

An Interview with Councilman Cedric Crear

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 Councilman Cedric Crear, Councilman for City of Las Vegas, and was conducted on 8/28/22 by Magdalena Martinez. This interview covers topics including reflections on leadership, organizational challenges, and opportunities for collaboration.

Interview with Cedric Crear

Date: 8-28-2022

SPEAKERS: Magdalena Martinez, Councilman Cedric Crear

Magdalena Martinez [00:02]

All right. So I am here today with Councilman Cedric Crear, from the City of Las Vegas. Today is August 29th. And I just want to make sure that I have your consent to, one, participate in this study-

Cedric Crear [00:14]

Yes.

Magdalena Martinez [00:17]

-and to record you.

Cedric Crear [00:18]

Yes.

Magdalena Martinez [00:19]

And to attribute any quotes that I may include back to you.

Cedric Crear [00:24]

Yes.

Magdalena Martinez [00:23]

All right. Thank you so much. I really appreciate your time. And also, the one thing I didn't mention is that we're also contributing to the historical archive on Southern Nevada and the COVID experience. All these interviews will also be a part of that, and you'll receive some correspondence about that in the future, as we move closer to that.

Okay – so if you could just describe for me, Cedric, what your role was through the pandemic, and the role of the City of Las Vegas, as a whole, as you saw it?

Cedric Crear [00:54]

Well, I'm a city councilman. I represent an area called Ward 5, which consists of half of downtown – the Historic Westside – which is where Black people could only live, work, and spend their dollars in our community, prior to 1960 or so, when they would not agree with our rules agreement was signed to desegregate the Strip. And also, in the urban area, go out to Rainbow, Alexander, and Mountain, and then Lake Mead and Rainbow. Come back down 70 Park, and then half of downtown, as I mentioned.

So I'm a very broad ward that I represent and a diversified group of residents. And as the councilperson – one of the – when immediately, the biggest, I think, challenge that we faced, and what we really went into active mode on, was to disseminate factual information.

Magdalena Martinez [01:51]

Mm-hmm.

Cedric Crear [01:55]

Okay? That was important. All these things were happening, right? Who knows what's going on? COVID was going to shut down – that was only going to last a couple of days, or a week or so. Here we are, months into it, six months into it, and there's so much information and disinformation.

And so, one, I felt that we needed to just get the facts out there and get the facts out there through our weekly – we had a newsletter that we were doing every couple of weeks. We went to every week, every Friday, we'd give out information regarding what was going on with COVID, right? And access to services, where there was experiencing – because you lost your job, you're experiencing, potentially, a shutdown of your power bill or cable, or this is who you contact for help. Contact Nevada Energy here. Contact Southwest Gas. Contact Cox. Contact the water district. Here's the health district; here's the information from them. Here's what came out this week, directly from the health district, to disseminate that information and sort of to be a trusted voice. And that was vitally – at least, I thought it was vitally important.

And then, obviously, you try to lead by example. We moved our office – we were the first in the city hall to move our office remotely, my team and Ward 5. And we started operating – so we had to set that up, like how do you do that? Because the phones are still ringing and the email still needs to be answered, and we are not together. And so we did that, and then we transitioned a lot into finding out what the needs were for the community. People weren't working. We stood up a number of food kitchens, getting out food and needed services to the community.

One of the hugest challenges – I call my office “Grand Central Station” because everybody calls the city hall and their council office for everything. And that ranges from if your kid got in trouble at school, to if you wanted to build a 30-dollar casino, call Circa, and everything in between, they called my office. People know to call here. And so, helping them manage that process with Dieter, trying to get the unemployment, was a challenge, a huge challenge. And we didn't really have a connection to try to help people, but we did the best we could to try to get them connected to needed services. And that, overall, was the biggest challenge, was just to get people connected with the needed services that they needed.

Magdalena Martinez [04:34]

Mm-hmm. Now, as you think back, and this is just based on your recollection, can you walk me through some of the key, pivotal points in the timeline, as you remember it?

Cedric Crear [04:51]

Well, you know, we had – my family, we had just gotten back from holiday, like a lot of people, and heard about something called COVID. And as we said, thought that it would be something

that may or may not affect the United States as much as it does for other countries, right? Similarly, they had, with Africa, H1N1, you know, those types of things you hear about it. I don't think that anybody thought that it would be a true pandemic. In my lifetime, this was the first pandemic that I had experienced. A true, nationwide pandemic. And so when it came about, my daughter was going to study abroad in France, in Niece. President Trump comes on like Wednesday and says he's going to shut the country down on Friday at midnight. So he didn't really specify that if you were still American, you could still get into the country.

And so, scrambling, trying to get my daughter, number one, get my daughter back, from France, into somewhere in the United States. (laughs) And so that was my number one concern, and luckily, got her back, and then she was quarantined for 10 days. And we moved out of the house, so she stayed in the house. We stayed with my brother, and so, we were there. I had just come back from a convention in D.C. with The National League of Cities. Got an email that two people from the convention had contracted COVID.

Magdalena Martinez [06:26]
Mm-hmm.

Cedric Crear [06:28]
And so, you're kind of wondering, "All right. What does that mean?" People – there was no testing, right, at that time.

Magdalena Martinez [06:34]
Mm-hmm.

Cedric Crear [06:38]
I remember they had very, very – testing came out, and then it was very limited to frontline workers, and you had to go to the health district. And that was a thing of trying to just get people – once testing came out, like how do I get a test, to see if I had COVID? That was a huge deal.

And then we started, as more testing became more readily available, we worked to get more testing sites out, and that was a huge deal. Working with some of the churches and organizations to just set up testing sites.

Magdalena Martinez [07:14]
Mm-hmm.

Cedric Crear [07:18]
And then managing that process. So we did that, and I think more – people were on huge, long lines that lasted all day, getting tested, etc. Still, I think there was a thought that "Okay, this is going to pass through a little bit." Lo and behold, it didn't. The governor shuts down the state, except for essential businesses. That was a huge challenge, obviously. It was extremely controversial; it had never happened in our country and in our state before. Hearing both sides of the conversation that were very loud. (laughs) Very loud conversations at city hall, you know. The mayor made a vow not to shut down the city, right? We still had our city council meetings. They were virtual. They were limited to the amount of people who could be in the chambers. We

were doing that transition, and some were in chambers, and some were not. But she vowed not to just stop because the city needed to keep moving forward.

Magdalena Martinez [08:28]

Mm-hmm.

Cedric Crear [08:31]

And that was a challenge getting through that. I think the city did a great job. The city did a great job of setting up our temporary facility at Cashman Center, where we set up basically a hospital at Cashman. Testing the people who had contracted COVID, and they had a place of quarantine and receiving help, and doctors were there. That was in conjunction with the county. That was fantastic, and they stood that up in a matter of days. It was great dealing with our indigent population and our homeless, trying to manage that with our [09:18] shelter, our courtyard, as well as working with our partners, like Catholic Charities and the Salvation Army, Shade Tree, and other organizations, to get them tested and to work with them to get people who had contracted COVID quarantined, and to get them help and services.

Magdalena Martinez [09:34]

Yeah.

Cedric Crear [09:37]

With all of that happening, the city did a good job, and went into a “state of emergency.”

Magdalena Martinez [09:40]

Mm-hmm.

Cedric Crear [09:43]

And with that, it allowed our city manager and team to make decisions right then, instead of having to come back to council. That helped a lot; so that they could be readily active, and to be proactive and reactive to whatever situation came that day. Every day was a new day. And so, our city did a great job.

As funding and resources came into the state and into the community, getting those needed pass-through dollars from the city into needed nonprofits that were – and then businesses that were affected by COVID. We stood up a number of grants to small businesses to help them get their PPE – remember PPE? (laughs)

Magdalena Martinez [10:37]

Mm-hmm.

Cedric Crear [10:40]

Masks, the plastic barriers, the gloves, services for – I’ve got about five-six-seven minutes for this, so I should probably stop talking and let you ask the other questions. But managing all that process, and getting those grants out to the community, so they could buy those needed services, was also very important for businesses and for people to help them.

Magdalena Martinez [11:13]

This is really helpful, Cedric. And in thinking about all of these great things that the city did, is there one or two things that you thought “That was really innovative, and this can really help us in any future crises.”

Cedric Crear [11:27]

Well, our Isocube – which was the medical facility, basically, their hospital that we set up at Cashman.

Magdalena Martinez [11:34]

Okay.

Cedric Crear [11:37]

And that was amazing. I don’t know if you saw it. I thought, in terms of another pandemic, or if something else happened, to be able to set up an Isocube, in a matter of days, and get doctors tents, cots, nurses, and medical facilities. It’s almost like we were in the Marines. (laughs)

Magdalena Martinez [11:54]

Yeah.

Cedric Crear [11:55]

You would see that the Marines would stand up. But we did it, and also, working with the county to help get that up, I think that was hugely helpful, and shows what we can do, when we come together, on behalf of our community. I think that was number one.

Two, you know, getting needed dollars and resources out to the community, I think was important, especially for small businesses. And then also, being reactive to some policy changes that we made, to help businesses. For instance, if you were in a restaurant, and you couldn’t have so many people inside the restaurant, but you could stand up, now, outside of the restaurant. If you have a restaurant, you just can’t start setting up tables and everything outside, and start serving alcohol and doing things, right? So you need to get ordinances approved. And we really were reactive on the fly and changed a lot of good things. And some good things that came out of that that are still in place today, like the restaurants, and the alcohol delivery from Lee’s or something like, you know, those types of things.

Magdalena Martinez [13:07]

Okay. And then, from your perspective, who was the hardest hit group by the pandemic?

Cedric Crear [13:16]

Well, I’m probably not the best person to answer that, and it’s probably a health district question because I don’t have the data and the facts. But what we do know is that people of color were more diversely affected than others. And we had what we thought 100 Plan in Action, which stands for our Historic, Urban, Design Redevelopment Plan in Action, which is our strategic initiative to bring back the Historic Westside. That is a living, breathing document, that we are working off of, to build up our community. And I say “living and breathing” because it’s evolutionary. When we saw that more people of color were contracting COVID than others, we

updated the “100 Plan in Action” to include the health outreach facility we’re talking about. How do we combat the issues – the preexisting conditions that, historically, are prevalent in our community? High blood pressure, hypertension, not eating properly, lack of exercise, and all of these different things, and how do we work to bring those metrics down?

Magdalena Martinez [14:24]

Yeah.

Cedric Crear [14:25]

That sparked us to create the health and wellness portion of the 100 Plan. Which in turn, we’re working, like I said, you have your School of Medicine, you have your School of Public Health, [R-14:37] we already executed programs to be more proactive in our reach, so that when something like this does happen again, our community is healthier. We’re standing up a community farming facility. Twenty-five percent of our population experiences some form of food insecurity. And so, we’re going to grow our own leafy greens, vegetables, and fruits, and give that back out into the community through a co-op grocery facility that we are doing. That is hopefully going to open up in the next few months in the first quarter of next year.

Magdalena Martinez [15:10]

Right.

Cedric Crear [15:11]

And so, looking at that, and looking at the healthcare disparities in underserved communities, I think was brought to the forefront, and we are looking to do something about it. So as negatively as it affected the community, hopefully – as a lot of things have been positive, come out of it.

Magdalena Martinez [15:28]

And the 100 Plan in Action, is that’s something that’s publicly available that I-

Cedric Crear [15:29]

Oh, without a doubt. Hundred – if you go to Las Vegas, Nevada, or if you just type in H-U-N-D-R-E-D-P-L-A-N-I-N-A-C-T-I-O-N, you will see – it should pop up – Las Vegas.

Magdalena Martinez [15:44]

Okay.

Cedric Crear [15:46]

And there’s a copy – you can look at it – yeah. And I would advise you to take a look at that. It is a living, breathing document, that we’re working off of, to change the- [overtalking 15:53]

Magdalena Martinez [15:53]

Okay. And then the last question is, are you hopeful? And, if yes, or if so, what are you hopeful for?

Cedric Crear [16:04]

Hopeful for – in terms of–? Hopeful for – you said, Magda? It’s kind of an open-ended question.

Magdalena Martinez [16:13]
Yeah, that's right. (laughs)

Cedric Crear [16:15]
What am I hopeful for?

Magdalena Martinez [16:16]
Yeah. Are you hopeful for-

Cedric Crear [16:17]
Just in general?

Magdalena Martinez [16:18]
Given that everything we've lived through the last couple of years, with the political landscape, and the pandemic, and the role of cities and the role of local government.

Cedric Crear [16:29]
Yeah.

Magdalena Martinez [16:31]
Are you hopeful? And, if so, what are you hopeful for?

Cedric Crear [16:34]
Without a doubt, I think one of the things is that local government, in today's age of people pigeonholing themselves to the Far Left or the Far Right and getting engaged in this rhetoric and political dialogue that's taking place today. Local government, there's no place for that, right?

Magdalena Martinez [16:56]
Mmm.

Cedric Crear [16:58]
People don't come to me and say, "Hey, what party are you in?" They come to me with challenges, and they're looking for solutions. They're looking for assistance to help them get to where they need to get to. And so, I love that aspect of my job and what I do – is that I don't have to get engaged in that [someone enters the room 17:15]

Speaker [17:14]
He has a meeting.

Cedric Crear [17:16]
Yes.

Speaker [17:17]
He has to go. I'm sorry.

Cedric Crear [17:19]

You know what I mean? And so yeah, I'm extremely hopeful. And I think that it is shining a green light on local government, the work that we do, and the importance we play. They say, "all government's local," and I – from being in this position, I most definitely agree with that.

Magdalena Martinez [17:38]

Yeah. Thanks so much, Cedric. It's been great to talk with you. I'll send you a copy of the transcript.

Cedric Crear [17:41]

Always good, Magda.

Magdalena Martinez [17:43]

Take good care.

Cedric Crear [17:44]

All right. Muchas gracias.

Magdalena Martinez [17:46]

I'll see you at the next football game.

End of audio: 17:53