

Korina Barry ([00:28](#)):

Boozhoo/Hello everyone. Thank you for tuning into the CASCW podcast. As we all continue to navigate the many ups and downs of life during a pandemic, I hope you continue to stay well and find gratitude and even the smallest of things each day.

In today's episode, I was fortunate to visit and chat with Minnesota's Lieutenant Governor Peggy Flanagan. There are many things that I love and appreciate about Lieutenant Governor Flanagan, but a couple of things that stand out to me include her ability to stay grounded in her values and the genuine hope and positivity she carries in even the most challenging times. During our conversation, Lieutenant Governor Flanagan discusses how she has been navigating change and loss due to COVID-19 including how she's taking care of herself and her family. Lieutenant Governor Flanagan highlights some of the ways that she and Governor Walz continue to advocate for vulnerable children and families during this time, including important policy changes that are underway. I really enjoyed my time with Lieutenant Governor Flanagan today and I hope you enjoy the conversation as well. You may also notice the emergency sirens going off in the background and possibly even my cat shuffling across my table multiple times. And well, that's the reality of working from home. Relatable content, right? Happy listening today.

Peggy, how are you doing?

Lt. Governor Peggy Flanagan ([02:02](#)):

I'm doing okay. I think that's always a really interesting question right now as we, we find ourselves in a pandemic, um, and it has been, um, kind of difficult year for our family. 2020 for a lot of families, so it's been a difficult year. We lost my dad in January and then in March my brother was diagnosed with cancer and then shortly thereafter contracted COVID-19, and passed away due to complications from COVID-19. And so, uh, this has been really personal for me and I know that it's been really personal for a lot of Minnesotans as well. Uh, but you know, I'm grateful for my health, for time with my husband and with my kiddo and just that we've been able to try to figure out how to navigate this as a family as well.

Lt. Governor Peggy Flanagan ([03:19](#)):

So, the work looks different right now for all of us as we are on phone calls and video conferencing. And one big adjustment just for me, it has been, you know, Governor Walz and I are truly partners. And so we literally sit next to each other at the head of our, our long conference table most days before the pandemic. That's what we did. And so it's weird to not be working with my buddy side-by-side each day. But we are in a constant communication with each other. We are navigating also distance learning with my seven year old, like so many people. And there are good days and there are bad days. But everyone's sort of just doing their best right now. And I think that's really all that we can do in this moment. That's just huge and stressful and overwhelming, and just trying to navigate through it and do our best.

Korina Barry ([04:26](#)):

Absolutely. It will. And I know myself and many others in community are, you know, we have been, we are sending so much love to you and your family and knowing that it has been a really tough year and just really feeling, feeling all of those feelings, around everyone being impacted in so many ways during this pandemic. I'm wondering if you could share a little bit about what, what are some of the coping techniques you're using and how you're taking care of yourself and as well as your family while you're at home and continuing to work. And like you said, distance learning for sure.

Lt. Governor Peggy Flanagan ([05:04](#)):

You know, we try to get outside as much as we can, every day. And so we have a loop that we do that's like four miles. Which, before the pandemic, I would never have been like, let's go for a four mile walk everybody. Right, so that, you know, that is new. And my daughter is constantly on her scooter and scooting around on her bike or we're flying kites. And just trying to do as much as we can to just be, um, outside. And one of the good things I think that's happening is that this pandemic is happening during a time when the days are getting longer, it's getting warmer and we can spend that time out of the house in a way that is safe.

Lt. Governor Peggy Flanagan ([05:58](#)):

Um, you know, we wear masks when we're, we're around a lot of people, in parks and that type of thing. Um but we're trying to do that and I just also have to say that you know, as a Ojibwe woman, there are things that we have at our disposal too, to be able to care for ourselves. And my friend Sarah Broken Leg sent me a care package that had traditional tobacco from all over the region and, uh, some Cedar. And we try to, to smudge every day. And even though we have to stay apart, which is I think so counterintuitive to just like who we are culturally and as a community, but those are our traditional medicines or are one of the ways that we can stay connected to each other, um, during this time.

Lt. Governor Peggy Flanagan ([06:47](#)):

And they are the things that have gotten us through, previous pandemics and challenges as well. And so that's been good. And just trying to find some time to get on Zoom and see family and friends in ways that, uh, I'm appreciative that we have sort of, you know, Jetsons technology. We can see each other. Um, and have these conversations and also like, just to be honest, like I'm also eating my feelings like many other Minnesotans during this time, and uh, watching really terrible television on Netflix and Hulu. And I won't share with you what those shows are cause you might lose a little respect for me, but I can guarantee, if it's trashy, I'm probably watching.

Korina Barry ([07:50](#)):

So are the rest of us. And I feel like, um have you made a loaf of banana bread in pandemic life?

Lt. Governor Peggy Flanagan ([07:58](#)):

I have not yet made a loaf of banana bread, but I can tell you my good friend representative, uh, Jamie Becker-Finn dropped off like several pounds of wild rice from Leech Lake. And so, um, we are having wild rice for dinner, wild rice for lunch, um, berries and wild rice, uh, for breakfast. Like if you like, you know, that is the thing that I can kind of, you know, get Zen about and cook. And so we have a lot of that happening in our, in our family meals right now.

Korina Barry

Yeah, that's great. I mean, and along with the traditional medicines and taking care of ourselves and like even wild rice being nourishing and good healthy food for us. So I'm glad you all are getting a little bit of everything. The good stuff, some trash TV, you know, we all gotta do what we gotta do. Right? And so as you mentioned, you're a mama and you're home with your kiddo and your husband, your family. And so as a mom, you understand how challenging can be for parents and caregivers who are at home with their little ones right now and everyone's struggling and out of routine and in searching for normalcy. Um, is there anything you can share about efforts that are taking place, um, you know, within leadership

and policy funding around this state to, to support our families that are at home right now? You know, I know that's a big question and you know, there could be education or other essential services, um, just anything you can share related to supports for families underway or on the horizon.

Lt. Governor Peggy Flanagan ([09:30](#)):

Yeah, absolutely. So I appreciate that question and I think I do have quite a bit of information to share, but I think, you know, I'll just start by acknowledging how incredibly hard this is for folks. And we had big dreams at the beginning of the pandemic to have a set schedule every day and to, you know, say like from eight to nine we're going to get out and walk and then we're going to do this. And then it's math time and reading. And like, I will be the first to say within like day two, that was all out the window. And so just to be clear this is something that we have never done before. And so, you know, it is really difficult. And so if you're, you know, for someone who's working from home or if you are in an essential position, are essential workers, or are not working at all. Parents are under immense stress as providers and as teachers, entertainers, supervisors, and you know, that's happening like all at once. So, we are lifting up with our partners in the legislature and specifically in the nonprofit sector and philanthropy ways that we can lift up families, especially right now as we are also looking very intentionally at our families who are most vulnerable during this time. Starting with distance learning. I know this has been an incredible challenge for folks and it is simply amplified, by families who don't have access to wifi, reliable internet, or devices. Our family also. We are grateful that we, our child, goes to a district where they had enough resources to be able to provide a Chromebook for students, which we don't have an extra computer laying around the house and you know, and we have one child.

Lt. Governor Peggy Flanagan ([11:35](#)):

And so that's been helpful. But I know that not everybody is in that position. So our Department of Education is really focusing on student relationships and connections, between teachers and students and support stuff, technology. Then just generally student safety and wellbeing. So, this traumatic experience has been amplified for our students who were already experiencing trauma. And it's why our focus has really been on ensuring that those relationships with the students, that those are maintained, and strengthened if at all possible. Giving additional support to educators and to districts through family engagement toolkits, resources on building relationships, how to teach virtually, which is certainly a challenge. And also, just ideas for communicating and supporting families most impacted by the inequities of COVID-19.

Lt. Governor Peggy Flanagan ([12:43](#)):

Knowing that things like attendance, is a scary issue for many of our families who are wary of the child protection system. And we know that our children, that Native children and African American children are removed from their homes at higher rates. And so working on strategies there to make sure that truancy does not become an issue where people have to live in fear simply because they cannot connect. So that's particularly important to me. We're also looking for additional resources to support students through technology. Starting to think about what summer school looks like, to do safely and then the ways that that would be able to then inform the fall and what that looks like for families as well. Related to childcare, we have done quite a bit of work there and have created supply chains to support childcare providers in cleaning products and hand sanitizers, masks and launched specific tools to support public health needs for those childcare providers.

Lt. Governor Peggy Flanagan ([13:55](#)):

We have proposed and successfully championed \$30 million in childcare emergency grants, with \$9.8 million going to out to 1,200 providers in the in the last month. Philanthropy has also secured an additional \$1.5 million in private supports for childcare as well. We launched mn.gov/childcare to support providers and families and create weekly updates for childcare providers who are caring for many of the essential, the children of essential workers, and are also wanting to protect themselves in their own families and then have also helped navigate additional financial supports for those providers as well. We were in a childcare crisis before this pandemic and so we are desperately trying to do as much as we can to not lose ground. We also know that families themselves are really struggling. So economic stability is a really critical issue.

Lt. Governor Peggy Flanagan ([14:59](#)):

We've proposed at the legislature a \$500 emergency grant to all families who are currently accessing MFIP. Our state's cash assistance program for the working poor and for low-income families. But also like these dollars already exist, right? And all we're asking for right now is for the legislature to allow those dollars to be distributed directly to the families who they are made to support. So, you know, we could use additional support from your listeners to try to get that out over the finish line. We stood up substantial changes to our unemployment insurance program and federal changes to unemployment benefits while addressing a really unprecedented number of applications and then have adapted our public work support programs like SNAP and WIC and healthcare, to increase access for families to these supports. And this is more, you know, of course more critical now than ever before. And we are grateful that much of that work has happened quickly to get to families. Um, and then just to ensure that our families have information about additional financial resources, federal and state that are available to them. And as we continue to receive additional dollars from the federal government, making sure that those are going to families who are in crisis and who are frankly, too often are invisible. We were invisible to decision makers before the pandemic and clearly are now. And so we need to be unrelenting and just making sure that the narrative is there about the families who are truly in crisis and their crisis has only been exacerbated by the pandemic.

Korina Barry ([16:56](#)):

When thinking about reopening and kind of that phase opening, we hear Governor Walz and yourself, kind of having to contemplate and, and think very critically about, we know it's complex. It's not black and white, you know, there are some Minnesotans who are very frustrated and want to quickly open and be able to get back to some of that normalcy and others who are worried and fearful. Is there anything you'd like to say to, to Minnesota families who are on both sides of those kind of feelings and realities about reopening and kind of what that looks like for us?

Lt. Governor Peggy Flanagan ([17:35](#)):

For sure. I think every family in Minnesota is hurting. We're just not all hurting in the same way. And so, you know, like I said before, this falls hardest on families who are already in crisis and for families of color, for Native families. This can also be a reminder of the gaps in support for our communities and how, again, we are often invisible. You know, for families who have loved ones who have either been diagnosed with COVID-19 or have been affected by it, or for folks who have lost family members or for people who have loved ones or they themselves have underlying conditions. Which we know for our communities, for communities of color, that this is something that weighs heavy on people consistently. So the idea of reopening too soon, I think is terrifying for many of our communities. Families who rely on the income of small businesses, maybe one that's been in their family for generations, you know that the idea of opening too late for those folks is also terrifying. So, you know, we know that people, um,

that there are emotions and there are risks on each side of this. And that's why we're trying to be really intentional and use data and rely on our epidemiologists and healthcare community to be able to do this in a way that puts the fewest number of people at risk. And, again, the pandemic has really hit every aspect of our lives. And I wanted to say to Minnesotans who are living in fear, that I see you and I hear you and I value you. And you are the people who we think about as we make these decisions every single day. There's not an easy solution or a perfect solution and all of these challenges, you know, hurt.

Lt. Governor Peggy Flanagan ([20:03](#)):

Um, so, uh, I also think that that Minnesotans are responding in a way where most of us have come together and most of us are helpers. And I, you know, think about often, that Mr. Rogers line where he said, for children who are afraid or during a crisis, you know, he said, my mother often told me to look for the helpers. And the good news is that there are helpers all over the place. And in Minnesota we asked people to make homemade masks and we received a 137, 430 masks, that were delivered to fire departments. Every single fire department in the state of Minnesota received those masks. So those are the things I think that are the bright spots in this challenge and pandemic and are the things that we need to remember as we are navigating this situation together. It's all new. It will continue for quite some time and we're going to have to figure out how to cope and adapt. And there are detractors who may put themselves and others at risk during this time and who may react from a place of fear and violence and that's scary. But I think the overwhelming majority of Minnesotans want to do right by each other. I think that's what we can see right now.

Korina Barry ([21:41](#)):

[laughter] I love that the storm the tests are going off, right now. I mean this is how we adapt in a pandemic. Okay, looking at time I just have one more question for you. So in a place of many unknowns, what does the next year look like for Minnesota?

Lt. Governor Peggy Flanagan ([21:59](#)):

That's a really great question and I wish that I had a crystal ball to be able to tell folks what the future holds. But I think, you know, what we know is that this virus has laid bare and exacerbated the existing inequities in our system. And I hear folks say often, you know, "I can't wait to get back to normal." And what I want to say is that normal was not working for us. Normal was a place where we had deep inequities in our community as far as wages, access to healthcare, education and that you often, um, you know, those disparities and inequities are plaguing black and Brown bodies. So normal is not what I am interested in returning to. And I don't think the governor is interested in returning to normal either.

Lt. Governor Peggy Flanagan ([22:56](#)):

I want to, instead of getting back to normal, I think we need to get back to better. And we are working with our community resiliency and recovery workgroup, which is grounded in ensuring that as we look towards recovery, that people of color, indigenous folks, immigrants and refugees are at the center of how we recover. And that the solutions will not come from state government systems that are historically full of inequities and a system that has for a long time excluded our people. And so we are going to need to rely on the community for those solutions and then determine how to best integrate those into our recovery in the long-term. So, um, it shouldn't be about getting back to normal. It's getting back to better. I think for many of us, this is the moment that we were made for, and need to remember to take care of our spirits and to take care of ourselves as we navigate through this time. And that we can do this collectively and we can do this together.

Korina Barry ([24:10](#)):

Chi-miigwech (many thank you's). Thank you, Lieutenant governor Flanagan, for joining me today and taking time out of your very busy schedule and just for everything that you do and all of your advocacy for all of us across Minnesota. I really appreciate you.

Lt. Governor Peggy Flanagan ([24:25](#)):

Thank you so much for this opportunity to visit. I am so grateful for the work that you do every day and that as our you know, social workers and those who care for others. Um, it's THE WORK and it is incredibly important. So just so much gratitude and love in my heart for you and for everyone who does this work on the frontlines to make us even better, to all of the helpers. So thank you.

Korina Barry ([25:00](#)):

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