

An Interview with Lisa Levine

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 Lisa Levine, Regent for Nevada System of Higher Education Board of Regents, and was conducted on 7/14/22 by Magdalena Martinez. This interview covers topics including reflections on leadership, organizational challenges, and opportunities for collaboration.

Interview with Lisa Levine

Date: 7-14-2022

SPEAKERS: Magdalena Martinez, Lisa Levine

Magdalena Martinez [00:03]

Okay. I am here today, July 14th, 2022, with Lisa Levine, who was on the University of Nevada Board of Regents at the time of the COVID crisis. Lisa, I just want to confirm that you consent to be a part of this interview and that you're okay recording this conversation.

Lisa Levine [00:29]

Yes.

Magdalena Martinez [00:30]

Okay. And any quotes that I use from this interview will be attributed to you, once I share them with you, and you have the final say on the review of the transcript.

Lisa Levine [00:39]

Thank you, yes.

Magdalena Martinez [00:42]

All right, thank you. So let's get started. Lisa, as a higher education policymaker how did you see your role during the pandemic?

Lisa Levine [00:53]

Crisis management and responding to constituents. Crisis management from kind of the forest view, but also the tree view. There was a lot going on.

Magdalena Martinez [01:05]

Can you give me a few examples of what that looked like in the early stages?

Lisa Levine [01:12]

First, it was safety, right? Just not understanding what this invisible enemy was. And so taking extreme precautions and shutting down campuses. By the time I came on, it was already existing. It was already going on. But there was already debate about how that was going to be impacting the campuses because of enrollment and connectivity issues. Not all teachers – not all faculty members were comfortable moving to online. So just figuring that out, the technology piece, also associated with that.

And then that goes into – then there are questions by parents. "So, are you going to have fees because now, they're online classes?" "No, we're not going to do fees." And that was something that the board talked about. And then it was also the technology crisis, which you saw really taking place more at the K-12 level, but then also recognizing that that was happening with our college students. And I think that was a big kind of lightbulb for my colleagues on the Board of

Regents, also, some of the staff at NSHE, and also administrative staffing executives for all these campuses is that even though higher education is more elite, our students are not.

Magdalena Martinez [02:25]

Mm-hmm.

Lisa Levine [02:27]

And so it wasn't this – we shouldn't expect that they all had connectivity in their homes or wherever they were going. Then that leads into – there were so many things, and that led into the third, I remember, conversation, which Thom Reilly at the time, and it was about all of the students who, when we closed the dorms, didn't have a place to go. They were homeless.

Magdalena Martinez [02:50]

Mm-hmm.

Lisa Levine [02:50]

And so there were some students that – and I know UNLV did a really good job at this – they made exceptions, and there were some students who were still living in the dorms because they genuinely had a need. And then there was the food crisis, where there were students who were going hungry. And so then you saw the communities coming together for food pantries. And then, underlining all of this, you had budget cuts. And so there was so much going on from so many directions, high-level, and directly with the people we were supposed to be serving.

Magdalena Martinez [03:27]

Mm-hmm. Now, could you recount to me again what the timeline was when you were pointed, and then, perhaps, to the best of your recollection, the pivotal points during that time, right? Whether it was related to policy issues, some sort of external disruption, or internal disruption. There's been a lot of scrutiny over the higher education governing board and the state. And so, I don't recall – but I mean, if there were any incidents like that. So walk me through a timeline of the COVID crisis as a higher-ed policymaker. What happened and what did you do?

Lisa Levine [04:19]

So, I would, knowing that you're going to look at the public documents, I would have to go back and look at the agenda for these meetings. But I can tell you that the Board of Regents typically has quarterly meetings. They will have these two-day meetings four times a year.

Dr. Martinez, when I was on the board, it felt like a full-time job. We had special meetings, it felt like, on a weekly basis, last-minute. And to some extent, I want to say that it was because there were lots of things coming up, right? But the biggest thing for the six months that I was on the board, from the end of May 2020 to January 2021 – it was a very short period – was the budget. And there was a lot of just government, bureaucratic, and also, elected officials trying to blame each other for why that was. At the end of the day, genuinely, I think it's just a lack of trust, and I think you see that across the board with COVID and intergovernmental agencies. There was just a lot of distrust, not just with higher ed.

So, gosh. I can't remember if there had already been a budget cut by the time I was on the board. I think there was, but I don't know. The first budget cut might have been in June, so I want to say it was like June 20th or something. And so we were entering the first round of budget cuts, and then I remember there was another special session called, and then by August 7th, we had a meeting. And that was infamous for a lot of reasons – which I remember the date – but we had to cut an extra twenty-five million. And so it was just – and while that's going on, and this I do recall, it was like well, is NSHE cutting their administrative budget. The regents have these \$2,500-dollar host accounts, which that was very contentious during one of the meetings –because that just pissed me off, to no end, that we weren't cutting back on that, which we did. Thom did it. I don't know if he could have, but he did. He did it through his own action – the board didn't even vote on it, which I thought was right. It could have been shorter, but it was good.

But then at the same time, we increased tuition, and that was really contentious knowing that the students we were serving were really struggling. We had budget cuts, so we were not going to be able to give them the same services that they had been expecting. And now, we're going to raise tuition, which campuses are like businesses, they've got to pay for themselves. And when you're getting less resources from the state, you've got to make up for it. But all of that was just very contentious, and I don't know the linear order of all of that, but it all happened within like four months.

Magdalena Martinez [07:07]

Mm-hmm. Yeah, okay. There was a lot going on during that time.

Lisa Levine [07:13]

Yeah. And even one of the meetings – I want to say it was during one of the special sessions or right after. Our Chair at the time was Mark Doubrava and he threw the legislature under the bus. And I remember it to this day: he just said how – and he was talking about mining, and he said, "Mining's hiding under the table," and he said, "And our legislature just doesn't understand education. They don't want to invest in education." And it really irked me because I remember watching the committee hearings, and Maggie Carlton was very clear that she was also frustrated because she didn't think NSHE was being as transparent as possible about all of the funding.

Magdalena Martinez [07:56]

Mm-hmm.

Lisa Levine [07:57]

And that was another thing that was going on – we have this reserve account, and that might have been one of the first things that I voted on. I can't – we spent it. This was – and I learned this from Reilly, and I will give him credit for it because it's interesting. But we spent it before the budget cuts so that they couldn't take our reserves from us.

Magdalena Martinez [08:16]

Okay.

Lisa Levine [08:17]

But there was another thing to that. It was initially \$100,000,000 pre-COVID. And then when COVID hit – and this was a very contentious meeting also – when COVID hit, it got down to \$50,000,000, and that's when we pulled those funds. And so we lost \$50,000,000, and we would have waited, knowing how the stock market went by that December. We would have probably ended up closer to like \$150 - \$200,000,000 in that account. At the same time, it was crisis mode. People wanted money, right? All the campuses were like "Give us this so we can sustain our budgets during the cuts." But then it also really pissed off the legislature because they were like "Well, how many other pots of money do you have that we don't know about?"

Magdalena Martinez [08:58]

Mm-hmm.

Lisa Levine [09:00]

And so it was a real tug of war, and I don't think there was a clear, right thing to do. But looking back, there could have been alternative choices probably presented.

Magdalena Martinez [09:15]

And this tension between the legislature and the governing board has been a long time in the making, right? Do you have any insights or perspectives? Earlier you said that there was a lack of trust between inner agencies, obviously not just with the legislature and the Board of Regents, but across. It seems to be especially contentious between higher education and the legislature. Why do you think that is?

Lisa Levine [09:59]

Well, this is my opinion from my perspective. One, we do not fund education adequately in this state, so that's going to create tension, right? At the same time, the Nevada System of Higher Education, the administrative arm of the Board of Regents, has not always done what it should have done. And you can see – that's just public financing 101: are you really going to fund an agency that you think lacks good governance, which they should, right?

Magdalena Martinez [10:39]

Mm-hmm.

Lisa Levine [10:41]

And are those dollars trickling down to where they're supposed to go? And to your point, that goes back at this point, like six chancellors ago, to some of these conversations. But I think pivoting, but staying on a similar topic, was something that was very frustrating to me at the time when I was on the board because I was an outsider. I was referred to as an outsider. And the Board of Regents, I don't know if they were just situationally unaware of their actions. But they always felt like "Well, why does everyone think we're doing a bad job?"

Magdalena Martinez [11:20]

Mm-hmm.

Lisa Levine [11:23]

And every time we had a meeting, Dr. Martinez, I would just sit back in my chair and be like "Because of the way you all are acting. That's why people think you're doing a bad job." You want people to start thinking you're doing a good job and that they can trust you, they're doing a damn good job." And I don't think that the body, as a whole, met the demands of the moment very often.

Magdalena Martinez [11:46]

Yeah. How do you think they could have met the demands of that moment?

Lisa Levine [11:57]

I think it's little things. For one, being more empathetic to the students and faculty members. One of the first things we voted on too, when I got on the board, was the furloughs.

Magdalena Martinez [12:11]

Mm-hmm.

Lisa Levine [12:14]

And all of that. I don't think the community ever saw how NSHE was cutting back their spending. And to be fair, I think they're right. I don't know that NSHE really did, you know? When you look at – I'm sure I have the document. It's just a one-pager on how we did the initial cuts, and it didn't feel like they shared sacrifice. And I know, going back into the meeting archives, and also some of the newspapers at the time, that was something that people were really upset about. And it wasn't just UNLV versus UNR, it was also schools like Western Nevada College and Great Basin College. Because if you cut their funding and you're like "Oh, it's only a couple of hundred thousand dollars," I mean Great Basin College, their foundation is only a couple of hundred thousand dollars, right? These are small colleges, and during COVID, they played really important roles, especially because that's where their nursing and their real healthcare centers are in these rural towns.

So I think that's an example, and also, just being more transparent. The universities, I thought, did a really good job at staying connected to the students and finding out what the students needed. And I just don't think – I don't know that the board did what they should have done, yeah.

Magdalena Martinez [13:43]

Mm-hmm. Now, thinking about the different levels of government, right, or governance, what do you wish the different levels of government would have done differently for the COVID crisis and recession?

Lisa Levine [14:03]

What do you mean?

Magdalena Martinez [14:05]

So it could be anything from the federal level – so, of course, higher education received, I think, the HRSA funding. It could be "Save Nevada," right? It could be – there isn't a lot of interaction

between the municipalities in higher ed governance, but just any level of government. Do you wish something would have been done differently? So the challenges, of course, were a lot of budget cuts, a lot of uncertainty, and kind of this distrust. So understanding that context, what do you wish the different levels of government would have done differently during the crisis, or do you wish they would have done anything differently?

Lisa Levine [15:02]

You know, that's a good question. I'm not sure. I think initially during the beginning of COVID, you had a lot of cooperation and collaboration amongst different levels of government, but you saw how that changed as it got farther in. I think a good example of that with the Board of Regents is, are they going to have a vaccination requirement? Are they not going to have a vaccination requirement? And that happened when I was off the board, and I just watched it from afar. I did do an op-ed on it, though, because it pissed me off. But it's like there's already so much confusion and anxiety, and that, unfortunately, is already a polarizing issue. But for them to just do this "hot potato game," the Board of Regents being them, for I think about six months, that adds to the confusion, and then it adds to distrust and further erosion of trust from the public to the entity, even if they don't agree with the outcome.

Magdalena Martinez [15:57]

Mm-hmm.

Lisa Levine [16:03]

Just make a decision, right? People, at some point, just want government to be decisive so that they know what the future holds.

So I don't know. The Board of Regents at NSHE certainly, towards the end, could have been more collaborative with the state. And you see that frustration [drops out: 16:29 - 16:35] Nevada System of Higher Education is not what it was two years ago, right?

Magdalena Martinez [16:39]

I'm sorry. I lost you after "you see that frustration." What did you say after that?

Lisa Levine [16:46]

You see the relationship with the executive branch in the State of Nevada and the Board of Regents has further eroded as well, right? And I think that exemplifies how the Board of Regents has really kind of hurt a lot of these relationships that, even if the politics aren't right, there's a reason that everyone needs to be working together. And just going back to the budget cuts and just the example of shared sacrifice, right?

The other thing that was going on at the time was we were hiring a president for UNR, we were hiring a president for UNLV, and we were hiring a chancellor. Really important positions. High-paid positions. And so at the same time as the budget cut, the same time as we were increasing tuition, at the same time as we were pissing off the legislature with these hidden pots of money, we were voting for \$500,000 contracts with \$12,000 car allowances with great benefit packages. And then we've got students who, literally, are going homeless because of the shutdown.

Magdalena Martinez [17:52]

Mm-hmm.

Lisa Levine [17:53]

It's just, Dr. Martinez, it felt so bad. Hmm, it felt really bad. And I remember when we voted on Melody Rose's contract – and it's ironic considering how that all unfolded – but I asked her to take a cut in her pay when we voted on it on the public forum. And she didn't, and I understand, and women deserve to be paid fairly and equally. But there were so many people making sacrifices, and I never really felt like those who really could afford it were being held to do it.

Magdalena Martinez [18:31]

Mm-hmm.

Lisa Levine [18:35]

Yeah.

Magdalena Martinez [18:39]

How do you change that? What's the lesson learned in that for future crises?

Lisa Levine [18:56]

I don't know.

Magdalena Martinez [18:55]

Is it a shared sacrifice? How do you – can you codify that? Can you legislate that?

Lisa Levine [19:07]

There was – and I can go back and look – I remember putting it in an op-ed in the *Nevada Indie* before the August 7th meeting. And a few faculty members, specifically from business colleges, were really upset with me. I did talk to Rob Lang about it before I publicly said anything about it. But I think it's the UC System in California. When they did the furlough, they did a scale. And so, if you were making \$100 - \$150,000, this was the percentage. But if you were making \$150,000 - \$350,000, this was the percent. And if you were making more than that, it was a greater percentage. And the idea was, there was more shared sacrifice. If you make more, you're going to have a little bit more of a cut, right?

Magdalena Martinez [19:53]

Yeah.

Lisa Levine [19:55]

Because chances are, you're going to be okay. So you're taking out 4% – I can't remember exactly what the furlough was now – but if you take – was it 2.5% or was it 4%? It was 2.5%, right?

Magdalena Martinez [20:06]

I think so.

Lisa Levine [20:08]

Or was it more than that? Yeah. And you just think well, if you're making \$500,000 a year, certainly, the monetary value of that is greater because it's a greater amount of money that you're getting from your paycheck. But you're going to be okay if we bump that up to even ten, right, because you're making so much money. Where a person who's making \$60,000 a year, I'm preaching to the choir – you know this. If you take that percent, you're going to cut into their grocery bills, because it's literally their needs.

So I think that's an example, but that's controversial. I remember talking to the Nevada Faculty Alliance, and they had a lot of questions that I wasn't necessarily able to answer on a high level – "This is something I'm thinking about that, maybe, the board should be considering."

Magdalena Martinez [20:50]

Mm-hmm.

Lisa Levine [20:53]

But I was hopeful and naïve, that when we were voting on these contracts, there would be some offering by some of the people who were in these positions. But they would say, "I want to do this for the greater good, and I'm making \$432,000 a year," whatever. You didn't see that, so maybe that is something that needed to be more legislated if you will. But then maybe it's also not in the Board of Regent's power to do that, right? Because then you get into something like that, and you also lower the incentive for those positions, which is why they're higher-paid, to begin with. So it's a no-win situation.

Magdalena Martinez [21:30]

Mm-hmm.

Lisa Levine [21:32]

And then, if a pay scale didn't work, I mean, do you really need a \$12,000 car allowance? I don't think so, you know – that's a lot of – or housing allowance, excuse me, a \$12,000 housing allowance, and then I think it's like a \$5,000 car allowance. But it's still an extra \$20,000 a year in benefits. And if you're already making half a million dollars a year, yes, the Las Vegas and Reno housing markets are not as affordable as they were pre-COVID, but they're still a lot more affordable than a lot of the competition around the State of Nevada and the region: Phoenix, Salt Lake, and Austin. It's still more expensive to live there. So I just thought there were some low-hanging fruits.

Magdalena Martinez [22:15]

Mm-hmm.

Lisa Levine [22:16]

Sorry, I'm ranting now.

Magdalena Martinez [22:17]

That's fine. I'm wondering if you could maybe reflect a little bit more on some other lessons learned. So I think this idea of a shared sacrifice, and you gave me an example of having

furloughs modeled after the UC System based on income. Did that ever make it to a board item for discussion?

Lisa Levine [22:41]

No.

Magdalena Martinez [22:43]

It was behind-the-scenes conversations?

Lisa Levine [22:44]

That's right. That item did not make it to a board.

Magdalena Martinez [22:46]

Yeah. So, even getting it on the agenda would be a step forward.

Lisa Levine [22:56]

Yeah. I'm pretty sure, during one of the meetings, regents have an opportunity at the end of the meeting to ask for items to be considered for a future meeting. And I'm pretty sure I suggested it during – it was probably the August 7th meeting. But no, it was never considered. And that was a very contentious meeting because August 7th was the day we talked about the Title 9 stuff. And so, unfortunately, even if there were regents who were open-minded, that meeting just polarized the board pretty dramatically.

Magdalena Martinez [23:34]

Yeah. It's like all these non-COVID-related hot potato issues were also coming into the public discourse.

Lisa Levine [23:43]

Yeah. There were a lot of crises – I remember seeing this on KNPR. We had the financial crisis because we didn't realize it was going to be a short recession, right? Which is maybe why we're in an inflation period now. I don't know. So you had the budget stuff. You had the healthcare crisis. You also had the social justice crisis going on with the Black Lives Matter movement, right? The George Floyd murder – at my first meeting, we took a moment of silence, and I led it for that. And there was a lot going on, and yeah.

Magdalena Martinez [24:23]

Mm-hmm. So based on all those things going on, what are some potential lessons learned moving forward? I mean it was a series of crises, not just COVID, like you said. And they could be anything – what do you wish would have happened? What could have been a lesson learned? What could we apply to future crises? How can we think differently about future crises?

Lisa Levine [24:50]

I think COVID was unique because it made people siloed, right?

Magdalena Martinez [24:53]

Mm-hmm.

Lisa Levine [24:55]

We weren't having meetings where we were physically going to the building. My first meeting was in-person. Once I had an opportunity – I will say this on record – once I had an opportunity, and I realized I could do it from Zoom, I realized that there were a lot of microaggressions that happen within the NSHE Administrative Office, and I didn't want to be intimidated. And so it was easier for me to be more comfortable being in these meetings, from the comfort of my home, rather than in the building.

Magdalena Martinez [25:27]

Yeah.

Lisa Levine [25:29]

But at the same time, not having face-to-face interaction with constituents has an impact, and I think you see that with the Board of Regents. They became so siloed that I don't know that they always remember the community that they're supposed to be representing.

Magdalena Martinez [25:46]

Mm-hmm. And our higher education governance structures are different from all the other states. It's very removed from the constituents.

Lisa Levine [25:57]

Yeah. And even the fact that NSHE has their separate offices, rather than be in the government building at the Grant Sawyer Building; I think that's a further way that they're siloed from the state government, is just literally their geographical office locations in the state, where there was just a lot more – I think it's easier to collaborate when you're running into folks at the watercooler, even if they're from a different department or agency, right? It's a lot harder to hate people if you see them every day.

Magdalena Martinez [26:29]

Mm-hmm.

Lisa Levine [26:35]

And Like Mark Doubrava blaming the legislature. It's like, has he ever been to Carson City to lobby? Probably not. So it's easy for him to kind of do that from his podium.

Magdalena Martinez [26:48]

Yeah. I mean, do you think that could be a lesson learned, like maybe a greater integration of higher education as a state agency?

Lisa Levine [26:59]

Yeah.

Magdalena Martinez [27:01]

Mm-hmm. I think that's what I heard you saying, right? Because of the silo, it's easier to collaborate when you're physically closer to the state government. Okay. That's really interesting.

Lisa Levine [27:14]

That's like org chart, right? And this is something – and it's interesting. Because if you look at the state constitution, it's very clear that – just about this idea of a state superintendent. And one of the things that I've challenged people is that the chancellor's position is a state superintendent.

Magdalena Martinez [27:30]

Mm-hmm.

Lisa Levine [27:33]

And it's interesting going through the historical aspect of how that job was created. And because the Board of Regents, through NSHE, kind of created the chancellor position. They now have ownership, and it's very interesting just how you take that ownership away. But I still argue that the chancellor's job is a state superintendent's job. It's statewide; it's public education. And then you think about, to your point, this collaboration idea with org chart within government agencies and imagine if the chancellor and the state superintendent for K-12 were in the same agency. Think about the type of collaboration that would just have to be forced.

I'm going to digress for just a second, but I will come back to it, right? One of the things I'm thinking about right now is workforce development and this really important role that higher ed plays, but also the talent pipeline that comes from K-12. And I was telling someone this the other day, and you know this, right? Curriculum flexibility is a big issue with workforce development because as – and this is more on, probably, the community college level – they're teaching students through an upskilling program, but they're partnered with an employer like Haas, for example, the big, advanced manufacturing company in Henderson. Haas is the private sector. If they see data that shows there is a more efficient and effective way to do something, they're going to implement it. They have R&D funding – that is an easy thing for them to do. But then if they do that mid-semester, and then they go to the folks who they're partnered with on the K-16 side and say, "Hey, we need you to change your curriculum a little bit because we're adopting these new measures, new machines, techniques," whatever it is. The faculty come back to Haas – this is just one example – Haas is just an example. I don't know if they've had this issue. But a company like Haas in this partnership is like "Well, we need this because you're going to now going to graduate these students, and they're not going to be prepared because we've changed how we operate." And the faculty goes "Well, we can't just fix the curriculum in mid-semester because it's a curriculum change."

And then you think about Nevada's System of Higher Education, how do you go about a curriculum change? Well, the faculty – and this is a little bit long-winded – this is true, and that's part of the issue in this process. The faculty who are on the ground, who have the relationship, and who are communicating with the private sector partner, realize that there needs to be some kind of change in the curriculum. They bring it to their chair of the department, or the dean, whomever that might be, for their org chart. The Chair of the Department and Dean of the Department then have to take ownership and think it's priority enough to bring it to Provost or President level. Provost and President level then have to think it's priority enough for them to bring it to the chancellor, and the chancellor then has to bring it to the chair of the Board of Regents and say, "We really need this to make an agenda because the Board of Regents need to

vote on it." All of that is a lot for everyone to say "yes." That also takes an enormous amount of time.

And then, even if the chair and chancellor are 100% on board, they're not going to call a special meeting for that. They're going to make it be on an annual – a quarterly meeting. So there are only four chances a year that that can even be voted on. And sure, it's probably going to make it a consent item, and not even be talked about and discussed by the board. It's an easy "yes" or "no" vote. But it is a huge issue when we're talking about workforce development and economic diversification. We're relying on the public sector to be nimble with the private sector, to promote and foster these relationships. And everything I just told you, a company's going to be like (claps hands) "I'm good. We'll just do it in-house."

Magdalena Martinez [31:32]
Yep.

Lisa Levine [31:34]
And that's a huge loss.

Magdalena Martinez [31:35]
Yeah.

Lisa Levine [31:38]
And so I think – I'm hopeful that this is something that's on my agenda, and I hope we can work on it. I think there are some easy ways that you can change that, but it would be the chancellor and the Board of Regents rescinding their power over curriculum.

Magdalena Martinez [31:56]
Hmm.

Lisa Levine [31:58]
Which is interesting. (laughs) But yeah, I think that's just one example of how the process is not as good as it can be, and as efficient as it should be.

Magdalena Martinez [32:15]
Yes. There are too many layers to it to be able to pivot quickly. Earlier, you started to talk about some of the innovative things that universities were doing during the pandemic and the recession. And you touched on college homelessness and allowing students to stay on campus. Can you give any other type of innovative ways that universities and colleges have dealt with the challenges? And so, universities and perhaps, through the lens of a higher-ed policymaker.

Lisa Levine [32:54]
Yeah. I think – I guess the first thing that comes to mind, and I think this answers your question, is healthcare. And I think about the COVID task forces, right? And you have the state taskforce, and Brian Labus from UNLV's Public Health. He was part of that. And so it was a professor from UNLV who was helping the governor set healthcare policy in the State of Nevada, but impacted education, right? But I think it further showed the impact that education has in the state, not just

in this very siloed like "Oh, they teach people. They do research. Cool. They're over there. We're over here." It's like "No. There's actually a huge integration that's already occurring. We just haven't recognized it, and now, we have to." So I think that, in a way, is innovative.

Another example was just this huge, very quick shift from in-class to online. And I remember visiting – Western Nevada College is an example – and President Solis at the time – now, it's Kyle – but when President Solis was there, he had gotten a federal grant, and he was able to turn all these classrooms that he had into SMART classrooms. And it was really cool to see that in Carson City, they were thinking about innovative ways. Because who knew how long the pandemic was going to last? But then, also, I think that there was this newfound recognition, by higher-ed administrators, that there's also a business case to be made if you can increase access.

And so I remember President Solis was saying, "In this classroom, for example, we have 32 chairs. But now, I can have 50 people also participating online; so suddenly, I can have 80 people enrolled in the class with the same professor."

Magdalena Martinez [34:41]

Mm-hmm.

Lisa Levine [34:44]

And so you started seeing – and that's really also critical, especially because the shift seems to be that there is going to be less state funding for higher education. So how do you look at it from that business sense and be like "Okay, how can we increase the revenue drivers that we have?"

Magdalena Martinez [35:01]

Mm-hmm.

Lisa Levine [35:02]

Another example that was innovative in terms of being more specific to the students. When President Meana was there, when I first joined the board, that's who was President at UNLV. She did a really great job, I thought, more than anyone else, from leadership, at doing these virtual listening sessions with students about a lot of the social justice movements that were going on. She was very – recognizing that even if she didn't have an answer, people just wanted to be listened to and heard out. And that was something that I thought was really impressive. And to Thom Reilly's credit, he tried to do it as Chancellor as well, and he did, and I will take some credit. I had mentioned it to him and [Michael F-??35:47] at the time. But there was growing distrust after George Floyd's death – murder, with our northern and southern police command that's under NSHE, right?

And so NSHE had a listening session with members from the community, students, and Adam Garcia, who's the head of the Southern Nevada Command, but really, the State Command because he was the one who led the consolidation of it in Reno. And just little things like that – even though it didn't necessarily create a policy outcome, it increased the conversation, and I think everyone felt better about that in a meaningful way.

Magdalena Martinez [36:37]

Mm-hmm,

Lisa Levine [36:40]

What's another example of something innovative? I mean there are policy outcomes that happened. You've got AB450, which I think was excellent. I think that report is finally coming out and they're going to get some funding out of it. And from there, you have this conversation now, and a newfound focus on workforce development and economic diversification with NSHE but recognizing that community colleges played a very different role than, I know you know this, but four years, right? And so, maybe they should have a different governing structure. Maybe they should have folks who are a little more dedicated, just to this specifically, rather than tying everyone in together. So that was innovative.

Magdalena Martinez [37:24]

Do you know what the outcome was of that? They were meeting over the interim, right?

Lisa Levine [37:28]

Yeah. I think Derek Hill chairs it, and it's a really good committee. You've got a lot of folks on there. It's my understanding that the language of the legislation changed, and the outcome was to do a committee to study what it would look like. And it's my understanding – I haven't seen it yet, and I don't know if it's been public – but they have finalized that study. And I don't know if it's public yet also, but it's my understanding that the state is giving them funding for whatever the outcome of that study is, \$5,000,000 or something like that. But they have met a few times.

Magdalena Martinez [38:18]

Okay. So, in thinking about the COVID crisis from your perspective, but then it can be within higher education – outside of higher education, which groups do you think were hardest hit by the COVID crisis and recession?

Lisa Levine [38:41]

Yeah. I mean the first – it's hard to say that some were harder hit than others because I don't know everyone's specific situation. But there's no question that if you didn't have a stable household that you came from, if you didn't have a credit card that your parents helped pay the bills for, if you were living off of student loans, if you didn't have some kind of employment opportunity that was fluid, right? Because a lot of our students do work, they became unemployed, just like the other 28% of the state's population at the time, the working population. It was – and of course, UNLV – all of our schools are actually really diverse at this point, probably Great Basin College being the least. But schools like UNLV, Nevada State College, and CSN, their students were much more urban. Their students of color, they're from lower socioeconomic backgrounds, and they're often first-generation. So the idea that they're in college, to begin with, is already a lot of barriers to getting there, and they're already exceeding the standards for – you know. And so I'd say, all of that.

And then on top of that, I think that, just like adults that we're seeing, if you had any subtle mental health issues, you'd probably have much greater mental health issues, having gone through the last two years. Yeah.

Magdalena Martinez [40:18]

Yeah, absolutely.

Lisa Levine [40:20]

I don't have the data to answer that question.

Magdalena Martinez [40:21]

No – no data needed. I'm more interested in your observations.

Lisa Levine [40:28]

Yeah. Well, then I'll say women too. And that was one of the things that, when the Title 9 issue came forward to the Board, it was really emotional for me personally. Because at that time, we already knew that violence against women and girls was going up around the world. And you knew that domestic violence in the State of Nevada is one of the worst, especially with a gun. And just knowing all of the things going on – yeah.

Magdalena Martinez [40:52]

Mm-hmm. Yeah, that's a lot. So, with that said, are you hopeful? And if yes, what are you hopeful for or about?

Lisa Levine [41:12]

I am hopeful. I'm hopeful that the fact that we're having this conversation tells me that more people are interested in this and focused on this. One of the things that we didn't talk about that also was very relevant during the time I was on the board and during COVID was Question 1, right, which was SJR5, and now it's SJR7. But that was on the ballot in November of 2020, and that would remove the Board of Regents from the state constitution so there would be more transparency and accountability.

Magdalena Martinez [41:42]

Yeah.

Lisa Levine [41:44]

And that was something that, going back to that conversation about how I think regents were very like "Well, why is everyone picking on me?" That was something that just really bothered them. I remember, when I joined the board, I was familiar with it for a lot of reasons. But I failed to realize how personally impacted regents took it. They thought it was like a personal vendetta against them. It was fascinating to me because I still, to this day, don't think it's that. I think it's just – going back to that conversation about workforce development processes – people just have a greater expectation of government right now.

So I am hopeful because you see that coming back to fruition. You also see the governor, because of everything that's happened in the last two years with the Board of Regents, and some of the chaos and scandal that's occurred is talking about "Well, maybe 13 is too big, and the legislature is capable of bringing down that unwieldy size, maybe, to nine, seven, or something." So that gives me hope.

It also gives me hope – and this is something that's important to say – a lot of students were engaged with NSHE and the Board of Regents during my time on the board. There were the students who were supposed to be engaged because of shared governance. There were student body presidents. There were also students who were just at home, upset, participating, and that was very interesting. And I don't know if it would be interesting just to do a study to see if public comment increased during COVID or not, right?

Magdalena Martinez [43:29]

Mm-hmm.

Lisa Levine [43:31]

If that would just be an example of participatory rates going up. But it felt like it, and it wasn't the same person every time, you know. You go to some of these meetings, and it's the same person who always writes in or always calls in. And that's fine. I'm not dissing that. But it was constantly a different variety of voices.

Magdalena Martinez [43:50]

Mm-hmm.

Lisa Levine [43:52]

Which is really interesting and that gives me a lot of hope. I think one of the reasons that higher education doesn't get as strong of support is that students aren't always their best advocates, right? Where, K-12, your parents who were advocating and your community members were advocating, higher ed just kind of gets sometimes lost in that shuffle because who's advocating for higher ed? So maybe that is helpful.

And then, in the end, I think the private sector realizes, much more now, the impact and importance that higher ed has. When you look at the states that are doing well at attracting new businesses and at increasing revenue, not by raising taxes, but by diversifying their economy, it's hand-in-hand with education. And so that gives me a lot of hope, yeah.

Magdalena Martinez [44:45]

That is really helpful. Lisa, do you think there are other regents, that were on the board at the time, that might be interested in talking to me? And if so, who might those be?

Lisa Levine [44:59]

I think, Amy Carvalho would talk to you. She is the vice chair right now. She was not in leadership at the time, but she had been on the board for I think about a year or two prior to me, and she has interesting perspectives. She kind of represents the Boulder City area, so she's in Southern Nevada.

I think the other person who might talk to you is Laura Perkins. She's on the board, and she's been on the board. She's very interesting. My guess is that she would talk to you. Her answers might be very interesting, but I'd bet she'd talk to you.

Carol Del Carlo – she represents the Lake Tahoe Area. She was Chair for a little while. When they hired Melody Rose, she actually oversaw the hiring of Chancellor Rose. I bet she would talk to you, and I bet she would have some really interesting perspectives on just how the relationships between regents changed during COVID. And she could speak to it before COVID, not like I could, because I wasn't on the board before COVID. And gosh, I think that's it.

Magdalena Martinez [46:25]

That's really helpful. Do you think their NSHE email would be the best way to get ahold of them, or is there a better email to reach them?

Lisa Levine [46:34]

I have mobiles. So if you're interested in going that route, I'm happy to share with you their mobile phone numbers.

Magdalena Martinez [46:40]

Okay. Yeah. Maybe I'll try their NSHE email address first, and then I will just make a notation that you have their mobile their cell numbers. Okay.

Lisa Levine [46:53]

And Melody might talk to you from her chancellor [46:55]

Magdalena Martinez [46:58]

Okay.

Lisa Levine [46:57]

And my understanding is she's still here. I don't know that for a fact. And her NSHE email wouldn't work anymore, but I do have a number. I might have to look for her personal number but I'm pretty sure I have it from her Oregon days. But she has an interesting perspective because she came on during COVID in 2020

Magdalena Martinez [47:24]

Yeah, that would be great. Okay. Great. Thank you so much, Lisa. I really appreciate your time.

Lisa Levine [47:29]

Yeah. Thank you.

Magdalena Martinez [47:32]

And we will talk soon. I will send you a copy of that transcript. It might be a little bit. But I'd love to catch up, either before the semester starts or when the semester starts.

Lisa Levine [47:43]

I appreciate that. I finished all my classes, and so I'm taking comps in August.

Magdalena Martinez [47:47]

Oh, awesome.

Lisa Levine [47:50]

Yeah, I hope it's awesome. (laughs) Yeah.

Magdalena Martinez [47:56]

Well, send me a note after your comps, and I'd love to celebrate with you and hear from you.

Lisa Levine [48:02]

Yeah, okay. Thank you very much.

Magdalena Martinez [48:04]

All right. Take care, Lisa.

Lisa Levine [48:07]

Bye.

Magdalena Martinez [48:06]

Bye.

End of audio: 48:08