn't have the people in the offices to carry it out. As we keep getting these different variants, like omicron is literally touching and wiping out an entire office. It's actually more invisible than the previous strain. And that's what's interesting about it, because I hear more and more, like, the whole office is out. And the person seems not, you know, like, there were no outward sign that they may have been infected, but it literally spreads in such a way it knocks out everyone at once.

**Dr. Magdalena Martinez** 24:48

Yeah.

**Senator Dina Neal** 24:49

So that's what is happening now. And there really is no way to bridge that and to make that manifest, because the people who work for the state or the people who for the county, I mean, there isn't enough bandwidth to bring those people to bring in new people, because it's typically a very skilled position in which you need someone to fill.

And so you don't have time to train, because the work is ongoing and is consistent as every day like Health and Human Services is overwhelmed. The GOED is having pretty much, having the same conversation they had in 2011. How do we diversify the state? How do we protect the state against the drop? You know, any kind of change in the environment, like build a border against the loss of gaming? But that's a good thing, because we should have already been, we should have been having that conversation for 12 years, we should have already built that infrastructure.

12 years, we should have been farther along if we hadn't just gotten comfortable. So, I see some similarities. But I also see more politicalization, I guess, of folks' positions. Rather than you know, everybody's looking for the perfect tweet. And I'm like, why don't you just do the work?

**Dr. Magdalena Martinez** 26:18

Yeah, thank you. That's very helpful. So I'm going to turn it over to Dr. Makada Henry-Nickie. Now to take the other half of the questions.

**Dr. Makada Henry-Nickie** 26:26

Thanks so much, Senator Dina Neal, when you talked about your father's loss, it reminded me of my time, about five years ago, and I lost my own dad. And so I sympathize. And I encourage you to do, take the time often to slow down, that self care is so important to being able to go through that grieving process.

So I want to just pick back up on that last comment that made me just smile and how much we have politicized the work of city government, the work of social policy. But you know, I think it's really encouraging to hear you say I, you know, looked wide and looked at our communities and saw that there's sort of culturally responsive needs for food pantries, Dominican Republicans very different from Ethiopian community. So kudos for recognizing that, you know, these are important ways to serve.

What would you say, you know, in your view, right, were the legislators biggest accomplishments during the latest session? We've had a lot, we've heard a lot about the challenges, what have you to kind of, you know, shifted a little bit and put an optimistic lens on the conversation for us.

**Senator Dina Neal** 27:27

I think we were able to move a lot of social policy that focused on communities of color. I think it was probably one of the first times that we actually saw white female legislators carry policy for communities of color instead of just the legislators of color carrying policy for communities of color. Because that's typically how it works. And that's typically the scrutiny right is, okay, well, let the colored people carry for this. And then we get criticized for the conversation around that work.

But this was the first time that they picked up and so I have to give credit to Senator Scheible on this one, because the bill that she carried. I believe it was SB 222 basically mandates that all, it gave a diversity inclusion liaison, that all state agencies, county, city, have to have this diversity liaison that will go in and look at the policy. Make changes in the actual policy or program so that it is inclusive to people of color.

**Dr. Makada Henry-Nickie** 28:49

That's an excellent.

**Senator Dina Neal** 28:50

It's a game changer.

**Dr. Makada Henry-Nickie** 28:53

Yeah, it is, it sounds like that's a new lever that will be available to you, at your level of government at least be able to apply this equity principle to help make your work so much more easier in terms of shining a spotlight. You talked about you following up personally with the governor's office to find out hey, did ARP, the Parkinson's training program get their ARP dollars? And so I wonder how confident are you, if you're doing this personally, are you that the executive branch has the tools, the capacity, and the funding necessary to rehabilitate the state's economy?

**Senator Dina Neal** 29:25

I think they have the capacity. The last conversation that I had they were like 'we're down to our last billion we're trying to hold on to this' and I'm like, 'what do you mean you're down to your last billion? That's actually a lot of money so like, how about are you doing XY & Z?' They've actually been super responsive to me and my questions and trying to find a way to fund what I've asked them to fund because, you know, they put it in an application and it's been helpful to help them see the narrative, right? This is a real issue. And these are the people who are going to be impacted if you don't fund. And then it just hits home like they've actually been super responsive.

And been keeping me updated in regards to this is what we looked at, we're still looking at these different angles to figure out what door we can open to provide the funding. I would even, even another state agency, the Department of Tax, which is totally random, but I found out, they were in a building where literally, if they plug in a space heater, it shuts down the power, and their computer stops working. And I was just like, what's happening? Because we were literally on a zoom. And then I called the governor's office. And I was just like, why? Why can't you get them into another space, where they can actually have heat and be on their computer at the same time?

Like they put in a bid as to your last billion dollars. You need to actually up this, up this conversation because it really made it hit home where I'm like, well, this is your own state agency. So who are you taking care of first? Right, like, state agencies should have been at the top. But then community after that, and I have, I just, you know, and I recognize political promises were made. But I feel like let's reprioritize and let's see, but because when I told them, they were like, wow, I didn't know that at all. And I was like, well, it just happened today. And

the building is super cold. And now she has to put her space heater somewhere. Because if they, if the person in another office plugs up her space heater, the whole wall goes out.

**Dr. Makada Henry-Nickie** 31:51

Wow. Wow. Yeah. I want to ask you to elaborate a little bit on the workforce issue that you brought up. This certainly is not unique to Nevada, or the private, the public sector. So what are you seeing in terms of the government, the governor's office, or the different agencies saying, okay, we recognize you've got a workforce challenge problem is not about labor shortage, you can't find the skills, what are they doing to sort of shore up their workforce response?

**Senator Dina Neal** 31:54

Well, workforce has been trying to, they've been trying to engage community to get trained or upscale, an existing training, so they can fill a gap. But what's happening is that people are reluctant to go back into the workspace because of the COVID transfer rate. So there's still an issue of direct reluctance just to get in. And then the ones who would take advantage of the opportunity, the time, the length of time it's going to take to do the upskill is going to be too long in order for them to be effective at the point of time that's needed, right.

So you could take a high school graduate, you can upskill them and give them the skills, but part of the problem is that the colleges are right now in the space where they're trying to tweak and build their programmatic structure to fit the need. And so there's a retooling on multiple sides. You can have the programs, you can have the dollar, but who's going to do the training?

So CSN is currently trying to do that work, right, to bring themselves up to speed to be, like, to do direct training. And then to do it in a quick way. Their issue is, there, it's what we do all the time, build the plane while flying it. That's the way you're building the plane while flying it. And then you're trying to figure out how to engage the student population that's there. So they can take advantage of it, the community so they can take advantage of it, and then have the training and the instructors that have the skill set to teach the skill that the business needs. That's where we are.

**Dr. Makada Henry-Nickie** 34:11

Sometimes it does feel like a chicken and egg game or catch 22. And I wonder when you talk about one, wishing you had done more before the COVID recession around this economic diversification pieces should have been happening for 12 years, not not just in 2020. And, you know, what are some other ways you can see the legislative arm of this body politic or government sort of, changes would help improve responses to future recessions? They're going to be here with us. We just don't know the time duration. But how can Nevada mount a much more robust response in the future?

**Senator Dina Neal 34:49**

I think actually planning and doing what we came up with. When we were in the middle of the recession, we had to operate quickly, right? We had to think, everybody, nobody, nobody had the skill set for a pandemic. Now that we're two years in, there were a lot of ideas that dropped in the space and how we can make our state better, how we can diversify, what kinds of centers we can establish and build up in order to kind of buffer.

What I haven't seen... And I'll rewatch the committee from the other day. I haven't seen those actually manifest yet. And so what I, my biggest fear, and it's also an opportunity, is that the ideas fall away, and then the money is gone to do the work. But we really do have an opportunity right now to stop, plan for our future, put things in place, put contingency plans in place, in order to help ourselves buffer for a pandemic, that's like this a pandemic, that's like something else.

What if our next big thing is an earthquake? Right? Like, whatever it is, we should have the capacity through this process to be able to put some things in place. But what I what my worry is that we fell more into the political promises, and everybody thought about right now, that first 12 months, and then they, and then they're going to try to figure out how to maintain the next 12 months, and the state won't have the money to afford it, the activity.

And I feel like there was more short-term thinking versus long-term in several areas, not not in HHS, but I think that we're still kind of operating in the same way, right? Like everybody's looking for advanced manufacturing and workforce, which is going to lead them to automation. And then my question is, what about the worker? What about the worker, because the biggest lesson we learned is that we didn't have capacity for mass scale, unemployment. Had no capacity for it, had no capacity to treat it, or fix it. So when you knock out a group, what is the plan, right? Because everybody's going after the federal dollar, we learned this lesson in 2011, go after the federal money, and then at the end of the day, when the federal money was gone, they were still left holding the bag, trying to figure out how to fund it. And it might have not even been an opportunity that was gonna work for our state. And this I see is a circular thing that's 2011, 2009, 2003 forward, that we are still in that same mindset. And I, and people are like, how can you criticize federal relief? I said, I criticize federal relief, because I want it to be used in a way that advances our state, not in a way that advances, that pushes us in another ditch that we can't get out of because we refuse to fund it, we refuse to push the narrative, or it locks out a segment of our society that will not be able to perform the work that you just put this federal dollars for. Because at the end of the day, we have an education issue in our state, we have a high school education as our top line for the casinos. So that means we have an upscale problem in general. So if you go for advanced manufacturing, and that then becomes the job, which then becomes the automated thing. What do you do? And, but that's what they're going after right now. And they're like, well, that's the low hanging fruit. I'm like, but is it though?

**Dr. Makada Henry-Nickie** 39:01

That is the question de jure is it though? Seems like you are the consummate activist, Senator, it's rare to come across someone like yourself, to hear you know, talk about individual groups, bringing it up to the policy level at the state level and connecting it to, you know, again, challenges for the federal government pushing them to do better. I want you to sort of be reflective here for a moment, what two to three organizational changes, you saw happen during the pandemic that you can say you're most proud of?

**Senator Dina Neal** 39:34

The, I would say in Health and Human Services. They try to really be more responsive at a community level. I really was excited and happy about that, they try to step out of the bureaucracy and reach into the streets, from the welfare division to aging and disability to all facets. And I think that's because of the director though. He actually has a really good heart. And he has a heart and a passion for people. And I think that, because of that, he's been able to drive a narrative down, that we should do this. And we should do it in collaboration, we should do it in partnership. And when there's opportunity for HHS to work with any other agency to build a solution, we should do it. And I've also seen the county, Clark County really tried to push their social services division to do more work. Like they have, when I've called them, they have jumped on immediately, I had a woman, she was sleeping in her car, her car, stop working. She drove from California, she's sleeping at the Circus circus in the parking lot. Because of course, it seems like the safest place to be will be in a casino parking lot with your children.

And I had to reach out to their Director of Social Services, they immediately placed them in a hotel, tried to get her squared away, get the kids into school and to stabilize the family. But they have been really good, because two years ago in the pandemic, they'd have been like, oh, Dina, our grants, doesn't allow us to do x. And we have to figure out if another agency can do this, because grant dollars that we have, will only do this, they gave me a lot of red tape. And now they're just okay, we'll do it. We'll move in. Let's do it. Let's figure it out. Let's get it done. I think that's awesome. That's, that's awesome. Because help is immediate. And one of the things that I kept trying to push under my, I had a bill, AB354, which is now project 354 on workforce, but it was focused on double digit unemployment, that kept trying to impress upon them was if somebody is getting ready to be evicted, can't pay their car note, do not freaking put them in a six week training program, stabilize them, give them a job, to pay their rent, pay the car note, then put them in a six week training program. But don't do that first.

And a lot of the, lot of the job developers were like, well, we put them in a training program, and then they fell out of the program. Because the immediate need of keeping a roof over their head, having a car, took over. And they're not going to go to school, they're not going to school right now. Stop it. And so they were very angry with me. But it took three years, from 2017. To now to get them in the mindset that we are triaging. And until you start thinking about how to triage a

person and not your metric. You're not going to meet the need of this person. And they were like, you know how you're criticizing us? And I'm like, yeah, because it's almost like you're blind. You're, your tunnel vision. You're like, well, the the guidelines say to do this. And so the conversation I had was with all of the directors help me, how, how much you can color outside of the line of violating the law?

**Dr. Makada Henry-Nickie** 43:34

Mm hmm. You know, I like that metaphor that you brought up on triaging this project feels very much like that was our vision, right, trying to triage, what's happening, are the policies lined up in the right ways to help people now in their time of need, but also put them on a path to what, something more certain, more sustainable? So but I also heard you talk about, hey, there's some people that you know, the ideas fall off the table. Some others are not in the room. I wonder if there are other people, you know, that come to mind, Senator Dina Neal, that you could, you know, help us connect with who are you thinking we should talk to, if we try to sort of extend this conversation on triaging at this policy level. Now and for the road ahead.

**Senator Dina Neal** 44:15

I would definitely talk to Irene on the workforce front, Irene Bustamante Adams, she's probably going to give you a more positive outlook because she's just positive. But, but um, I would talk to Irene because she's in the center of the workforce work, and how these grants that everybody went after how they're being deployed. And so you're going to see a different answer. In terms of that work. I would reach out to, I think, Olivia Diaz because the perspective that, one thing I've seen in Olivia is, once she became City Council, she became super local and super immersed. Um, and the way she's looking at local politics and the way she's looking at people is very different than in the legislature. It gave her an opportunity to take a deeper dive into the east side. And also, even with Edgar Flores, because... So like, so you'll get two pictures here. So Olivia has been kind of turned more social service. And then Edgar has been involved on the immigration legal front, and really gets involved in the most oddest circumstances like you hear about me with, you know, the woman in the parking lot, but he'll run into something and I'll be like, what, how did that even happen? Like? It's like problems find and seek him like a heat seeking missile. And I'll just be like, what did you, how'd as you fix this? But he literally will fix it. And he's very, he's so community. I love him for it because he is so community like he's more, he'll give you that youth perspective, like what's happening with the high school students and the adults in the space and that legal immigration perspective, because that's kind of like his circumference. And I think that will be interesting to hear his perspective on that front.

**Dr. Makada Henry-Nickie** 46:31



Wonderful. So it looks like Irene, Olivia, and Edgar are the exact kind of folk we want to talk to. Um, would you mind if we ask if you don't think we're imposing here, if we can ask you to help us connect with them. Snowball through this process, we can contact folks in your office.

**Senator Dina Neal** 46:46

No I'm just gonna, I mean, Magdalena knows all of them. But literally, it'll be easy. They're not hard people, well Edgar's hard to connect, but I can send him a text.

**Dr. Makada Henry-Nickie** 47:01

Wonderful. I appreciate all of the knowledge that you shared today. It's been such an education as to what's going on in Nevada. Thank you so much. From the bottom of my heart and again, deepest condolences on the loss of your dad.

**Senator Dina Neal** 47:13

Oh, thank you and on your father.

**Dr. Magdalena Martinez** 47:17

Thanks, Dina. Big hug.

**Senator Dina Neal** 47:20

All right. Bye. Bye.

[End of audio]