

00:00 [Elizabeth Finn] With that in mind, and I will start that. Awesome.

00:09 So, for goals, we want to demystify our government officials. We want to make them

00:16 a lot more accessible. And sometimes when we think about government officials, we see them

00:20 as like someone that's so different from us, but they're just some other person. And so, we want to

00:26 make sure that everyone gets to know our senator today.

00:29 We're also going to learn about policy position, so when you think about questions, think about

00:34 policy positions that the senator may hold and make sure to ask him questions about that.

00:39 And we also want to get students more excited about government in general.

00:49 [Syeeda Rahman] So, just some housekeeping, just some ground rules, just be really, really respectful. Think

00:54 about the goals that we just went over today. Respect one another. We know how to do that. And

01:02 one mic, so one person speaks at a time. Don't talk over one another. If you really just say

01:06 something or get something out, feel free to use the chat. And then also be mindful of other

01:12 people's time. We really, really appreciate Senator Boncore for taking the time out

01:17 for being here, so ask questions that will be helpful to our goals. Step up,

01:22 step down. If you notice yourself participating too much, let other people participate as well

01:27 and ask their questions. And also, just have fun. For asking questions, raise your hand,

01:33 we'll call on you. You can use the reaction button and you can raise your hand,

01:38 and we'll call on you. And you can introduce yourself and then ask your question.

01:42 And you can also put your questions in the chat if you don't want to unmute and ask it yourself.

01:50 [Finn] Awesome. Thank you for that. So, as we get to know the senator today, please ask as many questions

01:59 as you'd like. So, now we would like to pass it to Senator Boncore so he can briefly introduce

02:05 himself and talk a little bit about his district. So, we'll give it to him to take it away.

02:13 [Senator Joseph Boncore] Well, thank you. Good afternoon to everyone joining. I want to thank you all for the

02:17 opportunity to have this conversation today, and I hope it is a conversation.

02:22 Because I'm not looking forward just to speaking at you guys, I want to engage and

02:28 have this be the first of many conversations with Suffolk Votes. So, to Suffolk Votes, to Elizabeth,

02:35 Syeeda, thank you for working so closely with my office to coordinate this event. I'm so proud to

02:40 represent Suffolk University in the Massachusetts State Senate. The Suffolk campus sprawls across

02:46 the First Suffolk and Middlesex district. From the Ridgeway Gym on Beacon Hill, the residence

02:52 halls and academic buildings downtown, all the way to the Modern Theatre. And even to

02:57 the baseball and softball fields, as well as the soccer fields that are currently in East Boston.

03:03 Suffolk students and alumni have a long-storied history of working in the State House.

03:10 Many colleagues of mine in the Massachusetts State Senate have graduated from Suffolk.

03:16 Many Senate staffers and interns that work in the building, especially my chief of staff,

03:22 Maggie Randall, is a Suffolk... I guess, a double Ram from Suffolk, and she was

03:28 actually featured last month I think, she's probably going to kill me for saying this, in

03:32 the Suffolk online magazine, alumni magazine. So, it's definitely an article you should check out.

03:39 So, beyond Suffolk, the downtown Boston and Beacon hill area,

03:43 the First Suffolk and Middlesex district really is representative of my old town of Winthrop,

03:52 the city of Revere, the communities of East Boston, the North End, Downtown,

03:58 as we spoke about, Chinatown, the South End, Bay Village, and Boston, as well as Cambridge,

04:04 and over the Longfellow bridge, MIT, up to Riverside to the neighborhood of Cambridgeport.

04:12 My areas of interest in the Senate, previous to be joining the Senate, I was a public defender

04:20 and most of the district courts around Boston, so criminal justice reform is really the reason

04:25 I ran for the Senate and something that I've worked hard to see through in the last five years

04:31 in office. I am chairman of the Joint Committee on Transportation, and Then I was reappointed to that

04:39 chairmanship this year. Obviously, transportation infrastructure is critically important,

04:46 not only to our economy and how we get around, but to the environment, and ensuring that we have an

04:52 accessible, safe, and reliable public transit system in this Commonwealth is of the utmost

04:59 importance. So, last year I was proud to carry a \$17 billion bond bill through the legislature

05:06 and have that signed into law by the governor to really modernize our Commonwealth transportation

05:14 project. Prior to serving as chairman of the Committee on Transportation, I was chairman of

05:21 the Committee on Housing. And I think, really, we accomplished a lot during my time there.

05:28 Previous to joining the Senate, I was chair of the Winthrop Public Housing Authority.

05:32 And I think that experience has really guided my legislative decisions around increasing access to

05:39 affordable housing, or housing that is affordable, promoting transit-oriented development,

05:44 and addressing the gentrification area situation that we're seeing in Boston. So,

05:50 this year I filed significant legislation that would create a process to sale eviction records,

05:57 so reduce some of the hurdles and barriers people

06:01 have when facing housing. But like I said, I don't want to just speak at you, I want to speak to you,

06:08 so at this time, I think it's a good time just to open this up for conversation.

06:16 [Finn] Awesome. Yeah. So, for the questions...

06:22 First of all, thank you so much for just sharing that. And so, now it's our chance to ask

06:26 questions, so you can either raise your hand and we can call on you, or also put them in the chat.

06:39 I have a question that we can actually start with. So, your district is large and includes a lot of

06:47 different cities and towns, wards, precincts, and it's Boston and it's the surrounding areas,

06:53 and it's a very diverse population. So, how do you ensure that every citizen and every

06:59 community and all the different interests are represented?

07:03 [Senator Boncore] Yeah. I mean, I think it's creating access to my office is tantamount to being a representative.

07:10 I think we're elected by the constituents we serve, so ensuring that those constituents feel

07:15 that they have access to my office, really, is the most important part. Boston is a very diverse

07:24 city, and the communities within it really tell the story of the history of the city, the progress

07:31 the city has made, and what the future of the city holds. Boston's makeup of government, obviously,

07:37 is a city councilor and a mayor, but through the BPDA process, we have what's known as community

07:44 groups that are very active and engaged with all the issues happening in the neighborhood.

07:49 So, that's a good alternative for me to be able to talk to

07:52 a group who's really concentrating on the issues around the neighborhood,

07:57 having those conversations, and then seeing how I can be helpful.

08:04 In other communities I stay well-engaged in the city of Revere with the mayor of the city

08:09 counselor, meeting with students, just like we are, high school students, college students,

08:15 and really whoever wants to have a conversation. This is my full-time job, and it's what I do.

08:24 [Finn] Awesome. Thank you so much for that.

08:32 [Rahman] I also have a question. Jason can go first, actually.

08:40 [Jason Wright] Hey, Senator. Hope you're doing well. My name's Jason. I work for the University's

08:44 Office of External Affairs. Just kind of a general question for you. I was wondering what advice

08:51 you would give to any person that was looking to or thinking about running for public office.

08:56 [Senator Boncore] Yeah. I mean, I would say the best advice is let your experience lead, go find the experience you

09:04 want to be the change you want to see. I got very active in political campaigns. That's how I met

09:12 someone like John Nucci, who is the Vice President of External Affairs. Because I was a community

09:18 kid, and campaigns are a lot of fun and can be a lot of fun. Maybe not so much in this COVID era,

09:26 but as we build out of that, campaigns can be a lot of fun. But I think when you engage the system

09:34 in that way, you meet people who are of similar mindsets, you create a network for yourself.

09:44 And then, I don't think you need to concentrate completely on running for office. I think you

09:50 can get involved in many levels of government and have another career. I mean, at some point,

09:57 I think the opportunity we'll meet you to seek higher office, where it'd be like a full-time job,

10:04 but the majority of the good work that happens in government in campaigns and elections is

10:10 through volunteer work and people who step up and volunteer for this, volunteer for that,

10:15 in your own communities. The neighborhood groups that I'm talking about, no one's paid to do that,

10:20 they're all volunteers. So, volunteering around those groups, getting familiar,

10:25 familiarizing yourself with the issues in your community, I think that's most important. You

10:31 should never want to run for office because you want to run for office. You should run for office

10:35 because you feel like the energy of your community and you feel like you can make a difference.

10:42 I think for so many of us, no one plans for running for office, so much of it is the timing

10:48 of where we're at culturally, as a city, as a state, as a federal government. And meeting that

10:54 with your preparedness, your preparation, like, that you're in these conversations,

10:59 that you're in the rooms where people are talking about legislative changes, policy changes,

11:05 cultural changes. And I think it'll find you, in a way, if you're really looking for it.

11:14 [Wright] Thank you.

11:25 [Senator Boncore] Maybe I should have talked a little more at the front end.

11:30 [Rahman] So, you mentioned that you work with transportation,

11:33 and I was wondering, because a lot of the students at Suffolk are commuter students

11:38 and transportation can add up overtime, especially like public transit, do you have any plans to help

11:46 students cover those costs or anything to help us not spend as much money?

11:52 [Senator Boncore] Yeah, no. I think that's a great question. It's a question I've thought about over the

11:59 last two years a lot. And what I really believe is that there's a lot more work to be done in

12:05 transportation. Fortunately, we passed the transportation infrastructure bill last year

12:11 that's about a \$17 billion investment in public transportation,

12:15 and transportation generally in the Commonwealth. That coupled with the federal infrastructure bill

12:20 that's coming down the pike from the federal government, which on the high end,

12:24 we could receive about eight billion additional transportation dollars for, could be three. We'll

12:29 see what happens when it leaves the House and goes over to the Senate. I'm very optimistic about what

12:38 the house will do with that bill, but I'm kind of on the fence as to what the Senate will do.

12:42 So, there are infrastructure and investments that are being made,

12:46 but I really think there's always more to be done in creating a transit system that's

12:53 more equitable, more accessible. And as we think about climate resiliency and what the future of

13:01 our green system is going to look like, there's investments to be made there. And

13:06 some of that is investments in cleaner buses, cleaner trains, but a lot of that is operational

13:13 and creating programs for people on the lower end of the socioeconomic scale, creating programs for

13:22 students. And I really think we need to shift the paradigm in how we look at public transportation

13:28 in this Commonwealth. For too long, it's been looked at as like a business model, right?

13:36 And we need to raise so much money to deliver the public good that public transportation is.

13:44 And I think that's really antithetical to a good transportation policy. We can say that, well,

13:51 ridership is down, and it has been, right? So, through this public health crisis and pandemic,

13:58 we've seen ridership on the commuter rail dip as low as 3%,

14:04 three to 10% for the entire pandemic, and really, not a lot of signs of it coming back. Even



14:10 the subway system... I mean the Blue Line, I don't think, has dipped below 10% ridership,

14:15 but that's only the height of it during the pandemic was like 17% ridership. So, they lost 83%

14:24 of their ridership and the revenue gained from that ridership. But we're serving a certain

14:31 amount of people, and the Blue Line was the line that runs through Suffolk mainly. It serves so

14:39 many frontline workers, right? Emergency workers. And that's why you saw the ridership numbers dip.

14:43 But we'd never say, "Listen, gas, like natural gas, the users are low this year, so let's stop

14:54 building that infrastructure." We don't look at water bills and say, "All right, water bills are

15:00 down, so let's not provide any more water." No, we need to look at public transportation in the

15:04 same way as public good. So, this year I filed what I'm calling the Transportation New Deal

15:09 which is really a starting point. It recognizes the initial set of policies that we must undertake

15:16 to move Massachusetts forward and build out of this pandemic by modernizing our transportation

15:22 system and ensuring regional equity and socioeconomic equity, excuse me, on our system.

15:32 So, we focused on a couple of key policy areas. The first policy area that's gotten

15:37 a lot of attention is a policy of making the MBTA fare-free for buses, and I think that's something

15:45 that would help Suffolk students. We want to see people utilize public transportation. We

15:52 really don't want to see Suffolk students or anyone calling TNCs or Uber and Lyft, because

16:01 that creates a lot of congestion on our roadways. So, we also have a low-income fare program that

16:08 we'd be pushing for that as part of this bill, where just like anything else with Department

16:13 of Transitional Assistance and public goods, if people make up under a certain amount of money,

16:20 they'd have an opportunity to get a reduced fare on the trains and the commuter rails.

16:25 I'm also proposing a fare freeze. We've seen the cost of public transit go up more than 300%

16:36 over the past 10 years, right? Your train fares, your buses fares have gone up exponentially.

16:42 All the while, gas taxes and the cost of driving has really not gone up at all. So,

16:50 when people look at that from a 10,000-foot view, it's like we're encouraging people to drive and

16:56 not encouraging people to get on public transit. We're making it more difficult

17:00 for people to get on public transit. And then you don't have to wonder too hard why we have worst in

17:07 the nation congestion in greater Boston, worst in the entire country. I think we're third this year,

17:13 but for the past three years, we've been worst in the nation. Because we're not building enough

17:18 infrastructure for pedestrians, for bicyclists, but we're making it easier for people to drive.

17:24 So, things like that, piloting a late-night service on the MBTA service.

17:29 If you guys are studying late or you're going out, quite honestly, you can get home

17:36 on public transportation, because I think that's important. So, just coming at it with a different

17:43 outlook, that public transit is a public good, and a reliable, efficient public transportation system

17:50 is really the system we need to build out of this pandemic and create greater health and economic

17:58 opportunity for people in the Commonwealth, including Suffolk students.

18:04 [Rahman] Thank you. We'll go to Livia and we'll come to Adam.

18:10 [Livia De Oliveira Costa] Hi, this is kind of related to the previous topic, but I was just wondering,

18:16 in the 2020 election, one of the top issues among student voters was climate change, and

18:22 especially since Boston is such a coastal city, I was wondering if you could tell me more about

18:27 things that the state legislature has done to address the climate mitigation.

18:31 [Senator Boncore] Yeah. So, it's a good question. This past session we passed the Next Generation Climate Bill,

18:37 which would build a roadmap to greenhouse gas efficiency, to lowering our numbers, and setting

18:45 policy goals for the reduction of greenhouse gas emissions

18:50 in our buildings, in our transportation sector. The transportation sector is like a 68%

18:58 contributor to all greenhouse gas emissions in this state, in the country, so it's something we

19:04 need to wrap our head around. We did that all last year and the governor vetoed it,

19:09 so he vetoed the entire bill that was going to be No Next Generation Climate Bill.

19:14 But this year, due to the leadership in the House and the Senate,

19:18 before even committees were formed and in a normal cycle, the legislative session starts,

19:25 there's a bunch of bills filed, committees are formed, committees look to those bills. The ones

19:30 they want to report out to the floor, in the House and the Senate, get reported about favorably. It's

19:35 usually a six-month process before we start taking votes on legislation... But kudos to the Speaker

19:42 of the House, Ron Mariano and Senate President Karen Spilka. They fast-tracked legislation

19:48 around the climate. We were able to take a vote on that bill last month, so that is the first step,

19:56 I think, in setting out a map for climate adaption management for greenhouse gas emission goals. But

20:04 there's more work to be done, and there's really work to be done on every level of government.

20:08 You see in the city of Boston with, and like you said it's... And

20:12 most of my district is really on the water, around the water, so as we're developing a city,

20:20 as we're building infrastructure in the neighboring towns, we really need to think

20:25 about what Boston's going to look like in 2030, 80 years out. And we need to build buildings that

20:31 are coastal resilient buildings that can protect the shoreline and protect more inland too. So,

20:38 I think, you're starting to see in the city, and you've seen it through Marty Walsh's leadership,

20:44 really envisioning Boston out to like 2040 and what the development plans are,

20:50 what coastal management is going to look like. And in the legislature, too.

20:55 I mean, I filed a bill this year to ensure that every vehicle leased by the Commonwealth,

21:02 whether that's a firetruck, a police truck, DPW truck, a MBTA bus, to ensure that they're all zero

21:11 emission vehicles by 2030, that we're only buying and leasing vehicles that are climate friendly and

21:20 reduce our carbon footprint by 2030. I think the bill we did this year is a good first step, but

21:27 obviously, there's more work to be done, especially in the area of transportation.

21:32 [De Oliveira Costa] Thank you.

21:33 [Senator Boncore] You're welcome.

21:35 [Rahman] We have a question in the chat, and then we'll move to Adam. Yvette says, "Follow up question

21:42 with the committee work with transportation. After your final report on the RMV in January,

21:47 were you surprised by the issues that RMV is having with inspection stickers and their vendor?

21:53 Can you talk about a time in this work you've felt discouraged and how you moved forward?"

22:01 [Senator Boncore] Yeah. I mean, listen, there was no worst time to be the chairman of transportation with the RMV

22:09 issue that happened two years ago. Seven people were killed by someone who essentially shouldn't

22:16 have a license. I think the RMV, what we learned later, learned that the RMV's infrastructure

22:25 was such that out of state violations were not being dealt with in the RMV,

22:33 and they were essentially being put in a closet. So, what I mean by that is we had a hearing,

22:39 an oversight hearing, with the Committee on Transportation

22:42 after these people died, unfortunately, when they were hit by a trucker.

22:49 And we found out that people's licenses that were suspended in other states for violations,

22:58 that information, although we were paying for a system as a Commonwealth that would deliver that

23:04 information to us, once that information was being delivered to us, we were doing nothing with it.

23:11 And you can read about how that hearing went down, but essentially... There's a picture of me in The

23:18 Globe, I think, holding up a picture of boxes and boxes, they were just stacked on each other, that

23:25 were found in a room, in a closet literally, in the RMV in Quincy that had never been processed.

23:32 Thousands upon thousands of violations. So, does this surprise me? I would say,

23:38 it would take a lot to surprise me having to do with how the RMV operates. Well, fortunately,

23:44 would say that this isn't really an RMV problem as much as it is a vendor problem,

23:50 and the vendor that they hired had some glitch in their computer system with the

23:57 software that processes inspections. And it was, I think, Massachusetts and seven other states

24:05 that work with this vendor have had this similar problem with the glitch in their software system.

24:12 So, I wouldn't lay blame at the feet of the RMV for something they really have little

24:19 control over. They've actually been helpful in reaching out to local law enforcement,

24:27 making everyone aware of the program. And no one's going to get a fine or get pulled over for having

24:34 an old inspection sticker. There's going to be a grace period.

24:37 People who have violations will get more time. Yeah. I mean, I've seen a lot with the RMV.

24:44 This, I would say, is more on the vendor than it is the state itself.

24:53 [Rahman] Let's move to Adam.

24:56 [Adam Westbrook] Hi, Senator. Thanks so much, again, for taking the time today. I'm Adam,

25:00 I'm the Director of the Center for Community Engagement here at Suffolk,

25:03 and so we just really appreciate you being here with us and talking with us. One of the things

25:09 that I found in the work in the Center is that this generation is energized to make change.

25:18 But one of the things that I've found, some students are very skeptical of government

25:22 as the best place to make change. So, I'm kind of curious if you could talk a little bit about

25:27 maybe some of the things that you're most proud of. You've already talked about several examples,

25:31 but what are some things that you're most proud of that you've been able to accomplish and that

25:35 you're working on where you feel like government is a place where change can actually happen?

25:41 [Senator Boncore] Yeah. I mean, I would say when I was the chair of the Housing Committee, we know we have a

25:45 gentrification problem in Boston, we know that we're losing generations of students, like your

25:53 generation, graduating from Suffolk. Where are they going to go? Where are you going to get a job

26:00 that's going to enable you to afford to live in Boston where the cost of housing

26:07 is like second or third in the nation highest. Creating affordable housing options is something

26:14 we endeavored to do when I was chairman of the Housing Committee, and we created a bond for \$10

26:20 billion to make investments and offset some of the developer's costs as they developed,

26:26 to ensure that 20% of the housing being built in the city of Boston remains affordable.

26:33 So, we can keep the pipeline... We have some of the greatest institutions of higher education

26:39 in the entire country right in our own city, but we can't maintain any of their students

26:44 in their first five years out of college. So, that's one of them. The work we did to

26:51 eliminate on the hands-free driving bill last year in the Transportation Committee, to take the cell

26:56 phone out of the hands of drivers and really save lives, those committee hearings were difficult.

27:04 Families would come before us and talk about how they lost somebody.

27:08 But one of my proudest moments in the legislature was with the gun reform bill we did two years ago

27:16 and the red flag gun bill. And what that was, it was really a youth-led movement or

27:21 power-up movement. I mean, students, they were coming to the State House and demanding action

27:29 after we had another mass shooting. And I think in the Commonwealth,

27:33 we heeded their advice, quite honestly. A lot of students just cut school for the day,

27:39 came up to this rally, came into the State House, and testified at the hearing

27:45 regarding the red flag gun bill. And it changed. Students across

27:53 the Commonwealth that maybe that didn't show up at that rally were having rallies in their schools,

27:59 and I think as a legislator who's on the younger side of things, I work with people... Believe it

28:07 or not, I'm one of the younger senators in the building. I mean, I can identify with that and

28:15 I can meet students where they are and have those conversations, and I'm willing to. So, I

28:21 think seeing that red flag gun bill be passed and really see the power of a student-led movement...



28:33 The greatest legislative wins in this country for civil rights, voting rights, to gun reform,

28:39 has all been student-led. I'd love to talk more with students who believe that government

28:47 isn't the best place to do that work. I mean, I think it truly...how that will benefit

28:57 or to the detriment of your generation. You're going to be dealing with some of the

29:01 policies that are in place. That \$17 billion transportation bill is a five-year bill,

29:06 so we're going to be spending money into the next five years that's going to affect how

29:12 your economy works for the next 20 years. So, the conversations are important to keep having.

29:18 I would just encourage students to stay involved and not be deterred because when you don't

29:25 take advantage of the power you have, I really think the power takes advantage of you.

29:33 [Westbrook] Awesome. Thank you so much.

29:36 [Rahman] Jessica, you can ask your question.

29:41 [Jessica Mejia] Good day, respected Senator. My question is how do you compartmentalize pressing issues or issues

29:49 tempted to be resolved in parallel to each other? How do you determine what to focus your energy on?

29:55 [Senator Boncore] Yeah. That's a really good, and I'm very fortunate to have a very competent staff

30:02 who helps me compartmentalize things. Because like there's a lot to do in my

30:07 day to day. I started out with the meeting around COVID-19 vaccinations in east Boston,

30:15 and I had that update. I rolled that into a meeting with a group of constituents

30:20 to discuss criminal justice reform. I have an afternoon session set up with senators to talk

30:26 about legislative priorities. I have this meeting, tonight I'm meeting with the neighborhood group.

30:33 I'm getting pulled in a lot of different directions. But I would say that I have

30:40 my priorities in the legislature that I work on continually, and those are... They

30:45 they're expansive, but it's climate reform, it's transportation, it's housing, and it's criminal

30:52 justice reform. And I shouldn't have said climate reform, just the climate generally, although the

30:56 policy needs the reform. The climate is what the climate is. So, those are my four areas.

31:03 And just like I'm chair of the Transportation Committee, there's a Senator that chairs each

31:09 and every committee, so through engaging with my constituents and bringing my issues usually

31:14 to the chair of jurisdiction over these issues, we can really work on bills. And the legislature

31:20 isn't taking up like 30 bills a week, right? We're taking up two or three bills a week. So,

31:28 with enough lead time, we can have an understanding of what the bills are,

31:34 think about how they affect our constituents, have conversations with our constituents about them,

31:39 and then there's an amendment process on the floor to really make the change your constituents

31:46 want to see happen. Hopefully your constituents are working on the front end of these issues

31:50 as the bills move through the legislature, but if not, that's what our job is to do.

31:59 [Mejia] Thank you so much. I was wondering, may I just ask you just a secondary question?

32:03 [Senator Boncore] Yes.

32:04 [Mejia] How do we improve the public education system so every child gets a great education regardless of

32:11 income, when many are suffering from home insecurity, also known as homelessness?

32:16 Because it goes hand in hand in the public school system in Boston.

32:22 [Senator Boncore] Yeah. I mean, I think that's a really great question. I think when you're dealing with

32:28 an issue like housing that I've dealt with and ensuring that people have access to affordable

32:35 housing, it does have an effect on some of the other social health determinants like

32:40 where they're getting their medical care, where the students are going to school.

32:45 And like you said, when a family becomes homeless, it's very disruptive to that student who is...

32:55 Kids are always in a disruptive state in learning and growing, and when we make it

33:01 much more difficult for students because they have to move because they're evicted

33:07 or they are forced into certain neighborhoods because it's affordable...

33:14 And those are sometimes neighborhoods without access to public transportation, without access

33:19 to quality education. There are many detrimental effects to something like a housing issue.

33:31 So, to deal with the student end of things, a lot of this student funding is supplemented by

33:39 the state. Right? So, in each municipality there's taxes collected on real estate and excise taxes,

33:47 and that money goes to fund the school system. But not all school systems and communities are created

33:53 equal, so the state supplements the education funded on per pupil instance each and every year.

34:03 We were working for the last 30 years off a funding formula from like the 1980s

34:11 that was missing large swaths demographics of students. Minority populations were wholly going

34:20 under counted due to their immigration status, or whatever the situation was.

34:25 The last year, the legislature passed the Student Opportunity Act, which changes

34:34 the formula funding. I think it's like an \$8 billion investment in public transportation

34:39 over the next six years. And unfortunately, last year due to COVID, we weren't able to fund the

34:46 first... I mean, over seven years. We weren't able to fund the first seventh of that program, but now

34:53 this year, we're going to fund this year's part of the formula. So, we should see these effects. And

35:02 many gateway cities, many poor communities had a seat at the table. Boston did exceptionally well

35:10 due to the Boston delegation at the legislature, which I'm happy to be a part of, in ensuring that

35:15 Boston students would not be under-counted and would have what they need over the next seven

35:20 years. So, like everything else, there's some work to be done, but I think the Student Opportunity

35:25 Act is really the foundation that we're going to build a more equitable educational system on.

35:30 [Mejia] That's great to know. Thank you so much, Senator.

35:33 [Senator Boncore] Happy to answer it. Thanks for the question.

35:36 [Finn] All right. So, we have time for probably one more question, so I will let Katherine ask hers.

35:43 [Katherine] Thank you. Hi, Senator. I was wondering if you could comment a little bit about how you

35:48 work with local officials and if because of that you have an opinion on the Boston mayoral race.

35:54 [Senator Boncore] Yeah. So, I've engaged with... Just in government,

35:58 we're always at the same events with the city councilors, with our local representatives, and

36:04 we have really good relationships. Lydia Edwards from East Boston's one of my best friends,

36:10 not just in politics, but in life. So, we have really good relationships. We're always working

36:17 with city councilors on local issues. They're sending bills up to us, and we're trying to be

36:23 as helpful as we can. Things like educational funding, transportation funding, creating

36:31 affordable housing within their communities. So, as we look at the Boston mayoral race,

36:36 which you don't have to look for, it'll find you, there's obviously... I think there's seven

36:42 people in the field right now, or maybe more. I know at least four of them are city counselors.

36:50 And I have a relationship with each and every one of them. There's also a state legislator who's

36:56 running for office, there's someone from Marty Walsh's administration that's seeking the job.

37:03 So, I'm having conversations with all of them. When they ask me for their endorsement, I'm asking

37:10 them a lot of the questions you're asking me, "Well, what's your position on affordable housing?"

37:14 What's your position on education funding? What's your position on public transit?" And I think,

37:21 when people are on the ballot, communities win because these issues come to light.

37:28 They're going to have to have debates in public forums about the homelessness issue in Boston,

37:33 about testing in Boston to get into certain schools, and the adverse effects that

37:40 has had on students of color. These issues are going to come up time and time again,

37:47 and we're really going to have an opportunity to decide who the best person is for that job.

37:50 Now, I have a relationship with all of them, and they've all,

37:54 I think except for one or two have asked me for my endorsement,

37:57 but I'm going to let it play out a little longer. I want to see where they are on these issues and,

38:03 ultimately, support who I think is going to make this city a better place to live.

38:12 [Finn] Thank you for that. And I just have one last wrapping up question, is like, as students, what's

38:17 the best way for us to engage with your office and engage with state government in general?

38:23 [Senator Boncore] Yeah. I mean, I would just say pick up the phone, write an email.

38:31 I hate to use the adages like no stupid questions, but any issue you're having,

38:36 or if you just want to know how something works, our job first and foremost is constituent servants

38:44 and making sure that our constituents are having their needs met. So, if you have a question about

38:48 government, about a bill, about a policy that we're talking about, or maybe one we're not

38:53 talking about, I think you should really reach out to us and demand a response from us. Right?

38:59 Reach out. We get a lot of emails every day. In my current email box, I have 85,000 emails

39:10 that we're getting through. They're not all from today, but they're from the past couple of years.

39:15 But I mean, and also sharing your personal story. I know a lot of advocacy groups have people

39:21 interested send form emails to their legislators. Those become a little bit of white noise.

39:29 If we're taking up a bill, we can get 300 to 1,000 emails a day on that bill because

39:36 people are just submitting a formal letter. So, a letter can be a little more personal,

39:42 I think it's really important. But feeling free to reach out to us at any time, I mean,

39:47 that's what we're here for. My staff will put our contact information in the chat box. But again,

39:54 I think this is helpful, too. Right? Rather than having, whatever, 15 different conversations,

40:01 having one conversation with 15 people is a good way to do it. Let's continue with this

40:08 on a more regular basis, and we can expand the group and we can have more conversations. It'll be

40:16 really helpful, in not just informing you guys, but informing me as well.

40:23 [Maggie Randall] I would just add to that if you're doing any kind of research project

40:27 at the state or local level, and you're wondering, "Okay, what is the state doing on climate change?

40:34 Or have you taken up this issue?" Just email us, and I'm happy to touch base,

40:39 particularly for Suffolk students, but definitely email or call us.

40:46 [Finn] Awesome. And thank you so much to Senator Boncore for coming with us and talking.

40:51 It's really important that our local officials are accessible and we can build relationships, because

40:59 once you have that relationship, you're more comfortable and you're more willing to advocate

41:03 for the issues that you care about, and you get more involved in government once you know who your

41:08 representative is other than just voting. So, we really appreciate it. And thank you to Maggie for

41:14 help setting this up. And thank you for everyone for coming. We really appreciate it. And so,

41:22 we hope for all of you to join our event next week, next Thursday. We'll have City Councilor

41:29 Ed Flynn coming, so it'll be really great. So, thank you again, and have a great week, everyone.