

Health System Transformation Lecture

King County Equity and Social Justice Initiative

Questions and Answers

This podcast is presented by the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention. CDC—safer, healthier people.

Thanks. Now, if anyone has—we'll take just a few questions, and then we can have all the conversation we'd like during the reception. And if you'd like to ask a question, if you would please come to one of the mics or raise your hand, the mics will come to you. Stephanie?

Good afternoon, thank you very, very much. Mr. Sims, here's my question—how does it continue past your tenure as King County Executive? I've long thought that if you create the structure, the norm and the behavior sort of begins to change over a tenure period. Let's say it happens—and I'm talking about sustainability—but does it? And in your case, will it?

There is a phrase I use called "We be"—"We be here before you came, we be here after you leave." And so therefore—and it's important that structures of government don't change quickly, but that they do change. So what we've done is, the ownership's not going to be owned by me. What we did is, we put the ownership down into the structures of the government itself. And people acquired ownership. So long after I'm gone, they'll still have the equity reports, they'll still talk about race and poverty, they'll still measure it, they'll still have the public presence of it, and it's because it's not Ron's initiative. It has now become, actually, our government's initiative. And the people who can make the change—which are people who come to work—those are the people who will measure themselves and their performance and their very functions as public employees. And that also means with their partnerships—what do they establish with schools, with business, with nonprofits?

So we—the—we have just made a decision to inculcate it. We had some experience doing that—we did it with salmon recovery, where I remember sending out a letter saying there's going to be an endangered species list, we could fight it. So I sent out 400 letters inviting everybody in the room, so they said, "How did you select us?" I said, "Anybody that could sue, I brought into the room. Now, let's talk about either litigation, or let's talk about resolution and solving the problem and controlling our destiny." So, with the health initiative that—with the initiative, we had some great leadership, you know, David Fleming, who many of you know, Michael Gedeon, Jackie MacLean, other people in other departments—we said, "How can we inculcate it into the very fabric—not only of our government, but in King County's culture?"

And people like Microsoft have been complaining about this for quite a long time, so all of a sudden, they found a resident source, they found somebody else other than themselves talking about it. So, you know, I'll be 80 years old, smiling, and there'll still probably be a County Executive announcing another result—hopefully that we have succeeded as a community at doing—you know, eradicating poverty and minimizing the impacts of race. That would be—but it's not going to happen... it's a marathon, not a sprint. But it's inculcated, it really is inculcated. The faith-based community, the political community, the business community—no one threw rocks at this. Because the report discussed them all, and all of us were embarrassed. We really

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are. I mean, how do you want to be—why do you want to be the glorious generation, the most talented ever, and then the result of that be that you're denying people opportunity, social justice, economic justice, you're adversely impacting their health care. None of us liked this report card, we really didn't. And so people right now—our biggest problem—and it'll be—is trying to shepherd all of the energy and mobilize it. But we're a changed community, and I think it'll be inculcated, and I'll be...it'll be inculcated.

Any other questions?

I still gotta say this, can I say this?

You can say this.

You know, if there's anything from what I said today that I want you to remember, it is your potency. Honest—you've been—you've been given this incredible gift of life and careers. I hope that you would realize your ability to alter the course of—what'd you call it, "healthy republic"? I mean, you can! It's yours! It's yours for the taking! I mean, I wish we could have what you have, but we don't. I just hope that you realize how powerful you are, in a very positive way, at taking the greatest country, the greatest experiment in the history of humankind ever, this democracy we have here—it's the grand experiment. My God, here it is, something just waits for you to turn the ignition key—and go, CDC, go! And all I want to tell you is you have all of the authority, all of the presence, all of the mandates, all of the attention. If the CDC sneezes, people listen to you. That's just a fact.

All of us know that, so we look and say, wow, if anybody can handle healthy republic—I love that phrase!—healthy communities, it's the CDC! But you can't do it alone. But how will USDoT tell you no? They can't tell you no, because you have a mission, which is the general health, welfare of every American here, every person who resides in this country. So I just hope you grab the ball and run, I really do. The game is yours. It'll be won or lost by you. Our ability to be an extraordinary country in the most competitive century ever—you are so much the catalyst that needs to occur so we can achieve it, so that every community wins. You can't have poverty and compete, trust me. You can't have definitive losers and winners and win. You can't. Everybody has to gain. We have a short time to do that. But I just—I came here because that's the only thing I wanted to tell you—I really, I just want to tell you that. I may be a big county, I may be having fun as a County Executive and be able to do masterful things, but you got it all! You got it all! You got it all! So...just go hit the home run! Thank you. [Laughing] [Applause]

And one last thing—in appreciation for you coming and stirring us up and challenging us to get going, and taking some leadership, we'd like to give you this in recognition of your visit here.

Thank you.

Thank you. [Applause] And thanks to our two discussants, Karen Minyard and Robert Valdez. [Applause] And now I'd like to invite you all to join us for some... food and beverage outside of the hall, and to carry on this discussion and to figure out how we're going to take on this challenge.