

BUILDING JUSTICE PODCAST



CRISJ Building Justice Podcast

Season 3, Episode 1 : Dr. Flojaune Cofer, Ph.D. on Political Engagement, Progressive Policy, and Mayoral Leadership in the City of Sacramento.

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Guests: Dr. Flojaune Cofer, Ph.D.

Please note: This transcript may be imperfect. Please contact Monicka Tutschka directly should you have questions, tutschka@csus.edu

Music lyrics: Company under construction, the function, justice for the human family we demand it. Justice, true freedom, equality is a must. Thus, decolonization of the planet. So bust this. People be the power now we're Building Justice. Pulling out divinations, now we're Building Justice. Welcome the planet to the Podcast, "Building Justice," "Building Justice," "Building Justice." Building is to add on, or to do away with.

0:31

Monicka: Welcome to Building Justice, a podcast by Sacramento State Center on Race, Immigration and Social Justice. We explore critical issues affecting our communities with the hopes of creating a healthier and more just world. I'm Monicka Tutschka, a political science professor at Sac State. And my guest for today is Dr. Flojaune Cofer, who many of you know as Dr. Flo. Dr. Flo is an epidemiologist with a Ph.D. from the University of Michigan in Ann Arbor. Um, currently, Dr. Flo is a senior director of policy at Public Health Advocates. Um, Dr. Flo is a longtime local activist in Sacramento who recently announced that she's running for the mayor of the city. So hello, Dr. Flo. Thank you for coming on the 'Building Justice' podcast.

1:16

Dr. Flo: Thank you for having me. I really appreciate it.

Monicka: I am so excited to just have a conversation with you and to be together with you for a little bit of time. How about we begin with a question about your relationship to political participation or local activism? You know, all of us live in political communities, but we're not all actively involved. So what brought you to participate actively? What keeps you going and

what do you think discourages so many Sacramentans from being local activists or just participating more in politics at the local level?

1:51

Dr. Flo: It's a great question. You know, and I think part of it is being able to tell a little bit of my story. So I grew up in Pittsburgh, Pennsylvania, and I am the daughter of two public school teachers. My mom taught eighth grade English. My dad taught eighth grade math, and they never met, you know, an issue in Sacramento, in Pittsburgh that they didn't want to be involved in, whether that was, you know, what was going on in in our neighborhood, in, you know, our faith community. Whatever was happening, my parents were showing up and dragging me along to meetings and being involved in what was happening. I was also always dragged along when they went to vote.

And unfortunately, when I was 11, my dad passed away from congestive heart failure. And so really what got me engaged in thinking about policy was actually reflecting on that experience, later, as I was trying to figure out what I wanted to do with my life. When my dad passed away---he was 47---and he had been smoking a good portion of his life and that was before the tobacco companies were honest with us about the impact that smoking has on our health. They used to tell us it was health promoting. He also worked in the steel mills with my grandfather before he went to college to become a teacher, and so was exposed to all kinds of occupational hazards. And, you know, and certainly, you know, things that would have been in the air that he would have inhaled as well. And he also worked in buildings with disturbed asbestos. And so all of those things came together to be able to shorten the number of years that we had together.

(3:15) And those were all opportunities for policy protections that now exist for him to have been protected in a way that would have allowed him to have more years in his life and more life in his years. And so I think about that, but I also think about the ways in which I was protected by policy. So during this really dramatic event where my father has passed away and I'm not yet 12, I also have the benefit of having individual and group grief counseling at my public school, and my mother was able to continue to afford our home on a teacher's salary. And so I was not taken away from my only community. I knew it was already a really destabilizing and disrupting and traumatic event in my life.

(3:54) And so when I went off to college, I was kind of looking for, you know, what is this, this bridge? How do I provide connection to communities? Because I started noticing patterns. My mom was reviewing scholarship applications for students, and I started realizing that to many of the students who were Black and Latino have stories of having already lost a parent when they were applying to college as part of their college application or their scholarship application process. And that means that these parents, right, presumably didn't make it to be 50. And so what does that mean when I'm looking at the life expectancy? And so that's how I got into public health and that's how I got into, wow, there's there are opportunities for us to be able to to shape what we know and take that and shape it into what we do. And so that's really how I got involved in policy, because I saw the opportunity, I saw what happened when protections didn't exist and I saw what could happen when they did exist. And my life was the intersection of the best and the worst of that.

(4:49) So I absolutely understand when people say, why would I bother to get involved? This all seems completely corrupt and misguided and nothing ever seems to change. But what I'm encouraged by is not looking at the immediate term of things, but looking long term because,

you know, again, my father was born at a time where, you know, tobacco could be sold and everybody thought it was okay. And now we have so many protections that exist because people fought for that to happen.

5:18

Monicka: Two things that really came to mind when you were speaking. The first was: how important involvement at a young age through your family and through your community can be to sustain political engagement moving forward. And there are those families where people are politically active, and then there are families who aren't. And how do you engage them in the process is just the kind of question that came to mind. And the second thing that I really thought about was this phrase that you had about being protected by policy. You know, we live in a time where people fly flags that say, "Don't tread on me." And they think that policy is not protective or disempowering or harmful. And you're really flipping the script and telling us that if not for an active government and a community that is creating these policies, we are less secure, less free, less equal. Do you want to say a little bit more about that before we move on to another question?

6:19

Dr. Flo: Absolutely. So first, I would say, you know, I think this is the importance of history not being taught as a series of just, you know, dates and figures, but actually stories of people's lives. Because when I look at the arc of, you know, the experience, especially experience for me as a Black woman in the United States, and I think about all the Black women in my lineage that come before me, the story of policy is incredibly important. When I think about, you know, 1852 and, you know, the United States trying to decide if they're going to balance slave versus free states, Right. The decision to not do that, that's not going to be a progressive policy is a policy decision. When I think about the right to vote and women's suffrage, when I think about the civil rights movement and and the right to not have separate but equal be the law of the land. Right. All of these were policy decisions. When I even think about don't ask, don't tell, which during my lifetime was considered to be progressive policy, it's like, "Hey, we won't ask any questions; you don't tell us anything and everything is good." And now we have marriage equality. So when I think about this and also, of course, Roe v Wade, right. Which is of course, before I was born, but all of these things were policy decisions and they meaningfully shaped what people's lives look like. And so that's incredibly important to me when as a student of history, I understand that these are not trivial decisions that we're making. These are major decisions about how we're going to live and where we're going to live. And they have major impact for generations to come.

(7:39) You also mentioned something really critical, I think, about people feeling demoralized and not getting involved or not maybe coming from a family where people were actively engaged in policy. And certainly that's the case for many people. You know, even if it was just a matter of voting and not really being engaged otherwise or not finding a way. And I think there also is a responsibility in our government to reach out and touch people, to invite them in. And one of the things that has been most frustrating to me, especially in the city of Sacramento and the county of Sacramento, is that it is felt very much like the system is designed and systems are perfectly designed to get the outcomes they do. And so it feels like the system is designed to make it so that it's difficult to follow what's going on, that your input is not really wanted. Right. There are ways that we explicitly and implicitly convey our feelings about something and giving people 2 minutes, you know, five days after they learn about something to

provide public comment on an issue doesn't signal to anybody that you really want to have their input. And so I think there's a lot that we can do, and I think there's a responsibility of government to actually show up, especially at the local level, where you are so close to people. So to also invite people in and not make it so that only the people who come from a legacy of doing this work or who whose jobs allow them to do it in a paid capacity are the ones who are involved, but really reaching out and making a face.

Music Break

9:15

Monicka: You're talking about political engagement. political engagement, political engagement, which is wonderful. And I know that you do a lot of professional advocacy work, like you were saying, with Public Health Advocates. You've served on government commissions and committees. You've participated in direct action. You're talking about voting. If somebody is new to politics in the U.S. or new to politics in Sacramento, can you talk about what are the strengths and weaknesses of these different forms of political participation in terms of what impact they have or what benefits they give to the participant? Or how would you evaluate all these different forms if somebody was new to engagement and kind of wanted to have a scorecard?

9:56

Dr. Flo: What I would say is that there is no wrong entry to your political engagement. And I differ from, you know, many of, my professional colleagues, but also maybe even some of my my, you know, friends and colleagues who are doing this work, you know, on a more volunteer and community level basis, because I see value in it all. And I don't think that there's actually a hierarchy of effectiveness. I think we all rely on every other aspect of how we engage in our communities. And so the way that I describe it to people is I say, you know, our are the folks who are doing direct action and mutual aid really are the ones who are kind of our moral compass. They're the ones saying, I'm not waiting for anybody else to do something. I'm going to do something and I'm going to show you that it's possible. And I'm also going to push you and make noise and say, "This is a major issue and here's the North Star that we're focusing on." And then I think when the professional advocates come in and we're you're pushing and you're advocating towards your government to be able to change something. They're the translators. They're the ones who are saying, you see folks outside protesting in the streets or you see people not even bothering to engage in this process and just doing mutual aid and other things that should be your job. What are you going to do so that people on their own are not outpacing you and you're the one who has our has our budget. You're the one who has the institutional power and this is your responsibility. And so they're translating that message. And then our elected leadership are the ones who are supposed to then hear those things and take decisive action. And so I think there's a challenge when we start to think that one method is better than the other because each one relies on the other to be able to have the will, to be able to move, especially if you're fighting on on behalf of people who don't have moneyed interests, to be able to just drop into the system and say, "That's how I speak," and you have to have voices involved.

11:42 So what I say to people is, however, you're going to show up, whether that's voting and the voting is a big, you know, it's a big deal because it determines who gets in and who's

making those decisions and how hard you have to fight for other things, whether or not people share your values and are willing to push in the direction you want them to go.

11:56

Monicka: You know, there are accounts in political science literature that there's some sort of uni uni linear linear process, like there are voters and they tell politicians what to do and then they do it, or there are communities, they tell electeds what to do, then they do it. And you're saying the process is a lot more dynamic and, and these different bodies ricochet off of one another. And on the one hand you have a direct impact by cleaning up your community. On the other hand, you also are voicing to electeds that this is important and then electives might be then responding back to those communities and trying to develop greater considered judgment together and then policies are enacted. So it's a very dynamic, not uni linear process and you're encouraging people to to find the space where they can participate in a way that doesn't overwhelm them maybe. And I also think you're trying to sort of rattle those folks who create hierarchies around participation and evaluate some forms as more worthy than another and kind of democratize and make the process more horizontal.

13:12

Dr. Flo: That's that's exactly it. It's it's so much more dynamic than just, hey, you're this and you talk to this. It's like you're part of this complex interplay that weaves back and forth. It's kind of like a wave in the ocean, right? You know, the tide goes out, the tide comes back in. And there are ways that each influence how we do things. I mean, you know, this isn't just a one way street of like voters and not. It's all of these people who get involved in all of these different ways and the nonprofits and the other organizations and the, you know, the the specific political organizations and all of the work that happens around there to be able to and the people who just show up and use media to tell their stories and to humanize this process. You know, when I was coming of age, nobody talked about birth control and abortion publicly. And now people are coming out and telling their stories and making this so it's not some nameless, faceless, prestige medical procedure that happens. But these are real people's lives and they're telling their stories of why this was an essential service for them and how damaging it would have been if they hadn't had access. And that's incredibly important, and that's all part of the political process.

14:17

Monicka: I've got one question here about political participation because we're talking so positively about it, and this has to do with the city and the way it's responding to homelessness. You know, recently there was a 5 to 4 decision to move the question of where sanctioned encampments are going to be located to the city manager, City manager Howard Chan. And in effect, the decision that was made 5 to 4 was that the site planning, the locations [of the encampments] are not going to be decided with a lot of public input for the city council input or feedback from the community and so on. I'm wondering, you know, why do you think the majority of council decided to kind of take those questions away from those spaces where there is possibility for greater input and to put the decision in the hands of a more insulated city manager? And what does that say about participation around this issue? And what are your thoughts on that decision?

15:00

Dr. Flo: Yeah. Yeah, I think this is a really big question and it's one I certainly grappled with because I think there is some complexity here. First, and certainly I understand that, I believe housing is a human right and I understand that we are in a crisis when we have 10,000 people in Sacramento County who are currently, you know, experiencing homelessness. And so we have to first and foremost hold true to the fact that we have not acted, you know, fast enough. And we have allowed this this crisis not only to get out of control, but to last for far too long. And so I understand where that, you know, the desire for expediency and the desire for for decisive and immediate action is coming from.

16:10 And just because we, you know, failures to prepare on their part does not constitute, you know, a need for for reckless action on our part either. And so I am deeply concerned about the idea of handing over that responsibility to the city manager. On one hand, it does in some ways de-politicize it. I'm putting that in air quotes, you know, the decision, because it takes away from an elected official and puts it in the hand of someone who's hired staff. On the other hand, it makes it so that that person is shielded from the accountability of where those locations are. And I, you know, I, I have to be really honest that I don't trust our city manager to make those decisions in a way that are equitable because past behavior is the best, you know, predictor of future behavior. And, you know, at a time when six people died in one of the winter storms a few years ago and the Sacramento Bee interviewed our city manager and asked him, you know, would he have opened up shelter had he known that was going to happen? Like, you know, hindsight being 2020, as we as we know it is. And he said, no, he wouldn't do anything different. And to me, that showed a real lack of human compassion for our neighbors who had died.

17:22 And I, I also think that when it comes to, you know, thinking about equity on the lines of of income and status, there is absolutely no way he would have uttered those words without a major rebellion had six people in the Asian and Pacific Islander community died that night. If six police officers had died that night, if six members of the city council had died that night, if six members of our business community. And so in that moment, in his callous disregard for human life, what he also showed me is all lives don't matter, which we always knew was the [case]. We don't see equal value in certain lives. And so our unhoused community is being viewed as a throwaway. So, no, I don't trust the person who could so callously say something like that to make decisions about where these places are going to be are going to be located. I also think this is layered on top of, you know, redlining and some of the other residential housing segregation that existed and persists because of patterns around affordability in our community. And so there are serious concerns by some of the council members that the locations that our city manager is going to choose are going to be concentrated in areas they get fewer investments that are often ignored and that have been historically disinvested.

18:38

Monicka: There is some sort of perception, and I think you're you're really challenging this that the city manager because they're insulated or is somehow going to be more impartial. I mean, the argument for the Supreme Court too, right, because they're insulated from politics, they become neutral or impartial. And you're saying that is just patently not true. You bring to those positions whatever biases, whatever interests you have, and they bleed out into those decisions. And now there's going to be less accountability.

Dr. Flo: Yes

Monicka: Because of that insularity.

MUSIC BREAK

19:25

Dr. Flo You know, I am always of the belief and I say this repeatedly and people always chuckle. There's nothing that I've ever written, however much I like it. The first draft was the best draft. It has always benefited from some peer review. And so I also just, you know, even if our city manager was someone who I trusted very dearly, I don't think a decision like this should occur without some peer review and without the benefit of some other people who live in these communities or see me. I live in one place. He can't live in, you know, in 12 different locations. And so being able to think about all of the aspects and be able to have some public input on that I think is important. And I think as a public health professional, part of what I know is that these decisions are messy, chaos is part of the process. And so you're going to hear from people who don't all agree there's not going to immediately be a consensus. And that's okay. It doesn't mean you don't act. What it means is you listen through those challenges and complaints to identify what people care about because every piece of communication is somebody telling you what they care about. And we have to be thoughtful enough and skilled enough to hear that and then to be able to include to the best of our ability those ideas into our decision making.

20:33

Monicka: Mm hmm. You you sympathize with the idea that we need results and we want sites and we want them to be funded so that they provide water and social services and a place to shower and a safe place to be. Because without that, unhoused people are living without dignity. And so we want you want results. But having a city manager make those decisions on the one hand, as you said, is very expedient. But what you're looking for is considered results, good outcomes, and that requires a deliberation and feedback and consultation to kind of raise, you know, to use a poli sci term, the epistemic value. Right. The, the the the the quality of those decisions.

21:25

Dr. Flo Success has, you know, many parents and failure is often, you know, abandoned, as some would say, "orphaned." Right. Whatever the thing is. And so there's also this part of when you bring people into the process you they also then feel responsible and they help to push it along to success.

21:32

Monicka: I'm personally engaged in collective bargaining right now with the CFA and they've been doing democratic bargaining and because I've been participating in the very meetings with management, I feel like I have a greater stake. Being asked, being invited, being part of the process from the bottom up really helps facilitate a kind of ownership in a in a--not in a possessive way—bu-- a shared ownership. In the outcomes. And that is more likely to produce successful long term outcomes after the decisions are made. Yeah, and totally.

22:23

MUSICAL BREAK

Monicka: Another question I have here when we're focusing on participation is this requirement for participation around military equipment policies in the city. I know the state passed a law requiring public input, and I know I know there are public forums that have recently been held about the new increase in the military equipment budget or proposed increase. I know that there's a survey out there trying to get folks---the police is putting out a survey---trying to get folks to participate in reflecting on military equipment purchases. You know, when when people participate in that, sometimes they come away feeling as if their input isn't being heard. Other folks are saying, no, this input is putting pressure upon the police in the city. I mean, where do you stand when it comes to the public being really involved and required to be involved around military equipment for the police?

23:35

Dr.Flo: Yeah, I think it is incredibly important, again, for the public to be involved in all of these decisions, including, you know, the military equipment. I attended one of the meetings and what I found to be important was the fact that people showed up and they were really excited to share their ideas and really motivated to share, you know, what they thought about even the, you know, them acquiring these pieces of equipment and really wanting to better understand what are you using them for? Why do you have so much? How much is it costing? How have they been used in the past? I think that was that was really, really helpful for those questions to be asked.

24:12 And I thought they could have benefited from some public health, you know, help in terms of knowing there are---some communications help---in terms of knowing their audience and being able to communicate well with the audience, because there was an initial, you know, overview of the legislation that led to the community input. And it was at way too technical a level. There was a lot of jargon and a lot of like political speak involved in it, and it was not accessible to community members in terms of what's happening or what's relevant to this meeting we're having now. And then even the presentation from the Sacramento Police Department was lacking in terms of its ability to to be accessible to community members, because all of the presentation was entirely audio and there weren't really a lot of visual things to look at and it's a lot of information to process. And so I thought it was in some ways a missed opportunity for what could have happened had there been a little more skilled facilitation of those meetings. And I think that, again, if you go into a meeting, assuming that it's going to be this linear process where you share something, people give you feedback and then you all go home agreeing on the next steps. Then you were set up for failure to begin with. This is a chaotic process. You're going to hear a lot of things. People are going to, you know, sometimes blow up your meeting agenda. That's okay. You went in with a plan. That's all that matters. And now we're going to do something a little different to be responsive to the real time needs. And I think that more of that could have could have made this feel more productive in terms of the type of conversation that was being had.

25:48

Monicka: Mm hmm. I mean, I'm hearing you say that community involvement can be chaotic, but you're really advocating for a way to ensure that it's structured so that everyone who shows

up can gain from the experience because information is being offered in ways that are accessible to very diverse learners.

Dr. Flo: Yes.

26:07

Monicka: So the chaos doesn't mean don't have any structure; provide that structure so people can understand, so that they can learn, so that they can think more carefully and then know that there will be still a very fluid process that goes on on those terms rather than excluding people from the get go by making things too jargonized, or making things too technical or failing to provide different avenues for people to access information given their different learning styles. So there's a kind of balance between structure and chaos, fluidity and and kind of discipline that is part of those spaces if they're if they're serving their purposes well.

Dr. Flo: Yes. And people often see chaos as, you know, a kind of a pejorative term or like is a negative. Right. And I actually see, you know, there are there's an ordinal way of things happening. And then there's a way that is less predictable. And we often describe that as being chaotic. And that's not bad. It means that you're bringing a bunch of humans together and they're not going to behave as if they are machines. And it can often be in the in the short term, unpredictable. But in the long term, we often get to some level of agreement. So if you can hold on to the fact that this is part of the process and that you're hearing these things and that's where you are, you'll get to the other side.

Monicka: Let me let me turn the conversation to the measure used Sales Tax Community Advisory Committee, which is more of a professional, I think, committee than a public forum. People who are progressives often have some skepticism about serving on these kinds of committees. You know, sometimes they say that it's the electives who set the agenda. The boat is never rocked if you serve on those committees. Or, it's the electeds who pick who sits on those commissions. And so it's only people who are allies to the electeds, or even if you're self-selecting, it's usually people with higher education, politically connected, wealthy folks who serve. Some folks don't see value in serving on those kinds of boards and bodies because they don't have decision making power. Mm hmm. Some people wonder, you know, if you serve, who are you really representing as a member of that? Yes. And are you just providing cover for the electeds who are skirting accountability or looking to manufacture legitimacy? As someone who I know is a proponent and I share this commitment to serving on these committees, How do you respond to all these criticisms of that service? And how could we overcome those critiques or respond to that?

28:59

Dr. Flo: I first and foremost agree with every single criticism that people have of them. They often are too close to the elected officials. They are an extension of, you know, their their reach. They do tend to have people who are more politically connected and who are more educated and who are already represented by the process. And I think that is that is one of the downsides of, you know, how they are structured. And also, they also offer an opportunity. Right. And in the same way that we can talk about every system having its pros and cons, this one certainly does.

And so anybody who is skeptical has well-earned and well-deserved skepticism. And I say you are absolutely right, No argument from me whatsoever. And I've also chosen to spend my limited life minutes serving in them in some way. And, you know, and and part of the reason that I have done that is because just because they're flawed doesn't mean they're not important. And so where I stand and that doesn't mean I really want to hold on to this, that everybody is going to find value in them or that it's the right way for everybody to engage. And that's why I really believe it takes an all hands approach, because some people are going to be like, you don't have any official decision making authority. I have to play too nice with people who I don't want to play nice with. Right. I'm not sure. And then there are other people who can really come in and kind of take advantage of this and and in some ways use it to their advantage. And I hope that my tenure on Measure U was the latter and not the former, because for me, I went in very clear that we didn't have institutional authority, but I was part of the group that argued for having a measure you committee. When we could see that Measure U was going to take place because the previous version of the committee met like twice, and their only role was to be able to say, "Yup, no crimes happened with the spending of the money. Keep going." They were not an active body. And so we said we wanted there to be an oversight committee.

30:53 And what we originally proposed was I believe it was still a 15 member body, but we wanted more of them to be people who had specific expertise and lived experience. And then also, looking at, so you don't have official statutory authority to make decisions about spending, but boy, can you use your pulpit to be able to amplify your message. So when things started going awry and we felt like we were doing the right thing, we went to the media and we said, "Here's what's happening. Come to our meeting, pay attention to this". And we were able to get in some ways front page, you know, coverage in the Sacramento Bee and the News & Review and in the Observer about some of the things that were happening on our committee and the reasons why people should get involved and how the promises of that, you know, that campaign when it was on the ballot were being broken, and that there's an opportunity for us to get involved and push. And so what I look at is what wouldn't would not have happened, what conversations we would not be having today were it not for some of those decisions.

Monicka: So you're saying that your service on the Measure U Sales Tax Community Advisory Committee offered you a platform to really advocate for where that sales tax money should go. Can you can you tell our audience in what way were you critical of where Measure U money was going, particularly around the money going to the police?

32:22

Dr. Flo: Yes. So during the campaign, you know, so let me just give a little history of Measure U. In 2012, it was passed. It was a half cent sales tax that brought in about \$50 million a year and it was set to expire in 2019. And so in 2018, the mayor and council decided to put it on the ballot for renewal and to double the amount. So it'll go from a half cent sales tax to a \$0.01 sales and use tax and make it permanent so it would no longer have an expiration date. And so during that campaign, a few promises were made that the money was going to go to inclusive economic development, that the money was going to go to homelessness and affordable housing, and that it was going to be used to support the arts community. Now, there were other promises that were made on the campaign trail. I like to joke and say that every group that was approached was told that that \$50 million, what could you do with \$50 million for your cause was right. And there is there is absolutely some truth to that. But those are the main three that a lot of the messaging

was, you know, was targeted toward. And so I'm going to say in good faith, let's pretend those are the main three.

33:18 And so the what was proposed was that the first half cent would be used to continue to fund the things that always it already was, which were basic city services. So a little bit went to parks, a little more, went to fire, and then the lion's share went to the police department. But that the second half was going to be used for these other things. And there was a lot of like channeling the memory of Stephon Clark and our disenfranchized., our disinvested neighborhoods, nd, you know, communities that have been historically disenfranchized and how important this money was going to be to bolster, you know, economic development of these communities and really operate outside of just business as usual.

33:30 And then the second half that also went to the police department because they just continued to get raises and the money wasn't going where people wanted. And so there has been a lot of criticism of, you know, the the rallying calls to take money away from police departments. But the truth of the matter here is it really isn't about taking money away. It was about just stopping the ongoing increases that were not spent in a way that our community wanted. Like people in Sacramento want to be able to 24 hours a day, be able to call and have somebody respond to mental health crises and homelessness issues. And we could have had that had we taken \$7 million this year and invested it in making our Department of Community Response able to do 24 hour response. People want a place for our unhoused neighbors to be that safe, and that has dignity and the human resources that we all need, like bathrooms, because using the bathroom multiple times a day is not an option. It's a necessity.

34:55 And so we want that. And so I stood firm on these are broken promises that you're taking with our tax dollars, tax dollars that are disproportionately paid into by lower income folks because all sales and use taxes are regressive, which means that you pay a greater portion of your income into them if you have less money. And so that means that from a moral standpoint, I think we have a greater duty to our lower income residents who are paying into this pot to serve their interests. And what we did with the money was the exact opposite of that. And

I've been talking a lot about this lately. You know, we had two years, a little more than two years from the end of 2017 until the beginning of 2020, where we had no youth homicides in the city of Sacramento. None none of our young people were buried because of gun violence, deaths prematurely. And that happened because we had a complex network of violence prevention and intervention programs that were working collaboratively across the city to intervene and to prevent violence from happening. And right when the pandemic happened and all of the drivers of violence were going up, we were shutting down schools. We were increasing the unemployment rate by shutting down businesses. All these things that were necessary to be able to prevent the spread of a deadly infectious disease, but that we also know raise the risk of violence. Those programs came back to the city and said, we are going to need more resources to be able to pivot because this is new for us, too. We've never had schools shut down and businesses shut down, all of these things. But we do know what happens when any of those variables are tinkered with and it's that violence goes up. So if we want to keep this track record of no young people dying, we're going to need your help. And instead of giving some of the CARES Act money that came in and the ARPA money towards that, they kind of disbanded the network and shifted the money around. And so we no longer live in a city where young people haven't died for multiple years in a row from preventable deaths. And so when I look at public safety, I think of myself, you know, as a person who is firmly in support of funding public safety. But the difference between me and many other people who might use those same words are I

believe in prevention, because I know none of us woke up this morning hoping to have a reason to call 911. And I believe in funding the things that work. So I want to be able to see our money go to the things that evidence shows works, that the city shows works and that are cost effective and that are going to save lives. And that's a definition of public safety that I can get behind.

MUSIC BREAK

37:34

Monicka You mentioned, we don't always have to reinvent the wheel and come up with something new. If we have existing programs or even past programs that there is data and evidence to show that they work, they just need to be funded and supported and expanded and leaned into. What do you think is leading some so many people to look for the new shiny object rather than be data driven and say this is evidence based, it's worked for us, et's just continue it or expand it. What's happening to explain why folks aren't aren't doing what you advise?

38:18

Dr. Flo: I you know, it does seem nonsensical to me. I---the only thing I can figure out is that nobody wants to share credit with other people. And so if it's not--- so, everybody has to come up with their own brand new ideas for how they're going to solve this problem. And I am coming, you know, at all of these things with the approach of like people way smarter and way not more knowledgeable than me have answers. My job is to listen to them, to look for, look at their answers, and then to elevate them and to offer them as as, you know, options. I mean, and so we have to find ways to collaborate, even if we can't be your boss. And that's a great way for cities to be able to run is to be able to collaborate and find mutual interests and to come up with approaches to doing things together that are going to benefit multiple things without having to come along and completely change who's responsible.

39:10

Monicka: Mm hmm. Well, you're really talking about--at least what I hear--is a is a new vision of leadership, a leadership that's very collaborative and nature of leadership that's sort of humble. If there are experts, you can listen to their advice and move it forward. So can you talk a little bit about your vision of leadership, especially because you're running for mayor in a system where we don't have strong mayor, where we have city council members, where there is a board of supervisors, there's the state, there's the community, there are neighborhoods like how do you imagine leadership in the mayoral position? What is the right kind of leadership for our mayor in Sacramento?

39:55

Dr. Flo: So I, I always reject the frame of, you know, the limitations of the seat, because I also think that there are lots of ways this could be used that we haven't seen necessarily in recent times. One of them is, of course, narrative change, right? People want to know what the mayor thinks on issues and you have the opportunity to frame issues. And I use the word framing because when you put a picture in a frame, you change how people see it, right? That is the entire intention behind a frame. And so I think there is a leadership role in changing how people see the city's function and how people see some of the challenges that our city is facing. And I think that is a great role for our mayor to play.

40:34 But I think the other part of it is that rather than strong versus weak mayor, it's a collaborative mayor. And so it requires that you sit down and actually set some priorities, something that we have not seen our city do in so many years. Now, obviously, there will be new pieces of legislation that are passed along the way and new policy is implemented. But step one has to be: what overall are we working on so our staff can fit into that process; and our community members and our organizations and everyone can fit into what we've said is important and what we're going to work on and what are our outcomes and deliverables for those (so we can know whether we've been successful; , how much money we want to invest based on what we're trying to do). And so that's what I see as leadership, is that the mayor sets the council agenda, structures the meetings and decides how the business gets done. That's an incredibly powerful role. And so instead of going in saying, oh, well, you can't make unilateral decisions, well, good, because as I've talked about before, part of the challenge of making unilateral decisions is that you are by yourself.

And so, you know, the kind of community saying, "if you want to go fast, go alone. If you want to go far, go together." Fast is not bad for is not bad, But there are different goals and I think our city wants to go far. And so I think being able to get four other people on board for a vision and push that vision forward is incredibly important to making sure that our city has a backing to the things that we decide to do. And we're not just passing policy willy nilly and not having any any thoughtfulness into the implementation of it in policy books.

42:00

Monicka: In Poli Sci, folk often talk about the three faces of power, and one face is really the decision making power. But the two other faces, one is agenda setting, like you were saying, I mean, deciding what's on and not on the agenda. What will be decided upon and what won't be decided upon is tremendous power. And the third forum, the third face is about framing. It's about the discourse and establishing what the discourse around a particular issue is and what meaning it has, how it makes sense, what the options are. It's it's a kind of power that happens within culture and it's not always so visibly seen and understood, but it's tremendous power. So those forms of power could really facilitate all kinds of progressive politics. And if we can harness our collective power, we can go much longer and farther than if we go it alone. Yeah.

Okay. One final question. This is really been amazing and I've learned so much. You know, the Building Justice podcast originates from SAC State, and so many of our students are underprivileged, underserved minoritized. Many, you know, 10% of the CSU students are housing insecure. Many of them are working two jobs, driving long distances to come to campus. Yeah, and if you could pull them aside as an activist and also as a woman of color and could could, what would you tell them about the value of their political engagement and how could you mentor them? And if they talk to you about the barriers they face, like how would you respond?

43:44

Dr. Flo: I would first and foremost say that you are the expert at your own lived experience, and so no one can tell your story the way that you can tell your story. And that means that in every space and this is a really valuable lesson I've learned from public health, that in every space, it's not just the people who have formal education, who are experts in things, but it's also people who have the experience. And that experience sometimes comes from from living and sometimes comes from studying. And we value expertise in all the forms that it comes in.

And so you have some expertise and you being able to couple that with finding your voice and sharing that voice can really move people. Because any time legislation is up in our statehouse or anywhere else that people want to hear from the people most impacted, they don't always seek out those voices, but that is often the most powerful testimony. So finding ways to be able to elevate your voice and to be able to be a part of the change that you'd like to see is incredibly important. And if you're feeling downtrodden, if you're feeling demoralized, if you're feeling like nothing is going to get better, I strongly urge you to read some historical narratives about people who have been in the same position, because one of the things I find most comforting in life is recognizing that there are almost 8 billion people on this planet, and almost nothing about our experience is unique. We are just all living in a in a slightly different way, but throughout history and also currently any experience you're having, it's likely very relatable to probably no fewer than 100,000 people somewhere on the planet. And the more that we come together and collaborate, the better it is for our just our our souls and our beings. And so finding your people, being able to come together with them, being able to love on them, being able to organize with them, being able to support and cry and grieve and have your human experience with some other people is so important and seek out those people because they are out there. And just because the first people you find out your people, it doesn't mean they don't exist.

45:37

Monicka: Is there anything you want to leave with the audience before we close? It has been a real pleasure

45:41

Dr. Flo: It has been a pleasure. I am immensely grateful for the opportunity to serve the city of Sacramento in so many different ways. And I see this is just but another opportunity to offer, you know, my service and I am really, you know, hopeful and optimistic about the opportunity to be able to continue to serve in this capacity. But regardless, Sacramento is my home. It is a really rich and wonderful community, and I am really honored to have been on the show and to be able to have an opportunity to share some thoughts on things and to, you know, reflect some of the wisdom that has been imparted on me over the years. I am incredibly grateful to the people of Sacramento. And so I am looking forward to what we're going to do next. So let's go get it.

Monicka: That sounds great. We are going to do great things together. Thank you so much, Dr. Flo, for being on the bill "Building Justice" podcast. And with that, everyone, I'm going to close by saying thanks for listening. We hope our ongoing conversations spark understandings, empathy and motivation to join the struggle for a better future for all. And you just listened to the "Building Justice" podcast. The information contained in the podcast, including its title and description, represent the views and opinions of the hosts and the guest, and don't necessarily represent the views and opinions of SAC State, CRISJ or the Building Justice Podcast Committee. Take care.

Outro Music Lyrics

No more penalties and no more wars. Based on the actions. Now, time for "Building Justice," "Building Justice." Time for building justice, justice.

