

00:00 [Elizabeth Finn] Hi, everyone. Thank you for joining. We'll give it a couple minutes, just because I know

00:06 activities period starts at 1:05, so students will be trickling in as it gets closer to

00:13 that. But, thank you everyone for joining us. Happy Earth Day to everyone. While we're

00:24 waiting, if everyone wants to introduce themselves in the chat and because it's earth day, if

00:31 you want to share your favorite outdoor place anywhere, can be in Boston, can be in over

00:39 the world, in the country, wherever, to celebrate earth day.

00:58 All right. So, we're going to get started. It's 1:05 now, and I'm sure students will

01:48 be trickling in. I want to just start by thanking everyone for joining us today. My name's Elizabeth,

01:55 I'm a junior, she/her pronouns, and I am a Suffolk Votes Ambassador, and I'll pass it

02:00 to Syeeda to introduce herself.

02:02 [Syeeda Rahman] Hi, I'm Syeeda. I'm a freshman, and I also use she/her pronouns. And I'm a Suffolk Votes Ambassador.

02:11 [Finn] So, thank you everyone for coming, and we want to give a special thank you for everyone

02:15 who joined this event, and our co-sponsors, thank you to the CAS Honors Program, the Center

02:22 for Student Diversity & Inclusion, SGA, Suffolk Women in Government, the Political Science

02:28 Department, and the Suffolk Democrats, and also a special thank you to City Councilor

02:34 Flynn and Vanessa, for joining us today. We hope today will be a starting point for students

02:42 to connect with the government, in Boston's government in particular, and to learn more

02:48 about how it functions. So, City Councilor, Ed Flynn, he represents Boston's second district,

02:58 which includes Suffolk Campus, also includes parts of Beacon Hill, Chinatown, South Boston

03:04 itself. And, he served as the City Councilor since 2017 and he's the chair of the city

03:10 and neighborhood services. And so, we're so appreciative to have him here today, and we're

03:16 looking forward to getting to know him better.

03:20 So, just some goals that keep in mind today. So, we invited here the Councilor Flynn, to

03:31 be with us because it's important for constituents to have relationship with their elected representatives

03:37 and to promote accessibility of local officials. We tend to hold them to a higher status, but

03:43 really their job is to listen to their constituents and act based on their needs. It's important

03:48 secondly, to be aware of the different policy positions your elected officials take on various

03:55 issues. You want a representative who will present your values and to be vocal about

03:59 certain issues important to you. And then our last goal is, one of our goals at Suffolk

04:05 Votes is to encourage students to participate with the government beyond voting, and to

04:10 build a relationship with our representatives. Because, once you establish connection, you're

04:15 more comfortable with reaching out and advocating for the issues you care about. So, I will

04:20 pass it to Syeeda, to go over just a couple of rules we have.

04:23 So, these are some of the ground rules for today. We will first be asking questions that

04:31 were already submitted, but we will open up the floor for questions later on. So, just

04:37 keep in mind to be respectful. We all know what that means to be respectful of one another's

04:43 opinions, even if it is different from your own. Also, keep in mind today's goals, to

04:49 just get closer to your elected representative and to get to know them a lot more. Also,

04:56 one mic, don't talk over one another. We also have a chat function, so if you do want to

05:00 comment on things respectfully, just use the chat. Also, be mindful of other peoples' time,

05:06 make sure that you're not taking all the time to ask only your questions, let others participate,

05:11 and also step up step down, which is the same thing. Be respectful, ask questions that pertain

05:17 to today's subject, and just have fun. We're really, really excited that you're here and

05:21 willing to get more involved.

05:26 Awesome. Thank you. So now, we'll pass it to Councilor Flynn, to just briefly introduce

05:30 himself and talk a little about his district and his job. So, we'll give it to him to take it away.

05:38 [City Councilor Ed Flynn] Well, thank you, Elizabeth. Thank you, Syeeda and Adam, and the entire team here at Suffolk.

05:48 The students at Suffolk, thank you for the opportunity to be here with you. And I also

05:53 wanted to say thank you on behalf of Vanessa Wolf from my team, as well. We're glad to

06:00 be here and talking about government, how it works. As Elizabeth mentioned, I represent

06:06 district two, which includes Suffolk University campus, includes South Boston, the South End,

06:14 the Bay Village, Chinatown, parts of Beacon Hill, where you are, parts of Back Bay. I

06:21 believe that engagement with my constituents, is one of the most important parts of my job.

06:27 So, I'm very grateful for what you are doing here in organizing this important meeting.

06:33 I'm in the community all of the time, I try to build positive relationships with residents,

06:39 with community organizations in my district, by attending, hosting events across the district.

06:48 One issue that I focus on as I relate, and answer questions, and engage residents, it's

06:56 just a little bit about my district. It's probably the most diverse district in the

07:03 city, there's nine district city councils. I represent the largest number of residents

07:10 that live in public housing of any district in the city. I also represent the largest

07:17 Asian community of any district in the city. I also represent, I believe the second largest

07:25 Spanish speaking district in the city. I think I also represent the largest immigrant district

07:34 in the city, and a proud to represent that diverse district. Language access is a critical

07:42 issue. It's probably the number one issue I focus on in my job as a district city counselor.

07:54 Because of the diversity of my district, it is critical for me to communicate with my

08:00 constituents, and them to communicate with me.

08:07 And, I can only do that with dedicated and professional staff that I have, that work

08:16 for me, including Vanessa. We communicate in Cantonese, we communicate in Mandarin
and

08:25 we communicate in Spanish to our constituents. And, I specifically wanted a diverse team

08:37 on my staff, that could communicate in various languages that could relate to and
understand

08:47 the immigrant voice in our city. Of the five people on my team, four of them are women

08:53 of color, and four of them are immigrants. And I specifically wanted that because I wanted

09:02 to stress the important role immigrants play in our city. They've helped build our city.

09:10 They've helped build our country. And, I had the opportunity to serve 25 years in the
United

09:19 States Navy in difficult environments and hazardous environments across the world,
including

09:29 the Middle East and other difficult areas. And, I've seen immigrants serve with me in

09:36 harm's way. I've seen members of communities of color serve with me and harm's way.
And

09:46 I look at the rise of hate crimes in our city, in our country, especially hate crimes against

09:54 the Asian community, and here they're serving in harm's way, in the United States Military.

10:04 And then we come back to the United States, and they're a victim of hate crime or their

10:09 parents, or the grandparents are victim of hate crimes of bullying, intimidation.

10:16 So, those are issues that are important to me, the Chinese community. Many of you study

10:24 the immigrant role in our city and country, the Chinese community, along with the Irish

10:30 immigrants, built the transcontinental railroad, connecting the country. And I just say that

10:38 as an example, we see that famous photo in out of Salt Lake City when the railroad was

10:44 completed, hundreds of people in the photo and not one Asian person is in the photo.

10:51 And what did our country do after the Chinese built the railroad? We excluded them from

10:58 coming into the country. The Chinese Exclusion Act. So, I say that, because I'm proud to represent

11:05 an immigrant community, and I fight for my residents, I advocate for them, and I don't

11:14 let anyone try to disrespect or intimidate my constituents, and I don't tolerate any

11:22 of that. Thank you, and I hope that's helpful answering to the first question.

11:30 [Finn] Yes. Thank you. So now, we will open it up for the rest of our questions. So Syeeda and

11:40 I will take turns, if anyone else has any questions, if you want to put them in the

11:44 chat and hopefully we can get to them at the end. And our first question is just a general,

11:51 can you explain how the city government works? How do laws get passed? How do the committee

11:57 process work? Can you just give us a general overview of how the policy process works at the city level?

12:05 [Councilor Flynn] Yes, that's a good question. Boston, just especially for our students in government,

12:11 it has a strong mayor system. So, the mayor initiates a lot of policy and has a lot of

12:19 power, but the council also initiates. A lot of the regulations and laws need to be passed

12:25 by the council in order to be in effect. So usually, the mayor or the council will file

12:31 a new ordinance or a home rule petition, but we also need approval from the state on a

12:39 home rule petition. So basically, if we want to change the City Charter or make changes

12:46 to the charter in the city, it has to be passed by the city council. It has to be approved

12:54 by the mayor, home rule petition, and then it has to be voted on, by the legislature

13:00 and signed by the governor. That's how law is passed in our city. But certainly, the

13:07 mayor and the council have an important role in regulations, in policy on various departments

13:16 and city agencies, including the Boston Police, Boston Fire, Office of Immigrant Advancement,

13:24 Office of Food Access, and certainly the Public School system. So, the mayor's team works

13:31 closely with the city council, but also with the residents. And that's an important part

13:38 of it, is hearing the voices, and concerns, and frustrations and challenges of residents

13:46 across the city and trying to implement policy change to address those issues.

13:52 [Finn] Thank you for that. And then I'll pass it to say Syeeda, for the next question.

14:00 [Rahman] The next question is, Suffolk has a large number of commuter students who rely on public

14:05 parking in order to drive to campus. As chair of the City and Neighborhood Services, you

14:10 work on parking in the city. How are you working on improving parking and

14:15 transportation for students in the city?

14:18 It's a very good question. It's a major challenge we have certainly, parking, traffic, pedestrian

14:25 safety is a critical issue that I focus a lot on. But we work closely with the Boston

14:30 Transportation Department, on improving our traffic infrastructure, communicate to them

14:36 from residents about what their ideas are on improving parking and transportation issues,

14:43 including bike access and pedestrian safety. We also have a Planning Transportation Development

14:48 Committee on the City Council, which works with the Transportation Department with the

14:55 Boston Planning Development Agency, which is the old BRA and the Zoning Board. And all

15:04 those agencies have a direct impact on parking and transportation. But, just on parking and

15:13 traffic and pedestrian safety, the 25 mile an hour speed limit, and our city is too fast.

15:23 I know exactly where your college is, and can you imagine driving down Beacon Street

15:30 going by the State House, driving 25 miles an hour and expecting to stop in a crosswalk

15:38 when an elderly person is walking, or a person with disability as walking?

15:42 It's almost impossible to stop.

15:45 So, I think we need significant drastic infrastructure improvements on pedestrian safety related

15:55 issues. And, we need to desperately lower the speed limit with strict enforcement, zero

16:01 tolerance for any car. I even think, going from 25 to 20 is not enough. I think it's

16:08 15 miles an hour that we need in this city. I've said it many times, I've held hearings

16:13 on it. And I've had a little child in my district, was hit by a car and killed. The first several

16:24 months when I started, it wasn't a speeding related issue per se, but the cars in our

16:33 city of going too fast, and we need a dedicated Boston Police section that deals specifically

16:40 with traffic enforcement to deal with that issue. But, it's something that I continue

16:46 to work on. We make improvements, but not enough. More work needs to be done.

16:55 [Finn] Thank you for that. I will say pedestrians in Boston are not afraid of crossing. So,

17:03 our next question is, Suffolk provides two years of residential housing for students.

17:10 The majority of students who live on campus are either out of state, or they live too

17:14 far to commute to campus. Many upperclassmen have to find off-campus housing. Boston is

17:22 the fifth most expensive city in the country for renters. As a member of the Housing and

17:27 Community Development, how are you working to improve the cost of housing to make it

17:31 more affordable in Boston?

17:34 [Councilor Flynn] Yeah, that's another good question. I've worked and advocated with residents who are facing

17:41 difficulties in their housing situation. Worked with organization that you might be familiar

17:47 with, the Chinese Progressive Association, to prevent displacement, especially for our

17:53 immigrant neighbors, low-income residents, seniors, persons with disabilities. I strongly

17:59 support rent control. I know many people don't support it, but I support it. I support measures

18:09 that would help build affordable housing in the city for low income working families.

18:14 I'm a strong supporter of public housing. Boston Housing Authority, plays a critical

18:21 role in our city, in my district. I've held hearings on ways to discuss what the city

18:26 can do to face eviction and displacement and short-term rentals. We need to continue to

18:38 watch closely about them, especially at this time, they are checking precious housing stock

18:45 away from our city.

18:48 But, what I've advocated for is, removing investing units in opposing these executive

18:55 suites basically, that are nothing but de facto hotels, in my opinion, they're not regulated.

19:07 They're also taking away jobs from people that work in the hotels, and many of them

19:13 are immigrants, and many of them are women. Many of them are from communities of color

19:17 and they're my constituents. So, I fiercely advocate for them, and I don't want to see

19:22 them lose their job because someone wants to open a 25-unit de facto hotel. And I'm
19:34 going to challenge the Zoning Board, when someone needs approval every time, and I'm
19:39 consistent about that. And, when we see these short-term rentals go up, that are hotels,
19:48 what we're saying is that the voice of immigrants doesn't matter in this city. Because, when
19:55 we open these de facto hotels, and that means someone is not going into a traditional hotel,
20:04 and that's a job for someone that desperately needs that income to support their family.
20:09 And those are good jobs, they're good wages, they're union jobs. And again, they're
women,
20:15 they're communities of color, and it's a pathway to the middle class. And that's what I
strongly
20:22 advocate for, and strongly believe in. And, I strongly support organized labor and having
20:28 residents impact policy decisions on, one housing and economic justice issues as well.
20:39 [Rahman] Thank you. The next question is, Boston is one of the most racially segregated
US metro
20:48 cities. With the recent rise in hate crimes against Asian Americans, along with more
visibility
20:53 of police brutality taking place, how do you plan to create a more equitable city
environment?
21:02 [Councilor Flynn] I think a big part of it is, speaking out as an elected official that
represents a large
21:10 immigrant community, but even more importantly than speaking out is listening to voices
of
21:18 immigrants, listening to voices of the Asian community, continuing to engage them.
During
21:27 this pandemic, my constituents were victims of bullying, intimidation, and I held the
21:39 first public meeting on the Coronavirus in the country. And I had that, certainly in
21:51 New England. I would like to see if that's an accurate statement. I had it in January

21:56 2020. I had a public meeting about Coronavirus at the Josiah Quincy School. Many of you know

22:05 that school as well. And what's interesting, what the big takeaway for me was, a young

22:13 Asian high school student from Boston, and she attends Boston Latin, and she got on the train.

22:24 This is when Coronavirus was just becoming prevalent in the media, really. This young

22:37 student at Boston Latin would get on the MBTA train. And when she would get on the train,

22:45 the white commuters on the train would get off the train, and moved to the other side

22:50 of the train, to not be with her, or be near her. And this really impacted her and her

22:59 family. It impacted everybody in the room, but my takeaway is, people identified this

23:10 young student who's doing her best and whose family is comes from China, but people identified

23:19 this young student with Coronavirus. And then, we saw it throughout the country, Asians being

23:30 intimidated, beat up, bullied. And I've consistently advocated in support of the Asian community,

23:43 but addressing crime issues.

23:46 And I've probably been the first person, maybe in the country to talk about Asian violence

23:53 during this pandemic. And, I don't say that to give myself credit. I only say that because

24:02 I take this job very seriously. And I represent my constituents, the best I can. And, when

24:14 I think someone's being intimidated, or I think someone's being bullied or disrespected,

24:20 especially someone that may not speak English, they may not be here legally, and that's not

24:32 a reason for someone to intimidate anybody. So, I'm going to consistently continue to

24:41 advocate against hate crimes. And, my father was the mayor of Boston at one point, and

24:51 he started the Human Rights Commission, and that Human Rights Commission in the city was

24:58 a way for the city to discuss hate crimes, and document hate crimes, and investigate hate crimes.

25:08 And, it's been non-existent, to be honest with you, for 15 years and Mayor Walsh brought

25:17 it back to existence, for a long period of decline, but it can play a critical role in

25:24 this city. And that's something I want to continue to work on is, beefing up hate crime,

25:33 the staff on the Hate Crimes Commission, but also education, public awareness about respect

25:42 and dignity for all people, especially for people that are immigrants, that might be

25:52 here under very difficult circumstances. During this challenging time, they might have difficulty

26:02 getting food. They might have difficulty paying bills, but that's even more of a reason why

26:09 government has to support them during this pandemic and in as we go forward.

26:17 [Finn] Thank you for that. And as you mentioned, you're the son of a former Boston mayor. So

26:23 you probably grew up inspired to pursue a career in public service. So how do you persuade

26:29 the next generation of Bostonians to engage with their communities and potentially pursue

26:36 a career in public service like you did?

26:40 [Councilor Flynn] Yes. I have a difficult time answering that question because, although my father was the

26:49 mayor, I didn't necessarily plan on being in government. I got off to a late start in

26:59 government. I'll be 53. So, I'm only my third year. So, I'm late getting into elective office,

27:07 but I don't necessarily think you have to be in politics to just help people, and you

27:17 can make a difference. And, as I mentioned, I was in the military, but I was also a probation

27:22 officer at Suffolk Superior Court, which is right here right next to you guys. So, I work

27:29 with people coming out of jail, I work with people coming out of prison on Reentry Initiatives.

27:36 And, CORI Reform is something that's important to my constituents, but important to the city,

27:44 to residents of the city. But I just highlight that as an example that, there's a lot of

27:51 ways to get involved in government without running for office.

27:57 But one of the things that you're doing right now is critical, is learning about government,

28:03 learning how it operates, learning about people, learning about issues and seeing what's best

28:11 for you as you go forward from your college education, whether you go to graduate school,

28:18 whether you are interested in government, interested in nonprofits, but there's a lot

28:23 of opportunities, including running for office for you all eventually, if that's what you

28:29 want to do. But, just want to let you know that, getting involved in your neighborhood,

28:37 in communities is so vitally important and trying to mentor young people, whether it's

28:44 as a youth sports coach, or as a tutor. And, that's what government to me is about.

28:55 [Rahman] Awesome. Thank you so much. So, we have a question from another person saying today

29:04 is Earth Day, and I'm wondering what are some of Boston's major climate initiatives that

29:09 are currently underway, and what do you think Boston can do to be an even stronger leader

29:14 in becoming climate conscious city?

29:18 [Councilor Flynn] That's, that's a great question. I think as the city continues to build, especially during

29:25 this pandemic, and planning and development, we need to make sure that climate resiliency

29:34 plans are built into RFIs, request for information, when projects are announced by the BPDA or

29:45 the Development Community, there has to be a climate justice aspect to all development

29:51 and planning in the city. And, issue that I would like to highlight that might be very

30:00 direct and close to you, and it certainly impacts you, because I know many of you live

30:07 in the Downtown area, in the Beacon Hill area, and you go to school here and you visit, I

30:12 know many of you visit Chinatown also, at least once a week, because it's right down

30:18 the road from you. But, there was a group called, if I'm getting the name incorrectly,

30:28 it's called the Union Society of Scientists, and they had a study out and I talked to them

30:37 and read this study. But, the Chinatown community, which is down the road from you, has the highest

30:45 rate of asthma of any neighborhood or town, in the state of Massachusetts.

30:53 So, we talk about climate justice. There it is right there, right down the road from us.

30:58 And, here we have a community that's in a school, and you guys know what Josiah Quincy

31:08 School is, right? Right on top of the Mass Pike or next to it, I should say, on the Mass

31:14 Pike, on a highway system, down the road from the South Station Bus Terminal, where the

31:21 buses run all day in the terminal. As you guys know, from the fumes, we have the Amtrak

31:30 Train Station. We have the direct truck route basically from Maine to Florida, from 9395,

31:42 going up to Maine. But, we understand why that the Chinatown has the highest asthma

31:51 rate, because the residents are breathing in those fumes, all day long.

31:58 And, we are building a brand new public high school, a new Josiah Quincy High School, but

32:06 I don't pretend to be an expert on architecture or design, but I insisted that, when we were

32:16 planning the school, that we address the high asthma rate in Chinatown, and what infrastructure

32:26 changes, physical changes, can we make to that building to make it more healthier for
32:33 our children, for our students. So, that's just an example of what I think of when I
32:40 hear about the environment of climate justice. I try to relate it directly to the impact
32:48 it has on my constituents, my residents. And I try to make a difference in that immediate
32:59 area. I can't control everything in this city. I can only do so much, but I do know that
33:07 I can have an impact in my district.

33:10 And, if I have the ability to influence policy, I take that opportunity. And I don't accept
33:20 no for an answer from anybody, on issues that impact my constituents. And if I get no on
33:30 issues, I'll go right to the top. I'll go to the mayor because, my constituents expect
33:38 me to advocate for them, and for their quality of life, because wealthy people in other
neighborhoods

33:46 can call directly to the mayor. If they're in the business community, or they have influence,
33:54 they can get things done through their attorneys. But my constituents can't do that in public
34:00 housing or the immigrant community or communities of color. They can't just pick up the
phone

34:07 and contact the mayor, but I can. And so, I insist, and sometimes I demand that we look
34:16 at things differently, what impacts residents in my district, and we looked at things that
34:22 impact immigrants in my district. And, I don't speak for all my councilors, but I don't like
34:31 accepting no from anybody in City Hall.

34:36 [Finn] Thank you for that. To be cognizant of time, we're going to move to some questions
that

34:42 were asked in the chat. So, the first one is, respected Councilor Flynn, you mentioned
34:50 that you're proud to represent the most diverse area in Boston. My question is, serving a
34:55 melting pot of people, how do you cater to everyone's needs? Is it challenging to keep

35:00 things equalized between different groups of people?

35:04 [Councilor Flynn] Yes. It's very difficult. It's very challenging. It's hard to do. It can be frustrating at

35:12 times. I can get frustrated at times as well. But, to answer your question directly, it's

35:21 challenging. It doesn't always work. But, government and politics, as you know, it's

35:31 about compromise. And, I don't pretend to have all the answers, but what I try to do

35:42 is listen to people. And I rely on my staff a lot because, I can only communicate in English

35:49 and my staff can communicate in Cantonese, and they can communicate in Mandarin and Spanish.

35:57 And they have a different life experience than I do. Vanessa has a different life experience

36:03 than I do, and Sophia, and Ana, and Melissa, all do. So, I rely on them. They're younger

36:11 than I am. They have a different view of the city and different view of the country, maybe

36:17 than I do. So, I try to learn from them. My wife and I have two children. I try to learn

36:23 from my wife, Kristen, I try to learn from my daughter, who's a college student, and

36:29 my son who is a high school student. So, I try to listen to people.

36:37 [Rahman] Thank you so much for that answer. The next question in this chat that I'm seeing is from

36:46 Stephen. What changes do you see occurring in the city going forward post pandemic, changes

36:52 in office space, new public health measures, or anything along those lines?

36:57 [Councilor Flynn] Yeah, first of all, thank you, Stephen. And that's my son's name is Stephen. And he spells

37:02 out the same way you do, S-T-E-P-H-E-N. So, I like how you spell it as well. So, let me

37:12 just talk about public health. It's an issue that I didn't study growing up, or I didn't

37:20 study when I came to the city council, but it's probably the issue that I study the most,

37:27 and I enjoy the most. And, it's an issue that impacts everybody, but again, especially the

37:38 immigrant community and communities of color, and access to quality health care is a civil

37:46 rights or human rights as far as I'm concerned. And, I'm also the vice chair of Civil Rights.

37:52 And one of the issues I focus on, on Civil Rights besides advocating for immigrants,

37:59 but I spent a lot of my time on supporting persons with disabilities as well.

38:04 I'm a disabled veteran. That's not the reason I strongly advocate for persons with disabilities,

38:13 but I try to make sure that government works for persons with disabilities, for everybody,

38:20 but especially for people that don't have access to government leaders. But, public

38:27 health, just as an example, I know it's important to me, it's important to you. And I highlight

38:35 the immigrant community, but I also highlight challenges families have in getting to appointments.

38:47 And when they're at medical appointments, again, the first thing I mentioned to you

38:53 today was language access. Do we have enough people in hospitals that can speak various languages?

39:00 Do we have enough people in our schools, social workers, mental health counselors, that can

39:08 communicate in many languages? So, not only can you communicate with the student, but

39:12 you can communicate with the student's family, and make sure that the student's parents, mother

39:19 or father, or guardian, know exactly, some of the issues and challenges this student

39:26 has, but also developing a path that that student can go on, that might be helpful to

39:32 them. So, I think language access connects all agencies. In our city, I think language

39:39 access connects us as a society, and if we're dismissive of people because they can't communicate

39:50 with us in our language, or they might have a difficulty, even if they speak English,

39:57 they might have a difficult time with English as well. So, they're also important.
Everybody's

40:06 important. And that's what I try to focus on as a city councilor.

40:14 [Finn] Thank you for that. The next question that we have is, can you briefly discuss some of

40:21 the points of the City of Boston's Reform Bill regarding policing and what can we expect

40:27 to happen, if any changes, and when?

40:32 [Councilor Flynn] Yeah. The city is currently going through the budget process right now. The budget was

40:41 just released and the mayor has proposed restructuring, rethinking, reorganizing the way we do policing

40:55 in the city. And many of you are familiar with, I just want to give you an example.

41:01 I try to give examples so I can make things as clear for me and for you, but many of you

41:08 are familiar with the crisis we have it now, South Albany Street, South Hampton Street.

41:14 It's a mental health crisis. It's a substance use crisis, but do we want police responding

41:25 to mental health crisis in our city, regardless of the location? We want to make sure that

41:33 we're able to redirect those types of calls, as an example, maybe it's not the response

41:41 responsibility of the police to deal with mental health crisis, related to 911 calls.

41:50 Maybe that person might need the opportunity for medical care. Maybe that person might

41:56 need to be opportunity for mental health counseling or drug treatment program, and what are the

42:04 services available for that person? So, I used that as an example of how we think differently

42:16 of the police in their response. And, that's what I want to focus on as we go forward is,

42:25 the police play an important role in our community, but so don't mental health professionals,

42:33 so don't social workers in after school programs, in public education. Getting people the needed

42:43 quality, public education in afterschool activities programs, mental health counseling. We're

42:52 going to need more of that as we go forward, especially during this difficult year, during

42:58 the pandemic, especially for our young students that haven't been in class for the last year,

43:04 and maybe they're from an immigrant family, maybe their parents might not speak English,

43:11 but how does that young student communicate that he needs, or she needs mental health

43:21 counseling. And how do we connect that person to that mental health counseling again, in

43:26 that neighborhood, with services are available, with people that are providing those services,

43:33 understand someone's culture, someone's history, someone's background, and can communicate

43:40 with them effectively and with empathy.

43:45 [Rahman] Thank you so much for that. As an immigrant myself, I really appreciate that you're looking

43:51 out for other immigrants who may not have linguistic skills to communicate what they

43:56 need. So, I really appreciate that. The next question is from Jason. Councilor, what is

44:02 your proudest legislative accomplishment?

44:05 [Councilor Flynn] I would say my proudest legislative accomplishment is, I would say besides language access, I

44:19 highlighted that, and besides support of the immigrants, another part of that aspect is,

44:28 I would say working in government, I don't know if I'd call it legislative action, but

44:35 working in government as a leader on food access, has been probably the biggest highlight

44:42 for me in terms of my accomplishments during this pandemic, making sure my constituents,

44:51 residents of the city really also have access to sites across the city where they can pick
45:00 up groceries once a week, and groceries that are respectful to their culture. We've done
45:13 that consistently over the last year and others.

45:17 Probably nothing worse than someone going hungry, especially a child, or especially
45:24 a senior citizen, or a person with disability. So, I would have to say that working with
45:35 my colleagues, working with the mayor, it's not just me. It's working with residents,
45:45 especially in my team, but getting people access to food during this difficult year.

45:51 This is the highlight of my career so far, on the council, probably.

45:59 [Vanessa Wolf] Would I be able to just add to the Councilor's comments too?

46:05 [Finn] Go for it.

46:07 [Wolf] Yeah. So, the last year has been extremely difficult and early on in the pandemic,
in

46:13 around late March, this is not really so much a legislative accomplishment, but also, I
believe

46:22 a strong accomplishment that the Councilor did is that, he asked our office to organize
46:29 calls to check up on seniors. I think we all remember initially when the pandemic started,
46:38 there was very little information of how the Coronavirus spread, and there was a lot of
46:44 concern with our seniors because they were the most vulnerable. And so, the Councilor
46:49 organized a district-wide senior call. And so, our office, we were each assigned the
46:58 list of different neighborhoods, including language capacities.

47:03 And we called up folks in Chinatown, folks in South Boston, folks and South End, to make
47:08 sure that they were okay, and to make sure that they were getting food deliveries, because

47:12 a lot of these seniors were not really able to go out, and they were afraid to go out.
47:18 So, we checked in on them and made sure that they were able to be connected to the
Mayor's

47:26 Office of Food Access, as well as reaching out to volunteers who were less afraid to
47:33 deliver or coordinate efforts to get those foods delivered to these seniors. So, I'd
47:40 say, that was a great effort. And a lot of the seniors also were able to benefit and
47:49 secured food, during that critical time.

47:57 [Finn] Thank you for that. And so, our last question, because we want to be mindful of
time, but

48:04 this one's a great way to end it, kind of a call to action. So, Adam asked, you mentioned
48:09 compromise and advocacy as two main skills of being effective in politics. What are some
48:15 other skills and experience you recommend to students to work on if they're interested
48:19 in being an effective community leader or public official?

48:28 [Councilor Flynn] In terms of, I'm just trying to think of the question, like personal skills, I
think the

48:37 ability to listen to people is probably the most important aspect. And again, I don't
48:45 get it right all the time. I try to, but I don't get it right all the time. Sometimes,
48:50 I get impatient and don't listen to the question and don't listen to the comment, I jump right
48:57 in. That's my impatience, and those are my challenges, but I try to work on that. But
49:05 I think the ability to listen is the most important aspect of an elected official. And,
49:14 not waiting to think about what your response is to the question. At times, I think about
49:22 the response to the question before I even know what the question is, and that, again,
49:29 that's my fault.

49:30 That's a fault I have to improve on. But, listening to the question, understanding who's
49:37 asking the question, why they're asking the question, and then think about it for a second,
49:47 and then give you a response. But, as an elected official, you have to listen to your
residents

49:58 because you can't know everything that's happening in someone's life. And when someone calls

50:06 an elected official, when someone calls me on the phone, people don't generally call

50:13 an elected official, but when someone does call an elected official on the phone, that's

50:18 the most important call. That person is probably making all year, and that person's not calling

50:27 you just to shoot the breeze, and check in and say, hi, that person has a serious problem

50:34 if they're calling you. So, I take that call seriously, and that person needs help.

50:41 That person might be hungry. That person might be a kid, might be suffering from drug use

50:49 and is looking for a detox bed, or that person might be having challenges with their school,

50:56 for their child on special education issues. So, that call is the most important call,

51:04 that person might be making all year. I don't mean to exaggerate it, but I think it's that

51:12 critical, when you get those calls. And I do stress to my team, when you get that call,

51:18 that we try our best to help the person. And I'm thankful that Vanessa has been doing that,

51:28 and my team has been doing that, but it's hard. It's very, very hard, especially during

51:34 this year, and we get stressed out, you get stressed out, I get stressed out, frustration.

51:42 You're overworked, you think you're not appreciated, and you can get snappy at people at times.

51:56 So, we just have to all work on treating each other with respect. And that's something I

52:04 try to do. But, I can do better.

52:15 [Wolf] Can I also make another remark? I would like to say that, in my time working for the office,

52:20 I think the councilors sell themselves short. And, it's been a great experience. But, I

52:29 agree with the sentiment that, I think during this pandemic year, I think it's been very

52:37 difficult and a lot of constituents are very nervous and concerned, just like everyone

52:44 else. And so, it is important that, no matter how critical or serious an issue is, or, less
52:59 critical, we still make sure that we listen and address people's concerns as well as,
53:06 give back to them, and help them work their way through the City of Boston departments,
53:12 to get what they need. So, yeah.

53:13 [Finn] Thank you for that. And thank you for all the work that you've been doing for the
Boston

53:22 community and the Suffolk community as well. We really appreciate just having city
councilors

53:28 and just any government who's just for the people, and really willing to put in the effort.

53:34 So, we really appreciate that. So, thank you for all that you do. Thank you for coming

53:38 and speaking with us today. It was really great to get to know you more, and to learn

53:44 more about what you do. And you can comment if any of this information is not correct,

53:49 but if anyone would like to reach out to the Councilor, here is his information.

53:59 [Wolf] I'm happy to pass on our emails in the chat. So, I'm going to just put that in now.

54:11 [Councilor Flynn] Excellent. Thank you, Elizabeth, thank you to the Suffolk University
students, and glad

54:19 you guys are at Suffolk. It's a great school. It's a great training program for people that

54:24 are interested in government and helping people, and looking forward to seeing you guys
in

54:30 the neighborhood, and let's stay in touch. And we would be glad to do this at another

54:35 time as well. And, let's stay in touch. I enjoyed the conversation.

54:40 [Rahman] Thank you so much.

54:42 [Finn] Thank you. So, have a great day everyone. And thank you again for joining us.

54:46 [Wolf] Thank you so much.

54:48 [Councilor Flynn] Thank you so everybody.

